



beauty  
tames the  
beast



A KEPT SECRET



Edit with WPS Office

**CHERYL ZIKHALI**



Edit with WPS Office

## Beauty Tames The Beast

"What about my heart Randall? What about my fucking heart? "

### Epilogue

I wake up sweating and panting, it's been the same dream everyday since I was 8 years old. The memory is still fresh in my mind and my heart is still broken.

How do I fight something I do not know? How do I fight a face I have never seen?

It's been a hard knock life since my parents died in the hands of robbers who broke into our house while we were sleeping.

I was woken up by a loud bang only to find my mother standing by my bed side, I will never forget the horrified look on her face.

"Hide inside the wardrobe, behind the clothes. No matter what happens, do not come out."

She instructs as she whispers.

"What's going on mama?" I whisper back but she pushes me inside behind a pile of hung coats.

"I love you my baby."

She says before closing the door. I want to tell her I love her too, but someone budes into my room, her agonizing screams ring in my mind. It sounds like someone is dragging her out. There's noise, it sounds like men arguing, I can hear dad's voice.

My father has always been a strong man, not once have I seen his weak side and right now it breaks my heart to hear his pleas as he pleads for my mother's life.

"No, please. Do not touch my wife, I'll do anything." He's crying, I can't help but cry too.

My mother is screaming her lungs out, she's begging them to stop but it seems like her screams are falling on deaf ears.

I don't know what they are doing to her but they are hurting her and my father's cries are getting louder. He's weeping now, he's helpless. If there was anything he could do to help her, he would. That is the type of man I know him to be, he will do anything possible to protect his family.

Like a coward I'm hiding in here like my life depends on it, there's no other way, I am only but a child.

There's this deafening sound, it's a bang. I hear four of them, I can't hear my father's cries anymore, only my mother. She's wailing and screaming, it's heart wrenching and I can't take it anymore. I hear another bang then she stops, there's a deafening silence for a few seconds

before I hear footsteps. I listen carefully till they fade away, I think they are gone but I'm not sure. I need my parents, I need to be in my father's arms. Why are they not coming for me?

Why are they quiet? Anything will do, a scream, a shout. Even those heart breaking cries will do, at least I'll know they are still alive.

"Amara you can't be serious, you're day dreaming again?" That's my cousin Nombulelo, I call her Lelo. She doesn't understand my situation, that I'm depressed and sometimes lose track of reality. She knows my story but says I was so young, I should have at least gotten over it by now. She can be insensitive sometimes.

"You've burnt the pap again, that woman will have your head." She's talking about her mother.

After my parents were brutally killed, my aunt and her husband took me in. I can't say they did their duties of being parents to me, they are the worst. In fact I hate them, more especially my uncle. I swear that man has a special place reserved for him in the pits of hell if not at the devil's right hand side. He has done unspeakable things to me, things a child should never go through.

"Sorry Lelo, I zoned out a bit there." She rolls her eyes, one day they'll fall off. We have a tight relationship like real sisters, she's the only thing that keeps me going.

"You need to stop that or else people will think you're crazy." She says. Lelo is loud and happy and free and beautiful. She's light skinned, has dread locks that touch her shoulder. Her parents love her like she's the best thing in this world, they give her everything she wants.

"Do not tell me, you burnt my food again?" My heart sinks to the pit of my stomach at the sound of that voice, that's the evil uncle I mentioned.

He gets home from work around this time, before I finish cooking. Lelo is not allowed to help, apparently I should be grateful that I have a roof above my head. The least I could do is cook, clean and be on standby when they need something.

"Lelo go to your room." He demands.

"Dad it's my fault I..." Lelo tries to explain but he cuts her off.

"I said go to your room man." He booms, Lelo flinches and runs out of the kitchen.

I wanted to tell her not to leave me alone with this monster, but she's afraid of him as much as I am if not more.

He's glaring at me, I know that look. I know what he's thinking and I'm disgusted by the sight of him. He takes a step towards me and my heart drops, I want to run out of this kitchen and never look back but he'll catch me before I make it to the door.

He's still moving towards me, I move back. I don't want him touching me, my stomach turns each time he does. Before I know it he has me trapped against the wall, tears fall on me and I can't stop them. He smells like a brewery and it's nauseating. I hate everything about this man

standing before me, his voice, his lustful eyes.

"Please don't." I'm pleading for my innocence.

He grins.

"I like it when you say please Amara, it turns me on." He says and chills go through my spine. He's breathing down my neck, I would've killed him by now if I had the strength.

My aunt doesn't know what her husband has been doing to me, she might be suspecting it but I think she's afraid to confront him. He grabs my breast and I freeze, I want to scream but he hits me when I do.

"You are one lucky woman Amara." He says.

I'm a girl you freak.

"I have found the perfect one for you. Tomorrow is going to be a good day." He steps back, laughs and walks away whistling.

I don't know what that was about and I doubt I want to know.

To be continued...



1.

AMARA\*

"Wake up Amara." I open my eyes to the sound of my uncle's whisper, he's on top of me, his hands trapping me on both sides. My heart starts racing at the sight of him, his heavy body feels like torture on top me and his breath is nauseating.

Uncle: "Wake up princess, Time to go." He smirks but I don't understand what he means by that and I don't understand why he is on top of me but I know he has bad intentions, he always does.

Me: "Uncle please, I can't breathe." I cry, but he doesn't seem to care.

This man is big, as in fat and right now his pot belly is crushing my lungs.

Uncle: "You have bigger things to worry about than me crushing you." He whispers.

I wish I had slept in Lelo's room, he forbid from it before we went to bed. No one ever argues with him in this house not even my aunt, he told me to make myself comfortable on the couch.

This was his plan I guess. He runs his filthy hand on my thigh, fear engulfs me instantly.

Me: "Uncle please."

Uncle: "Why are you wearing this, I want to feel your skin."

He whispers as he grabs the garment of my night wear and tears gush out of my eyes.

Me: "Please stop."

Uncle: "Relax, I won't do anything to you. Remember Amara, you're my precious egg, one crack and my dreams will come crushing down. You are my ticket to a better life."

He's always been saying that to me, from the moment they took me in.

He pulls me up with him and drags me by the already open door.

Me: "Where are we going?"

Uncle: "Wouldn't you like to know?."

My aunt and Lelo are sleeping in their rooms, they have no clue what's going on right now.

Me: "Le..." He covers my mouth depriving me a chance to scream.

Uncle: "Don't you dare, or I will kill you and everyone in this house. You know I'm very much capable of it Amara, I have nothing to lose."

There goes my chance.

I'm not sure what time it is but it's still dark outside, I'm wearing a thick onesie, at least it's protecting me from this night breeze. We get into his car, I have no idea where the road leads to but it seems far and I have been crying from the moment we left the house. Maybe today my prayers will be answered, maybe today God will have mercy on me.

It's been thirty minutes, he parks the car at what looks like an abandoned building. The streets are empty, there's no sign of humans only the presence of street lights and sounds of owls hooting. The moon is up in the sky, and the stars are plastered around it in all of their glory.

Two men approach him the moment he steps out, my sixth sense tells me to run but, where will I go? I don't know where I am.

Man1: "Is this her?"

My world shakes from beneath me.

Uncle: "Yes boss." He sounds like an idiot right now.

Man1: "Why is she in the car?"

My uncle opens the door and pulls me out, a scream escapes my mouth rewarding me a slap from him. I stagger back and almost fall but, one of the men catch me, he pushes me to the side before slapping my uncle across his face.

Man1: "You idiot, this is precious cargo."

This man who has been doing most of the talking looks mixed race, he has a British accent. The other one is black, he hasn't said a word.

Uncle: "Sorry boss."

He sounds like he's sucking up to them but mostly there's fear in his voice. At this point, I have figured out what is happening. I'm only 18, my life hasn't begun yet.

Me: "I want to go uncle please, I'll behave I promise."

They ignore me like I'm not here.

Man1: "I hope you have been taking care of her or else the boss will hang you."

Uncle: "I'm a man of my word boss."

The black man hands him a bag, my uncle smiles like an idiot as he clings to the big heavy black bag. I have a clue what's in it, I hate him so much that I want to see him dead.

"Let's go sweetheart."

The mixed race guy says as he grabs my hand, I yanked it away. The plan is to run as far as I can, I feel a pair of huge arms snake around my waist, whisking me up. I scream like my life depends on it, which it does.

"Where do you think you're going sweetheart?" He buries his face on the crook of my neck as he says that, he smells strongly of alcohol and nicotine.

It's the mixed race guy, I can't see his face because he's holding me from behind.

I'm kicking and screaming while he takes me to the black SUV with tinted windows, my uncle is gone. I heard his car drive off when I attempted to run, he is a coward and I curse him. This day



will come back to haunt him, karma will soon have its way with him.

I lose all hope when he puts me in car and shuts the door, the black guy is already on the driver's seat. The second man is sitting with me at the back, I scream when the car starts moving. My mind tells me they will let me go if I keep this up, there's nothing more annoying to men than a screaming woman.

"Shit, can you shut her up?"

The black man booms.

Man1: "What do you want me to do?"

Man2: "I don't know, slap her senseless or something."

That's enough to shut me up, I'm cuddled up like a wet dog. My body refuses to listen to me, I can't stop it from trembling and my lips from quivering.

Man1: "I'll go for 'something'. I'm not ready to meet God yet, I'm still enjoying my life on earth. Scar will mutate the hand that stroke her."

Man2: "Forget meeting God bruh, you definitely earned yourself a place in hell, right next to the devil. You on the right side and Scar, well, he'll probably share a sit with him." He laughs.

Gosh! Who are these people? What do you they want from me? What has my uncle done to me?



2\*

RANDALL\*

\*At his house\*

It's 4am and I haven't heard anything from Styles and Nkomo, they are my trusted allies. They better have a good explanation as to what's keeping them.

Styles walks in the living room just as I'm about to dial his number.

Me: "Must you always keep me waiting Styles?" I hate being kept waiting, time is money and I hate losing money.

Styles: "Sorry Randy, that fat pig was late."

Me: "Did he deliver?"

Styles: "Like he had a choice, if golddigger was a person, he would be it."

Me: "How is she?"

Styles: "Shaken but, she'll live. Are you sure this is a good idea? We went against our biggest enemy and he won't take it lying down."

Me: "That old bastard doesn't scare me, he's a cockroach."

Styles: "Let's not forget that he has an army behind him."

Me: "An army of flies."

Styles is like a brother to me, I've known him since I came to grace the streets of Joburg from Ghana.

He taught me how to survive out there, I was a boy running away from my destiny as I had other plans for my life. We shared a flat in Hillbrow, I had little money from back home and once it ran out we had to hustle. The hustling involved stealing, lying, manipulation and a few times in and out of jail.

Here we are years later, I must say the hustle has paid off pretty well.

Styles: "You know it's not too late to back down?"

He's starting to piss me off.

Me: "Don't tell me what to do Styles, I am not a child. You think I didn't think this through?"

I snap at him, he raises his hands in surrender.

I don't get why he has to be like this. I haven't made it this far by being a pussy and running to hide each time an enemy arose. I hate cowards, I hate bullshit and mostly I hate liars.

NTOMBI\* (Amara's aunt.)

Back at the house.

Ntombi: "Uthi wenzeni Moses?" (What did you do?)

He frowns at the sound of me yelling at him.

Moses: "Yey yey uyang'rasela Ntombi maan." (You're annoying me.)

Ntombi: "Ngiyak'rasela? Ngiyak'rasela Moses? You sold my brother's child and you're telling me ukuthi ngiyak'rasela? God!!! See my life. What have I married? Uyinja moses yezwa?" (You're a dog.)

Moses: "Uthini?" (What did you say?)

He stands up fuming.

Ntombi: "I didn't stutter. "

Moses: "Heee Ntombi ngathi uyang'khohlwa. Sesiyajwayelana manje?" (You seem to be forgetting who I am. We're disrespecting each other now?)

Ntombi: "Yazi ungcobile Moses." (You're sick)

Moses: "Yey mfazi!!! Ngizo..." (Hey Woman!!! I will...)

He threatens, pointing his forefinger at me.

Ntombi: "Uzoyenzani? You want to hit me? Hit me then, ng'shaye Moses, ng'shaye." (What will you do?)

I'm all up in his face, screaming at him. He slaps me so hard I fall on the couch. I didn't think he would actually do it, this man has never laid a hand on me.

Ntombi: "Haaa! Moses, you hit me?"

Moses: "You asked for it, next time you speak to me like your speaking to your useless father, I will kill you Ntombi siyezwana." (Understand?)

Ntombi: "I want my niece Moses, God will punish you." I scream at him.

Moses: "Yeah yeah, ok'salayo we're eating this money together. I don't know what your problem is, you never liked her. Now you're acting like the world's greatest aunt."

This man is heartless, yes, I didn't like Amara that much. But, I don't hate her. She's still my brother's child.

Ntombi: "You have a cold heart."

Moses: "And because of this cold heart, I'm a millionaire. Angithi uthand' ama pie? I will buy you all the pies you want, you'll eat to your heart's content." (You like pies right)

He laughs as he sits back down and goes back to counting the money.

Ntombi: "You're so greedy for money Moses that you have forgotten the deal you made with Mkhize. You owe him your life, how will you explain that girl's disappearance?"

Moses: "I will deal with Mkhize relax."

Ntombi: "And how will you do that when you can't even speak to him without trembling? I swear Moses that man better not come for my daughter. I swear ngizofund uk'loya just for you." (I will learn black magic)

He ignores me, the look on his face says he doesn't care. The money has consumed him. How will I explain this to my siblings?



3\*

AMARA\*

I've screamed, cried and pleaded but no one has come to my rescue. It's been forever since those men locked me in this room, it's a big room big enough to be separated into two bedrooms.

There's a single bed at the corner with one blanket and a pillow, a small table and a chair on the other far corner. The room has white tiling, it's walls are white too. There's this cold breeze that has my teeth shattering, I think the A.C. is on.

I prayed myself to sleep last night or this morning rather, it was still dark when we got here. I could hardly see the house outside due to the darkness, there were no street lights. The men had to use a torch just so we see where our feet were leading us.

I literally walked in here with them, all hope was lost anyway and there was no use in fighting them, I had accepted my fate.

A wave of disappointment welcomed me the moment I opened my eyes this morning. I have been standing by the small window since, there's nothing outside but thick trees.

No road, just a dense forest looking place. I know I'm at the top floor because I'm looking down at the creepy scenery. I don't know what my destination is. What I know is that I'm terrified out of my wits.

I hear footsteps treading towards the room and my heart jumps to my throat. They stop at the white door, it's quiet for a while before the door knob turns and the door opens slowly. I'm still standing by the window, my body trembling and my mind confused.

A tall dark skinned man walks in, he's wearing all black. Has his hands tucked in his pockets, he's looking at me as he's standing on the door way.

I can't tell his facial expression it's completely blank. I scan the door then him then the door again.

Maybe if I run, I can escape him. He's big and I'm like a mouse compared to him although, I'm a size 34.

I think he just read my mind because his face welcomes a smirk, he flips his foot back and uses it to push the door closed. He's daunting, the black clothes he's wearing seem to add power to the dark aura hovering over him. His demeanor has me shaking with fear.

He ambles towards me and all I can do is watch, I can't move, my legs have rejected me. My mind can't seem to communicate with them.

Him: "Do you need anything?" He sounds arrogant.

Silence.

Him: "Water, food, a bath maybe."

Silence.

Him: "If I were you, I'd get very comfortable."

His face becomes hard as his gaze on me intensifies.

Me: "What do you want from me?"

I have so many questions and I don't know where to begin, I'm more afraid that if I say the wrong thing, it will be the end of me.

Him: "There'll be time for questions later." His face loosens up.

Me: "Please I want to go home."

Him: "What home? Where you're not wanted? This is your new home Amara, like I said, get comfortable."

He scowls at me.

Me: "Please."

He shakes his head, I'm already in tears. He smirks again while taking a few steps towards me and towers over me. His dark aura heavier than it was when he walked in. I can hear my heart thudding against my chest.

I try to move but he's too fast, he traps me on the wall. I want to scream but the strength to do so is not here. He smells of expensive perfume and nicotine and he's too close for comfort. I want to get away from him.

This suddenly feels like deja vu as my mind takes me back, reminding me of what my uncle had been doing to me.

Me: "Please don't hurt me." I cry.

Him: "Those tears are my weakness Amara, maybe if you stop shedding them I might move away. You have no idea how long I have been itching to touch you and feel you."

He whispers, burying his face on my shoulder and plants a wet kiss while running his hand down my arm. I push him off but he's too strong.

Him: "Relax, I won't do anything to you."

He whispers in my ear while biting my earlobe. I stifle a scream, his word is not definite.

How do I trust the words of a man who has kept me locked up?

Him: "You're fueling me with those sobs, you know that?"

He whispers, it hits me what he means by that and I smash my hand against my mouth trying to

suppress the cries that will get me into trouble. There's a knock at the door but, it doesn't stop him from grazing kisses down my jaw line to the curves of my neck, I'm disgusted by all of this.

The door creaks open and that mixed race man walks in.

"A word." The mixed race guy says.

This one huffs seemingly annoyed and stops, he takes a step back. His eyes are fixated on me, I still can't read the expression on his face.

Him: "What is it Styles?" He says softly.

The Styles guy looks at me then at him.

Styles: "There's trouble." He looks unsettled.

Him: "I'll be back princess." He winks, turns, then follows Styles out.

In a second I'm on the floor weeping.

To be continued...



4\*

RANDALL\*

Me: "What the hell is so important that you have to drag me out of there?"

I snap at him as we toddle to my office.

Styles: "Sorry Randy, the meeting didn't go as planned. The Russians are demanding..."

Me: Demanding what now? We sealed the deal yesterday."

Styles: "You know how Vladimir and Mikhail can be, they want more girls."

Me: "How many?"

Styles: "Fifty."

Me: "Not happening."

Styles: "We have to deliver Randy, they are our biggest clients."

Me: "Not happening, we agreed on 20. You know the rules Styles, I will not be told what to do by those bloody twins."

Styles: "Those bloody twins can fuck you up."

Me: "Not in this life time."

He shakes his head.

Styles: "I hope your arrogance doesn't get us killed one day."

Me: "I'm not arrogant, I just don't take bullshit from people. You should try it sometime." He chuckles.

Styles: "Well either way, you need to sort this out or we'll lose a lot of money."

The door opens and one of the guards walks in.

I love my space and I like people who respect that. Today is a good day or else I would have put a bullet through his skull for walking into my office without knocking.

Me: "Hey, is this your mother's house?" I give him an intimidating look, he drops his head immediately, seemingly ashamed of his lack of mannerism

Him: "No, sorry boss."

Idiot.

Me: "Next time you pull this stunt, you won't make it outside this door."

Styles shakes his head, I know he disapproves of my attitude but it's who I am and I'm not

willing to change for anyone.

Me: "Speak." I say to the guard.

Him: "Mkhize is here."

Styles: "Why am I not surprised? This was bound to happen, I didn't think it would be this soon."

Styles is all about peace, meditating and shit, he hates violence. Just don't step on his toes because when he retaliates, you would wish the ground could open up and swallow you.

I've seen his dark heart before and what it does to him. It was when his little sister was killed by some loan shark he owed money. He went for him guns blazing. He took out his whole family, even the dogs. Burnt them alive one by one and made the guy watch as his family was engulfed in flames.

The memory is still fresh in my mind, sometimes I can still smell the burnt bodies and I get nightmares about that night.

We do almost everything together, know each other's deepest darkest secrets.

As for the loan shark, Styles said because his heart is as cold as ice, he'll rip it out and put it in hot water so it melts. I thought he was bluffing until the guy's agonizing screams filled the room, he threw the heart in a kettle of boiling water, leaving it to boil till it stopped.

I couldn't eat for a week after witnessing that scene.

There was no emotion on his face, it was blank. His eyes were cold like he'd lost touch with reality.

Till this day I don't know what was on his mind and I don't plan on finding out. Sometimes I'm afraid that he will turn back to that person, it's definitely something I'm not looking forward to seeing.

Styles hates that side of him, he made me promise that if I see any signs that he's turning, I should do anything to stop him even ending his life. That is something I cannot bring myself to do.

NOMBULELO\*

I have a feeling that my parents are hiding something from me, no one is willing to tell me where my cousin is. I heard their argument this morning but I couldn't hear exactly what it was about, apparently dad did something mom disapproves of. I only hope it has nothing to do with Amara, I know he hates her for whatever reason but she is still his niece.

"What's wrong with you? You've been out of it since you got here."

This is Zuma, my boyfriend.

We've been dating for over a year, Zuma is not that fortunate, he's had it hard in life. He's



currently taking care of his sick mother who lives in Limpopo, he has a food stand at Noord taxi rank where he sells fruits and vegetables.

My parents don't know about him, they'd kill me if they find out. His social status is something they wouldn't approve of. I've been visiting him in his shack daily after school, sometimes I would skip school or sleep over in pretence of a sleep over at a friend's house.

Me: "I've been thinking about Amara, she went missing." I explain my absent mind.

Zuma: "What do you mean missing? No one just goes missing nje, something must have happened to her. She doesn't have family out there, so she wouldn't just go."

This man of mine is wise, one of the things that made me fall for him.

Me: "My point exactly, I think my parents know where she is. I heard them arguing this morning."

Zuma: "That's strange, what could they possibly do to her? Unless..."

He has that look and I know he's put two and two together but...

Me: "What?"

Zuma: "Unless they sold her."

Yoh hai, and I thought he was wise. He frowns at me as I roll on the bed laughing my head off.

Zuma: "Okay, that's enough now."

He looks offended but, I can't help it. It's too funny. What do my parents know about trafficking? They are ordinary citizens.

Me: "I'm sorry."

I'm trying to stop laughing but my mind keeps replaying what he said and it's funnier each time.

Zuma: "I'll be outside while you entertain yourself." He clicks his tongue as he gets up.

Me: "I'm sorry, baby don't go."

I say through my laugh, he's too sensitive for a guy. I grab his arm, trying to stop him from walking away but my laugh is not helping. He yanks his hand, side eyes me and clicks his tongue.

I'm left smiling now as I'm trying hard to control my sensations.

RANDALL\*

We walk out to the living room where Mkhize is waiting for us, he's standing and he's not alone. This bastard comes to my house with his zombies, he probably thinks shit will go down. Not on my account, not till I blow the whistle. He doesn't scare me one bit.

Me: "I'm beginning to like you old man, at least you know I hate it when trespassers sit on my

white sofas.

Mkhize: "Cut the crap Scar, I think you have what belongs to me."

His cold tone doesn't move me.

Me: "You think? Really Mkhize? Maybe you should consider retiring, you know. Spend some quality time with your grand kids, grandpa is starting to lose it."

He clenches his teeth and a pucker forms between his eye brows.

Mkhize: "You're a piece of trash Scar, stop clowning around."

Me: "Maybe you should get your facts straight before coming to my house and accusing me of things I know nothing of. Did you do your homework grandpa?"

I smirk at him. I know I'm pissing him off and that's the plan, I like seeing his blood pressure escalate.

Mkhize: "Don't play games with me Okolie."

He barks.

Me: "I don't play games Mkhize and when I do, I don't play nice."

One of his guards steps forward while taking out a gun. There's five of them including Mkhize against me and Styles.

Styles cackles, I join him.

Me: "Please, point that thing at me. I want to see something."

The look on my face says I'm not kidding.

He swallows hard and steps back to his position after Mkhize gives him a nod.

Mkhize: "I don't have all day Okolie, bring back what's mine and no one will get hurt."

I laugh at his statement.

Me: "Unless you are talking about the 100k I owe you, then..." I shrug my shoulders.

Styles hands me a bag full of money and I throw it at Mkhize.

Me: "Fetch." I hiss and one of his zombies picks the bag up.

Styles: "An angry old man? Now that's something you don't see every day."

Mkhize clicks his tongue, giving Styles a black look.

Mkhize: "Don't insult me Okolie, I don't take them easily."

Drops of sweat have formed on his forehead, it won't end well if he explodes. If push comes to shove, I am still coming out of this alive. No one is taking what belongs to me. I claimed it hence, it is mine. I take a few steps towards him but Styles puts his hand out, stopping me from going

any further.

Me: "Well, I don't take threats easily grandpa. You don't tread on my territory and throw demands like you own this place. Like I said, I don't play nice."

He shakes his head.

Mkhize: "This is not over, I'm coming back for what's mine."

Me: "You can't claim what you never had msunu."

He chuckles before walking out with his gorillas.

I need a drink... bloody idiot. Who the hell does he think he is?

A glass of whiskey always calms me, Styles pours himself one too. He looks agitated.

Since when is he afraid of that cockroach? I glare at him and he shrugs before settling down on the couch. I make myself comfortable on the opposite couch.

Me: "And then?"

He better have a good explanation for that foolish face he's wearing.

Styles: "That bastard means business Scar, a war with the Mkhizes is something you don't want. His brothers are just as fucked up as him."

Me: "I'm ready for anything Styles, if it means I get to keep what belongs to me."

Styles: "Why don't you just give him what he wants?"

I'm getting tired of Styles' cowardice.

Me: "I'm going to pretend you did not say that to me."

Nx!

Styles: "But Randy..."

Me: "Where did you lose your balls Styles?"

I snap at him.

Styles: "Fuck you Randall." He frowns.

Me: "No, fuck you Styles. If you're a coward then don't drag me into it, I'm not weak and I will not bow down to that baboon. I've been in this game for too long, I know what I'm doing."

Styles: "She's not worth it man."

You know what? Nx!

Me: "If you don't want me to blow your brains off, then shut the fuck up."

I'm done talking, no one has a say in this matter but me.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

6\*

NOMBULELO\*

Everton (Her father's place.)\*

Martha: << Sithi sangoma ngihlabele amadlozi,  
ngoba mina, hayi ziyang' bhedela. >>>

These are my mother's friends Martha and Tebogo, they are completely drunk. They are dancing and singing to Brenda Fassie's song, completely messing it up. Each is carrying two bottles of beer. Are they not ashamed? And on the streets of all places?

There's people taking videos and pictures of them while laughing.

Tebogo: <<< Awu bheke babamba' ama- lotto,  
Abanye, babamb' um'china >>>

She jumps in with that line, her finger directed at my house. These old women though. Martha sees me and grabs my arm.

Martha: "Nombulelo, come, come."

She stumbles, almost falling on me, I quickly slide to the side. She smells like a brewery.

Martha: "Your father is a blesser today. Look at us, si happy, si grand, kumnandi, futh' asina stress. Dololo problems, dololo stress." (We are happy, life is nice and we're stress free.)

Says the woman who was just singing to a song that talks about having problems in life.

She burps, loudly so.

Tebogo laughs at her.

Me: "Sis' Martha, what happened?"

Martha: "Call me mam' Martha. Tell me, how does Moses feel about taking a second wife?"

Did she just...

Okay... Maybe I'm hearing things.

Martha: "Wena mgane aw'funi ukus'joiner no Ntombi? You can be the third wife." (Don't you want to join us my friend?)

Tebogo: "Cha, cha, cha chomie. Ngiyabonga, uMoses us'dudla maan. Hy is vet. How will he satisfy me in bed? Cabanga nje, when he starts eating his money, uzobe ushade i tumble dryer Martha." (No thank you my friend, Moses is too fat. He's still going to gain more weight.)



Martha: "Ohooo, uzoz'bona. Mina I'll be singing <<<Versace on the floor, take it off, take it off for me>>> (Suit yourself)

She sings off tune while twisting her hips, they should be sued for being off tune and for messing up the songs too. Plus, jail time for those terrible dance moves.

Why am I entertaining this?

I have seen and heard enough to traumatize me my whole life.

STYLES\*

Houghton (Randall's house)\*

Nkomo has finally lived up to his name, he messed up with that stunt he pulled. Randall is going to kill him, I have known Randall almost all my life and I have never seen him lose it like that.

Who would've thought the cold hearted Randall would have a soft spot for a woman?

I'd be damned.

The girl is unknowingly melting his icy heart.

I hope all of this is worth all the enemies we've gained.

Randall: "Where is that ass hole?"

He shouts as he marches down the stairs, note Randall does not shout. Although ruthless, he is calm and soft spoken. This confirms my suspicions, he's catching feelings which is something he would never admit to.

Me: "He's on his way to the hospital."

Randall: "Why did you let him go?"

He rumbles.

Me: "Don't bite my head off Scar, I had to do something. You almost killed the guy."

Randall: "That was the fucking plan Styles, that bastard deserves to be burnt alive."

His words remind me of a dreadful past I've worked so hard to forget, he notices the look on my face.

Randall: "I'm sorry bruh, I didn't..."

Me: "It's okay, don't stress about it."

I walk out to the back yard with a glass of whiskey in hand and sit on one of the couches outside, he follows me.

There's a big in ground pool surrounded by hard wood decks, the interior here is that of a lounge. It's a comfortable setting, thanks to the glass walls surrounding this house you can see the inside from here. Randall has a taste of royalty when it comes to buying a house and interior decorations. Living big is his motto, he doesn't do cheap.

I sometimes tease him about how this royalty that runs in his blood will leave him bankrupt if that is at all possible, he might be a spender but he uses money wisely.

Anyway, if you want to get along with Randall Uze Okolie. Do not, I repeat, do not mention the word royalty.

Randall: "You good?"

He sits as he looks at me with worry, he's about to go mushy on me.

I decide not to answer him because I don't know the answer to that.

Me: "How is she?"

He clenches his fist.

Randall: "I don't know, I can't think straight man. I need to get out of this house, I keep seeing him on top of her. It's driving me crazy."

Me: "Maybe you should, I'll keep an eye on her. The guards are here too..."

My phone rings cutting me off, it's Khethukuthula. The only woman in my life.

Khethu: "Styles you have to come home, your uncle is here again. He's drunk and banging on the door, I've been telling him to go away but he won't budge. He's called me by every possible racist name I can think of."

She's sounds fearful.

Me: "I'm on my way."

I cut the call.

Randall: "Julius?"

Me: "That bastard probably wants money again."

Randall: "Don't you think you should stop gifting him with money and take him to rehab?"

Me: "And where is the fun in that? My whole plan of getting him addicted to drugs and alcohol will be in vain."

Randall: "Yeah but he's a junkie now, he's lost everything including his wife and kids. Isn't that enough punishment?"

Me: "Nope, I'm still having fun Uze."

Randall: "Fuck you, don't call me that."

I laugh at him.

Did I mention not to call him by his native name as well? It's connected to that royalty shit too.

Me: "It's your name? Embrace it."

I pat his back.

Randall: "No, it's my father's repression over me."

I shake my head.

Me: "I have to go man, if you need a breather then do so. We don't want you losing it and scaring that poor girl again, she's been through enough."

Randall: "I hear you."

Me: "And stay away from Cow, I know you Randall. You've already planned his death in that sick mind of yours."

He doesn't say anything and I know he won't listen to me.

NOMBULELO\*

Everton\*

I thought I was in trouble because it was late and I just got home, only to find my parents too stressed to care about my whereabouts. The house is a mess, there's empty beer bottles scattered everywhere, dirty dishes all over the kitchen.

Mom should know I'm not going to clean this mess, it's not like I was invited to the party anyway. So, this is where Martha and Tebogo's fun began?

Where did these people get the money to throw a party and make alcohol rain like manna?

Dad is passed out on the couch, it looks like he's about to fall off.

This man though... How many times do I have to tell him he's too big to sleep on the couch?

I'm not waking him up today, if he falls, he falls.

Me: "Mama, what's going on?"

She's been sitting on the floor, drinking beer from the bottle.

Since when does she drink like this anyway? Should I tell her about her minions who are completely drunk outside and having a party for two?

Ntombi: "Our lives are over Lelo, we are finished my child. Your father has ruined us."

She's been repeating these words like she's in a trance, she hasn't explained further. I'll talk to





them tomorrow when they are sober and normal.

I'm still not cleaning this mess.

Besides, I have bigger problems to worry about. I'm pregnant, I don't know how it happened. Zuma and I have been very careful, we used protection all the time. Mom is too soft but my father, aaii. That old man is going to kill me, if not throw me out of the house and when he's done with me, I'll cringe at the thought of having sex.

He's always been singing praises about how proud he is of me and that I will be the one to make him a respectable man in the community. My father has an extremely high case of 'abantu bazothini' (what will people say) syndrome and it's killing him.

I have to tell Zuma about this pregnancy, I'm not sure if I want it but it's also evidence of our love.

If it's a boy, he'll look like him although Zuma is not the most handsome man on the planet but he's my Zuma and I love him.

If it's a girl, she will look like me. I only hope they won't inherit their father's big head.

I already see a future together with him, without the shack obviously because there's no way I'm raising my kids in a one room kitchen/ bedroom/ sitting room.

Me: <<< We need to talk. >>>

I text him, he replies immediately. He knows I hate being blue ticked and for some odd reason, he's always online.

Zuma: <<< I'm listening. >>>

Me: <<< In person, it's important. >>>

Zuma: <<< Whatever it is, I didn't mean it. >>>

It's phrases like these that make me think he's up to no good.

Zuma: <<< I have to go buy stock in the morning, you can come around a bit after 12pm. >>>

Me: <<< Sure. >>>

Suddenly I'm nervous.

KHETHU\*

Bryanston, (Styles' house)\*

I love Styles with every bit of me but I am tired of having to deal with his uncle, this man comes to the house banging on the door whenever he feels like it. I don't know how he's able to open the gate, he's sly like that. I'm sitting on the couch waiting for Styles, it's been too long and the shouting, banging and singing of that drunk man has me highly frustrated.



Doesn't he get tired?

Styles: "What are you doing here Julius?"

Oh, great! Finally, he's here.

Julius: "Styles, my boytjie."

He shouts, his voice is naturally loud, I think.

Julius is Afrikaans, he has this deep Afrikaans accent. He hates the fact that I'm dating his brother's son, apparently I'm too black for him. Whatever that means, that man is as racist as they come.

I rush to stand by the door, I will not open it just in case he plans to attack. Sometimes Julius looks at me like he wants to murder me.

Styles: "Get out of my property Julius."

Julius: "Is this the way to speak to your father?"

He sounds so wasted.

Styles: "You are not my father."

I can hear the anger in his tone.

Julius: "Hey sonnie, your father denied you and because I'm his brother, that means I'm the only pa' you have." (Father)

I know Styles is livid right now, but thankfully he's always been calm so he'll handle this well.

Styles: "You're testing my patience Julius."

Maybe I spoke too soon.

Julius: "Okay, okay. I'm gone, give me a hundred there. I haven't had anything to eat in days."

Same story all the time.

Styles: "Why should I give you my money?"

Julius: "Come on, don't be like that Stylesie."

Styles: "Don't call me that."

Julius: "I'll stop if you give me hundred bucks."

There's silence for a few seconds before Julius starts laughing, Styles has probably given him the money.

Styles: "Here, now go."

He grunts.

Julius: "Daar sy. I'll be back Stylesie. Yeses! You're stingy man." (There you go.)

He's ungrateful like that, the door opens. Our eyes meet and I'm in his arms in a second.

Styles: "Are you okay?"

He caresses my cheek, I nod.

Me: "Can't you do something about him coming here?"

I ask as he leads me to the couch, I sit beside him.

Styles: "We spoke about this Khethu."

Me: "I know baby, but... Look I can speak to my father."

My father is a police commissioner.

Styles: "You know I hate this 'daddy can I' mode, I don't need his help."

He's insulting me. Nx!

Styles: "I'm not weak Khethu, I will deal with this my way."

Four years of my life I have been with this man and till today I struggle to get used to his mood swings, they change like the weather. Styles is unpredictable, you never know what he's thinking or what he might do next.

I haven't experienced his anger yet, something tells me he's bottling it up and one day...

Just one day...

I only hope it never comes.

To be continued >>>



7\*

RANDALL\*

At the hospital\*

I'm at the hospital, that idiot declared war with me when he let his lust control him. Styles must not know me if he thinks I will sit idle and let this slide.

There's someone guarding the door, I know Styles has a hand in this. He stops me as I pass him and attempt to open the door.

Him: "You're not allowed to go in sir."

Me: "Excuse me, do you know who I am?"

He's blocking the door now.

Him: "I know who you are, that's why I can't let you in."

Me: "I want to see you stop me."

He stands still as I try to walk past him, this fool has a death wish.

Me: "I will crush you boy, get the fuck out of my way."

Him: "I respect you Scar but Mr. Sishi gave me strict instructions not to let you in."

He sounds like he's pleading which I don't really care about, he's pissing me off right now. My phone rings just as I am about ready to push him aside...

Perfect timing.

Me: "What the actual fuck Styles?"

Styles: "Get out of there Randy."

How did he know I'm at the hospital?

Me: "This is between me and Nkomo, you have nothing to do with this Styles."

Styles: "I have everything to do with it, you're my brother and I will not watch you do something you will live to regret."

Me: "What I will live to regret is not killing him when I should have."

Styles: "We have been through a lot with him Randy, you can't just kill him like that. You'll hate yourself and I refuse to let that happen."

Me: "That bastard means nothing to me, I will not be okay till I see his lifeless body."



Styles: "That's not you talking but Scar and I know he's angry and wants revenge but you have to take control Randall, think this through."

Me: "I am not a child Styles, do not reprimand me. Come hell or high waters, Nkomo is going down."

Styles likes pressing my buttons and he's bloody pressing the wrong one right now.

Styles: "Just so you know, that guard is trained. He's ready to risk his life, you are not going in there Uze."

Nx!

Me: "Fuck you."

He chuckles.

Styles: "Don't worry, Khethu is on it right after I drop this phone call."

Idiot...

Me: "She better fuck you back to your senses because I am not backing down from this."

He laughs and drops the call.

AMARA\*

Randall's house.\*

That Randall guy said get comfortable and that's what I have done, I needed a long bath after not bathing for two days. It helped me relax, the closet is so big and full of new clothes. My taste and size actually, it's like all of this was planned. There's everything in it, from dresses, jeans, track suits and socks to sleep wear.

Knowing how this house is flooded with men whose plans for me I know nothing of, I opted for a track suit. I have to hide my body, I've lost a lot of weight in just these two days. I have bags under my eyes, I'm drained, weak and my spirit is down.

The bedroom is bigger than the room I was locked in, it's warm, has a proper bed with bedding and pillows, white and Turkish blue in colour.

Two wooden chairs are placed on each side of the window, yes, there's a normal big window draped with a turquoise curtain. There's a small table and two chairs in the middle of the room.

Whoever decorated this room had the word comfy in mind.

There's a sliding door leading to a balcony, a beautiful garden with lollipop trees and different kinds of flowers as the star cast of that breath taking garden. The gardener must love his work.

I can see the high way from this view. It's very far from here, that it would take me the whole day

to probably get there.

I did think of jumping out the balcony and running out that door but they are all locked. So, I've been standing by the sliding door, staring at the cars. It's the only thing that looks real to me right now.

There's a knock, then an elderly woman probably in her early fifties walks in. I don't know why she knocked, the door was bloody locked.

She smiles the moment our eyes meet, I don't have it in me to return it.

Her: "Hi, you look refreshed."

She has a Nigerian accent, I don't answer her. I'm still standing by the window, my arms folded across my chest. She puts the tray of warm food, with a glass of juice on the table and looks at me.

Her: "Word of advice my girl, you need to stop thinking a lot. It will only make you sick. Listen to Mr. Okolie. He only wants what's best for you."

Nx! And Barak Obama is my father.

I might be naïve but I'm not stupid.

Me: "By keeping me locked up against my will?"

She looks at me, before dragging her feet out the door. I hear her lock it, I'm not going to eat that stupid food. I will starve myself till my body gives up on me, I would rather die than be here.

RANDALL\*

At some apartment in Randburg.\*

After that phone call with Styles I decided to go blow off some steam, the stupid guard is stubborn. I don't know how Styles knew I was at the hospital, the fact that he's unpredictable freaks me out.

With him, you have to tread carefully. One slip up and you're fucked, he can be a sick bastard when provoked.

At least I'm comforted by the fact that he would take a bullet for me and I would do the same for him.

I'm at a place I shouldn't be right now, looking at this sexy woman standing before me. Somehow I always find myself here when I'm angry and feel like I'm about to explode, she's not the only one.

I "puff and pass" so they don't catch feelings.

This one has been around for a while, she's a bit of a hard-core, which is good for me because she won't be catching feelings anytime soon. I would be lying if I say I know her name, I don't allow them to talk to me, kissing is not allowed and they are not allowed to unclothe me either.

We do what we do and go our separate ways. I can name a whole lot of things we've done in this apartment.

That gaze in her eyes says she wants me, she's always ready to service me.

I've been sitting on this bed contemplating with myself, there's this thing forcing me to leave but I will not be controlled, I am my own person.

She looks restless and irritated as I keep her waiting.

Her: "I..."

Me: "Don't talk to me."

Just when I thought she's hard-core, she tries to break the rules. She better not be feeling me.

Me: "Strip."

I command and she strips naked with a seductive smile dancing on her face, I feel rather annoyed by it.

Amara occupies my mind and that forces me to try something different, just so I can get her out of my mind. I pull the woman to me and ravenously kiss her. She smiles through the kiss, her arms are hooked around my neck.

I can't believe I'm breaking my own rules.

Like a fresh memory, Amara's sweet innocent face flashes before me compelling me to stop, I push the lady away as I stagger back a bit. She frowns.

Her: "Are you okay?"

I guess she thinks the rules are off the table, I take her in my arms again. There's no feeling in this kiss, it's dry and meaningless. I push her to lie on the bed and she smiles widely, I'm trying by all means not to think about Amara and maybe after this she'll be out of my mind.

I get in between her legs and begin planting kisses all over her body.

Her: "Oh Randy."

The sound of her voice is ruining the moment so I cover her mouth stopping her from speaking.

I see Amara's face again and this time it compels me to stop, I jump from the bed and rush out of there.

To be continued...

8\*

Randall\*

I'm being tailed, I noticed the black car when I entered Malibongwe DR.

I decided not to drive home just to see if the idiot was really on my tail. Here I am a while later still driving around, I know it's that baboon Mkhize. He's so old now that he makes such mistakes.

Styles: "For a prince, your timing sucks."

He's breathing heavily, the idiot is having sex. I know he always answers my calls on the second ring, but he could have just ignored it.

I'm an understanding person.

Me: "For someone who doesn't believe in marriage, you're sure having your way with Dladla's daughter. Don't tell me you're still at it Sishi. Let me remind you in case you've forgotten, her father is a police commissioner."

Styles: "What do you want Randall? I'm busy."

He snaps, I laugh at him.

Me: "There's a monkey tailing me."

Styles: "Mkhize?"

"Baby get off the phone."

Khethu complains, she sounds frustrated.

Styles: "I'll call you back just now."

Me: "Really? Are you that fast?"

He laughs and drops the call. I'm still being followed, so I slow down just to pass time.

Normally I would know what to do in a situation like this but, since Amara, I have to think twice before acting. If I drive to my house where there's guards, I could be risking her life. Mkhize is after her with red eyes and I know what the fucker is capable of.

I owe Amara my life, she is my number one priority. I will fight anyone to protect her, I will even fight her if that means she's safe.

I had to take her by force, I'd rather have her think she was bought than let that sick son of a bitch Mkhize take her. I had an option to, either tell her about her uncle's evil tactics and ask her to come with me. Which sounds extremely insane considering that I'm a stranger or I could have killed Mkhize, but that would mean an unending war with his family.





AMARA\*

I jump up to the sound of gun shots, it sounds like a war out there and I can't seem to make out what's really going on. Are these people fighting each other? Am I in danger?

I know the house is surrounded by body guards, the lady who brought me food told me this. She said I won't be able to escape without being seen so, I might as well accept my fate.

What kind of a woman is she?

Doesn't she have kids?

I thought she would have mercy on me and help me escape so, when I hinted about fleeing she blurted out these words to me. I can tell she cares about this Randall guy.

I decide to peep through the window maybe I'll catch a glimpse of what's happening but there's nothing, it looks so peaceful from this view, I run towards the sliding door to see if there's also anything there.

The moment I peek, I see this tall scary looking white man, he sees me and a bone chilling smirk forms on his mouth. I duck but it's too late, not later than a second I hear screams of a woman.

"Che stanza e?" (Which room is it?)

A loud deep male voice shouts in a foreign language, it sounds like he's outside my door.

My sixth sense works overtime telling me I should hide under the bed, there's more voices. I can't really make out what they are saying but I know they are here for me and their intentions are not good.

If I were from a rich powerful family I would think they are here to rescue me...

The door swings open.

"Deve essere qui." (She must be in here.)

The same voice says, there's two of them. I can only see their feet.

"Non ce nessuno qui Franco." (There's no one here Franco)

The other guy says, I have figured out that they are speaking Italian. But, what could they possibly want from me?

There's an uncomfortable silence for a while before I feel someone snatch my leg, I scream as they drag me from under the bed. It's the guy I saw outside, he gives me the same smirk.

"Oh cara, e una bellezza." (Oh dear, she's a beauty.)

He digs his fingers deep into my cheeks as he says that, it's painful but tolerable.

I haven't said anything yet, fear has made me mute. He gags my mouth before I could scream.

RANDALL\*

Styles calls back.

Me: "Let me call you back, I've got guests."

I'm surrounded, there's two cars behind me and an SUV in front. Mkhize steps out of the SUV with his brother Musa and son, I don't know which one because the dick head has so many of them. They are armed.

I jump out of the car, I have little Scar on my hand, loaded and ready for action. They have their guns drawn out as well.

Me: "Damn! Wrong day to piss me off Mkhize."

Mkhize: "Good day to die though?"

I laugh, he's an idiot if he thinks he can actually kill me.

Me: "We both know if you wanted to kill me, you would have pulled that trigger already. You can't kill me Mkhize, even in your wildest fantasies."

Mkhize: "You think I'm afraid of you?"

Me: "I know you're afraid of me."

Musa: "Bafo Dubula lenja." (Brother, shoot this bastard)

Me: "I highly doubt that's a good idea. My death will have your family cursed for generations to come, even your great, great grandchildren will pay for it. Tell him 'bafo' tell your illiterate brother what killing an Okolie will do to your family."

I say looking at Mkhize, there's a bit of fear reflecting on his face.

Musa: "You're bluffing."

Me: "Really? Trust me, you don't want to find out if I'm bluffing or not. Oh and... I also have a brother. The difference with mine is that he can turn into a fucking psycho who goes around killing anyone who was involved in killing his dear one. The problem with that is, children also fall victim to his fury. He wipes out the entire generation and leaves no stone unturned."

Mkhize knows exactly what I'm talking about, he becomes uneasy at the sound of my words.

Mkhize: "You're nothing without that boy."

He declares, as much as Styles acts like a coward. People tremble at the mention of him, he is very much known and feared in the dark world and what he can be capable of.

Me: "Aren't I just lucky."

I smirk.

Son: "Baba, why are you wasting your time talking to him. He's obviously lying to us, we're the Mkhizes. There is nothing we can't do."

Me: "Aww, daddy brought boy boy to work. What? Was the crèche closed today?"

Son: "Ungang' jwayeli kabi wena, Uzofa kab' hlungu." (Don't piss me off, you'll die a painful death.)

This little boy is funny, he got me laughing out loud. Although I'm Ghanaian, I can speak all eleven languages.

Me: "Control your puppy Mkhize."

Mkhize: "Awume wena." (Wait.)

He shouts at him

Mkhize: "I got what I wanted. Our job here is done."

He winks at me.

He has that smile that says, I have just defeated you.

Then it clicks... Oh shit.

Me: "You fucking bastard."

I roar and rush to the car, leaving him laughing. I have a few missed calls from Styles, he calls just as I dial his number.

Styles: "Shit! I thought they had you."

Me: "They have Amara, I've just been fucked bruh. The bastard was stalling me just so I don't go to the house, he planned this Styles. How did I not see it?"

I explain as I speed off.

Styles: "Where are you?"

Me: "Driving home, I have to get to her."

Styles: "No, they probably left the house already. Listen rather do this, take the freeway to Soweto."

I hear shuffling in the background.

Me: "Really Styles? A goose chase?"

Styles: "I put a tracker on her."

Me: "What?"

See why I say he's unpredictable.

Styles: "The day you sent me to buy her clothes, I thought it to be a good idea to put trackers on them. You know, just in case."

Me: "They'll probably figure that one out."

Styles: "There's one or two on her teeth as well."

Me: "Do I want to know how you pulled that one off?"

Styles: "It was in her toothbrush, it's like a magnet. So, when she was brushing her teeth, it stuck to one of them. They won't be able to trace this one, it's as small as a speck of dust. Plus, the liquid in her mouth works as a shield, it blocks out every type of machine they could possibly use to trace trackers."

Okay... This is too much to grasp in one go.

I'm not sure I know Styles at all, I know he's intellect but... This...

I guess I have been underestimating him all this while.

Styles: "The car is headed towards Nasrec, they are probably taking her to Kliptown."

Me: "There's tin shacks there, it will be hard to find her?"

Styles: "Plus, he grew up there, that's his territory. If they make it there Scar, you'll never get her back."

Me: "Styles, I will face the devil if I have to. Amara is sleeping at home tonight, I will turn that town upside down just to find her."

Styles: "Relax, let's not get carried away. We need to make sure that they don't make it to Kliptown."

I don't understand how he can be so calm in situations like these.

Me: "I see the car, it's one of Mkhize's cars."

Styles: "Don't make any moves Scar, I just passed Gold reef City. We'll corner them at the bridge."

Me: "But what if she's in the car? I can get her out."

Styles: "Your stubbornness will only mess things up, I have a woman waiting for me at home Randall. She's expecting me to walk through the door tonight and I will, and you have a daughter last time I checked. Let's not be rational okay?"

He's right, I tend to overreact when I'm under pressure.

Me: "No one is dying today Styles, we're making it out alive with Amara."

Amara\*

To think the gag wasn't enough, they put a black cloth over my head when we got to the car. Time has slowed down for me, seconds feel like minutes. Minutes feel like hours.

I don't know what is what anymore.

All I'm thinking in my head is that I'm about to die, this is it.

This is how my life is going to end I will not be able to say goodbye to my aunt and Lelo, she's my best friend. We were supposed to experience so many things together.

We had it all planned out, she would finish her studies, get a job and help pay for my studies, then move to Cape Town permanently. I was going to be her maid of honour and she would be mine.

Our husbands would be best friends and we would have date nights every Friday, go to soccer matches on weekends, only because they love soccer but Sundays would belong to me and her.

Or kids would go to the same school and we'd have play dates for them, all of this is nothing but a dream now, one that will never come to pass.

If anyone told me that one day I would be in such a predicament, I would have laughed in their face.

There's probably four men in this car, I have heard four different voices, three sound foreign and one sounds South African.

There's a phone ringing.

"Bafo"

Listens \*\*\*

"We're on our way"

Listens \*\*\*

"Don't worry we're not being followed"

Listens\*\*\*\*

"That fool has no chance bafo"

Listens\*\*\*\*

"I hear you, the wedding will be tonight. Everything is ready. By the time he finds her, she will be Mrs. Mkhize."

He laughs, my heart drops to the depths of my stomach and a pulsating heat goes through my entire body. I pray he is not talking about me.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

9\*

RANDALL\*

A taxi almost hits me, I lurch the car to the side almost hitting another one in front of me. I manage to gain control of my car. The taxi hoots followed by the driver showing me the middle finger. It's a good thing I'm driving an SUV or else they would have crashed me.

Soon after, almost all the taxis are sounding the horn. It feels like I'm at Bree during morning rush hour.

Why is there so many taxis here? I can't see the car anymore, there are taxis blocking it. In fact, they are all over the road. My car is the only car here.

Styles: "What's going on? What's that noise?"

I'm still on the phone with Styles.

Me: "Is there a taxi strike today?"

Styles: "Not that I know of, why?"

Me: "All lanes are full of taxis, there's more coming. I'm the only one with a car here and I've lost Mkhize's car."

Styles: "Shit!!!"

Me: "It's his taxis, they are all written Mkhize taxi association."

That son of a gun, he carefully planned all of this.

Styles: "I'd be damned, the old man still has what it takes."

He sniggers.

Me: "This is an ambush Styles."

Styles: "At least we know they won't kill you, he knows what will happen if anything were to happen to you."

Suddenly, all four lanes are full of taxis and none of them are moving.

Me: "I'm surrounded, there's a traffic jam. I can't move forward or back, there's no way out bruh."

Styles: "Dammit! He knew we were going to follow him, this is a perfectly thought out plan. I have a feeling he isn't working alone, Mkhize is smart but not that smart."

He goes quiet for a while, I know he's having a moment with his brain.

Styles: "Franco, that Italian son of a bitch. Mkhize teamed up with the Italians."

Me: "Italians or not, no one is stopping me. I'm going to have to start shooting."

Styles: "No, they might be armed. These are taxi drivers remember, they'll take you down without a thought to it."

Me: "What the fuck do you want me to do Styles? Camp here and hope for the best?"

I'm so riled by this whole thing, I'm always a step ahead Mkhize. That's why I was able to take Amara without him knowing about it. How did I let this happen?

Styles: "I have a plan."

Me: "What is it?"

Styles: "I'd rather you see it."

Me: "Unless you can fly and get me out of here, I don't see another way out."

Styles: "Hey! Chief Segun Okolie's son. You need to calm down, that girl has your mind in shambles. We are dealing with the Italians remember, they are the elephants and Mkhize is an ant compared to them."

He retorts.

He can be disrespectful when he wants to. Then again, he's right.

Mkhize alone wouldn't have succeeded in taking Amara. That's how tight security was at my house.

I'm already pissed off by all of this so I might as well.

I sigh heavily in frustration.

Me: "Where are you now?"

Styles: "Approaching Bara taxi rank, they changed the course. The car is headed towards Pimville, if my plan works. We'll be able to ambush them before they reach Grace Bible Church."

Me: "This better work Styles."

Styles: "Well, if you keep talking to me instead of letting me cut the call so, I can work. This plan might backfire. If they reach his home town, it's the end of the road for us and the beginning of Amara's nightmare."

He reminds me of a heart throbbing truth.

Me: "Not if I have anything to do with it."

Styles: "I'll call you back."

He drops the call, time is not on our side.

NOMBULELO\*





I just finished posting a few pictures of Amara on all my social media accounts, asking for people to contact me if they have seen her or help look for her if possible. I plan to go to the police station tomorrow to report her missing, the 72hour period has passed.

I wish she had a phone, but she wasn't allowed to have one. Now that I think about it, dad has always been awful to her.

I come across another missing person's post.

It's a girl saying she's looking for her big brother who went missing 16 years ago. Apparently he was 18 years old when he left home and they haven't seen him since, my heart breaks. I would hate that to happen with Amara.

It's starting to get dark outside, mom passed out on the floor. It took forever to get her to wake up and go to bed, talk about drinking your sorrows away. As for dad, he's snoring his life away on the couch. At least I won't have to cook, I'll just have bread and tea.

What kind of party doesn't have food? The fridge is packed with alcohol.

I am so moving out once I start working.

I finally got the internship at the hospital and I start the day after tomorrow. I guess I have never been that intelligent, my marks didn't allow me to study medicine so being a nurse was the closest I could get to being a doctor. I'll work my way up.

RANDALL\*

It's now dark outside, some of these drivers have fallen asleep. I see they are very comfortable, bloody idiots. I hope whatever Styles is planning works, he's taking long though.

Unexpectedly, police and ambulance sirens resonate, they are trying to pass through this congested traffic. I would like to see them try to pass through these stubborn taxi drivers.

Styles calls back.

Styles: "Do you see it?"

Wait! What?

Me: "This is all you?"

I'm impressed.

Styles: "There should be about six police cars and four ambulances plus, two police helicopters. You'll see how the drivers will start panicking. I doubt they want to spend the night in jail."

I hear and see the helicopters approaching, the flash lights are on. This man never ceases to

amaze me.

Me: "Okay, I see all of this but what if the police start asking questions? We don't have time for that."

Styles: "Those are not real cops man, well one of them is. He owes me so, I had to collect on the favour."

There's movement.

Judging by the looks of these two fuckers on both my sides, they are terrified.

Me: "It's working, the bloody cowards are moving. Shit you're a god bruh."

He chuckles.

Styles: "Don't sing my praises yet, let's get your girl home first. Then you can buy me that SUV Maserati Levante."

I laugh.

Me: "I beg ooo, see your life."

He cackles.

Styles: "Another thing, I managed to set up a road block on Chris Hani road just to stall them. This has bought us some time and the fun part about this is, they won't suspect a thing. This is South Africa, road blocks are common.

He's having more fun than I am, his laughs testify of that.

Me: Maybe you do deserve that SUV."

I let that glide out amusedly, causing him to break out in laughter.

Styles: "In that case let's do this shit."

Once the taxis begin driving away, I step on it, speeding at 160.

AMARA\*

Breathing has become like a challenge under this mask. I'm exhausted and the will to fight refuses to grant me access, leaving me with only a choice to be frail. I have finally come to the conclusion that it's the end for me.

The car is still moving, it's a smooth ride. So, I presume we're on the tar road.

These men sound jolly and a bit drunk, they are having a little party in here. While I'm tied up like a wild animal, my back has begun to hurt as I've been laying on the same position for what has seemed like an eternity.

My wrists and ankles are burning due to the ropes tightly binding me.

The car suddenly hurtles throwing me against what I think is the front seat, it screeches and stops. An ungentle grip forcefully lifts me from the floor and puts me back to the position I was in.

The men sound angry and curses fill the car.

“Fuck, how did they find us?”

The South African guy shouts.

“It’s only two of them, we can take them down.”

The man with the Italian accent declares, he sounds so sure of himself. I have no clue who they are talking about.

“Don’t undermine those fuckers Franco, the two of them are more dangerous than ten men. They’ll fuck us up if we are not careful.”

The South African guy responds in a fit of rage, he sounds more frustrated than the Italians.

“I don’t fucking care, I never lose. Capire?” (Understand)

Franco shouts back, I can sense fear and panic in their voices now.

I hear gun shots, they are so loud that my ears begin to hurt. These fools have started shooting at whoever is after them, there’s more gun shots. These ones sound a bit far. I hear a window smashing and glasses hitting the ground.

“Shit, Matteo!!! They fucking killed Matteo.”

One of the Italians shouts, I think one of them has been taken down.

“This is not worth it, fanculo.” (Fuck it)

Franco groans, I hear the door open and a pair of heavy footsteps running from us. There’s this cold wind embracing my body.

“Franco, you can’t leave. You guys can’t leave me hear.”

The South African guy roars.

“Fanabla.” (Go to hell)

Franco shouts as I hear another pair of feet leaving us, it must be the other accomplice. I guess taking one of them down proved that they don’t know who they are dealing with.

I think it’s just me and the guy from mzansi, the car is swiftly filled with sounds of panic and his heavy breathing and profanes escaping his mouth occasionally. If fear had a voice, then it would sound like this.

He keeps shooting recklessly without stopping. Each bullet sound is accompanied by a cowardly scream from him.

The other team hasn't stopped shooting, they are fighting back just as hard. A loud groan escapes this man's mouth, before a heavy object falls on top of me. I scream while trying to shrug it off of me but the gag rejects the level of my screams, letting me grumble instead and the object is too heavy that my small body has no chance against it.

It feels like a body and it's not moving, the thought of a dead person on me is as scary as death.

"Amara!!! Amara!!!"

I hear his voice, it's him. Randall is here and he's desperately calling out to me. I want to scream and say I'm here but I'm tied up and limited by this gag on my mouth. The cloth over my head is blocking my vision and there's a dead man on top of me, I'm in a helpless position.

I give up trying to move but I'm still groaning loudly.

I hear the sound of the back door opening and a strong wind welcomes me. The heavy body is removed from me followed by a loud thump and a pair of large hands grab my upper arms, sitting me up. I can hear the person wheezing, evidence that they undoubtedly ran to the car, they haven't said anything yet.

"Amara."

His soft whispers tickle my ears and my heart stops a bit at the sound of his fretful voice.

I feel him pull the cloth from my head and this bright light blinds my eyes for a second, before his face appears through that same light. I feel so bad for being glad to see him. He looks at me with a concerned expression but also, there's rage in his eyes.

He untangles the gag from my mouth, cuts the ropes binding me, with a pocket knife. All this while I'm leering at him, hoping and praying that this is not a dream. I'm afraid to even blink lest, it's all in my imagination.

He pulls me into his arms, clasping them around me. I feel so small in his huge arms, somehow it feels like the safest place in the world and there's nowhere I would rather be.

How else would I feel though? I have been through hell and back in the hours that passed.

Overwhelmed, I find myself holding him back as I snuggle against his neck. The river containing my tears is dry. Moreover, I do not have the strength to cry.

Randall: "I'm here, you're safe now."

He whispers against my ear, assuring me of what I already feel. Strangely, I believe him and my heart slips into comfort.

He pulls back, looks into my eyes as he buries my cheeks into the palms of his hands. His warm hands feel like velvet on my skin.

Randall: "Me hemma." (My queen.)

Another soft murmur eludes his mouth before it reaches my ears, I can't help but notice the gentle look in his eyes. It's almost as if I matter to him and he cares genuinely for me.



It's been a long day and I'm probably hallucinating.

The fear, the hunger, the pain and exhaustion consume me, causing me to pass out.

To be continued...



10\*

RANDALL\*

We managed to ambush the car as they approached Maponya mall, that's when all the chaos began. Pedestrians were injured and possibly traumatized. Cars were destroyed, leaving the drivers and passengers wounded and innocent lives lost.

At that moment, I didn't care about anything. All I could think of was getting Amara out of that car alive, she was all that mattered.

I don't know the pain of losing someone close and I have never felt anything strong towards anyone as I have built walls around my heart in the past years. Even the walls of Jericho were not stronger than these, guarding my heart.

But, for some reason, the thought of finding Amara dead in that car killed me. That's when the walls of my heart came crushing down.

I almost went crazy calling out her name and she wasn't responding. I never want to feel that way again.

We didn't know how many people were in the car, Franco and his stooge ran like cowards.

That was minus two people.

And I thought he was tough. Coward!!!

The car they were in, is plastered with bullet holes. So, I didn't know if Amara was hit. All I had to hold on to was hope that she's okay.

A wave of relief washed over me when her big brown eyes met mine, they were bursting with fear.

Here she is, in my arms. I can't look anywhere else but, at her impeccable guileless face. I also can't help but feel like shit for everything I have put her through since, I have come to know her.

Styles got us another car, I'm done asking myself how he does all these things. He has a mind no human can ever crack.

I opt to sit at the back with an unconscious Amara while he drives us home, her head is resting on my lap and my hand is on her back, slowly creating gentle circles.

Me: "This whole mess is fucked up."

I murmur referring to the muddle we just left behind.

Styles: "Yeah and it's a good thing I managed to wipe out all the surveillance footage from every angle."

Me: "What about the witnesses?"

Styles: "Nothing a few hundreds, won't solve. Some will be too traumatized to speak about it."

Me: "Yes, but there's rubbernecks who like capturing everything on camera." Styles: "Oh Scar, you know sometimes it hurts to see how you still don't know me. I don't know if I should be offended or not."

He laughs... Nx!

His window is slightly open and the wind is violently kissing my face, Amara must be cold. At least she's wearing a track suit, I pull the hood of her jacket over her head, covering the side of her face.

Me: "Close the window, the breeze is too strong."

He does as I ask and turns the heater on.

Styles: "Is she okay?"

Me: "She's alive, we'll find out the rest when she wakes up."

Styles: "I called Mbuso when you went to get Amara in the car and asked him to go to the house. You'll find him waiting for you there."

Mbuso is a doctor, we grew up in the same circle. He wasn't about the hustle, homeboy wanted to make his father proud and being a doctor was a dream his father had for him.

Me: "Thanks man."

Styles: "As I was saying. I set up a virus, if anyone attempts to upload anything for the next seven days, their phones will crash. It doesn't matter what the post is."

Me: "I don't want to insult you by asking how that is possible, I already feel stupid."

He lets out a proud laugh.

Styles: "You know how people like to hash tag everything or else it doesn't trend. So, that hash tag itself will completely crush whatever device is used to upload the footage, rejecting the upload in the process. Whether it be a status, video, or picture. Even voice notes are not safe from it. And words that have anything to do with what happened there, will also be rejected, with or without the hash tag."

I'm utterly dumb struck by all of this, this friend of mine should work for the C.I.A or something. He can't let such talent go to waste.

Me: "So this goes for the whole country?"

Styles: "Since we don't know who witnessed the crime scene, there was no other way."

Me: "Well, you could have just set up Gauteng alone."

Styles: "I don't take chances Randy. If a post from Europe takes seconds to reach South Africa,

imagine how long a post from Johannesburg to Limpopo will take.”

Me: “I hear you but, what if someone was live streaming?”

Styles: “Okay, now I’m offended.”

He laughs and I shake my head. This fool will make me want to go back to school.

Me: “You’re an idiot.”

I tease him as he continues to laugh.

Me: “Will you explain or laugh the night away?”

He laughs louder.

Styles: “Okay so, as we were approaching those monkeys. I activated the electromagnetic radiation from this device.”

He hands me a small remote looking thingy, it has two buttons, one red and one green. I have no idea what the heck I’m looking at.

Styles: “They are radio waves, their wavelength can be anywhere from shorter than a grain of rice to longer than the diameter of the earth. They travel at the speed of light in vacuum. The position of an electromagnetic wave with the electromagnetic spectrum can be characterized by either its frequency of oscillation-.”

I’m surprised he thinks I’m interested in knowing the details of how it works.

He’s cracking my brain, I think I’m getting a headache.

Me: “English please.”

I snap cutting him off, he laughs.

Styles: “Okay, sorry. I won’t explain the physics part of it because I know you will shoot me.”

Me: “Damn right I will.”

I clown.

Styles: “Those waves interrupted the streaming, also causing the device to crash.”

Me: “No one is safe from that brain of yours.”

Styles: “They must stop liking things, maybe I’ll take it down a notch.”

Then he says I’m the arrogant one.

Me: “I guess I’m staying away from social media for the next seven days.”

I joke.

Styles: “You’re not even on social media. Speaking of that, Ifeanyi is at it again. She opened a few pages, same pictures as last time.”



This is the past I dread talking about. If I were to erase it permanently, I would.

Me: "That girl will be my down fall, the last thing I want is for that old man to find me."

Styles: "Don't worry, I took care of it. Amara's cousin posted a picture of her too, she's asking people to help find her."

That's nothing to worry about, his phone rings. It's connected to the Bluetooth.

Styles: "It's Khethu."

He reveals as he accepts the call.

Styles: "Hey."

Khethu: "Where are you Styles? It's after 9pm and I'm waiting here like an idiot, you didn't bother to call me and explain why you're not home at this time."

Style: "Relax will you, I'm with Randy."

Khethu: "Well, you should have called and told me that. What was so hard about it?"

Styles: "This is not the time Khethu."

Khethu: "When is the time Styles? Do I have to beg you to communicate with me? Four years of my life, I gave it to you in hopes that one day you'll be the man I had been praying for."

Styles: "I said this is not the time woman."

Khethu: "Styles-"

Styles: "Fuck, don't I come home to you every night and sleep by your side? I don't know what the fuck you want from me, you're grilling me Khethu and I'm getting frustrated. I'm not going to contribute to your foul mood."

He drops the call, knowing Khethu she will shout till sun rise. That's the woman she has become over the years, I think she wants more in the relationship and this man here doesn't believe in marriage. He loves her but will never marry her or anyone for that matter.

Me: "That was hectic."

Styles: "I don't want to talk about it."

His tone has changed now, trust Khethu to ruin his mood. I know when to shut up.

We eventually arrive in Houghton, Styles pulls into the drive way.

Me: "Just so you know, I'm going back to school. You bloody made me feel uneducated."

I proclaim as I carefully take Amara out of the car.

I amuse him, I see. He shakes his head sniggering.

Styles: "I would come in but, I have a crazy woman I need to put to order at home."

I frown at his proclamation and he laughs while getting into the car.

I don't wait for him to drive off.

I carry Amara up to her room. You can't tell that a war had broken out in this house, everything seems to be in its place. There are a few guards who were injured but thankfully, no one died.

STYLES\*

I didn't want to give anything out in front of Randy but I'm getting piqued by Khethu's derogatory manner.

Somehow she has convinced herself that I'm seeing other women and have no interest in her anymore. I love that woman, God knows I love her but her tantrums are unattractive.

The house lights are still on, my house is nothing compared to Randall's mansion.

It's a beautiful house though, a five bedrooled double story. The front wooden double door leads you to the foyer the moment you step in, where there's an imperial staircase. You are led to the lounge as you turn right and could also see the kitchen from the lounge. It's an open floor plan, I like black and grey so I went for these colours in terms of interior decors.

I've been living with Khethu for two years now, she moved in with me when she turned 27. Her father was against it but that girl can surely put up a fight, she is the daughter of a police commissioner after all.

I'm welcomed by a splash of cold water on my face as I close the door shut.

Me: "What the fuck?"

I holler at the angry looking Khethu standing before me with an empty jug on her hand, she has the other hand on her hip.

Me: "What the hell is your problem?"

She doesn't answer me but walks away making her way to the kitchen. This is the second strike of disrespect today and I'm about to burst. I march behind her and grab her arm, forcing her to face me just as she places the jug on the kitchen counter.

Me: "Really? Cold water?"

Khethu: "Would you rather I used hot water?"

She shouts, yanking her arm away.

Me: "Are we being childish Khethu?"

I snap at her, I'm beginning to lose my cool.

Khethu: "Childish? Now, I'm the one who is childish Styles? Ungazong' nyela wena." (You're

shitting me)

I chuckle coldly.

I'm standing here listening and watching this girl being insolent. I don't know how much I can take of this.

Me: "What the fuck did you just say to me?"

I rumble through greeted teeth roughly seizing her arm again, causing her to flinch.

Khethu: "Don't use that language with me, I am not one of your friends Styles."

The impudence of this woman is getting out of hand. I clasp the grip on her arm as her words arouse more anger in me.

She frowns at me as she tries to snatch it away but my clench is too tight. I'm glaring into her eyes, there's a bit of fear in them. I want to stop but my rage won't let me.

Me: "I am getting tired of your shit Khethu, now you're going to tell me what your problem is or go sleep this stinking attitude off."

I demand, she can see that I'm not kidding. Not once have I laid a finger on her but right now she's provoking me.

Khethu: "Now, you want to talk? You didn't seem interested when you were with your friend."

Me: "Is this about Randall? You have a problem with him?"

I eventually let her go, she steps back as she sends her other hand to rub the discomfort from her arm.

Khethu: "You spend more time with him than you do with me, I'm your girlfriend Styles not him. I give you pleasure the whole night, not him."

I don't know what happened but I lost it, the next thing she's on the floor rubbing her hand on her right cheek.

My heart breaks seeing her like this. I want to apologise and promise her it will never happen again but my rage denies me the will to do so.

Instead of helping her up and comforting her, I walk away. I'm so enraged I need to cool off before I do the unthinkable. I hate myself for putting my hand on her. Khethu has been a good woman to me and doesn't deserve this. I lost it when she spoke about Randall in that manner, that man is my brother.

I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for him. He kept me sane when I was losing my mind after my sister's passing, he has proved to me time and again that he has my back and his loyalty lies with me. Now that's a bond no one can break, not even Khethu herself. Randall and I are not blood related but our bond goes beyond blood, I will not tolerate any disrespect towards him.

RANDALL\*

I've been watching Mbuso check on Amara, for some reason I am very anxious. He asked me to leave the room but I declined, I will not leave her alone, not after what happened today.

Me: "How is she?"

I enquire as I cover her with a soft throw.

He's done and packing his medical bag.

Mbuso: "She's weak and dehydrated."

Me: "She refuses to eat or drink any liquids."

Mbuso: "You need to make sure she eats Randy or her heart will give up on her, leading to death."

I refuse to let the word death be associated with her name. This angers me a whole lot.

Me: "I won't let anything happen to her."

He chuckles. I don't see anything funny about this.

Mbuso: "You're not God."

He raises an eye brow.

Me: "But I can make things happen."

Mbuso: "I'm okay with not knowing what those things are. What happened with her anyway?"

Me: "Ask no questions, hear no lies."

He laughs. He's forever laughing, like Styles.

Mbuso: "Make sure she gets all the rest she needs. But, when she wakes up, you need to feed her Randy. Convince her if you have to."

Me: "I will, let me walk you out."

I lead him towards the door.

Mbuso: "Take it easy with her, don't try anything that will traumatize the poor girl. It might send her into shock. I think keeping your distance from her will help her for now."

Maybe my ears are clogged.

Did I hear right?

Me: "Don't tell me what to do Mbuso."

No way am I staying away from her. Who does he think he is?

Mbuso: "As a doctor, I say do as I say and you will thank me later."

Me: "Yeah that's the problem with you doctors. You think you're the gods of all wisdom."

I announce as I walk him down the stairs.

Mbuso: "I see you're still conceited."

Me: "No, I hate being told what to do."

My father tried it once and failed grimly.

Mbuso: "I'm the one with the profession here, I know what my patients need."

Me: "Firstly, I'm not your father. I don't need you to impress me with your doctor skills and secondly, Amara is not your anything. You're just helping out a friend, you don't want me to start naming the things I have done for you, right? I would hate to start collecting on the favours Mbuso. It won't end well."

He raises his eye brows, he can't believe I'm talking to him like this.

I don't care, I had a shitty day and this is the last thing I need right now.

Me: "I'm sure you still remember how to open the door right?"

He smirks, this one is not easily offended. He doesn't take things to heart.

Mbuso: "Randall?"

He laughs.

Me: "Please, make sure you close my door as well. I'll call you when I need you and next time leave your opinions in your house or ask daddy to preserve them for you."

Mbuso: "You arrogant bastard."

He cackles.

Me: "Yeah, bye."

I leave him half way down the stairs and walk back up to Amara, I'd rather be with her than entertain garbage.

I hate nonsense.

She's sleeping peacefully, she's lost so much weight and she looks completely different from the day she was brought here. I still can't believe she's here in my room, on my bed. I had to give up this room so she gets all the comfort she deserves but, I won't be staying away for too long. This is where she belongs, with me.

As I take her hand into mine and sit on the edge of the bed, I fight the urge to lie beside her and cage her in my arms.

My mind takes me back to a few hours back when I held her in my arms. It was the most blissful thing ever, it felt so right.

Today I uttered something to her, something I have never said or felt towards a woman. I called her my queen, thankfully, it was in Akan. A language I plan to teach her once she blends in, I can't wait for her to look at me with different eyes. Right now the gaze in her eyes break my heart making me feel like shit while at it.

I'm not a very patient person, I tend to say what is on my mind or in my heart. But with her, I have been trying as I don't want to overwhelm her with what my heart holds.

To be continued...



11\*

## STYLES\*

It's been an hour since the fight, I had to go look for her.

I knew she would be in our bedroom, she loves this room. It's where she feels the most comfortable, she's standing in front of the big long mirror, twisting her natural hair.

She does that every night before bed, she says her hair is so course that it becomes a mission to get it to listen to her in the morning. I've seen the stress it causes her. It's funny and sometimes I tease her saying she should just cut it off and go bald. That's her crown, you don't mess with the queen's crown.

She's already in her sleep wear, I guess she's had her shower.

I potter behind her and wrap my arms around her waist, letting my hands settle on her stomach. We make eye contact in the mirror. I bury my face on the curve of her neck and place a clammy kiss, while impishly biting her neck. She shies away, the colour of her cheeks giving away her blush.

Me: "I'm sorry."

I whisper in her ear and she pouts.

This has become a norm in this relationship, it starts with her, losing her cool and talking shit and ends with me apologizing for what I don't know.

I know one day I will get tired of pacifying her.

Khethu: "Me too."

Me: "You too what?"

I bite her neck softly and she giggles, placing her hands on mine.

Khethu: "I'm sorry too, I didn't mean to speak to you in that manner. I'm scared that I'll lose you to someone else Styles."

Me: "You are the only one for me Khethu, I'm not going anywhere."

She turns around to face me at the sound of my assurance.

Khethu: "But, what if one day you wake up with a change of heart? We're not married Styles, I can't claim you as my own."

Me: "Not that again Khethu."

I toddle to the one seater couch that's facing the bed and sit, I hate this conversation. She knows it too but she has a tendency to bring it up.



Khethu: "I'm so used to being someone you love and I don't want that to change."

Me: "And it won't change baby, you'll always be that someone for me. Married or not."

We've had this conversation before, each time I keep anticipating that she understands.

Khethu: "We're already living together Styles. What difference will it make if we seal it with a marriage certificate?"

Me: "Exactly, what difference will it make?"

Khethu: "You know what I mean."

She sits on the bed facing me, her eyes holding back tears.

Khethu: "I want to belong to someone Styles."

Me: "You do belong to someone, me."

Khethu: "For a smart man you sure are-"

She stops at the sight of my stern look, she shifts uncomfortably as I stand on my feet. My glower directed to her.

Me: "Khethukuthula Dladla, I love you. God, I have never loved anyone the way I have loved you. But, disrespect me again and I will throw that love in the trash. I will wipe you out of my heart so fast it will leave your head spinning. If your father lets you speak to him like that, don't think I will as well. I have bloody tolerated your bitchiness because I love you but I'm about this close to snapping and once I snap, there's no turning back."

She's looking up at me, her lower lip is quivering. I have just instilled fear in her.

Khethu: "I'm sorry Styles."

Her voice breaks, she drops her eyes as shame visits her.

Me: "Since you're always fucking up, I suggest you save that sorry. You only have, but a few of them left."

I proclaim before turning to walk out.

Khethu: "Styles I apologize."

She shouts after me, but I'm done talking to her. I shut the door.

I detest impudence.

NOMBULELO\*

I have been listening to my parents arguing for two hours now. When dad woke up from the couch, he went looking for mom. She was still asleep but he didn't care, his effort to wake her



up was failing so he pushed her off the bed and she fell with a thud. There was confusion on her face for a moment before her mind registered what was happening. They began barking at each other, I couldn't stand it so I walked out. They have been at each other's throats since.

I can't tell what the argument is about because they are both fighting to be heard, but I have a clue it has something to do with what happened today.

I'm sure Martha can hear them next door, and she's probably having second thoughts about being my father's second wife.

That's how close her house is, Martha lives alone in a one roomed RDP house. Actually all these houses are government houses, we are one of the people who were fortunate enough to extend the house. Two bedrooms were added, a bathroom with a toilet and a kitchen. The original room became the sitting room.

This all happened a year after Amara moved in with us, at the back of my mind I always knew that they used her inheritance. She never saw a cent, she was only allowed to study till grade 12 and became a house help while I was sent to study further.

I scurry out of my room at the sound of a bottle breaking, their bedroom is right next to mine. Dad is sitting on the floor with his hand pressed on his head, his face is covered in blood and there's broken pieces of glass around him.

Me: "Mama, what have you done?"

I scream at her, she's standing a few feet from him, carrying her hands on her head. I can see her body shaking from here, and tears have taken over her almost wrinkled face. She's overcome by fear and guilt.

Ntombi: "Moses, Moses uright?" (Are you okay?)

Her voice refuses to support her words as it breaks.

Dad looks out of it, I run to him after grabbing a shirt from the washing basket. I use it to press the wound on his head, he groans in pain.

Me: "Call an ambulance mama."

I instruct her in panic.

Ntombi: "Ngizoyichaza kanjani lendaba Lelo? They'll send me to jail." (How will I explain this?)

She starts crying and it's so annoying. My father is badly injured, he's losing a lot of blood and all she cares about is herself.

Me: "Would you rather he dies kee? If he dies mama then you should start worrying about spending life in jail, but right now we need to help him. I am not losing my father."

I chastise her while shouting but it seems like she's not here, all she's doing is cry while watching him. She drops to her knees, weeping like someone just died.

Ntombi: "Ngiyaxolisa Moses... Ngixolele baba ka Lelo." (I'm sorry Moses, forgive me Lelo's

father.)

She wails louder and I am browned off by the sight before me.

This old woman is driving me crazy. I will never forgive her if anything bad happens to my father.

I sprint back to my room to get my phone, I have to do everything by myself in this house. Sometimes it feels like I live with two teenagers who refuse to grow up, I stand with my decision to move out. We'll see how they put up with each other without any supervision.

RANDALL\*

"Uze you need to eat and go to bed, you can't sit here the whole night."

This is Chioma, she's the only one allowed to call me by this native name that I detest. Actually she insisted, she said she will not call me by a European name because I'm African. At first I never used to respond when she would utter it but got used to it as time went by.

She lives in the outhouse just outside this mansion. It has two bedrooms, a bathroom kitchen and living room. I asked her to move into the mansion temporarily when I brought Amara here, I needed her to take care of her.

Chioma is Nigerian, she's been around for as long as I can remember. She lived in the same flat with me and Styles in Hillbrow. There was about six people sharing that one flat. It was very crowded and stuffy, and the only privacy you would have was when you're in the toilet.

She used to cook for us, wash our clothes and sometimes clean the room we slept in. I knew she was a genuine person when she refused payment for her good deeds, she said because we are like her children. We gave her the sense of being a mother as she never had children of her own.

So when my life turned around, I took her in. She is about the same age as my mother, only three years older.

Me: "I'm not leaving her alone ma."

Chioma: "Nothing will happen to her Uze."

Me: "Stop trying to convince me because it will not work."

I stand my ground, I respect her but I'm not listening to her when it comes to this.

She sighs heavily.

Chioma: "Okay, I'll leave the food here just in case you change your mind."

She squeezes my shoulder before walking out.

I'm still holding Amara's hand, I want her to know that I'm here and I don't plan on leaving her

side.

My phone rings, it says private number. Amara stirs a bit at the sound of this loud ring tone, darn it! I should have put it on silent.

Curiosity compels me to answer, I never get private calls. So, maybe this is something I would want to hear.

I dash out the door quietly closing it.

Me: "Speak."

I give out an attitude just in case it's some fucker who thinks I'm their friend.

"Not even a 'good evening' to an old friend."

I guessed right...

This Italian idiot thinks I have time to entertain him.

Me: "And I thought you ran and hid under a rock. You shouldn't have come out Franco, unless you have a death wish."

Franco: "I want you to know I'm on to you Okolie, you killed my cousin Matteo."

He groans, he thinks he can intimidate me with his ugly voice.

Me: "You had my woman, anyone who touches her dies. I don't make exceptions when it comes to her."

Franco: "The cold hearted Okolie boy finally has a weakness, I should have slit her throat just to make you suffer. Pity I'm only being informed now."

He laughs.

Me: "I will kill you for saying that Franco."

Franco: "I'm a ghost, you can't touch me."

There's an assertion in his voice, he really does think that he's untouchable.

Me: "Tell me again Franco. What's your deal?"

I would like to hear this one...

Styles and I used to work closely with Franco's father, it was a good respectful business relationship. But, this fool hated his father and so, he killed him.

He took over the family business, created enemies for himself in the underworld. Like I said, he thinks he's untouchable hence, calls himself Ghost. Unfortunately for him, no one seems to be acknowledging this name as we all continue to call him Franco. He's a toddler in a big man's shoes.

Me: "Why are you doing this?"

Franco: "Just to piss you off."

Did I not say he's a toddler?

Me: "I beg to differ. You're sucking dick now Franco? Wow, you're sucking Mkhize's deformed dick?"

I laugh, I know this will send him on a high trip of rage.

Franco: "Vaffanculo Okolie." (Fuck you Okolie)

He grumbles.

Me: "I'll pass, I prefer women, thanks."

I throw a wisecrack.

Franco: "Sei fottutamente morto pezzo di merda." (You're fucking dead you piece of shit.)

Me: "Sognare è bello a volte ragazzo Franco." (Dreaming is nice sometimes Franco boy.)

I riposte.

Franco: "I'm coming for you Okolie, you and that little beauty you have there."

His extortions don't move me.

Me: "I'll slice you before you even touch her."

He's pissing me off by threatening Amara, I can't hear a word against her. He laughs at my comeback.

Franco: "I will pay a million to see your face when I hand her to Mkhize."

Me: "This is South Africa you fuck, you're in my turf. Even that old geezer won't be able to save you from me."

This is one mistake he makes, he thinks because his father was feared, the same will apply for him.

Franco: "I'm not afraid of a dog with no teeth."

He insults me.

The nerve of this ass hole.

Me: "Oh but, this dog has transformed into a beast and he's got venomous fangs."

Franco: "You impassive bastard, I will destroy that unflinching attitude."

Me: "I'm pleased you know me very well Franco, I'm not intimidated by anything."

Franco: "You're going to pay Okolie."

I think he's out of insults, he sounds defeated.



Me: "Word of advice, never start something you can't finish fool. Have fun playing with Mkhize's old wrinkled balls."

I accompany my sally with a subdued chortle before dropping the call.

I think I've been too comfortable, people think they can jump over my head. Mkhize dared to challenge me by coming to my house and taking what's mine, now this idiot thinks I have time for games. I need to change mode, I can't afford to be soft or else I'll lose Amara.

To be continued...



12\*

AMARA\*

I wake up from a deep slumber feeling weary and sluggish, I turn my head to see him holding my hand. His head resting on the edge of the bed while he sits on the floor.

I let my eyes scan the room and my heart shatters at the realization that I'm still in this prison. The morning light is shining through the window, almost making this enormous room look like heaven. The curtains are extensively open and one window is slightly open enough to let air in.

I look back at the daunting man who still has my hand in the grip of his warm hand, there's a strange feeling I can't ignore that convinces me that this is where I belong. Right beside him.

I can't shake this feeling and I hate it because it is contradicting with my mind.

Why is he here anyway?

He pretends to care for me but refuses to release me.

I saw his eyes last night, they speak a tale of passion. Never have I seen a look of love in one's eyes as the one he had on while leering at me, it made me feel like I was worth every beautiful thing in this world.

If this man holds so much affection for a stranger he does not know, why does his actions not bother that I am being kept against my will?

He looks like an angel while sleeping. The dark aura and the arrogance are not visible at the present moment, he almost seems like a normal human being.

Like he feels me watching him, he opens his heavy-lidded eyes. A smug smile dashes to his mouth commanding me to rapidly look away.

To think I was almost fooled by the innocence of a sleeping beast.

Randall: "Welcome back."

His smoky voice fills my ears making me shiver.

He's still holding my hand and I have no clue why I haven't claimed it back, however, he releases it just as my mind is conveying a message to my hand to let go.

Randall: "How are you feeling?"

He sits on the edge of the bed facing me, his gaze intensifying. I want to look away but his eyes are spellbinding. It's too late to push my head back as he reaches his hand to touch my forehead, checking my temperature.

Randall: "You're burning up."

I don't know how to respond to that, and the look of unmitigated admiration in his eyes is not helping at all.

I'm planning on not speaking to him at all.

Yes, this is what I want but chances are, I will end up saying something to him.

Randall: "Amara, I need to know if you're okay after last night."

Last night feels like a dream, one I do not want to relive. I'm still mystified by the events that happened and I might not have said this out loud but I'm grateful that he saved me.

Me: "Thank you for saving me."

My unfaithful mouth blurts that out unexpectedly and against my wish. His upper lip curls before a side smile forms on his mouth.

This doesn't change anything, I still want to go back home. I want to see my family, being kept here has made wonder if I will ever see them again. Do they miss me or notice that I'm not around. I know my uncle will lie about my whereabouts, that greedy evil bastard.

What did my aunt see in him anyway?

Me: "When will you let me go? I want to see my family, I want to go home."

I'm taking chances here.

Randall: "This is your home now Amara."

Me: "Why are you keeping me here? I don't want to be here and the police are probably looking for me. I'm sure there's pictures of me splashed all over social media. Pretty soon this place will be swamped with police."

The plan is to tap on his fear a bit, hopefully it works and he lets me go.

He furrows his brow slightly tilting his head to the side and not a second after, a haughty laugh escapes his mouth.

Randall: "Which police? Princess, if we're talking about South African police then I'm sorry, you're stuck here. Let me just ease your mind a bit because you seem to be stressing a lot, no one is looking for you Amara not a single person. Take my advice will you? And get comfortable."

He strokes my cheek as he complacently states a heart breaking truth. I've seen cases like this, where women go missing and are found dead in a secluded area.

I feel every bone in me go cold.

Me: "Are you going to kill me?"

Saying it torments me.

He looks offended by this question, I could be wrong. In the two days I have known this man, I have come to the conclusion that he's two different people. I hope he's not one of those with a

split personality otherwise my life is in danger.

Randall: "I don't blame you for thinking that, but if I wanted you dead, you wouldn't be here right now."

His words are bone chilling.

Me: "Why are you keeping me here then?"

Randall: "To protect you Amara."

He says it sensitively as if me being protected means the world to him.

Me: "From what? You don't even know me."

Randall: "You'll find out soon enough."

I don't trust him but he sounds assuring.

Me: "Okay but... please, can I see my cousin, just once? I won't make a scene, I promise. I won't even hint that I'm being kept here against my will."

Randall: "You need to eat."

He pronounces, completely ignoring my request.

Me: "Please, just one meeting with her. I'll tell her that we've known each other for a long time and we have fallen in love and want to be together and, the reason I didn't tell them about you was because I was afraid they'd never accept you."

I prattle on, it sounds perfect in my head and I'm convinced it will work. If he cares like I think he does, then by the end of this day. I will be talking to Lelo.

Randall: "Your body is weak, it needs nutrients. For how long do you plan on starving yourself?"

Really?

Is he going to ignore me like I'm speaking gibberish?

I feel like crap... Being ignored is not a nice feeling.

Me: "Why are you doing this?"

I scream at him as tears streak my face, I can't comprehend why he's doing this to me.

He frowns, not once has he raised his voice at me.

Randall: "You need to calm down Amara, your body is still weak. Eat first then, you can take out all your frustrations on me, when your stomach is full."

The arrogance of this man, I give up and my disloyal tears have betrayed me. That admiration he had in his eyes feels ancient as they now welcome a cold stare, I made him angry by insisting.

Randall: "There's your food, I'll get someone to warm it for you." He gestures to my right side, I turn to see a plate of oatmeal.



Me: "I'm not hungry."

I lie, I'm ravenous.

Randall: "Hungry or not, you're going to eat."

He affirms before walking out.

I know he's not kidding.

NOMBULELO\*

Dad was admitted last night at Sebokeng Hospital, I had to lie to the nurses and say he was robbed while walking home from work. Mom hasn't stopped crying since, I'll be lying if I say I feel sorry for her. I wish the guilt consumes her whole being because she brought this upon herself.

What was she thinking when she threw a beer bottle at her husband?

I'm nervous about the meeting with Zuma, I hope he takes the news well. You never know with that gender, my biggest fear is him denying his baby.

I find him outside hanging clothes on the line, there's an abandoned plate of half eaten pap and kidney beans on a bench close to the door.

He sees me and smiles, that's my weakness right there.

Me: "Zuzu."

This name began with me teasing him, he hated it first but I guess it grew on him.

Zuma: "You're early."

He announces as he continues hanging his clothes.

Me: "It wasn't hard getting a taxi."

I sit on the bench, accompanying the dirty plate of food. Zuma is not the type of man who would attack you with a hug or a kiss when he sees you, even our goodbyes are dry, unless I initiate the first move. I won't touch on the sex topic because...

Sigh!

I love him and I'm here.

The love I feel for him overrides every lack.

Zuma: "So, what did you want to talk about?"

He doesn't waste time.



Me: "Please come sit with me."

He stops what he's doing, peeks sideways at me with a concerned expression.

Zuma: "What is it Lelo?"

I'm not sure I like the tone of his voice.

Why is he suddenly so serious? I haven't broken the news to him yet.

He folds his arms across his chest, intently looking at me.

Me: "I'm pregnant."

It's better to get it off my chest than beat around the bush, which will only make me more anxious.

Zuma: "What?"

The shock in his voice.

His face doesn't hide the shocked expression as well and he looks a bit troubled.

Me: "I'm preg-"

Zuma: "I heard you. Congratulations, I guess."

He shrugs.

His next words have my eyes widening in shock.

Zuma: "Who's the father? Do I know him?"

Really?

Me: "What do you mean? You're the only man I have ever slept with. Zuma I gave you my virginity."

I'm on my feet now, panicking and this fool looks as cool as a cucumber.

Zuma: "Where is the proof of that Nombulelo? Selfie nyana? I mean that's what you women do, right? You capture everything on camera."

My heart breaks into a million pieces at the sound of his taunts. I so want to slap him right now.

Me: "Zuma? So this is you saying all of this to me?"

My mind still can't grasp what is happening and what I'm hearing.

Zuma: "Yes, it's me. Lalela la Nombulelo, all the girls I have slept with never came to me claiming that they are pregnant. And wena what are you trying to do Lelo? You think you're clever neh? You want to trap me with a baby? Here I was thinking you were smart." (Listen here.)

Me: "Fuseki Zuma, fuseki yezwa? You bloody shit, I can't believe I gave myself to a bastard like you." (Piss off Zuma)

I shout, he looks at me like he wants to strangle me but I know he won't dare touch me, not when there's so many people on the streets.

Zuma: "Bastard is that thing in your womb. Hamba la Nombulelo, go find the man who made you pregnant." (Go.)

I hate him.

How did I fall in love with him?

There must've been red flags. How did I miss them?

Zuma: "I said get out of my house."

He shouts, grabbing my arm and begins to drag me towards the gate. Zuma is breaking my heart, can't he see that?

People are watching and no one dares to stop this man who's manhandling a defenceless woman.

He throws me on the ground and locks the gate, leaving me crying.

KHETHU\*

It's afternoon and I still haven't heard from Styles, he left home last night after the argument. I can't call him because my stupid phone crashed when I attempted to post a picture of us on social media. This was a first because I'm not one to advertise my life in public but something tells me that I'm not the only one in his life and if there is a whore out there, she should know that he is taken.

Styles has never spent the night away from home before and it breaks my heart that he would do this to me. I know I messed up and pissed him off but I will not tolerate this kind of treatment from him.

I couldn't stand being in the house anymore, time seemed to slow down while waiting for him. I emailed my father asking to meet up, I need to speak to someone who will listen to me. Although strict, he is my best friend.

I can't say the same thing about my mother who just wants to control my life, she hates Styles with a passion. If it were up to her, I would marry the president's son.

In her own words, I can do better than this.

My mother was raised with a silver spoon in her mouth. She got everything she wanted and that gave her the impression that the world revolves around her, which is ludicrous. My father was in the police academy when they first met, according to him it was love at first sight I don't know about her. Is she even capable of loving, all she cares about is her businesses and sealing the next deal.

Dad said I would find him at Mandela square, he loves the coffee from Mugg & Bean. That's where we usually have our dates.

I walk in and I'm immediately approached by a waitress, she gives me the usual customer smile and asks if I want a table. I scan my eyes around and spot my dad sitting at a table at the far end corner of the restaurant. He sees me and waves, he's smiling and already I feel like everything will be okay. I tell the waitress I'm good and toddle to my father, he's already on his feet as I approach.

Dad: "Angel."

He gives me a brief hug before we settle down, he's already ordered coffee for us.

Me: "Look at you, you're gaining weight. Is Nobayeni finally granting you a divorce?"

He hates it when I speak ill of his wife but still laughs when I make such jokes. I don't trust that woman, she's never home and when she is, she's grumpy and starts a fight with dad just so she can have an excuse to leave.

Dad: "That's your mother Khethu."

I roll my eyes, I really don't care. If she recognized me as her daughter maybe I would show respect towards her.

Dad: "Speaking of her, she's been asking about you. When are you coming to the house?"

Me: "Remember she said as long as I'm still with Styles, I shouldn't set foot in her house and I don't plan on leaving him dad."

His face changes to that of annoyance, he's also not a fan of Styles but tolerates him for my sake.

Dad: "I still can't believe you chose a man over your own mother."

He's starting.

Me: "Maybe I would've chosen her if she chose me when she brought me into this world, you practically raised me alone dad."

Dad: "That doesn't change the fact that she's your mother, you need to respect her."

Me: "Nobayeni Dladla doesn't deserve to be called a mother, she doesn't even deserve to be your wife. Dad you don't deserve to be treated like this, she doesn't respect you and-"

Dad: "Enough, I am not going to discuss my marriage with you khethu. You're a child and you wouldn't understand. I'm not going to hear anything against your mother."

Me: "Sorry."

I mumble after rolling my eyes.

Dad: "How is everything with you?"

I can't tell him after bashing him about his wife, he'll call me a hypocrite.

Me: "Nothing, I missed you that's all."

Dad: "Maybe you should come home more often."

We're back to that...

Dad: "Your mother is hosting her family next week, you should come. Your grandfather will be there."

I love my grandparents but they are judgemental like their daughter so, I'll pass.

Me: "Dad, I'll explode if I hear more of... {{{When are you getting married khethu? You should leave that good for nothing boy khethu... You're from a well off family, you should marry a man of your stature.}}} That's the song they are always singing."

He laughs.

Dad: "I went through the same thing with your mother you know, her parents hated me. It was only when you were born that they finally started to accept me. Her father was forever threatening to end my life but my love for her was stubborn."

Me: "Was she worth the fight?"

He frowns at me and shakes his head disapproving of my attitude towards my mother.

Dad: "She was and she still is, I can't see my life without that woman. It's completely blank."

Okay... and they say women are fragile.

To be continued...

RANDALL\*

My fragile Amara, she's stronger than she looks. I hate seeing her in tears but I have never seen anything more attractive in my life. Her teary eyes swirled with her fighting spirit make me lose my mind, making me want to taste her but, I can never have her without her consent.

I can't afford to lose control with her, I want her heart as well not just her body. The sight of her tears aroused something in me and all I could think about was taking her in my arms and making her mine hence, I had to rush out of there before I could do something I would regret.

I have become entirely addicted to her to a point that, not being by her side makes me feel like my world is falling apart. I have a need for her, one I cannot control anymore and distancing myself from her will be for the best but it will be like jumping in front of a moving train. That option is out of the table, I will just have to fight this urge. I love being in her company.

I know she sees me as a heartless monster and it will be difficult to convince her otherwise but, one day her heart will know me and accept me.

When my eyes had the pleasure to behold her beauty, I knew I would never rest till she was mine. It was two weeks back in Auckland Park, when she bumped into me almost falling and I held her hand preventing the fall from happening, her lush lips whispered the word sorry, accompanied by a soft laugh but her eyes only took a glimpse of me barely noticing my presence.

I was captivated as my eyes stuck on her beauty, her innocence and kindness illuminating from the inside.

I haven't been at peace since, I had to know who she was and that's when I found out about Mkhize, her past and the life she had been accustomed to. At first, it was about saving her from those bastards but I have grown selfish and needy that her freedom has come last.

Now she wants leave me and that is something I cannot allow. I might as well surrender myself to my enemies and let it be the end of it all.

Me: "I thought you said you were going to put her to order."

I remind Styles of the words he spoke last night. He looks like shit, he says he came to the office around 5am. He wanted to avoid another fight with Khethu.

I'm watching him stress eat, it's a norm and he hates it but...

There's literally everything on this table, from pizza, donuts, burgers. You'd swear he's pregnant, it's a good thing he has a fast metabolism or else he'd be obese. People in the cafeteria have been staring from the moment the food was brought to us. Styles doesn't care, he's eating like it's the end of the world.

Styles: "That was the plan but when I saw her face, I melted."

I laugh at him but he's not laughing.

Me: "Even after she baptized you with water."

Styles: "Worse, you don't know how much it took for me not to take her in my arms and have her all night. Her aggressiveness does things to me man."

I cackle at his confession.

Me: "You see, I told you not to go for a Dladla. They know people, who know people, who know good witch doctors. The very best in Africa, look at you. You're like a woman, the next thing you'll be walking down the aisle while she waits for you at the altar. I have to say though, the thought of you in wedding dress is traumatizing, now I have to unthink that."

I laugh.

Styles: "Go fly a kite Randall, you're talking rubbish. It's a good thing you're going back to school."

He scoffs as he takes a big bite of his burger.

Nx!

Me: "On the real man, you should marry her. Khethu has been around through everything, she knows about most of your shenanigans and she's still here. If it were someone else they would have ran to daddy and snitched."

Styles: "What is marriage Randall?"

He questions me while sipping his milkshake.

If you want to get on his nerves mention marriage.

Me: "Commitment, giving her the right to every part of you. It's the way one says I need you and love you enough to spend forever with you."

Did that just come out of my mouth? Damn...

Styles freezes with the straw still in his mouth, his face has turned pale like he's just seen a ghost. Believe me, I'm shocked as well.

He turns heads as he howls in laughter, he's a laugher but never this loud.

I sit back, sipping on my coffee, I'm going to give him time to himself till he's done being an idiot.

Styles: "Wait, what did you do to my friend?"

Me: "That wasn't me, that was Amara's heart speaking."

Honestly...

He looks at me sceptically before another laugh erupts from his mouth.

Styles: "So, you're finally admitting that you love her?"

Me: "Whoah, hold it. Don't let that milkshake get to your brain, you're spewing shit now."

He frowns...

Love is a strong word.

Styles: "How would you know what love feels like when you've never tasted it? Ask me I know, you have all the symptoms. You're love-sick Randall Okolie."

I mull over his words. Could it be that I have come to love her?

All these emotions I feel towards her, being sensitive with her and craving to be around her. Are they really signs of love?

Me: "Says the man who is stress eating because of a disagreement with his woman."

I retort, he chuckles.

Styles: "Yeah eish."

He can't stop eating.

Me: "We need to deal with Mkhize man, we both know he's not going to take this lying down."

Styles: "And now that he's working with Franco, he's more dangerous than before."

Me: "That bastard. I know he's planning something, his silence proves it or else he would've roared by now."

Styles: "Oh, he's roaring alright, it's just a matter of time till we hear him. I hope he gets a heart attack while at it."

Wouldn't that make our job easier?

Styles: "You know when you came to me saying I should look into this girl, I thought okay. But, when you said you wanted to save her from Mkhize, I knew you were losing it. Dude, just one glimpse of her had you running around like a headless chicken. And now look at us, fighting a taxi boss to keep her safe and trying not to get us killed in the process. I'm going on vacation once all of this is over."

He likes exaggerating.

Me: "I never would've forgave myself if I sat back and let him take her, now I live to protect her. There's no turning back Styles, we took a step and you know we don't look back once it's done."

Styles: "I foresaw this day you know? The day when the heart of Randall Uze Okolie would melt and who knew such an innocent frail girl will be the one to take the credit. Remind me to thank her one day, okay?"

He enjoys mocking me, I'll let it slide because he's stupid and fragile at the moment.

KHETHU\*



I wave at my father as he pulls out of the parking lot, before getting into my car. He gave me his phone to use in the meantime, I decide to call Styles before driving back home.

Something tells me to drive and call him when I get home, I turn the ignition on and see a shadow from the corner of mine. I turn instantly to see a man watching me, he's about the average height.

He gestures me to open the window, it looks like he wants to ask something. Oh well, he doesn't look harmless. So, I roll the window just enough for him not to grab me.

Him: "Are you khethukuthula Dladla?"

He asks in a grating voice.

I'm shaken by his question. How does he know my name? Because I'm pretty sure I have never seen him before.

Me: "Who's asking?"

Being a daughter of a cop has taught me to be vigilant and quick to thinking, I already smell a rat.

Him: "I have a message for that coloured boyfriend of yours."

He announces and now that he mentioned Styles, I'm more curious. Could he be the boyfriend of the whore he's messing with?

Me: "Styles? How do you know him?"

This is so not me, I don't entertain strange men at a mall's parking lot.

Him: "I don't, my boss does. Tell him Mkhize says next time he won't miss."

He already has a gun pointed at me as he says this and shoots after his announcement. I scream, while my body goes into shock, stopping me from ducking. The sound of a gunshot and glass shattering pierce my ears.

Before I know it, my car is surrounded by people fussing over me and asking if I'm okay. I unable to respond, I'm a whimpering mess. The man is gone, he must have ran.

Everything happened so fast. My mind tells me that I should be covered in blood or feeling pain, I start inspecting myself. I'm okay, shaken but okay. He aimed for the dash board.

"Here, drink some water. It will help ease the shock."

Some random guy says, offering me a bottle of water. I don't want water, I want to go home but I take it either way.

Him: "Do you want me to call someone? You can't drive in this state?"

Styles is the first person that comes to mind.

I shake my head.

Me: "I'm okay thanks."

Him: "Are you sure? Maybe I can drive you to the hospital."

He persists.

Me: "I'm fine really."

I smile gratefully.

NOMBULELO\*

I didn't know heart break would be this painful, my chest hurts and it feels like I can't breathe. Zuma has shown me a different side to him I didn't know existed. I'm only 19, how will I explain this to my father? How will I tell him that the father of my baby refuses to acknowledge it?

I've been walking for a while now and I don't know where I'm going but I'm going somewhere far, I want to walk off this heartache.

A car hurtles towards me causing me to fall flat on my butt, it stops right in front of me. That was a close call, a man jumps out and rushes to me, panicking.

Him: "Are you okay?"

He helps me up, I snatch my hand away after I'm steady.

I nod, I want to chide him for his reckless driving but I'm in no mood to talk.

Him: "You must watch where you're going sisi. If you have a death wish, then please leave us innocent people out of it."

He cracks and clicks his tongue.

Being overwhelmed by everything I break into a loud sob, it's the stress, the heart break and the tremor of almost being hit by a car.

He frowns while his hand flies to his beard and he rubs it, suddenly the confidence he had when shouting at me has gone with the wind. Only panic holds the look on his face.

Him: "Oh shit, look I'm sorry. I didn't mean to shout. Now stop crying."

I don't want to stop crying. I want to cry it all out, it eases the pain.

I shake my head and continue sobbing.

Him: "Hey, I can give you a lift if you like. Where do you live?"

No way am I getting in that car.

I shake my head.

"Nombulelo? Why are you crying?"

I raise my teary eyes to meet Tebogo, what is she doing in this part of town.

Him: "Oh great, you know her?"

He sounds relieved.

Tebogo: "What did you do to her wena? I'm going to call the police."

She threatens, I'm still crying and I want to stop.

What will I say to my mother when she finds out I was crying in public, in front of a strange man?

Him: "I swear I didn't do anything."

He raises his hands in defence.

Him: "She suddenly jumped in front of my car."

He explains his version.

Tebogo: "Heee!!! You hit her with a car?"

She screams and the guy looks around like he's afraid someone might have heard.

Him: "No, no. She's okay, you can check her yourself."

I almost feel sorry for him, you'd think he tried to abduct me the way Tebogo is interrogating him.

The hand on her waist and the foot taping is drawing attention, not to mention her high pitched voice.

Me: "I'm fine sis Tebogo."

I assure her, trying to stop my tears.

Him: "See? She's fine, I have to go."

He turns to leave but Tebogo grabs his shirt pulling him towards her, he flinches, confusion filling his face.

Him: "Hey."

Tebogo: "You're not going anywhere. Who do you think will drop us home huh? This child is traumatized. Does she look like she can walk to you?"

Him: "Look, I'm in a hurry. I can give you taxi fare."

Tebogo: "No, you're going to take us home. Come Lelo, this man thinks he can take chances."

She clicks her tongue while making her way to the car, she opens the passenger door and sits. Her hands are folded across her chest, I think Tebogo just needed a free ride home. She saw a chance and took it, she's dramatic like that.

The man looks bothered but he still stretches his hand out, gesturing me to get in the car. I jump

at the back and slip into raw silence, my mind flashes back to Zuma.

To be continued...



14\*

KHETHU\*

"Baby."

He comes rushing to me almost bumping into a nurse, he doesn't stop to apologize. His eyes are on me and he's panicky and angry, he takes me in his arms tightly holding me. I'm guessing he doesn't see this tall displeased man in a suit standing by the bed, I hold him back but with only one hand. I think my father is already feeling uncomfortable.

Me: "Styles."

I try to warn him but he's not letting go, his body clenches and I can feel it trembling.

Styles: "Are you okay?"

He inspects me, his hands cupping my cheeks. I nod trying to push back my emotions. My father clears his throat, that's when Styles looks up and draws back. He suddenly looks uncomfortable, the story with them is that they don't get along well. Putting them in a room together is like starting a fire. I watch them as they glare at each other, waiting for one of them to say something. It seems like I'm going to wait my whole life here, I nudge Styles.

Styles: "Mr. Dladla."

He's greeting him by the way, my father scowls. He's angry, he gave me a long speech when he got here. I had decided to drive to the hospital just in case I needed treatment and he was the first person I called. According to him, Styles was supposed to be there to protect me.

Me: "Dad."

I whine as I sit up on the bed.

This is no time to be impolite, what's wrong with this old man?

Dad: "I'm going to say this straight Sishi, my daughter is coming home with me."

He's not asking.

Does he think this is the police station where he demands and things happen?

I look at Styles who's frowning now, and the worst part about this is that, he has rammed his hands into his pockets, looking at my father like he wants to take away his favourite toy.

It's so disrespectful.

Styles: "Khethu is coming home with me sir."

He's also not asking.

Dad: "Don't mess with me boy, I will put you behind bars so fast your head will spin."

Styles: "Mr Dladla, this old trick does not faze me. I'm not a child to be threatened by time out, I'm a grown man who's fully capable of taking care of his woman."

That time he left his woman alone at home last night.

I'm confused, none of my exes have never stood up to my father like this. Black men don't do that right? They know the importance of respecting your partner's father because like it or not, my father has the final say as to whether I will spend my life with this man or not. Is it because he's not planning on marrying me? He knows there is no chance of lobola negotiations, that's why he's being insolent towards my father.

Dad: "Your woman?"

He huffs.

Dad: "What have you done to make her your woman Sishi? Sharing sheets with my daughter does not give you the right to claim her as your own. I can end this little fairy tale of yours with a snap of a finger."

Styles: "With all due respect sir."

Okay, he's definitely about to say something disrespectful.

Styles: "I don't take kindly to threats, so I would appreciate it if you would withdraw from that and like I said, I have been taking care of this woman for two years now. From where I'm standing, I'm doing hell of a good job."

Maybe I should go back to dating black men, my father doesn't take kindly to threats as well.

"Is this what you have chosen for yourself Bridgette?"

We all turn to the sound of the angry voice, it's Nobayeni. She's standing by the curtain, looking posh as usual. This is the thing with Nobayeni Dladla, she's not the jeans, sweat pants type. Even at home, I doubt she's ever comfortable in those formal clothes but with her it's all about looking the part. Whatever that is. Bridgette is my second name, she prefers it over Khethu.

I was named after my grandmother who passed away the day before I was born. My mother loved her dearly, she raised her and her siblings while their parents were busy filling their bank accounts and showered them with money and gifts to compensate. Pretty much what she's done with me, only I never got gifts to make up for her absence in my life.

Nobayeni ambles in the room and stands next to my father, don't expect a kiss or hug. This relationship is as dry as leaves in winter, she looks disgusted by the sight of Styles who's not at all intimidated by her.

Nobayeni: "Is this the type of men you attract? Who disrespect your father?"

She's one to talk.

Me: "I am my mother's daughter after all."



My comeback will get me in trouble, she raises her hand to slap me but Styles shields me standing in front of me, I can only see his back. The rise and fall of his shoulders demonstrating the extent of his anger.

AMARA\*

There's a knock on the door, I sit up on the bed as I see Chioma emerge from behind the door. So far only two people enter this room, Chioma and Randall. I always know who's about to enter when they come, Randall doesn't knock. He budges in as if I'm his wife while Chioma knocks every single time.

She has brought food, it smells so nice. My stomach growls at the mouth-watering smell of it. She places the tray on the table and looks at me with a smile.

Chioma: "I made supper early today seeing that you didn't have breakfast and lunch. Come eat."

She points at the table, I'm tempted. Maybe it's time I abort mission, starving myself is not working in my favour. Randall's warning this morning frightened me, I know he will do something bad if I continue with this hunger strike. I also know that he's capable of anything, I mean look where I am.

Slowly, I climb out of bed. The moment my feet touch the floor, I feel light-headed. I stagger back a bit and fall on the bed. Chioma rushes to help but I raise my hand stopping her.

Me: "I'm fine."

She steps back.

Chioma: "Sit, I'll bring the food to you."

Me: "No, I've been lying on this bed for too long. My body is numb, I need to stretch."

Chioma: "Let me walk you there then."

Me: "I will manage thank you."

She sighs, if she wants to help then she should get me out of here. I brace myself as I pull my body up and toil towards the table. She's slowly walking behind me, she thinks I'll fall.

That wasn't so bad... I think to myself as I sit down on the chair. I can't hide the confusion on my face as I look at the food before me. What exactly am I looking at?

Chioma: "This is chicken noodle soup, you need to eat that first so you don't get stomach cramps from the heavy meal."

There's more carrots than chicken in this thing.

Chioma: "And this is Jollof rice, it's a Nigerian dish. You'll love it."

She shoots me a warm smile, it reminds me of my mother. Her memory is still fresh in my mind, I wish she was still here, I wouldn't be in this place.

Chioma: "Eat your soup before it gets cold."

I grab a spoon and take a scoop, it's not bad but I'm not finishing it.

Me: "Sit with me."

I offer but, she shakes her head.

Chioma: "I'm not allowed."

She reveals.

Me: "By who? Is it that man?"

I can't bring myself to let his name roll out of my tongue.

Chioma: "My job is to make sure you're okay and well fed."

Me: "Tell me about him. What kind of a person is he?"

I know what I'm doing?

She seems shocked that I'm interested in knowing about Randall.

Chioma: "Randall is a good man, he cares about you."

I didn't ask that.

I leave the soup half eaten and start digging in on the rice, it's edible although I'm not a rice person.

Me: "I need some air."

I proclaim between scoops of rice.

Chioma: "I'll open the sliding door but I will have to close it before I leave."

Me: "That won't make a difference, I'm suffocating in this room."

Chioma: "You can stand on the balcony."

This woman is not hearing me.

Me: "I was thinking maybe I can take a walk outside in the garden, it's beautiful and I want to explore it. It would be nice if I could smell the trees and the flowers."

Chioma: "I can't let you out my girl."

Me: "Please, I feel like a prisoner in here. I'll go crazy if I don't let my feet taste the grass, pretty please Chioma. You have no idea how it feels to be locked up in here, not knowing what will happen to you next. Waking up in the morning thinking today is your last, I only have my scary thoughts to keep me company."



I didn't prepare this speech but it seems to be going well.

Chioma: "Randall will never hurt you."

Not convinced.

Me: "That's what you say but, is this not hurting me? He's already kept me from civilization, at least let me mingle with the birds outside. You'll come with me, I won't try anything I promise."

She ponders upon it, I think my power to persuade people has come out to play. She presses her lips together before nodding.

Chioma: "Okay but, he shouldn't find out about this or he'll kill me. He'll be home in two hours so we should be quick, we'll walk around then come back."

Me: "Thank you."

I smile at her and she returns it while shaking her head nervously.

NKOMO\*

Me: "When am I getting out of here?"

I question the nurse who is busy doing her rounds.

Her: "We have to wait for the doctor sir."

She responds without looking at me.

Me: "I want to go home, call whoever that doctor is."

She turns to look at me then rolls her eyes.

Her: "We're here to work bhuti, not take orders from patients."

Me: "Hey, don't fucking give me an attitude. I'll mess up that ugly hairstyle, now go call the bloody doctor."

She's terrified by my sudden burst of anger, with fear in her eyes she darts out of the room.

I'm left to ponder upon my stupidity.

It's not like me to be so careless, I let my lust get the best of me. I've been feeling like shit since I woke up, I'm not even angry that he beat me up. I'm mostly angry at myself, Randall has done so much for me. He once risked his life for mine, we had become brothers and I betrayed him like that. I knew better than to mess with Scar.

I know what he's capable of, it's a miracle that I'm still alive, thanks to Styles. He came to see me yesterday, said I should lay low for a while because Scar is buying for my blood. Knowing him, he's had my obituary printed. I can't run to my father as we are not on good terms.

They say when you speak of the devil he appears.

Me: "What the hell are you doing here?"

He huffs as he walks towards me, using the walking cane as his third leg. Talk about drama, the man is perfectly healthy but has been using that cane for as long as I've known him. He once said it makes him feel powerful and it will make people respect him, he thinks this is a movie.

This is what happens when money gets into your head.

Him: "Look at you, cowardly lying there. Don't tell me that boy messed you up like this. I knew this friendship was toxic."

He's still condescending as always.

Me: "Get out."

I shout, the sight of him makes me gag.

Him: "Calm down son, I came to see how bad it is. You shouldn't let that idiot boss you around, stop being weak son."

That's the thing with Scar, he's always been the leader of the crew. His slyness and possessiveness gave him that role. He's more like an Alpha male, he's bold, aggressive and unshrinking. Nothing moves that man, he can kill you right after laughing with you and go on about his business like nothing happened. He has done things that left Styles and I questioning our sanity. Randall will literally dine with the devil and accept an invite to tour hell after.

Even this old man has underestimated him, money can buy you everything but it can't buy the kind of spirit Randall has.

Me: "You don't know anything about me and you have no right to be here."

Him: "You're still disrespectful I see, I thought time away from your family will teach you manners. Your mother must be turning in her grave."

Me: "The very same grave you put her in."

He scowls at my accusation.

Him: "You will not speak to me like that boy, I'm your father."

He roars.

Me: "You seized to be my father the day you plotted to kill my mother."

I shoot back.

Him: "Your mother was a slut who slept with every man that waved at her, I'm surprised she didn't make a move on her sons."

Son of a bitch.

I jump at him but he pins me back down with one hand.

Him: "I will finish what that boy started, don't dare me son."

My anger has me gasping for air. How dare he insult my mother's memory?

Me: "I hate you."

I hiss, he sees the full extent of my hatred reflecting in my eyes. For a second I see a twitch of hurt but he quickly brushes it away, heartless bastard.

Him: "Okay... Now sleep mfana wam', I will come see you again. Ubaba uyakuthanda yezwa?"  
(My boy) (Your father loves you, okay)

He mocks me as he smirks while patting my head, this man is confident to the point of impudence and I am disgusted by it.

Me: "Hamba uyofa." (Go and die)

He releases a scornful laugh and walks out with it.

I should have grabbed that bloody walking stick and stabbed him with it. I hate him.

Only Scar can help me bring him down but chances of that happening are slim, after what I have done.

To be continued...

15\*

KHETHU\*

Dad: "Khethu is this the way to speak to your mother?"

He lectures me, I try to push Styles to the side as he's blocking my view but he doesn't move. How do I speak to my parents now and this man of mine can be stubborn as a mull, it comes natural along with his rudeness.

Nobayeni: "What is this thug doing here?"

I hear my mother's disembodied voice, her rudeness makes you want to smack her across her face.

Styles: "You can insult me all you want, if it makes you feel better about yourself but, never lay a hand on this woman."

He declares sternly.

Nobayeni: "Really? He wants to hit me now. You see Bridgette? You see the shame you have brought us? Do you think this little fling you two have will last?"

Me: "Styles, baby, please move."

I try to push him aside but it's like I'm struggling with a tree.

Sigh!!!

Styles: "She should step back first."

He states, I can tell he's glaring at my mother.

It takes her almost a while to move back, Styles can be very intimidating. Even my father doesn't stand a chance against him.

Nobayeni looks like she's about to explode, her eye lashes haven't stopped flapping. She does that when she's extremely angry. I only hope she doesn't take it out on my father, it's a habit of hers.

Me: "Mom-"

I try to speak but she cuts me off.

Nobayeni: "Neo, arrest this boy."

Me: "For what?"

I shout, I expected this from her.

Nobayeni: "He threatened me, you all heard that."

Me: "No he didn't."

I'm shouting, I don't know why but I'm shouting.

I look at Styles and he's not disturbed by all of this, he's back to sticking his hands in his pockets. There's a knot on his forehead and I'm failing to grasp the look on his face, I wish I knew what he's thinking. This family drama will cost me the love of my life.

What normal person can endure such taunts and insults?

Dad: "Don't be absurd Nobayeni, I should arrest him on what grounds?"

Nobayeni: "Threatening a defenceless woman."

Khethu: "Really mom? I thought you were the smart one in the family."

I riposte, Styles side eyes me.

He doesn't like what I said and I don't care, I will not let my mother think she can control our lives.

Dad: "Khethukuthula? Watch how you speak to my wife."

This man though.

Nobayeni: "You know what? Let us end this now. Bridgette, it's either you're coming home with us or this boy goes to jail."

Styles: "I think I've had enough of you calling me boy. Mrs. Dladla I respect you as Khethu's mother but I will not wag my tail like a dog, at your behest."

Nobayeni: "You call this respect?"

She gives him a dirty look.

I'm done.

Nobayeni: "I don't expect much from you anyway, you're an orphan. There was no one to teach you respect and manners."

I think Nobayeni just pressed the red button. She touched on the wrong topic.

Styles: "Baby, get your bag. We're leaving."

He instructs. I don't know what to do now, my dad is looking at me with pain in his eyes. He wants to say something but Nobayeni wears the pants in that household, I guess he's waiting for her command.

I want to go with Styles, I belong with him but I don't want to leave my father like this. As for Nobayeni, she can go jump.

Styles: "Why are you still sitting? I said let's go."

He's so calm but I know his rage has been awakened and the sooner we get out of here, the

better. Or else, Styles will definitely attack a defenceless woman. I can't have him spend the night in jail, I won't be able to take it. The thought of him behind bars is unbearable.

I grab my bag as he takes my hand into his and begins leading me out.

Nobayeni: "Bridgette, if you follow that boy I will disown you and this time it will be for good."

This is all she knows, threats.

I stop at my tracks, letting go of Styles' hand. He glances at me as he frowns, he sees my discomposure and fears.

I want to cry now, I can't live without Styles and I can't live without my father either. He sighs, looks at my father. I think they're communicating because dad gives him an assuring look, he's back to lugging me towards the door.

NOMBULELO\*

Me: "Baba?"

He slowly turns his head to look at me, he's lying on the couch. I didn't think he was going to be discharged today.

I rush to him while he sits up and hug him, I'm in tears as all my emotions engulf me.

Moses: "I'm okay my child, you don't have to cry."

I'm not crying because of that but because I'm in pain and being in my father's arms makes me more emotional, I want him to protect me and assure me that everything will be okay.

Me: "Dad I messed up, my life is over."

I admit sheepishly.

Moses: "What's wrong Lelo? What did you do?"

Me: "I'm pregnant."

I didn't mean to say that, I was thinking it then it came out. My mind and mouth conspired against me, he slowly unwraps his arms from me but I don't let go. I don't know what he'll do next and I fear the look of disappointment in his face.

Moses: "Lelo?"

Me: "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to dad. It just happened..."

I'm still holding on to him and I can feel his chest briskly moving up and down.

Moses: "Let go Nombulelo."

He commands, I can tell by the sound of his voice that he's angry.

Me: "I'm sorry daddy, I'm sorry."

I cry louder. He stands up with my arms around his plump waist.

Moses: "Ntombi!!!! Ntombi!!!!"

He shouts for my mother. Now I'm more than terrified, I'm demented and bawling louder than before.

This old man is going to kill me.

My mother comes running from the kitchen.

Ntombi: "Yini Mo-"

She stops as she sees me wailing in my father's arms.

Moses: "Get your daughter off of me now."

He orders, anger visible in his voice.

Ntombi: "What's going on Nombulelo?"

There's fear in her voice, it must be because of the state I am in.

Me: "I'm sorry dad, please understand."

Ntombi: "Lelo let go of your father."

She shouts.

Me: "No, he's going to hit me."

I protest.

Ntombi: "Why would he hit you? What did you do?"

She's standing behind me now, I don't answer. My tears have taken over.

Ntombi: "Nombulelo stop this craziness and let go of your father."

My mother shouts while grabbing my waist and starts pulling me back, I finally let go. I feel a hot sensation on my cheek resulting in me seeing stars and I'm on the floor in a split second, my cheek is on fire.

Ntombi: "Moses, what are you doing?"

She shouts at him.

Moses: "Thula wena." (Shut up)

He roars.

I look up at my father who's on his feet now, I have never seen that look before. I really messed up and he will never forgive me.

AMARA\*

It feels so good to be outside, the sun is almost setting and I've been trailing it as it feels good on my skin. The garden is more beautiful from this view but this is not why I'm here. I have inspected my surroundings, there are no guards on this side of the house. We've been strolling for a while now and Chioma looks anxious.

Chioma: "We should go back now, it's getting late."

Me: "Okay."

I don't want her to suspect anything.

I smash her head with a rock I picked up a while ago, she falls and passes out. I can't escape this feeling of guilty that's stinging me, I'm comforted by the fact that I didn't bash her head hard. She should be awake within the next 10 minutes, I will be gone by then.

Me: "I'm sorry Chioma."

I whisper to her as she lies unconscious on the ground.

This is my chance, just a few more steps and I'm out of here.

I finally make it out the gate without anyone seeing me, but where do I go?

I can't see the main road from here, it's literally a forest. The main road is probably on the other side of the house and I can't go there. I will be seen, all of this will be in vain. I can probably walk around this forest, I doubt there's wild animals, considering that a house was built here.

I find myself paving through bushes, it feels like it's been a while since I started this journey. I can't help but feel that I have been walking in circles and it's getting dark.

Maybe I shouldn't have left the house, I am terrified of the dark and not once did this cross my mind when I was planning my escape. I trudge on, desperate to be free again. If luck is on my side I will make it to the main road before it gets too dark. At this point I can't rely on fate, see where it has brought me. If it gets its way today, I will end up back in that beast's house.

My heart jerks when I hear footsteps trailing towards me, I'm confused at first as I can't tell if they are human or animal. I decide to hide behind some tree, it's thick enough to hide me. Problem is, I can't stop wheezing out of fear of the unknown.

My thoughts are constantly running around Randall for some reason, I keep wondering if I will ever see him again. Will I make it home or will I be devoured by some wild animal?

Will he be troubled when he finds my body? Well, whatever will be left of it.

Will he blame himself for my death?

The footsteps are getting closer, I hold my breath as I prepare for the worst. I'm starting to hate



this fate thing, it's messing with my head.

Suddenly I lose all senses to stay alive. What is life anyway? It has never claimed me nor does it want me. So, why should I fight for it?

I shriek at the sound of a branch cracking behind me. Whatever it is, is behind me. I scream as someone grabs my waist from behind, a large hand covers my mouth and my breath is caught in my throat. I seem to recognize the hold but, too terrified to recall it. He releases my mouth and I continue to struggle in their grip, fighting for my life but he's holding on for dear life. I know it's a man because these arms feel big wrapped around my waist and I'm powerless against him.

"Normal people don't take strolls in the bushes me hemma, we have parks for that." (My queen.)

His fierce voice prickles my ears, a sense of relief ripples through me at the sound of it, somehow I am ecstatic that it's him. Although he hasn't concealed the level of his infuriation from me. I fall numb in his arms, I'm tired and giving in to this beast seems like my only option.

He turns me around without letting go, his face is visible but I can't see his eyes due to the darkness hovering around us. I feel them stabbing me though and it's intense. His dark aura is weighing me down, there's this heavy presence that's surrounding him and it's scaring the living day lights out of me. I sense rage and disappointment from him.

Randall: "What is this princess? Where are you off to? Why do you want to go away from me?"

He asks softly but his threatening voice gives him away as it paints pictures of his wrath.

He tightens the grip on my waist, my bosom is pressed against his chest as he's looking down at me. Unable to take the heavy presence coming from him, I drop my head but he uses his forefinger to bring my face up, forcing me to look at him. His face is too close to mine, I can feel his warm breath tasting every inch of my skin. It has the smell of nicotine again, this time it's mingled with a bit of mint.

Randall: "You can't run away from me Amara, I will always find you."

He whispers, burying his face on my neck and sniffs it.

Me: "Please."

I whimper, I don't know why this plea leaked from my mouth.

He doesn't respond to it but picks me up with ease as if I weigh nothing and begins treading through the bushes, using his back to shield me from the dangling branches. I keep my hands to myself and stiffen my body. I haven't tried to fight him since he whisked me up, I don't have the strength to do so. My mind is confused, and my heart is heavy.

We enter through the front gate, the guards are all over the yard. There seems to be more of them now, by the looks on their faces, they are in trouble. This man carrying me doesn't even turn to look at them, his gaze is fixed to where he's going. He kicks the door open as one of the guards attempt to open it. I finally catch a glimpse of his face in the light as he walks us up the stairs, he's livid.

My body begins to tremble out of fear, I don't know what he's going to do to me. He kicks the bedroom door open, marches in and rejects my body on the bed. I sit while scooting back to the head of the bed, the look in his eyes says he's going to attack me. He sneers but coldly and my body shivers at the sight of that evil smirk.

He turns and walks out, locking the door after banging it.

To be continued...



16\*

RANDALL\*

This is the second time I have come close to losing Amara, if I didn't come home early and found Chioma passed out and put two and two together. I would be speaking a different story.

That girl is testing my patience, I don't want to lose my cool with her but, what she did is stupid and dangerous. I am beyond mad and might have to punish her for that. Thankfully Chioma isn't badly injured, it's just a small bump just above her neck. Mbuso is taking her care of her in her bedroom, I hope she's awake because I need to know how Amara managed to leave the house.

I walk in just as Mbuso hands her a glass of water, she's probably taking her pills.

Me: "Good, you're awake."

I say making my way towards them, she looks at me with fear in her eyes.

Me: "Mbuso, thank you. Please, leave us."

I see Chioma tremble, I don't know why because I won't do anything to her.

Mbuso looks at her then at me, he notices what's going on.

Mbuso: "You need to calm down Randall, let her recover first."

Me: "I said thank you, now leave."

I snap.

Mbuso: "Randall you can't treat people like you own them."

Me: "You know this thing of you telling me what to do is getting old, you're pissing me off Mbuso."

Mbuso: "I'm trying to help here man."

The nerve of this fool.

Me: "What I do in my house has nothing to do with you, get the fuck out of here before I throw you out."

He's pushing me.

He looks defeated, sighs then walks out. Chioma sits up and she gulps as I give her an intense glare.

Me: "What happened?"

Chioma: "I'm sorry Uze, I-"

Me: "Will you tell me what happened or should I go ask Amara and believe me, she won't like my interrogation."

I know she has developed a soft spot for her, she's been bugging me about letting her go. She's clueless about what's really going on.

Chioma: "I'm sorry."

She's crying, I know I shouldn't be doing this but right now this is the only way I'll pacify my anger."

Me: "Yes, you're sorry but I want to know what happened."

Chioma: "She said she wanted to take a walk in the garden."

Me: "And you agreed because?"

Chioma: "I don't know I-"

Me: "I want answers Chioma, I don't know is not an answer."

Chioma: "I'm sorry."

Me: "Will you stop saying that?"

I yell and she flinches.

Chioma: "She said she couldn't breathe in that room and."

Me: "In that big ass room?"

She looks at me then continues.

Chioma: "She promised that she wouldn't try anything and I believed her, she's so innocent that she sounded convincing."

Me: "You're right about that Chioma, she is innocent and naïve. She doesn't know what's going on around her, that's why she's here. Exposing her outside was careless and stupid. Do you have any idea what you've done? If I didn't find her, do you know what would've happened to her?"

She shakes her head while wiping her tears.

Me: "That girl is your responsibility when I'm not around and if anything happens to her while I'm not here, you will know me Chioma. Do you hear me?"

Chioma: "I'm sorry Uze."

I clench my eyes, I hate that word.

Me: "Amara will be sorry once I'm done with her."

I threaten before marching out.

AMARA\*

I've been laying on the bed crying my sorrows out, a sound of heavy footsteps tramping towards the room catch my attention. I know it's him, suddenly my heart starts beating fast. Fear knocks and it's already in before I could reject it.

The door flies open and Randall storms into the room, trudging towards me and rage visible on his face. I'm on my feet in an instant, my heart racing to its full speed.

His cold angry eyes are fixated on me. I don't know what he's about to do but this beast is scaring me. I scream as he flips the bed with no effort at all. I watch it as it falls to the floor. He looks like he's about to explode, he turns to look at me with a scowl on his face and begins sauntering towards me. I move back till my back collides against the wall. My body is trembling and I can't stop it. He towers over me, both his hands caging me on the wall.

Randall: "Why do you like pissing me off princess?"

He grunts.

I don't respond, his eyes are looking deep into my soul, shredding me apart and it almost feels like every part of me is exposed to him, even the most hidden parts. I want to drop my eyes but their too stubborn to adhere to my command. Instead, they would rather stare into the scary eyes of the beast.

Randall: "I think you enjoy pressing my buttons. You love seeing me angry don't you?"

His voice quavers with rage, he's so scary right now. Afraid of what he might do, I shake my head vigorously.

Randall: "You better listen and take notes, pull that stunt again and I will have you flying to Europe. I'm not kidding Amara, try me."

He threatens in a deadpan voice. There's a sudden knock at the door, someone is struggling with the handle. It seems to be locked, I don't remember him locking it.

"Uze open the door."

It's Chioma, she's banging on the door. Her voice is laced with fear as it frantically calls out to Randall.

I have finally dropped my gaze but his eyes seem to be stubborn, they refuse to let go of me. I'm still detained by his hands and the warmth of his breath that's invading my face. He appears to be unbothered by the cries of the elderly woman.

Chioma: "Uze open this door right now."

Her demand forces me to look up into his eyes, he would really be a monster if he ignores that desperate cry. I see a twitch in his eyes. He pulls back slowly, his eyes still exploring me.

Randall: "You're joining me for dinner, this is how it's going to be from now on. I won't keep you

locked up anymore. By the way me hemma, there is no escaping anymore and I'm sure you wouldn't want to challenge me." (My queen)

He turns to walk away, Chioma is still causing drama at the door.

Me: "I didn't know hating someone could come so easy."

He stops and it takes him a minute to turn back. He looks at me intently, he doesn't look bothered by my declaration.

Randall: "Don't worry princess, we'll definitely do something about that hatred."

The arrogance...

He pops the door open and Chioma jerks, taking a step back. She's standing there looking all worked up, she scans her eyes in the room. There's relief in her eyes as they meet mine, Randall passes her and disappears into the corridor.

NOMBULELO\*

We're outside and the whole neighbourhood has come out to watch, my father has been going in and out of the house taking my clothes and throwing them outside. I keep following him scream crying and begging him to stop, he doesn't want me in his house anymore. This is the very same man who wanted to be respected in the community, now he's showcasing our lives in public.

I grab his arm as he throws out the last of my clothes.

Me: "Daddy please..."

I scream cry but he yanks his hand away.

Moses: "This is what you do to me Nombulelo, after working my ass off to put you in a prominent school."

I can't speak, all I do is cry.

Moses: "What the hell are you all looking at? Don't you have better things to do with your miserable lives? Nithand' indaba zabantu. That's why nihlupheka zinja." (You're too nosy, that's why you're living in poverty.)

He roars at the crowd, some laugh while others gasp.

Me: "Daddy I'm sorry, please. Where will I go if you throw me out?"

I drop to my knees in front of him, he looks down at me. The look in his eyes breaks my heart more than his actions.

Moses: "I don't care where you go, as long as you're not in my house."

Ntombi: "Moses, don't do this please."

My mother is behind him weeping, he had said he will kick her out if she tries to stop him.

Moses: "Shut up wena Ntombi."

He yells at her before turning to me.

Moses: "Wena ufile kimi, I don't have a child. Ntombi, look at the woman you have become. You're barren Ntombi, you can't say you have given birth usho lento." (You're dead to me... Referring to this.)

He shatters my soul with his words. My mother carries her arms on her head and screams before wailing like I have just died. My own mother is mourning me while I'm still alive.

My father is meant to protect me, and threaten that idiot Zuma. Isn't that what fathers do? They go all out for their daughters.

Moses: "If I ever see you in my premises, I will kill you and then kill myself because I refuse to go to jail for a useless thing like you."

He shouts, turns and grabs my mother's arm. He drags her crying into the house, leaving me to gather my things with tears bullying me.

Martha: "Hayi, uMoses uyenzani ingane jesu? (What is Moses doing to this child?)

"Izoyaphi nkosi yam'. (Where will she go?)

Some old woman jumps in. There's whispers from the crowd, I can't make out what they are saying.

I'm looking at them, hoping one of them will offer me a place to stay at least for the night. These people might as well have raised me, I grew up around them. They all give me pitiful looks before each one goes into their respectable homes, locking the doors behind them.

I don't understand what's going on? How did my life take such a drastic turn? Where will I go in this night?

I'm left with one option.

STYLES\*

Khethu is not okay. I've lost count of the number of times I have stolen glances at her from the time we pulled out of the hospital parking lot. My heart has been racing since she called and told me what happened. How can I be so careless? I was so caught up in protecting Amara that I completely forgot about my baby. Mkhize has messed with the wrong man, first I will deal with the baboon who shot at her.

Khethu walks ahead of me as we make our way to the house, I rush to open the door for her.

She hasn't looked at me since we got in the car and the ride was silent which was odd, our silent moments are never that awkward.

Me: "Do you need anything?"

I ask as she sits back on the couch, she doesn't look at me but sighs in frustration. I hate seeing her like this. I amble to her and sit beside her.

Me: "Baby-"

Khethu: "Where did you sleep last night Styles?"

What?

Me: "I slept in the guest room."

Khethu: "Don't lie to me Styles, you weren't here when I woke up this morning."

Me: "Because I left the house earlier than usual."

Khethu: "Styles you're lying to me."

Me: "Baby, what's going on? What is this?"

Khethu: "I want to know where you were last night. Who did you go and see?"

I see where she's going with this.

Me: "I'm not cheating on you if that's what you're thinking."

She looks at me and cackles.

Khethu: "I didn't say that you're cheating on me."

Me: "You were implying it."

I snap and she goes quiet for a while, I take her hand into mine.

Me: "Baby, look at me."

She raises her eyes.

Me: "I love you, I would never look at another woman. You're my khethu, my only eye."

She giggles.

Khethu: "Only eye?"

Me: "Yes, meaning you are the only one for me and I'm sorry for being an ass." I explain as I lean over her, she smiles, her eyes shying away from me. It's amazing how after so many years of being together I still make her blush, and it's still the most perfect sight I've ever seen. My lips softly brush hers long enough to breathe her in.

Me: "You're okay?"



I whisper against her lips.

Khethu: "I'm okay."

She whispers back and I don't give her time to breathe as I capture her lips into mine, every kiss with her feels like the first. She is a breath of fresh air and I know I don't need marriage to prove how much I love her, I wish she would understand that. I pull back finishing the kiss with a peck on her nose, her plum cheeks have turned a shade of pink.

Khethu: "Baby, about what happened at the hospital-"

Me: "I don't want to talk about that, there's something I need to ask you."

I take my phone and show her a picture.

Me: "The man that shot at you, is it him?"

Her face gives it away as horror is evident in her eyes.

Khethu: "Yes."

Her voice breaks.

Me: "Khethu I want you to listen to me."

I make sure I glance into her eyes as I take her cheeks into my hands, she needs to see how serious I am about this.

Me: "No one will ever threaten you again, not as long as I am alive."

She nods.

Me: "I'm going to go out for a bit."

Khethu: "No baby, let it go."

That's the thing, I can't let it go. I won't be okay if I ignore this.

Me: "Don't worry, I'm just going to see Randall."

She knows I'm lying hence, the tears in her eyes.

Khethu: "Don't do this Styles. What if something happens to you? What will become of me?"

Me: "Nothing will happen to me, I told you I'm just going to see Randall."

She follows me to the door.

khethu: "I'm coming with you."

Me: "No! I told you I'll be back, didn't I?"

Khethu: "But Styles."

Me: "Go to bed Khethu."

I instruct and dash out the door, leaving her calling out to me. Khethu doesn't understand, Mkhize crossed all limits today and I will not sit back and put my feet up.

To be continued...



17\*

NOMBULELO\*

Life should really come with a manual, this shit is hard. If someone had told me that growing up would be this hard, I would have asked to remain a child forever. Not so long ago I was on my father shoulder as he spun me around like I was as light as a feather, the look in his eyes promised protection from all the bad things life had to throw at me.

Look at me now, I am alone, walking in the dark with nowhere to go. No one to call, maybe I should end it. How do I live after all of this? I wish Amara was here, at least I wouldn't be alone.

My emotions shut down and the only thing I can think of is ending my life, I find myself standing in the middle of the road with my luggage and garbage.

I shut my eyes and wait for whatever will come to run me over, it will be better if I don't see it coming.

That way I will wake up in heaven, well, that's what I hope. I've been a good girl and I love God, surely He can't reject me as well.

Suddenly, I'm not so sure about this plot of mine. I am not brave enough to take my own life, I admit that I'm a coward. It's too late to move because I hear a car, the driver won't see me as I'm wearing all black. I can see the light piercing through the darkness of my vision, I clench my eyes and prepare for the worst.

I hear it screech and the light has become brighter, it will be over any second now. I wait for the inevitable, there's no going back now.

Okay, I'm still standing.

Why hasn't it hit me yet? I hear the sound of a car door open.

What the hell is this? Even death rejects me?

"Hey, are you crazy?"

I open my eyes to the thunderous male voice barking at me. I'm unable to make out his face due to the bright lights. His voice sounds familiar though, he marches up to me. I step back as I detect anger in his body language.

Him: "Are you trying to kill yourself and get me\_"

He stops as he recognizes me, it's that guy who almost hit me with a car earlier on.

Him: "Wow!!!"

He chuckles annoyingly so.

Him: "You've got to be kidding me, it's you again."

He sounds shocked and bewildered.

Him: "Is it a norm for you to jump into speeding cars or you have a death wish or something."

Me: "I have a death wish."

I respond coldly.

He frowns, I'm confusing the guy.

Him: "Do you need help?"

Me: "If you would run me over with a car. That would be great."

I'm not playing. My face is cold, my emotions are tucked away somewhere and my tone is as cold as a corpse.

Him: "Sisi, I don't know what's going on with you but, death is never an answer."

Me: "It is to me."

Him: "Think of your family. The pain they will go through when-

Me: "I don't have a family."

I cut him off. He releases a defeated sigh.

Him: "What's your name?"

He takes a step closer.

Me: "Lelo."

I don't know why I'm telling him my name because I will be dead soon. Maybe he'll be the only one at my funeral since my family has disowned me and probably my mother, that's if my father allows her.

Him: "Lelo, nice to meet you. I'm Mbuso."

He introduces himself and I'm least interested in who he is.

Mbuso: "It's cold out here, shall we get in the car?"

I follow him anyway, if he turns out to be some psycho serial killer then hooray for me. I struggle a bit to climb into his SUV, it's warm inside.

Mbuso: "Are you warm?"

I nod.

Mbuso: "You seem like a nice girl Lelo."

I don't see a point to this.

Mbuso: "Life is never what we want it to be but, that doesn't mean we should succumb to its afflictions. I'm pretty sure you're stronger than this Lelo, you shouldn't give in to those voices whispering inside your head. They utter pure nonsense, its lies and if you're not careful you'll give in to it."

I still cannot see his point.

Me: "Do you have any idea what I have been through in the past few hours? My life took a major U-turn straight into traffic. There's no other way out for me but to jump and I have accepted my fate."

Mbuso: "This can't be your final destination Lelo, you-"

Me: "Listen if I needed a sermon, I would've gone to church. Please spare me the lecture I'm okay."

I snap at him. Does he really have to frustrate me like this? He goes quiet for a while, he's looking at me and I look away.

There's an urge to click my tongue but I can't afford to be rude not when I'm in his car.

Mbuso: "Is there anywhere you can go to? I can drop you."

Me: "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to snap. Now you're rushing to get rid of me."

Mbuso: "No, that's not it. I have a plane to catch in two hours and I wouldn't want to miss it."

Me: "Is it a norm for you to go around dropping people off?"

I joke, showing a little lazy smile. He chuckles.

Mbuso: "So far, it's only been you. I hope next time we meet it won't be under dire circumstances."

I shrug my shoulders as I have no answer for that, I don't know if they will be a next time. I still have to ponder upon his preaching.

Mbuso: "Well?"

He snaps me back. I recall the option I had when I left home, I hope I won't live to regret it.

Me: "Yeah."

If this is life then, I'm good.

RANDALL\*

To say I feel like crap is an understatement, the thing is I lost it. I couldn't comprehend the thought of Amara leaving this place. That would only mean that she would be away from me, which is a nightmare.

What will I do with this addiction I have? The need to be around her, what will I do when it grows and she's nowhere to be found? I had to rebuke her so she sees how serious I am about this. I can't honestly tell her the truth about what's going on, this is to protect her and I have a feeling that she won't believe me if I do tell her.

I have heard Styles complain about how Khethu takes forever to get ready, it's a trait that women have. I've been waiting for Amara to come down stairs for dinner, I wonder what's keeping her. Chioma had said five minutes, I guess five minutes to women is probably an hour or forever if they feel like it.

I asked Chioma to help her get ready, she should make her look good. I said to her that I want to be speechless when I see her, maybe dressing up will make her feel a bit better. I hate that she stresses a lot but, one day she will come to understand why I did what I did and hopefully she will thank me.

Growing impatient, I get up to go check on her, I stop at the sight of her walking down the stairs. My heart does something there, I don't know what it is and I won't dwell on it. Her head is bowed, she walks like she doesn't want to be here but she'll get used to it.

I knew red will blend well with her hazelnut skin colour, I'm completely speechless as I watch her tread down those long stairs. I want her to get to me already so I can see her from a close range, hence I meet her halfway. Her scent meets me before I get to her.

She doesn't look up at me, I'm tempted to hold her in my arms but I don't want to alarm her. It's bad enough that I let her see that side of me today. I tilt my head as I lean over, letting my eyes follow hers. She raises her sad pale eyes that reveal the stress and trauma she's been going through. The urge to embrace her grows but I'm able to restrain myself.

Me: "Me hemma."

There's no emotion in her eyes, it hurts me to see her like this. I want to release her so she can go rest but I'm too selfish for that, I want to spend time with her. She has become like a drug to me and I need my dose of energy before the night is over.

I want to tell her she's beautiful but something in me refuses me access, it must be this stupid ice box that's wrestling with my heart. I find myself sniffing her neck, leaving trails of wet kisses. Her body starts trembling and she builds a bridge between us with her hands, she wants me to stop. With great difficulty I pull back, now I see panic has taken over her eyes. I only hope she doesn't start crying because her tears are my weakness, I will lose it and finally make her mine. A risk I hope I will not take, she's too fragile and delicate.

Me: "My precious Amara, shall we sit."

I reach out my hand, she looks at it. Her eyes say she's contemplating, she takes it reluctantly.

This happens all the time when I'm around her, something seems to take over and I can't control what I say to her.

I feel like a king as I hold her hand, it's warmth on my skin is unexplainable. I lead her to the table, pull a sit for her and sit right next to her, I refuse to let distance have this moment. It's my



moment and I'm not letting go.

NTOMBI\*

Me: "I can't believe you did this Moses. My only child?"

Moses: "What child? You don't have a child Ntombi, she's dead."

Me: "You can't abandon your own daughter Moses, God will punish you."

Moses: "If you want to make funeral arrangements so you can get over this, then fine we will do it. The whole shebang, we can even have a tomb stone done for her. We have the money now."

I can't believe he just said that, he's sitting on the couch eating like his life depends on it while his child is out there in the cold. What kind of a demon is this? I married the devil.

Me: "Moses? Vele you want to make me a childless woman?"

I yell at him but, he doesn't seem bothered as he continues taking bites of his meat.

Moses: "You are a childless woman Ntombi, we should have had a boy. I knew having a girl was going to bring me shame, look at me now. I should have ran when the time was right, I wouldn't be this humiliated. Now everyone knows that I had a whore of a daughter."

He continues with his mouth full while taking more food into his mouth. This pig speaks of my daughter in past tense, he really has declared her dead. I'm baffled by all of this. Is this man aware of what he's saying or has he lost his mind? Maybe I hit him too hard with that bottle. I should have killed him, the sight of him makes me nauseas. I can't stand him right now.

Ntombi: "I don't know what to say to you anymore Moses, but know this. My God sees everything."

Moses: "Oh? Ngempela? Like how you hit me on the head with a beer bottle? I haven't forgotten what you did wena Ntombi, and one of these days I'm telling you. You will pay for this, uyabona this scar on my head will remind me of the kind of woman you are. Ungang' bulala phela wena. I have to sleep with my eyes open now because I don't trust you." (Really? You are capable of killing me.)

Disgusting evil bastard.

I click my tongue and walk to the kitchen.

Moses: "Yeah, hamba vele." (Go)

His voice follows me to the kitchen.

RANDALL\*

Amara hasn't eaten much, I have been conversing with myself. All she does is nod or shake her head and I'm reminded of the words she uttered to me before I left her room earlier. It's not a nice feeling knowing that she hates me. I will deal with that in time, what matters at the moment is that she's here with me. Although her eyes refuse to meet mine.

My phone rings disturbing me from this perfect moment, if it were in my pocket I would've ignored it. But seeing the caller ID, it could be important.

Me: "Olivia?"

This woman gets on my nerves sometimes but I have to tolerate her for the sake of my daughter.

Olivia: "Randall please come, it's Joseph. He's trying to drown Liya."

She sounds frantic, for a second it's hard to believe what she just said. But knowing that junkie boyfriend of hers. I told her to keep him away from child.

Me: "I can't stop him Randall, he's locked up in the bathroom with her and I can't get in."

I jump up startling a quiet Amara.

Me: "I swear Olivia, if that son of a bitch hurts my daughter, I will fucking kill you."

Olivia: "Joseph open the door, don't hurt my baby please."

She screams in the back ground, there's a loud banging as well.

Me: "Olivia!!!"

I shout but all I hear is her sobs and pleas.

Amara is looking at me, confusion written all over her face.

Me: "Chioma!!!"

She rushes down at my call.

Me: "Take care of her, I have to go out."

I don't give her a chance to respond as I rush out of the house. I'm going to kill Olivia, she's stupid. She's always been stupid and I curse the day I met her.

Olivia was a one night stand, I was drunk and one thing led to another. Five years later, she comes to me with a baby claiming that she's mine. Of course I didn't believe her, the DNA proved her words to be true. She denied me the whole five years of my daughter's life, when I wanted to take Liyana to live with me she declined and threatened to disappear with my princess. Olivia is white, and I wondered why she would give our daughter a Zulu name. She explained about how she was dating this black guy for four years, he was possessive. When she found out she was pregnant, he was already in her life and the dates didn't add up. She had no choice but to present my baby to him as his. He left her when he found out, till today it angers





me that another man raised my child while I was deprived the chance. That woman is evil. It's four years later and I'm still working on getting Liyana home.

To be continued...



18\*

## STYLES\*

It didn't take long for me to get to Pretoria East. For someone who goes around threatening people Mkhize sure is comfortable, the old man is not vigilant. I can count the guards outside in just one hand.

I use my laptop to disengage the electric gate, the alarm system and security cameras. Walking in there will be as easy as sliding into a slay queen's DM's.

My gun is ready and loaded, I only need one. I grab my back pack, I think we're going to have a party in there.

I enter the gate with such ease, some guy in black comes running towards me and I shoot him on the head with a silencer, he falls dead. The house is not far from the gate, I spot another guard walking back and forth at the front door.

I think of using the back entrance but taking out that fool as well will do me good. I don't want to be disturbed once I'm in there with Mkhize.

I tip toe behind him, he clearly cannot detect anything. This is very careless of Mkhize, hiring immatures to guard his family. I tap him on the shoulder, he turns. He looks startled and immediately reaches for his gun but I shoot him on the head as well.

If life was this easy, wouldn't we be one fucked up humanity.

The door is not locked, I'm in the house. There's no one in sight, the lounge is empty but the lights are on. I hear humming coming from behind me, I can recognize that scratchy throat from anywhere.

He has his head dipped in the fridge, he's wearing his night gown. I lean against the kitchen counter waiting for him to come out. He stops as if he feels my presence and peeks behind the open door. I smirk at him as he frowns upon seeing me.

Me: "Hiiii."

I hum.

Mkhize: "Shit."

He grunts and turns in an attempt to run but I'm behind him in a jiffy, my gun poking his lower back.

Me: "Relax Mkhulu, you'll pass out if you overwork yourself."

I taunt him.

Mkhize: "How did you get in here?"

Me: "Doesn't matter, what matters is that I'm here. You called me didn't you Mkhize? I believe you left a message with your errand boy."

Mkhize: "You're making a mistake Sishi."

Me: "Not from where I'm standing."

Mkhize: "My family is here, can we do this somewhere else?"

Me: "Don't be a spoiler old man, you summoned me and so I came out to play. It won't be fun without the mighty Mkhizes though."

Mkhize: "Don't do this boy, it won't end well."

Me: "You started it, never start a fire you can't put out mkhulu."

A little boy about ten years of age comes rushing into the kitchen, I hide my gun just in time. He stops at the sight of me.

Him: "Baba, ubani lo?" (Who is this dad?)

Me: "Hello boy boy."

I greet, he slowly raises his hand and waves.

Mkhize: "Woza" kubaba mfana wam" (Come to your father my son.)

I see what he's trying to do.

Me: "Don't even dare, send him away."

Mkhize: "Mfana wam..." (My son-)

He thinks I won't do anything to him in front of his son. I slip my gun out and press it on his lower back.

Me: "Dare me Mkhize. Now send this boy away or I'll start serving bullets like candy at a birthday party. We wouldn't want a blood bath now would we? I can already see the headlines... <<<Taxi boss and family killed execution style>>> or better yet... <<<Taxi boss kills family then turns the gun on himself>>> I will make it a gruesome death that the president will declare this day a public holiday in honour of the Mkhize massacre. You know I can make it happen"

He knows I'm not playing.

Mkhize: "Hamba uyo lala mfana wami." (Go to bed my son)

Me: "Good night boy boy."

I grin at the boy as he walks away.

Me: "Awesome, we're alone now. Just what I wanted."

Mkhize: "What do you want from me Sishi?"

Me: "I just want to talk that's all. Here's the plan, we're going to walk out of this house without

anyone noticing.”

Mkhize: “Where are we going?”

Me: “Down memory lane.”

Mkhize: “I’m not going anywhere with you nja.” (Dog.)

Me: “I don’t speak negative mkhulu. When I say we are going then, we are going. Now move.”

I poke him with the gun but he stiffens his body.

Mkhize: “I said I’m not going anywhere with you.”

He resists making me angry.

Me: “Okay, let me go see if boy boy wants to accompany daddy.”

Mkhize: “Okay, okay...”

I smirk at as he begins moving towards the back door.

“Baba, ingane ithi-”

A woman young enough to be his daughter comes running and screams as she sees me pointing a gun at him. I know she’s his wife because the bastard only has sons.

Mkhize: “Thula.” (Shut up.)

He snaps at her and she covers her mouth.

Me: “Great, the more the merrier. Hi.”

I smile at her but she doesn’t return it.

Me: “Okay, I see mkhulu’s sour face has rubbed in on his wife. So it’s true what they say, a married couple eventually starts looking alike. In this case you abducted each other’s personas. Come, join us.”

She shakes her head, her eyes almost popping out of her eye sockets.

Mkhize: “This is between me and you Sishi, leave her out of this.”

Me: “Relax, I just want to introduce myself that’s all. This is wifey number?”

I wait for an answer while glaring at the sweating Mkhize, if eyes could kill I would be dead right now.

Me: “Help me out Mkhize, I’m cracking my brain here.”

He doesn’t respond but continues to wear the deadly stare.

Me: “Okay, I’ll do the honours then.”

I gesture Mkhize to move towards his wife, and instruct them to stand with their back against

the wall.

Me: "You must be wife number 4?"

She sheds tears as she clenches on his arm, he doesn't hold her back. It appears that his frustrations won't let him comfort her.

Me: "No? Okay 3? Whatever, you're wife number something. Damn, you like them young don't you Mkhize? You greedy bastard, to think you still want to add to your collection."

I jump on the kitchen -Island to sit.

Me: "Can he still get it up? Unless you're married to the money and not him, it's easier to bare anything when money is involved. Am I right wifey? Take it easy with the old man, we wouldn't want him getting a heart attack. Please inform your sister wives as well."

Her: "Please stop."

She pleads as tears streak her face. I would like to say I'm moved but I left my emotions at home.

Me: "Don't worry this is a friendly visit."

Mkhize: "Unyile Sishi." (You're in shit.)

He groans, a loud laugh erupts from my mouth causing his wife to scream in fright.

Me: "Ah! He's a comedian. Boredom must not know this address, with a man like him, you all are always entertained. Well, since we're on the topic of entertainment. Let's call the whole family out to party shall we?"

Mkhize clenches his jaw.

Mkhize: "Leave my family out of this boy, you will regret this I promise."

Me: "Shut up and move."

I lead them to the leaving room.

NOMBULELO\*

Mbuso dropped me at the gate, I told him he can go I'll be fine. Besides, the streets are still occupied with people. I notice that the light is still on, this better not backfire or I'll be sleeping on the streets tonight.

I knock twice, the door swings open at my second attempt to knock. He looks shocked and not happy to me see.

Me: "Hi Zuzu."

Zuma: "What are you doing here?"

Me: "I didn't have anywhere else to go, my father threw me out of the house."

Zuma: "And you thought it best to come here?"

He's blocking the door way and looking at me like I am some monster who came to collect his soul.

Me: "Please Zuma, it's late and you're my only hope."

He glares at me as if considering my request.

Zuma: "Eish, Nombulelo. Don't you have aunts or cousins around here?"

Me: "You know I don't Zuma, I am begging you for the sake of our baby."

Maybe I shouldn't have said that, his face changes to that of disgust.

Zuma: "Hey, hey. Don't tell me that shit wena maan."

He shouts while pointing his forefinger at me.

Me: "Okay, for the sake of what we once shared. I know you love me Zuma, I still matter to you."

There was once a time when he was protective of me, I miss those days.

Zuma: "You can stay for the night but I want you gone in the morning."

You would think my heart isn't broken already, I dig my nails into the palm of my hand trying to stop myself from shedding a tear. But like everything else in my life this also disappoints me as a tear slips down my cheek, I send my hand to quickly wipe it off before he sees it. I would hate to have him think I am a weakling.

Zuma: "Are you going to stand there and cry or come in?"

I leer at him gratefully as he paves a way for me to enter. It's almost hard to believe that this is the same man I was laughing with just a few days ago, he was kind, compassionate and sensitive. Now, I don't recognize what's before me and it's painful to think I have lost him. How do I get my Zuzu back? The same man who promised to marry me when his life gets on track. I wish I knew his reason for his hostility towards me.

Zuma: "Since it's cold you can't sleep on the floor so we'll have to share the bed."

My heart jilts to my chest. I remember a time when we used to share this very same bed lovingly. Now it's just going to be two people who only tolerate each other because there is no other way.

RANDALL\*

Boksburg is too far from the north, Olivia and her stubbornness though. I once offered to buy

her a house in Rivonia just so my daughter can be close to me but she refused. Talking about how she can't leave the house she inherited from her parents, and something about memories and value. I didn't care much to listen further as her insistence frustrated me.

My phone rings while I'm still driving or speeding rather, something must be wrong if Khethu is calling me.

Me: "Miss K?"

We are not best of friends but we tolerate each other, she makes Styles happy and I'm grateful to her for that.

Khethu: "Randall, you have to stop Styles. He went after some guy, now he's not answering his phone. I didn't like the look on his face when he left."

She's not making sense.

Me: "What do you mean Styles went after some guy? What guy?"

Khethu: "I was attacked at the mall this afternoon, the man said he was sent by his boss, Mkhize I think..."

Oh shit!!!

Me: "Did Styles say where he's going?"

Khethu: "No, he showed me a picture of that man on the phone asking if I recognized him. Then, he left. He said he was coming to meet you. But I knew he was lying, please find him Randall."

Me: "Don't worry, I will. Styles is a smart man. He's smarter than all of us combined, he wouldn't do anything that would put his life in danger."

Khethu: "I just want him home Randall."

She snorts.

Me: "Don't worry, I'll get him to call you."

Khethu: "Thanks."

She drops the call.

I find Olivia waiting outside, the gate is already open so I drive in. she runs to me as I pull over, she looks like a mess. She has a cut lip, a swollen eye and a five finger print on her cheek.

Olivia: "Hurry Randy, he's inside."

She follows me as I rush before her, we enter through the kitchen. My heart drops to my stomach at the grisly discovery as we turn left into the bathroom. I stagger a bit as my legs fail me in response to what my eyes see but refuse to believe.

The door is wide open, Joseph is sitting on the floor hugging his knees to his chest. He's rocking himself back and forth as he watches Liyana who's lying lifeless on the cold tiled floor.

Olivia screams at the sight, I pull myself together and rush to Liyana. First thing I do is feel her pulse. It's there, faint but there's hope. Olivia rushes in and starts performing CPR on her, everything around me stops as I watch my little girl's miniature body hang on to life by a thread. I'm not even sure if she's strong enough to fight or she understands what's going on. She's only a child and knows nothing.

Joseph: "I tried to save her, I tried to bring her back."

He's crying as he says this. I lose it and attack him.

Olivia: "Randall stop."

She screams but I'm consumed by anger and I can't stop as I release all my wrath on him. He doesn't try to fight back, but takes every blow I throw at him.

Olivia: "Randall, she's awake. She's awake."

Those words are enough to stop me, I turn to see her in Olivia's arms coughing and spitting a small amount of water that was blocking her lungs. I rush to her abandoning a bloodied Joseph and take her in my arms.

Olivia: "Randall he's dead, you killed him."

She shouts as I rush towards the door.

Me: "He better be dead or I will finish him off."

To be continued...



STYLES\*

Me: "Get your family down here."

I instruct Mkhize as we reach the living room and motion for them to sit on the couch. I don't want to do this but he forced my hand, I once swore that I will never go back to this.

Mkhize: "I'm warning you Sishi, leave my family out of our squabbles. This has nothing to do with them."

I smirk at him.

Me: "You got them involved in this when you threatened to kill my woman, you invited her to the party so it's only fair I invite your family. A tooth for a tooth right?"

His wife hasn't stopped crying.

Me: "MaMkhize would you kindly do us the honour of bringing the family down here. Your sister wives and the kids, let's have Christmas in June shall we?"

She looks straight at me without blinking.

Me: "She's a feisty one I see."

I laugh.

Me: "Will you do it or should I use force?"

I inquire in a cold tone, she blinks a few times before attempting to stand up.

Mkhize: "Hlala phansi wena." (Sit down.)

Mkhize growls at her, she sits back down. I don't miss the confusion mocking her face, she doesn't know who to listen to.

Me: "Oooohhhh, mkhulu. I'm worried about that heart of yours you know."

Mkhize: "You're a coward Sishi, you're powerful at this moment because of that pistol in your hand."

Me: "I don't know about that but if you say so. Now are we calling the family or not, time is not on my side."

They glare at me with no response and that just aggravates me further.

Me: "Oh Family. Come out, come out wherever you are."

I shout, loud enough for my voice to reach upstairs, Mkhize looks like he's ready to jump at me but I know he's not that stupid because one mistake and he's a goner.

Mkhize: "I misjudged you Sishi, you are crazier than that Okolie boy."

Me: "No, this is just a slap on the wrist compared to what he'll do to you if you fight him. I might as well convey the message since I'm here, stay away from Amara."

He smirks at me coldly, the son of a bitch. The look on his face says he won't give up his evil plans.

I return the smirk before turning on the radio and blast the volume, some song I don't care about is playing. I'll make him wish he never met me. I should take a video for Randall so he sees Mkhize's helpless face, it's priceless.

I sit on the coffee table facing Mkhize and his little wife, I guess she's grown tired of crying because her tears have dried up. In a while the Mkhize clan comes rushing down the stairs, the frustration on their faces is evident.

I shoot Mkhize a side look and wink at him as I stand up, he looks terrified. I'm guessing he knows it's about to go down.

Me: "Welcome family, the party was starting to get boring without you. Guess what? It's Christmas and Santa has come bearing gifts."

I wave the gun around, they scream as they all scurry in one corner. The women shield the children, Mkhize charges towards me but I push him back and he falls on the couch.

Me: "Come closer."

I instruct them.

With fear seeming to paralyze them, they toddle to the couch Squeezing each other on the five seater. Some of the kids sit on the floor right in front of the elders, I want them where I can clearly see them without having to turn.

Mkhize has three more wives and I lose count of the number of children in my attempt to count them.

Me: "So many kids Khabazela? What? Are you building a nation? You want to be Abraham hey, father of nations."

One of his older sons giggles, probably 17 years of age. Mkhize side eyes him causing him to clear his throat.

Me: "I like this one."

I announce pointing at the boy who's now biting his nails, Mkhize clicks his tongue. Senseless fool, even his kids are afraid of him.

Me: "Who wants to hear a story?"

I propose to the family.

Me: "It's a great one, you'll love it."



I push the coffee table back to accommodate my long legs, I need to be comfortable for this.

Mkhize: "What are you playing at boy?"

Me: "You'll find out."

He clenches his jaw as I grin at him.

Once upon a time there was a man by the name of Bangizwe Mkhize, he was a junkie and would steal from his mother just to get his next fix. One day Bangizwe decided to slaughter his poor vulnerable mother, he tattooed her body with multiple stab wounds."

MKhize: "Sishi!!!"

He roars while shifting unnervingly on the couch, he moves to the edge of the seat almost ready to stand.

I chuckle at his shocked face.

Me: "How many stab wounds were there Mkhulu? I forgot."

He charges at me, I shoot at him between his feet and everyone screams. Not long after, the house is filled with sounds of weeping. This family is getting on my nerves.

Me: "Everybody please shut up?"

They suppress their cries except for the small children.

Me: "If your husband moves again, I will blow everyone's brains off. I was still telling a story and I hate being interrupted."

Mkhize: "Please Sishi, you're a good man. Don't turn into Okolie, he's a psycho but not you-"

Me: "Oh stop kissing my ass Mkhize, it's disturbing."

I cut him off.

Mkhize: "Ngiyakucela Sishi, don't tell them about that. You are traumatizing my family, ingan' zami. How will they look at me after this? Rather kill me Sishi. Ngibulale once." (I'm begging you... my children... rather kill me)

He pleads, I would love to say that I feel sorry for him but damn, I'm enjoying this.

Me: "Oh! How the mighty have fallen."

He started a fire but can't stand the heat.

Me: "Death will be an easy escape for you Mkhize. Don't stress, I have better plans for you. You are going to love it."

I declare with a sly grin.

"Mfana wam' ayilungile lento oyenzayo. Usasemncane ndodana, Uyamazi unkulunkulu pho? (This is not right my boy, you are still young. Do you know God?)



I'm guessing this must be the first wife, she looks older than the other three and she's seated right next to her husband.

Me: "Lalela la salukazi. I am not your boy, and before you try to educate me about God. Rather start with your husband, unless you know about all of his evil deeds. Nizosha yazi." (Listen here old woman... You will burn.)

They look shocked by my retort, something tells me they were not expecting me to speak Zulu.

Me: "Tell me gogo, what happened to your sister wife? You know the one who came after you? She was your blood sister right and you hated her because you had to share a husband?"

Her eyes expand in horror. By the look on Mkhize's face, he knows what's coming.

Me: "So, you helped this foolish thing you call a husband to cover up her murder. He killed his wife and you dug the grave and put her in. I mean, you might as well have."

Her: "Hayiii, hayiii."

She screams in agony and covers her ears as she can't bear the truth. Funny thing about the truth, it's the most pure thing but can destroy lives.

The other wives burst into sobs at the mention of the horrific news.

Me: "How do you sleep at night?"

Mkhize: "Ung'funani we mfana ndini?" (What do you want from me boy?)

He yells.

Me: "Mkhulus, I'm just getting started. Phola, mkhulu, phola baba." (Relax Oldman)

I can tell the kids have had enough, they can't stand being here anymore. Two of them are too young to understand what's going on, as they sit on their mother's laps sucking their fingers. The older ones have killed me with their glares.

Me: "The party is over family, I have given out gifts. Now, Santa has to go back but he's taking daddy with."

Mkhize: "I'm not going anywhere with you."

He roars, startling the children. The younger ones resume their crying sessions. I'm getting a headache.

Either way, I laugh at Mkhize's riposte, while digging for something in my pocket.

Me: "You're funny Mkhulu, Trevor Noah has got competition here hey."

He clicks his tongue shooting me a deadly stare.

Me: "You see this Mkhize? This will help them sleep peacefully."

I hold up a glass tube with blue liquid inside.



He jerks up, shock visible on his face.

Me: "This is my best discovery so far, you see this chemical is lethal. Just one crack, then poof, it's bye bye family."

Mkhize: "Yoh!!! Ungenzani lo mfana?" (What is this boy doing to me?)

Me: "Unfortunately, this is for the wives and kids"

Mkhize: "Stop playing these games Sishi, you don't know what you're doing."

He looks like a crazy person right now, this is exactly what I wanted. For him to lose his mind.

Me: "I don't play 'house' Mkhize, you invited me to come play so here I am. This is a grown man's sport but you're boring me to death."

I inform him as I take two gas masks from my back pack, I hand it to him. He takes it hesitantly.

Mkhize: "What is this for?"

Me: "You're old enough, figure it out."

I have wasted enough time, he looks at it like it's going to swallow him alive.

Me: "Put it on Oldman. Should I guide you through everything?"

He hesitates a bit but, grudgingly wears it without a thought to it.

Me: "Sorry family, it looks like the man of the house has chosen himself over you. It was nice knowing you all."

I look at them as confusion proclaims war with them, they haven't grasped what's really happening and why I have this chemical in my hand.

I strap my mask on before smashing the glass tube on the floor and smoke emerges from the blue chemical. The house is filled with agonizing screams as the family stands up in attempts to run but are knocked out before they could take another step. It dies out almost immediately, Mkhize falls on his knees and weeps like a child. I smirk at him as I remove my gas mask.

Me: "Remove that thing, you look ridiculous."

He takes it off, with his head still bowed, his shoulders convulsing as he cries silently. I am not done with this idiot. He is going to wish he never met me.

RANDALL\*

Olivia followed me out of the house leaving her boyfriend behind, I don't know about the state he's in and I don't care. It was a relief when I saw her rush out of the house, it would hurt Liyana if she were to find out that her mother chose a man over her. Olivia hasn't stopped crying since Liyana was rushed into the ER. I see the doctor approaching and meet him half way, he speaks

before I could ask anything.

"Your daughter is fine sir, you brought her in just in time. It's a good thing you performed CPR on her or else-

The doctor informs us.

Being in this waiting room and not knowing what's happening has been utter torture.

Me: "I want to see her."

I cut him off, I'm not interested in hearing the negatives.

Doctor: "Sure, you can both see her."

He informs before he walks away, I'm about to lose my cool and my patience has already been tested today. If this woman follows me in that room, I will kill her.

She moves with me forcing me to stop.

Me: "Where are you going Olivia?"

Olivia: "Randall please."

Me: "Was this some sick plan of yours Olivia? You and that bastard planned to kill my daughter."

Olivia: "What? No. How could you ask me that?"

Me: "You lied that the door was locked, it was bloody open Olivia. Are you fucking trying to collect on her insurance?"

Olivia: "Oh come on Randall, you watch too much TV."

I grab her hand and she winces in pain.

Me: "Don't fucking tell me shit woman. Are you that desperate for the next fix that you would sacrifice your daughter's life?"

Olivia: "You're insulting me Randall."

Me: "I haven't even begun to insult you."

Olivia: "Randall let go, you're hurting me."

She snatches her hand away.

Olivia: "I am not a drug addict."

Me: "I'm taking my child Olivia, I don't care what happens to you. Liyana is the only reason you're still standing here after that shit you pulled. If you dare try to fight me, I will expose you. And you will never see that girl again."

Today has been hectic, first Amara escapes and now my little girl is lying in a hospital bed. Everything is overwhelming and I know exactly what will appease me, the plan is to rush home and catch a glimpse of her. Only she can bring me the peace I need, just being in her presence.

This is what my mind has been doing lately, getting lost in thoughts of Amara. She consumes every fibre of my being and there's nothing I can do to stop it.

Olivia: "Randall!!!!"

Olivia nudges me and my spirit drops at the sight of her.

Me: "What?"

Olivia: "What's wrong with you? You zoned out?"

Me: "Maybe I don't want you talking to me."

I snap.

Olivia: "Well, whether you want to speak to me or not. Please, look where you're driving."

Me: "I'm doing you a favour by dropping you home, so shut up and don't tell me how to drive."

She rolls her eyes at me.

Olivia: "What time will you go to the hospital tomorrow? So I know when to be ready."

She cannot be serious.

Me: "You'll drive yourself to the hospital Olivia."

Olivia: "My car broke down Randall and I can't afford to fix it."

Me: "Well, maybe if you didn't give the money I send you to that loser boyfriend of yours, you wouldn't be in this dilemma."

Olivia: "That is not fair."

Me: "Life is not fair, look at me. I have to tolerate you my whole life because of my daughter."

Me: "You know she's my daughter too, it hurts me when you refer to her as only yours."

I look at her briefly before taking my eyes back to the road. The things we do in this world. I can't believe I had a child with this woman.

I'm saved by Khethu's phone call.

She will want to know if I have spoken to Styles, I have no answers for her right now. I know she's agitated but, I have to speak to Styles first.

Olivia: "Won't you answer that?"

I ignore her as I drive on.

Olivia: "Is it one of your girlfriends? Trouble in paradise?"

Me: "Why are you talking to me Olivia? You are not out of the woods yet."

It's a good thing we are here. I park at the gate and wait for her to get out.

Olivia: "Thanks, I'll see you tomorrow?"

Why is she still in my car?

Me: "I want that idiot in jail by tomorrow morning, I don't care how you do it. And you know better than to challenge me Olivia. Now get out of my car."

I call Styles as I pull out and drive off.

Styles: "Randy"

He sounds happy.

Me: "Where are you?"

Styles: "Taking a drive with Mkhize."

Me: "What are you doing Styles?"

Styles: "Having fun."

Me: "I'm not kidding Styles, abort mission now. This is not how we do things."

Styles: "Sorry Randall, the sheep is sailing. There is no turning back now, tell him Mkhize."

Mkhize: "This demon killed my family, he fucking killed my family."

Mkhize shouts, his sorrow filled voice penetrating through the phone.

Styles: "Hey, less talking and more driving mkhulu."

His voice sounds so cold that I find it hard to recognize him.

Me: "What have you done Styles?"

My voice almost comes out as a whisper, I hear him laughing like it's funny.

Me: "Styles what have you done man? I thought you were done with that life. We don't kill innocent people Styles."

Styles: "There's nothing innocent about this baboon Randall."

Me: "His family bruh, his family was innocent. Dammit! What have you done?"

I shout, I'm more afraid than angry.

It almost feels like a dream. No, Styles couldn't have unravelled. How did I not see this coming? This is fucked up.

To be continued...





20\*

RANDALL\*

I'm at a loss for words, honestly. How am I going to fix this? How will I bring my friend back from this darkness he has fallen into? It wasn't easy last time and I'm not sure if he will essentially come back.

I feel a pang of guilt as it dawns on me that I am responsible for all of this, my obsession for Amara has birthed terrible results. Maybe I shouldn't have pursued my desire.

Me: "Styles, I want you to meet me at my house now. We need to find a way forward."

Styles: "And you say I'm the sensitive one. Relax Randall."

This is his attempt to piss me off.

Me: "After what you did, you are telling me to relax?"

Styles: "They are not dead."

He shouts.

Wait! What?

Mkhize: "What did you say?"

He asks sceptically.

Styles: "Yes, Mkhize. Your family is very much alive."

He sounds reassuring that I almost believe him, but I don't trust the state he's in.

Mkhize: "But how? I saw them."

Me: "This is no time for jokes Styles."

I yelp, nettled by his dry stupid jokes.

Styles: "You know me Randall, I promised never to go back to that person. That I would fight him with everything in me. I didn't go to Mkhize's house with the intent to kill his family."

Mkhize: "But the smoke, they collapsed all of them."

Styles: "You know I didn't have the privilege to go to prominent schools, I went to a school in Joburg. Centurion College in Joubert Park, ever heard of it? Anyway, there were posters plastered around the school. With every turn you'd be reminded that 'school is cool, stay at school' I adhered. That's why I've got brains."

Trust Styles to go off track at a time like this. What the hell is he on about now?"

Me: "Get to the point man."

He laughs.

Styles: "The chemical I used is not lethal, it just put them to sleep that's all. And listen Mkhize, you'll love this part. They won't remember anything that took place tonight. They're probably awake by now, all of this was done to torment you. Besides, your kids are so adorable?"

He laughs.

I'm done, I'm speechless.

I just want to go home and be with my sweet Amara.

Mkhize: "You are evil Sishi."

Me: "Are sure Styles? I don't know with you anymore."

Styles: "Mkhize call them if you like."

There's a bit of silence before I hear Mkhize gasp, it's overpowered by excitement. He's actually having a conversation with his wife, I'm not a fan of the guy and I loathe him. But, I wouldn't wish death upon his family. It's not their fault that they have him as their leader.

Styles: "See I told you."

Me: "You need prayers bruh, you are one fucked up fool."

He laughs, this idiot is laughing after messing with our minds like that.

Me: "So, where are you taking him?"

Styles: "Don't worry about it Randy, Mkhize and I are going to have some fun."

Me: "Styles, go home to Khethu. She's worried sick."

Styles: "Khethu is fine."

He drops the call denying me a chance to speak some sense into him further. Within a bat of an eye, I am submerged by a wave pent-up frustrations. This friend of mine has managed to make me angry, confused, annoyed and relieved within a space of less than 10 minutes.

Styles Sishi has always been the voice of reason while I was the one who blew things out of proportion, acted without thinking and have my desires devour me. I guess I would react the same if Amara had come this close to being killed. But nevertheless, I am disgruntled with the way he has dealt with things. It's careless of him to go into war alone, Mkhize's brothers will raise hell once they find out about this and peace will cease to exist for us as an unending war will emerge from this dispute.

I opted to drive to Pretoria from the moment Styles cited that Mkhize's family is still alive, I have to see for myself. Normally I would send someone but if you want things done right, you have to do them yourself.

I get there to find the gate closed, it won't be easy to get in. Plus, it's almost mid night, an inappropriate time to knock into someone's home. The lights are on though. That should be something.

I decide to ring the intercom. I must not be thinking straight but, I won't be able to rest if my uncertainties are not cleared.

"Yebo."

A voice of a young man echoes through the speaker.

Me: "Hi. Is your father home?"

Him: "No, he's not around at the moment. Who is this?"

Should he be asking an adult that?

Me: "A friend."

I cringe at the thought.

"Who's calling at this time of the night?"

A female voice shouts in the back ground.

That's my cue.

Styles, you son of a bitch.

I have to say, I'm enthralled by the way his mind works.

STYLES\*

Me: "Mommy we're home."

I shout as we walk through the kitchen door. Mkhize wanted to turn back when he noticed we were headed to Kliptown, I could also tell by the look on his face that he had no idea whatsoever about the destination.

Me: "Do you recognize this place? Its mommy's house, although it's a bit unrecognizable due to the black dust, crumbled walls and charred furniture. That boy Bangizwe was fucked up. Can you imagine he tried to hide evidence by burning the house down? I managed to fix the lights though."

He doesn't say anything as he has his eyes scanning his surroundings.

Me: "I have a surprise for you, let's move to the living room shall we?"

I push him as he drags his feet, I have never seen this man so defenceless before.

He gasps and reels back to the point of almost falling, beholding the scene before him. He

stifles a sob that's stopped by his hand smashing against his mouth.

Me: "I thought it would be nice if we went down memory lane. So, I gathered pictures of you and mommy and well, plastering them on the wall wasn't my idea. I'd like to take the credit for this work though."

Mkhize: "Why did you bring me here?"

His voice breaks, I see the pain I was hoping to inflict in him. It's there and now I see that everything I did was worth it.

Me: "I told you, a blast to the past. Now move and sit on that chair."

I strap his hands and legs on a metal chair, it's amazing the things you can do when you have a gun in your hand. His eyes haven't stopped scanning the pictures on the wall, he appears to be tormented by his past demons.

This is why we are here, this moment right here. That look in his eyes. I want him to remember this for the rest of his life.

Mkhize: "Awungazi Sishi, I know people who will make your life a nightmare." (You are underestimating me.)

He threatens as I finish binding him, his chesty breathing verifying his exhaustion due to the events that had taken place in the last few hours.

Me: "You mean those witch doctors you dance with at night? I'm not afraid of them. All of that mumbo jumbo is in the state of the mind, ever heard of the law of attraction? You attract what you think about the most. Mara why Mkhize? Why did you have to rub me off the wrong way? I hate this person I have become."

He looks uncomfortable and squirms on his chair.

Me: "I have to go, seeing, you don't have answers for me. You get to live, it's your lucky day Mkhize. You should busk on these beautiful pictures while we wait for the sun to come up. It was fun while it lasted."

Mkhize: "Are you letting me live, just like that?"

Me: "Unless you prefer otherwise?"

Mkhize: "You're a coward after all."

His words have me raise my eye brows in amazement.

Me: "Wow, you still got balls after what you went through today? I thought you lost them along with your dignity when you wept like a baby."

Mkhize: "You do know you risked it all by bringing me here, I own this place Sishi. You won't make it till dawn, your body will be laying on the streets by morning."

This old geezer has managed to crack me up today, he's certainly a funny man. I walk around

him slowly.

Me: "My reason for stepping into your territory Mkhize was to show you that I am daunting. Ask that nephew of yours you sent to do your dirty work, that's if he's still alive."

Mkhize: "What did you do to him?"

Me: "I delivered him to his enemies on a silver platter, they'll do with him what they see fit."

Mkhize: "You better run boy and make sure I don't find you."

Me: "Goodnight mkhulu, and you can scream all you like. No one will come to your rescue, you might get lucky in the morning though."

RANDALL\*

"Where have you been Uze?"

I'm shocked by Chioma's question and why is she still awake at this time of the night.

Me: "Why are you sitting in the dark?"

Chioma: "I was waiting for you."

She gets up from the couch and toddles towards me, I don't understand the purpose of her wanting know about my whereabouts.

Me: "What's going on Chioma? Is it Amara? Did something happen to her?"

I can't even let myself entertain thoughts of her being hurt.

Chioma: "She's fine."

She affirms, looking up at me.

Me: "Okay then, what is this? Why are you questioning me? Since when do you ask about my whereabouts?"

Chioma: "Since you brought that poor innocent girl into this house and asked me to look after her."

Me: "Your point is Chioma?"

Chioma: "You're never around, Amara is hard work Uze-"

Me: "If you have a problem with her, then you're welcome to leave."

She furrows her brows, I see a twinge of hurt in her eyes.

I have known this woman longer than Amara but if the worst comes to the worst, I am choosing Amara over everything.

Chioma: "I don't have a problem with her it's just-"

Me: "I thought as much. Good night Chioma."

I can't be coming home to such nonsense, her eyes follow me as I walk past her. She knows better than to say one more word and challenge me, I don't understand why the sudden complaining. Is it because her life was risked today?

I open the door to Amara's bedroom barely a crack and peep inside, only the side lamp is on. Chioma had mentioned that Amara revealed her phobia of the dark. I find myself drawn to her as I amble inside.

This has been on my list of things to do, watching her sleep. It's the only thing that makes sense to me at this point in time otherwise, my world is spinning at a fast pace and I hate it when I have no control over things around me.

This doll before me has changed my life in more ways than one. She feels like this is a curse but, I see it as a blessing and I long for the day she will accept me and everything I come with. Looking at her now, I know I am ready to lose it all and I know there is so much to lose but also, there's so much more to gain

KHETHU\*

I hear the scrap of a key in the lock, it's him. I know by how he turns the key and how he shuts the door. I recognize the sound of his footsteps. I can honestly say that I can recognize him with my eyes closed, if that makes sense at all.

I decide to meet him halfway and not wait for him in the bedroom like I usually do, it's in the wee hours of the morning and I haven't slept a wink at all. Worry and fear kept me company from the time he walked out of the house.

I approach to see him standing at the bottom of the stairs, his head bowed and his arm stretched out as his hand holds on to the stair rail. He raises his head as I begin to slowly guide my feet down the stairs, I don't like what I see. He looks broken, and the image of this shatters my heart. He flicks a smile that flashes on and off like lightning on a stormy night. He gives me a peculiar look as our eyes meet levelly and instantly, I know that something is wrong. He must've done something that he now regrets, I should have followed him.

Me: "Baby."

I take his cheeks into the palms of my hands and my body shivers at the coldness of his cheeks, it must be freezing outside.

Me: "Are you okay?"

A pucker grows between his eyebrows, followed by a head shake. I pull him to me, run my hand on his head and feel him shiver against me. He buries his face on my chest and releases a

heavy sigh, his warm breath slithers on my bust.

He raises his head to gaze into my eyes, giving me a regretted look of pain. I can't help but want to carry his burden. I have known this man for four years and not once have I seen him this low.

What is it that Styles has done?

Will I have the police knocking at my door tomorrow morning? Call me insane but, I will protect him with everything I have, I am not about to let all the years spent with him go to waste.

His lustful eyes scan my lips before he whispers words I never saw coming.

Styles: "Make me feel better Khethu, make me feel human again."

He leans closer to my face as he says this strange request that leaves me frightened than scared. Surely something did happen but I can't entertain that right now, he needs my attention and I will not deprive him of that.

Before I know it, our lips meet and we are caught in this insatiable kiss that leaves us yearning for more. He pulls out, looks into my eyes as if asking or searching for assurance. I'm stumped as to why, because we have done this so many times.

I take his lips into mine, this is me saying I belong to you and you don't have to feel this way as long as I am around. I want to fill the hole that was punched inside of him, the shallow hole that's visible each time I glance into his eyes.

He scoops me up into his arms and walks us upstairs. This is Styles Sishi, the man who doesn't believe in having sex anywhere in the house but the bedroom. His reasons are, it would be awkward to see our guests seated on the same couch we shared our most sacred moments. The same excuse goes for other rooms in the house. I think it's time I ban people from coming to my house.

He puts me down as we near the bed, I drop my gaze because his eyes are searching me. It's a look I have never seen before, one that makes me shy away from his gaze. He tilts my chin with his hand then cups my cheek and before I know it, our lips are dancing effortlessly in one harmony. We take time to kiss, feel and explore each other.

I have seen him without his shirt before but today, he looks different, daunting, almost as if I'm looking at a perfect stranger. He takes a step back, his perverted gaze willing me to submit but also wanting to shy away as it penetrates to the depths of my soul.

Styles: "Will you let me lead?"

I frown at the question that has put me in a befuddled state.

Styles: "Let me love you Khethu."

My body shudders at his request that leaves me gasping. Is this a rhetorical request? He already loves me, he loved me from the moment he saw me. He's been loving me every day since.



To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office



21\*

KHETHU\*

Styles: "Undress for me baby, I want to see you. I want to relive this moment forever."

This is a first, he's never asked me to strip for him and he's never cared to stop and admire my body like he says he wants to do.

Besides, it's not like he has never seen me naked before, I stop myself from shooting him a strange stare.

Me: "Styles, I'm not the 24 year old you met years ago anymore. I have put on weight, my stomach is not tight anymore. I have stretchmarks, cellulite and flabs there and there. I've let myself go.

Styles: "Undress for me baby, I want to see you. I want to relive this moment forever."

This is a first, he's never asked me to strip for him and he's never cared to stop and admire my body like he says he wants to do.

Besides, it's not like he has never seen me naked before, I stop myself from shooting him a strange stare.

Me: "Styles, I'm not the 24 year old you met years ago anymore. I have put on weight, my stomach is not tight anymore. I have stretchmarks, cellulite and flabs there and there. I've let myself go Styles."

My insecurities speak out loud and I don't know why I'm telling him this but maybe I'm hoping that he will forget about wanting to see my naked body, I don't even look at myself naked in the mirror.

I see a twitch of disappointment in his eyes, he hates it when I'm insecure. He takes my hand and pulls me into his arms as they circle around me, I see my worth in his eyes as they gaze down at me.

Styles: "It's you baby, I still see you the way I saw you the first time I laid my eyes on you. Only, you are more matured now and it's darn hell attractive."

Me: "But baby-"

I might spoil the mood with my big mouth, his hand cradles my face.

Styles: "I love every inch of you, the love handles you complain about, the stretch marks and whatever else. It's all a part of you. It's what makes you, you and baby I wouldn't have it any other way."

My heart is already dancing on my chest, it feels like it's about to burst. My dress slips easily from my body to the floor as I pull it off, he has given me this confidence and I'm not letting it go. I'm left with my under garments, thankfully I avoided wearing those comfortable granny panties today. My spirit must have predicted this moment, his jaw drops while his eyes scan my whole body making me nervous.

Styles: "I am going to cherish this moment forever."

It comes out as a whisper as if flabbergasted by what he's beholding, I think he's exaggerating if you ask me. I see that look again in his eyes, the look that says I'm worth it. My body quivers as goose-bumps tease every inch of my skin.

He places his hands on my hips and pulls me to him while his eyes adore every part of my body, he touches and kisses the most sensitive parts of my body. He nibbles on my bra strap, gradually pulling it down to my shoulder with his teeth and teases my shoulder with wet kisses. Styles: "You're a goddess."

He looks into my eyes as he declares and I notice how his eyes have turned from lust to desperation and helplessness. I know that he's pretending because he is the strongest man I know but, I appreciate his gesture of wanting to make me feel like I am needed and I'm on top of the world.

He kisses me again, slow and open-mouthed, his arms loop around me cradling my back. I feel him grip the hook of my bra and unhooks it, he nibbles and bites the crook of my neck in the process and undoubtedly leaving a hickey. I'm letting him lead like he asked, it is what he wants.

I'm accommodating him with touches and kisses.

He grazes his lips from my neck down to my chest making my knees shake. He buries his face on my breast, sniffs and looks up at me with a silly smile on his face that leaves me blushing. He has a fetish for my breast, he says it's his most favourite part of my body. He kisses my bosom before taking my nipples into his mouth one at a time, licking and sucking them. I shiver at the pleasure as his mouth claims my skin. His lips move to mine, he's kissing me again.

With his body against mine, I feel my feet sway backwards as if I'm floating. He leans over me and in a jiffy I'm on the bed lying on my back. His lips leave my mouth and find their way through my body, leaving trails of wet kisses like a passionate painter telling his love story with his canvas.

His hand slides between my legs before he positions himself, I clench my fingers on his back as he pushes himself in.

The occasional kisses, here and there. The feel of his warm skin on mine. The glances of love in his eyes, his warm breath dancing on my skin and his soft moans echoing in my ears. They have my world upside down, placing me on cloud nine. The saying 'I feel like I'm on top of the world' has come to its full manifestation as this Greek god worships my body with his hands, his lips and his body. Leaving me on the verge of tears.

He feels good inside me and I love him more than I did seconds ago. He grabs a pillow and places it under my bum and thrusts in an upward motion.

I can't help but cry at the beauty of his deep thrusts that have me feeling like I'm losing my mind. He catches a glimpse of my teary eyes and stops, which I wish he didn't. I don't want this perfect moment taken from me, I don't want it to stop.

He looks worried.

Styles: "Are you okay? Am I hurting you?"

No, you're perfect.

I shake my head nonetheless, I can't get anything out of my mouth. He claims my lips, feasting on them.

He goes on, every thrust and stroke assuring me that an untainted pleasure is yet to come. I send my hands to his buttocks pulling him against me, my breathing escalating and the sound of my moans filling this sacred room. He consumes my whole being as I feel my soul surge to connect with his.

I feel this glorious sensation like electricity gush through my whole body.

I know instantly when Styles has hit the G-spot so, I tighten myself around him and ride this pleasurable wave. With every thrust I lose control of all my senses. My body shudders under him in this glorious moment, he kisses me and it's perfect. I blare out his name, I'm panting like I have just run a marathon. I feel something warm glide inside me as he releases inside me.

He buries his face on the curve of my neck, his heavy breathing in my ear sounding sexier each second.

Styles: "Thank you."

He whispers and that forces a smile on my face. I love this man.

I swear, if this is not proof that God loves me then I don't know what is.

\*\*\*

I'm woken up by my growling stomach, the hunger is starting to hurt now and it feels like my stomach is on fire. I refused food again yesterday and I hardly ate anything at dinner with Randall. I was glad though when he said I'd be having dinner outside this room, this will give me a chance to scan my surroundings and probably find a way out.

I try to get up to get some water since the door is forever locked and I can't go to the kitchen. I can't move, there's these large arms around me and immediately I know it's him, he's sleeping behind me. How did I not feel this? And why is here?

It feels so strange to have a man hold me like this, I have never been in this state in my life before. With effort I struggle in his arms trying to loose myself but he tightens the grip. He nuzzles his face on my neck and kisses me, my body responds by trembling.

Randall: "How does it feel when I do this princess?"

He whispers in my ear as he nibbles on it, I shiver in embarrassment.

Me: "Please..."

I plead, I'm already emotional. I can't perceive what's going on and why he is doing this? It feels different though, it's not like when my uncle touches me. With him, I always felt disgusted but with Randall, it feels right and I hate myself for it because this is the very same beast who bought me from my uncle.

He turns me around, he's on top of me before I can blink. My heart races as I feel his weight on me and my body stiffens. He's looking down at me and his eyes are smiling. I quickly look away. He cups my cheek with his hand gently caressing it.

Me: "What are you doing?"

My voice fails to support my words as I ask this question, he smirks.

Randall: "Is it not clear what I'm doing me hemma?" (My queen.)

Me: "Please, let me go."

My eyes still refuse to meet his gaze.

Randall: "I have a need for you Amara. Do you know how long I have been craving to hold you like this?"

He moves his finger along my lips and that frisson of embarrassment tugs at me again.

Randall: "Can I taste them?"

His voice is pleading. I clench my eyes as I tremble under his touch.

He's too close, so close I can hear the sound of his heart throbbing against his chest. If this room didn't hold on to the pure stillness of the morning, I'd think he doesn't possess a heart.

Randall: "This is all I can think about, my mind can't seem to think of anything but your plump lips."

He whispers as he takes my chin, making me face him.

He brushes his lips against mine, I can't stop my body from trembling. My emotions are all over the place and I don't know what's going on. I want him to stop but I don't want him to stop and this brings unsolicited tears to my eyes.

The door flips open and I know it's Chioma, a wave of embarrassment teases me and I want to hide and never reveal my shameful face. You would think this man would move but not only hasn't he moved an inch, his eyes are still exploring my facial features. They can't seem to leave my lips, I bridge him trying to push him but it feels like I'm pushing a standing wall.

Chioma: "Uze."

There's shock and chastisement in her tone, but why isn't he moving though. He's still staring, I've never been caught in such an uncomfortable situation.

Chioma: "Uze?"

She tries one more time, it's almost like he doesn't hear her, like it's just the two of us. This man is insane.

Me: "Please, get off me."

I plead with my eyes as well, he sighs, tilts his head to the side and dips it on my neck nestling his face. I shiver at the warmth of his breath on my skin.

He gets up from me finally and I'm so embarrassed that I can't even look at him and Chioma so, I keep my eyes outside the window. I hear his heavy footsteps faring away from me and a flood of relief ripples through me.

NOMBULELO\*

Zuma wasn't in the house when I woke up this morning, so that gave me time to bath and clean up this place. I don't know how he lives like a pig.

He walks in just as I pour water in a pot.

Me: "Hey, I'm making porridge, would you like some?"

He scans my body, looking at me like I'm disgusting, I drop my gaze because this breaks my already broken heart. I miss the look of love in his eyes.

He saunters towards the bed and starts picking out clothes out of a royal blue trunk close to the bed, that's where he keeps his clean clothes while the dirty ones are kept in a bucket next to it.

Zuma: "What time are you leaving? I need to go to the rank. It's rush hour and I won't sell much if I get there later than eight."

I look at him as he continues to stab my heart with his words and cold tone.

Me: "I thought you were letting me stay till I find my feet."

He stops and gives me a look that leaves me feeling stupid.

Zuma: "Haibo! You said you wanted a place to crash for the night."

Me: "I know but, I don't have anywhere to go Zuma."

Zuma: "Manje mina ngingenaphi?" (How is that my problem?)

Me: "Zuma?"

What happened to him?

Zuma: "What Nombulelo? Ungangi bhori tuu." (Don't bore me please.)

I gasp, it's going to take me forever to accept this.

Zuma: "Askies, Eish." (Excuse me)

He hisses as he pushes me so he could pass to get to the other side of the room.

Me: "Zuma, why uso vele yee?" (Why are you being like this?)

He frowns at me.

Zuma: "I was okay Nombulelo till wena for some reason decided to fall pregnant. You didn't even think about me, selfish Nombulelo, selfish maan." (You're selfish.)

Me: "I decided to fall pregnant? Zuma do you hear yourself? You're not making sense, mistakes happen. I'm not perfect, I was bound to mess up at some point. Wena you were expecting me to be a submissive girlfriend which I bloody was Zuma. I was loyal to you and loved you, I gave you everything. Wena nje wathatha uthando lwam' walulaxaza like it meant nothing to you. Who is selfish here Zuma?" (You took my love and threw it away.)

His face changes to that of anger and annoyance.

Zuma: "Ungazong' tshela amasimba wena Lelo. What the fuck do you know about love? If you loved me, you were going to take contraceptives. But, you thought it best to trick me with a baby." (Don't tell me shit.)

Me: "Oh, so you agree that the child is yours?"



Zuma: "I don't agree to shit, I'm done with you. All of you."

He looks at my tummy as he states the last part.

Zuma: "I want you gone and I never want to see you again."

His words evoke so much anger in me that I want to burn him with the water that's boiling in the pot. I am tempted to pick this pot up and throw it at his disgusting face. How did I come to love this idiot?

Me: "Fuck you Zuma. Where do you get off telling me all that shit? How dare you force me to be okay with all of this? I'm stressed as well, you think being pregnant at a young age is fun? You have no right to say those things to me, I thought you loved me Zuma."

He laughs as if it's funny.

Zuma: "Uthando Nombulelo? How stupid can you be? Just because I made you scream my name while I was inside you, it gave you the impression that I love you?" (Love?)

He finishes with a mocking laugh, I look at the boiling pot of water, then back at him.

Gosh, the urge is there.

Me: "You told me you loved me."

Zuma: "Those three simple words? Please, I can even say them to the cockroaches I share this room with."

Me: "You bastard, I hate you."

He grins at me, I have never seen evil in my life but if it exists then I'm staring at it right now or else he is a good actor.

Zuma: "Ah! That word, that's the right word to use. The feeling is mutual sisi wam'." (My sister.)

It hurts more that he just referred to me as his sister, it means he doesn't see me as a woman anymore. I manage to fight back my tears.

Me: "Fuck you Zuma, fuck you and your match box of a house."

Zuma: "At least I have a house."

He retorts, amusedly.

Me: "Uyinja yezwa?" (You're a bastard.)

He growls in anger as he charges at me, I'm not shaken because I know he won't hit me. He has never laid a hand on me before.

Zuma: "Listen here Nombulelo, I am getting tired of your shit. Talk to me like that again and I will \_."

Me: "What will you do Zuma? What will you do?"

That time I'm on his face poking his head with my forefinger.

Zuma: "I'm warning you Nombulelo."

He shoves my hand away, his gaze piercing at me. I don't know what came over me but I can't control my anger, somehow provoking him makes me feel better. It's easing the pain in my heart.

Me: "Do your worst Zuma."

I shout my lungs out, resulting in him chuckling coldly. He steps back as he shakes his head, defeat declaring him a loser.

Me: "I thought as much."

My body is trembling from fear, it's not like me to take such risks. Being bold enough to stand up to this fool. I leave him speechless as I turn to get a container of mealie meal from the top cupboard. It's too high and my height doesn't support me.

As I turn to get a chair so I can climb, I find him glaring at me emotionlessly. I roll my eyes at him and click my tongue before continuing with my cooking. I climb on the chair and reach my hands to grab the container but a strong vigorous hand wrenches my top, throwing me on the floor with a loud thud. I hear something crack as my body collides with the hard base.

Before I could speak, he smashes his foot on my stomach followed by multiple ones, at this point my hands are on my lower torso as I shield my womb from this beating. I eventually scream as he straddles me and throws punches at my face, I send my hands to my face to cover up but he shrugs them away and continues boxing me. My body has become numb, my vision blurs and I don't feel the pain anymore as it feels like I'm drifting to a faraway place. After he's satisfied with his animosity, he stops, stands and looks over me with rage but also a pang of regret on his face. His face then turns to panic before he cowardly runs out leaving me in agony, my heavy eyes finally close.

To be continued...





RANDALL\*

It felt so good to hold Amara in my arms all night.

Last night while watching her sleep, I couldn't fight the urge to climb into bed with her and envelop her in my arms. I gave in to my desire and it was the best feeling ever.

I got to feel her skin today, she trembled under my touch and I knew it wasn't from fear. Her breasts felt, so good pressed against my chest. The kiss wasn't planned, the moment was presented. The temptation overpowered me and I surrendered. I'm scared now because, although it was a mere brush, the longing to taste her lips fully has grown. I want to know how they'd feel as they mingle with mine leading us into a perfect sublime kiss.

I'm terrified of being greedy for her and wanting more than she can offer. What if I lose control over this obsession?

I hardly noticed Chioma when she walked into the room, she always knocks and I don't know what got into her. I refuse to let anything come between me and my queen. I had to leave my own room just to accommodate her.

I was losing my mind anyway and had to get out and cool off.

Amara hasn't been to this side of the house, I think she would love the pool although it's winter, the sun is still warm in the mornings.

It suddenly dawns on me that I haven't spoken to Styles yet, I know he's okay. I don't know about Mkhize, his ancestors are probably throwing him a welcoming party.

Styles: "How are you awake so early in the morning?"

His sleepy voice causes me to frown, it's 10am.

Me: "Because I'm not a night walker, like someone I know."

Styles: "It's too early for your lame jokes Randall, I haven't had breakfast yet."

Me: "Get your ass up and come to my house, we need to talk about you know who."

Styles: "What?"

He sounds confused.

Me: "Don't make me say it over the phone."

Styles: "I still have a few things I need to do but, I'll be there."

Me: "Are you okay though?"



Styles: "I'm talking to you aren't I?"

Me: "Smug much?"

He laughs.

Me: "We can drive together to the hospital after."

Styles: "What's at the hospital?"

Me: "Liyana, she was almost drowned by Olivia's boyfriend."

Styles: "Please tell me you put a bullet through his head."

He sounds angry.

Me: "Hello? Who's this? May I speak to Styles please?"

I mock him, he clicks his tongue.

Styles: "Lay off the jokes Uze, you're not funny man."

I laugh at his annoyed tone.

Me: "It is you Styles, I thought I'd lost you for a second there. You know how I recognized you? You're still as sensitive as shit."

Styles: "Did you call to piss me off Randall because it's working."

I laugh at him...

He laughs and drops the phone.

The rudeness.

STYLES\*

"Baby, won't you come already?"

Khethu yells from downstairs, her voice is spiked with impatience.

Me: "I'm coming."

Waking up this morning was a struggle, I'm still shaken by what I did last night. It literally drained the life out of me, seeing the fear I instilled on Mkhize's family. I didn't care about anything while I was there, I was driven by revenge and wrath but everything hit me while driving back home. The look on their faces, their cries and screams.

Did I ever mention that Khethukuthula Dladla is a breath of fresh air? I would crumble without her.

"If the mountain will not come to Muhammad, then Muhammad must go to the mountain."

I turn to Khethu's voice, she's standing in the door way carrying a tray of food.

Me: "Baby you didn't have to bring it up here, I'm almost done. I was just fixing the bed."

She puts the food on the table.

Khethu: "I wanted to."

She treads to me with a gentle smile on her face, my arms go around her waist as she looks up at me. I lean in, so my forehead presses against hers. She slides her hands down my spine pulling me closer till there's no space left between us. Our lips familiarise with each other, I shiver as her tongue presses against the seam of my lips. She tastes of coffee, she can't start her day without a cup or two.

She plunges her tongue in my mouth and it pushes against mine. Her kisses are promising, they are from the heart and they tell me that I am loved by her. I love it when she takes charge.

I feel her smile against my mouth, compelling me to smile back.

Khethu: "Thank you."

A whisper discharges from her mouth.

Me: "For what?"

Khethu: "Loving me."

How can I not love such a woman?

Khethu: "I invited my father for dinner this evening."

She introduces, I pull away from her. She knows I can never get along with her parents.

Khethu: "Styles?"

Me: "Why would you do that Khethu without telling me?"

Khethu: "He wants to know how I am since, you know."

Me: "So, I'm supposed to share a table with your father and pretend that we like each other?"

Khethu: "Please, for my sake."

She flashes me a cute smile as she flutters her lashes. Her hands are on her back and she sways back and forth like a child sulking for candy.

How can you say no to that?

Me: "Can those eyes get any bigger?"

She flutters her lashes again.

Me: "Fine, I'll try to be on my best behaviour too."



She beams before shrieking with laughter and throwing her arms around me, I chuckle at her.

Me: "I'm bringing my gun just in case."

The look on her face is priceless.

Me: "I'm kidding baby."

I peck her lips and she smiles widely.

Khethu: "I know you are."

NTOMBI\*

"We Ntombi vula." (Open)

Eish!!!

That sounds like my elder brother Mhambi, he's banging on my door. The nerve of that man. He must have heard about Amara being missing, I hope he didn't bring his nosy wife Petunia. That woman talks too much that it's nerve wrecking, she complains about almost everything.

Great! She's here.

Her face is the first thing I see when I open the door and an angry Mhambi right beside her.

Me: "Mhambi?"

Mhambi: "Ntombi? What is this I hear about Amara being missing? Where is my brother's child Ntombifuthi."

He makes himself comfortable on my sofa as he disrespectfully ask me this. Petunia is the one lugging their bags, she drops them on the floor and with an attitude marches to my kitchen. She better not touch my things, my eyes are engrossed on her as I'm more than keen to find out how she can still be so arrogant even after so many years.

Mhambi: "Where is Moses?"

Me: "He's bathing."

I don't want to talk to him. Just like Petunia, Mhambi is twice as arrogant and rude.

Mhambi: "Why are you still standing there Ntombifuthi? I didn't come here for a vacation. Call your husband."

Yet your wife is in my kitchen preparing a feast for you. I hear a plate shatter and run to the kitchen, this old witch has dropped three of my expensive plates.

Me: "Petunia, my plates."

I shout at her, she rolls her eyes.



Petunia: "Askies." (Sorry.)

She doesn't lose the attitude.

Me: "Those were my Christmas plates. Who said you must use them anyway?"

Petunia: "Yoh Ntombi, you can't expect me to serve my husband on those old cracked plates. Yoh, maybe for Moses hayi uMhambi wami." (Not my Mhambi.)

I think I'm going to lose my mind. Breathe Ntombi, breathe.

Dammit I'm getting old, even controlling my breathing is becoming hard.

Me: "For how long are you staying anyway?"

She frowns.

Petunia: "You don't want us in your house Ntombi?"

She says as she pours two cups of rice in a pot of boiling water. These people think I have money.

Me: "I'm just asking."

Petunia: "Maybe two weeks."

She mumbles...

"What are you trying to tell me Moses?"

We hear Mhambi shout before I could speak, I rush back to the living room. Petunia doesn't bother, they probably planned this ambush.

Mhambi is on his feet while Moses is seated on a couch opposite him, looking unbothered by Mhambi's demeanour.

Mhambi: "Ntombi, what is this I hear?"

I'm confused, I don't know what Moses might have said to him.

Moses: "Amara is not as innocent as you people think. That girl used to gallivant these streets with men, you can go knocking on every door Mhambi and they will tell you the same thing. Every boy in Everton has tasted that girl, she's a loose cannon. She fell pregnant and ran away with the father."

I feel something sting my heart and I drop back on the couch. Moses is lying, he could have thought of a better lie but not tarnish that girl's image.

Mhambi turns his gaze to me, he looks as shocked as I am but our reasons differ.

Mhambi: "Ntombi? Is this true? Is your husband telling the truth?"

How do I answer that?

How do I betray my late brother like that?

Moses: "Yes, it's true. Ntombi finds it hard to speak about it because it hurts her."

Petunia: "That is a lie."

Petunia shouts as she marches from the kitchen.

Petunia is those thick short aunties, the ones you wouldn't want to mess with. She's in her mid-50's.

She's loud and very confident. She's Mhambi's only wife, there were other women in his life. They gave him children, boys while Petunia bore him girls. His longing for a boy child drove Mhambi outside of the marriage but the women never dared to stay, this woman would rather burn my brother alive than have him take a second wife.

Petunia: "Amanga lawo Moses." (It's all lies.)

Moses: "Haibo! And then, Iona? This has nothing to do with you, you're just an in-law." (This one)

Petunia: "You're also an in-law Moses."

Moses: "Petunia, buka uNtombi. Not once has my wife raised her opinion since the men started talking. Wena ucabang' ukuthi uwubani? Mhambi, khuza ndoda. Hai niyazi ukukhetha shame, uhlazo lolu. A woman who disputes with men?" (Look at Ntombi) (Who do you think you are?) (Chastise her) (You know how to choose them, such an embarrassment)

Petunia: "Yeyi!!! Ung'hlanyisi wena Moses. You will tell us what you did to that child." (Don't piss me off.)

Moses: "Ang'su Mhambi mina Petunia, esami isandla siyasebenza." (I'm not your husband, I will hit you.)

Mhambi: "Why do I feel that your talks are of someone who is trying to hide something? You're attacking my wife because you don't want us to see through your lies."

Moses: "Hau Mhambi, in my own house. Okay, I see. So this is the reason you came to my house, to downgrade me and insult me. All the way from KZN, nizonyela mina emzini wami." (You came to disrespect me in my house.)

I am so embarrassed by Moses, he deserves an Oscar for his acting. But my brother can see right through him, I hope he doesn't throw them out. It will be the end of me, Moses is not ashamed to act stupid in front of people.

Mhambi: "Ntombi are you going to keep quiet while your husband speaks to your elder brother like this?"

I don't know what Mhambi wants from me, it's not like he doesn't know how Moses can be.

Moses: "What do you want her to do? Ntombi is my wife, so she's bound to take my side."

Lord let this bickering come to an end please.

Petunia: "It doesn't matter if Ntombi speaks or not. She can sit on that sofa forever if she likes,

ok'salayo you people know where Amara is and we want her back or I will have you arrested."

Moses bursts out in a scornful laugh making Mhambi and Petunia glance at each other in confusion.

I also can't comprehend his reason for laughing.

Moses: "Hawu suka la wena, amabhodo ayasha ekhishini Petunia." (Get out of here. The food is burning in the kitchen.)

He seems to be tickled by his retort.

Me: "Moses please, can't we-"

Moses: "Who said you can speak Ntombi? Uyabona nje ngizama uku khuza u sis' Petunia but you want to be difficult nawe. Kanti abafazi banjani hee?" (You can see that I'm trying to reprimand Petunia. What's wrong with women?)

Mhambi: "I want you to listen to me Moses, I am not leaving this house until I see Amara."

Moses: "Vele vele Mhambi, What do you want from Amara? You want to take her as your second wife? Is Petunia too old for you now?"

There's a loud gasp in the room and Mhambi falls back on the sofa as shock numbs his body. Moses has crossed limits in his life but this surpasses all of them, he has a dirty mind.

Petunia shakes her head and defeated, she goes back to the kitchen. Mhambi is left speechless, his face is expressionless. I think he is beyond embarrassed, he folds his arms across his chest while as, I drag myself to the bedroom. I'm going to hide, maybe for the rest of my life if possible. I can't deal with this, Moses will send me into an early grave.

To be continued...



NOMBULELO\*

"Hey, welcome back."

I wake up to see my friend Koketso in the room, I scan my surroundings and realize that I'm at the hospital. Everything comes back like a wave and I burst into a loud sob, my body is in pain. Then it hits me, my baby. Zuma kicked me on my stomach. My hands glide to my stomach as I pray and hope that my baby is okay. It's the only thing I have of him, the only evidence I have of the love we once shared.

Me: "My baby, my baby."

Koketso looks shocked, she doesn't know what to do.

I didn't tell her I was pregnant.

She's my best friend, we met in grade one and have been inseparable since. She lives in Sebokeng with her parents and two brothers.

Koketso: "I'll get the nurse."

She runs out of the ward, calling out for the nurse. The thought of losing my baby hurts more than the physical pain that has engulfed my body.

Me: "My baby, nurse please, tell me my baby is okay."

I cry as I see her calmly walk in with Koketso not far behind.

Nurse: "Relax sisi, your baby is okay."

But he...

I saw him, I felt the painful kicks on my stomach as he stomped on me with clearly an attempt to kill my baby.

Nurse: "Apparently the battering didn't affect the baby. It's a miracle."

I guess I'm not as cursed as I thought.

Koketso: "I didn't know you were pregnant Lelo. Why didn't you tell me?"

She looks rather hurt by this, which is strange. Come to think of it, I haven't seen her in a month. Each time I would ask that we meet, she came up with excuses. It came to a point of her ignoring my messages and calls.

Me: "I was going to tell you, if you took my calls."

Koketso: "Who's the father?"



Me: "Who else would it be Koketso? It's Zuma's baby hau."

Why is she being like this? I don't like the way she's looking at me. Her eyes follow the nurse who just walked out before she turns to me with a frown on her face.

Koketso: "That's impossible Lelo, Zuma would never get you pregnant."

What the hell did she just say to me?

Me: "Askies?" (Excuse me?)

Koketso: "I said Zuma will never-"

Me: "Well he did Koketso, I am pregnant with Zuma's child. What is your problem?"

Koketso: "My problem is you Lelo, you think you are better than everyone."

Me: "Koketso, where is this coming from? I don't understand why you are being hostile towards me and why did you say Zuma will never get me pregnant? How do you get to say these things to me when I don't share such private things with you?"

She rolls her eyes and folds her arms.

Koketso: "He told me that he will never release inside you."

My world crumbles at the sound of her words.

What's happening?

Me: "I don't understand, why would Zuma be telling you such things? Why would he share our most intimate moments with you? Koketso, what's going on?"

My voice is demanding now, she looks like she doesn't care that she's hurting me.

Come to think of it...

Me: "Are you the one who brought me here?"

Koketso: "Yes."

She's snobbish and I want to wipe the floor with her face as I have figured out what is really going on but, I want to hear her say it.

Me: "What were you doing at his house? How do you know where he lives?"

Koketso: "Oh enough, Zuma is my boyfriend okay. He loves me, wena nje you were just his side dish. Who do you think has been keeping him warm at night while you had to run back home because of your stupid curfew? He was going to dump you eventually, this was bound to happen Lelo. Let him go, let the poor guy live his life in peace."

So this is what life has instore for me, pain and agony?

Me: "Koketso you're supposed to be my friend, we grew up together. We shared baths together, I was there for you when your parents almost divorced. You would ask to sleep at my house

because you couldn't stand their bickering. You throw all that away for a dick Koketso, fuck there's so many men in this country. Why would you go for mine?"

To say I am hurt is an understatement.

Koketso: "I saw, I liked and I took. Sorry that he thinks I'm hotter than you."

Me: "It's not even about that you stupid bitch, you played me. You and Zuma played me, I can't believe I didn't see this coming. The social distancing, the blue ticks, all of it was because of him. Because you were fucking my man behind my back?"

Koketso: "Yoh hai kee, I'm getting tired of this. I hope you get well soon Lelo and that you find the father of your baby."

Me: "Get out of my room s'febe." (Bitch)

koketso: "That's rich coming from a girl who doesn't know who the father of her child is, stop claiming sisi. Leave my man alone, or else I'll burn that ugly face of yours with acid. Remember how I castrated my uncle who molested me for years? I am capable of anything Lelo, try me and I will show you."

Me: "Get out."

I hate her, I hate my life.

She rolls her eyes and leaves me crying.

How is it that I am alone in the world? A month ago I was happy, I was loved and my future was looking bright.

AMARA\*

Chioma: "Hey, I brought you an extra blanket."

Chioma declares as she walks in, funny she knocked this time. What was hard for her to do that in the morning? I am still very much embarrassed, I can still feel his lips on mine. My body shivers occasionally as my mind takes me back, and the words he uttered to me still ring in my mind.

Me: "I don't need it."

I respond without looking at her, this spot by the window has become my favourite spot. I somehow feel at peace when looking at nature outside, the bright green leaves have started to turn orange. It's beautiful to look at and the birds flying freely outside, I wish to be like them.

Apparently, breakfast is still brought to the room while I'm forced to have dinner with Randall.

Chioma: "Don't be silly, it's winter. You will freeze to death."

The dark and dry days of winter are approaching, the nights are much colder and longer.

Me: "There's a heater in the room."

I turn to look at her, she's standing next to the bed clenching on a thick grey winter blanket.

Chioma: "I know but, the temperatures drop at night."

She spreads the blanket out on the bed.

Me: "I'm sorry for what I did."

I am so ashamed.

Chioma: "It's okay, I understand your reasons."

She doesn't look at me so, I'm not sure if it really is okay.

Me: "Chioma, what is me hemma?"

This has been on my mind since morning.

She looks at me and smiles.

Chioma: "It's Akan for my queen, it's a widely spoken language in Ghana."

Me: "He's Ghanaian?"

Chioma: "Yes."

A wave of silence passes through the room creating a rather uncomfortable atmosphere.

Me: "Why does he want to kill me?"

Chioma: "Who?"

She moves closer as she gives me an intriguing look.

Me: "Him, I think he wants to kill me. He wants to torture me first before he kills me."

I reveal what I suspect to be the truth.

Chioma: "Randall will never hurt you, he's not like that. Not my Uze."

Me: "Sadly Chioma, behind a veil of normalcy lies a passion for murder. I have seen his outbursts, the way he looks at me when he's angry. That man wants me dead."

"Who wants you dead?"

I jerk up at the sound of Randall's inquisitive voice, I turn to see him standing right behind me. There's a pucker between his eyebrows and I am confused as to whether he's upset or hurt, his face is mysterious at this moment.

Randall: "Who wants you dead princess?"

He whispers as he bends over bringing his face to mine. There's something about his eyes that

force you to leer into them, I move my head to the side when his nose almost touches mine.

He continues anyway, slightly pressing his forehead on the side of my face. I shut my eyes and hope that this ends now, Chioma is here and this is as embarrassing as this morning's events. I hear him sniff as if breathing me in before something cold and soft tugs at my cheek, instantly I know it's his lips. I recognize them from that day they claimed my neck and this morning even though it was for a mere moment.

I shiver and jump to my feet.

I look up only to find him staring back at me, He rams his hands into his pockets and right then, the daunting image appears making him look almost like a giant.

Randal: "For how long will you dwell on this absurd fantasy that I am after your life? You are not going to die, I go where you go. Even if death happens to come, we'll embrace it together."

My blood runs cold as his words declare me weak and overpowered. I look away from him, trying to control my racing heart.

Randall: "Stop fighting this me hemma." (My queen)

Me: "Don't call me that."

I snap at him, he looks shocked by my riposte. He frowns, turns his gaze to look at Chioma who hasn't said anything since he walked in. He knows that only she could tell me the meaning, Chioma drops her head shamefully.

Randall looks back at me and smirks, without a word, he turns and saunters out of the room. Leaving me winded.

I had been holding my breath.

Chioma: "Are you okay?"

I nod as I grab a glass of water and gulp it down in one go.

Me: "Why is he like that?"

Chioma: "I can't answer that for you but, you'll figure it out one day."

Me: "Well, I don't plan on staying for that long."

Chioma: "He will never let you go Amara, Randall never goes back on his word."

Me: "I will leave this place Chioma, one way or another."

There is another way and Randall might be all that but this time, he won't be able to do anything about it. I will go away from him forever and he'll be left with no choice but to watch me as I leave him.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

24\*

RANDALL\*

I leave the room to be followed by Chioma as I approach the bottom of the stairs.

Me: "What happened?"

Chioma: "There's something you need to know."

Me: "I'm listening."

She follows me to the foyer.

Chioma: "Amara said something that made me think she'll try to escape again."

Me: "It's all in her mind, she's not going anywhere."

Chioma: "That girl is smart Uze and she's adamant on leaving this place."

I stop as I turned to her, I'm met by her worried expression.

Me: "Smart or not, she won't slip out of my hands this time."

Chioma: "Something tells me that she's planning something, I have a bad feeling about this Uze."

Me: "What could she possibly be planning? Amara is not going anywhere Chioma, I will smell her before she steps out of the door."

I assure her, my phone rings as she opens her mouth to speak.

Me: "Excuse me, I have to take this."

She nods and walks away.

Me: "Olivia what do you want?"

She's been blowing my phone since morning.

Olivia: "You need to come to the hospital, Liyana is asking for you."

Me: "I'll be there later."

Olivia: "The doctor said we can take her home today."

Me: "I know, I was at the hospital this morning."

Olivia: "Why didn't you tell me?"

Me: "I have better things to do with my time than run after you."

Olivia: "Are you still upset about last night? Really Randall? Joseph is in jail, and Liya is alive."



Why are you still grumpy?"

Me: "How does it feel to be stupid Olivia? Do you expect me to congratulate you for putting my daughter's life in danger? I will never forgive you for what you did."

Olivia: "Liyana is my baby, I will never do anything to her."

Is she kidding me?

Me: "Goodbye Olivia."

Olivia: "Wait, are you coming?"

Me: "Did I not say I'll be there."

Olivia: "Well, you need to come now Randall. Your daughter needs you."

Me: "Don't ever tell me what to do."

She sighs deeply.

Olivia: "Look, I'm just worried about our child. I don't want her to be disappointed by you not being here."

Me: "Have I ever disappointed her before?"

What the hell is she trying to do?

Olivia: "Then come Randall"

She cracks and that just aggravates me.

Me: "Olivia I said I will come, must I drop everything at your call?"

Olivia: "You should drop everything for Liya."

She shouts.

Me: "I am not Joseph, you do not get to speak to me like that."

How did it happen that I had to cross paths with her of all people.

Olivia: "What is so important that your daughter has to come second?"

Me: "How dare you talk to me like that?"

I yap at her.

Me: "Why are you so bent on annoying me Olivia?"

Olivia: "I'm just worried about Liya, she wants to see you Randall."

Me: "I don't need parenting advice from you, do not call my phone if you have nothing better to say to me."

I'm done with that woman. The nerve she has to challenge me, and imply that I do not care

about my child. I will take Liyana from her and she won't be able to do anything about it.

I decide to go check on Amara before I leave the house, what Chioma said didn't sit in well with me. What could she be planning? I would hate for her to try anything that will get her into trouble with me, nothing can keep her away from me, not even her.

I walk into her sleeping peacefully and walk back out so I don't disturb her.

STYLES\*

Me: "I swear baby, drag me to another store and I will leave you here."

We've been at it for hours now.

Khethu: "Only you would say that and you shouldn't, one would think this is your first time in a relationship."

Me: "Explain."

Khethu: "All men hate shopping but instead of voicing it out, they bare the torture but you Mr. Sishi, speak without a care in the world."

She says as she pulls me into another clothing store.

I swear it will be a miracle if I'm seen at a mall again with Khethu.

Me: "I am not all men."

Khethu: "My point exactly. What do you think about this skirt?"

Why am I here again?

She holds it up, looking at me like my opinion matters to her.

Me: "It's a skirt."

I shrug.

Khethu: "I know you don't want to be here but a little enthusiasm would be nice."

Me: "Baby, I don't do shopping. And why do I feel like this is a punishment? Did I do something wrong?"

Khethu: "Spending time with me is a punishment?"

She seems a bit hurt by that.

Me: "I didn't say that."

She turns to put it back on the shelf, and shrieks when an odd looking man bumps into her. I grab hold of her hand preventing her from falling while, the idiot continues on as if nothing





happened.

Me: "Hey."

He paces on as I call out to him.

Khethu: "Styles don't."

She says but it's too late, I'm already after the guy. The store is crowded and he's dodging people while trying to escape from me, he increases his step and disappears into the crowd walking in and out of the door. I pave through them till I'm outside the store, there's no way I will spot him in this crowded mall.

Shit! Khethu.

I think to myself and hurry back inside, I find her frozen while leering down at some piece of paper. She looks up and I'm met by her glossy eyes being bullied by tears.

Me: "What happened?"

She extends her hand, giving me the piece of note.

It reads <<< Occhio per occhio>>> (An eye for an eye)

Franco, I'd be damned.

Khethu: "What is this Styles? Are you back into that life?"

Me: "I don't know what you're talking about?"

I know exactly what she's talking about.

Khethu: "Wow."

Me: "Can we go home please."

Khethu: "I'm not going anywhere with you until you tell me what's going on? What does this mean?"

Me: "What makes you think this is for me? You picked it up from the floor didn't you? It could belong to anyone."

Khethu: "I'm not stupid Styles, that man who ran into me dropped this note. You went after him for a reason and I demand to know what."

Her attitude is beginning to show and people are staring.

Me: "I'm not having an argument with you in public."

Khethu: "There doesn't have to be an argument, just tell me the truth. Where did you go last night Styles? What is it that you did, that broke you so much? Did you kill people? Randall sent you to kill someone didn't he? I know he's a criminal and..."

I chuckle in disbelief. Khethu will never change, I don't know how I let her impudence get this far.

Now she thinks she can speak to me anyway she likes.

I stuff my hand in my pocket and come out with the car keys, I throw them at her and walk away. I'm done entertaining her impudence and attitude.

NKOMO\*

Me: "What are you doing here?"

I didn't think I would find Randall sitting comfortably in my house, he's even helped himself with my whiskey.

Randall: "I thought you might want someone to welcome you home, there's nothing worse than coming home to an empty house, don't you think?"

I'm standing in the door way, the door is still open. One move from him and I will be able to escape.

Me: "How did you get in here?"

Randall: "Does it matter?"

He gets up and ambles towards me, his eyes are like the eyes of a hunter who's just spotted his next prey. I see rage and fury in them. Styles warned me to stay clear, Randall Okolie doesn't forget nor does he forgive.

Randall: "You look better."

I shrug.

Randall: "Tell me Nkomo, how do you really feel considering that you were hospitalized?"

He's looping around me as he says this, I feel his heavy presence and I hate to admit that it's not a nice feeling. I flinch at the sound of the banging door.

He stops at my silence- tilts his head to the side, scowls before a gut knotting sly grin embraces his face.

Randall: "Are you really, going to let me repeat myself?"

He whispers ghostly, my mind is circling around the door but he will kill me before I make it out.

Me: "I'm okay."

This time my jaw is clenched as anger has consumed me, I hate that he imparts fear in me. I grew up with this man, we were in the same calibre. So, the fact that he dominated us still puzzles me.

Randall: "You're okay?"

He nods a few times. I don't see Randall anymore but Scar, the merciless bastard.

Randall: "Do you think Amara is okay, after what you did to her?"

I gulp as I did not expect him to ask me that, my silence appears to be fuelling his anger.

Randall: "Do you want me to make you talk Nkomo?"

Me: "Get out of here Scar."

I have to dismiss him before he puts a bullet through my head. He throws me a smug smile.

Randall: "What's wrong Nkomo? You're sweating."

And my heart is palpitating against my chest, I can almost feel its thud in my throat. I fling my hand to wipe the dribs of sweat loitering on my forehead.

Me: "Look, I'm sorry about what I did, okay? I don't know what came over me..."

Randall: "You still haven't answered me. How do you think Amara is doing?"

He folds his arms across his chest, a pucker grows between his eyebrows. This means he's growing impatient.

Me: "I don't know."

I take a step back towards the door.

He stares daggers at me.

Randall: "You don't know?"

Randall is soft-spoken but that should not be mistaken for modesty. Inside, he is a roaring lion and that's the most nerve-racking thing about him.

Randall: "I am so disappointed in you Nkomo. You have proved that you are your father's son."

Me: "I am nothing like that monster."

I bark at him and he raises his eye brows disbelievingly.

Randall: "I am not convinced."

He turns around and saunters about the lounge before pouring himself another glass of whiskey. I had an opportunity to strike him from the back but that would be suicide.

Me: "I can help you take him down."

I have only his side view as I watch him raise the glass with the golden liquid- stirs a bit, takes a sip, then looks at me before drawing his eyes back to the glass. He indulges on another sip.

Randall: "What makes you think I can't do it myself?"

Me: "I know you can but, you have something valuable to protect and I can get you what you want. He wants me back home, I'll approach him in the pretext that I'm coming home."



He turns to me, with the glass still in hand, he plunges the other hand into his pocket. Knowing Scar, anything can come out of that pocket.

Randall: "I'm not stupid Nkomo, I know that useless father of yours will not allow you back into his home. He doesn't give a shit about you, I have seen it."

Me: "Well, you didn't see him when he came to visit me at the hospital."

He smirks, something tells me he knows about that visit.

Randall: "Continue."

Me: "He seemed desperate for me to come back, I think he wants me to help him destroy you."

He chuckles.

Randall: "I see."

I clear my throat.

How intimidating can this man get?

Me: "I can help Scar."

Randall: "Don't call me that."

He scoffs softly yet with so much authority.

I take a step back as he ambles towards me, I have to stop acting like a coward. This man feeds on fear, he's probably having a time of his life. He reaches for my cheek and places his hand right below my ear, his cold eyes are piercing deep into my soul. Anything can happen now, I could lose my life in the blink of an eye.

Randall: "Don't go anywhere Nkomo. I'm watching you."

He lightly slaps my cheek three times, it's painful but I take it. He hands me the glass of unfinished whiskey.

Randall: "That's good stuff."

He compliments.

And with that, he walks out

Shit!

To be continued...

25\*

AMARA\*

I feel someone nudge me as I'm lost in a stack of worries.

Chioma: "You didn't respond when I knocked. What's wrong?"

That's a rhetorical question.

Me: "I'm tired of being here, I'm tired of being locked up. I can't stand it anymore Chioma."

I protest.

She sighs as she grabs a chair and sits opposite me, we both look outside the window, with no words said. Just the winter afternoon sun pouring through the window and kissing my skin. This room, the atmosphere and the scenery outside might be perfect for someone who actually wants to be here. But, for a kept person like me, it's a prison adorned with beautiful ornaments. My heart misses home and the ones I call my own, I miss having the sense of belonging. But, I am surrounded by faces my heart does not recognize and the only thing I can think of is escaping.

Chioma: "Won't you give him a chance? He wants to take care of you."

I'm jolted back by her question.

Me: "What gave him the impression that I need to be taken care of? How does he know me anyway?"

Chioma: "I told you, there are things that only he can tell you."

Me: "But he's not saying anything, he doesn't tell me why I'm here. All he does is look at me with lust if not rage, he is nothing but a beast."

Chioma: "That is not true Amara."

Me: "What is the truth Chioma?"

Chioma: "I can't say."

Me: "I don't know why I even bother talking to you, he's your boss right? So, clearly, you are loyal to him."

Chioma: "I care about you too."

I huff at her words.

Me: "You don't know me enough to care for me. What I say really doesn't matter because I'm a stranger to you."

Chioma: "Okay, tell me one thing that Randall has done that has stood out for you."

What is she on about? She looks at me, eagerly waiting for my answer. I don't know what to say, I haven't been around him long enough to notice the things he does.

But there is one or two.

Chioma: "Well?"

Me: "He saved me from this guy who wanted to..."

I can't bring myself to saying it, my blood boils when I think that I was almost raped.

Chioma: "Did you see a beast when he saved you."

Me: "When he was attacking him yes but.."

Should I really be saying good things about him? The same man who has kept me prisoner.

Chioma: "But what?"

Me: "I don't know, I'm overwhelmed by everything and I don't know anything anymore. I'm not in a space where I can trust people and as far as Randall goes, I don't see him as someone who wants to protect me but, a monster."

She doesn't look happy with my response.

We fall into another episode of silence.

RANDALL\*

Styles pulls up just as I drive in.

Styles: "I don't like that look on your face."

He declares as I approach him, we walk together into the house.

Me: "What look?"

Styles: "That look, your eyes are cold. Did Amara try to escape again?"

Me: "She wouldn't dare."

Styles: "Then what is it? You are planning something and it's dark."

Me: "I went to see Nkomo."

Styles: "What? Please tell me you didn't kill him. I told that halfwit to go into hiding."

Me: "You know, sometimes I wonder where your loyalty lies."

Styles: "Well, stop wondering because I am here. That should tell you something."

He follows me to the kitchen and stops at the entrance.

Me: "What happened?"

He looks spooked.

Styles: "What are we doing here?"

Me: "To get something to eat, I'm hungry."

Styles: "I have never seen you in the kitchen before, bruh, can you even boil water?"

I shoot a cold stare at him.

Styles: "No, seriously. A prince does not make his own food. I wouldn't be surprised if you brainwashed Chioma into doing our chores back then."

Me: "Maybe I felt sorry for you since, you did everything by yourself."

He laughs.

Styles: "Shit! That used to piss me off. You were one lazy motherfucker."

Me: "Stop playing and take a sit."

He raises his hands defensively as he laughs before ambling to a chair.

Me: "Would you like something?"

Styles: "If I want something to eat, I will make it myself. I don't want to die of food poisoning."

I give him the middle finger and he shakes his head.

Styles: "So, what did you do with his body?"

Me: "He's still alive, for now. He wants to help in bringing down his father."

Styles: "I'm not surprised, he hates that fucker."

Me: "I know but remember, he always had daddy issues. What is to say that, he won't turn on us at the last minute?"

Styles: "There is a possibility."

I settle opposite him with a plate of cheese sandwich, he frowns at my food.

Me: "Save it."

He laughs.

Styles: "Look what I have."

He shows me a chip, the size of a micro sim. I give him an inquisitive look.

Styles: "This is a chip, all we have to do is insert this in Mkhize's phone. It will give us access to his emails, text messages and we'll be able to record every call he makes."

Me: "But, how are we going to do that? It's not like he'll hand over his phone to us with a smile."

Styles: "I have a plan and it's already in progress."

He smiles.

I have heard that line before and he never disappoints.

Styles: "His first wife is sick so, Mkhize has hired a live-in nurse to look after her. That's where Kazi comes in."

Me: "Kazi?"

Styles: "Sisikazi Shezi, she works hand in hand with Mbuso."

Me: "It's blank, sorry."

Styles: "Fuck! Bruh, you once tapped her."

It's either he's crazy or I'm losing my memory.

Me: "I have no clue who she is."

He laughs and I'm irked by all of this.

Styles: "You are a man whore Randall Okolie. How many girls have you fucked and can't recall their names?"

Me: "I don't ask names. What's the point if I will never see them again?"

Styles: "Like I said, man whore."

Me: "Call me a man whore again and I will shove this sandwich down your throat."

He laughs while passing me a piece of paper.

Me: "What's this?"

Styles: "Your friend Franco, he's still adamant on teaming up with Mkhize."

Me: "Why did you spare his life anyway?"

Styles: "Death is an easy way out for that baboon, we need to make him suffer first."

Me: "I say, we take them down once and for all."

Styles: "Hence the plan I orchestrated. This is going to be fun, we are going to attack when they least expect it. You know Mkhize actually grinned when I warned him to stay away from Amara."

Me: "It's so like him, that smug bastard. Let them come at me with everything they got, I will fight them till death."

Styles: "Only, it will be their death."

Me: "You're damn right."





Styles: "Let the games begin."

He chuckles as he rubs his hands together.

His phone rings, he looks at it and rejects the call.

Me: "Won't you take that?"

Styles: "And have her talk to me like I'm her friend."

Me: "You are her friend."

A pained expression shadows his face.

Styles: "I'm her man before that. Do I not at least deserve her respect?"

Me: "What did she do?"

Styles: "I don't want to get into it really."

He dismisses, I don't know why I still bother asking. He never discloses much about his relationship.

KHETHU\*

Styles is completely ignoring my calls, I can't believe he's doing this to me again. Nobayeni has been judging me since they got here, I don't know why dad brought her along and he didn't tell me that she was coming.

Nobayeni: "For how long will that boy make us wait?"

She's been sipping on wine since they got here two hours ago, I think she's drunk now. She even took off her heels and stretched her feet out on my white couch.

My father keeps stealing glances at her.

Me: "His name is Styles mom."

Nobayeni: "His name is not important."

She tosses her hand like it's nothing.

Riled by her insolence, I look at my father. He shakes his head, gesturing that I shouldn't respond.

Nobayeni: "This is humiliating, just this one time your father manages to convince me to give that boy a chance and he does this."

I'm honestly being offended here and I'm about ready to snap, there's a way she says these insults that turns every knot in me. How is this woman my mother?

Dad: "Will you calm down Nobayeni? Styles knows that we are here, he's probably on his way."

Nobayeni: "You are just like your daughter Dladla, naïve."

She points an accusatory finger in his direction.

Me: "Don't speak to my father like that."

She frowns at me before rolling her eyes.

Nobayeni: "Bridgette, I am your mother. I brought you into this world, speak to me like that again and I will take you out."

She snaps looking slightly miffed.

Me: "That's the only thing you contributed into being a mother, bringing me into this world."

Nobayeni: "What is wrong with this child? Who taught you to speak to grown-ups like this?"

She targets at me as she says this. Nobayeni might be classy but she has a wild side and it's not a nice sight to watch.

Nobayeni: "Dladla, is this how you raised her?"

Me: "At least he raised me. What about you Nobayeni? You have done nothing for me."

Dad: "Khethu?"

Nobayeni: "No, let her speak her heart out Dladla. This is her house right? She can climb on the roof if she wants to and tell the whole world what she thinks of me."

Me: "That's exactly what I want to do, tell the world how bad of a mother you are. Nobayeni Dladla, the great respected business woman sucks at being a mother."

This is the first time I'm crying in front of her because of this, I was filled with so much anger before but now, it's pain and negligence that's targeting at my heart and it's unbearable.

Me: "I remember when you didn't come to my sixteenth birthday. I waited till mid night for you to come home. Dad kept telling me to go to bed but, I needed to see you, I needed to hear you wish me a happy birthday.

The memory of you stumbling in the house drunk is like a fresh wound that won't heal, the disgusted look you gave me. But because I was a child and couldn't see the hate in your eyes. I ran to you and threw myself in your arms but you pushed me and I fell, hitting my body against the stair rail. I still have the mark of your hatred mother."

I stretch my hand out to show her the scar on my elbow, she doesn't look like she cares. She's pouring another glass of wine, the bottle is almost half empty.

Me: "I asked you that night why you didn't make it to my party and you told me to my face that I shouldn't have been born."

Dad: "Nobayeni?"

He grunts in a shocked tone, I turn to him. My tears are having their way on my face and I can't stop them from cascading down my cheeks.

Me: "Yes, dad. Your wife here, said that I was a mistake. She told me how much she hates me and I should never expect her to be a mother figure to me."

Nobayeni: "That's enough Bridgette."

She demands, we watch her as she pours herself another glass of wine. Completely emptying the glass.

Me: "You said I should speak my heart out because I'm in my house, let me speak my heart out Nobayeni. Let me tell my father how much you hate his daughter and how you didn't want to have any more children after me."

Nobayeni: "Bridgette, I said that's enough."

She's glaring at me with the same hatred she had that night, I will never forget those eyes.

Me: "Dad, she told me that she tied her tubes after she had me, she confessed everything to me that night. You were drunk Nobayeni, I was just a child but, you put this burden on me. I was desperate for you mother, I was desperate for your love but, you rejected me and only gave me hatred.

Nobayeni: "Shut up Bridgette, shut up."

She shouts, throwing her glass at me. I duck and it hits my father on his arm, luckily.

Nobayeni: "You demon child, I should have killed you before you were born."

Dad: "Nobayeni?"

He shouts throwing his hand at her and before I know it, my mother is on the couch with her head bowed and her hand rocking her cheek.

Dad: "I told you that I will protect this child with everything I have, you will not do this Nobayeni. Not to my daughter."

He yells at her, she raises her head. My heart stops as she glowers at me with a deadly stare, she screams and charges at me. In a second she has chunks of my hair in the grip of her hands, pulling and shouting. The only thing I can do is scream and try to get her off me."

Nobayeni: "I hate you."

She proclaims at the top of her lungs while fighting me.

To be continued...

26\*

AMARA\*

Me: "I'm okay Chioma, you don't have to help me."

Chioma: "I was told to help you."

We're in the walk-in closet and she's picking out a dress for me but I don't want to wear a dress, I don't want to dress up for anything.

Me: "I will manage, you can go."

She nods, I watch her as she walks out. I turn to look at myself in the mirror. My weight is still down, my eyes are attaining their normal colour. But I still don't feel fine and no dress or make up in this world will take away this sadness that has taken over my heart. I will walk out in these tracksuits, they are the only thing comforting me right now. If not the memories I have of Lelo. Sometimes I wake up feeling like I am forgetting her face and force myself to remember.

I walk out of the dressing room to find Randall standing in the doorway, dressed in black. I'm yet to see him in a different colour. Looking at him now, I realize that he has a habit of folding his arms across his chest and scowling. Tenderness is only but, a guest on his stern face.

His gaze stabs at me and I'm forced to lower mine.

Randall: "Why aren't you ready?"

He queries.

I run my eyes to him with a serious expression and shrug my shoulders.

Randall: "Amara?"

His voice demands an answer.

Me: "I am."

I whisper, he nods.

Randall: "Shall we?"

I frown as I am stumped by his question.

Randall: "I came to get you, let's go."

I am not taking that hand he just stretched out to me.

I toddle to him, he smiles as I approach. I want to pass but he's blocking the way. He likes looking into my eyes a lot, I drop my gaze.

Randall: "How has your day been?"

Is he seriously asking me this?

Me: "Terrible."

I respond almost immediately, pointing out the obvious. I see a glint of worry in his eyes.

He takes my hand, I want to snatch it away from him but his grip is too strong. My body shivers at his touch, I'm not comfortable with this feeling that's washing over me. I try once again to claim my hand back from him but, he refuses to let go, having me give up. We walk down the stairs to the dining room. The food is already on the table, a little too much for two people.

KHETHU\*

Dad: "Nobayeni let her go."

My father is trying to pull her away from me, I'm crying and I don't understand how my own mother would attack me like this.

What is she thinking?

What's going through her mind?

Our voices are wrestling each other as we compete in a screaming contest.

Dad: "Nobayeni stop, stop."

It appears that he can't pull her away, without hurting me in the process as her grip is too strong. I feel a few strands of my hair being plucked out.

Nobayeni: "I hate you Bridgette, you cursed child."

She screams while pulling my hair, I'm struggling to get her grip off of me while, my father is also failing dismally.

Gosh! I pray it's the alcohol talking and not her.

Out of nowhere, a duos of strong hands clench my waist and swiftly but, gently pull me back. Nobayeni releases her strong hold and slowly draws back, her eyes are amplified as she looks over my head. The rise and fall of her chest and breathlessness, displaying fatigue from the attack. The gentle hands are still on my waist, I turn to see Styles. The look on his face is terrifying, he looks like he is ready to kill someone. His black stare is fixed on Nobayeni.

I'm so mad at him that, I can't even cry on his chest. I want to cry and scream all these painful emotions out but, I'm also ashamed that my mother and I turned his house into a wrestling ring.

How do I explain this fight and how I let it go this far?

My father is sitting on the couch, looking whitewashed. His hands are supporting his head as he has it bowed in shame, I know how he feels. I don't know if Styles will ever look at him the same



or as a man who can't keep his house in check.

Styles: "Get out of my house."

He demands in a firm voice. I have never seen this side of him.

Nobayeni: "Bridgette..."

I see another insults coming.

Styles: "Don't even dare say one more word to her."

He cuts her off.

Here I am, standing in front of Styles. His hands are still gript on my waist and I know he's not about to let go. I can feel them trembling, that's how angry he is. I'm looking at my mother with the same hatred she's showing in her eyes. I wish for this to be a dream, I want it to be nothing but a dream.

I hoped and prayed that maybe one day Nobayeni will see a child in me, she will finally see me as the baby she carried for nine months and shower me with the love I was deprived of.

Styles: "Mr. Dladla, please, take your wife out of my house. I do not want to come across as disrespectful but, if need be, I will protect Khethu. It doesn't matter what I have to do or what boundaries I have to cross."

He states in a dark threatening tone.

His words have me in tears, to be loved and protected like this can only be a blessing.

Nobayeni: "What is this? Dladla, will you let this boy..."

Styles: "Get the hell out of my house."

His thunderous roar fills the room, I flinch while Nobayeni steps back, looking alarmed. My father walks up to me with a painful expression, caresses my face and kisses my forehead.

Dad: "I'm sorry angel."

I don't know what to say to him so, I don't respond. He looks at Styles remorsefully.

Dad: "I'm sorry about all of this Sishi, don't hold it against anyone. It's only family squabbles."

I wish that was all it was.

Nobayeni cackles, my father turns to her, grabs her arm and drags her towards the door.

Nobayeni: "Dladla, let go of me. Do you know who I am? Let go of me, now."

She's screaming at him but he doesn't take heed to her as he continues to haul her outside. I shove Styles' hands off, the minute they close the door. Now that it's just us two, I want to cry and let it all out but, I won't. Seeing through me, he pulls me into his arms but I push him away and run upstairs to the bedroom.

AMARA\*

Randall is sitting too close for comfort, he literally pulled his chair closer to mine. My heart has been racing since and I don't understand it, he's staring and I'm struggling to get any food into my mouth.

Today we're dining in the indoor patio, it's beautiful I must say. The room is walled with faux bricks, it has a vintage touch to it. The dark mahogany chairs are adorned with thick grey and white striped cushions, there's a wooden table in front of us. Big enough to accommodate six people. A tiled -stone, wood-burning fire place is the prime focus of this patio.

I watch as the sparks hop about, teasing the wood that's revolving into a shade of black. The flames spring in an upsurge and reduction motion, in eagerness to accomplish the goal on which it is set on.

There's a big glass wall facing us, you can see the pale cold moon beaming down on a blanket of green grass in the garden. Glancing at the beautiful scene, I feel an incredible intense sensation of warmth. It almost assures me that it's going to be okay, I will be okay.

Randall: "Won't you eat?"

His voice fills my ears, hauling me out of this fantastical world I just built for myself.

Me: "I am."

Why am I even talking to him?

Randall: "One day you will understand why I'm doing all of this."

He explains upon seeing my gloomy face.

Me: "I can't possibly see a good justification for human trafficking."

He glowers at me as his gaze intensifies.

Randall: "Human Trafficking?"

It's almost as if he doesn't believe what just came out of my mouth.

Me: "My uncle sold me to you right?"

I toss that in without hesitation.

He stares at me with brooding eyes as they become hard and melancholy, he blinks once after what seems like a minute. He clears his throat, sending his hand to pull a nip of his earlobe. He slouches forward as if leaning over to me, bringing his face to mine. For a moment I think he's going to kiss me but he pushes his chair back with his legs, stands straight and leers down at me.



I look away, I can't look into those pained eyes. I made him like that, something I said beckoned sadness into his soul. I feel a pang of guilt flow through me.

Randall: "Just so you know Amara, nothing is as it seems. You should ponder on that when you go to bed."

He drops that and turns to walk away, leaving me stumped by his riposte.

"Randall."

A tall white woman with red hair comes running in, she throws her petite body at him and burst into a showy sob. His hands go up in an attempt to hold her but doesn't.

Her: "He's gone Randall, Joseph is dead."

She wails.

NOMBULELO\*

The lady next to me has not stopped crying since she woke up, the nurses tried to calm her down but she refuses to stop. Apparently, her husband beat her up only because she asked him why he didn't sleep at home for two nights. Is this what marriage is like? Zuma seemed so sweet and kind, he was compassionate. I was convinced that he wouldn't hurt a fly, but he turned out to be a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Nurse: "Haibo sisi, it's enough now. Urasela abanye abantwana." (You're making noise.)

The nurse chastises her, she lies down on the bed and pulls the bed sheet up, covering her head and continues snivelling. I'm also getting annoyed by her crying and to think she refuses to press charges against him.

I don't blame her though, love is ignorant and selfless. I don't think I will be laying charges against Zuma.

Nurse: "Yoh hai, this woman."

She looks at me while shaking her head.

Nurse: "What about you sisi?"

I'm not sure what she wants.

Me: "What about me?"

Nurse: "Are you going to lay charges against the man who did this to you?"

I have thought about it and the answer is no, he might be a bastard but I can't see him in jail. I won't forgive myself if that happens.

I shrug my shoulders and she cackles.





Nurse: "What's wrong with you?"

If she were in my shoes she would know what's wrong with me.

Me: "Try walking a mile in my shoes then, ask me that question again."

Nurse: "Hayi, ngiyabonga. I would never let a man do this to me, just think about it. Next time, he will kill you. Which shoes will you be walking on when you're lying dead in a coffin?" (No, thank you.)

She leaves me with those words.

AMARA\*

Her: "There was a riot in jail and he was stabbed, he's dead Randall."

She continues wailing as she clutches on him for dear life, I feel a pinch of an uncomfortable sensation. Randall turns his head to look at me with a scowl on his face and while still gawking at me he flings his hands to her upper arms and gently pulls her from him.

It takes a while for her to eventually let go, she has this confused look on her face but, it also shows that maybe she crossed boundaries.

Randall takes a step back, folds his arms across his chest as he ogles at the crying woman.

Randall: "Olivia, surely you cannot come crying to me for that bastard."

He states in a soft but cold tone.

Olivia: "My heart is broken Randall, and this is all you have to say to me?"

Her voice is laced with hurt.

Randall: "You and I have no relation, none whatsoever. I'm not your friend Olivia or your anything, the only thing that we have in common is Liya."

Olivia: "Why are you so cruel?"

She screams at him.

He seems to be angered by her outburst.

Randall: "Funny, you should say that, when you and that son of a bitch almost killed my daughter."

I didn't know he had a child, I wonder where his wife is or if he is married. I haven't seen a ring on his finger.

Olivia: "Why are you talking to me like this?"

She finally acknowledges my presence in the room as her eyes run to me, I don't understand the

look on her face and I can't explain it.

Olivia: "Is it because of her?"

She swings her hand my direction.

Randall: "Why are you in my house Olivia?"

Olivia: "Does Liya know about her?"

Randall: "How dare you question me?"

Olivia: "I'm asking for Liya, Randall. I will not let you bring..."

Randall: "Finish it, I dare you to finish that line Olivia."

Her eyes pop open, they have dried up. You can't say that she was crying a while ago, only the pinch of her nose stand witness to that as it has turned pink."

Randall: "Get out of my house."

He demands.

Olivia: "My daughter is here."

She must be his wife or ex, by the looks of it.

Randall: "And this is her home now, I told you that Liya will be staying with me now. You are not to set foot in my house Olivia, if you want to see Liya I will bring her to you."

Olivia: "You can't do this to me Randall, I will fight you in court."

Randall: "Dare me Olivia."

Olivia: "You want her, to be a mother to my child."

She glares at me.

I am clueless as to what she's talking about.

Randall: "Don't talk about her, don't even look at her."

Olivia: "Randall, what has gotten into you? This is not you."

Randall: "You don't know me. I'm not going to stand here and entertain your bullshit, leave my house."

Olivia: "Liya still needs me, I'm not going anywhere."

She folds her arms across her chest showcasing an attitude.

Randall: "Do I have to put it in writing that you are a danger to my child Olivia? You almost took my daughter away from me, and that is something I will never forgive. Now get the hell out of my house, you're pissing me off."

He's soft spoken but still holds the anger. Olivia glares at me then back at him.

Olivia: "This is not over Randall, I'm coming back for my child."

Randall: "Yeah, get out."

She scurries out.

I haven't moved an inch as I'm left mystified by what just happened, I have seen a different side to Randall today.

He looks at me and I look away, maybe I should've walked out when they started quarrelling but I am not allowed to move without him saying so.

Randall: "Shall we go?"

I get up and walk before him, his eyes are stabbing me from the back as I feel him watching me.

To be continued...



27\*

NTOMBI\*

I find Moses in the living room, carrying a plastic jug filled with brownish liquid. He's chanting words I can't make out.

Me: "Moses, what are you doing?"

He's startled as he swivels and almost drops the jug.

Moses: "Eish, Ntombi maan. Ufunani?" (What do you want?)

He whispers, seemingly annoyed. I understand the reason behind him whispering because Mhambi and Petunia are sleeping in Lelo's bedroom.

Me: "What are you doing?"

I move closer and grab the jug as he attempts to pull away, he looks nervous and he's starting to sweat. I sniff the jug, it smells like muti (traditional medicine.)

Me: "Please, tell me this is not what I think it is."

Moses: "Hey, give me that wena."

He snatches it and clicks his tongue.

Moses: "What are you doing here anyway? You are supposed to be sleeping."

Me: "And you thought it would give you a chance to practice witchcraft, while we are sleeping?"

This angers me a whole lot, I don't know what his intentions are. I don't trust him anymore since, he sold my niece off.

Moses: "Nx! Ungazobheda wena, witchcraft yani?" (Don't be ridiculous.)

Me: "Then, what are you doing Moses?"

I raise my voice and he smashes his hand on my mouth in attempts to shut me up.

He runs his eyes towards Lelo's room.

Moses: "You will wake them up."

He whispers before I push his hand away.

Me: "They have to wake up vele. What you're doing is evil Moses."

Moses: "Ntombi maan, lalela. This is to wear off evil spirits." (Listen)

He explains and it sounds crazy.

Me: "What evil spirits?"

Moses: "I went to see S'godi, he told..."

He's still whispering.

Me: "The sangoma?"

Moses: "Yes, he told me that Mhambi and Petunia came here with bad intentions."

Me: "Ini?" (What?)

I don't believe it.

Moses: "Yes, they took this Amara situation as an opportunity to come to my house. Our house s'thandwa sam' and kill us."

Now I know he's lying, he turns into a sweet person when he lies.

Me: "Never, not my brother."

Moses: "Lalela wena, they want this house and our money. The plan is to kill us and take over, once we are dead. I am not going to let that happen." (Listen.)

Me: "Moses, aren't you ashamed of lying. Uphila ngamanga nje, that's all you know." (You're always lying.)

Moses: "Ohoo! If you don't want to be protected then, it's fine. Bazokwenza umkhovu wena, kodwa qhubeka. Mina, I will protect myself and my home." (They will turn you into a zombie, but continue.)

Me: "I will not let you do this in my house Moses, if this was the truth then why didn't you take me along with you to see S'godi?"

Moses: "It just happened nje, I was passing by his house and I decided to go greet him. That's when he told me all of this."

Yeah right...

Me: "Moses, ang'dlali nawe. Don't sprinkle that thing in my house. Since when do we do such things?" (I'm not playing with you.)

Moses: "Since our lives turned upside down. Look at Lelo, she fell pregnant and disgraced us. I was forced to disown my only child. You think I did that because I wanted to? It was not a coincidence? They obviously did something Ntombi, they turned me into this cold hearted man. I refuse to fall victim to witch craft. Your family is evil Ntombi. Do you really think they are sleeping in there? I bet you, if we go into that room we won't find anyone. They are night walkers those two, baya thakatha labantu." (Those people practise witchcraft.)

Nx!

I'm left speechless, hence I walk back to the bedroom.

## STYLES\*

This whole thing is messed up, I was shocked to find Khethu's mother attacking her while she was trying to pull off from her grip. How does a mother hate her child like that? I saw the hatred in her eyes and it's sickening.

Something is amiss and I intend to find out what. This guy's number is on speed dial, he can get me what I want.

"Bozza yama bozza." (Boss of the bosses)

He's always high spirited, this is Neo. He owns an IT company in Pretoria, we studied physical and biological sciences together. I don't know how he took the IT route, I guess physics was too hard for him.

Me: "Let Randall hear you say that."

He laughs.

Neo: "Ah bozza. How is oga doing?"

This idiot and that time he's using a Nigerian accent.

Randall hated it when he called him that.

Me: "Let him hear you say that as well."

Neo: "Eish, entlek Stylos, is die man okay? He's too serious for my liking man." (Actually Styles, is that man okay?)

He complains.

Randall doesn't gel well with him, he finds him too forward and annoying. Which he is.

Me: "Hey, I didn't call you to talk about Randall. I have a job for you."

Neo: "Speak to me Stylos, thuma mina." (Send me.)

He hums in a high-pitched voice.

Me: "I need information on Nobayeni Dladla, formerly known as Mdluli."

Neo: "You're a mastermind Stylos, you can find legotlo lama gouwa bare ke Stuart little among those rats in Alex. Why ubatla gore ke chunne spaan se? Don't tell me you're losing your touch bozza. It means there's no hope for the rest of us moes, I'm not ready to retire nna." (Stuart little the mouse.) (Why do you want me to do this job?)

Me: "Fuck off Neo, why do you like off-ramping?" (Going off-topic)

He laughs.

Neo: "Hade Stylos, energy yaka e ko cloud nine vandag. Ek is baie gelukkig." (Sorry Styles, my energy is on cloud nine today. I'm very happy.)

Me: "Your energy is always fucking too high, you better not be on drugs ntwana." (Boy)

Neo: "Me? Never Stylos, my mother is a Christian. Die vrou can pray in tongues, she will spot that demon from a distance. You know, speaking of demons. You should bring oga, so she prays for him. I promise you, he will be laughing like an idiot once she's done with him." (The woman.)

Me: "Uyinja ntwana. Maybe you should call me when you've decided to grow up." (You're a bastard boy)

Neo: "Eish, askies bozza. You know this is a sickness, I can't control. I tend to blabber, I was born talking you know. My mother says..." (Sorry boss.)

Me: "Shut the fuck up."

Nx!

Me: "Just get me that info Neo, I want it before you go to bed."

Neo: "Aah, o lata jy. I'm already in bed Stylos." (You're late.)

I need strength for this.

Me: "Are you even listening to me?"

Neo: "Sho, sho ngamla." (Yes, boss.)

Me: "You are draining bruh."

He laughs.

Neo: "But wait, Dladla? Ke yena ma O'lady wa ga Khethu moes?" (She's Khethu's mother?)

Me: "Yeah."

Neo: "Shit! What did she do?"

Me: "Let's just say, I'm about to turn her world upside down."

He goes into another roll of laughter.

Neo: "Go easy on her Stylos, ke mamazali wa gago." (She's your mother- in-law)

Me: "Get on it Neo."

Neo: "Sho, sho bozza." (Yes boss.)

He sings.

Neo: "Kea zwaka jozi beke e latelang. Please tell Chioma to prepare egusi, soup, pepe soup and that rice they always eat in the movies. The one with one big piece of chicken. Jollof rice, yes. I want to feel like a chief hee, Chief Neo Chukwudoro Ugezu." (I'm coming to Joburg next week.)



Sigh.

Why am I still listening to him blabber on?

Me: "Chukwu what?"

Neo: "Chukwudoro Ugezu, my Nigerian name. It seems like anyone can be a chief in Nigeria, so I might just be lucky. You should think of one too, I can help you. I know a lot of Nigerian names."

I stop myself from laughing because he will think that I am contributing to his craziness.

Me: "To start off, it's pepper soup and tell Chioma yourself. I am not your errand boy."

He laughs before I drop the call, Neo can go on the whole day.

Nobayeni Dladla, hold on to your seat, the ride is about to get bumpy.

RANDALL\*

This is not the way I wanted Amara to find out about Liyana.

Now, I'm watching her as she's perched on the bed. Her head is bowed and her fingers are keeping her hand company as she squeezes them in agitation.

I know she's waiting for me to leave so she can sleep, but I can't. My feet are frozen, I can't seem to walk out of this room. Something deeper than me is drawing me to her, all I can think of now is being in her presence. Even if I keep my distance from her, as long as my eyes can still see her.

Amara: "I would like to get some sleep."

Her soft voice makes my heart dance, she hardly says a word to me and this right here, means everything to me.

Me: "I'm not stopping you."

She raises her head, looking rather alarmed. I smirk at her and she drops her eyes.

Amara: "I can't sleep while you're in here."

Me: "Why not?"

Her eyes shoot up again, this time, annoyance fill her eyes.

Me: "I like this me hemma. You, talking to me." (My Queen)

I introduce as I waddle towards her, she scoots away from me when I sit next her. I grab hold of her hand as she tries to stand, she falls on my chest and swiftly moves back. She can't go far because my arm is circled around her waist. I am mesmerised by her sweet scent.

Me: "Where are you going princess? I just want to see you from a close range."



I pull her closer to me, the plan is to shut this space between us.

She looks anxious, I take her cheek into the palm of my hand. It feels like she belongs here, in my arms and I know she does.

How did this woman change my life in the blink of an eye?

Me: "Don't worry me hemma, I won't touch you without your permission." (My queen.)

I declare as I push my forehead against hers, her lower lip is quivering and I'm tempted to take her lips into mine. I feel her body tremble against mine. She has her wrist pressed against my chest, her efforts to create a hedge between us. I hate that, anything that would threaten me getting closer to her.

Me: "Tell me princess. How long will you starve me of you? How long do I have to endure this suffering?"

I whisper in her ear, her body shivers and I hold her closer. She's fidgeting.

Amara: "What do you want from me?"

Her voice halts, I would hate to see her cry but I can't seem to move away from her.

Me: "I crave for you Amara, I want to feel your skin on mine. I want to taste your lips and I long to see you smiling back at me."

I blurt out my desires and selfishness while looking into her eyes.

Amara: "I am not yours to have and I will never be yours to keep."

Her resistance only makes me want her more.

Me: "Let me be the judge of that."

Amara: "Please, let me be."

Her eyes plead on her behalf, and I have no choice but to grant her wish.

STYLES\*

I can't stand to see Khethu cry.

Me: "Baby."

She's under a bed cover, her whole body completely covered. I position myself on the edge of the bed.

Me: "Khethu, come out of there?"

She continues crying without a word, this breaks my heart.

Me: "Won't you let me hold you?"

Khethu: "No."

She whimpers.

Me: "Are you sure?"

She's quiet for a while...

Khethu: "I want you to hold me Styles."

Me: "Then, come out of there."

Khethu: "No, I'm embarrassed."

She voices out.

Me: "Of what?"

Khethu: "Everything, I'm sorry we disrespected your house."

Me: "You don't have to apologize my love, I'm worried about you. I can't imagine how you must be feeling right now."

Khethu: "I want to die."

She cries.

Her words have me pull the bed cover off as they make me angry, she sits up rapidly and looks at me. Her pain- filled eyes, turned into a circus of tears.

Me: "Don't ever say that to me again. Do you hear me?"

She nods, suddenly shocked by my retort.

Me: "Everything will be okay, I will fix this okay?"

I assure her as I cradle her cheek in my hand, she nods.

Me: "Now stop crying, it doesn't suit you. You're one of the ugly criers."

She laughs and hides her face on my chest as I pull her into my arms. I press my chin on the top of her head, while drawing circles on her back.

Me: "You will be okay my love, you'll see."

To be continued...



AMARA\*

I don't know what Randall meant by the words he spoke and my mind was too occupied to actually dwell on that. I have set my plan in motion. I'm leaving this place, although, the way I have chosen is not ideal but, there is no other way out. This place is a hovel, I just want to fade away into oblivion, where I will cease to exist. Then, we'll see how powerful Randall thinks he is.

Everything is thought of and ready, there were a few bed sheets I found somewhere in the closet. I had tied them together, making a rope and I found the perfect spot to do what I need to do. There's a clothing rail in the closet, it's long enough. I tie the rope I made on the rail, stand on a chair and put the noose over my head.

I am terrified to death but, there is no way out of this.

Only death can set me free. I have never thought of dying or how death would summon me, neither have I looked into life after death.

Where will I go when my soul leaves my body? Will it be the end of me or, is there a place I go to. Will I find my parents waiting for me?

The thought of seeing them again makes this all worth it.

This is more painful than I thought, it was supposed to be easy, painless and quick. It's too late to turn back now, I've kicked the chair to the side. My legs are dangling from the ground. I don't struggle with the rope because, I want it to be painless. But, I'm fooling myself.

Tears gush out of my eyes as, I feel life being sucked out of me, the room becomes vague and it feels like it's closing in on me. I feel a deep fade-away. Randall's face flashes before me.

I don't know why but, I don't think he's the last person I want to see before I die. My jumbled brain can only entertain thoughts of him in these last moments, the sound of his voice. His arm on my waist, the feel of his hand on my cheek and that brush. That gentle soft brush on my lips, that made my body shiver with pleasure. I was ashamed that I would feel like that with this man that I do not know.

I hear the sound of the door being kicked open, I remember I had locked it from the inside.

"AMARA!!!"

His panicky voice booms, I hear his heavy feet running towards the closet. I could be hallucinating or my brain is shutting down but, for a second as I drift away, I long to see his face before I go away.

My wish is granted as he dashes into the dressing room, his face is blurred and immediately, my

soul is jolted away.

NOMBULELO\*

Nurse: "I'm sorry sisi, we can't keep you here for another night. We need the bed."

Me: "Please nurse, try to understand my situation. I have nowhere else to go."

She seems like a nurse person hence, I'm pleading with her that she lets me stay one more day till I make a plan.

Nurse: "This is not a hotel, there are patients who need the bed."

Me: "I am begging you sisi, I'm pregnant and Vaal is not a safe place for a young woman like me. I don't have anyone."

Nurse: "I'm sorry, I can't afford to lose my job. Please, come sign the discharge papers."

My tears are not being fair right now.

What am I going to do?

Maybe if I go back home they will let me in, like the saying 'Sleep on it'.

Hopefully my father has slept on it and has realized his mistakes as a father, maybe this time he will protect me like he was meant to. I can't live like an orphan when both my parents are still alive.

My bag is at Zuma's place. How will I take it without seeing him?

The thought of seeing him again makes my skin crawl, to think that he's the only love I have ever known and was the best love I had ever tasted. Zuma had brought joy upon my life, he filled it with dreams and he had become my safe haven. I trusted he will catch me when I fall but, he had no intentions to catch me.

I never knew that such pain existed. I had been a fool, building all my hopes around him.

As I mull over the words of the nurse from last night, I want to fly away and never look back but, Zuma has taken my wings with him. He plucked them out with no care at all and it scares me to think that I would go back. Betrayal and dishonesty, this is where he dwells now. These have become closest to his heart and he seems to love them more than he ever loved me. He has become a stranger with a heart of ice. Maybe I never really knew him but, why do I want him more than I did before? I want my wings back and I yearn to fly again, I can't stand the ground. I want to be where he put me when he looked at me with love in his eyes, right up in the sky and I hate myself for seeing a human behind that evil veil.

NTOMBI\*

Petunia has made my kitchen hers, she has prepared a full breakfast for her husband. Moses and Mhambi are in the living room, no one is talking to anyone. Moses is watching TV and laughing like he doesn't care, it's a mocking laugh. One that says, this is my house.

I let Petunia serve them, she feels important when she's in charge. Being a house wife is her speciality and she loves it.

Mhambi: "My wife and I have been talking."

Moses chuckles and sips tea loudly, he doesn't even look at Mhambi. His eyes are still glued on the TV.

Mhambi: "We have to find my brother's child by all means and there's only one way to do that."

Me: "What is it?"

Mhambi: "A seer."

Moses chokes on his food, we watch him as he coughs. Spitting whatever is in his mouth on the floor.

Me: "Moses? Yini?" (What's wrong?)

I rub his back, he pushes my hand away.

Moses: "Ang'zwanga Mhambi, utheni?" (I didn't hear what you said.)

Petunia: "You heard him well Moses."

Moses: "Habe!!! Ngabe ngiya lingwa yini? You want to bring a witch into my house?" (Am I being tested?)

He shouts.

Mhambi: "She is not a witch Moses, she's a sangoma and a prophet."

Moses: "Ayikho lento Mhambi." (There is no such thing)

Me: "Moses please, listen to them at least."

He shakes his head but, listens anyway.

Mhambi: "She will tell us what happened to Amara and where she is."

Moses: "Amasimba k'phela lawo. Nginibhekile nina nobabili. You want to bring bad spirits into my house. Ang'shongo Ntombi, ang'shongo?" (That's bullshit) (I am watching you both.) (Didn't I tell you Ntombi?)

Mhambi: "Ihaba ngelani Moses?" (Why are you exaggerating?)

Me: "Moses please, don't do this. Let Mhambi explain."

Moses: "So you want me to sit here and listen to this nonsense? Angeke shame." (Never)



He takes his plate and gets up.

Moses: "I can't even eat in peace in my own house. What kind of nonsense is this? Huh ahh Mhambi, huh ahh maan." (No Mhambi.)

He complains as he makes his way to the kitchen.

Petunia looks shocked by his reaction towards the whole issue, I'm baffled as well. It's strange how he is against consulting a seer while he was busy sprinkling muti (traditional medicine) last night. I trust my brother and we are going to see that woman.

KHETHU\*

This has always been a dream of mine, being woken up with kisses like this. And only by this beautiful topless man on top of me, he smiles the moment my eyes meet his.

Styles: "Hi."

Me: "Hi."

Honestly, four years later and I'm still blushing.

Me: "You're an early bird today."

Styles: "You were snoring, so that contributed to my lack of sleep."

He teases.

Me: "I do not snore."

I protest, defensively.

Styles: "I knew you wouldn't believe me so, I recorded you."

What? I gasp in shock and amusement.

Me: "You didn't?"



Styles: "I can play it right now."

He says, reaching for his phone.

Me: "Styles, don't even humour."

I laugh as I slap his hand, he smiles and puts the phone back on the bed side table.

Styles: "I'm kidding baby."

He scans my lips as he says that, I love how he looks at me like it's the first time.

Me: "What are you looking at?"

I ask in a soft tone, my heart is already thudding against my chest. I'm pretty sure he can feel it as he's on top of me.

Styles: "My only eye."

I laugh, he holds this serious face. His fingers have been massaging my hair.

Me: "You're sticking to that?"

Styles: "Yes, only this way, you will always know that I will never fathom to look at another woman."

My heart leaps in hearing those words, I don't know what I did right to have him love me like this. But, whatever it is, is sure working in my favour.

His lips press against mine and in a second, we are lost in each other as he kisses me like it's the last time. His hand automatically runs to my thighs, I feel it slither its way up.

Me: "What are you doing?"

I whisper as I'm almost out of breath. His face holds a gentle frown.

Styles: "Having my breakfast."

Trust Styles to say that.

Styles: "And, it's a good thing you slept naked. Less work for me."

Lord help me...

He utters and I frown smile at his stupidity.

He doesn't give me a chance to respond but, takes my lips into his again. I'm not about to argue with him, not when he's kissing me like this. He pulls back, looks at me and flashes a ghostly smile, I'm too nervous to smile back. He uses the tip of his index finger to trace the edges of my upper mouth before substituting it with the tip of his tongue, this time only tracing the ends of my upper lip.

A ticklish feeling ripples through me and I shiver with desire. He kisses my lips playfully over and over, his other hand hasn't left my head as he gently massages my scalp. I'm already turned on by all these stimulations, I giggle at the feel of his warm tongue behind my ear. He bites my earlobe before nibbling on it.

Me: "Styles."

My dry mouth rejects my voice as it pushes out, emitting as a grating sound.

He whispers sexy things and what he wants to do to me while blowing mildly in my ear.

Me: "I love you Styles."

I murmur softly into his ear. With my hands gently fondling up and down his spine, I browse the inside of his ear with the tip of my tongue, before capturing his earlobe casually between my teeth. I feel him shiver against me, he raises his head and his lust-filled eyes smile at me. At this point, my arousal is built up and I'm as wet as a lake.

He plants trails of wet kisses up and down my neck tracing his way down to my chest. His tongue explores my collarbone, playing around the gouge that links it with my neck. In the meanwhile, he trails his index finger down my shoulder in a circular motion. His mouth opts for that spot on my shoulder and before I know it he's found his way to my bosom, his favourite





place as I know it.

He's nibbling and sucking on my nipples, my body shivers as it feels like the sensations have doubled. He looks at me with a mischievous smile, bites his lower lip before muttering softly.

Styles: "I want to taste you."

All of that combined drive me crazy. He gets up, pulls my body to the edge of the bed. He goes on his knees, plunges his tongue inside me and I yelp as my hips buck up to his mouth. He presses his hand on my stomach, keeping me rooted while, lunging his tongue in and out of me. My loud moans fill the room as I cling on the bed sheet, he moves his tongue out, leers at me and smirks.

Styles: "You taste so good."

I smile, timidly.

His finger serves as a substitute for his tongue, as he plunges it inside me. I am declared powerless in this sensational moment- my senses go on time out, as he adds another finger, moving them around my clitoris in a twisting motion. I feel a pulsing ticklish hot wave from between my legs moving to my finger tips and my toes. A squeal floods out of my mouth as I orgasm and I'm flattered by another sneer from him when my eyes meet his. I find myself smiling while shaking my head at his craziness.

To be continued...



NOMBULELO\*

The taxi drops me right at my father's gate, I'm not sure if he's home. Come to think of it, I don't know what he does. He doesn't have normal working hours, he's at home more, than he's at work. The door is not locked, it means someone is at home.

Me: "Mama."

I don't know why I'm calling out to her because she's usually at work around this time. No one answers, I should be trembling with fear, since the events that happened last time I was here. But, I feel at home.

I am so hungry, hopefully there's food left from this morning. I left the hospital around 9am and it's almost 12pm now. There's scrambled eggs left in a pan, this will do with bread. My mother must've left the house in a hurry, she always cleans her kitchen before going out.

I troll around the house, as I wait for the microwave to count down.

Their bedroom is empty, good, because there's something I need just in case things don't go according to plan, I will need protection.

I make a cup of rooibos tea. But, the smell of eggs is getting to me. I can't seem to stomach the food, I force the sourness down and continue eating. Half way done, I feel a rush of bile surge up my stomach, as the nausea claws at my throat. I make it to the bathroom in time and my head is dipped in the toilet bowl in a second.

My stomach contracts violently as chunks of partially digested bread spew out of me continually, I heave a few times till only a clear liquid comes out. My abrasive throat drowns in soreness and I'm disgusted by the foul smell and nauseating image before me. It forces me to heave again but, nothing comes out. I swiftly shut the toilet bowl and flush before pushing my weak body towards the sink to rinse the bitter taste in my mouth.

"When you're done, ngicela ungiphumele kwam'." (Please get out of my house.)

I turn frantically, to meet my father's sullen face. He's standing at the door way and he looks disgusted by me.

Me: "Dad?"

My tears seek attention immediately, without a warning.

Moses: "What are you doing here?"

Me: "Dad..."

Moses: "Who let you in?"

Me: "The door was open dad so..."

Moses: "So, you broke into my house Nombulelo?"

Me: "I didn't break in dad..."

Moses: "Ngempela? Here you are standing in front of me. I told you never to set foot in my house again and you go against my word." (Really?)

Me: "Dad, I didn't go agai..."

Moses: "Thula!!! I'm still talking. Ngiyalubeka nawe uyalubeka? Ang'zwani ne ngane engalawuleki mina." (You're quarrelling with me.) (I don't like unruly kids)

He shouts.

Moses: "Nombulelo? Do you know the pain you have caused me? Ungihlambalazile emphakathini. Abantu baphuza itiyi ngami Nombulelo. I believed in you, I thought you were going to put me on the map." (You embarrassed me in the community, people talk about me behind my back.)

Moses: "Why did you do this? Why did you have to go and sleep around like a prostitute? What is it that your mother and I didn't give you Nombulelo? You had everything."

I don't have answers for him. How do I tell my father that, his little girl fell in love and gave in to temptations and desires?

Moses: "Ngikhuluma nawe, ng'phendule." (I'm talking to you, answer me.)

He barks and I wince as his voice catches me off guard.

Me: "But you said I should keep quiet."

I know I shouldn't have said that.

Moses: "Yazi Lelo, inqodo awunazo. That's why you're in this situation, I am not going to support another man's child. And I can't look past your mistakes, you dragged my name down the drain." (You don't think.)

Me: "I'm sorry dad, please forgive me."

Moses: "You are not my daughter anymore remember? You're dead Nombulelo, you have no place with the living. So you're wasting your time with your sob stories and fake apologies."

Does this father hear himself?

Me: "Daddy please, I have nowhere to go. Zuma has..."

His deepens his gaze on me.

Moses: "Is that his name?"

I nod.

Moses: "Did he do this to you?"

I nod and my tears mock me.

Moses: "Did you report him?"

I shake my head as I drop my gaze. I can't stand the way he's looking at me right now. I have disappointed him and broke his heart.

Moses: "Please go."

I leer at him, dazed by his request.

Me: "Daddy."

Moses: "I don't want to drag you out Nombulelo so, it would be better if you leave on your own accord.

Me: "But where am I supposed to go dad, I don't have a place to sleep."

Moses: "I would've cared if you were my daughter but, right now, I don't know this woman standing before me."

So, I have been relegated from his little girl to a woman. I was supposed to be his little girl forever.

Me: "Daddy, you're breaking my heart."

I declare as I wipe my tears.

Moses: "My heart is broken too Nombulelo. I'm not going to ask you again, leave my house."

He demands and I know he's dead serious, the look on his face proves it.

Me: "Daddy it's me, you precious Lelo."

I remind him of what he used to call me as I plod towards him, I see a glint of guilty in his eyes. Maybe this little girl mode is working on him after all, it has to or else I'll be out on the streets.

He grabs hold of my hand and begins to drag me outside, he pushes me out the door and looks at me with pain in his eyes before, shutting the door on my face. I break down right there, wailing for my father and the love he promised me. The world will swallow me without his fortification, I won't make it out there. Why won't you see my heart daddy? Why won't you shelter me?

AMARA\*

It seems I am fated to be here, death has failed me. I tempted it and it rejected me before I could even embrace it. I was ready to claim it as my own but, I was repulsive to it as it spewed me out like bitter gourd. Tears glide on the side of my face as I apprehend that Randall will

always win over me, his poise stands that even death bows down to him.

“Hi. How are you feeling?”

The doctor smiles at me, I have never seen him before. The fact that he’s here proves that he works for Randall, or I would’ve been taken to the hospital. My throat is painful so, I can’t speak. He sees me rubbing my throat and hands me a glass of water with a straw. He helps me to drink...

“AMARA!!!!”

A demonic growl echoes from the corridor and shivers runs through me. I scream and jump from the bed as weak as I am, when he scurries into the room charging at me. He looks scary, I have seen his angry sides but, this one takes the cup. He’s wheezing and only anger resides on his face.

My back hits the wall and I stifle a scream, knowing he has cornered me. One move and I’m dead, if I smart, I will stand still. He pushes his body against mine completely crowding my space. He grips my upper arms and I wince in pain and fright, his eyes look like they could kill. They are heavy and stony.

Randall: “So, you decided to consult death, thinking it will pave a way for your escape?”

He growls.

Doctor: “Randall, what are you doing?”

Randall: “Stay out of this Mbuso.”

He roars while still vacantly glaring at me, my eyes are on his as they willing me to ogle into them.

Mbuso: “Randall this is wrong, she’s not strong yet.”

Randall: “I swear Mbuso, if you don’t fucking get out of here...”

He threatens, I can’t see Mbuso as he’s standing behind Randall but, he sounds fearful, not as terrified as I am though.

My body hasn’t stopped palpitating with horror while, my tears are painting my face with colours of fear and grief and he is not bothered. His anger has consumed him, it has taken full control of his emotions. I see it in his eyes, I feel it in his heavy breathing as it emanates in and out of his nostrils, smashing against my face.

Mbuso: “No Randall...”

He stands ground and that’s when everything goes downhill, as Randall swivels and charges at him like a raging bull that’s being taunted with a red flag. Mbuso staggers back, his feet leading him towards the door. Randall pushes him out with such force that he stumbles to a point of almost falling.

He bangs the door closed and locks it before preying on me again but, this time he saunters

towards me. My mind is at sixes and sevens as I fail to apprehend the motive behind his wrath. I coo with fright as I try to run towards the bathroom and he grabs me, his arm ringing my waist.

He pins me against his body, tightening the grip on my waist. He's looking down at me and I don't have the forte to lower my head, it's that hypnotic look that's got me in this shameful stance. That even if I want to, I can't get away from him. He derives a powerful dark aura and it has numbed every bone in my body.

Randall: "Don't challenge me Amara, the beast in me is not tamed. You're standing on its tail and you won't like my growl."

My heart hits rock bottom at his words.

I knew he was a beast but, this is beyond me. I am petrified but, looking into his stagnant eyes, I see a twitch of anguish.

I gasp when my back hits against the wall. I don't know how we moved but, his body is pushing against mine. My heart feels like it's about to jump out of my chest.

Randall: "How dare you not listen to me?"

He grumbles through greeted teeth, I can't push him away, nor can I ask him to stop. I'm bounded by his eyes - his arms, his body and his words of fury. I can't help but notice this elephant in the room as he scans my lips with that frown on his face. He cups my cheek in the palm of his hand, my lips quiver as I predict what is about to happen.

Randall: "Dammit, you drive me crazy Amara."

My mind goes on vacation when he smashes his lips against mine, as if trying to flatten and abolish my mouth. I don't respond to it, instead try to push him back. But it's futile, I'm a toddler struggling to push a train.

He's strong. My knees weaken, as he pushes his tongue through my clenched teeth, like it's desperately searching for mine. It triumphs over my stubbornness and I find myself kissing him back, it feels like I am frozen in a moment in time.

I swear, I can hear his heart racing as if it's competing with mine. I feel my feet leave the ground, only to realize he has winched me up. I grab hold of his shoulders so I don't fall. His arm is supporting my back, while his hand cradles my cheek. My feet touch the ground as he pulls back from the kiss, leaving me breathless and my wobbly knees fail to support my legs. He still has me in his arms as he's leering down at me. I can't look at him, a wave of embarrassment has engulfed me.

Randall: "Try that stunt again Amara and I will bring you back from the dead. I don't know how but, I will do it so help me God and you will be sorry you went against me."

He mumbles in a dark threatening tone while his forehead is pressed against mine. He releases me from his clutch, steps back with a smirk on his face and walks out. My body slips to the floor as I try to balance my breathing.

What the hell just happened?



I fell weak in his arms. How will I look at him now without feeling awkward? And that anger he portrayed is somewhat strange.

It baffles me as to why Randall goes absolutely mad about my attempts to escape, they seem to bring out the beast in him. In his human days, you'd wonder what lies behind that normal unsmiling face. And the black clothing that seem to match his demeanour, they conclude that he would be an awfully scary man to love. In my conclusion, loving this man would be like loving a demon.

NTOMBI\*

I had no choice but to go against Moses and bring the seer to the house, maybe when he sees her he will understand that we need help. I might not have been a good parent to Amara but, I owe it to my late brother to bring her back home and Moses will never willingly tell me who took her.

Me: "You can take a sit, I will go call Moses."

I instruct the seer, Mhambi and Petunia lead her to the living room while I go fetch Moses. He's probably sleeping because I know that he didn't go to work today.

My guess is right, he's snoring like his life is perfect.

Me: "Moses wake up."

I nudge him and he opens his eyes immediately.

Moses: "What happened?"

He rubs his eyes as he sits up.

Me: "There's a visitor, please come to the living room."

Moses: "Aaii Ntombi. So this is why you woke me up?"

He queries, looking rather annoyed.

Me: "Eish! Moses please, don't be difficult. Come and hear what she has to say."

Moses: "Who is this important person that I had to be disturbed from my sleep?"

Me: "You'll see."

He clicks his tongue but, gets out of bed anyway and follows me out to the living room. He stops at the door as he sees the woman dressed in African traditional clothes, we are all startled as a laugh erupts from his mouth.

Me: "Moses?"

Moses: "Don't mind me mkami, I think I'm losing my mind. Ntombi, awungitshele. Is there a



sangoma sitting on my couch right now or am I still sleeping and this is a bad dream?" (My wife.) (Ntombi tell me.)

Me: "Hau, Moses? What kind of a question is that?"

This man has too much drama for an old man.

Moses: "Hai, ngiyabuza nje. Ngempela, ngempela my word means nothing in this house angithi? Mhambi is now the man of this house? Sizwa ngo Mhambi manje? Kukhala esakhe is'cathulo?" (I'm just asking.) (Honestly) (Right.) (Mhambi sets the rules now, he is the man of this house?)

Mhambi: "Moses, we are trying to help Amara."

Moses: "AAii qhubekani. Akuna nkinga." (Continue, there's no problem.)

What just happened?

There's no way he can agree just like that."

Me: "Are you sure?"

I have to double check. You never know with this man.

Moses: "Yes, sit down. I will go and make tea for everyone."

Me: "No, I'll do it. You sit."

He's acting strange.

Moses: "No, no. Ntombi, I will do it."

He gestures me to sit and I have no choice but to do so. Mhambi and Petunia don't see what I see, that man is up to no good.

To be continued...



30\*

RANDALL\*

Chioma opens the door for Styles, I called him over. I need someone to talk to after what happened.

He smiles upon seeing Chioma.

Styles: "Wow, it's freezing outside."

He announces as he rubs his hands together.

Styles: "Ma?"

Chioma: "Styles, how are you? Are we playing hide and seek? I don't see you around anymore."

He chuckles while making his way in, I'm standing in the foyer waiting for their salutation to be over.

Styles: "I'm always here ma, this is basically my second home. You're the one who's hiding."

Chioma laughs.

Chioma: "I should cook for you one of these days, bring Khethu with. I miss her too."

Styles: "That will be great and that reminds me, Neo said he's coming over next week. He wants you to prepare all the Nigerian dishes for him."

Okay, this is taking longer than I anticipated.

Chioma laughs and shakes her head.

Chioma: "He de craze." (He's crazy.)

Styles sniggers at her retort.

Styles: "Exactly what I told him."

Me: "Chioma, please check on Liya."

She looks at me with a smile.

Chioma: "Sure... It was nice seeing you again my son."

Styles: "Likewise ma."

He ambles towards me as soon as Chioma walks away.

Styles: "I came as soon as I could. You look like shit."

Me: "I feel like shit. I think I'm losing my mind man."

I proclaim while leading us to the lounge area. There's a guard who walks out as we enter. I stride to the bar area to pour us some whiskey, I need something stiff to calm down.

Styles: "You smell like a chimney, don't tell me you're still stress smoking."

He speaks out as I hand him a glass and position myself on the opposite couch.

Me: "And who died and made you Chief Segun Okolie?"

He laughs.

Styles: "I can't believe she attempted suicide. How is she?"

Me: "Alive and in deep shit."

Styles: "What is that supposed to mean?"

Me: "I'm going to punish her."

He glowers at me.

Styles: "Don't be ridiculous Randall, you of all people should understand what she's going through."

Me: "No, what Amara did is stupid and selfish. She needs to account for her mistakes."

Styles: "Do you hear yourself Randall? That girl has been through enough."

Me: "Don't you think I know that Styles? But, it doesn't give her the reason to take her own life. Fuck! I almost lost my mind when I found her hanging..."

I can't even say it.

Me: "I don't think I will ever get that vision out of my head. I have never been scared of anything in my life Styles but, what I saw today killed me."

Styles: "I can only imagine."

Me: "I won't be okay till I punish her."

Styles: "No Randall, you will not expose Scar to that girl. She's too fragile."

Me: "You will not tell me what to do in this matter Styles, I have decided."

Styles: "I'm sorry Randy but, I won't allow you."

He argues. He never disputes with me.

Me: "Since when do you care about her?"

Styles: "It's you, I'm looking out for you Randall. I know you will hate yourself after this."

Me: "I am not a weakling Styles."

Styles: "No one said you are but, I know you love that girl even though you deny it. She lives in

you and you haven't acknowledged it yet."

Me: "Don't be ridiculous. My heart leaps a bit at the sight of her and you diagnose it as love. You know I have never been about that life."

Styles: "I would assume that Scar is the one who's in denial and not Randall."

Me: "That does not even make sense."

This thing of him splitting me into two is lame and imprudent.

Styles: "It does to me. Look, I suggest you talk to Amara and explain the whole situation to her. Tell her why she's here, tell her about Moses and Mkhize."

I have thought of that but...

Me: "Amara doesn't see me as human, she won't believe any word that comes out of my mouth."

Styles: "Try her, she might surprise you."

Me: "Then again, I don't want her to like me because I saved her from those men but, for who I really am."

Styles: "Would that be the old Randall or the one who belongs to Amara now?"

Me: "Fuck off."

He laughs.

Styles: "Have you realized that with every word you say, you declare your love for her? But yet, you insist that it is not love."

How can I agree to something I am not familiar with?

NTOMBI\*

Moses has been in the kitchen for too long, we can't commence without him. I hope he didn't go back to sleep.

Petunia: "Uphi u Nombulelo?" (Where is Nombulelo?)

Trust Petunia to raise this conversation, I have been avoiding it since they came here.

Mhambi: "Haibo!!! ingane ka malume bandla. I didn't realize that we didn't see her izolo the whole day. I thought she was at school but, she wasn't home this morning." (My niece) (Yesterday)

Petunia: "We've been caught up on finding Amara that we failed to recognize her absence. Iphi ingane Ntombi?" (Where is the child?)

The way these two go on, you would swear that Lelo and Amara are their children. How do I



even begin to tell them that Moses threw his daughter out of the house?

Our focus is captured by the seer's loud groans and burping.

Seer: "Iphi ingane sisi?" (Where is the child?)

Great!

As if Petunia and Mhambi asking me that wasn't enough, now I must answer to her. She'll know when I'm lying.

Seer: "You need to bring her home, there's a..."

Moses dashes into the living room, he's carrying a pot of steaming water and he's headed towards the seer. We all jump up screaming while she runs towards the door screaming out loud.

Me: "Moses!!!"

I shout.

Petunia: "Oh Jesu!!!" (Jesus)

She screams.

Moses: "Voetsek, phuma kwami." (Piss off, get out of my house.)

He attempts to splash the boiling water on her and she staggers back screaming.

Me: "Moses, wenzani?" (What are you doing?)

Seer: "Petunia, Is this what you called me here for?"

Mhambi: "Moses, unga yenzi lento. Uzosisola." "(Don't do that, you'll regret it.)"

Moses: "Yeyi, ningi jwayela kabi nina. Ngifuna lomthakathi aphume aphele emzini wam' manje." (I want this witch out of my house, now.)

Seer: "Ubiza bani ngo 'mthakathi?" (Who are you calling a witch?)

Moses: "Habe!!! Usase la?" (You're still here.)

He shouts, he's been shouting and he's not about to stop.

Petunia: "This man is crazy, this is insane."

Moses: "Vele ngiyahlanya Petunia. You want to see how crazy I am?" (Yes I'm crazy.)

He splashes the water on the seer's feet and she jerks up and runs out the door. Moses rushes out, I think to make sure she goes out of the gate. We follow behind.

Seer: "Uzonya wena, libambe linga shoni." (You will regret this.)

She shouts as she marches out the gate.

Moses: "Nawe, libambe linga shoni mthakathi." (You too, you witch)

He shouts back, we are left stunned.

Moses: "Nx! Ngi la ngani. One more move Mhambi and you will leave my house." (I have had it with you people.)

He clicks his tongue, spills the water on the grass and walks back into the house. As usual people are watching this drama, we are now known as 'that' family.

AMARA\*

Chioma: "How can you be so stupid and selfish Amara?"

Chioma yells as she walks into the room, she decided not to knock today. I sit up from the bed.

Me: "Please lower your voice, my head is aching."

I disclose, while massaging my head.

Chioma: "It should hurt. What the hell did you expect?"

She's still shouting and she's standing before me with her hands on her hips. I frown at her angry face as I fail to understand why she's acting up like this.

Me: "I don't know what you think I did but, I don't like your tone Chioma."

Chioma: "You're a child Amara and I will chastise you like one."

I didn't know she could be this strict.

Me: "What did I do?"

Her frown grows.

Chioma: "Wow! So, you don't see anything wrong with trying to take your own life?"

Oh!!!

Why is she making a big deal out of this? If she knew what I am going through, she wouldn't be judging me like this.

Me: "What would you have me do Chioma?"

Chioma: "Do you hear yourself Amara?"

Me: "Yes, I want to die Chioma. It's the only way I will be free from this place. I don't want to be here."

She stares at me for a while as if searching for something in me.

Chioma: "So, you're ready to leave him."

I don't know what she's getting at.

Me: "Who?"

Chioma: "Randall, you're ready to walk away and forget that he exist."

Me: "If I say yes, will he let me go?"

Chioma: "Why are you accustomed to playing games?"

Me: "This is not a game, this is my life. I didn't ask to be here Chioma. Why is it about him, when I'm the one who was wronged?"

Her remarks about Randall are befuddling, her words are vague as she's not clear on specifics.

Chioma: "I hope you understand what you have done because Uze will not let this pass."

Her words shake the ground underneath me. I have seen what he is capable of, and it scares me to think I will be punished for this. She leaves me to my misery, my mind goes back to thinking about him. 'Nothing is as it seems', these are the words he held last night. What could it be? Why am I being kept in the dark?

RANDALL\*

Styles: "If you're going to drink that much, stay away from Amara. You might scare her with your drunken eyes."

He voices out as I pour another glass of whiskey.

How can I not drink, this is the only thing that is keeping me sane right now. My mind is all over the place, there's this thing that's pushing against my heart and I'm trying so hard to fight it. But, it seems I am losing to it.

Kissing Amara was not planned at all, I had promised that I will never touch her without her permission. Having her close to me like that, feeling her heart beat against my chest.

The fear in her eyes, her trembling lips. I knew I had to taste them or else I would regret it if I didn't. Right in that very moment, I felt like a traveller lost in a desert with no water or food to keep me alive.

I needed to breathe, I wanted to live and only she held the breath my soul was yearning for. I knew that I was sure going to die if I didn't taste her tempting lips and now, what I was afraid of has happened. My addiction for her has reached its maximum.

I might deny it to Styles and can never say it out loud but, my heart cannot deny what it wants and it is calling out for Amara.

Me: "You know I find your sense of humour rather tasteless."

He laughs, I'm used to his crude jokes. This is what he does when he senses that I'm flustered, it's his way to try and make me feel better.

What a brother he has been to me and I cannot ask for better.

Styles: "You find everything tasteless. You know, I was talking to Neo, apparently he wants his mother to pray for you."

I doubt this is something I want to entertain.

Me: "What for?"

Styles: "You have a demon."

He laughs, I don't find it funny at all.

Me: "That idiot is still alive?"

He's a nuisance, honestly.

Styles: "Yeah and he's coming to Joburg next week."

Me: "That's if his baby mama lets him, that woman has him tied around her waist."

Styles: "I wonder how he still talks too much, I thought he would be restrained by now."

The raucous sound of a ringing phone draws our attention.

Styles: "Wow. It's him."

He gives me a look I cannot make out.

Styles: "Mention the devil..."

I chuckle at the inside joke.

Me: "And he will appear."

He sneers as he takes the call.

Styles: "Neo."

He puts him on loud speaker.

Neo: "Awe, awe ngamla, o reng bozza." (How are you, boss?)

Styles: "You're late, Neo."

Neo: "Sorry bozza, eish. Mamazala came out clean so, I had to dig deeper. With this one. I had to put my IT skills on the shelf. And go 1950's on it. You know before there was the internet and shit. So, my brother's friend's friend helped me with this one. I emailed everything to you."

Styles: "Great, I'll have a look at it."



Neo: "So, bonus nyana Stylos? Akere we are dealing le mamazala mo, so eish die spaan is nie pap 'n vleis nie." (How about a bonus Styles) (This job is not easy, since you're investigating your mother-in-law.)

I saw this coming. This clown will never change.

Styles: "Hey, don't practice your tsotsi on me twana. Bonus yama simba." (You want a bonus for what?)

Neo: "Aii bophelo bo tata maan, motho a re o zama life mo. Anyway. Did you give Chioma my message?" (Life is hard.)

He's complaining, nothing we are not used to.

Me: "What do you want with Chioma?"

I jump in.

Neo: "Ahh! Oga? How far?" (Boss, how is everything?)

I don't know what gave him the idea that I'm Nigerian, this fool is too much.

Me: "Fuck you. Who is oga?"

Neo: "Ahh, ahh! Oga, wetin dey happen? You too dey tear head." (Boss, what's going on? You are too short-tempered.)

Styles: "Here we go."

He laughs as he says this.

Neo: "Weitsi ubatla speiti or brook-lux. Eish, but your wahala is too big oga. I think stamina will help you, I don't know if you will find it at checkers. But ba di rekisa mo di spaza shop, I will bring it with me when I come next week. But you will have to pay me. Three to four hours in the toilet and you will come out holy, you will even open up a church. Pastor Uze Okolie." (You need anema, but your problem is too big for that boss.) (They sell stamina at the tuck shops.)

What the hell is he on about?

Me: "The one who needs help here is you s'dididi. Why does your mother leave you behind when she goes to church?" (Fool.)

Styles laughs.

Styles: "You need Jesus ntwana, that demon in you will get you killed." (Boy.)

Neo laughs, he doesn't seem to be offended.

Me: "Do you know you're a father now? So this craziness you have going on there must stop."

Neo: "I sabi." (I know.)

Styles vents in laughter.





I'm defeated and where the hell did he learn Nigerian pidgin?

Neo: "I must go, I have work to do. The pampers won't buy themselves. I don't know what I was thinking when I was making a baby with that crazy woman, ke stakile le yena noe." (Diapers.) (I'm stuck with her now.)

Styles can't stop laughing while I can't wait for this call to be over.

Styles: "Your crazy ass attracted her crazy ass."

Neo: "Eish, Stylos. Now that you put it that way. The things we do for sex, never again. I'm done, I will join pastor Uze and be a bishop."

Me: "Styles, are you going to cut this call or should I do the honours?"

Neo: "Relax oga, ah ah."

Me: "You fucking idiot, remember you're coming here next week. You will tell me to my face who oga is."

He starts laughing like the idiot he is.

Neo: "Randy! Bozza ya di bozza." (Boss of the bosses.)

Styles is seriously entertained by all of this and encouraging it. I get up and leave them to their idiocy.

To be continued...



NTOMBI\*

"We Ntombi."

I have succeeded in avoiding these woman till now, I am too ashamed to face them. How will they look at me as a woman after I stood back while my husband threw my daughter out of the house? What breaks me the most is that, I haven't spoken to Lelo since? I don't have the guts to call her, I know I will break down at the sound of her voice.

How will I explain to my baby that I have failed her as a mother? I brought her into this world only to turn my back on her, only to choose a man over her. Her love for me is genuine and pure and I can't say the same for Moses.

He might wake up one day and decide to leave me. Only then will I be pushed to make amends with Lelo.

I stop half way to the door and walk up to them, they are standing at the gate. Ready for gossip.

Martha: "Yoh Ntombi, your house is falling apart."

Tell me something I don't know.

Tebogo: "You see, this is like an episode of generations, ngisho phela the old one with abo Ntsiki nabo Karabo." (I mean)

Martha: "Yoh, uyakhumbula Tebogo? That was real drama, more like what's happening in your home Ntombi. First that girl Amanda goes missing..." (You remember?)

Tebogo: "Huh wena, it's Amara." (you)

Martha: "Kanti akufani? She always responded when I called her Amanda moes. Hayi, niya wa khetha ama gama Ntombi." (Is it not the same?) (The names you give your kids Ntombi.)

Normally, I would have said something. I don't have it in me to dispute over this nonsense.

Tebogo: "Moses is destroying your home Ntombi, remember I told you long ago that he is dodgy? Now look where you are."

Me: "What do you people want from me?"

Martha: "Haibo! You people?"

Tebogo: "We haven't seen you in a while hau Ntombi, let's go to my house so we can catch up."

I know they want to busk on my problems.

Wolfs in sheep's clothing.

Me: "And why would I do that?"

Tebogo: "Are we not friends now?"

I cackle at her question.

Me: "Friends Tebogo? My friends would've have stood by me when my husband was throwing my child out of my house. I expected you people to at least take her in until I make a plan."

Martha: "But Ntombi, you know my house is small. Where was she going to sleep? And I don't have a job, I can hardly feed myself."

Me: "It's not like your house is the size of a toilet Martha and I was going to give you money for food."

Martha: "What about Moses? He was going to kill us for accommodating Nombulelo."

Me: "What do you have to do with Moses Martha? He is nothing to you so, why would he question you?"

Tebogo: "Where is Nombulelo?"

Me: "I would tell you if I knew, I only hope that boy took her in. The thought of my baby being homeless breaks my heart."

That's it, I will have to tell Mhambi the truth. Even if it costs me my marriage then, so be it.

NOMBULELO\*

I can't believe I have found myself back here, I'm just going around in circles like a lost soul. In a way I am, I have nothing in this world, I have no one. I am like the waves of the sea, going back and forth with no direction or purpose. Apart for my father's house, this is what I know.

This place was once a shelter for me, I came and went as I pleased. It has converted into a grave and the last time I was here, I succeeded in jumping over the six feet hole and cheated death.

Who is to know that, this time I will fall to my demise?

I think it would be better, I grab my bag and leave before Zuma comes back, he will definitely take my life this time around. He keeps a key inside a plant that's behind the house.

The place looks clean, like a woman's touch swept through her and I'm convinced that it was Kocketso. That desperate thirsty bitch, she will get what's coming to her.

I freeze as I bump into him at the door, he's looking down at me. I'm frightened out of my wits but, I have so many questions for him.

What went wrong? What is it that I wasn't doing right? How did your love for me turn into

animosity and cruelty? How do you expect me to go on without you?

Just one look from you, one look of love in your eyes and I will forgive you, I will throw all this pain away. You don't have to say anything, I will take you back like nothing happened.

The raw, heart breaking words that cannot be unspoken, those have been imprinted in my soul but, just one look from you and I will love you like I have never loved before.

These are only in my mind and it fails to collaborate with my mouth and articulate them. But, I need him to know all of this. He shatters my heart with the unsympathetic look on his face, my hope is gone. I am stripped naked of this little faith I had.

Zuma: "What are you doing here?"

His voice still holds a box of ice as his words come out as cold as a mid- winter's night.

My heart can't keep still, it's almost suffocating. It feels like a truck is standing on my chest. It is said that God is love right? But, why does this love hurt like hell? Does it have to feel like a thousand deaths?

Me: "I came to get my bag."

I explain my reason for invading his privacy that once belonged to us. We were one person, travelling at the same speed but he has chosen to leave me behind and the path I'm journeying on is eerie. It has left me unsighted, I can't see where I am going nor do I know if I will get there.

Zuma: "Are you stealing from me Nombulelo?"

He interrogates, the hatred in his eyes has killed me.

Me: "How can I possibly steal from you Zuzu?"

He frowns.

Me: "I... I mean Zuma."

I correct myself, sheepishly.

I walk past him with ease. For a moment, I'm thinking he won't follow me but, I can hear his footsteps treading behind me. I shriek as he grabs my arm.

RANDALL\*

Maybe Styles is right, maybe I should tell Amara the truth. The problem is that she hates me hence she won't believe whatever I tell her.

Watching her sleep brings me peace, it has done what the whiskey failed to do. My heart feels lighter and breathing seems like a walk in the park, suddenly. This is insane, it can't possibly be real.

It's been a while since I came into the room and she has been sleeping since, I fought and wrestled with my tenacious heart that was so keen in convincing me to take her in my arms.

Her eyes lids flutter a few times before her eyes pop open, she jerks up upon seeing me standing at her bedside.

Me: "Hey, careful."

She frowns, her eyes are filled with sorrow.

Me: "Are you okay?"

She shrugs her shoulders without looking at me.

Me: "There's something you need to know. Will you come with me?"

She goggles at me with an inquisitive look.

Amara: "I'm not going anywhere with you."

Her stubbornness weakens me but, at the same time irks me, making me want to use force to get her to listen to me. But, I can't bring myself to do that as my own heart has declared war with me. I never lose to anything but at this point, I seem to be powerless against this force.

Me: "Amara..."

I am interrupted by a knock, I hate being disturbed. Whoever it is better have a good explanation.

"Boss."

It's a guard. I saunter to the door and open it, he looks distraught.

Me: "What?"

I snap at him.

Him: "There's a crowd outside the gate, it appears to be a strike."

Me: "What do you mean?"

Him: "They are workers, most of them are in uniforms with your logistics company name on it."

Me: "Well, move them. What the hell do I pay you for?"

Him: "We tried boss, but they started throwing rocks over the gate."

Me: "You people are incompetent, I don't know why you're still here when I do everything myself. Who the hell recommended you anyway?"

I turn to Amara, she's staring into space. I hate to see her lost like that.

Me: "Amara."

She looks up at me with a blank expression.



Me: "I'll be back."

She doesn't care, I lead the guard out and lock the door behind me. It pains me that I have to keep her locked up in there but, there is no other way to keep her safe.

Me: "Stay here and guard this door."

He nods.

I rush down the stairs, taking two steps at a time.

It sounds like there's an uprising outside, there is too much racket to upset the entire neighbourhood. I pass two guards that were instructed never to leave the door at all cost. There's a few ambling about in the yard and four more at the gate, two of them are engrossed on the crowd.

I spot the odd oscillation of the protestors, something doesn't seem right. Their undulation seems out of place, like a coordinated piece. I also take notice of the logo on their uniforms. It's imprinted at the back in bold letters. The original one has two Rs, each facing the other side, almost making it appear as a butterfly.

I spot Franco's minion in the crowd and reach for my gun. That's when everything falls apart. All four guards are taken down at the same time with silencers as I didn't hear any gun shots and I can't tell who shot them. The troops disarray as a war cry breaks out while, charging towards the huge black steel gate.

They are attempting to break it down while some are climbing it.

I run for cover behind one of the trees that serves as a drive way aisle, a tear gas is thrown over the gate and there's smoke before I could call for backup. A few more guards come running, they are armed. One of them gets shot on his chest and I open fire, the guards do the same but, we can't see anything.

We might as well be fighting ghosts.

There's too much smoke and it seems to be expanding.

There's a loud clunk as the gate drops to the floor, the smoke seems to be clearing a bit and I see the men run as they are ready to attack.

Right now, I can only think of Amara. I have to get to her, thank fully more guards have come out to play. This will give me a chance to run back in the house, I know Liyana is safe because it's Amara they are after.

KHETHU\*

Honestly, we haven't gone out just the two of us in a while and I was happy when Styles proposed that we dress up and go out for dinner.

It's winter but, I felt like wearing shorts thinking we will be indoors and it won't be that cold. The problem is that, I keep pulling them down and he's been stealing glances at me.

He hasn't said anything yet but, I know it's coming.

The stares I'm getting from the opposites sex is uncomfortable, I have lost count of the number of men who have stripped me with their disgusting lustful eyes. Styles detected it too, he's been wearing this glower on his face since.

Styles: "Why did you wear them if you'll keep pulling them down?"

Ahh, there is it.

Me: "Don't start with me Styles."

I'm already discontented with this weather and the bloody stares.

Styles: "I'm just saying, now look how uncomfortable you are. Clearly, you are struggling with those shorts."

I think he's planning on getting on my nerves and it's working.

I continue plodding, as I choose not to dignify his stupid comment with a riposte.

Styles: "Shorts with tights yes but, having all these baboons staring at you, hell no."

Did he just say tights?

Actually the entire remark is stupid. I look away and roll my eyes. He sees it hence, he grabs my arm and pulls me closer to him.

Styles: "You should teach me how that's done. I want to roll my eyes at you as well so, you know how it feels."

He rejoinders with a miffed tone.

His attitude is annoying sometimes and can be unattractive. Tears fill my eyes but, I manage to blink them away. I can't twig why I'm suddenly so emotional, it's so unlike me to tear up over a trivial matter.

Styles: "I know I messed up yesterday at the shop and I have been moody lately. I wanted to make it up to you by taking you out, I couldn't buy you a gift. You have everything besides, you are not easily impressed by material things and I didn't know how else to make it up to you."

An engagement ring would have sufficed.

Styles: "I know, I can be an ass sometimes but baby, having those men stare at you like that is torture for me."

Now I must stroke his ego?

Sigh!

Me: "And you're actually behaved hey, or else you would've caused drama."



I throw in a joke, this is me trying to lighten up the mood.

Styles: "It's not funny Khethu."

I'm tempted to roll my eyes again but, I push it away. It's a good thing we're almost out of the mall, I'm done with his sulking and whining. Can't a woman want to feel good without some big baby grumbling about it? We walk out and this strong icy wind smashes against me, pushing me back a little. Styles rapidly snakes his arm around my waist and pulls me closer to him right after putting his coat over me.

I look up at him and he's still sulking.

Me: "And then?"

A pucker grows between his eye brows as he continues leading us to the car.

I decide to let him be, I'm in no mood to stroke an ego.

To be continued...





32\*

NOMBULELO\*

Me: "Zuma let go of my hand, you're hurting me."

I shout at him as I yank my hand from his hold.

Zuma: "You're a thief now Nombulelo?"

He snaps at me.

Why is he so angry?

Me: "What the hell are you raving on about Zuma? What can I possibly steal from you? You have nothing."

He cackles, scornfully.

Zuma: "Not from where I'm standing. You're the one who seems to be down and out."

This is what has become of this man. He spews nothing but trash.

Me: "Koketso taught you well hey, you have a foul mouth now Zuma."

His eyes widen as big as a saucer, he blinks a few times as if trying to conceal a secret from his eyes. He becomes nervous and draws back a bit.

Zuma: "Ukhuluma ngani?" (What are you talking about?)

He stumers.

Me: "Don't act dump, I know what you and my so called friend have been doing behind my back. That whore couldn't keep her big mouth shut, she vented everything out. How you two have been making a fool out of me. Koketso of all people Zuma? Were you that desperate?"

Zuma: "Hai, she's lying. I would never look at her like that, futhi she's not my type."

The fact that he's refuting it hurts even more.

Me: "What's the point of denying it, you've dumped me right? So, you might as well come out and say it."

Zuma: "Hayi suka. Give me that bag Lelo, I want to search it."

He says as he grabs it. I'm not about to be disrespected like this so, I tighten my grip on it.

Me: "Zuma wenzani? Let go of my bag." (What are you doing?)

We tug and pull and he's not about to let go. How can he think I stole from him?

Me: "Zuma maan."

I scream but, it has no effect on him. He's so adamant on searching my bag.

Zuma: "U yi bull fighter manje Lelo? Uhlanya kanje vele?" (You're a fighter now Lelo? Is this how crazy you get?)

I try to push him away but, his stubbornness is overpowering me. My dignity is at stake hence, I refuse to be tainted like I'm nothing. Eventually, he releases and I fall, hitting the floor with a thud. A scream escapes my mouth as my butt collides with the hard concrete ground.

"Aren't you ashamed of fighting a woman?"

I hear a familiar voice, it's Mbuso.

I'm being lifted up from the ground before I could turn to see his face. He stands in front of me after I'm steady.

RANDALL\*

I Hope Styles has seen the SOS text I sent him.

Liyana comes running to me the moment I enter the house, followed by chioma.

Liyana: "Papa."

I whisk her up as she stretches out her arms.

Liyana: "I'm scared papa."

Me: "It's okay princess."

Chioma: "Uze, what's going on?"

Me: "Take Liya and go to the basement, don't come out no matter what."

Liyana: "No papa."

She cries as I try to put her down.

Me: "Liya, you need to go with Chioma. I will be back I promise."

Liya: "But, I'm scared. What if you don't come back?"

Me: "Have I ever lied to you."

She shakes her head and I place her down.

Me: "Good, now go with Chioma, okay?"

Chioma: "What about Amara?"

Hence, I'm trying to get to her.

I sigh as I scan my surroundings, there's not a single guard in this house. I'm disappointed because one of them was supposed to be looking after Liyana.

Me: "There's a door in the basement, remember it?"

She nods.

Me: "You need to get in there and lock it. It can only unlock from the inside so, no one will be able to get in. Don't open it Chioma, lest you here my voice or Styles."

Chioma: "What do you mean or Styles? Uze, you better come back for this child."

She exclaims while holding a look of worry in her eyes, I look at my baby who hasn't stopped shading tears.

Me: "I will always come back for her. Now go."

Liyana wraps her arms around my lower torso as she screams, there's still a commotion outside. If I delay any further, their lives will be in danger and I won't be able to save Amara.

Me: "Liyana, go with Chioma."

Liyana: "Daabi." (No)

She screams and I know she is scared but, this is no time to pacify her.

Me: "Chioma take her away please."

I plead with her, tugging a screaming Liyana away from me, Chioma takes her hand and lugs her away. My heart breaks as she yelps for me.

I hear gun shots coming from upstairs and Amara's ear-splitting scream.

NTOMBI\*

Moses hasn't stopped complaining, Mhambi has given up trying to make him see reason and my sister-in-law is giving herself therapy in my kitchen, cooking up a storm. I don't know for what and I'm surprised Moses hasn't said anything about her wasting away his food, he complains about everything even how the toilet should be flushed.

Moses: "I need some air."

He introduces as he puts on a jacket.

Me: "Where are you going?"

I follow him towards the door.

Moses: "Ngithe, I need some air." (I said)

Me: "Moses, you can't just leave like that. We need to talk about this issue at hand."

Moses: "Did I say I'm not coming back? And, I am done talking."

Me: "Who did you talk to Moses? You were scolding us like we are kids, you didn't give us a chance to let one word out."

Moses: "Ngiyak'cela Ntombi. Ungang' bori tuu. You people are suffocating me, I can't breathe in my own house." (Please, don't bore me.)

He looks at Mhambi who is washed-out on the couch, there's no emotion on his face but that of defeat.

Moses: "You brought your brother to my house, so he can disrespect me. Is this what I deserve as your husband Ntombi?"

He complains. I honestly don't know what Moses wants from me, I can't be part of his evil endeavours.

Me: "You know that is not true."

He clicks his tongue, puts on his cap and opens the door.

Me: "Moses unga hambini." (Don't go.)

I call after him but, he doesn't heed my plea.

Mhambi: "Ntombi hayi, woza uzohlala phansi. Let him go." (Come and sit down.)

I close the door and do as told.

Mhambi: "Lalela Ntombi, kusasa lokhu, we are going to see another seer. I heard there's a man by the name of S'godini around here, apparently he's powerful." (Listen, tomorrow)

Me: "What about that lady? We wronged her Mhambi, we need to apologize."

Mhambi: "And we will but, I doubt she will want to help us after what Moses did. We'll go see S'godini tomorrow, don't tell him anything. If Moses did anything to that child, he will have to face the consequences."

I agree, things will fall apart if I continue to let Moses take the wheel.

Me: "Okay, I hear you."

Mhambi: "Jonas will be here tomorrow morning, I told him about everything."

Jonas is our brother, he lives in Mpumalanga. Has construction company, it's not out there yet but, it puts food on the table.

He's not married and doesn't have children. His reason is that, the world is a dark abode, where no human deserves to live and he would never bring a soul to the world so they could suffer.

He's deep like that.

He is two years older than Mhambi and can be crazy when he wants to. Moses doesn't like him because only he can stand up to him, and Mhambi is too soft compared to Jonas. The only time Jonas and Moses get along is when they are drunk, because that's the only thing they have in common.

Maybe it's a good thing he comes although, that husband of mine won't be happy about it.

Mhambi: "There's something the seer said that has been bothering me."

I give him a quizzical look.

Mhambi: "What happened to Nombulelo?"

I didn't expect him to ask me that.

Mhambi: "And I want the truth Ntombi. Where is my niece?"

Me: "U Moses umxoshile." (Moses threw her out.)

"Ini?" (What?)

I turn to the sound of her dazed voice, she's walking in from the kitchen while wiping her hands with an apron wrapped around her.

Petunia: "Ithi uya dlala Ntombi." (Tell me you're kidding.)

Mhambi: "That man has lost his mind."

Petunia: "Why did he do that? What is happening in this house Ntombi?"

I have no choice but to tell them the truth, they are bound to find out anyway."

Me: "U Nombulelo ukhulelwe and Moses threw her out when he found out." (Nombulelo is pregnant.)

Mhambi shakes his head.

Mhambi: "That doesn't give him the right to do what he did. Who is she supposed to turn to if her father abandons her?"

Petunia: "And you let it happen?"

Me: "You know how Moses can be, once he's made up his mind, there is no turning back.

Petunia: "Ok'salayo Ntombi, you watched her as she was being chased out of her father's house and did nothing. What kind of a mother are you? How do you let your daughter sleep on the streets while you're tossing and turning comfortably in your bed?" (Still)

She's shouting now.

Sigh!

Me: "Don't judge me Petunia, okay?" You don't know what I have been through, you have no idea how I feel. Lelo is my baby and I was powerless against Moses, I couldn't help her even if I

wanted to.”

Petunia: “Hai suka, a real mother would have followed her child. You are no different from Moses wena Ntombi. Niya fana maan, nx. (You’re the same as Moses.)

She shouts as she makes her way back to the kitchen.

One day when I lose my mind, Petunia will definitely be the cause of it.

Mhambi: “We are bringing my niece home, I don’t care what Moses says. Or else we are taking her with us back to Pongola.”

The look on his face has me feeling like a failure.

NOMBULELO\*

Mbuso: “Are you okay?”

I nod while dusting myself, he picks my bag from the ground and hands it to me. I find it strange that he seems to creep up everywhere I am, this is the third time we have met and right here in Vaal.

Mbuso: “How about you pick on somebody your own size?”

He warns Zuma with a menacing tone.

Zuma: “And then? Iphuma’ phi le nyoni?” (Who’s this idiot?)

He retorts, frowning at him.

Mbuso: “Ubiza bani nge nyoni wena mgodoyi?” (Who are you calling an idiot, you bastard?)

He taunts as he charges at Zuma, I grab his arm pulling him back.

Me: “He’s not worth it Mbuso.”

Zuma laughs but, it’s not a happy one. He’s narked by Mbuso’s retort.

Zuma: “I see you finally found the father of that bastard child you’re carrying, congrats ndoda, it’s a pity you’ll be stuck with her forever.” (Man.)

Mbuso gazes at me, I can’t read his expression but, either way the glare in his eyes forces me to look away mortified.

Who wouldn’t be ashamed of this? To have the man you love reject you and your baby.

Mbuso: “Sorry to disappoint you mfana but, this is blessings on blessings.” (Boy.)

He declares as he places his hand over my shoulder and pull me close to him. Zuma laughs like Mbuso just cracked a joke, this proves to me that he doesn’t take me serious.



Zuma: "Whatever rocks your boat."

He ridicules with a stupid grin accompanying his face.

Mbuso: "You know the saying 'you don't know what you have till it's gone'? That day will come for you and when you realize what you've lost, don't even dare try to look for her or I will butcher you. I will start with that small dick of yours."

Zuma sniggers and it's breaking me all over to see how he doesn't care about me.

Zuma: "Lelo doesn't seem to think that it's small, angisho Lelo?" (Right Lelo?)

He smirks, while he leers at me with a perverted look. I clench my eyes as his words shatter my heart into a million pieces.

Mbuso: "Uyi silima saani. Impilo yi vili and ivili liya jika." (You're an idiot boy, life is like a wheel. Sooner or later it will come around to where you started again.)

Mbuso takes my bag and hand and leads me towards the gate, I lumber beside him as Zuma's words have left me feeling numb. He has evoked this anger inside me and I can't let it go.

Zuma: "Enjoy my leftovers."

He shouts after us and that's when I lose it – I stop, drop my bag and pull out the pistol I took from my father's dresser. Mbuso sees it and draws back in fright.

Mbuso: "Lelo?"

He gulps.

Zuma is my target, the neurotic look on his face seems to nudge at me perfectly. I want him to be afraid of me, I want him to suffer the way he has made me suffer. I want him to cry the same painful tears I cried and I want him to regret every terrible thing he has done to me. I want him to beg for his life, like I pleaded for my baby's.

To be continued...

RANDALL\*

The man I had instructed to guard Amara's room is lying in a pool of blood at the top of the stairs. My heart is thudding so hard against my chest that it's beginning to hurt.

The thought of finding Amara dead in there is scarier than anything I have ever known. I jump over the dead man and tread towards the room, I have to be quiet just in case she's not alone.

"Non renderlo difficile per me, caro, non morderò." (Don't make this hard for me dear, I won't bite.)

Bastard!

It's Franco's gofer, I am going to kill him.

I hear Amara snivelling.

I peep through the open door, I can see his back and he's dressed in all black. Amara is throwing pillows at him and he's dodging them while laughing as if he's enjoying every second of it. She sees me and stops, her eyes plead for help, there's a bit of relief in them as well.

I place a finger on my lip, motioning that she doesn't say a word as I aim my gun at the man. The fearful look in her eyes gives her away and in results to that, the minion swivels. I pull the trigger, not giving him a chance to aim his gun. He drops dead right in front of Amara, she screams and staggers back while covering her ears with her hands.

I rush in and enfold her in my arms, at first she doesn't hold me back but eventually, I feel her small arms wrap around my broad shoulders. She is trembling like a leaf, I hold her tighter while turning us around in effort to shield her from the corpse before her.

Amara: "You killed him."

She states with an unsteady voice.

Me: "One of us had to die and I was faster."

I express what happens to be the truth. She tries to pull out of my hold, stiffening her body but, I refuse to let go as I see Franco and Musa step in followed by two armed goons also in black clothing. They guard the door while, those two smug monkeys amble in the bedroom.

Musa is Mkhize's lap dog, he desperately wants to be like his brother and Mkhize knows it. Hence, he makes him do all his dirty work, knowing that when the worst comes to the worst. Musa will take the fall, while he walks free.

I bury my face on the crook of her neck and place a soft kiss, her body loosens.

I know which places to touch to make her melt and she is not aware of the power I have over her.



This is the wrong time for my feelings to be seeking attention but, I can't help it. I see more moments like this one, her in my arms, surrendering herself to me.

My heart flicks at the thought.

Me: "Amara, I need you to listen to me. You are going to be taken away but, I need you to stay calm."

I whisper in her ear and she releases a gasp.

Me: "Don't try to put up a fight, they won't hurt you."

Franco: "Should we give you two space or are you done?"

He mocks.

Amara quails at the sound of Franco's voice as she recognizes it. Her arms clench around me, I feel her hands cling on to my shirt.

I shoot Franco a deadly stare, in a second now, Amara will be exposed to their malevolent faces. If I could, I would hold her like this forever, just to protect her from the darkness this world has to offer.

Me: "Don't trust these men or anyone. Whatever they will say to you is a lie, do not listen to them. They will try to win your trust but, it's all a façade to get you to do what they want."

She's crying now, fear has engulfed her. I rub her back, hoping that it will stop her body from shuddering.

Musa: "Haibo! Kwanele." (That's enough.)

Musa grunts as he hurtles towards us. He tries to grab Amara by the shoulder and I send my leg forward with a force, kicking him right on his stomach. He falls but, gets back up almost immediately.

Amara can't see anything as she has her back against the door but she's whimpering now. She can sense the danger in the room. She hasn't said anything, her cries give a testimony of her terror.

Musa tries to charge at me again, and is stopped by Franco who's grinning at me. The stupid look on his face says he has declared himself victorious.

Me: "I will find you me hemma, no matter what. You belong with me." (My queen.)

I assure her.

Franco draws out his gun as he approaches us, he grabs Amara's hand. She screams as she holds on tightly to me.

Me: "Don't touch her you bastard."

I rumble.

He laughs, showing me his gun and snatches mine from me.

Franco: "È finita Okolie." (It's over Okolie.)

He growls while pulling a screaming Amara from my hold. It doesn't take long for Musa to hit me with a gun on my head and I'm thrown on the floor with a single knock. Amara releases another scream, I look up at her and the tears in her eyes evoke that dark force inside me.

Me: "Sei morto Franco." (You're dead Franco.)

And this is a promise.

I pull myself up as Franco laughs at my threat.

Franco: "You're a funny man Okolie."

Musa: "Dead men don't crack jokes."

Musa says as he points a gun at me, these fuckers were instructed to kill me.

Amara: "No, please don't kill him."

She pleads for my soul while struggling in Franco's hands and I'm astounded by her cries. Now, I'm more eager to save her.

Franco: "Aww! Would you look at that, Juliet is pleading for the life of her beloved Romeo. I fucking hate Shakes Spear."

He derides with an unemotional tone.

Me: "I will find you Amara, don't forget that."

Franco and Musa laugh.

Franco: "Kill him."

He instructs Musa who still has a gun pointed at me, I can't stand Amara's cries of agony. The tears that kiss her eyes lids, as they push to sway on her plump cheeks, exposing the secrets of her heart. I can bear anything but, not a single tear drop in her eyes.

Me: "I'm sorry me hemma." (My queen)

She scream cries and that's when Musa pulls the trigger, piercing my chest with a bullet. I hear a fade-away of the next three gun shots collaborated with Amara's heart wrenching screams and I black out.

NOMBULELO\*

Zuma's words have left me feeling desolate and bereft, this gnawing love I have for him has birthed this moment right here. I have pushed out Mbuso's voice that's desperately trying to

convince me to drop the gun, Zuma is before me trembling like a fool.

I love this man in front of me but, my hate for him is as strong as my love. No one has ever hurt me the way he has, I am a broken soul because of him and now I'm standing in front of him like a wrecking ball. I will destroy anyone who stands in my way.

Zuma: "Lelo, wenzani? What is this?" (What are you doing?)

He raises his hands in surrender.

Me: "This is what you have planted Zuma. You know the saying 'you reap what you sow? It's time to reap you bastard."

Zuma: "Lelo, please baby. Ngiyakucela s'thandwa sam' beki s'bhamu phansi." (I'm begging you my love, put the gun down."

Now he knows how to be civil?

Bloody hypocrite.

Me: "Don't fucking call me that. Yazi Zuma, I loved you. Bengiku thand' ukufa and what did you do? You destroyed me, you ripped me apart and took away every part of me. You killed me Zuma." (You know I loved you beyond anything.)

I scream, drawing attention from bystanders. I don't care what happens to me right now, I want this fool to know what he has done and how I feel.

Zuma: "I'm sorry Lelo, ngiyaxolisa s'thandwa sam'. I don't know what came over me, it was the devil."

This angers me, every word coming out of that lying mouth of his.

Me: "The devil Zuma? You idiot, look at you. Even at death's door you still refuse to take responsibility of your mistakes. I want to know why you have destroyed me, I want to know why you betrayed me when I loved you."

Mbuso: "Lelo, put the gun down. We should talk like civilized people."

Me: "Now that I have a gun in my hand, we have to be civil? What about when this man was ripping my heart out of my chest? No one dared to cry civil, every accusatory finger was pointed at me, as if I made myself pregnant. My own father chased me out of his house like I meant nothing to him. I came crying to you Zuma, only for you to use me as a punching bag. Am I that worthless that you had to be hostile towards me?"

Zuma: "No baby, you are worth it. You are worth everything..."

Me: "Shut up, stop lying to me you piece of shit."

I scream at him and he draws back, his eyes keep running back and forth to the gun then, to my face.

Mbuso: "Lelo..."

Me: "Mbuso, I don't want to hurt you. One more word from you and this gun will go off."

I warn him and he takes a few steps back, Zuma drops his hands and attempts to charge at me.

Me: "Keep those useless hands up and if you move one more time, your mother will bury you next week."

I bark and he raises them rapidly.

I'm emotionless at the moment and it's all his fault that my heart has become protective of me, caging me from all emotions that try to engulf me.

Zuma: "Lelo, let's go talk inside please. You'll get in trouble, someone might call the police."

Me: "Look at me Zuma. Do I look like I care about anything right now? You broke me and emptied me. I want you to fix me."

Zuma: "Lelo, come on. How do I even do that?"

Me: "I don't know, figure it out. I want my soul back, I want you to put my heart back together again. What you did is inhumane Zuma, it's evil."

I yell at him.

Zuma: "And I said I'm sorry okay, I didn't mean any of it Lelo. I was afraid okay. I panicked when you told me that you're pregnant, I felt betrayed."

Me: "What the hell does that even mean? You think I didn't panic? I had to go through everything alone."

Zuma: "I know, I'm sorry baby. Please, don't do this, don't ruin your life. Think of the baby."

Me: "What baby Zuma? Because according to you I'm carrying a bastard."

Zuma: "It's me Lelo, your Zuzu. Please, my baby lower that thing."

Good he's pleading but, he's not saying what I want to hear.

Me: "I hate you Zuma, I hate everything about you."

I'm lying, I hate how much I love him.

Zuma: "And it's my fault, I take full responsibility of that."

Me: "The only responsibility I want you to take is of this baby growing inside me, you need to man up Zuma."

Zuma: "I will, I promise. I will take care of you and our baby."

Me: "Your promises mean nothing to me, you're nothing but a liar. Give me one good reason why I shouldn't pull this trigger."

Zuma: "You're not a murderer."

Me: "Not good enough."

I don't know how but, Mbuso grabs me from behind, and snatches the gun from me. I look at my shaky hands as I sink in his arms bawling.

Mbuso: "I've got you, it's okay."

He assures me but, it doesn't feel okay. Zuma walks up to me, with a distraught expression.

Zuma: "I really am sorry Lelo."

That's all he has to say, sorry? I should have pulled the bloody trigger.

I watch him as he walks back to the house.

MOSES\*

I can't believe that I am surrounded by senseless people, Ntombi's family is a bunch of stupid idiots. If they think they can challenge me, they have another thing coming. I will show them what I am made of. I had to leave that house or I would have lost my mind.

This is my hide away, my home away from home. This tavern, Jafta my old friend introduced it to me years back, I was struggling to get a job while Ntombi worked as a nurse. My ego was bruised, having being fed by a woman. She became the man of the house while I was a house husband, I would clean and cook and wait for her to come home from work.

It came to a point where my friends started mocking me, calling me names and that I let a woman dominate me. This alone gave me sleepless nights and the only way to cope was to turn to a bottle and boy did it comfort me, it comforted me in ways Ntombi never could.

But that also led me to greed, I sold my soul to the root of all evil, the love of money. Gambling was the easiest way to attain money, luck was on my side for the first three tries, but the fourth time I lost everything. Thinking it wasn't a good day I tried again, only to lose many times after that.

It stopped being about just the money but, chasing that feeling of winning.

That is when I met Mkhize, Jafta introduced him to me. I needed money to gamble and Ntombi's purses were not of great help anymore, she stopped carrying cash. That woman thinks I'm stupid, I will show her one day what I'm made of.

Mkhize lent me a great amount of money, my eyes couldn't believe what was before me. I guess I wasn't thinking straight because I gambled it all and Mkhize wanted to kill me because I couldn't pay him back, that's when my light bulb when on. Knowing that he had many wives and liked them young, I showed him Amara. She was going to be my ticket out of this debt, he fell for her at first glance.

His plan was to take her when she's 18 but, things took a great turn for me when I was approached by these men who had an interest in Amara. They wouldn't tell me how they knew



her, or what they wanted with her.

All they did was offer me money and nothing smells so heavenly like a stack of bank notes. I gave in and agreed, besides, I wasn't gaining anything with Mkhize although I owed him. Now, I'm in deep trouble and have to think of a way to pay that old fool.

I could be out of the hook, as I haven't seen him lately.

Ntombi doesn't know that I spend most of my money at the tavern. She really doesn't have to know about it, it's not like it's her business. Her job is to be a wife to me and jump when I say jump.

I even got myself someone to love on the side, I love Ntombi it's not a lie but, she is not the same woman I married years ago and my love for her is kind of diluted now. She doesn't have that fire anymore.

There are days when I stop myself from strangling her to death, days when she rubs me off the wrong way.

Mashoto here is different, she gives me peace. She is a breath of fresh air. I have thought of taking her as my second wife. But, Ntombi would kill her before she can say 'I do' and I would probably be digging my own grave as well.

Me: "Uyabona bra wami, this is the life." (You see, my friend.)

Jafta: "Ungasho futhi. Sithi isingisi, you can never get enough of a good thing." (You can say that again.) (There's an English saying.)

I know he's asking for more beers, this has been an everyday thing since I became a million rand rich. My circle of friends has increased, we drink ourselves silly almost every night. It's a good thing I can handle my beer or Ntombi would give me an ear full.

Jafta: "We sis' Brenda, somile. Fill up the table sis wam'. (We are still thirsty.)

Jafta has no limit. If he knew how I got this money he's enjoying, will those beers go down the same way they do now.

Mashoto: "Huh ah Jafta, you want to finish my man's money."

Jafta: "Kyk hier skat. Dit is baie late, other women are at home warming up the bed for their husbands who are out drinking. So wena, angazi ufunani la" (Look here sweetie, it's very late.) (I don't know what you want here.)

He's drunk, he talks shit when he's wasted.

Mashoto: "He eh Jafta, he eh Jafta. Singa phaphelani tuu." (Don't be smart with me.)

Me: "Awu ngitshela Jafta, uzodla imali yami kuze kube nini." (Tell me Jafta, how long do you plan on spending my money?)

Jafta: "Haibo Moses bra wam' khohlwa lokho. As'phuzeni nabu tshwala." (Moses, my friend. Forget that. Here's the alcohol, let us drink.)

He states as he grabs a bottle of beer after Brenda places them on the table.

Me: "Uzofele 'tshwaleni ndoda." (You will die of alcohol.)

The music suddenly stops and this feels like *déjà vu*, as I see Mkhize walking in the tavern, now I'm convinced that I will never be at peace till I pay my debt.

No one dares to say a word, Mkhize is feared in this place. My knees begin shaking as terror engulfs me, I know him to be a cold hearted bastard. I have seen him kill people who owed him money, he made me watch just so I know what will happen to me when I fail to pay him.

Mkhize: "Wenja, for someone who is in deep shit, you're sure having hell of a good time."  
(Bastard.)

I slowly push myself up as he stands in front of me.

Me: "Mkhize? I was going to call you and..."

Mkhize: "Did I say speak?"

He shouts, I shake my head no.

Mkhize: "You owe me s'dudla, don't think I have forgotten about it."

Me: "I know you haven't..."

One of his men throws a punch at me, I stumble back and almost fall on Mashoto. She screams as she gets up from the chair. Jafta has moved, I can't see where he is now. Some friend he is.

Coward.

Mkhize: "When I talk, you listen. Siyezwana?" (Do you understand?)

Me: "Yebo."

I can't express how embarrassed I am, everyone is watching me trembling before this man. At least they are all drunk, chances of them remembering this episode are zero to nothing.

Mkhize: "Lalela ke s'phukuphuku. You and I are going to take a long drive, I have a surprise for you. This is only to remind you that I can do whatever I want and angihlulwa yi lutho mina."  
(Listen you idiot.) (There's nothing I cannot do.)

This is it, these are my last moments on earth. I know he's going to kill me, Mkhize doesn't just take drives with you. No one ever comes back alive from those rides.

Me: "Mkhize ngiyakucela khabazela, I will find her and br..." (I'm begging you.)

I receive another punch from the same guy, this time he throws in a kick the moment I fall. I'm thinking he's going to stop but he doesn't, he's having his way on my body. Punching and kicking me mercilessly, I raise my eyes to look at Mashoto. She's sobbing while, frantically watching the whole thing.

I'm so ashamed that I want to dig a hole and hide. Everyone in this place knows that if they dare

utter a single word, Mkhize will shoot them without a thought to it.

Mkhize: "Stop."

He instructs the man, he pulls back with a grin on his face. I think I broke a rib, it's getting hard to breathe and my body feels like it's on fire.

Mkhize: "Indaba awu laleli s'dudla. When I say, you don't open your stinking mouth when I speak, I mean it. Now, how about we go for that ride." (The thing is you don't listen.)

The smirk on his face sends chills down my spine. I'm a goner, I will die like a dog. Two buff men, grab my arms and drag me out like a sack of potatoes.

To be continued...





34\*

AMARA\*

Something gashed inside me when that man shot Randall and I can't seem to figure out what it is, the last time I felt so much pain was when I saw my parents lying dead in their own blood.

It felt like I was pleading for their lives when I implored, that they spare Randall's life

We are in a white Jeep, driving on the four lane high way and all hope is lost.

I can't believe that I watched him die. I'm still on this mission of trying to catch my breath, I feel suffocated and I can't stop wondering why seeing him die took every breath inside me.

My brain keeps replaying that scene, Randall being shot and I being taken away. It sounds so unreal, like somebody scripted it for me.

The skies turned black like a perfect storm was coming, when we stepped out of the house and it started raining greatly as we entered the car.

I find it a bit odd because, we are in the middle of June and storms are infrequent at this time of the year.

There are three passengers in this vehicle, including me. I remember this Franco guy, he makes my skin crawl. I'm sitting with him at the back while the other guy is driving. Franco hasn't said anything since we got in the car, he has a gun in his hand and that's a threat on its own. The driver though, hasn't stopped playing loud music and singing at the top of his lungs, he appears to be one happy bastard.

Franco: "Turn down that shit."

He woofs at him seemingly frustrated - the driver laughs, tilts his head to the back, then turns the volume down.

Him: "Won't you let me celebrate? I have avenged my brother's death. Okolie killed my brother that night and I have been baying for his blood ever since."

He declares, he must be talking about the night I was kidnapped.

There was only one black man in that car and he was shot dead, I can't say it was Randall who killed him because, I was blind folded. It's a different story today, as if they perceived that I will not put up a fight.

Franco: "My brother's death has been avenged too but, you don't see me singing out loud like a lunatic, turn that music off completely. It's bloody giving me a headache.

Him: "What is wrong with you? You seem jumpy and spooked out."

Franco: "I think we fucked up man."

He sounds horrified, like they did a great blunder.

Him: "I don't get it."

Franco: "You're stupid, that's why. Mkhize specifically warned us not to kill that idiot, you don't kill an Okolie man. Shit! My heart hasn't stopped beating hard since you pulled the trigger. Something doesn't feel right, something dark is coming."

A sob slips out of my mouth as I am reminded that Randall is dead, Franco turns his head and glares at me with a sly grin on his face.

He's sweating and looks kind of nervous.

Him: "That's all a myth. What is he? God? That dump head is on his way to hell and we'll continue with life as it is, nothing bad is going to happen."

The driver laughs out loud aggravating Franco, a frown is born on his face.

Franco: "Didn't your brother tell you what happens when you kill an Okolie?"

Him: "He did but, I don't believe that shit. Don't be a pussy Franco. We have achieved what my brother failed to do, we killed that bastard. He'll be proud of me when I tell him how I took Okolie's life and there was nothing he could do about it."

Franco: "This is why I said you're stupid, you fool."

Franco barks and right after that, lightning strikes in front of the Jeep. Causing it to swerve out of control, while the driver fights to gain control of it but, is failing and my body is knocked forward and sideways.

A car that's travelling at a high speed clangs into ours, flipping the Jeep over. It screeches on its back, on the hard tar road.

My head smashes against the window and the loud glass resonates, my arms and legs are floundering in a desperate search of something to hold on to, and stop the muddled movement of my body.

The scene of the accident is filled with deafening violent bang of metals, as if it is happening right inside my head, the smell of burnt tires and burning vehicles is too intense for words.

My muscles feel like they were being severely smashed by a blunt object, as my body is pinned against the cowl of the car. I can taste the coppery blood flooding in my mouth, I see Franco with my blurred vision as my head feels like everything inside it is stagnant.

The tormenting pain is the only thing that has me drifting in and out of consciousness, it's keeping me awake, pulling me from this great need to sleep. In the meanwhile I hear his voice fade away, as I slip into a slurping darkness.

STYLES\*

Khethu: "Oh my God Styles. What happened here?"

I had no choice but to bring Khethu with me, there was no time to take her back home. She is horrified by the scene as we drive through the collapsed gate of the Okolie residence, there are dead bodies scattered everywhere. Some men are alive and they are trying to pick themselves up.

It looks like a war had broken out in this place, the bloody bastards left us to clean up the mess. I have no idea how Randall is doing, he better be okay. I tried to call him, his number sent me straight to voice mail.

Khethu: "Styles?"

She taps my shoulder and I'm jolted back to what my mind was trying to protect me from, this grisly scene. I can only pray that Randall and Liyana are okay, that's the only power I have at this moment.

I pull up on the drive way, jump out of the car and scurry in the house, leaving Khethu behind. It's raining cats and dogs outside, there was no warning of hail storms tonight or rain at all. So, this sudden change of the weather is somewhat peculiar.

The scene in the house is different from the one outside, it's spotless. I start with the lounge and other rooms downstairs, before heading upstairs to check the bedrooms. The deafening silence cracks the minuscule hope I have of finding them alive, no one is answering to my desperate call as I shout out their names.

Liyana's room is the first one in the corridor, it's empty. I rush out and I'm met by Khethu at the top of the stairs, she screams when she tramples on a dead body and falls on top of it. I help her up swiftly, the disturbed look on her face has grown. I can't mollify her right now, she needs to be strong. I need her to be strong for me.

Khethu: "Styles, what's going on? Where is Randall?"

Me: "Alive, hopefully."

I state and hope as I saunter towards the bedroom Amara uses, my heart is in need of great attention as it hasn't stopped drumming against my chest.

Khethu grabs my arm, following behind me. I reel back, aghast by Randall's bloodied body on the floor. Khethu releases a gasp, she hooks her hands on my arm and buries her face on my shoulder.

Gradually, I move away from her. Making my way into the room, there is no sign of Amara. They took her and Randall must have fought to save her...

The first thing I do is to feel his pulse, my heart stops as I feel a pulsation on his neck.

Khethu: "Is he..."

She stops and heaves a sigh, I feel her gentle hand on my shoulder. I didn't realize I was crying, these are not only tears of sorrow but, joy as well. My brother lives.

Me: "He's alive."

I inform her, my words comforting me.

She breathes a sigh of relief.

Me: "I'd be damned."

A cackle glides out of my mouth when I rip his shirt open.

Khethu: "He's wearing a vest."

She confirms what I already know.

Me: "Lucky son of a bitch, he's cheated death once again."

I proclaim, gladly.

You can't take this Ghanaian Prince down, they have tried and failed bleakly.

He has a flesh wound on his left shoulder, a bullet hole on his upper thigh and two bullets are stuck on the bullet proof vest or else he would've been a goner.

Me: "Help me get him on the bed."

Khethu: "Shouldn't we call an ambulance?"

Me: "And say what?"

Khethu: "He lost a lot of blood Styles, he needs medical treatment."

Me: "And that, he will get."

Khethu: "How? You're not a doctor."

Me: "Khethu, help me get him on the bed."

I instruct, firmly.

Khethu: "But Styles..."

Me: "Are you going to help me or not? There's no time to waste Khethu."

She looks at me as I shoot her a stern look, she bends and grabs his legs while I lift his upper body and we place him on the bed.

Khethu: "Should I call an ambulance?"

She asks softly while looking at Randall.

Me: "Get me a bowl with hot water, some germ disinfectants and a cloth, I need to clean his wounds."

I pay no heed to her question as I unstrap Randall's bullet proof vest.

Khethu: "Styles you're putting his life at risk, you're not a doctor and have no experience."

Shit!!!

Me: "Will you get me the fucking water or should I do it myself."

I shout and she cringes.

Khethu: "Don't ever, speak to me like that again."

She retorts. I know I'm in the wrong but, I am frustrated and she is adding to it.

Me: "I'm sorry. Look I will explain everything later okay. We can't take Randall to the hospital, they will have us open a case.

Khethu: "My father will help us, we'll explain what happened and he will find whoever did this to him."

Me: "Don't be stupid Khethu. Did you happen to see those dead bodies outside or was I seeing things? You are not to tell your father about any of this, do you understand?"

She leers at me, her mouth not promising a single word from her.

Me: "Khethu, I said do you understand?"

I snap and she nods. Khethu is a strong woman, not once has she shed a tear due to this grim discovery.

Me: "I almost forgot Liyana and chioma, they are probably in the basement. I need you to go and get them."

Khethu: "How do you know that?"

Me: "If this is your plan to make me lose my mind, sweetheart, it's working. You're bloody pissing me off right now Khethu. Must you be difficult?"

Khethu: "Styles."

My name whooshes out of her mouth, as if she is astounded by the harsh tone I'm addressing her with.

Me: "I need you to work with me here, please. Go and get Liyana and Chioma out of that basement, they must be terrified. Make sure Liyana doesn't come here and if she asks where her father is, make up something."

Khethu: "Like what?"

Me: "I don't know, but it should be convincing. I will take care of Randall. There's an old rusted iron door in there, turn left after you take the stairs. You won't miss it, the light switch is on the left, right after you take that turn. "

Khethu: "Okay."

Me: "Thank you."

She hurries out of the bedroom, leaving me to call Mbuso.

NOMBULELO\*

Mbuso: "Come in."

Mbuso offers, as he gestures with his hand stretched out. I walk in slowly and immediately scan my surroundings. It's a bachelor apartment, on the third floor. The entrance leads you to the living room, a five seater royal blue corner couch is situated in the middle of the room, with a few mustard cushions decked on its corners.

What an odd colour combination.

A 32 inch flat screen television poses, facing the couch and the two shelf TV stand, holds a few books and what appears to be old video cassette tapes. There's a Sony VCR video cassette player just on the bottom shelf and a DSTV decoder next to it.

The light grey walls are ornamented with a few family pictures, mostly it's of him and two girls younger than him. They have the same facial features with slight differences, a big picture frame with an elderly looking couple takes the spot light in this room.

It's on the wall right above the couch, it's the first thing you see when you walk into the apartment. If not those blinding colourful couch cushions.

The tiny kitchen is blended with the living room but, stands alone on the far end corner, just a few steps from the door. A single door stainless steel fridge inhabits that small space and portable red kitchen cabinets with stainless steel appliances. It's a pretty kitchen for a bachelor.

There are stairs with maybe ten steps leading upstairs. That's all there is to this part of the floor.

Mbuso: "Make yourself at home."

He leads me to the couch, I take a sit, it doesn't feel like home and my body language snitches on me.

Mbuso: "Relax Lelo."

His friendly smile greets me, I can't believe I am trusting a complete stranger with my life.

Mbuso: "You can stay here, until we figure a way forward."

Me: "I don't want to impose."

Mbuso: "If I thought so, then I wouldn't have brought you here."

Me: "Look, I was planning on going to my uncle in Pongola so..."

Mbuso: "The bundus?" (The rural areas?)

I nod.

Me: "I need a break from Gauteng anyway."

Mbuso: "Really?"

He sits next to me and looks at me, I drop my gaze. He's that type that leers deep into your eyes when speaking to you, it kind of gets uncomfortable.

Mbuso: "You can't possibly tell me that you're ready to go and share a house with chickens and goats."

He says smiling, I laugh.

Me: "There's nothing wrong with that."

Mbuso: "Yes but, you don't look like the type. I mean the neighbours might think you were kidnapped or something, if they see you there. You simply will not blend in."

Me: "That's insane, give me a week and I will look like I was bred there."

His laugh fills the room, it's soothing and comforting. Maybe I notice because, he is the first person to treat me with kindness since I began my path on this dark road. I need a friendly face right now or I will crack.

Mbuso: "I am yet to see that day although, I doubt it will come."

Me: "You're a nice person Mbuso and I don't want to take advantage of your kindness."

Mbuso: "Don't be silly. If that's the case then, let me, take advantage of my kindness."

He smiles.

This is his... argh! I've lost count of the number of smiles his face has accepted, since we were in the car on our way here. We are in Randburg, in the estates of Windsor east. It's a nice compartment, well-guarded and very private.

Mbuso: "Besides, who will feed your cravings in the middle of the night?"

My heart leaps as I'm reminded once again that, I have a human growing inside me. What will become of my baby? How will I explain his father's absence in his life?

Mbuso: "And, I doubt your uncle knows anything about pregnancy food cravings. He will probably tell you to down it with sugar water or something."

He expresses as he sees my gloomy mood take over my body, I'm able to let out a laugh in the midst of it.

Mbuso: "I want you to be free Lelo and try not to stress too much, you have someone to think about now. It's not just you anymore."

He's right, I would hate to lose my baby.

Me: "I don't know how to thank you Mbuso, honestly, I have no words."

Mbuso: "Just try to be happy, that will be enough for me."

He declares.

Mbuso: "Okay. So, there's two bedrooms in this flat. Unfortunately we will have to share a bathroom. I'll try to be as clean as I can since, there's a lady now in the house."

He articulates when the moment turns the awkward direction.

Mbuso: "You saw the kitchen right? I usually do groceries once a week. The fridge is kind of empty right now but, there's left over pizza from last night which, I also had... for... breakfast."

He sends his hand behind his neck and rubs it, as if ashamed of his confession.

I respond with a smile.

Mbuso: "I'll try not to live like a troll."

He makes a goofy face as he assures me, it tickles my laugh bone.

Me: "Thank you, I'll do the washing and cleaning since, I can't pay you right now."

Mbuso: "Then, I'll be insulted if you do that. I want you to be my roommate, not my house help. There is someone who comes to clean twice a week, your job here is to relax and take care of little Goku there."

Oh hell no!!!

Me: "I rebuke that."

He laughs out loud.

Mbuso: "Why? It's a nice name for a baby."

Me: "No, you can't call him that. These names grow and I will not have my baby named after some crazy animae farmer, who fights villains for a living."

He stares amusedly at me, before breaking into laughter.

Mbuso: "I see you're informed."

He states while his mouth holds a chuckle.

Me: "Yes and I stand against it."

He rolls into another path of laughter.

Mbuso: "You will find it cute one day, when you're holding him in your arms."

Me: "Is this you trying to convince me to consider this name?"

He nods, gleaming at me and I shake my head.

His phone rings, taking us away from this pendant debate and his face has changed. That friendly smile is gone with the wind, he's holding a frown and furrowed brows.



He gestures to be excused as he gets up and stands a few feet away from me.

Mbuso: "Styles? \*\*\* What? \*\*\* I'm on my way."

He drops the call as he turns to me. I'm tempted to ask if everything is okay, as his tone gives an alarming message. But, I don't want to pry.

Mbuso: "I have to go, your bedroom is the one on the right. Everything you will need is there except for a toothbrush though, I'll pass by the garage and get you one. I'm sure you won't miss the bathroom. It's on the far end corner right after your room. I'll grab some take outs on my way back, in the meantime, you can feast on that left over pizza."

His face says he's not sure about the stale pizza.

He makes a face, having me laugh with delight.

Me: "Maybe not?"

Mbuso: "Yeah, hey."

His hand flies to the back of his neck again, rubbing it timidly.

Mbuso: "There's cereal and milk."

He elects.

Me: "I'm not really hungry, I'll wait for you."

I lie, my stomach is grumbling. I haven't had anything to eat since I threw up this morning.

Mbuso: "Hey, like I said. Make yourself at home."

He leaves me with that, I guess my luck hasn't run out yet.

To be continued...

34\*

AMARA\*

Something gashed inside me when that man shot Randall and I can't seem to figure out what it is, the last time I felt so much pain was when I saw my parents lying dead in their own blood.

It felt like I was pleading for their lives when I implored, that they spare Randall's life

We are in a white Jeep, driving on the four lane high way and all hope is lost.

I can't believe that I watched him die. I'm still on this mission of trying to catch my breath, I feel suffocated and I can't stop wondering why seeing him die took every breath inside me.

My brain keeps replaying that scene, Randall being shot and I being taken away. It sounds so unreal, like somebody scripted it for me.

The skies turned black like a perfect storm was coming, when we stepped out of the house and it started raining greatly as we entered the car.

I find it a bit odd because, we are in the middle of June and storms are infrequent at this time of the year.

There are three passengers in this vehicle, including me. I remember this Franco guy, he makes my skin crawl. I'm sitting with him at the back while the other guy is driving. Franco hasn't said anything since we got in the car, he has a gun in his hand and that's a threat on its own. The driver though, hasn't stopped playing loud music and singing at the top of his lungs, he appears to be one happy bastard.

Franco: "Turn down that shit."

He woofs at him seemingly frustrated - the driver laughs, tilts his head to the back, then turns the volume down.

Him: "Won't you let me celebrate? I have avenged my brother's death. Okolie killed my brother that night and I have been baying for his blood ever since."

He declares, he must be talking about the night I was kidnapped.

There was only one black man in that car and he was shot dead, I can't say it was Randall who killed him because, I was blind folded. It's a different story today, as if they perceived that I will not put up a fight.

Franco: "My brother's death has been avenged too but, you don't see me singing out loud like a lunatic, turn that music off completely. It's bloody giving me a headache.

Him: "What is wrong with you? You seem jumpy and spooked out."

Franco: "I think we fucked up man."



He sounds horrified, like they did a great blunder.

Him: "I don't get it."

Franco: "You're stupid, that's why. Mkhize specifically warned us not to kill that idiot, you don't kill an Okolie man. Shit! My heart hasn't stopped beating hard since you pulled the trigger. Something doesn't feel right, something dark is coming."

A sob slips out of my mouth as I am reminded that Randall is dead, Franco turns his head and glares at me with a sly grin on his face.

He's sweating and looks kind of nervous.

Him: "That's all a myth. What is he? God? That dump head is on his way to hell and we'll continue with life as it is, nothing bad is going to happen."

The driver laughs out loud aggravating Franco, a frown is born on his face.

Franco: "Didn't your brother tell you what happens when you kill an Okolie?"

Him: "He did but, I don't believe that shit. Don't be a pussy Franco. We have achieved what my brother failed to do, we killed that bastard. He'll be proud of me when I tell him how I took Okolie's life and there was nothing he could do about it."

Franco: "This is why I said you're stupid, you fool."

Franco barks and right after that, lightning strikes in front of the Jeep. Causing it to swerve out of control, while the driver fights to gain control of it but, is failing and my body is knocked forward and sideways.

A car that's travelling at a high speed clangs into ours, flipping the Jeep over. It screeches on its back, on the hard tar road.

My head smashes against the window and the loud glass resonates, my arms and legs are floundering in a desperate search of something to hold on to, and stop the muddled movement of my body.

The scene of the accident is filled with deafening violent bang of metals, as if it is happening right inside my head, the smell of burnt tires and burning vehicles is too intense for words.

My muscles feel like they were being severely smashed by a blunt object, as my body is pinned against the cowl of the car. I can taste the coppery blood flooding in my mouth, I see Franco with my blurred vision as my head feels like everything inside it is stagnant.

The tormenting pain is the only thing that has me drifting in and out of consciousness, it's keeping me awake, pulling me from this great need to sleep. In the meanwhile I hear his voice fade away, as I slip into a slurping darkness.

STYLES\*

Khethu: "Oh my God Styles. What happened here?"

I had no choice but to bring Khethu with me, there was no time to take her back home. She is horrified by the scene as we drive through the collapsed gate of the Okolie residence, there are dead bodies scattered everywhere. Some men are alive and they are trying to pick themselves up.

It looks like a war had broken out in this place, the bloody bastards left us to clean up the mess. I have no idea how Randall is doing, he better be okay. I tried to call him, his number sent me straight to voice mail.

Khethu: "Styles?"

She taps my shoulder and I'm jolted back to what my mind was trying to protect me from, this grisly scene. I can only pray that Randall and Liyana are okay, that's the only power I have at this moment.

I pull up on the drive way, jump out of the car and scurry in the house, leaving Khethu behind. It's raining cats and dogs outside, there was no warning of hail storms tonight or rain at all. So, this sudden change of the weather is somewhat peculiar.

The scene in the house is different from the one outside, it's spotless. I start with the lounge and other rooms downstairs, before heading upstairs to check the bedrooms. The deafening silence cracks the minuscule hope I have of finding them alive, no one is answering to my desperate call as I shout out their names.

Liyana's room is the first one in the corridor, it's empty. I rush out and I'm met by Khethu at the top of the stairs, she screams when she tramples on a dead body and falls on top of it. I help her up swiftly, the disturbed look on her face has grown. I can't mollify her right now, she needs to be strong. I need her to be strong for me.

Khethu: "Styles, what's going on? Where is Randall?"

Me: "Alive, hopefully."

I state and hope as I saunter towards the bedroom Amara uses, my heart is in need of great attention as it hasn't stopped drumming against my chest.

Khethu grabs my arm, following behind me. I reel back, aghast by Randall's bloodied body on the floor. Khethu releases a gasp, she hooks her hands on my arm and buries her face on my shoulder.

Gradually, I move away from her. Making my way into the room, there is no sign of Amara. They took her and Randall must have fought to save her...

The first thing I do is to feel his pulse, my heart stops as I feel a pulsation on his neck.

Khethu: "Is he..."

She stops and heaves a sigh, I feel her gentle hand on my shoulder. I didn't realize I was crying, these are not only tears of sorrow but, joy as well. My brother lives.

Me: "He's alive."

I inform her, my words comforting me.

She breathes a sigh of relief.

Me: "I'd be damned."

A cackle glides out of my mouth when I rip his shirt open.

Khethu: "He's wearing a vest."

She confirms what I already know.

Me: "Lucky son of a bitch, he's cheated death once again."

I proclaim, gladly.

You can't take this Ghanaian Prince down, they have tried and failed bleakly.

He has a flesh wound on his left shoulder, a bullet hole on his upper thigh and two bullets are stuck on the bullet proof vest or else he would've been a goner.

Me: "Help me get him on the bed."

Khethu: "Shouldn't we call an ambulance?"

Me: "And say what?"

Khethu: "He lost a lot of blood Styles, he needs medical treatment."

Me: "And that, he will get."

Khethu: "How? You're not a doctor."

Me: "Khethu, help me get him on the bed."

I instruct, firmly.

Khethu: "But Styles..."

Me: "Are you going to help me or not? There's no time to waste Khethu."

She looks at me as I shoot her a stern look, she bends and grabs his legs while I lift his upper body and we place him on the bed.

Khethu: "Should I call an ambulance?"

She asks softly while looking at Randall.

Me: "Get me a bowl with hot water, some germ disinfectants and a cloth, I need to clean his wounds."

I pay no heed to her question as I unstrap Randall's bullet proof vest.

Khethu: "Styles you're putting his life at risk, you're not a doctor and have no experience."

Shit!!!

Me: "Will you get me the fucking water or should I do it myself."

I shout and she cringes.

Khethu: "Don't ever, speak to me like that again."

She retorts. I know I'm in the wrong but, I am frustrated and she is adding to it.

Me: "I'm sorry. Look I will explain everything later okay. We can't take Randall to the hospital, they will have us open a case.

Khethu: "My father will help us, we'll explain what happened and he will find whoever did this to him."

Me: "Don't be stupid Khethu. Did you happen to see those dead bodies outside or was I seeing things? You are not to tell your father about any of this, do you understand?"

She leers at me, her mouth not promising a single word from her.

Me: "Khethu, I said do you understand?"

I snap and she nods. Khethu is a strong woman, not once has she shed a tear due to this grim discovery.

Me: "I almost forgot Liyana and chioma, they are probably in the basement. I need you to go and get them."

Khethu: "How do you know that?"

Me: "If this is your plan to make me lose my mind, sweetheart, it's working. You're bloody pissing me off right now Khethu. Must you be difficult?"

Khethu: "Styles."

My name whooshes out of her mouth, as if she is astounded by the harsh tone I'm addressing her with.

Me: "I need you to work with me here, please. Go and get Liyana and Chioma out of that basement, they must be terrified. Make sure Liyana doesn't come here and if she asks where her father is, make up something."

Khethu: "Like what?"

Me: "I don't know, but it should be convincing. I will take care of Randall. There's an old rusted iron door in there, turn left after you take the stairs. You won't miss it, the light switch is on the left, right after you take that turn. "

Khethu: "Okay."



Me: "Thank you."

She hurries out of the bedroom, leaving me to call Mbuso.

NOMBULELO\*

Mbuso: "Come in."

Mbuso offers, as he gestures with his hand stretched out. I walk in slowly and immediately scan my surroundings. It's a bachelor apartment, on the third floor. The entrance leads you to the living room, a five seater royal blue corner couch is situated in the middle of the room, with a few mustard cushions decked on its corners.

What an odd colour combination.

A 32 inch flat screen television poses, facing the couch and the two shelf TV stand, holds a few books and what appears to be old video cassette tapes. There's a Sony VCR video cassette player just on the bottom shelf and a DSTV decoder next to it.

The light grey walls are ornamented with a few family pictures, mostly it's of him and two girls younger than him. They have the same facial features with slight differences, a big picture frame with an elderly looking couple takes the spot light in this room.

It's on the wall right above the couch, it's the first thing you see when you walk into the apartment. If not those blinding colourful couch cushions.

The tiny kitchen is blended with the living room but, stands alone on the far end corner, just a few steps from the door. A single door stainless steel fridge inhabits that small space and portable red kitchen cabinets with stainless steel appliances. It's a pretty kitchen for a bachelor.

There are stairs with maybe ten steps leading upstairs. That's all there is to this part of the floor.

Mbuso: "Make yourself at home."

He leads me to the couch, I take a sit, it doesn't feel like home and my body language snitches on me.

Mbuso: "Relax Lelo."

His friendly smile greets me, I can't believe I am trusting a complete stranger with my life.

Mbuso: "You can stay here, until we figure a way forward."

Me: "I don't want to impose."

Mbuso: "If I thought so, then I wouldn't have brought you here."

Me: "Look, I was planning on going to my uncle in Pongola so..."

Mbuso: "The bundus?" (The rural areas?)

I nod.

Me: "I need a break from Gauteng anyway."

Mbuso: "Really?"

He sits next to me and looks at me, I drop my gaze. He's that type that leers deep into your eyes when speaking to you, it kind of gets uncomfortable.

Mbuso: "You can't possibly tell me that you're ready to go and share a house with chickens and goats."

He says smiling, I laugh.

Me: "There's nothing wrong with that."

Mbuso: "Yes but, you don't look like the type. I mean the neighbours might think you were kidnapped or something, if they see you there. You simply will not blend in."

Me: "That's insane, give me a week and I will look like I was bred there."

His laugh fills the room, it's soothing and comforting. Maybe I notice because, he is the first person to treat me with kindness since I began my path on this dark road. I need a friendly face right now or I will crack.

Mbuso: "I am yet to see that day although, I doubt it will come."

Me: "You're a nice person Mbuso and I don't want to take advantage of your kindness."

Mbuso: "Don't be silly. If that's the case then, let me, take advantage of my kindness."

He smiles.

This is his... argh! I've lost count of the number of smiles his face has accepted, since we were in the car on our way here. We are in Randburg, in the estates of Windsor east. It's a nice compartment, well-guarded and very private.

Mbuso: "Besides, who will feed your cravings in the middle of the night?"

My heart leaps as I'm reminded once again that, I have a human growing inside me. What will become of my baby? How will I explain his father's absence in his life?

Mbuso: "And, I doubt your uncle knows anything about pregnancy food cravings. He will probably tell you to down it with sugar water or something."

He expresses as he sees my gloomy mood take over my body, I'm able to let out a laugh in the midst of it.

Mbuso: "I want you to be free Lelo and try not to stress too much, you have someone to think about now. It's not just you anymore."

He's right, I would hate to lose my baby.

Me: "I don't know how to thank you Mbuso, honestly, I have no words."



Mbuso: "Just try to be happy, that will be enough for me."

He declares.

Mbuso: "Okay. So, there's two bedrooms in this flat. Unfortunately we will have to share a bathroom. I'll try to be as clean as I can since, there's a lady now in the house."

He articulates when the moment turns the awkward direction.

Mbuso: "You saw the kitchen right? I usually do groceries once a week. The fridge is kind of empty right now but, there's left over pizza from last night which, I also had... for... breakfast."

He sends his hand behind his neck and rubs it, as if ashamed of his confession.

I respond with a smile.

Mbuso: "I'll try not to live like a troll."

He makes a goofy face as he assures me, it tickles my laugh bone.

Me: "Thank you, I'll do the washing and cleaning since, I can't pay you right now."

Mbuso: "Then, I'll be insulted if you do that. I want you to be my roommate, not my house help. There is someone who comes to clean twice a week, your job here is to relax and take care of little Goku there."

Oh hell no!!!

Me: "I rebuke that."

He laughs out loud.

Mbuso: "Why? It's a nice name for a baby."

Me: "No, you can't call him that. These names grow and I will not have my baby named after some crazy animae farmer, who fights villains for a living."

He stares amusedly at me, before breaking into laughter.

Mbuso: "I see you're informed."

He states while his mouth holds a chuckle.

Me: "Yes and I stand against it."

He rolls into another path of laughter.

Mbuso: "You will find it cute one day, when you're holding him in your arms."

Me: "Is this you trying to convince me to consider this name?"

He nods, gleaming at me and I shake my head.

His phone rings, taking us away from this pendant debate and his face has changed. That friendly smile is gone with the wind, he's holding a frown and furrowed brows.

He gestures to be excused as he gets up and stands a few feet away from me.

Mbuso: "Styles? \*\*\* What? \*\*\* I'm on my way."

He drops the call as he turns to me. I'm tempted to ask if everything is okay, as his tone gives an alarming message. But, I don't want to pry.

Mbuso: "I have to go, your bedroom is the one on the right. Everything you will need is there except for a toothbrush though, I'll pass by the garage and get you one. I'm sure you won't miss the bathroom. It's on the far end corner right after your room. I'll grab some take outs on my way back, in the meantime, you can feast on that left over pizza."

His face says he's not sure about the stale pizza.

He makes a face, having me laugh with delight.

Me: "Maybe not?"

Mbuso: "Yeah, hey."

His hand flies to the back of his neck again, rubbing it timidly.

Mbuso: "There's cereal and milk."

He elects.

Me: "I'm not really hungry, I'll wait for you."

I lie, my stomach is grumbling. I haven't had anything to eat since I threw up this morning.

Mbuso: "Hey, like I said. Make yourself at home."

He leaves me with that, I guess my luck hasn't run out yet.

To be continued...

35\*

STYLES\*

Mbuso slogs in the bedroom looking flushed and flustered, his eyes are teary and red and his clothes are soggy.

He flings his hand, sending it against the wall as he tries to gain balance.

Me: "What happened to you?"

He glares at me, eyes wide open.

Mbuso: "What happened to me? What happened out there?"

Oh, I see.

Me: "You were not supposed to see that, I told those boys to clean up fast."

Mbuso: "Styles, there's a massacre out there."

Me: "We'll talk about that later, Randall needs your help."

He frowns at me, it look as if he's going to throw up.

Me: "What the hell Mbuso?"

He welcomes a sour face, heaves a few times before running to the bathroom. I hear the sound of retching about three times.

I thought this guy is a doctor.

The door flies open and he steps out, his face is pale and dripping sweat and tears. He sniffs a few times, swipes his nose with his back hand, while walking towards the bed.

I leer at Randall, unconscious. How is Mbuso going to help him, when he is like this? Maybe calling him was a bad idea.

Me: "Are you not a doctor man? Don't you see dead bodies every day? You should be used to it by now."

He rolls his eyes and ignores me.

Okay...

He's a bit sensitive right now so, I decide to let him be.

Mbuso: "I thought you guys were done with that life."

He expresses what his frail mind is clearly entertaining, as he inspects Randall's wounds. This is a bad time to be judging us.

Me: "Nah, not really. It's too much fun that we threw a party, just so we could kill everyone. I'm sorry you didn't get an invitation."

Nx!

He grimaces, shooting me a disgusted look.

Mbuso: "Hahaha, funny."

There goes his eyes again.

Me: "Is there something you would like to tell me, Mbuso?"

His attitude is getting to me now, he looks at me and clears his throat.

Mbuso: "No... no."

He stumers and shrugs his shoulders.

Me: "Do you really think Randall would put his child's life at stake? Anyone can see that they were ambushed, I don't understand how you can be a doctor and still be stupid. Now please, help him. He has lost a lot of blood."

Mbuso: "Well, I don't understand how you and Randall take joy in insulting people, you seem to have a joy ride as far as my career is concerned. I am not sorry that I took a different path in life, while you two were headed the opposite direction."

What the hell did he just say?

Me: "Fuck you Mbuso, this is no time to be wearing your Mr. Perfect coat. You don't want to make me mad man, shut the hell up and do your job."

Mbuso: "You need to step out."

Me: "Why?"

Mbuso: "Because I can't work while you're here."

Me: "Yeah, I've heard that line before. You doctors act like you have some kind of super power that shouldn't be exposed to the human eye. Don't worry, I won't steal your gift, I'll just stand there. You pretend that I am not here and go full force. What I am not going to do is leave my brother alone."

Mbuso: "You know your sense of humour is cold and dry."

He shakes his head, the scene outside must have got to him pretty bad. I don't care anyway, I need Randall to recover.

Me: "What will be cold and dry is your dead body, if Randall dies. He better make it Mbuso, I am not playing with you."

He huffs.

Mbuso: "I know my job thank you."

Me: "Hence, you're here."

I retort coldly.

Mbuso is a friend but, we are not that close. Reason being, he thinks he's perfect. Randall and I are criminals as far as he's concerned, he was privileged to have everything while some of us had to hustle to get to where we are.

Mbuso: "I will need an IV drip, an oxygen mask and..."

Me: "Those are being delivered as we speak and don't ask me how."

He shoots me a judgemental glare, I did say that, he thinks he walks on water.

NTOMBI\*

Me: "Mhambi ngiyakucela tuu, hamba uyofuna uMoses." (Please, go look for Moses.)

This is my third plea and I think I have annoyed him enough. Moses' phone is on voicemail. When I called him at first, a woman answered. I tried again thinking I had dialled the wrong number and it sent me straight to voice mail.

Mhambi refuses to go look for him, I know he might be around. Something is not right, I can feel it.

Me: "Mhambi khuluma." (Say something.)

He is not acknowledging me right now, his eyes are glued to the TV screen and I am sitting opposite him and Petunia. They seem to be enjoying the show that's playing, because they are not bothered about my husband's whereabouts.

Petunia: "Hayi Ntombi. Isicefe ngesani? Uthe u Moses, he wants to breathe. So, why do you want to bother him?" (Why are you being a nuisance? Moses said.)

I will switch off the bloody TV if she continues to speak to me like this. This stupid show they are engrossed on is the reason Mhambi won't get up.

Petunia: "And then?"

She asks as I stand in front of the TV.

Me: "My husband is out there and I don't know if he is alive or not and nina are sitting on his sofa, watching his TV as if everything is okay." (You.)

My anger is evident, I will not tolerate this in my house. Petunia laughs out loud while clapping her hands, her face suddenly turns cold.

Petunia: "Bakuloyile wena Ntombi." (You are bewitched.)

She predicts.

Mhambi gives me a disappointed look and shakes his head.

Me: "Askies?" (Excuse me?)

Petunia: "Askies yoku nuka. You're here worried sick about that selfish heartless man, while you don't even know where your child is. You have a big problem sisi."

Me: "Mhambi? Are you listening to how she's talking to me?"

Mhambi: "Manje mina ngenzeni Ntombi? Petunia is only stating the truth, I don't understand how you can worry about Moses when Lelo and Amara are missing. Not once have I seen you cry over those girls, Moses has been gone for only a few hours and you want to flip every rock in this town." (What do you want me to do?)

Me: "Mhambi you're also judging me, your sister?"

Mhambi: "Offense is taken Ntombi not given, deep down you know what you're doing is wrong and nothing will ever go right in this house as long as you follow Moses."

Me: "U Moses ungumyeni wam', I have to abide by his rules." (He's my husband.)

Petunia: "Hehehe!!! Athi abide by his rules."

She cackles as she gets up.

Petunia: "Wena, awu yazi impilo. One day Ntombi, one day." (You will regret this Ntombi.)

I will take that, as a threat.

Petunia: "Sala nale TV yakho. Nx!" (You can stay here with your TV.)

She clicks her tongue and leaves, Mhambi follows her. I feel like an idiot right now.

MOSES\*

My vision was vague but, if I remember correctly, there was a sign that said Johannesburg. I thought we were headed there, I thought Mkhize was taking me to the rank where he will torture me before killing me. But, we are in Winchester now. I'm being dragged inside a house by two guards, everything in my body is throbbing and I know I'm at death's door.

The guards recklessly let me go and my body tumbles right in front of Mkhize's feet, he's sitting on a chair in an office room. His leg is crossed over the other and he's holding a walking cane. I'm on my knees, looking up at him. Strange how he always brings me to my knees.

Mkhize: "I'm sure you're asking yourself what you're doing here."

He holds this proud look on his face like, he is about to announce something big.

I'm not about to talk because of the thrashing I received back at the tavern."

Mkhize: "Well, Moses. I have finally taken what belongs to me."

I can't grasp what he's talking about.

Mkhize: "Consider this as a special invitation to the Mkhize wedding."

He chuckles, scornfully.

Me: "A wedding?"

I'm confused.

Mkhize: "Yes. I'm getting married and guess who the bride is."

He laughs, I think he enjoys the sound of his laugh.

Me: "Do I know her?"

Mkhize: "Argh s'dudla. For someone who was smart enough to attain himself a million rand, you cannot be asking that stupid question. It's your niece, remember her? The one you sold to those boys, I finally got her back. You're lucky wenja, you know I had a bullet with your name on it." (Bastard.)

I can't believe what he's telling me. How did he manage to take Amara from those men?

Me: "Where is she? Where is Amara?"

I want to see for myself.

Mkhize: "Why Moses? You want to lust after her again?"

He gets up as he asks me this, my eyes widen. Why would he ask me such a question?

Mkhize: "Oh, don't look surprised s'dudla. I know what you have been doing to her and you are going to pay for it."

Me: "Mkhize, ngiyakucela. I'm sorry, I don't know what got into me." (Please.)

Mkhize: "You don't know what got into you? You dared to lay your filthy hands on my property Moses."

He chuckles, coldly.

Me: "I'm sorry Mkhize, khabazela. You have Amara now and how will she feel when she finds out that her husband killed her uncle."

He strikes me on the head with his cane, it sends me crashing on my side.

Mkhize: "Don't talk shit mgodoyi. You are lucky that I am giving you a few days to live, you will pay for betraying me Moses." (Bastard.)

He gestures the two men to help me up, they do as commanded, placing me back on my knees. He squats before me, grabs me by the collar of my shirt.

Mkhize: "This is what is going to happen, you are going to accept money for ilobola. Then, you

are going to walk Amara down the aisle before walking to your death. Your life is in the palm of my hands now Moses and there is nothing you can do about it.”

His words send chills down my spine, I had made a deal with the devil and now he has come to collect.

Me: “It doesn’t have to come to this Mkhize. Look, I know that Amara will never agree to marry you. How about I convince her in exchange for my life?”

He laughs as he stands up.

Mkhize: “That girl has no choice now, she will marry me whether she wants to or not. You are in no position to lay down demands s’dudla, I’m in charge here. You will stay here until the day of the wedding.”

Me: “But my wife, she’ll be worried Mkhize ngiyakucela.” (Please.)

Mkhize: “Who is really the wife in that house? You or her? Because you sound like a woman right now.”

He insults me and there is nothing I can do about it, I am powerless against this man.

Mkhize: “Don’t worry, they won’t miss you and what will be the point of going back home if you will be dead in three days.”

Me: “Three days?”

Mkhize: “Yes, the wedding is in three days.”

One of his men scurries into the room, he holds an imperative look on his face.

Mkhize: “Kwenzenjani?” (What happened?)

Him: “There’s been an accident boss.”

STYLES\*

Khethu: “Baby, Nkomo is here to see you.”

She announces as she hurries into the bedroom.

Khethu: “How is he?”

She inquires while looking at Randall, he hasn’t blinked or shown any signs that he’s close. I hate seeing him like this, Mkhize has ignited a fire he won’t be able to extinguish.

Mbuso: “He will be fine.”

Me: “How is Liya?”

Khethu: “She’s sleeping with Chioma, she wanted to see her father though.”





Me: "Well, he is her father."

I can't imagine how she must be feeling.

Khethu: "I think we should call Olivia to come and get her."

Me: "Not happening."

Khethu: "She needs her mother Styles, Randall is in a bad state right now and Liyana will wake up tomorrow morning, wanting to see him. What will you say to her?"

It makes sense but, I am not letting that woman anywhere near Liyana.

Me: "Liya is not going anywhere Khethu, she is staying here, where her father is."

I decree firmly, starring at Randall.

Khethu: "I was just giving a suggestion Styles."

I turn back to Khethu, already grouching. Her teary eyes glaring at me. I don't have time for this.

Khethu: "Is he really going to be okay Mbuso?"

Mbuso: "He lost a lot of blood but, he will pull through. He's a fighter."

He chuckles. I thought he hated us.

Khethu: "That is a relief."

She states while leering at me. The look on her face says, she knows I will never be the same if something were to happen to Randall.

Me: "Excuse me."

I amble out, leaving them glancing at Randall, as if waiting for him to open his eyes.

There was no other option but to call Nkomo over, Randall would have voted against it. My hands are tied at this point and we can use all the help we can get. Mkhize took Amara with the intent that he will not lose her again, it means they will be watching us like hawks.

I find Nkomo in the lounge, he's sitting on a couch and has a drink in his hand.

He jerks up as he sees me approaching.

Nkomo: "Why am I here?"

He is not wasting time.

Impressive.

Me: "Relax, Randall is injured and he doesn't know that you're here."

I see his body ease a bit, as he releases a silent sigh of relief.

Nkomo: "What happened?"

Me: "He was ambushed, by Mkhize's men. They took Amara and left Randall to die."

Nkomo: "Okay but, why am I here?"

Me: "You owe him Nkomo and I am collecting on his behalf. I know he wouldn't like this but, we need your help."

He chuckles.

Nkomo: "No wonder the storm outside, the great Styles Sishi has been humbled. You never ask for help."

I would laugh if it were funny but, I am in no mood for jokes.

Me: "My brother is lying upstairs, wounded. If I had not gotten the message he sent me, he would have bled to death. Do you know how much that aggravates me? I can't think of anything else but to see Mkhize beg for mercy while I torture him."

The bastard didn't learn his lesson the last time.

Nkomo: "But, Randall hates me, he will never accept my help."

Me: "He really doesn't have an option now."

Nkomo: "What do you need me to do?"

Me: "First, I want you to assure me that you are in this a hundred percent, there is no turning back after this Nkomo and if you betray us, I will kill you."

Nkomo: "I wouldn't dream of it."

Me: "You have a history of your words not matching your actions."

Nkomo: "I want to help Styles, maybe this will help get back my friendship with Randy."

Me: "I highly doubt but, if that motivates you, go with it."

He frowns at me.

Me: "I will fill you up on the plan once Randall regains consciousness, it won't be hard to find them."

Nkomo: "They are in Pretoria, obvious."

Me: "It's a good thing you're not a soldier, you wouldn't have made it. I need you put you're A game on Nkomo, please use that brain of yours."

Nkomo: "Dishing out insults I see."

Today I am surrounded by sensitive people.

Me: "I'm not going to be nursing anyone, this is war and I need woke people by my side. Mkhize is not stupid enough to take Amara to his house."

Nkomo: "Okay. But, how do you know where they are?"

Me: "You will only know what I feel you should know."

I am not taking any risks.

Nkomo: "Where is the trust?"

Me: "I don't trust you Nkomo. Firstly because you betrayed Randall without thinking twice about it, you're a snake. Servants do not dine with royalty. Secondly, that monkey's blood runs in your veins."

I touched a nerve there, he looks like he is about to explode.

Nkomo: "I am not him."

Me: "Relax spot. I know but, I am yet to see a drop of kindness in the Mkhize family. Including you, as you have proved to us that you are nothing but shit."

Nkomo: "Do you and Scar realise that arrogance is not power."

He growls, I can't grasp his sudden anger. The truth is one painful bastard.

Me: "Oh suck it up, this is not a day care. If you're going to be sensitive all the time, then take a hike."

I declare as I toil to the bar area, I need a stiff drink. This fool is getting on my nerves.

Nkomo: "Wow."

Really?

I chose to pretend he did not say that. I turn to him scowling at me, he's placed himself on the arm of the couch. Probably drained by my honesty.

Me: "By the way, you will be an orphan after all this, because I am going to kill your father and anyone who gets in my way. Mkhize is going to pay."

He gulps and shifts uncomfortably on his seat.

To be continued...

KHETHU\*

Styles seems different since we got to Randall's house, I don't know him to be like this. He snaps at me at every chance he gets, he is somewhat aloof. I know he regards Randall as his brother but, he should think about himself as well. I hope he doesn't close off completely because I feel him drifting away from me every second he sits on Randall's bed side.

I had to cook for everyone in the house, Nkomo will be staying here till Randall regains consciousness and decides if he wants him here. Mbuso is also staying the night, he didn't want to and Styles being Styles forced him and he had no choice but to agree.

This man and getting his way, I wonder why people tremble at the sight of him. I only hope he is not back to his old ways, I love him but, I doubt I will be able to stay with him. I refuse to live my life in fear of what if.

He still hasn't explained the blood-bath we found outside. I will have to force it out of him, which will be a task because it seems like he doesn't want anyone near him.

I find Styles in Randall's bedroom, he's sitting at his bedside and has a knot on his forehead, as he's lost in deep thought.

Me: "Baby."

I snap him back to reality, he blinks once and flashes a feign smile as he looks at me.

Me: "Here, you need to eat."

I hand him a plate of warm food, he ogles at it and shakes his head.

Me: "You need to eat."

Styles: "I have much more pressing things to worry about than filling my stomach."

Me: "There is nothing we can do for Randall right now, except to wait and you should eat in the meantime."

I press.

Styles: "I'm not hungry baby."

His stubbornness frustrates me sometimes. Not wanting to push him any further, I place the plate on the bedside table.

He sighs as I brush his head and sit on his lap. I encircle my arms around his neck and press my forehead against him. I'm waiting for him to hold me back but, nothing. It stings a little as the realization of what I was afraid of hits me like a splash of water. He's drifting away from me and I need to pull him back.

Me: "Baby."

I whisper with my eyes closed, he is not saying anything and it hurts even more.

Me: "I need you to be okay Styles, don't drift into that dark pit."

He sighs and I can feel his burden and his pain.

I press my lips on his, in a short sweet kiss and only then, do I feel his arms enfold around me. He buries his head on my neck and we dwell in that posture for a while, welcoming the silence.

I run my hand on his head and he shivers, this is my way of comforting him and assuring him that I am here.

"Styles."

We are brought back by Mbuso's voice, he is standing at the door with an awkward look on his face.

Mbuso: "Sorry."

Styles gets up, lifting me up with him and gently places me next to him.

Style: "What is it?"

He looks alarmed, I don't know why he's expecting bad news. Mbuso said Randall is going to be okay.

Mbuso: "Neo is here, I couldn't let him come to the bedroom because..."

Neo: "Askies dokotela." (Excuse me doctor.)

He doesn't finish speaking because Neo pushes him to the side as he dashes into the room.

Neo: "U na hana hore nna ke tla mamela wena. Le hore le joang lena bo ngaka. Dit is my Oga hawu. U tla mona le di twang twang tsa hao. Yey kuse mzansi la, you will twang there mo Cuba where you learnt this doctorism of yours nxa."

(Do you think I will listen to you? What's wrong with you doctors? This is my boss. You think you will come here with your high class English, this is South Africa. You will practice this English of yours in Cuba where you studied to be a doctor.)

I almost forgot he's a clown, I can't help but smile. Styles looks a bit relaxed now with a ghostly smile on his face. Mbuso clicks his tongue.

Mbuso: "You're still crazy even now Neo?"

Neo: "Nyu are still nwazy Nyeo, nxa. Wa continua le ntwi ntwi tsa hao. Hai twana, udlisi 'team. Look at Stylos here, he's white and black but you don't hear him are ntwi ntwi. Ho etsahalang ka uena mara?"

(You're still crazy Neo. You continue speaking that English of yours. You're embarrassing us man. What's wrong with you?)



Mbuso: "Voetsek saani." (Piss off man.)

Excited, Neo jumps up, jolts his fist towards Mbuso who just glares at it without any promising movement.

Neo: "Nou oa bua saan', this is what I want to hear. Ba reng ka sizulu, eish? Uhlukane nobulungu." (You see.) (What do they say in Isizulu? Stop trying to be white.)

He just butchered my language.

Mbuso: "Uyinja boy." (You're a bastard.)

Neo's smile grows, he seems to be enjoying what he's hearing from Mbuso.

Neo "Sho, sho ntwana. Le wena u hond." (Yes, boy. You're a bastard too.)

Styles: "I thought you would leave your crazy persona in Pretoria."

Styles says as he smiles at him, it feels good to see him smile. He hasn't done that since we got here.

Neo: "Persona? Stylos? Ke o tsepile kakana and wena uyang' phoxa, I just praised you in front of dokotela mo. And wena uyang' phika ntwana." (I trusted you Styles and you disappoint me.) (I praised you in front of the doctor and you deny me.)

Styles: "What the hell are you talking about now?"

Neo: "Persona?"

He says it with an English accent.

Neo: "Wat is dit? Oa bona, you must stop hanging around with this cheese boy. Otla li upgrader to ma coconuts." (What is that? He will turn you into a coconut.)

Styles: "You're crazy twana."

Neo: "You're speaking my language now because Kea tseba twana." (I know the word twana.)

Can someone have so much energy? He hasn't noticed me until now, as he googles at me with a silly smile.

Neo: "Awu isiphaphala se ntombi, awu suka madoda. My lady, how are you?"

(Come on now, such a beautiful woman.)

His accent has suddenly changed, he sounds polite and posh now.

He takes my hand in an attempt to kiss it but, Styles shrugs his hand away.

Styles: "I will burn those big lips Neo."

He threatens, Neo smiles.

Neo: "Eish, Phola bozza. U uptight too much maan. I'm allowed to appreciate ubuhle be ntombi." (Relax boss, you are too uptight.) (The beauty of a woman.)

He smiles at me, I'm not sure I know how I feel about this.

Neo: "Ai no jealous down, Joburg women are beautiful. Wena Stylos le Oga mo, thunder fire you. You let me move to Pretoria, knowing very well that there are beautiful girls mo Jozi. Aii no maan, kea hana. Entlek what happened to the bro code vele? Lena le tla'ng' bodisa." (Styles and the boss.) (I refuse.) (You two would kill me.)

Mbuso: "You know we can diagnose you with a mental illness? You're not normal ntwana." (Boy.)

He turns to look at Mbuso, then back at me and Styles while holding a frown on his face.

Neo: "O reng o? Gore the only thing e ke utloile ke ntwana fela." (What is he saying? The only thing I heard is ntwana. {Boy})

I laugh.

Neo: "Us'kang bora dokotela." (Don't bore me doctor.)

Styles: "Okay that's enough."

Styles dismisses.

Mbuso: "Please, don't make noise. Randall needs his rest."

Mbuso looks piqued by Neo's forwardness, I think it has something to do with Styles forcing him to sleep over.

Neo: "No, you should go rest. Gravity e go bontsa di flames twana. You're talking shit now. It's past your bed time." (You must be sleepy.)

He retorts, I try not to laugh because Mbuso is already offended.

Styles: "Are you here to see Randall or argue with Mbuso?"

He turns to look at Randall and his face suddenly becomes serious.

Neo: "Chai. What kind of nonsense is this? Chineke." ( God.)

He snaps his fingers once. You would think he would be serious at a time like this.

Neo: "Hai shame, is' aram se nkosi. Ke mang achunne daai ding Stylos?" (Poor soul. Who did this to him?)

There is a worried expression on his face, but I can't seem to take him serious. It's a mission, especially not with the tone he is using.

Styles: "Mkhize."

Neo: "Daai grootman? Ai man oa tseba ke mgijimi daai man?" (That Oldman? You know he's a zombie?)

Styles: "What's that?"

Neo: "Mgijimi Stylos, Mpiyakhe ko Isibaya. Li yena ana le taxi boss." (From Isibaya, he was also

a taxi boss.)

Mbuso: "What does that have to do with Mkhize?"

Neo: "Nwye nywe nywe nywe, tsamaya... uyo... robala... dokotela. Hau, si kgoa sa hau siya khenya maan." (Go to bed doctor, your English is boring.)

Styles: "Neo."

He stops him but this is Neo, you can never filter his mouth. Neo uncensored.

Neo: "Eish bozza, we have to find a strong sangoma to help oga. We must strengthen him because Mkhize otla mo nka a mo etse mgijimi." (Mkhize will turn him into a zombie.)

Me: "Neo, are you okay? Do you need anything, food or something to drink?"

I have to stop this.

He smiles at me widely.

Neo: "Ah, nkosazana. What did you have in mind?"

I opt to brush out what my mind is trying to tell me.

Styles: "Fuck you Neo, u tlo nya ntwana." (You will be sorry.)

Styles barks at him and Neo laughs.

Neo: "Haibo bozza yaka, high high iya khuphuka. You want to join oga there, ebile there's enough space." (My boss, your blood pressure will rise.)

Styles: "I'm not playing Neo, this is my woman. Watch your mouth."

Neo: "Ek het niks gedoen nie. Jaive ke hore o nahana ka dintho tsa tlof tlof. Le tlo limala Stylos, high high ha e na chomie, hai khethi." (I didn't do anything. The problem is that you are thinking about sexual things, you'll get hurt Styles. Blood pressure doesn't have favourites.)

Mbuso: "I'm not going to stand for this, clearly this guy is crazy."

Mbuso says as he marches out, he's sensitive today. He's easily offended, maybe Neo rubs him off the wrong way.

Neo: "Oa bona?" (You see?)

He points at the door with his hand.

Neo: "Ke mention- a tlof tlof yena oa vaya. U tshaba tlof tlof bari eo." (I mention sex and he runs, that idiot is afraid of sex.)

Khethu: "I will get you something to eat."

He wears that polite smile again.

Neo: "Yebo nkosazana." (Yes, my lady.)



Styles gives him a cold stare, before clicking his tongue.

Neo: "Eish, Oga madoda. Ebile ha se mo tsoanele ntho ena, e nkare utlo jumper are 'who's oga?'"

Mkhize u tlonyela daai moorskot. Ke tla mo bontsa m'ae. O tla utloa eka oa cha, we must deal with him traditionally bozza. That's his language, that mada fukha."

(My boss guys) (This doesn't suit him, it looks like he'll jump up and say 'who's oga?' Mkhize will be sorry.) (I will teach him a lesson, that mother fucker.)

Neo is too much for me, I can't seem to grasp how he can hold such a serious face while spewing such words from his mouth.

Styles: "We don't need that Neo. What Mkhize needs is torture before we send him to the afterlife. His death will be so grisly that even hell will reject him."

Shivers ripple through me at the sound of his cold words, Styles just confirmed my biggest fear. They are back into that life of crime.

Neo: "Leave it to me bozza, Ke tseba sangoma tse blind. In fact, baloi ba tops Stylos. Ke tsho the ones ba flaya ka naliti. Mkhize utlo nyela, ba tla mo vur vaya." (I know good witch doctors/traditionalist. Witches actually, the ones that fly with a needle. Mkhize will be sorry)

Styles: "Neo, you know Randall is not about that life. If you want to piss him off then continue with your stupid plans."

Neo: "Joang? What about the things ere li bona mo di movini tsa ko Nigeria? Wa dlala wena Stylos, Oga o tseba boloi first hand. Mmotse." (But how?) (We see in Nigerian movies. You're not serious Styles, boss knows witchcraft first hand. Ask him)

He says pointing at Randall, Mbuso was right. This man needs to be diagnosed so he can be treated.

And, he still thinks Nigeria and Ghana are the same.

Me: "Neo, please. Come with me to the kitchen so, I can give you something to eat."

The smile again.

Neo: "Ndlovukazi, you can give me anything to eat. Le bheka mina ngedwa, I will even ask for seconds." (My queen. Even a love potion.)

He has me giggling at his words, Styles frowns at me.

Styles: "Did I tell you that I have a gun and I know how to shoot people?"

Styles threatens, Neo is not fazed. He throws his head back, a laugh erupting from his mouth. That was loud, I glance at Randall who is sleeping peacefully.

I find Styles looking at him as well, as I turn to him, he flashes a quick smile that disappears like it was never there. Craving to feel his lips on mine, I shift closer and lean up to kiss him.

Neo: "Go sharp, ke tsoere kerese mara yoh e chesa." (I'm holding a candle but, it's hot.)



He declares, I muffle a laugh. As I walk out of the room, he follows behind me leaving Styles alone.

NOMBULELO\*

There's a knock on the door, it must be the delivery man. Mbuso ordered the food, he had called me saying he won't be back till tomorrow. For a moment there, I thought he opted to sleep over at his girlfriend's house. I felt so bad that I was ready to leave the next morning, it was until he told me that a friend is sick and he has to take care of them.

He did not give much detail and I didn't care to ask any further. It is none of my business anyway.

Tomorrow I have to go to the hospital and see if I still have that intern job. I missed a few days, I was so caught up in my misery that I forgot to report to work.

Being in doors can be suffocating, especially when you have so much on your mind. You only have your disconcerting thoughts to keep you company. It feels like these walls are closing in on me yet, I have been here for only a few hours.

The food is not that bad, although I would prefer anything but, pizza. If wishes were horses, beggars would ride. Being picky is not an option.

My phone rings.

What does she want? Not once has she called me since I was thrown out of my father's house. I'm even forgetting the sound of her voice, I think of not answering but, she is my mother.

Me: "Hello."

I make it a point that she takes note of my cold tone.

Ntombi: "Oh my baby. Unjani sthandwa sam?" (How are you my love?)

Me: "What is it mom?"

I'm not going to pretend with her.

Ntombi: "Lelo, where are you?"

Is she being serious right now?

Me: "I don't have time for chit chat mom, tell me what you want."

She breaks into a sob, normally I would feel sorry for her.

Ntombi: "Oh Lelo, your father is missing."

Wow.

I was a fool to think she loved me.

Me: "Are you kidding me right now mom?"

Ntombi: "No Lelo, I'm serious. He left here a few hours ago and..."

Me: "You have got to be kidding me Ntombi. Do you know where your daughter is? Do you know what she has been through? Not once have you called me to ask if I was okay, if I had a place to lay my head on or if I had eaten. And the only time you remember that you have a daughter is when your husband goes missing just for a few hours."

I cannot express the amount of anger I am feeling.

Ntombi: "Nombulelo hle..."

Me: "You people disowned me remember, I have nothing to do with you anymore."

Ntombi: "Lelo..."

I drop the call before she can speak any further. This pain here exceeds the one Zuma drilled in me Am I that bad of a person that even my own mother rejects me like this? It feels like I'm drowning and there is no one to pull me up. How do I deal with these demons surrounding me?

I can't fight back the tears anymore so, I burst into tears, releasing everything out. Sobs turn into wails, which turn into screams of anguish. I want it to stop, I want the pain to stop.

Me: "God, if you're there take it all away."

I scream it all out.

How can I suffer like this when my God is alive? I can't carry this burden anymore, it's heavier than it should be. If this is a test, then I have failed.

To be continued...

37\*

NOMBULELO\*

I'm woken up from a deep slumber by a loud knock on the door, my head feels heavy. It must be from the crying marathon I had last night.

I drag myself out of bed and trudge out of my room.

"Mbuso open this door."

A woman's voice sounds from the other side of the door. I open it and meet a middle aged woman who frowns at the sight of me.

Her: "Who are you and where is my son?"

She pushes me to the side, forcing herself inside the apartment. I let her be since she mentioned that she is a mother to the owner of this place. The look she is giving me makes me uncomfortable in all types of ways. I'm wearing a t-shirt that covers me up to my knees and I cannot comprehend why she is looking at me like I'm a prostitute.

Her: "I asked you a question ntombazane." (Girl.)

Me: "My name is Lelo ma and Mbuso is..."

How do I say this? Mbuso and I are not exactly friends.

Her: "You must be the maid."

She concludes and I don't have it in me to argue.

We'll let her think that for now.

Her: "Go make me some tea, black with two teaspoons of sugar."

Okay... We are giving orders already.

Me: "Yebo Ma."

She scowls and squints her eyes at me.

Her: "I am not your mother, I'm Mrs. Xaba to you."

She corrects me with an attitude, she is way different from Mbuso. I wouldn't be surprised if she is the aunt.

Me: "Sorry."

My hormones are also knocking too and she will know me once they manifest. I watch her as

she treads to the couch and throws herself on it, she grabs the TV remote and starts channel searching.

Her: "What are you waiting for? I said go make me some tea."

She commands, rudely.

I turn and roll my eyes as I lug my feet to the kitchen.

Her: "I saw that, nx!"

She shouts after me.

Gosh...

Mbuso better come back early, I do not have the strength to deal with this woman so early in the morning.

STYLES\*

The tracker I put on Amara says that she's at Bara hospital, something doesn't add up. Why would she be at the hospital?

I spent the night in Randall's room waiting for him to wake up, I wanted to be here when he opens his eyes. Mbuso confirmed that he is okay and should be awake by now, he can't explain though, why he has not opened his eyes yet.

"Is it safe to say that your attachment to Randall is strange?"

Nkomo says as he walks into the room, he is carrying two cups of coffee and hands me one.

I am not going to drink that.

I take it anyway and place it on the table, he takes a sit beside me.

Me: "I will not dignify your question with an answer."

Nkomo: "You have been on that laptop since last night."

He gurgles, I don't know why.

Nkomo: "Any luck with finding her?"

Me: "I think I have something, it could be a trap though."

Neo: "What happened to you Stylos? This was your thing, ba mo nkile joang daai cherie ha o ne o le teng?" (How did they take Amara while you're here?)

Neo voices out, he just walked in and he's not alone.

Me: "What's going on?"

I inquire, looking at the elderly woman he is with. She is wearing a long white robe with a white head wrap.

Neo: "Ke MaSonto o, she is a prophet. I told you gore ke tseba batho." (I told you I know people.)

Me: "Neo, what is she doing here?"

Neo: "Bozza o hloka mithandazo Stylos, MaSonto will help him."

Nkomo: "He could be right you know, his injuries were not that bad. He should be awake by now."

I think that I am surrounded by clowns, it's times like these when I miss my brother. He's the only reasonable person I know.

Her: "Who is this man?"

She asks as she glances at Randall.

Neo: "Ke Uze MaSonto." (It's Uze.)

Her: "I mean, where is he from? He is not supposed to be here."

Oh shit!!!

Neo: "Oga is from Ghana."

Me: "The doctor advised that we shouldn't crowd Randall so, Neo it would be best that you show her out."

This is me trying to get rid of her.

She looks at me, her eyes are searching my soul. No one has ever compelled me to drop my gaze but, there is something powerful about this woman. I can't put my mind to it, it's like she knows every bad thing I have ever done in my life. She just dug into my deepest darkest secrets.

Her: "Stop hiding things from me Siyabonga."

She declares, having me gulp in fear. How the hell does she know that name? No one knows about it, not even Randall. It's a hidden past that should stay hidden.

Fear doesn't know me. Who is this woman that has fear challenge me? Neo has this regretful look in his eyes, I am going to fuck him up for this.

Neo: "MaSonto, we brought you here for oga. Not bozza."

Her: "Neo, this is bigger than me. This man needs to go back home, his people are searching for him. He was chosen before his birth to lead his people, nothing has gone right back home since his departure. If he continues to ignore his calling he will die."

Me: "This is insane. What you are saying doesn't make sense, it's Ludacris."

Neo: "Eish, bozza askies. Kopa se ke oa boa se kgoa se deep. MaSonto ha a utloe." (Please don't speak deep English, MaSonto doesn't understand what you are saying.)

Me: "Fuck this shit okay. Did I not tell you not to do this Neo? I specifically told you that I will handle everything."

Neo: "No Stylos maan, oang disappoint-a. Please show respect ko MaSonto. Phela she's a prophet, her God will strike you with lightning. Don't say I didn't tell you bozza." (You're disappointing me Styles.)

Nkomo: "Look, I know I have no say when it comes to Randall but..."

Me: "Then shut the fuck up."

I bark at him, he raises his hands in defence.

Her: "You are using your anger as an escape from the truth, you can't protect him forever Siyabonga."

I hate that name.

Me: "Don't call me that."

She shakes her head, as she closes her eyes.

Her: "I can see his soul, his grandfather refuses to let him go."

She starts groaning and falls on her knees, it's so fast that we don't have time to catch her. Her body convulses while, she mummurs words we can't make out.

Neo: "Blood of Jesus."

He expresses loudly as he runs to hide behind me.

Neo: "MaSonto."

The fear in his voice gives him away. I can't put into words what is happening here, I'm just as shocked as Neo. Nkomo though, doesn't seem fazed, he kneels in front of MaSonto.

Neo: "O etsang bari see? Nkomo ntwana, se ke oa chunna daai ding. U tla khautheka. Ke lintho tsa bodemoni tse." (Nkomo don't do that, you'll get hurt. These are demonic things.)

Nkomo: "Guys, I know what is going on, my family is very traditional. I grew up around these things, MaSonto is manifesting. A spirit has come forth and it wants to speak."

Me: "Don't play us Nkomo, it's not funny."

Nkomo: "This is real, she will remain in this position until we speak to the spirit. It will not depart until it says what it wants. Get on your knees now."

He explains and requests.

Neo grabs my arm and I pull it away.

Neo: "Oa hlanya Nkomo saani, I'm not going anywhere near her." (You are crazy Nkomo.)

Nkomo: "You too are just wasting time."



Masonto starts groaning again while her body shudders.

Neo: "No, ke sharp, I will sit next to oga there. You two continue, I'll watch from a distance. Demons and I are not friends, it's a long story."

He explains while moving towards the bed and sits on top of it.

Nkomo: "Who are you?"

Nkomo says to MaSonto.

She laughs but her voice sounds deep and thick, for a second there I think a male spirit has taken over her. Then again, this is all crazy and unreal.

Her: "Okolie Okolie."

The deep voice echoes in the room before a laugh evades her mouth, my heart stops. Okolie Okolie is his grandfather, but I know him to be alive.

Neo: "Stylos."

Neo nudges me.

When did he get behind me?

Neo: "Ke tlo checker Khethu ka kichineng, seke oa wara ka 'na neh." (I'm going to check on Khethu in the kitchen. Don't worry about me.)

He whispers.

I grab his hand and pull him down, he falls on his butt.

He brought this woman here, so he must swallow the pill.

Neo: "Stylos u ntse u etsang ntwana, I'm coming back relexa. Maybe MaSonto will want something to eat after this." (What are you doing Styles? relax.)

Me: "You are not going anywhere Neo."

Neo: "Eish, wena bozza. You will kill me one day. I will haunt struu."

Nkomo: "What do you want?"

Her: "That is my grandson on that bed."

Nkomo: "Who is your grandson?"

Her: "Uze Okolie."

She laughs.

Her: "He is a King, his soul is with his people now. It was appointed to him from his mother's womb that he will be a leader but he ran from his responsibilities. My soul has not been at rest since I took my last breath. I have been searching tirelessly for him and now that I have found him I will not let him go."





Neo: "Hayi bozza, when I said ke tseba baloi, I didn't mean this. This is higher grade witchcraft maan. Nna ke batla ho tsamaea Stylos. If he can take oga's soul while he is still alive, imagine hore na o lta le etsa eng" (I know witch craft but this one is upgraded, I want to go Styles. Imagine what he will do to us.)

None of this makes sense.

Me: "Randall is not dead, his heart is still beating. How can his soul be with you?"

Her: "His soul is with me, he needs to make a decision and he has to choose wisely or I will not let him go."

This angers me greatly.

Nkomo: "Okay, we hear you. But, how do we bring him back?"

Her: "His father has to come here, he will know what to do."

Me: "That will not happen, I will not allow it."

Nkomo: "Styles..."

Me: "No Nkomo, Randall wants nothing to do with those people."

Her: "If he remains in this state, he will never be free from me. The storm will not cease, it will rain every day until what should be cleared is cleared."

I hear Neo gasp in shock behind me.

Neo: "Oa bona noe Stylos, oa bona. This is not normal man, so you mean the rain outside was... Aiii no maan. What sort of witchcraft is this? Stylos a re tsamaea ntwana, re tlo hele Nkomo le mkulu oa Oga. Oa bona hore he's used to this." (You see Styles? Let's go Styles, Nkomo will handle him.)

I don't care what is happening, I will not allow that man anywhere near Randall. There is a reason he left his family.

NTOMBI\*

We walk through the gate at S'godi's house, he instructs us to remove our shoes before entering his hut. This old man has a rondavel in his back yard, it's not weird because he is known as a witch doctor around Vaal. There are speculations, that he is more than a healer. The hut is a bit dark inside, it looks like your typical traditional shed. The room is ornamented with medicine-filled bottles, weird looking sculptures that send chills down your spine. This is it, there is no turning back now.

We assemble on a traditional Zulu mat (icansi), Petunia and I share one while Mhambi is given a newspaper to sit on.

S'godi throws his bones, he grunts a few times.

S'godi: "Vumani bo."

Us: "Siyavuma."

We chorus.

I feel a quivering sensation inside my abdomen, and my chest is tightening. I can't comprehend the reason behind it, there's this fear that has engulfed me and I can't shake it off. Sgodi raises his head and his eyes fall on me, my heart stops as the look in his eyes increases the fear that has claimed me.

S'godi: "Your husband knows why your child is suffering."

My stomach knots in response to his announcement.

Petunia: "Bengazi." (I knew it.)

Nx!

She's too forward.

S'godi: "We sisi. Tell your husband to confess what he did to that child and where he took her. If the truth is not revealed, ingane yakho ayisoze yaba nokuthula. Amadlozi athukuthele ngenxa yendlela yonke into ephethwe ngayo." (Your child will never be at peace, the ancestors are angry because of the way everything was handled.)

Me: "Angiqondi." (I don't understand.)

Petunia: "Usho ukuthini ukuthi awuqondi Ntombi, Kucace nje?" (What do you mean you don't understand Ntombi? It's clear.)

S'godi: "Ngikhulumile, there is nothing else I can do for you. This is all that has been revealed to me." (I have spoken.)

I glance at Mhambi, his silence scares me. I wish I knew what is running through his mind. Amara meant so much to him, she resembles our late brother and Mhambi felt a connection with him whenever he was around Amara. Now he has nothing to hold on to, nothing but pictures that are frozen in time. An image that will remain that, an image.

KHETHU\*

Liyana is difficult today, she hasn't stopped asking for her father. I don't know what to tell her anymore, Styles specifically told me to keep her away from Randall's room. Calling Olivia would be best, only she knows how to comfort her child. I kind of feel sorry for Chioma too. Playing her granny role to Liyana, she appears to be drained and bleak. She understands that Randall will be okay but, there is a bit of doubt tugging at her.

She exclaimed that if Randall is okay then, why is he not awake yet.

Liyana: "Aunty Khethu, you said papa will be back later right?"

I should have come up with a different excuse. How will I explain why he is not back from where he supposedly went?

I nod, as I fill her bowl with another scoop of ice cream. Chioma advised me against it because it's winter. I don't have any other option, this is the only thing that, can compose this ten year old girl. I am out of ideas and her fetish for ice cream is my most favourite thing at the moment.

Liyana: "It's later now. Can we go see if he's back?"

My heart breaks as she looks up at me with her innocent cinnamon eyes. Lying to kids always backfires, this is proof right here.

Me: "Sweetie, he's not back yet. You know how I know that?"

She shakes her head, her eyes filling with tears.

Me: "Because when he comes back, the first thing he will do is look for you."

She pushes the bowl to the side.

Me: "Won't you eat your ice cream Liya."

She shakes her head and a tear drops from her eye.

Liyana: "I don't want it anymore, I want my papa."

She sobs. I don't know how to pacify her anymore. There's an incoming call on my phone, it's my father. Liyana's eyes light up, they follow my hand grabbing the phone from the kitchen counter.

Me: "Hello."

Liyana: "Is it him."

She smiles widely, I feel bad for having to break her little heart. She jolts from the chair and runs off when I shake my head no.

Randall, you better wake up.

Dad: "Khethu, where is Sishi?"

The tone on his voice is not sociable.

Me: "He's around dad. What happened?"

I hope he hasn't found out about Style's shenanigans.

Dad: "Get him to call me, it's urgent."

Me: "I can pass the message to him, he's kind of busy lately."

Dad: "No, just tell him to call me."

He dismisses me before dropping the call and I'm left perplexed. What could he possibly want from Styles?

Now, I have to find Liyana.

To be continued...



## MOSES\*

Mkhize left this place screaming like a monkey, I hate that man. It turns out the car Amara was in crashed, I can't say that I am worried about her. Honestly, I never really looked at her as my niece, none of Ntombi's family matters to me and I can't stand her brothers. Especially Mhambi and Jonas, they get on my nerves.

I'm stuck in this room and there is no way out, there's a bouncer outside the door. He was given strict instructions not to open the door, the bloody idiots didn't even attend to my wounds.

When I escape from this place, I will have to go back to S'godi for stronger muti (traditional medicine). The one he gave me last time for protection seems to be wearing off. I have to make it out of here alive.

Mkhize is full of it, he wants me to walk that stupid dumb girl down the aisle. If it wasn't for my greed for money, I would have taken Amara as my wife. I had thought of it when Ntombi came home with her, the night her parents were killed.

The plan was to dispose of Ntombi once Nombulelo moved out and take Amara as my wife, but greed got to me. Now I'm stuck with a scrawny woman. How she managed to lose so much weight over the years, puzzles me. She fails to gain even an inch and I have to endure that for the rest of my life.

Mashoto makes up for it in all ways than one, her full figure, her thick thighs and my favourite is her flabby stomach. I love how it feels against me, and I love how she takes care of me. I can't say the same about Ntombi, I'm tired and drained by her family drama. I blame them for the lack of love that I feel towards her, they have destroyed my marriage.

## NOMBULELO\*

"Haibo girly! Are you still washing those clothes? How long does it take to do the washing?"

You heard right. She is making me wash Mbuso's clothes, with my hands. It beats me why I haven't told her who I am, I have a feeling she won't believe me even if I do.

Me: "Kodwa ma, the washing machine would have been faster." (But.)

I'm bending over the bath tub, scrubbing his jeans. She threw them at me, saying they were greasy and had tough stains. Is this how women who are married to tall big boned husbands feel when hand washing their clothes. This is pure torture.

Her: "Uyakhononda? Uthe ufuna umsebenzi, Sebenza ke girl." (Are you complaining? You said

you wanted a job, you must work now.)

She clicks her tongue before walking out of the bathroom, I hear the TV. She's watching the news, this gives me time to run to my room and call Mbuso. I must inform him that his mother is here, and is on a power trip.

He is not answering his phone, I will not dial his number again. I am not about to go all 'girlfriend' on him. I might as well go finish the work I was appointed to.

Do I really look like a house keeper? Or is his mother one of those women who enjoy repression?

My phone rings as I walk into the bathroom, it's him.

Mbuso: "I'm sorry, I was driving so I couldn't take your call. Are you okay?"

Me: "I am, there's a woman here. I think she's your mother."

He sighs, I think he's frustrated.

Mbuso: "Why is she there?"

How am I supposed to know?

Me: "She didn't tell me."

Mbuso: "No, I just thought out loud."

Weird.

Mbuso: "I'm outside, I will see you just now."

Why did he call me if he was just outside? I hear voices downstairs, he's in the house. Now I don't know if I should continue with this or leave it, I still have to go to Sebokeng Hospital.

"Lelo, leave all of that please."

I turn to his voice. When did he get here? I didn't hear him walk up the stairs? It must be because of the loud scrubbing of the jeans.

That's right, I'm using a brush.

She's also here and looks pissed.

Her: "Haibo Mbuso, it's her job and this is how jeans are washed anyway."

Mbuso: "Ma, Lelo is not a housekeeper. She's my friend."

He explains, gently so.

Her: "Ohh, ngempela?" (Is it?)

She looks at me like I am covered in faeces, her opinion of me doesn't matter anyway. I don't know her.

Mbuso: "Yes mom."

Her: "Hayi kee, mina I thought she was the hired help. She looks the part though so, you can't blame me for assuming."

She is still holding that look, as she articulates what she thinks of me.

Mbuso: "Lelo, I'm sorry for all of this."

Her: "Mbuso, I didn't know that friends of the opposite sex live together. Is there something I should know?"

I hope she is not thinking what I think she is.

Mbuso: "I'm helping out a friend ma. Am I not allowed to do that?"

This is getting awkward.

Her: "A friend with benefits, that's what you youngsters call it right? How can you be so careless Mbuso? Ingabe uyazazi izifo? You're a doctor for goodness' sake." (Are you not aware of diseases?)

She seems convinced by her assumptions, I need a place to hide. To say I am highly offended is an understatement.

Mbuso huffs, riled by his mother's predictions.

Mbuso: "Ma, you are embarrassing my friend. This is the twenty first century, a man and a woman can be friends without it meaning anything. If I was helping a guy friend, you wouldn't be like this."

Her: "Hayi suka. It's not the same and you know it."

Mbuso: "Does dad know that you're here?"

She rolls her eyes and clicks her tongue.

Her: "I have a life my child. Should I be strapped on your father's back all the time? Ungazo bheda wena." (Don't be ridiculous.)

She ripostes.

Mbuso gestures that I should walk out, his mother walks away first.

Mbuso: "Please don't mind her, old age is not kind to her."

I laugh.

Me: "Why do you have such heavy jeans?"

I tease and he introduces a laugh.

I notice that he does this thing of rubbing the back of his neck, it could be due to nervousness.

Mbuso: "Hey, those are the most comfortable jeans."

Me: "And heavy."



Another laugh.

Mbuso: "Hence, the washing machine."

He adds as he leads me out of the bathroom.

Mbuso: "Have you had breakfast yet?"

Me: "Yes, your milk is off by the way."

Mbuso: "Yeah, the thing is, I'm never home. Don't tell me you ate cereal with stale milk."

Me: "Water."

I confess, as we toil sluggishly down the stairs. His mother is back to watching the news. She gives me a look I cannot understand.

Mbuso: "Tell me you're joking."

Me: "It wasn't bad."

I lie. I couldn't finish it so, I disposed of it.

Mbuso: "No way, I'm taking you out for breakfast."

Me: "I can't, I have to go to the hospital."

Mbuso: "Why? Is it the baby?"

Me: "No, I have to check if I still have a job."

Mbuso: "You work at the hospital? Which one?"

Me: "Sebokeng and no, I don't work there yet. I was accepted as an intern in nursing and was meant to report to work a few days back. I'm not sure if I still have the job."

I explain my sad boring story.

Mbuso: "I work at the hospital too, I'm a doctor."

Mrs. Xaba did mention that.

Me: "That's nice but, shouldn't you be living in some nice big house or something? Why an apartment?"

He stops halfway down the stairs and turns to look at me. Judging by the look on his face, I think he doesn't want his mother to hear what he has to say.

Mbuso: "I work for a private practice, it's not really making much but, I love my job."

His whispers confirm my suspicions.

Me: "Okay."

I whisper back.



Mbuso: "I can help you with that intern job, you know."

Me: "Well, now that you told me you're a doctor, yes I know. But, you have done enough for me and I want to do this myself. I have to learn to stand on my own two feet. I have been living under my father's wing my whole life that, I didn't have time to learn how to be responsible. This is my chance, thanks for the offer though."

He shrugs and smiles.

Mbuso: "I'm still taking you out for breakfast."

He insists as he continues down the downstairs.

Me: "I'm okay. I swear."

Mbuso: "Well, you might be okay but, not Goku."

I frown at his retort.

Me: "Jesus fix this."

He laughs.

Her: "Didn't your parents teach you not to take God's name in vain?"

This is my cue, I can't tolerate her anymore.

I'm ready to leave, my hand is already gript on the door handle.

Mbuso: "Ma asambe." (Let's go.)

Her: "Go where?"

She's confused.

Mbuso: "I'm taking you back home Ma, there won't be anyone here to look after you."

I doubt she's ready to leave.

Her: "I am not going anywhere."

Mbuso: "You're wrong, I am taking you home. Look, I don't mind you visiting me but, now is not a good time."

Am I the only one who is noticing this big elephant in the room? I hope she doesn't think I'm the reason he is taking her back home.

She gives me her famous look again.

Her: "Mbuso, I was planning on staying for at least a week."

Mbuso: "Is that so? Where are your bags then?"

She folds her arms across her chest.



Her: "Your father will bring them."

She stutters as she explains her absent luggage.

Mbuso: "I'm not buying it ma."

That's a respectful way of telling an adult that they are lying.

Mbuso: "I know that old man cannot stay away from you. He won't let you sleep over here, let alone stay a week."

She sighs...

Their relationship is admirable, you can tell that Mbuso has so much respect for his mother.

## STYLES\*

MaSonto shudders a few times before she comes back to her senses. After what I have just seen, I still find it hard to believe it. Such things cannot be real, in my opinion, Randall would rather die than have his father come here. I'm at a crossroad and whatever I decide, I hope he will come to forgive me.

Neo: "MaSonto? Ke uena eo? Is the demon gone?" (Is that you?)

How am I friends with this man?

MaSonto is still trying to gather herself up, Nkomo glares at Neo like he is crazy. Neo shrugs his shoulders, responding to the unpleasant look.

Neo: "He eh! Mntwana ka Mkhize, nisibonisani entlek heh? Ntwe ke eng mara guys?" (Mkhize's son. What are you showing us? What is this?)

He says as he brings himself up, Nkomo is left speechless. He helps MaSonto up and that's when Liyana rushes into the room, her eyes find her father first. She runs to him and jumps on the bed.

Neo: "Eish saan."

Neo expresses as he carries his hands on his head.

I know what he means, this is messed up.

Liyana: "Papa, wake up."

The tone on her voice shows that she doesn't know what's going on, although the oxygen mask and drip speak volumes.

Me: "Liya."

I amble to her, she doesn't look at me.

Liyana: "Wake up papa."

She shrugs him vigorously, it almost seems like Randall will open his eyes and smile at her.

Me: "Liya come with me."

Liyana: "No. "

She screams when I try to take her.

MaSonto: "Leave the child."

She instructs, I don't like the way she's looking at her.

Liyana: "Papa wake up. Why are you not moving? You said you will come back for me. Why didn't you come back?"

Her mind has conveyed the message as to what is really happening.

That's it.

I can't take this anymore, I take her in my arms and she screams, throwing a tantrum.

Liyana: "No, I want my father uncle Styles. Tell him to wake up please."

It's getting harder to carry her as she's kicking and fighting me.

Nkomo: "Styles, I think you should let her be."

I put her back on the bed and she lays her head on his chest crying, my heart breaks seeing her like this. Khethu streaks in, she makes a gesture of apology when she sees the chagrined look on my face. This is so careless of her, Chioma dashes in after her. The loud shrieks of Liyana must have brought her here.

Chioma: "Liya, come with me."

Liyana allows Chioma to take her, Khethu follows them as they walk out.

Me: "I think everyone should leave the room now."

I have heard enough.

MaSonto: "Siyabonga, that child should be taken to her father's land. I can't see her future, kunethunzi elimnyama elisibekele konke." (There's a dark shadow that's clouding everything.)

Here she goes again.

Neo: "MaSonto o qala hape? That demon will come back moes, asseblief tuu, that's enough boporofeta vandag." (You're starting again? Please, that's enough prophecies for today.)

I never thought I would see a day when something sensible would come out of his mouth.

Me: "I agree with Neo, please."

I plead with her in hopes that she will understand.

MaSonto: "Awukwazi ukubalekela iqiniso Siyabonga. I am telling you all of this because you are like a second father to that child. Her feet need to kiss the soil where her father was born. If you cannot take her there now, shisa izinkuni, uthathe umlotha uwusebenzise emzimbeni wakhe izinsuku ezintathu. She must drink it also, mix a small amount in warm water and give her, do it for three days. This will protect her from the dark shadow that follows her." (You can't run away from the truth.) (Burn wood, take the ashes and apply it on her body for three days.)

I don't believe in these things and I will not be doing what she is instructing, maybe Chioma might understand but, nothing will be done to Liyana in her father's absence.

Neo: "MaSonto, O bua ka meriti e lefifi nou? This is too much, Liyana ke ngwana maan. Entlek ho etsahalang mo Ghana?" (You are talking about dark shadows now? Liyana is a child. What's going on in Ghana?)

Nkomo: "I advise that you take this serious Styles."

Me: "You are the last person I should be getting advice from Nkomo, nothing will be done to that child until her father regains consciousness."

Nkomo: "Do what you must but, don't say you were not warned."

Me: "Everyone get out now, you too Neo. Don't ever pull this stunt again."

He frowns at my finger pointing at him.

Neo: "Ulaka ngolani Stylos? Don't say I never did anything for you, this is my cut off limit. Do you know how hard it is to find a prophet? I had to go to Hillbrow to check those flyers on the streets. Hee bozza, jy veg vir die lewe."

(Why are you angry Styles? You fight for life.)

He's drivelling on about things that do not make sense.

MaSonto: "Neo Umsebenzi wami uphelile, they will decide what to do next." (My job here is done.)

She announces.

Neo: "Aii MaSonto le wena, warning nyana hore utlo etela meea. Yazi motho oa feela. Ons harte sal stop man, nie MaSonto, nie maan." (MaSonto you don't warn us that you're going to visit the spirits, you just fall.)

She laughs as she finds his stupidity funny. Nkomo looks defeated, I don't blame him. Maybe we need Neo's vibrant personality right now, everything seems so dark and gloomy.

MaSonto: "Siyabonga."

I stop myself from shouting at her. Why does she feel that she has the right to call me by that name?

Neo: "Entlek ke mang Siyabonga? Esale u re Siyabonga. Stylos ke le kgoa MaSonto. Ha a tsebe letho ka bo darkie." (Who is Siyabonga? You keep saying that name. Styles is white, he doesn't

know anything about blacks.)

Nkomo: "Hayi Neo! Must you love being the centre of attention?"

Neo scowls at him, shakes his head and laughs.

Neo: "Nkomo, kea tseba hore ntate oa hau ke moloji, mara ungangi phapheli. Ngiphethe umaSonto nou. Wena le Mkhize le tlo nyela saan." (I know your father is a powerful wizard, but don't test me. I have MaSonto by my side now. You and Mkhize will shit yourselves.)

Nkomo: "You are lucky I respect MaSonto, one day Neo."

Neo: "E etsang one day Nkomo? Hai, le rata ho ba staring. Phola ntwana, tell him Stylos." (What about one day? You act like you are better than me. Relax boy.)

Nkomo charges at him and he runs towards the door, he is like a child.

Neo: "MaSonto asambe, ho na le ma demoni mona. The Mkhizes have come out to play."

He shouts from the door, MaSonto turns to me.

MaSonto: "Your friend will never give me a chance to speak, you need to come see me. There are things I can't say to you in front of them."

I would say I am dazed by her words but, I cannot force myself to believe in things that do not make sense to me.

Neo: "MaSonto, u senya nako ea hau le ena. He will never come to see you, he's a scientist. He doesn't believe in isiko." (You're wasting your time with him.) (Tradition.)

Neo is right, she is wasting her time. She smiles at me.

MaSonto: "There is so much you don't know Siyabonga, one day you will look for me."

She turns and I watch her as she walks away, leaving my mind muddled.

Neo: "Nkomo ntwana, kea tla hond." (Nkomo boy, I'm coming dog.)

He yells with a straight face before following MaSonto out, Nkomo gives no reaction to him.

To be continued...

## NTOMBI\*

No one has said anything since we came back from S'godi's house, I think we are all afraid to confront the truth. At least I know I am, I doubt I have it in me to question Moses. Petunia went straight to the kitchen, she's cooking again. How much does Mhambi eat anyway?

Now, I'm starting to think she is cooking for herself and uses my brother as an escape goat. This morning she made him breakfast with four eggs and six slices of bread, to think Mhambi will say something. No, he ate to his heart's content. I'm only a nurse not a doctor, these people must leave my house before they suck me dry.

Petunia: "We Ntombi, I forgot to tell you. The braai pack is finished, I need money so, I can go to the mall and buy more."

She strides into my room without knocking and says this to me. How do I deal with this woman? It's a pity she's my brother's wife.

Me: "I braai pack iphelile Petunia ngoba you are always cooking up a storm as if it's Christmas." (It's finished because...)

Petunia: "You're complaining for food? Haa awukahle Ntombi." (Stop it.)

Me: "In case you haven't noticed Petunia, I am the only person bringing money into the house. Moses does nothing to help me, it's bad enough now that I have four mouths to feed, plus Jonas who is on the way."

I have been wanting to say this, Moses has hidden that money he got from selling Amara off. I haven't seen a cent of it. I know he is not about to spend it on me.

Petunia: "Ntombi, if you don't want us in your house, say it and we will leave."

She shouts, I think she wants Mhambi to hear us.

Me: "If you continue to put words in my mouth, maybe I might just say it. Think whatever you want Petunia, the fact of the matter is anginayo imali." (I don't have money.)

Petunia: "Manje uzodlani uMhambi?" (What will Mhambi eat?)

Part of me believes that's all she cares about, feeding her husband.

Me: "I'm not bothered about that, izinto zimbi sisi, wena okukhathalelayo yi braai pack." (Things are bad and all you care about is a braai pack.)

Petunia: "Yeyi, umyeni wami uyena engimkhathalelayo. You know Mhambi doesn't eat red meat." (My husband is the one I care about.)

She shouts and I have had it with her.

Me: "What about my husband? I don't even know if he is still alive, hlukana nami pansi Petunia. All you ever think about is food, you haven't left my kitchen since you came here. I can't make a cup of tea without you crowding my space, hai Petunia. Ask your husband to build you a kitchen and stay out of mine. Nxa!" (Leave me alone.)

I shout back, I have to tell her what has been eating me up.

Petunia: "Ukhuluma nami kanjalo Ntombi?" (You are talking to me like that?)

I guess she is the only one who is allowed to raise her voice.

She treads towards me, pointing her finger. I see a slap coming and I take a step back.

Petunia: "Ntombi, ngithe ukhuluma nami kanjalo?" (I said are you talking to me like that.)

She grabs the fringe of my jersey and pulls me closer to her.

Me: "Petunia leave me alone."

I yell. The truth is that I am afraid of her, she could beat me to a pulp if I'm not careful with my words and Mhambi would probably cheer her on.

Petunia: "Who the hell do you think you are wena Ntombi? Ukhohlwa ukuthi ngingubani." (You're forgetting who I am?)

Me: "Ngidedele Petunia." (Let me go.)

I scream as I try to move away from her but, her grip is too tight.

Petunia: "Ngizokukhombisa abantu namuhla, you will learn how to respect people." (I will show you what I am made of today.)

She throws me to the floor, straddles me and starts slapping me repeatedly. All I'm able to do is scream and try to push her off me, every slap burns my cheeks.

"Petunia wenzani?"

That's Mhambi he's pulling his wife off of me and someone is helping me up. My brain comes back to its senses and I see Jonas.

Jonas: "Mntase nguwe lo? I leave for a few months and you turn into a wrestler?"

He's crazy.

Am I the only one who can see that Petunia is sick in the head?

AMARA\*

The last thing I remember is the accident, I don't know what happened next. Everything is blank. I'm in a hospital room and there is this old man standing on my bedside. He is staring at me and

I find it weird.

Him: "How are you feeling?"

I sense a bit of concern in his voice.

Him: "Nod if you are okay and raise your hand if you're not."

Why is he saying that? It's not like I have lost my voice, I'm not saying anything because I don't know him. My throat though, feels dry, a drop of water would be nice. I lick my lips, wiping out the evidence of dehydration.

The pain swamping my body, makes me desire death so bad.

Him: "Should I call a doctor?"

I look away, he is a stranger and I haven't had much luck with strangers lately.

He draws a deep shuddering breathe.

I feel a prick of resentment towards anyone who has ever called me family. What is family anyway? What is love?

All these things are a façade that fate throws at us so, we accept this appalling thing we call life. I am even ashamed that God sees me in this dark world.

Why are we given people to love without limits, if they will be taken away from us?

Such cruelty to delicate fragile hearts, humans are meant to be handled with care. But, here I am, being thrown around by life as if I will not break. Death is also not living up to its purpose, it has proved to me that is a feeble enemy.

"Oh death where is your sting? You have been declared powerless, you have become a mockery and a sham. I challenge you on this day that you take me as your own, if life continues to ridicule me. I cannot be precluded by life and you."

"What did you say?"

I turn to the old man as he bawls at me. I fail to understand what he is talking about?

Him: "Are you testing death?"

He barks, sounding annoyed.

Did I say that out loud?

My mind has done it again, conspiring against me with my mouth.

Him: "What the hell is your problem? Do you know how lucky you are to be alive?"

I don't feel lucky.

Him: "What sane person would wish death upon themselves?"

He continues barking, annoying the hell out of me. I have no words for him and I don't care why



he is here or who he is. The nurse darts into the room, she doesn't look happy.

Nurse: "Sir, please keep it down. This is a hospital, there are many patients here."

She coos politely.

I am actually not the only one in this ward and this old man is causing a scene.

Him: "Hayi suka."

He rugs his hand at her and looks at me as he is ready to say something. His eyes buck for a minute and with an angry look he turns and walks away.

Nurse: "Are you okay?"

Her warm smile fills her face. I nod.

I am not okay though.

Me: "What happened?"

I know what happened, at least I think know but, I need to hear it from someone who is stable.

Nurse: "You were in a car accident? A man brought you here? Don't you remember anything?"

Me: "The memory is vague. Who is that old man?"

My question seems to surprise her as she shoots me a dumbfounded look.

Nurse: "Is he not your father?"

Me: "No, I have never seen him in my life."

She shrugs.

My world might be colliding but, I know that strangers are not permitted to see patients.

Me: "May I please use your phone."

I need to call Lelo and inform her of my whereabouts.

Nurse: "Sorry sisi but, it's against the rules."

Me: "Okay, where can I find one?"

She gives an impression that she is not comfortable with this conversation, she turns to look at the entrance then, back at me. I find her demeanour quiet strange, you would think that I am in bondage again and under strict watch.

She shrugs before streaking out of the ward, leaving me confounded and hurt.

Overwhelmed by life's endeavours, I feel a penetrating desolation. It's mashing my soul, not promising a better tomorrow.

My heart splinters as the thought of Randall comes to mind, it's still so hard to believe that he is

gone. It all feels like a dream, I can still see the look on his face before he was shot. For only that given moment, I felt like I mattered and maybe someone would fight for me.

In his last moments, he only cared about me and my safety, I wonder what it is about him that his demise makes me feel like I can't breathe.

I guess my hate for him shrouded my mind and now, all I want is to see his face. Just one more time, maybe my questions will be answered. Maybe my uncertainties will be cleared. And maybe this dark hole inside me will be filled.

## STYLES\*

I didn't want to leave the house, lest Randall wakes up. Khethu's father can be difficult, he thinks he can control me like he controls those cockroaches who work for him. He insisted that I meet him at the police station, it got me thinking though that, maybe my past has come back to haunt me. Then again, it's impossible because Randall and I always clean up.

After we find Amara and Mkhize has been dealt with, we have to step away from this life, leaving the house every day and not knowing if you will come back because there is a bullet out there with your name on it.

I'm sitting in Mr. Dladla's office, he summons me then makes me wait.

"Sishi."

He utters as he walks in and closes the door behind him, I stand and stretch my hand out to him. He scrutinizes it- huffs, then walks around the small wooden table leaving me hanging. This is proof that we will never be friends and the only thing we have in common is Khethu.

I turn to him as he draws out a .23 caliber gun, he loads it and places it on the table, the barrel facing my direction. Two can play that game but, I will not give in.

He gestures me to take a sit, I glare at his cold face. I can't figure out his facial expression, except for the glower he's addressing me with.

Leisurely and with my eyes glued on him, I settle on the metal stool. He takes his time but, ultimately sits.

Dladla: "How is my daughter?"

He could have asked me this over the phone or called her rather.

Me: "You spoke to her this morning, you should know how she is."

His eyes shoot up in shock.

Dladla: "I have always found your arrogance appalling. It still baffles me as to what my daughter saw in you."



I huff and he frowns at me.

Me: "Why am I here commissioner?"

He's still wearing the scowl on his face.

Dladla: "What do you want with my wife Sishi?"

Me: "I'm not sure I follow."

Dladla: "You're a smart man Sishi, surely, you cannot stall this conversation. We both have things to do, right? So, get to the point and tell me what you want with my wife."

I am not intimidated by him at all, if that's what he thinks.

Me: "Mr. Dladla, you are the one who seems to be stalling this conversation. I have no idea why I am here and from what I have concluded, you want to play the guessing game."

Dladla: "Don't play smart with me boy, I never liked you and I never will."

Me: "Your point?"

Dladla: "My point is that I do not like you for my daughter."

Me: "You could have told me this over the phone. Why did you have to call me here?"

He sniggers coldly.

Dladla: "I hear you have been snooping around Sishi."

Me: "Enlighten me."

He stabs at me with a black stare, reaches out his hand and lugs the gun towards him. His forefinger is on the trigger and his eyes are still on me, my unshrinking attitude appears to be pissing him off.

Dladla: "You blatant bastard."

He grunts.

This water and oil relationship is probably what makes me want Khethu even more, I will prove to Dladla that I am good enough for his daughter.

Me: "Commissioner, when your daughter told me that, you want to see me. She forgot to mention that you will be dishing out insults. Am I that bad of a person?"

His forehead creases.

Me: "Careful with that furrow, you might eventually have a permanent surprised look."

I state, I'm tired of his attitude. He raises the gun, pointing it at me. I have a good mind to walk out of here.

Dladla: "You know I can shoot you right now and cry self-defence? You are in my grounds Sishi, anything is possible?"

Me: "This is getting boring Mr. Dladla. Why am I here?"

I inquire not showing fear or hesitation in the face of danger, he places the gun back on the table.

Dladla: "I want all the information you gathered on my wife."

Me: "That is not going to happen."

He must be crazy if he thinks I will do that.

Dladla: "Do you know how much it will destroy Khethu if the truth were to come out."

Me: "I am not careless, Khethu will never find out about this."

Dladla: "Why did you go around snooping?"

Me: "One reason only, to protect the woman I love."

Dladla: "Having the truth right under her nose, is protecting her?"

Me: "Like I said Mr. Dladla, I am not careless. Unless your wife cracks and spills the beans."

I exclaim.

Dladla: "I will never allow that to happen."

Me: "Good."

I push the chair back as I get up.

Me: "I guess we are done here."

I predict and walk out, not giving him a chance to insult me any further.

To be continued...

40\*

STYLES\*

Neo: "Bozza u hokae? O tsamaile nako e telele, you know you should never leave a beautiful woman like Khethu alone hon a le batho ba tsoanang le Nkomo." (Where are you? You have been gone for too long.) (When there are people like Nkomo.)

I'm the one who called him but, he doesn't give me a chance to speak.

Me: "You mean people like you."

Neo: "Stylos, u'ska e chunna daai ding. Ke tsoana le brother oa hau, angeke ngikudle ithende.) (Don't do that Styles, I am like your brother. I will never snatch your woman from you."

I believe him but, he is still stupid.

Me: "If I am like your brother then, Khethu is your sister."

I flinch at his high-pitched voice.

Neo: "The devil is a liar, abomination. Stylos no maan. U joang mara hee!" (What's wrong with you?)

Me: "I am watching you Neo, stay away from Khethu. I will call Innocentia and tell her what you're doing?"

Neo: "Eish, why o tlameha ho involv-a batho ba bang bozza." (Why must you involve other people?)

I laugh.

Me: "Meet me at the rank in fifteen minutes."

Neo: "Which rank bozza? Usuhamba ama rank nou?" (You're going to ranks now?)

Me: "I'm going to check that lead, I might need back up. Bring Nkomo with."

Neo: "Eish, are you sure hore re ka ts'epa le rete ea Mkhize? (Are you sure we can trust him?)

Me: "Nkomo could be our only hope Neo, he is Mkhize's son after all. I know the hospital is heavily guarded so, it won't be easy to get in there."

Neo: "That makes sense bozza mara, I think you should check the coast first, we can't just attack out of the blue."

Me: "I know, that son of a bitch Mkhize has proved to be smart."

Neo: "Mkhize is not as smart as he wants us to think, se ka oa mo fa credit. It's that Italian shit head Franco. Yesis, I still can't believe that he managed to get into oga's house." (Don't give him

credit.)

Me: "I smell a rat Neo, this has Olivia's finger prints all over."

Neo: "But why would she do that?"

Me: "Revenge."

Neo: "Eish! Basadi ba ma kgoa." (White women.)

Me: "Are you done with that task?"

Neo: "The cameras have been installed all around the house bozza."

Me: "Good, I've got to go, I'm at the hospital now."

Neo: "Don't go in Stylos, that monkey will kill you."

Me: "I have a plan, relax. Besides, I can't wait for you. Neo you talk too much, you're supposed to be here already but..."

Neo: "Eish! When I hear that slogan, o nkgopotsa 007. A re, I have a plan." (You remind me of James Bond.)

He mimics my voice.

Neo: "Fill me in bozza."

Me: Let's just say, I know someone who works at a snake park."

I chortle at my plan.

Neo: "Ebe u batla hore ke tle moo? Ke grand Stylos, nna ha ke tle, Nkomo o tla tla. I'm sure o re tloaetse lintho tseo. Taima la hae ke moloji moes." (Then you want me to come there? I'm okay, Nkomo will come. He is used to them. His father is a witch.)

Me: "Fine, tell him to meet me at the rank. Wena, just watch over Randall okay."

Neo: "Ua bua nou." (Now you're talking.)

He starts laughing and I can't find a reason behind his stupid giggle.

Me: "Share the joke."

Neo: "Ey bozza us'ka kwata neh. Ke ne ke nahana hore mme oa hau drooped you at birth. Phela wena oa hlanya. You're a psycho Stylos, Linoha bozza? Aii ke bo satane bozza." (Don't be angry boss, I was thinking that your mother dropped you at birth. You are crazy, dealing with snakes. That's satanic boss.)

He gibbers.

Neo tends to jabber that sometimes he crosses the limit, this is a sensitive topic and I will not engage in it.

KHETHU\*

I'm sitting on the kitchen counter watching Chioma prepare supper, Liyana is sleeping in her room. Poor child, she cries every time she wakes up. It's sad that she has to go through this, Styles forbid me from calling Olivia.

Me: "Your food smells nice Chioma."

She gives me a warm smile.

Chioma: "Neo requested it, he said he wants to eat like a chief."

I laugh.

Me: "He said that?"

She nods, smiling still.

Me: "Why am I not surprised? He is something else."

Chioma: "Tell me about it."

There is something I have been meaning to ask her and it's bothering me.

Me: "Chioma?"

Chioma: "You're wondering about that woman that was here?"

She predicts.

Me: "How did you know?"

Chioma: "I can't stop thinking about her too and why she was brought here."

Me: "Do you think Randall's issue is spiritual?"

She closes the pot and turns to face me, the look of worry apparent on her face.

Chioma: "It crossed my mind and it's possible, Randall is very mysterious. I wouldn't say that I truly know him, he has always been closed. Same as Styles, they let me know what they felt I needed to know."

Me: "Something is definitely up Chioma, did you see how that woman was looking at Liyana?"

It made my heart drop, she leered at her as if she was in danger or something.

Chioma: "I did and I didn't like it, we have to go see her and find out what is really going on? These men will never tell us anything and we can't really grill them, as they are engrossed on finding Amara."

She smashes her hand on her mouth, sealing it as if an abomination escaped out of it.

Me: "Who?"

She swiftly turns and opens the steaming pot, her eyes hiding from me. This woman cannot mask a secret, even if she wanted to.

Me: "Who is Amara Chioma?"

Chioma: "Did I say Amara?"

She questions without looking at me.

Chioma: "I was thinking about this show that I was watching today."

She's lying to me.

Me: "Chioma, you said they are looking for Amara. Who is she and why are they looking for her?"

"If I knew there were beautiful women in this kitchen, I would have come here a long time ago. Whoever said men do not belong in the kitchen is a fool."

We turn to Neo's loud voice, he smiles and you can't help but smile back. His smile is contagious.

Neo: "Ndlovukazi, le wena mama." (Queen and you too ma.)

He greets, as he approaches. We respond with beams. He takes my hand and kisses it and I let him because... it's Neo.

Neo: "How is the Queen doing? Stylos o tlohetse o le mong? Cabanga nje, banna ba bang ba dom maan." (Styles left you alone? Imagine, some men are stupid.)

This is the part where I should be offended but, the way he says it is so funny so, I laugh.

Me: "I will make sure to pass on the message to him."

He chortles.

Neo: "Yeah, mo joetse. Ha ke mo tsabe. You see if you were my woman, I would carry you on my head and take you everywhere I go." (Tell him, I'm not afraid of him.)

There is definitely nothing wrong with what he just said, at least I'll pretend that it's normal.

Me: "Why am I being carried on your head, if I may ask?"

His face lights up.

Neo: "Is that even a question? You're a beautiful woman, I must show you off to the world. Mara Styles, ke Dracula, o tsamaea a le one se tlaela se." (Styles is always travelling alone, that fool.)

Chioma nudges me as I throw my head back and laugh, I can't help it. Neo is an idiot and it's amusing.

Chioma: "Will you say that in his face?"

He puckers at her question.

Neo: "Ah ah mama, I almost forgot you're here."



She smiles and rolls her eyes. Neo kisses her on the cheek and pulls her into a short hug, he opens her pots one at a time as he dips his head in, sniffing in the aroma.

Chioma: "Hey, people are going to eat that."

She slaps his hands and he titters.

Neo: "Mama, hunger dey tear my belle. I wan chop." (I'm hungry, I want to eat.)

He says in a Nigerian accent, I'm completely lost.

Chioma: "Na so?" (Is that so?)

Neo: "Yes mama."

Chioma: "You want my food but, you didn't greet me."

Neo: "Ah ah mama, how na?" (How are you?)

Chioma: "I am not your friend Neo, greet me with respect."

Neo: "Mama wetin wahala na? Notin spoil?" (What is the problem? All is well?)

Chioma shakes her head and deciding to ignore him, she takes all her focus back on the pots. That's Neo, he can be draining sometimes.

Neo: "Maaamaaa."

He hums...

Chioma is sulking, this is how they are.

Me: "Neo, who is Amara?"

My mind keeps pondering around that name and this is my chance to ask plus, I'm killing two birds with one stone by saving chioma from his nagging. Or else, he will never stop talking.

Neo: "What is that? Ke motho?" (Is it a person?)

He frowns at me as he says, I can almost believe that he doesn't know what I am talking about. Then again, I know that they don't hide things from each other.

Me: "Something is going on in this house Neo and I want to know what."

Neo: "S'momondiya sika Stylos, o motle haholo hore o ka stress-a." (Styles' beautiful lady, you're too pretty to be stressing.)

Me: "Neo..."

My phone rings taking me away from this unresolved conversation.

Me: "Dad?"

I greet as I answer.

Dad: "Your grandfather has been arrested."

I jerk from the kitchen counter, shock written on my face. It's impossible, that man will never do anything wrong.

NOMBULELO\*

Me: "I didn't think that missing a few days would be a problem."

I express to Mbuso as we walk out of the hospital, we came here after having breakfast. I actually opted for Lina's fat cakes, no one makes them like she does. I used to buy them every day on my way to school, Amara was also a fan. We would wake up at 6am, just to be on time for the freshest ones, then go our separate ways after.

Amara would go back home while I took a taxi to school, being there with Mbuso brought back so many memories. I have been so caught up in my problems that I forgot about her, there is no news on social media about the post I uploaded. I miss her so much it hurts.

Mbuso: "It's not the end of the world, there are so many internships on line. I will help you look for them."

Me: "I guess but..."

The sight before me blocks my words from departing from my mouth, my feet fail me as they refuse to move. I lose my mind at the realization that it's really happening and it's over.

Mbuso stops.

Mbuso: "What happened?"

Me: "Zuma."

I gasp the words out.

His turns his head.

It's Zuma, he's with Koketso and they look happy. My heart suddenly feels heavy and it's getting hard to breathe. It was hard to believe that they were actually an item when she confessed but, now that I see them. It hurts more and I can't take it.

How dare they laugh while I am in so much pain?

That should be me holding his hand, it should be me laughing at his stupid lame jokes. Not her, she doesn't even deserve a pinch of happiness.

Mbuso: "Let's go."

He says but, I can't move. My feet are numb, I want to scream and shout and cuss at them. I hate myself right now, I hate myself for loving him the way I do and allowing him to hurt me.



Mbuso: "Lelo?"

He brings my attention back when he prods me.

Mbuso: "Don't do this to yourself, he is not worth it."

He tries to assure me but, I am not convinced, I am looking at a man I love make another woman smile.

Me: "This is not fair Mbuso, she doesn't deserve that smile on her face."

My eyes are still gript on them.

Mbuso: "No, they do not deserve you Lelo. The real losers here are them and not you."

Me: "If that is the case, then why am I hurting like this? Why do I feel like the loser?"

I let my tears parade on my face, I want cry. It is the only thing that makes me feel better.

Mbuso: "Lelo look at me."

I can't look anywhere else but at them as they approach us, they see me. Koketso smirks while Zuma has this shocked expression. Mbuso takes my cheeks into the palm of his hands and turns my face to him, his eyes hold an annoyed appearance.

Mbuso: "You are stronger than this Nombulelo."

He swipes his thumbs over my cheeks, removing the evidence of my pain.

Mbuso: "You will not cry in front of those idiots, you're stronger than this Lelo, I have seen it. You will be the bigger person and not give them the satisfaction of seeing you hurt. You hear me?"

I want to say yes but, I would be lying, I don't even feel strong. I feel like a failure, I feel stupid and worthless.

"Aren't we cosy?"

I try to turn my head to look at him, I have been waiting for him to get here but, Mbuso still has his hands buried on my cheeks. He's looking into my eyes, as if waiting for assurance. I give him the nod he wanted and as soon as he let's go, I swiftly turn and my eyes meet Zuma's.

They are still the eyes of a stranger as I fail to recognize them.

To be continued...

41\*

RANDALL\*

I have heard people talk about being stuck in a bad dream and no matter how much you try, waking up becomes a mission. This is the case with me, I can count the steps I have drilled around this place with my feet. I have been circling this big mountain, each time thinking I will reach my destination but, eventually find myself in the same place I started.

There are thick big trees attending to it, as if shielding it.

I'm stuck in the dead of night, I think it's been a few days I'm not sure but, it feels like an eternity. The sun refuses to show its glory as if it is too shy to shine, only the stars gleam so brightly, covering the dim sky like a blanket that stretches to the ends of the earth. There is so many of them that I have kept myself busy trying to count them.

The crescent moon shines so brightly in the night sky like it's trying to show off.

My mind can't fathom the beauty that is before me but, I can't ignore this void that keeps drilling into my soul. My ears are filled with cries of a woman, I fail to recognize her voice but, my heart cracks with every yelp that fills my ears.

I want to help her but, I can't seem to find her. It is pure torment, one that has my soul shattered.

"Uze! Uze! Uze!"

I jerk to the bone chilling whisper of a male voice calling out my native name.

Me: "Who is there?"

I shout, this is not the first time I have heard this voice calling out to me. Whoever it is, they are too cowardly to show themselves.

"Uze! Uze! Uze!"

If their plan is to impart fear in me, then it is working.

Me: "Please, show yourself. Who are you and what do you want from me?"

I shout as loud as I could in hopes that he will answer, suddenly a strong wind throws me on the floor. Dropping me on my knees, it dies out in jiffy as if it was never there.

Me: "Please, if you're there, show yourself."

I plead with the unknown and wait for a response.

It's gone. I am left alone again in the dusk, the piercing silence seeks my company and I am forced to indulge in it.

STYLES\*

I arrive at the hospital, I know Mkhize's cars now. There are three of them parked outside and a caravan, it has his logo on the windshield. One minute you think he is smart, then he goes and makes such mistakes. It's a good thing they are oblivious to Amara's trackers, this makes my job easier.

I can't see any of the goons outside, big buff men in black, guarding a public hospital would look suspicious.

I'd be damned, his brain does work after all.

I receive a call just as I'm about to jump out of the car, it's Nkomo. He must be here.

Me: "Where are you?"

Nkomo: "Aeroton."

Me: "Meet me at the hospital, I'm going in."

Nkomo: "What's the plan Styles?"

Me: "I don't have time to fill you in."

Nkomo: "Neo told me about it. What are you going to do with a snake?"

Me: "Who said it's a snake?"

Nkomo: "I'm not sure I follow?"

Me: "You don't have to."

Nkomo: "Styles, you can't do that. It's government property, you will get in trouble."

He snaps in a panicking tone.

Me: "I know what I'm doing relax."

Nkomo: "People will die Styles, do you even know if those snakes are poisonous or not? This is a stupid plan."

Me: "I don't see you coming up with anything, let me do what I have to."

I made a mistake by calling this idiot.

Nkomo: "What about all those people in the hospital? You think those snakes will tell them apart from Mkhize's goons?"

Me: "Dude, calm down. You sound like a nagging wife, jeez. It will just be on that ward and not the whole bloody hospital."

Nkomo: "So, the ward she is in has robots?"

Me: "I'll put them to sleep once I have Amara with me."

Nkomo: "That doesn't even make sense, you're educated Styles but, you didn't think this through."

He shouts, I will let it slide.

Me: "Nkomo, you should know me by now that, I never do anything without thinking it through. My plots always include a start, middle and end. This one is well thought of."

Why am I even explaining this to him? His senseless brain won't even be able to grasp it.

Nkomo: "How many snakes are we talking since you are so sure of yourself?"

His annoying voice is getting on my nerves now.

Me: "Fifty to sixty, the keeper was a little vague on specifics."

Nkomo: "What? How the hell are you going to put sixty snakes to sleep? How will you even stop them from slithering around the hospital?"

He continues to yell.

Me: "Will you stop shouting at me? I am not stupid Nkomo, I told you I know what I am doing. If you feel like you can't do this then, go back home."

I return the bark.

Nkomo: "I'm almost there so, I might as well. At least, tell me how you are going to put them to sleep and what's the use of them anyway?"

My plans for today did not include being interrogated by this fool while, I'm parked outside the hospital.

Me: "There's this chemical I had made at the lab, ask daddy dearest, he will tell you what it does."

I continue to explain.

Nkomo: "What?"

I knew that he wouldn't understand.

Me: "Time is not on my side, I have to get in there. I hope I will find you waiting for me when I come out. I need a getaway car just in case I'm being followed."

I explain and hope he is in this.

Nkomo: "Whatever. This stupid plan of yours better work."

He drops the call.

I do not have time to dwell on him, I can't lose focus now. I put on a cap and the hood of my jacket, they won't see me coming.

AMARA\*

This old man is back but, he is not alone, Franco is with him. The slight bruises on his face give evidence that he was in an accident. He gives me a nauseating smug as my eyes meet his. My world shakes as I comprehend what is happening, Franco took me from Randall and now he is here with this old man. They look cosy, like old friends.

Fear consumes me and I grasp that, I actually felt safe with Randall, he always gave an impression of someone who was bent on protecting me. I cannot say the same about these men, their looks send chills through every bone in my body.

I close my eyes as I search for Randall in my thoughts, maybe I will feel safe. His face is sure to soothe me but, nothing comes to mind except that insatiable stolen kiss that had me weak in the knees.

The way he sucked on my lower lip while my body pressed against his, as if it were the only thing we could do, the feel of his warm tongue crudely blending with mine. The soft moan he stifled through the kiss, confirming that he was enjoying me. It left me wanting more and thinking how he would feel inside me, how his skin would feel on mine and how his hands would worship every inch of my body.

How did my mind block all this out? How did I miss all of this?

Was I so bent on hating him that, I failed to see what was being shown to me in a form of a beast?

That is one riddle I would never have been able to crack.

Now, I will never know what it is about him that has all these mysterious feelings come at me like a flood.

Suddenly, this deep need to taste his lips again nudges at me. These thoughts about him bring me the peace I was seeking.

“Amara?”

I open my eyes to see the man who just jolted me out of my fantasy, I can only show nothing but, anger towards these two animals.

Him: “What’s wrong with you?”

I glare at him and Franco who is still holding the smug on his face.

Franco: “It appears that princess is day dreaming.”

He mocks me as he smirks, coldly.

The old man looks at him with dead eyes.

Me: “What do you people want from me?”

Franco chortles.

Franco: "Wouldn't you like to know?"

Me: "I have nothing to do with you, please let me go."

I seem to amuse Franco because he ruptures into a laughter.

Him: "And, where would you go Amara? You have no one, your uncle sold you to that evil man and we saved you from him."

He declares, trying to convince me. I'm not stupid, I heard what Franco and that other man were saying. I know they have bad intentions towards me.

Me: "What do you mean you saved me?"

I ask anyway.

Him: "Randall and his friend Styles are into human trafficking, they target young and innocent girls like you and sell them to the highest bidder. Franco and I being against it and knowing how cold hearted they are, we saved you."

He explains and justifies his malicious deeds.

Me: "That is a lie. You don't know me so, why would you want to save me?"

Him: "Your father was my closest friend, I wanted to take you in after their death but your aunt and uncle refused. They hid you from me Amara, I was willing to give you the best education. Have you ever wondered why they didn't allow you to study further? Why their child got everything while you had to settle for her leftovers? The only reason they kept you was because of your inheritance, your father left you a great amount of money and the house. Moses sold it and used the money for his own selfish needs."

He sounds so convincing that I almost believe him.

Me: "How do I know that you're telling the truth? You could be lying to me."

He looks at Franco who is now leaning against the wall with a smug look on his face, for a while there, I think he is going to laugh. Franco pushes his hand into his pocket and comes out with a photograph, he hands it to the old man who gives it to me.

I fear what I am beholding, it's a picture of my father. He is exactly how I remember him- average height, bald head and his round chubby face. He was my teddy bear, I didn't comprehend how much I missed him till now. My heart breaks and craves for his love, his hugs he would smoulder my eight year old body in.

Him: "That's me, next to him."

He says, as if desperate to convince me. I raise my eyes to scan his face, then back at the picture. It is him and you can see their closeness in this picture as my father has his hand resting on this man's shoulder.



I'm confused, I don't know what to think anymore. I try to hold on to Randall's words "Don't trust these men, whatever they say is a lie."

I am surrounded by lies.

That kiss with Randall, it's something that cannot be denied even if I wanted to because so far, it is the truest thing to me.

KHETHU\*

Me: "Dad, what happened?"

He meets me half way as I approach him and leads me to his office.

Dad: "Your grandfather has been accused of raping a 16 year old girl."

What he says to me crumbles my world. Not my grandfather. He is the most untainted person I know.

Me: "No, that is a lie dad."

I debate.

Dad: "I doubt it."

Me: "What are you saying? Dad you know he will never do that."

I raise my voice at him.

Dad: "Khethu, I saw the girl. She was shaken and she wouldn't stop crying. You can't fake something like that."

Me: "Well, maybe she's mistaken. Maybe it was someone else and she's putting the blame on him."

He looks at me like I am losing my mind, maybe I am.

Dad: "That is stupid and you know it. You are a woman Khethu, you should know that no woman can fake such tremor."

He is right but...

Me: "Oh my God, he must be broken. Honourable Judge Asanda Mdluli arrested for rape? Do you know what that will do to him and his career? No, I refuse to believe that. He cannot be capable of rape. That man is an angel, he loves people. I don't know anyone as compassionate as him."

He offers a look that says he believes the accusations.

Me: "Dad no, he is your father- in-law. You know him better than this."

I whimper in sobs and he pulls me into his arms.

My mother walks in, her face displaying a blank look.

Nobayeni: "So, it's true?"

Dad pulls me out of his arms, turns to my mother and nods. They exchange a look I cannot make out.

Nobayeni: "Maybe that bastard will finally rot in jail."

She states coolly.

Me: "Why are you so heartless? He's your father."

I yell at her.

The last time I saw her was when we had that fight.

Nobayeni: "He's a rapist, a sick- spineless paedophile who deserves to rot in jail for the rest of his life."

She shouts back.

Me: "I'm not surprised that you would say this, you don't care about anyone but yourself."

Dad: "Lelo, this is not the time."

Nobayeni: "You're a child Bridgette, you don't know anything."

Me: "I know that my grandfather is innocent, he is not you Nobayeni. You're capable of anything, you don't deserve a father like him."

She cackles scornfully, taking delight in my declaration.

Nobayeni: "This is the most sensible thing you have said to me so far, you are right. I deserve better."

Me: "One day, karma will visit you and you will be sorry."

Nobayeni: "Why is this child so disrespectful? I am not your friend Bridgette, in case you haven't noticed. I will put you in your place right now, dare me you stupid child."

She pokes my head with her forefinger while shouting at me, I shrug it away and she grumbles. My father stands as a bridge between us.

Dad: "I am not going to allow this in my place of work. Don't you two have any shame at all? Bickering with each other like animals?"

He grunts.

Nobayeni: "Teach your daughter some respect Dladla, or I will."

I hate her.

Me: "I want to see my grandfather."

Dad: "I don't think that is a good idea."

Me: "Why?"

Nobayeni huffs, I can tell that she is hiding something.

Dad: "I think you should go home, I will take you to see him when the time is right."

What the hell does that even mean?

Me: "Dad I want to see him, I'm not going anywhere till I see my grandfather. I don't want him thinking that I have also abandoned him like some people."

Nobayeni shoots me a deadly glare and clicks her tongue, I roll my eyes at her.

My father knows I can be stubborn and I will not back down. He follows me out as I make my way towards the holding cells, I don't care to check if Nobayeni is tagging along.

To be continued...



42\*

STYLES\*

Kgotso is waiting for me at the entrance, he has the package with him.

Kgotso: "Monna." (Man.)

He greets.

Me: "How many?"

kgotso: "Sixty."

Like I predicted.

Me: "All lethal?"

Kgotso: "Every single one of them."

Me: "Good. Let's go."

Kgotso is dressed as a maintenance guy and because of that, we pass through reception without any hassles. We take the stairs to the fourth floor, I gesture that he stops as we reach there. I check the coast and there are four guards on the entire floor, they are dressed in normal clothing. One would think that they are just ordinary citizens but, I know Mkhize's minions, they look like bouncers and that gives him away.

I turn to kgotso who's awaiting my command.

Me: "I will tell you when to release them."

He looks worried and edgy.

Kgotso: "Are you sure the substance will put them to sleep?"

He probes, perspiration running down his forehead, showing the magnitude of his agitation.

Me: "Yes, I just need to cause a commotion then get what I want."

He nods, while dabbing his forehead with his coat-sleeve.

Me: "Would you relax? You'll fuck up if you're so jumpy. Here, put this in your ear."

I hand him a Nano wireless earpiece.

Me: "Wait for my call."

I pull the cap a little lower to my face and leisurely walk down the passage, I make sure not to make eye contact with the goons. Franco walks out of the chamber I'm headed to, he looks at me and I try not to look cynical as he walks towards me and keeps a guarded gaze on me.



He slowly walks past while glaring at me, if he recognizes me then my plan will be ruined. I breathe a sigh of relief when he finally walks past. Just a few more steps and I will be in Amara's room, that's when I will give Kgotso the go ahead. Once the snakes are out, the party starts. Those little devils will be a great distraction.

"HEY!!!"

Shit! That's Franco. I ignore him and keep on walking, I pull out a gun as I prepare for the inevitable.

"Hey, Styles."

Franco shouts again, if I continue walking, the son of a bitch might shoot me from behind. Mkhize walks out of Amara's room just as I'm about to turn, he recognises me and hurries back in. I guess my disguise is not that good.

Me: "Now."

I whisper through the earpiece before turning and opening fire, taking two gofers out. I run for cover dodging Franco's bullets, there's chaos everywhere. People are running and screaming, this is what gets black people killed. Instead of running for cover, they scatter everywhere.

Franco: "Styles you're dead anyway, you might as well come out."

He yells.

I'm inside a room and there are five patients gathered in a corner, they look distraught as they glance at me with fear in their eyes. I try to move but, I'm stopped by this excruciating pain on my abdomen. I send my hand to inspect, and flinch as the pain reacts to the touch of my fingers. I feel a warm thick slimy liquid and realize that I've been hit.

NOMBULELO\*

We are standing in the parking lot, Zuma and Koketso are still holding hands and it stings.

Mbuso: "It would be best if you walk away, we don't want to start trouble."

Mbuso makes the first move, I doubt I was going to say anything. I was ready to cry for him and ask him if he enjoys hurting me.

Zuma chortles, responding to Mbuso's demands.

Zuma: "Lelo, inyoni yakho iyakukhulumela manje?" (This bird speaks for you now?)

I think I will cry any minute now, my eyes are stuck on him and I can't seem to get a word out of my mouth.

Mbuso: "Lelo, let's go."



I can hear his voice but it's far, my eyes refuse to leave Zuma's face. It's like I am stuck and have forgotten how to move. He's leering down at me as he smirks followed by a wink. Bastard, he's enjoying seeing me like this.

Koketso: "Baby let's go."

Her riling voice gives my eyes back the power they were seeking, they fall on her face and I lose it. The next thing I know my hand is splashing against her skeletal face, she lets go of Zuma's hand as a scream soars out of her mouth. She returns the slap just as hard, and I stumble back a little and gain my balance.

Controlled by my emotions, I jump on her, pulling her ugly wig off and exposing her short hair. She tightly seizes my dreads, I could feel the strands of my hair snapping on my sculp. I scream, flailing my hands and letting them hit wherever they land on her body.

Everything happened so fast that the boys were bemused, they didn't have time to act.

Zuma: "What the hell is your problem?"

He shouts at me as he snatches my arm, pulling me away from Koketso, Mbuso pulls me from him and stands between us.

Mbuso: "Don't cross your limits boy."

He threatens and Zuma laughs, derisively.

Zuma: "Or what? You think I'm scared of you cheese boy?"

He asks, in an insulting manner. I gawp at Koketso next to Zuma as she fixes her wig.

I am so livid right now that, I can't even think straight. There's so much anger plastered on her face but, she cannot be as angry as I am.

Koketso: "You're going to pay for this wena s'febe." (You bitch.)

She threatens as she shoots me an evil stare, I'm not thrown by her empty threats.

Me: "Is'febe nguwe Koketso. How dare you do this to me? You wanted to eat from a table you were not invited to so, you thought it best to lurk behind my back and steal from me. Uzonya wena." (You will get what's coming to you.)

I return the threat.

Koketso: "Ngizo ku trapa, I see you didn't feel anything when Zuma hit you, you want more akere?" (I will trash you.)

She yells, reminding me of a painful memory. Mbuso mildly shoves me behind him as I attempt to jump on her again.

Mbuso: "Control your pest boy, uzolimala." (She will get hurt.)

He's still standing right in front of him, I can't see his face but only Zuma's. He's scowling at Mbuso.

Koketso: "Who are you calling a pest wena s'lima?" (You idiot.)

She screams her insult at him, Mbuso doesn't even acknowledge her presence.

Zuma: "Awume kancane wena." (Wait.)

He reprimands her and she clicks her tongue.

Mbuso: "I think I didn't mention this the last time, stay away from Nombulelo. When you see her, walk the other way. Don't even let the thought of her enter that empty head of yours, pretend she doesn't exist."

What the hell is he doing?

This is not what I want, maybe it's not but, I'm not ready for Zuma to forget about me.

Zuma: "Or what?"

He's as bold as brass. This is how he's always been, stubborn, arrogant and egocentric.

Mbuso: "I know people ntwana and believe me, you wouldn't want them to know you."

He growls, in a deadpan voice.

I have no clue what he means by this but, his words are disturbing.

I see Zuma gulp and that undaunted attitude he was flaunting is gone.

He clicks his tongue, gives me a warning look that assures me that, this is not the last I see of him. Zuma is not one to be threatened and lets it go, I know he will want to hurt Mbuso.

Mbuso turns to me as soon as they walk away, he's wearing a frown of distress and looks offended.

Mbuso: "I have to be somewhere so, I will drop you off at home."

He speaks, serious-faced.

Me: "Mbuso, that fight..."

Mbuso: "You don't have to explain anything."

But, I want to explain.

Me: "That was not me, I swear. It's just that, when I heard her call him baby, I lost it."

I justify my violent actions.

I know, I don't owe him an explanation. I just want him to know that I don't walk around randomly attacking people.

Mbuso: "Lelo it's okay, honestly. I understand where you are coming from."

I nod.



Mbuso: "Shall we go? Or else I will be late."

He says as he fixes my dreads, I nod.

We walk quietly to the car, this is awkward.

NTOMBI\*

Jonas and Mhambi have sat us down, petunia is next to her husband. While, I am sitting opposite them, Mhambi looks very disappointed in me. I know for a fact that he blames me for this fight, he thinks his wife is perfect.

Jonas: "You're fighting your elders now Ntonto?"

That question is inconsequential and I fail to apprehend why he would want to ask me and not her, she's the one who went 'Chris Brown' on me.

Me: "Before you ask me trivial things. Has anyone even bothered to try and find out where my husband is?"

Petunia: "Yeyeni."

She cackles loudly, as she claps once.

Jonas: "Petu, I know you love attention but, wait for Ntombi to finish."

She rolls her eyes at him.

Jonas: "Mhambi, khuza mfowethu." (Apprehend her my brother.)

He gives her that firm glare that, makes you withdraw from whatever you want to say. Jonas is strict like that but, he can also be a clown when he wants.

Mhambi will not dispute with his brother, this is how much he respects his opinion.

Jonas: "Ntonto, we are listening."

Me: "Bhuti Jonas, my husband has been missing since izolo and uMhambi doesn't want to help look for him, instead, he just sits and lets Petunia do whatever she pleases in my house. Huh ah mina ngikhathale Bhuti, I can't handle everything alone." (I'm tired brother.)

I explain my troubles in anticipation that, Jonas will pity me, put his hate aside and help look for Moses.

Petunia: "Ntombi is selfish..."

Jonas raises a hand and she shuts her big mouth.

Jonas: "Petu wait, I want to hear what she has to say. Ntombi must explain to me why my kids



are not at home.”

Petunia is ready to roll her eyes but, she refrains from it.

This is my chance to introduce my tears to him.

Jonas: “Is it true Ntonto that you let that good for nothing man oust my child out of the house? And where is Amara?”

The look in his eyes commands answers.

Me: “I tried bhuti, you know how Moses can be.”

I whine, crying.

Mhambi: “Enough with your excuses Ntombi, tell Jonas the whole truth. Tell him how you lost Amara and how Moses banished Nombulelo from the house while, you stood there and watched.”

He shouts as he shifts to the edge of the couch, Mhambi hasn’t been this angry since they came here. It appears he is losing his patience or lost it rather. Maybe I should tell them the truth about Amara. What if Moses doesn’t come back? And, I am protecting someone who is probably out there spending his money with other women.

Jonas: “Ntonto, Uzokhuluma noma cha?” (Will you speak or not?)

He grunts.

Suddenly I see my father in him, he is the exact replica of Vusamazulu. That man implanted patriarchy in my brothers, Jonas adapted to it while, Mhambi showed no interest in becoming the man my father was.

Me: “Ngiyaxolisa bhuti, I’m powerless when it comes to Moses. Please, I tried to protect Amara. I took her in as my own and loved her but, Moses had evil plans for her.” (I’m sorry brother.)

Their faces change as they look at me in anticipation, you would think they know what I am about to say. I heave a sigh as my heart is beating hard against my chest, this revelation will change everything. It will change how they see me as their little sister. I can’t take their condemnatory stares so, I’m forced to drop my gaze in shame.

Me: “Moses... gave Amara... away.”

It takes everything in me to spill out this confession.

Petunia: “Ini?” (What?)

Her loud voice fills the room

Jonas: “What did you say?”

He roars and Mhambi chortles, infuriated.

Jonas: “Khuluma!!!” (Speak.)

He rumbles as he charges at me, I screech as I jolt from my seat. Mhambi is also on his feet, he knows what Jonas is capable of. He is not afraid to put anyone in their place, I have been a victim of his hard hand before and I refuse to let that happen again.

My feet lead me back but, I can't seem to escape Jonas as he keeps moving closer with every move I make.

Jonas: "Ntombi Khuluma, what did Moses do with that child?" (Speak.)

My tears seek full attention, I can't control them. I know if I let these dreadful words roll out of my tongue Jonas will not hesitate to hit me.

Me: "Ngiyaxolisa bhuti, I didn't know what Moses was planning. He confessed everything to me after he came home that day and had a bag full of money." (I'm sorry brother.)

Petunia: "Hayi, oh Jehova. Sixolele baba." (God forgive us.)

She screams as she carries her hands on her head, a little dramatic if you ask me.

Mhambi: "A bag of money?"

He barks, shock marked on his face.

Jonas: "Ntombi, uthe wena Moses gave her away. Isikhwama semali singenaphi manje?" (Why are you mentioning a bag of money?)

He knows what I meant, his face says it. He just wants me to say it again.

I stagger back, my eyes widened in fear of what my brother will do and tears streaking my face.

Me: "Jonas, Mhambi I swear. Bengingazi ngecebo lakhe. Ngifunga amathuna kaNkosiyabo kanye noFikile. I will never do anything to hurt their child." (I didn't know anything about his plans. I swear on Nkosiyabo and Fikile's graves.)

Jonas slaps me so hard I tumble to the floor.

Jonas: "Ungalinge ubandakanye umfowethu kulokhu. They have nothing to do with your evil ways Ntombi." (Don't you dare involve my brother in this?)

He roars, as he points an accusatory finger at me and grabs my hand, pulling me back up.

Jonas: "What did you two do to Amara Ntombi? Where did the money come from? You better think before you answer or I swear, I will call the police.

I'm weeping now and my tears refuse to plead Jonas on my behalf, he is not falling for them.

To be continued...





Edit with WPS Office

43\*

STYLES\*

Two black female nurses run in screaming, they see me standing with my back against the wall and a gun in my hand, they attempt to run back out.

Me: "Hey, hey."

I target the gun at them and they stop. If fear could speak, it would be calling out to them.

Me: "Come here."

They glance at each other then back at me, with their eyes popped out and shake their heads in unison.

Me: "I said come here."

One of them starts crying.

Nurse: "Please sir, please don't kill us."

She pleads and it frustrates me to the core plus, the agonizing burning pain on my wound adds to my frustrations. My legs lose their capability to stand as the loss of so much blood has made me weak, I let my body slide down to the floor. The gun is still aimed at these two horrified ladies.

Me: "Shut up and come here."

They lumber towards me at my strict demand.

Me: "I need to clean up this wound, get me some antiseptics and bandages."

I instruct, she nods swiftly and marches to the cabinets.

Me: "What's your name?"

Nurse: "Sethu."

She stutters, her eyes glistening with tears.

Me: "Sethu, don't be afraid. I won't hurt you, you see the men out there?"

She nods.

Me: "They are very dangerous men, now I need your help, okay?"

She nods again.

Me: "I need you to peek out there and tell me what you see."

Sethu: "What if they see me? They will kill me."

Me: "They won't see you, I can't move due to this pain. You're my only hope now Sethu, if those men get here, they will kill everyone in this room. Do you understand?"

She runs her eyes to the group of people gathered at the corner then, back at me. She trails them to my torso and a soft frown builds up on her face, she attempts to lift my top up and I press my hand on it. There is so much blood oozing through the gun wound and leaking down my jeans.

Sethu: "I want to see if it's infected."

Her lips quiver as she validates her inquisitive.

Me: "It's a fresh wound."

It can't be infected yet, my body though is sweltering. My vision is a little blurred and I feel light-headed. I can't really say I see a good ending to this.

Sethu: "It's a deep wound, you need to get treated or you will go into shock and die."

I frown at her prediction, funny it's how I feel right now. I clamp my teeth at the burning and stinging sensation, dribs of sweat are occasionally falling from my face. She runs to a nearby drawer and comes back with a bandage and starts wiping my sweat. The other nurse hurries back with the medical kit and I gesture that she helps me.

Me: "Sethu, I need you to peek out there and tell me what you see."

"Boss, let's get out of here. Jojo has been bitten by a black mamba."

One of the goons shouts frantically, Sethu keeps her alarmed eyes on me.

Franco: "No one is fucking going anywhere, kill them if you have to."

Franco shouts and it's followed by multiple gun shots, Kgotso will have to forgive me for the dead snakes.

The turmoil and commotion has died down, the ward must be empty.

Franco: "Styles you sick son of a bitch, I'm going to kill these snakes and your next."

Me: "I would be careful if I were you Franco. You're in the presence of the world's deadliest snake, they can be very aggressive when threatened."

I yell back, he doesn't respond. I only hear gun shots now. The nurse dressing my wound is fidgety, her hands are trembling and tears flowing down her cheeks. I wince at the sting of the antiseptic.

Me: "Will you relax? You're a nurse for goodness's sake."

I bark at her due to the agonizing pain, she shrieks. Dammit!

Sethu: "Lebo relax, it's okay."



Sethu comforts her and she nods, wipes her tears and continues.

Me: "Please check and tell me what you see."

She dips her head through the door.

Sethu: "There's a white man, he's alone and he's coming this way."

She explains.

Me: "Is that all?"

Sethu: "Besides the snakes slithering around, yes that's all."

Me: "Don't you have something strong for the pain?"

I ask Lebo, I can't bare the pain anymore. She nods and runs back to the medicine cabinet. My phone rings, It must be Nkomo, took him long enough.

Me: "Please get my phone for me."

Sethu rams her hand in my left pocket and comes out with my phone, she swipes the flashing green button and places it on my ear.

Nkomo: "What the hell is happening Styles? People are gathered outside, saying there's a shootout in there and snakes all around the hospital. There are news anchors everywhere. Do you realise what this means? The police will be here any minute now."

Nkomo is too negative for my liking.

Me: "I will probably be dead by the time they get here."

I laugh.

Nkomo: "What do you mean?"

Me: "I was hit, Franco is one step away from me but, that's not a problem. I won't go down without a fight, I'm taking that fucker with me."

Nkomo: "No, you cannot die, remember why you're there."

He reminds me why I'm doing this, I can't fail Randall. I have to get Amara.

Me: "You need to get here Nkomo, if you find me passed out. Do anything to bring me back okay? Styles Sishi is not going out like a coward."

Nkomo: "I'm coming."

I motion that Sethu drops the call.

Me: "There's a glass tube in my pocket, please take it out."

She does as I say.

Me: "I want you to throw this out the door with force, make sure you smash it against the wall."

Then, shut the door immediately.”

Her eyes widen.

Sethu: “What is it? Is it a bomb? I can’t do it.”

Me: “Those snakes out there will soon get here, if you want to be safe then, you will do as I say.”

She gulps, hesitantly gets up and throws the glass out, I hear it break.

She shuts the door and squats in front of me, her hands are shaking with fear.

Franco: “Funculo!!! What is...” (Fuck.)

His voice diminishes, the smoke has knocked him out.

Me: “If I pass out, I want you to use a defibrillator to bring me back.”

I’m losing my strength with every word I utter, thankfully Franco has been dealt with.

Sethu: “I’m not a doctor sir, I might even lose my job.”

She panics.

Me: “I will make sure that doesn’t happen, remember what I said Sethu. Those men are dangerous and I’m the only one who can stop them.”

She nods but, there is so much doubt written on her face. I feel myself drifting into a deep sleep but, the mission at hand keeps bringing me back. I doubt I will last long.

AMARA\*

The old man comes running back in, he draws out a gun and people in the ward start screaming and running for cover, immediately there are sounds of gun shots outside the room. I try to get my painful body out of bed but, he grabs my arm, stopping me from moving.

Him: “You need to come with me.”

He commands frantically, I snatch my arm from him.

Me: “I am not going anywhere with you.”

Him: “Amara this is for your own good, the men I told you about are here. They want to take you away.”

Randall instantly fills my mind but, I know it can’t be him because I watched him die.

Me: “I am not going anywhere with you, I don’t even know you.”

Him: “I told you that your father was my friend, my goal is to protect you.”

The tone of his voice says that he is losing his patience.

Me: "I don't believe you, I was told about your lies. Just because you showed me a photograph of you standing next to my father, doesn't mean that I can trust you with my life."

He grabs my arm again, this time pulling me off the bed.

Me: "You're hurting me."

I yelp in pain, but he doesn't heed to my cry nor does he recognize the fact that I am injured and in so much pain.

My head spins and my knees are wobbly as my feet hit the ground. I almost fall, he catches me and throws me a coat.

Him: "Wear this."

I put it on as slow as I can, every limb in my body hurts with every move.

I look at the doctor who is hiding under a bed, his face is that of horror. I understand this man has a gun but, a little help will do.

He lugs me towards the door, someone pushes it open and he lurches back.

Styles limps in and aims his gun at the old man who hooks his arms around my neck and pulls me in front of him, using me as a shield.

Styles: "Hiding behind a woman mkhulu? Shame."

He mocks with a smirk on his face. He looks weak and pale, his hands and clothes are covered in blood and I swear he would fall any second now.

Him: "You are no match for me Sishi, look at you? You can't even stand straight."

Styles: "You should know by now that I never go down without a fight, hand her over Mkhize."

He commands with great authority, this Mkhize man laughs.

Mkhize: "You must be stupid if you think I will do that, Amara is coming with me. What will you do with her anyway, Okolie is dead. She is no use to you and I know she isn't your type."

Styles has a little smug smile on his face, I wish I knew the reason behind it.

I am disgusted by the words coming out of Mkhize's mouth, my heart thuds against my chest as I am reminded of Randall's death. The thought of not seeing him again is suffocating.

Styles: "As you can see Mkhize, I don't have much time. One thing I know is that I am not leaving this place without this girl. So, are we going to do this the easy way or the hard way?"

Mkhize: "You must be losing your mind if you think I am intimidated by your threats Sishi, you have lost, give it up."

I see Franco leisurely walk in with a gun pointed at Styles.



Franco: "Drop it dick head."

"You drop it dimwit."

It's Nkomo, he presses his gun on Franco's head. I am dumbfounded that he is still around, I haven't seen him since the attack and I never cared to ask how he was doing.

Styles: "How did you escape the smoke you shit head? You should have your memory wiped out."

Styles growls and Franco is tickled by his words as a conceited laugh evades his mouth.

Franco: "You are not the only one with brains Styles."

Mkhize: "Franco shoot this idiot."

Mkhize commands, I'm standing here baffled by everything that is happening. Having a gun pointed at you and not knowing if today you will breathe my last. It almost feels like a movie, anytime now someone will say cut. This Mkhize was lying to me all along, Randall was right.

Nkomo: "I wouldn't do that if I were you."

Mkhize: "You are a disgrace to the family Nkomo. How long will you be this boy's lap dog?"

Nkomo: "You do not get to talk to me you bastard."

He growls, I sense a lot tension between them.

Styles: "This is no time for a family reunion, I am losing my patience old man."

Me: "Please, let me go."

I plead but, my cry falls on deaf ears.

Mkhize: "Drop the gun Sishi."

Styles has this smug look of victory, I don't understand it but, he knows he is walking out of here triumphant.

Mkhize bursts out in a fit of laughter which leaves everyone confused.

Mkhize: "You people are stupid. Do you really think that I will give her up so easily? I have waited for this moment and now that I have her, I'm not backing down Sishi. My brother died trying to bring her to me, his death will not be in vain."

I didn't know the driver died, Franco escaped with a few scratches and I thought the same thing happened with him.

Styles: "Your brother's death is not the last of it Mkhize, the Okolies are raving mad. They seek revenge for their son. You see this rain outside? It's evidence of their wrath."

It is still raining outside, I heard some nurses complaining about the rain. Some saying their townships are as dry as a desert while, some said it was hard for them to leave the house due to the flooded streets.

Franco: "You Africans have to justify everything with tradition, that's bullshit. Are the snakes a part of your voodoo practises as well? Can you believe this fucker released snakes all over the hospital?"

He states, questions and reveals as he pokes his gun on Styles' head, Styles growls and shoots him a cold stare. Nkomo does the same thing to Franco.

Nkomo: "Yey, yey, mgodoyi. Shut your pie hole." (Bastard.)

Franco: "Fuck you."

He growls.

Mkhize: "You know me Sishi, I will not vacillate between killing her and walking out of here with her. I have nothing to lose."

He threatens and I know it's over, Styles clamps his jaw. I think he knows there is no other way out, he looks at me and I see regret on his face.

Styles: "Sorry."

He signs the words with his mouth.

NTOMBI\*

The room is silent and only my sobs are heard, everyone is looking at me, waiting for my explanation. It pains me to think that this will break their hearts.

Jonas: "Don't force my hand again sis wam' I am losing my patience."

He roars as he grabs my arms and shakes me vigorously.

Me: "Okay, okay."

I scream cry and he lets go.

Me: "Jonas please, listen to me bhuti wam' I had no part in this. I didn't know Moses was planning to sell Amara to some men. He only explained when I asked him where he got so much money from."

Petunia: "Oh Nkosi yami." (Oh my God.)

She screams, burying her face in her hands. Mhambi drops down on his knees and sobs quietly and Jonas is gobsmacked, shock is evident on his face. His chest is rising and falling under his t-shirt while he looks at me like I killed someone.

Jonas: "I was hoping you would say something else but, this? Ai unghoxile mta kababa." (You have disappointed me my sister.)

Me: "Ngiyaxolisa bhuti Jonas." (I'm sorry brother Jonas.)

Jonas: "Uxolisa amasimba, I am ashamed that we share the same father Ntombi."

He barks at me, all I can do is cry and it hurts that Mhambi is sobbing as well. I know him to be strong and very private, I have never seen him cry.

Me: "Mhambi, ungakhali. Ngiyaxolisa bhuti, ngicela uxolo." (Please don't cry Mhambi, I'm sorry. Please forgive me.)

I beseech in tears.

Petunia rushes to me and slaps me across my face, I didn't see it coming. It evokes so much anger in me that I try to jump at her but, Jonas pushes me back, throwing me on the floor. I look up at him like a child who is being scolded by her father, the hate in his eyes pierces through my soul.

Jonas: "You are going to pay for this Ntombi, as for Moses, I will show him how people are treated."

His words send a wave of pain in my heart, I kneel before him.

Me: "Bhuti, I know Moses has done stupid things in his life and made so many mistakes but, please spare him. It was a mistake bhuti."

I know Jonas, he will have Moses killed. Petunia cackles loudly.

Petunia: "Yoh hayi, yifilim le. I can't believe my ears, Ntombi are you seriously pleading for the life of Moses? After everything he has done Ntombi?" (This is a scene from a movie.)

Me: "You won't understand Petunia because your life is perfect."

She is always quick to judge me and I hate her.

Jonas: "Shut up Ntombi, shut up. You are still disrespectful after what you have done? I will deal with Moses how I please and you better not say anything to him or I swear Ntombi, I will disown you. I will make sure the whole family will disown you, uzosala no Moses wakho. That's if he will stick around because I don't see this marriage moving forward." (Moses will be the only one you'll be left with.)

Mhambi: "Jonas, we have to do something. We have to bring our child home, I can't even imagine what she is going through. What they are doing to her."

He breaks into another sob, Petunia toddles to him and starts patting his shoulder.

Jonas: "Don't worry Mhambi, once I am done with Moses, he will come to us willingly and confess everything."

He declares while glaring at me, I see the seriousness in his face and I am afraid for my husband. I understand that what he did is wrong and he should be punished but Moses is naïve. He is not as harmful as they perceive him to be.

To be continued....



Edit with WPS Office

44\*

RANDALL\*

"Uze wake up."

I open my eyes to meet my grandfather's face. What is he doing here?

Me: "Nana?" (Grandfather.)

He helps me up and walks to sit around a bonfire, it wasn't here before.

Okolie: "Come Join me."

He waves his hand and I do as told.

Me: "What's going on?"

I have never been this confused in my life.

Okolie: "You are where you belong now Uze."

Me: "I don't understand, nana I have been stuck in this isolated place for months now, if not a year. I want to go home."

This dark place has me feeling gloomy and alone.

Okolie: "It's only been a few days Uze."

He says, there is no sense of emergency in his voice.

How is that even possible? Could I have calculated wrong?

Me: "What?"

Okolie: "This is the spirit realm, a day feels like an eternity here."

Me: "Okay, I hear you. But, why am I here?"

Okolie: "I told you Uze, this is where you belong."

Me: "Are you saying that I'm dead?"

Okolie: "No, your soul is being kept here. Your ancestors are angry Uze. You ran from your responsibilities, leaving turmoil and anguish behind. Your people need you."

Me: "I am not the only son of Okolie, Uzoma is older than me. He should be appointed monarch."

Okolie: "Uzoma does not have the Okolie blood running in his veins."

He reveals a secret and I am shocked at this revelation.

Me: "How? Does agya know?" (Father?)

Okolie: "He knows, only the kids are kept in the dark. Your father is on his way to your house Uze."

He utters and I can't accept this.

Me: "I don't want him in my house nana." (Grandfather.)

Okolie: "You have no choice, if he doesn't get there you will die."

Me: "I would rather die then."

Okolie: "And spend all eternity wondering around this mountain, like a lost spirit?"

He just had to paint it.

Me: "I don't want that man anywhere near me."

Okolie: "Think of the people you left behind Uze, they will perish without you. You are the rope that holds them all together."

My mind immediately reminds me of a familiar face I have been trying so hard to recall.

Me: "Amara."

I whisper her name out.

Okolie: "You went about it the wrong way Uze."

Me: "I was trying to protect her."

Okolie: "And your heart pulled you to her, you love her."

Me: "I didn't say that."

Okolie: "You don't have to say it, your heart speaks for you."

He is exaggerating it.

Me: "They took her nana. How do I save her?"

Okolie: "Don't worry, she will be fine."

Me: "That doesn't comfort me."

He titters.

Okolie: "I know but, calm your heart. It's new to this hence, you suck at using it."

He must find himself funny.

Okolie: "You have always been immune to feelings, that's why it was so easy for you to leave your family behind."

Me: "I felt suffocated by them, they expected too much from me. Agya treated me like I was a



robot, he wanted me to be perfect.” (Father.)

Okolie: “He was wrong on his part, things are different now Uze. You don’t have to run anymore.”

Me: “What do you mean things are different?”

Okolie: “That girl broke down the walls you built, she is your chosen one.”

Me: “I would think that you and Styles are twins, you sound like him right now.”

He laughs.

Okolie: “You are the only one oblivious to what is happening around you, open your heart and stop fighting your feelings. Yes, you can rule the kingdom but, it won’t be possible without her. You will be a despondent King and eventually run away like you did years ago. That is how you will spend your life, running away. Happiness will never find you, no matter how much you wish for it. Your wishes will fall on deaf ears.”

I’m not sure I know how I feel about his words, the thought of being without Amara is suffocating. Why would I be without her? I will never let her out of my sight, not even death will take her from me.

Okolie: “You would kill yourself just to prove to death that it cannot defeat you?”

He states as if he read my mind.

Me: “What?”

Okolie: “You have always gotten what you want and your stubbornness knows no bounds, but remember Uze. Don’t mistake your ego for your heart, it will be your downfall.”

He declares and I’m left perplexed by his words.

Me: “Why are you here?”

Okolie: “Only your father can bring you back, remember to listen to your heart.”

He gets up and walks away without turning back. He completely ignored my question.

KHETHU\*

“I’m sorry but, you cannot see judge Mdluli. He has been transferred to the maximum prison.”

The police officer’s words shock me.

Me: “What?”

Dad: “On whose command?”

My father jumps in.

Police: "The minister of Police sir, he gave strict commands that the judge should be transferred with immediate effect and under no circumstances should he be allowed to meet with anyone."

Me: "That is insane, it doesn't even make sense. He hasn't been proven guilty yet, that means he is innocent."

I shout and turn heads as everyone at the station glare at me like I am losing my mind. Fact of the matter is, I am losing my mind.

Dad: "Relax Khethu, we will fix this."

I spot Nobayeni sitting on a chair with her arms folded across her chest and a smug smile keeping her company. She gets up, as she sees me marching to her.

Me: "You did this, didn't you? You pulled some strings and got my grandfather transferred."

She cackles.

Nobayeni: "Oh Bridgette, I wish I could take the credit. I must commend whoever did this though. I mean, even I don't have such contacts, considering all the money I have."

Me: "You are lying."

I shout, I can't stop. I am so livid.

Nobayeni: "Do I have a reason to lie? I'm glad I'm not the only one who sees him for the monster he is."

She laughs and that just sends me to the final limit.

Me: "What the hell is your problem?"

I yell, as I charge at her and my father pulls me back.

Dad: "That's it, I'm done. You two are pissing me off now."

He proclaims with authority.

Me: "But, dad..."

Dad: "Go home Khethu, I will see what I can do regarding your grandfather. I'll call you when I hear something."

Nobayeni: "Yeah, go home Bridgette. You have no business being here."

This witch.

Me: "He will need a lawyer, I'm going to call Mbongeni."

Nobayeni: "That 'legal wise' lawyer will not get him out of this mess, trust me, he is doomed."

She says with so much pride and arrogance.

Dad: "Go khethu."





Khethu: "Someone will have to call ugogo and tell her."

Dad: "Your mother will."

Nobayeni rolls her eyes while she holds a conceited attitude. I have to get out of here before I attack her.

AMARA\*

Mkhize moves in the direction of the door, his arm is still tightly hooked around my neck and a gun pressed on my temple. Franco pushes Nkomo towards Styles and he bumps on him. Styles winces in pain and pushes Nkomo away. They both still have their guns drawn out, we exit the door entering the corridor.

Styles is following us, his black stare is fixed on Mkhize while Nkomo keeps his on Franco. Styles keeps stealing glances at me, as if assuring me that it's going to be okay, I don't know if I can trust that right now.

His crimson blood is leaving trails of his big footprints behind. I'm stunned by how he is still alive, his lips are pale white and he can't walk without holding on to the wall. Nkomo notices his weakness and moves closer to help him but, Styles pushes him off.

We're are moving backwards, facing Styles and Nkomo. Franco is working as a shield, as he is toiling backwards in front of us. His gun ready for anything. I step on something squishy and slimy, I can't look down because of the gun pressed on my head.

As we move more steps, I see them. Snakes but, they aren't moving. They look real though and they felt real under my feet, I scream as I step on more. My heart is racing fast and in my wildest imagination I can't imagine why there are snakes at the hospital?

Styles: "Relax Amara, it's okay."

He guarantees me. How does he know that it's okay?

Nkomo: "That guy is supposed to collect them before they come- to, where the hell is he?"

Nkomo declares ogling at Styles like he's crazy, Styles doesn't say anything. His eyes are engrossed on these two men who are luring me away.

Mkhize: "You are a threat to humanity Sishi, I should report you to the authorities."

Styles smirks at him.

Styles: "Then you should know that I will not let go easily mkhulu, dammit! I should've killed you last time."

He grunts.

Mkhize: "You won't make it out of this hospital alive, you're a dead man walking Sishi."

Franco: "Your stubbornness is something to admire Styles, at least you will go down with a bang."

He laughs out loud.

Nkomo: "Are you even in this country legally you piece of shit? Styles, I think we should call immigration. Someone has overstayed their visit."

Nkomo suggests which aggravates Franco, he shoots between Nkomo's feet and I scream at the loud piercing sound of a gunshot. Nkomo jumps up in fright but, escapes unharmed.

Mkhize: "Watch it you bastard, that's my son you're shooting at."

Mkhize growls at him.

Franco: "He shouldn't be here if he can't take a bullet."

Franco laughs, he's enjoying this.

Nkomo: "Fuck you Franco."

He growls.

A man comes running towards us as we approach the elevator, he widens his eyes upon seeing the guns and stops.

Him: "Styles?"

His voice shakes.

Styles: "You can take your babies now Kgotso, we lost a few but, you will live."

Styles says without looking at him, he hasn't removed his eyes off of Mkhize and his gun is still drawn out.

His voice though, gives away that he is weak. I want to scream and ask for help but, no one will dare come to my rescue.

Mkhize presses a button and it doesn't take a second for the lift to open, two policemen are in there. Mkhize shoots them both as they aim their guns at us, they fall to their death. Franco laughs, this is all a joke to him.

I scream as I am horrified by what he just did, the last person I saw kill a man was Randall. He was trying to protect me but, what justification does Mkhize have for killing these innocent cops.

My body is trembling with fear and I am in so much agony to top it off, I'm whimpering in tears.

Styles: "You need to calm down Amara, you're not recovered yet."

Me: "Please help me."

I plead with tears streaming down my face.

Styles: "I will get you back, I promise."

He assures me, only doubt is playing around me at this point and I don't see myself surviving this. Mkhize pushes us into the elevator and it dawns on me that this is the end, once this door closes, I am done for.

I was better off with Randall, although I made it my mission to escape every day. He had this thing of making me feel safe just by being around me, I hated myself that time for enjoying his presence but, now I realise that it is all I wanted. And I need it right now, I need to feel safe. Then again, he is gone. He left me to fight battles I am not strong enough to face.

Franco is trailing slowly to the entrance. He's still aiming at Nkomo and Styles.

Styles: "How about a little gift to remember me by?"

Styles says as Franco presses the 1st button and the door starts closing. Styles shoots, piercing Franco on his thigh. He screams as the bullet sends him on the floor, there is no time to react. The door is shut and we're moving.

Franco: "Fucking shit."

He roars while clapping on his leg.

To be continued...



45\*

STYLES\*

Nkomo: "You got him."

He declares with a smug look.

Me: "That doesn't change... the fact... that... I let Mkhize walk away... with Amara."

My body fails me with these words, Nkomo catches me before I hit the ground.

Nkomo: "We need to get you treated."

He helps me to sit on the floor.

Kgotso: "Shit man, you never said anything about people being shot and killed."

Me: "Get... your snakes... and get out... of here."

Nkomo: "I think we should get out of here, this place must be surrounded with the police force and it's bad enough that Mkhize has killed two of them. If they find us here, they will pin it on us."

Kgotso: "This man needs a hospital monna and you're in it." (Man.)

Kgotso gives his two cents.

Nkomo: "Hey, get your bloody snakes and get of here. This has nothing to do with you."

Nkomo shouts at him, Kgotso raises his hands in defence and moves back.

I turn to my left and see Sethu running to us, she's trying hard not to trample on the snakes while wearing a sour face.

Nkomo: "Here's a nurse, maybe she can help us."

Sethu: "Sir, there's a private room on the fifth floor, I'm pretty sure the police won't look there. That ward wasn't evacuated."

She says as she takes in quick breaths.

Nkomo: "Why would you want to help us? What's in it for you?"

Sethu is frightened by Nkomo's outburst, she draws back a bit as she welcomes a look of fear.

Me: "It's... okay... let her... help us."

My throat feels drier with every breath, my vision blurs and I feel I can't hold on anymore.

Nkomo: "Bring a stretcher then."

Nkomo commands with a cold tone, I don't get why he is being mean to her. Sethu looks at me

and I give her the go ahead, she runs back to the direction she came from.

Kgotso is almost done collecting his devils, he doesn't look happy about the dead ones, as he looks at them displeased and shakes his head.

Nkomo: "Why didn't you tell Mkhize Randall is alive?"

Me: "He doesn't need to know that, let him assume otherwise and think he has won. This will give us time to plan our next move."

Nkomo: "But there is no time, I spoke to my brother earlier. He told me that, that old fool is getting married in three days. He has obviously planned the wedding."

Honestly, I didn't think it would be this soon. Randall has to wake up before it's too late.

Me: "I swear, I will blow his house up with his family in it, if I have to. Mkhize will not have Amara, I swear it on my mother's grave."

Nkomo becomes uneasy at my words, I know he loves his siblings but, I have a family of my own to protect.

KHETHU\*

Styles' habit of not answering his phone is annoying, I hate it. Its things like these that bring out my insecurities. What am I supposed to think when he goes and does this?

I called Mbongeni and he said to meet up in his office, he's a criminal lawyer, he works for one of South Africa's biggest law firms and if I know anyone who can help my grandfather then, it's definitely him. Mbongeni is a family friend, we grew up together since primary school.

Their offices are situated in Sandton Rivonia.

It's after 6pm so, his secretary is not at her desk.

I knock in his office once, before letting myself in, he is sitting on a chair and there is a woman sitting on his lap and their kissing. It looks heated, they stop at my expense as they turn to glance at me. Embarrassed, I swiftly offer my apologies and walk back out. Dammit, this will teach me to knock next time.

I'm still standing at the door when he opens it with a smile on his face, maybe I should have moved to some corner.

Mbongeni: "Khethukuthula Dladla?"

He chortles.

Me: "Hi."

I feel my cheeks heat up, I cannot comprehend the level of mortification I feel right now.



Me: "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have..."

Mbongeni: "I should be sorry, this is a place of work and I shouldn't have..."

Me: "I won't tell if you don't."

He laughs.

Mbongeni: "My life saver. What would I do without you?"

He teases as he places his hand on his chest with a smile, I laugh at his failed attempt to actually crack a joke. We turn to someone clearing their throat, it's his girlfriend or whatever. She's pretty I must say, dressed formally, she could be one the employees in this place.

She scans her eyes all through my body with an unpleasant look on her face before, turning to him.

Her: "Babe, I'm going home, seeing that we were rudely interrupted."

She mumbles, giving me the look again.

Mbongeni: "Khensani, this is my long-time friend Khethu."

He introduces as he smiles at me, I smile at her but, she responds by rolling her eyes.

Okay! I guess she is not a fan of him having female friends, which I completely understand.

Mbongeni: "Khethu, this is..."

He pauses and glances at her, she frowns and steps away from him, folding her arms across her chest in the process.

Khensani: "His girlfriend."

She throws the words out of her mouth with an attitude, I honestly felt that. The girl is marking her spot and it's justifiable, Mbongeni is a looker. A thirty year old successful lawyer, he's tall, caramel skinned and a bachelor. So, a girl's got to do what a girl's got to do.

Khensani: "Mr. Nong, I'm going home. So, you know where to find me when you finally decide which spot I hold in your life."

She declares and walks away without acknowledging my presence at all.

I'm okay.

Mbongeni shakes his head and indicates that I go in, he closes the door behind him. It's a nice little office with a small table and a chair, a few books on the shelves and his graduation pictures on the wall.

NTOMBI\*



I'm lying in my bed when Jonas knocks, the door is open so, he walks in.

Jonas: "A word?"

I sit up as he approaches the bed, he stands with his hands folded across his chest. The look on his face still breaks me.

Jonas: "I was asking around if anyone has seen Moses, it wasn't hard because your husband is known around here. Thanks to that million he scored himself."

He clenches his jaw.

Jonas: "He was last seen at the tavern, that's all I could get. By the looks of it, people were afraid to give out more information. But, we will find him."

Me: "Thank you bhuti."

Jonas: "No, no Ntombi. I am not doing this for you, it's for my niece Amara. Moses has to come and account for his evil deeds, I want you to know that I will enjoy torturing him and the best part about this is that, I will not even lift a finger."

The look on his face sends shivers down my spine, my mind is unaware of what he is planning. I can never figure Jonas out, he is too mysterious it can be annoying sometimes.

Me: "Bhuti, I know you love me. I am your little sister. Remember how you raised me when our parents passed on? You gave me away on my wedding day and..."

Jonas: "Shut up."

He howls.

Jonas: "Emotional blackmail will not work on me, you have killed that love I had for you Ntombi with your stupidity. Tomorrow I am going to find Nombulelo and I will bring her home, I hate nonsense Ntombi and I will not tolerate it."

He clicks his tongue, gives me a black look and walks away banging the door behind him. I have cried a river since my confession, I didn't think what Moses did was that bad, till today. I can't shake this vast amount of guilt that taunts me, I feel like the world's biggest idiot for covering up for Moses. Still, I can't shake this love I feel for him, he is my husband after all.

KHETHU\*

Mbongeni: "So what brings you to my office late at night?"

Me: "I'm sorry but, I couldn't wait till tomorrow. Tata has been arrested for rape."

Saying these words makes it seem real and I can't even fathom him doing something so horrible.

Mbongeni: "What?"

Just the expression I expected, he is shocked.

Me: "I know, right? It's insane, he will never do such a thing."

Mbongeni: "This is crazy Khethu."

Me: "Tell me about it, I need you to represent him in court."

Mbongeni: "Me, represent judge Mdluli? Wow, I don't know. This is huge. What about his lawyer Mr. Crawford? He is the best and has never lost a case."

Me: "You're closer to home Mbo so, the possibility of us winning this case is high."

He welcomes a stupid smile on his face, I frown at him.

Me: "What?"

Mbongeni: "You just called me Mbo."

His smile grows as he says this.

Is this nigga blushing?

Me: "So, it's nothing new."

Mbongeni: "I know but, it's been a while since I heard you call me that. It's music to my ears."

He chortles causing me to roll my eyes.

Mbongeni: "And, it's been a while since I have seen you roll your eyes like that."

He accepts another chuckle, his plan to make me smile is working.

Mbongeni: "Why have you been hiding yourself anyway? I haven't seen you since that boy you're dating."

Now, we're getting too personal.

Me: "He is not a boy, I take offence in that, just so you know."

Mbongeni: "You still defend him, wow. Somethings never change hey."

He laughs, he thinks it's funny.

Me: "I will always defend him, he is the man I love."

His smile vanishes with my words, and he takes a look of annoyance.

Mbongeni: "Does he make you happy?"

Why is he asking me this?

Me: "Yes."

He must know and I hope I sound convincing.





Mbongeni: "I'm not convinced. I remember how you've always wanted to be a wife, a house wife to be exact."

He laughs and shakes his head at the last statement. I was young and stupid.

Mbongeni: "I don't see a ring on your finger."

He finishes.

Me: "I never said I wanted to be a wife."

I deny what I know to be nothing but the truth.

Mbongeni: "Please, you couldn't stop raving about it. You got me dreaming there, you know?"

He introduces a topic I am not sure I want to get into.

Me: "Dreaming?"

My curiosity will be the death of me.

Mbongeni: "A life with you."

Gosh!

Maybe I shouldn't have asked.

Me: "We were kids Mbo..."

He smiles.

Me: "Mbo... nge... ni."

His smile turns into a laugh.

Mbongeni: "Fair enough but, you did give me a chance once, till that..."

I raise my eye brows at him and he rephrases.

Mbongeni: "Till Stings came and took you from me."

I am being mocked, maybe Mr. Crawford would've been ideal for this case.

Me: "Will you ever get his name right? I feel insulted you know? His name is Styles Sishi and he loves me like I have never been loved in my life. He makes me happy Mbongeni and I would appreciate it if we drop this topic, I hate talking about him behind his back."

I voice out and a flash of humiliation targets him as it shows on his face.

Mbongeni: "Sorry MaDladla, I hope I didn't cross my limits."

He's still holding on to that name he dubbed me with.

Me: "Can we talk about Tata's case please, he was transferred to a maximum prison. Is that even possible"

Mbongeni: "Not that I know of, he is innocent till proven guilty."

Me: "Is there anything we can do to get him out on bail, at least? The officer said no one is allowed to meet with him. I have a feeling Nobayeni is behind this."

Mbongeni: "You two are still at daggers drawn? When will you call a truce?"

Me: "Not anytime soon, if she has anything to do with it."

Mbongeni: "You should try, maybe she will open up."

I am not here for that evil woman.

Me: "Can we get Tata out or not?"

My mood has changed, suddenly I don't want to be here.

Mbongeni: "I will see what I can do. Today is a Thursday so, I will speak to the judge tomorrow. If he doesn't get bail, he will have to spend the weekend in jail."

Me: "He is honourable Judge Mdluli, his name will speak for him."

He titters and shakes his head.

Mbongeni: "That's not how the law works."

Me: "I trust you."

This is me saying don't disappoint me. He hasn't stopped flashing a smile since, he saw me. I get up as I get ready to leave.

Mbongeni: "I'll walk you out."

He offers getting up from his seat.

Me: "You don't have to."

Mbongeni: "I was on my way home anyway."

I shrug my shoulders. We hold a conversation as we toil out of the building to the parking lot, he opens an umbrella while we walk. There are many cars here and people have departed to their respectable homes.

Mbongeni: "This rain is strange don't you think?"

Normally, conversations about the weather convey an awkward moment between two people but, this weather is actually strange.

Me: "It is, God must be angry about something."

I let that out.

Mbongeni: "Someone up there is definitely furious, I haven't seen this much rain since cyclone IDAI in 2019. That was a hectic one, I didn't think I would make it you know."

Me: "That's over exaggerated."

I laugh and he chortles.

Me: "This is me."

I mumble as we reach my car, he instantly pulls me into a tight hug. Mystified by this sudden act, I don't hold him back. He lets go gradually and brushes his lips on my cheek, his eyes meet mine and a twitch of guilt mocks me. I take a few steps back, sending my eyes everywhere but, his direction.

Me: "Bye."

This is all I am going to say to him, this friendship thing can never work. Mbongeni still has expectations and I can't live up to them, I belong to another man.

He watches me as I pull out of the parking lot and drive off.

To be continued...



46\*

AMARA\*

“AMARA!!!”

I jolt up from my sleep at the sound of my name being whispered in my ear, it sounds like Randall’s voice. I can still hear it echoing in my eardrum, I find myself tearing up as memories of him fill my mind.

I can’t seem to get over his death, it hurts so bad and I don’t understand it. Why am I feeling like this? Why am I unable to grasp for air each time I think of him? What is this power that he holds over me even from the grave?

Will I ever be able to forget him?

I haven’t had the nightmare about my parent’s death since I came to Randall’s house, I think only he gave me the peace I needed hence, the dreams couldn’t haunt me anymore.

The need to see him again is greater than me, I am losing my sanity at this.

Now I am stuck with this old man, with no one to help me.

Styles didn’t look promising, his condition was so bad.

There was a Quantum waiting for us when we got out of the hospital, we went out through the ground parking. There were four men inside and all dressed in black.

Franco was dropped at a nearby hospital, he was bleeding profusely.

We’re in Pretoria now. I am being kept in a bedroom, I didn’t see anyone in the house when we came. I feel like a prisoner again, maybe this is really my fate and I should start accepting it.

Life will never be kind to me.

The ambiance in this room is dark. I’m lying on a double bed, it has caramel and tortilla bedding. The curtains are plain peach and there is a big wardrobe next to door that probably leads to the bathroom, I don’t want to be here.

I was sedated and I have been drifting in and out of consciousness, there is a nurse here. She said her name is Kazi, she is young. Probably around 25, maybe she can help me escape this place. She could understand my story, considering that she is a woman.

The door opens, it’s her.

Kazi: “Hi, you’re awake? How are you feeling?”

Me: “I want to go home.”

I will not stretch this and I don’t want to have a meaningless conversation.

She holds a look of guilt on her face.

Kazi: "I'm sorry, there is nothing I can do. I am just an employee here."

She states.

Me: "But you can help me escape right, they won't have to know."

Kazi: "Even if I do, you won't go very far. You were badly injured, your body is still very weak."

Me: "Yes and I should be in the hospital, not here. That man took me by force and brought me here."

I tear up at the thought of being kidnapped again. Whoever is writing my life story needs to edit it, the script is wrong.

Kazi: "I'm sorry sisi, I wish I can help."

She mummurs, leering at me like she pities me. She hands me a tissue to wipe my tears, I don't take it. I don't need a tissue, I need to get out of here.

Kazi: "Look, I know someone who might help you. He's good at things like this, I'll have a word with him. But, I'm not promising anything."

I nod, wiping my stubborn tears.

Me: "Can you call him now?"

I plead, she frowns at me before shaking her head.

Kazi: "You better thank God for that innocent face of yours, or else I wouldn't risk my life like this. Mr. Mkhize will kill me, he's a very dangerous man and will not hesitate to put a bullet through my head."

She tells me a tale I experienced first-hand.

Me: "I know, I saw him kill two men today. He has no conscious at all."

Kazi: "So, you know what might happen if he finds out?"

I nod and I'm not fazed, if death comes then it will come. I have nothing to live for anyway.

She takes out her phone and fiddles on it before placing it on her ear, she waits a while before trying again.

I am glancing at her with anticipation, I have built this hope in my heart as I see myself out of this place.

Kazi: "He's not answering."

She announces, breaking that little hope I had.

KHETHU\*

I miss my home, I have to speak to Styles and convince him that we go back home. He can always come back the next morning to check on Randall, this is not our place.

I find Neo sitting on the couch with Liyana on his lap, she's fiddling on his phone while he's also irregularly scrolling.

A sweet little giggle escapes her mouth in response to a statement he uttered. I wonder what he said to the poor child, he can never be serious even if he wanted to.

Chioma is seated on a two seater couch, her eyes are engrossed on the news channel.

Me "Where is everyone?"

By everyone, I mean Styles.

I gain their attention as they all turn their heads and glare at me.

Chioma: "It's just us, Mbuso is upstairs with Uze."

That's odd.

Styles left here saying he's going to meet up with my father and he is not back yet.

Me: "Did Styles come back by any chance?"

I enquire and hope she will say yes, I can't think what he could possibly be doing wherever he is and at this time of the night.

Chioma; "No."

Neo, is keeping himself busy with Liyana. I know he is avoiding me.

Me: "Neo?"

I toddle to sit next to him, Liyana looks at me and goes back to whatever she is doing on the phone.

Neo: "Ndlovukazi?" (Queen?)

He utters without looking at me.

Me: "Where is Styles?"

Neo: "You know I should be offended, you come here and the first thing you do is ask for that fool Styles. Not once have you asked if I was okay. Should I be looking for another woman?"

The fact that he just spoke English without mixing it with vernacular proves that, he knows where he is.

Me: "Neo, not now. I am not in the mood. Where is Styles?"

I demand and he better tell me, if he knows what's good for him.

Neo: "I don't know, as you can see I have been here the whole day with Chioma and Tinkerbell."

He tickles her as he says this, she laughs while shrugging her body, her eyes are still on the phone.

Liyana: "I am not Tinkerbell uncle Neo."

She laughs it out.

Neo: "You're a princess so yes, you are Tinkerbell."

He says tickling her again, this time she doesn't laugh as much.

Liyana: "You're silly uncle Neo, Tinkerbell is a fairy, not a princess."

She corrects him and he sniggers.

Neo: "Same thing nana."

Me: "Will someone tell me where Styles is."

I demand, I feel like an idiot as I am being ignored.

Mbuso runs down the stairs, he gestures a greeting and I click a smile which doesn't stay on my mouth.

Mbuso: "What's going on?"

Me: "Maybe you could tell me where Styles is."

He frowns and I know that he doesn't have a clue.

Mbuso: "I would tell you if I knew, I have to go. Please keep an eye on Randall."

Neo: "Oga o joang cheese boy?" (How is boss, cheese boy?)

Mbuso huffs.

Mbuso: "Still the same."

He responds with a bit of an attitude, these two are never in good terms.

Neo: "Awe awe cheese boy."

He says and Mbuso shakes his head bids us goodbye and leaves.

Chioma: "Oh my God, look."

She yells, getting our attention and turns up the volume. It's the news and there was a shootout at Bara hospital.

MOSES\*

I was brought to Pretoria by Mkhize's goons, I think we are in his house, it looks like a family home and it's big. I would honestly get lost here trying to find my way to a certain room.

Now we're waiting for him in his office, I'm being guarded by two men.

How the mighty have fallen, look at me being controlled like a puppet. Moses, see your life and what you have become.

The door opens and he walks in first with his cane as his third leg, followed by another tall bouncer. The two who are guarding the door maintain their positions, while this one walks behind him.

Mkhize: "You're sitting comfortably on a chair I bought with my money mgodoyi? Animals belong on the floor, right next to their master's feet." (bastard.)

He proclaims as he gives me a dirty look.

Mkhize: "Usahleli wenja? Sukuma man!!!" (You're still sitting dog? Get up.)

I jerk up almost tripping on my own feet, he laughs mockingly and sits on his high chair, facing me.

Mkhize: "How dare you stand in my presence mgodoyi?" (Bastard.)

He growls and I drop to my knees, another mocking laugh entertains him.

Mkhize: "Oh Sdudla, it's clear now why you're unemployed. Udom man, yeses. I would have given you a job at the taxi rank, just to wash the taxis but, your empty brain won't be able to find its way through that. Look at you Sdudla, you're an embarrassment to us men. I said animals belong on the floor, right next to their master's feet." (You're dull.)

He says and I look at his feet. Life, what is this you are showing me?

Mkhize: "Ngeke ngiphinde Sdudla." (I won't repeat myself.)

He threatens. I get up and attempt to walk to him, he raises his hand, gesturing that I stop.

Mkhize: "Animals don't have two legs, I am yet to see one. I want you to crawl to me like the good mgodoyi you are." (dog)

To face such humiliation as a man.

What will Ntombi and Mashoto say when they hear about this?

Hesitantly, I drop to my knees and begin crawling.

Mkhize: "Stop."

He says after I have taken two steps.

Mkhize: "I want you to hang your tongue out, you're a dog right? And all dogs walk around with their tongues out."

The guards laugh at my expense. I look up at Mkhize, I am not doing this. My ego has been



bruised enough already. Mkhize frowns at me.

Mkhize: "Sdudla, anginaso isikhathi." (I don't have time.)

He grunts.

I have no choice but to sag my tongue out, I crawl towards him.

Mkhize: "Wait."

He stops me again.

I fear what he is about to ask next.

Mkhize: "I want you to bark, dogs bark right?"

His goons can't stop laughing, Mkhize has this cold look on his face. I see the hate he has for me.

Mkhize: "Khonkotha wenja!!!" (bark dog)

He shouts and I start barking while crawling to him.

Mkhize: "Stop, you bark and hang your tongue out. And smile while you're it."

He demands, which is followed by another roll of laughter from these bloody goons. How the hell does he expect me to do that?

Me: "Kodwa Mkhize?" (But.)

Mkhize: "Voetsek!!!"

He roars.

Mkhize: "Dogs don't speak, haibo naye imihlola. Where have you seen a dog that speaks?" (Abomination.)

He mocks and my dignity has gone down the drain.

Mkhize: "Now do as I say."

He demands, I follow his commands as I crawl, bark, hang my tongue out and try to smile all in one. The guards laugh as if they are watching a comedy show, I finally get to him and he smirks.

Mkhize: "That's a good boy, I was starting to think you are incompetent. Shelters for dogs do not adopt useless dogs, I was going to execute you. Now, sit."

He points next to his feet, I sit facing the door. He pats my head, slowly.

Mkhize: "Ungangicameli wenja." (Don't pee on me dog.)

I am broken beyond reason.

Mkhize: "Now, listen. My bride has come, she is somewhere in this house. Unfortunately, the wedding has to be postponed. My beauty is not feeling well, but next weekend, umshado lento."

(There will be a wedding.)

He is obviously talking about Amara, his obsession over her is crazy.

Mkhize: "You will still give her away, like we agreed."

We didn't agree to anything. Nx!

Mkhize: "When she is better, I want you to convince her that this marriage will be good for her, okay? No funny business Sdudla."

He pats my head.

Amara will not trust me, not when I sold her. Maybe I can use this opportunity to convince her to plead this evil man for my life.

Mkhize: "You're a good dog aren't you?"

He continues to pat my head, this time tapping his fingers one at a time.

Mkhize: "How do dogs respond Sika?"

He asks this idiot next to him.

Sika: "They bark baba."

He responds with a deep throaty voice.

Mkhize: "Then, why is this one not barking?"

Sika: "Mhlawumbe uyisimungulu." (Maybe he is dumb.)

They burst out in laughter except for Mkhize, I look up at him and he has this haughty smirk on his face.

Mkhize: "Unless you really are dumb mgodoyi, I want you to respond. I hate being ignored, it makes me want to kill."

He states in a hostile tone.

Mkhize: "Let me rephrase, you're a good dog aren't you?"

I bark once and they laugh.

Mkhize: "You're a lazy dog. One bark nje? Hai Sdudla, two nyana at least? Or three? Yes, give me three good barks and don't make me ask again because I can do this the whole day."

He affirms.

I brace myself, I have lost my self-respect so, I might as well. I bark loudly three times, sending the bloody fools on another trip of laughter.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

NOMBULELO\*

Mbuso came home with groceries, he said he's cooking today. I wanted to protest, considering that he lives on cereal and dry pizza. I'm sitting on a kitchen bar stool while watching him do his magic, for lack of a better word because I have no clue what will come out of those pots.

I find myself admiring him in an apron as he moves about in the kitchen, I am a woman and my eyes wonder when I see one of God's show offs. The way his legs move in those tight jeans, they don't look heavy from this view. The furrow on his forehead when he is focussed, and the little victory dance he does after tasting his food, thinking he nailed it.

He turns, catches me staring and smirks. It makes me shiver.

I look away and clear my throat.

Mbuso: "Shouldn't you be making the gravy?"

The amusement in his voice is louder than the noise of the morning traffic in Joburg.

Me: "No, you said you're a pro. Let me not get in the way."

I riposte, trying to get my eyes to behave so, I stop looking like an idiot.

Mbuso: "Throwing me under the bus I see?"

He laughs.

Me: "You offered Mr. Xaba and I do not involve myself in people's matters. I let them do what they want to do."

He smiles, sends his hand behind his neck and rubs it.

Mbuso: "Wow, Miss..."

He narrows his eyes at me.

Me: "Mngoma."

Mbuso: "Miss Mngoma, you're something else aren't you? Now, I know who not to call when I need to hide a body."

I laugh.

Me: "Just know my number will always be on voicemail."

Mbuso: "Appreciate the heads up, same goes for you."

Me: "I'm glad we're on the same page."

He sneers while, as I laugh. He turns to open the fridge, dips his head and comes out with a jug of fresh looking mango juice.

Me: "You know, I'm still in the dark about what's on the menu, I saw you throwing in some sticks and you haven't stopped stirring."

He frowns at me while pouring the juice in a glass.

Mbuso: "Hahaha, funny."

Me: "I'm hungry, the smell is making my mouth water."

I confess.

Mbuso: "I'm almost done, just have to let the meatballs simmer. You are going to love this."

Me: "Spaghetti and meatballs? I'm not a fan, I'm more of a pap type of girl."

He hands me the glass and I smile at his kindness.

Mbuso: "Wait till you taste my food, no one cooks like me."

He looks impressed with himself.

Me: "Conceited aren't we?"

He titters.

Mbuso: "So, how old are you?"

He asks as he sips on a glass of wine, that's right, I get to have thick sweet juice while he enjoys a real drink.

Me: "Nineteen."

He chokes on his drink and looks at me with eyes wide open.

I am confused by the horrific look on his face.

Me: "What?"

Mbuso: "You're so young."

He gasps out what his brain contained.

Me: "Young adult."

I correct him.

Mbuso: "Yeah but, I can't believe you have been through so much at such a young age."

I can't believe it either.

Me: "Life rejected me at an early age I guess."

I shrug, he toddles to me and leans over the counter facing me.



Mbuso: "Don't say it like that."

He reprimands me.

Me: "How old are you?"

I decide not to ponder upon my sadness.

Mbuso: "Thirty three."

He reveals without hesitation.

Me: "You're surely treating that thirty three pretty well hey."

I don't know where that came from and it's too late to take it back.

He smirks, having me roll my eyes. The silence welcomes an elephant in the room, too awkward. Mbuso clears his throat and ambles back to the stove.

Mbuso: "I think it's done."

He predicts on his way there, I watch him as he opens the lid and dips his nose in. He grabs a spoon, tastes the food and there goes that dance again. I giggle at what I am observing.

It doesn't take long for Mbuso to dish up, we're seated together now and the food smells divine.

There's this bottle of wine on the table that has my name on it but, I cannot indulge because of this big head growing inside me.

Mbuso looks at me inquisitively as I taste the food, I close my eyes at the mouth-watering sensation in my mouth and do a little dance. I pop them open when I hear him breathe a sigh of relief.

KHETHU\*

News anchor: IT IS SAID THAT THERE WAS A SHOOTOUT AT CHRIS HANI BARAGWANATH HOSPITAL TODAY. THE WITNESSES SAY THE GUN SHOTS BEGAN AROUND 4PM, TWO POLICE OFFICERS WERE KILLED IN THE LINE OF DUTY AND NO SUSPECTS WERE FOUND AT THE SCENE OF THE CRIME!!!

Me: "Why do I have a feeling that this has Styles' name written on it."

Neo laughs as if I cracked a joke.

Neo: "Yoh hai nahana ngoana, Stylos ke lehlanya. O tseba eng ka shootout tsoa ho Soweto. Kuse kasi lapha, die pleke tsa bo darkie. What does he know about terrorism? You're giving him too much credit now. I know ke motho oa hau mara yoh, kanti lerato le so? Rea juthana fela? Hai kea e tsaba tlof tlof."

(Imagine babe, Styles is an idiot. What does he know about shootouts from Soweto? That's the township and black people live there. I know that he is your man but, wow. Is love like this? We mislead each other? I respect sex.)

Me: "There is a child here Neo, watch what you say."

Neo: "Ha a utloe letho oe." (She can't hear anything.)

Liyana: "What is tlof tlof uncle Neo?" (What is sex?)

She asks as she looks at him, this is exactly what I was afraid of.

Neo: "Ke kgogo nana, e ea loma." (It's a roach baby and it bites.)

Me: "Neo?"

I snap at him.

Neo: "The child asked, ke etseng. There's nothing wrong in teaching her about the birds and the bees." (What should I do?)

I am defeated, I can't, really.

Liyana: "Birds and bees, that's sex right?"

Oh Lord. What is happening here?

Neo covers her mouth with his hand.

Neo: "Ke ngoana oa mang oe? Someone must come get their child. Chioma take this child to bed tuu, re utloa lintho mona." (Whose child is this? We are hearing things here.)

He says looking shocked.

Chioma is just sitting there watching the news as if her long lost husband is set to appear.

How does she not find this appalling?

Me: "Liya, where did you hear that word from?"

Liyana: "Uncle Joseph, I was in my room and I heard mommy screaming. So, I ran to check and saw him on top of her on the couch. When I cried and begged him to stop, he said they are having sex and it's normal for adults. He locked me outside after that and said he will let me in when he is done making mommy happy."

Chioma: "What?"

Now, she decides to engage.

I also cannot believe what I am hearing.

Neo: "Ke mang Josefa? U tla nyela, masipa ae hae." (Who is Joseph? He will regret this.)

He is so angry right now and it's kind of strange because Neo is always this jolly person. I take a confused Liyana from his lap and carry her in my arms. Chioma is on her feet gawking at us.



Neo is now pacing up and down, I think he's trying to calm himself. He's mumbling words I cannot make out.

Chioma: "Liya baby. What do you mean he locked you outside?"

She takes her from me.

Liyana: "He said I must stay outside until he's done making mommy happy and that I won't hear things that I am not supposed to hear."

Why is she making the child repeat herself?

Me: "Chioma, take her to bed please."

Neo: "Wait."

He takes a few steps to them.

Neo: "Nana, did uncle Joseph ever touch you where he is not supposed to?"

She looks confused but, shakes her head anyway.

I didn't know Neo was this protective of this child, I know he's more close to Styles than Randall. It could be that Randall doesn't entertain his clowning moments.

Neo: "Okay, goodnight nana."

He brushes her head, Chioma walks away with her in her arms.

Me: "Oh my God Neo. What have they done to this child?"

Neo: "Ha ke tsebe Ndlovukazi mara ba tla nyela." (I don't know queen but, they will pay for this.)

Me: "We have to tell Randall."

Neo: "No, oga o tla hlanya, o tla ba bhodisa." (Boss will go crazy, he will kill them.)

"Who is Randall killing?"

We turn to Nkomo's voice, he's soaking wet and his clothes are bloodied.

SETHU\*

Mr. Mkhize asked that I watch over his friend, he said he will pay me for over time. He is being kept in a private room and I don't know how Mr. Mkhize got a doctor to treat him. He was taken to surgery and the bullet was removed. Everything was done privately and I know they are hiding something but, it has nothing to do with me.

His recovery though, looks promising.

I have been watching over him since.





I turn to the sound of the door opening, Lebo frowns at me.

Lebo: "You've got to be kidding me, you're still here?"

Me: "Am I supposed to be somewhere else?"

Lebo: "Yes, home. We were told to go home, remember?"

I frown at her, failing to comprehend why she is so worked up.

Me: "Everything has passed Lebo, at the end of the day we have work to do."

Lebo: "Argh, I don't understand how you agreed to help this man. We almost died Sethu."

She rolls her eyes.

Me: "For a nurse who helped him, you sure sound hostile."

Lebo: "Maybe if he didn't have a gun in his hand I would have helped him whole heartedly, he's nothing but a criminal."

Me: "He can hear you, you know?"

Lebo: "I don't care. What is wrong with you? Why do you suddenly care about this stranger?"

Me: "Unlike you Lebo, this is not just a job, I'm passionate about helping people. Yes, what happened today was traumatic. But, we shouldn't go around judging people without knowing fully why they do what they do."

She laughs out loud, not minding the sleeping patient.

Lebo: "Mother Teresa, you're crazy if you think this man is a good person after what you saw."

She expresses, I know Lebo to be negative and her attitude towards this man doesn't surprise me.

Me: "When will you start seeing people as people Lebo? Not every man is like your father."

She gasps in shock at my proclamation.

This is a sensitive topic for her, Lebo's father is a drunkard who physically abuses her mother and sometimes turns his hand on her and her siblings.

Me and my big mouth...

Me: "Sorry, I didn't..."

Lebo: "Voetsek Sethu, Voetsek yezwa?" (Piss off Sethu.)

She cusses furiously and storms out of the room.

FRANCO\*



I jump up from the hospital bed as I feel a hard slap on my cheek. The room is empty, it's just me.

Me: "Who is there?"

I shout, as I frantically inspect my surroundings. It's dead quiet, maybe I had a dream which felt real. So, I lie on my back.

The light flickers once, I don't pay heed to it. These bloody hospitals, it's time I go back to Italy. My job here is done anyway, Okolie is dead but, first I need to deal with Styles. If he is not dead, I will kill him.

A cold shiver ripples through me and I shudder once, my heart starts thudding heavily against my chest, I could literally hear it.

It feels like it's about to snap out of my rib cage. Suddenly I feel a heavy negative presence in the room and a great feeling of fear engulfs me to the point that, my stomach turns, there is someone in the room. I can feel it although, I can't see them.

It's almost like they are close to my face, staring right into my eyes.

Me: "Who is there?"

I shout again, my voice trembling as it gives out my panic.

This has to be a dream, I should wake up any minute now. The light flickers twice before completely going off, leaving me in the dark.

With fear laughing at me, I sit up and shout for the nurse but, my voice won't come out. There are words but, no audio. I feel someone swoosh past me and try to get up but, I can't move. My feet aren't working, they are paralyzed. I don't understand, they were okay a few minutes ago.

Then I see it, a shadow on the door. I yelp in fear and my body is trembling. It must be a demon, it raises a pointed finger at me. I want to scream but, my voice is gone.

My spirit fights, while I am lying on this damn bed, defenceless. Suddenly I feel something pull the bed sheet and a tight grip clutches on my neck, it deprives me of air and I fail to fight against it. I can't even stifle a scream as I am being strangled by a force I cannot see.

"Sir wake up."

I jump to the voice of a female nurse, I'm wheezing and panicking as I am struggling to breathe while, trying to get up from the bed.

Her: "Sir, you will rip the stitches open if you keep moving like this."

She pins me down.

Me: "There... is... something here."

She frowns at my declaration.

Her: "What is it?"

Me: "I don't fucking know okay? This bloody room is haunted, I want to be transferred now."

I yell and she laughs.

Her: "Are you on drugs sir? Because they are not allowed in here."

She looks at me like I'm a junkie.

Me: "What the fuck are you talking about you stupid bitch? I'm telling you that this room is haunted, I demand a transfer right now or I will sue this bloody hospital and everyone in it."

She tilts her head back with an attitude and a laugh flares out of her mouth. She marches to the door still laughing and opens it.

Her: "We Mpumi, woza uzobona." (Mpumi, come and see.)

Good, she's calling the doctor. I'm confused when another nurse walks in, wearing a curious expression.

Her: "He says this hospital is haunted."

They chorus in laughter.

Her: "Cabanga chomie." (Imagine my friend.)

"Sir we don't condone drugs here."

The second nurse states and I am angered by their attitude towards this.

Me: "Do you fucking know who I am? I will have your jobs."

Her: "Oh please, go ahead. It's not like we're happy here. Yoh ama drugs ngiyawasaba chomie." (I'm scared of drugs my friend.)

The piercing laughter fills the room having me feel like an idiot. Maybe it really was a dream, or I am losing my mind.

To be continued...



48\*

KHETHU\*

Me: "What happened to you?"

Nkomo: "The rain happened, shit it gets worse at night."

Me: "And the blood?"

Neo: "Nkosazana u ka mo botsa joang ntho eo u tseba hore kwa Mkhize ba practis- a di rituals. The witchcraft in that family will make you move into a church and u phele le baruti feela." (How can you ask him that? Knowing that the Mkhizes practice rituals.) (And live with pastors.)

Me: "Don't be silly Neo."

Neo: "Silly? Don't call me when you can't sleep at night because o batla ho tseba ka bophelo ba bona behind closed doors. Ke eng khomo? O ne o ntse o nwa madi?" (You want to know about their secret lives. What is it cow? Were you drinking blood?)

Nkomo: "Otlo nyela saani." (You will shit yourself.)

Nkomo retorts annoyed by Neo's forwardness. I won't lie, it's getting on my nerves right now.

Neo: "Bathathe Nkomos." (Show them Nkomo.)

Me: "Not now Neo, I swear one more word from you and I will lose it."

I shout at him and he is not dazed at all.

Neo: "Yoh mo shebelle. I keep saying that Styles le oga are not good company, everyone is grumpy now. Who do we talk to in this house? I am going to sit with Uze, at least o robotse so, I won't have to face his dark attitude. (Look at her.) (He's sleeping.)

He says as he starts strolling away, he exchanges a glance with Nkomo and I just know something was said.

Me: "What was that?"

Nkomo: "What?"

I know he will not give me an answer.

Me: "Where is Styles?"

Nkomo: "Business trip. There's something he has to take care of so, he won't be coming home."

I must be hearing things.

Me: "That's it, I'm done. I will not tolerate this anymore."

Nkomo: "What do you mean? I told you Styles has business to take care of."

He is lying to me.

Me: "Stop covering up for him Nkomo, Styles is nothing but a liar. He's with another woman isn't he?"

Nkomo: "That's a little absurd don't you think?"

I will show him absurd.

Me: "When your friend has had all the fun and decides it's time to grow up, tell him he knows where to find me."

I turn to walk but, he clutches my arm and I yank it from him.

Nkomo: "It's not what you're thinking, I swear. Styles would never do that to you."

Me: "Then where the hell is? I know there is no business trip, since when does he go on business trips? I'm not staying one more second in this place, that man is ungrateful. I followed him here because his friend needed him, I have been taking care of things in this house Nkomo and this is how Styles thanks me. I am done with him."

I yell at a defeated looking Nkomo.

"Never make a mistake of disrespecting your man like that."

I turn to Chioma's voice, she's trudging down the stairs.

Me: "Excuse me?"

Chioma: "You heard me, he will meet someone who respects him. Respect is a big deal to men Khethu, I am telling you this because you are like a daughter to me. Just as he is like my son."

Me: "Styles will never leave me."

I roll my eyes at her.

Chioma: "That's another mistake women make, you walk all over him thinking he will never leave you because he loves you. You are not the only woman to say this and have their men leave them. Even husbands have separated from their wives because of lack of respect in the union."

Me: "So you want me to submit to him, and let him do whatever he wants while, I sit back and cheer him on? That is patriarchy and I will not bow down to it."

Chioma: "I didn't say that Khethu, you are not listening to me. Remember that, nothing binds you to that man, anyone can take him."

Me: "I will not have four years of my life go down the drain, I am not losing Styles to any woman and I refuse to let him do whatever he wants."

Nkomo has gone quiet and I have a feeling he is not about to say anything.

Chioma: "People cry over seven to ten years of wasted time in relationships, women are left to

be single mothers and wives divorcees. This is the real world my child, we can't claim things. Nothing is ever truly yours and by the rate you're going, Styles will soon get tired of your impudence, it will drain him. Although it will be hard for him to leave you, another woman will give him that strength and the final push."

Me: "Why does this sound like a curse Chioma?"

Nkomo: "It's not Khethu, she is showing you the light as an elder with life experience."

I thought he was staying out of this, spoke too soon.

Me: "What experience? As far as I know Chioma has never been married so, I don't need advice from a woman who has never had a man to keep."

My response breaks her, as tears swell up in her eyes, instantly I regret my words of fury. Like the strong woman I know her to be, she fights them back.

Chioma: "It's okay my child, just heed my advice. I don't want you to be heart broken."

She pats my cheek and walks back upstairs.

Nkomo looks at me like I am the world's meanest person.

Nkomo: "Wow!"

AMARA\*

Kazi: "I was told to stay in here with you the whole night, just in case you might need something."

She says as she prepares an aerospace bed, it's comforting to know that I won't be alone in this creepy room.

Me: "Do you possibly have a clue as to why Mkhize took me?"

She pauses and looks at me, I see pity in her eyes.

Me: "Well?"

Kazi: "I heard one of his wives saying that, there will be a wedding after the funeral."

God! Please tell me she's not saying what I think she is.

Me: "Wedding?"

I whisper the words out.

Kazi: "His brother died and the funeral will be this Sunday and a few days after the funeral, there will be a wedding. Your wedding Amara."

My heart stops.



Me: "What? No, I can't get married. To who? Is he marrying me off to someone?"

Kazi: "Unfortunately, he's the groom."

She says it occasionally like it's not a big deal. I would rather die than be married to that old man.

Olivia walks in the room stopping me from responding to that awful news. She's wearing a proud look on her face, I am surprised to see her here.

Olivia: "If it isn't the future Mrs. Mkhize."

She taunts.

I can't comprehend why she is here and why the smug look. I look at Kazi who turns away and continues fixing her place of sleep.

Me: "You're Olivia right? Randall's..."

Olivia: "The mother of his child, the only woman who should be in his life."

She plods to the bed and sits on the edge, she starts trailing her fingers in oscillation on my arm. Her actions prompt an unsettling sensation as I glare at her with a jumbled look.

Me: "What's going on?"

Olivia: "I'm the reason you're here. You know when I saw you in Randall's house that day, I knew that I had to get rid of you.

I hate competition Amara and having been the only woman in his life, I couldn't stand that his eyes were wondering. That man has always been stone cold but, I saw the warmth in his eyes that day and how he defended you.

He wanted you to take my place in my daughter's life, I can't have that. That's when I met I Franco, I don't know how he found me but, our paths met. I told him about Randall and he introduced me to Mkhize and the rest is history."

She laughs, I run my eyes to Kazi who is now glancing at us. She looks shocked.

Kazi: "Randall? Randall Okolie?"

Olivia turns to her and gives her a dirty look.

Olivia: "You know my Randall?"

Okay.

Kazi: "Yes, yes, I know him. He's friends with Styles, I've met him a couple of times."

I can't believe what I am hearing, all this while I was talking to her and she knew Randall.

Kazi: "Amara, how do you know Randall?"

Olivia: "Yes, Amara, tell us how you know Randall."

I frown at her, I will not respond to this nonsense.

Me: "So, it's your fault that Mkhize's brother killed Randall?"

Her jaw drops as she gasps.

Olivia: "Randall is not dead."

She denies but, doubt declares her stupid.

Me: "I was there, that man fired multiple bullets and he... I saw him... take... his last..."

A huge lump builds up on my throat as the memory of his dead body flashes in my mind, it's too late to hold my tears back.

Olivia: "That is a lie, Randall can't be dead. I would've known, someone would've told me. My daughter is in that house, they would've called me to comfort her."

I don't care what she thinks she knows, Randall died because of her.

Me: "Karma will visit you Olivia, you and those evil men Franco and Mkhize."

She gets up and furiously marches out of the room.

Kazi: "I can't believe Randall is dead."

She says, softly.

NKOMO\*

What the hell is going on? There's someone knocking down stairs as if they own this house. The owner of the house is unconscious as far as I know.

I check the time on my phone and it's after 2am. Who could it be late at night?

I run down stairs to find Neo, Khethu and Chioma.

Neo: "Nkomo, ntante oa hao o kantle. Tsena ke linako tseo ba demoni ba hae ba sa robala."  
(Your father is outside, these are the times when his demons don't sleep.)

It's 2am.

Who blabbers so much in the early hours of the morning?

Me: "Will you stop and open the door?"

The banging is getting louder.

Neo: "Why nna? Ba batla uena." (Why me? It's you they want.)

Me: "You are stupid, you know that?"

Khethu: "Can someone open the door please?"



I saunter and open it barely a crack, two dark skinned men leer at me. I spot another behind them, he's carrying an umbrella, sheltering them from the heavy rain.

One of the men pushes the door wide open before I could ask who they are and what they want.

Me: "Excuse me? Who are you? You can't just budge into people's houses like this."

Neo: "Ke mang khomo?" (Who is it cow?)

He yells from the stairs.

They step in and the guy with the umbrella remains outside and shuts the door, I find all this very strange.

These two are dressed in Nigerian traditional clothing, if I am not mistaken. Now that I look at them under the light, one is older. Probably around Sixty and the other could be thirty five. What baffles me is that, they both look like Randall.

"Where is my son?"

The older man asks, Neo and the crew toddle to us. They also look as bewildered as I am.

Neo: "Ke mang o? Eh ntante, entlek u tsoa kae? This is Mzansi, we don't go around re kokota nje in people's houses bosiu. Ba tla u chesa." (Who is this? Sir, where do you come from?)  
(Knocking.) (They will burn you.)

The old man shoots him one cold look and I immediately see Randall.

Me: "Oh shit."

I express, he frowns at me.

"Is this how people are greeted in this country?"

Him again.

Neo: "Entlek..."

Me: "Neo, I wouldn't if I were you. This is Randall's father and I presume you're his brother?"

I probe, looking at the young man. He nods his head haughtily, wow. Now I see where Randall gets his demeanour from.

Neo: "Oh!! Nnai, you're welcome." (Elder.)

He extends a hand but, Mr. Okolie does not acknowledge it.

Mr. Okolie: "If I am not mistaken, my son lives here. My contacts led me to this place."

His contacts he says.

How come he was able to find Randall this time around, he's been hiding his whole life. I find it strange and I do not care to ask.

Me: "Please come in sir."



I lead them to the lounge.

Me: "Please sit."

Mr. Okolie: "Take me to my son."

I look at Neo he shrugs, he seems humbled suddenly.

Me: "Follow me."

They follow me up the stairs, trust Neo to trail behind us. Chioma and Khethu remain.

To be continued...



NOMBULELO\*

I keep tossing and turning, I'm unable to sleep but, it also feels like I'm sleeping and having a bad dream. There is a woman outside the window, the curtain is drawn but, I can see her. I can't make out her face, her body though, I have seen her somewhere.

My mind can't grasp where. She keeps pacing up and down as if trying to figure out a way to come in, my room is pitch black and I suddenly feel uneasy.

I should get up and call Mbuso, maybe he will chase her away.

For a strange reason my body feels heavy and it takes forever and all the strength in me to get out of bed, I clomp towards the door the moment my legs hit the floor. It gets harder to move with every second and I end up dragging my feet as if they have lost its feeling.

Me: "Mbuso."

I choke as I stifle his name, my voice box is blocked by something I can't explain.

Me: "Mbuso."

I muffle again and the tightness on my throat grows. I finally get to the door but, to open it becomes a mission. I feel a need to peek through the key hole so, I slouch aiming my eye on the spot. I see that woman again, she's outside my door now. My body becomes heavy upon seeing her, I feel a force weighing me down.

I try to scream but, nothing. All there is, is piercing silence.

Her: "I want that baby in your womb, give it to me."

She whispers in a voice that doesn't sound human, she flashes a smile that sends shivers down my spine.

Me: "Mmmhh, mmmhhh, mmmhhh."

This is the only sound I am able to get out, as I push to speak and call out for help. Then I remember, there is power in this name and only He can get me out of this situation.

Me: "Jesus."

It comes out as a whisper at first but, at least I am able to speak now.

Me: "Jesus, Jesus."

I finally scream and surge from my dream like someone woke me up. I browse through the room while, wheezing for air and my heart racing fast, I'm relieved that it was really a dream.

The next thing I know, I hear a knock on the door, the person knocks again and opens as I'm

about to invite them in.

Mbuso: "Lelo?"

He peeks through.

Mbuso: "Are you okay, I heard you screaming."

I nod.

Me: "I had a bad dream."

It felt so real.

Mbuso: "You need some company?"

He rephrases as he sees my blank stare.

Mbuso: "I don't mean it like that... Since you had a nightmare you're probably feeling scared."

I am actually.

Me: "What time is it?"

Mbuso: "A little after 2am."

Me: "I doubt I will be able to sleep after that dream, I'll go and watch TV for a while."

Mbuso: "I'll keep you company, I can't sleep either. Maybe, you can tell me about that dream over a cup of tea."

I shrug and follow him out.

RANDALL\*

I feel my body resting on a soft surface, it's dark and I can't see anything. I can hear conversant voices, exchanging dialog. They speak a language I am familiar with though, it is hard to understand what they are saying.

Abruptly, an unfamiliar strong smell fills my nostrils, compelling me to sneeze.

"Uze."

The deeper voice says and I can't shake the feeling, I have heard this voice before. My nostrils itch, prompting another sneeze. I slowly open my eyes to be met by a bright light so, I shut them swiftly.

"Uze, open your eyes."

The voice again.



One more try, I rub away the irritation on my eyes as I fully open them only to see a figure of a familiar man. My father, Segun Okolie, standing over the bed. He flashes a soft but, distant smile.

Segun: "Uze, my son."

I should've stayed asleep, I'm suddenly reminded of my grandfather's words. I still don't want this man anywhere near me.

"Randy?"

Raven is also here, he's grown since I last saw him.

Me: "Shit, you look like an old man."

He laughs at my retort.

Raven: "Old man? I see, a monkey is laughing at his mirror reflection."

He ripostes.

Me: "You're here?"

Raven: "I'm here."

The moment becomes emotional, he leans over and takes me in a hug. We hold it for a while before pulling away.

Me: "You know you could have waited for me to sit up, I'm not an invalid. I can still move."

Raven: "That sling on your shoulder tells a different story."

He smiles.

Segun: "Will my presence be ignored?"

I have nothing to say to him.

Segun: "Uze?"

Me: "Don't call me that."

I snap. Raven pats his shoulder when he draws back.

Raven: "Father, he just woke up. Let's not suffocate him."

Segun: "Suffocate him? I have waited sixteen years to see my son and you tell me I'm suffocating him. What did you think Uze? That you will run away forever?"

Raven: "Father please."

Segun: "Uzoma, wait. I have to say this, he is a man right? He will take it like a man. Sixteen years Uze, sixteen years I prayed and longed for this day. There were days when I would pray for you to have a near death experience just so, I will be led to you."

What the hell does that even mean?

Me: "You wished death upon me?"

Segun: "Not death but, this. Only this rain would lead me to you, and I eagerly waited for it."

Me: "Raven, please tell your father that I am tired and would like to get some rest."

Raven sighs, they both know my stubbornness has a life of its own.

Segun: "Uze..."

Me: "And please, tell him to refrain from calling me that."

Segun: "What is wrong with you son?"

Raven: "Father, that's enough."

Segun: "Don't tell me what to do."

Me: "Leave my room, Raven please stay."

If he thinks I will entertain him, then I am not his son. I can be twice as stubborn.

Segun: "We'll talk in the morning."

He announces and walks out.

Raven: "Do you believe this whole saga about the rain?"

He pulls a chair to sit.

Me: "That's a myth."

Raven: "I doubt, I don't hear it anymore. It's been raining crazy since we got here from Ghana yesterday."

Me: "How did you find me?"

Raven: "He said nana told him in a dream where to locate you." (Grandfather.)

Me: "This is too much to grasp and why would nana speak to him in a dream when he could have..."

Raven: "He's dead Randy, he died a year after you left. He mysteriously fell sick, doctors couldn't explain what was wrong with him."

No, that's why he didn't tell me why he was there.

Me: "I'm sorry I wasn't there."

Raven: "Enough about that, we'll talk in the morning. You need to get some sleep."

Me: "What time is it?"

Raven: "Witch hour."

He chortles, the door swings open and Neo dips his head in. He smiles as he sees me and lets

himself in.

Neo: "Hee, the resurrected one, Mr. Die hard. wena le Stylos, same WhatsApp group neh. You were vacationing with the ghosts? Was it that nice you didn't want to come back to us?"

I can't help but smile at his stupidity, I never thought I would say this but, it's good to see him.

Chioma and Khethu follow behind, Styles must be here as well. I peruse my eyes on the door, waiting for him to stride in.

Khethu: "He's not here, he's on a business trip."

She explains as she notices my restlessness, it's followed by a heavy eye roll. Something is up. What business trip?

I glance at Neo and he blinks once, Styles better be okay. I can't even ask any of them about Amara.

MKHIZE\*

"Wake up."

A ghostly whisper tickles my ears causing me to arouse from a deep slumber. MaSibiya is sleeping soundly beside me, I turn to the window and notice that the sliding door leading to the balcony is wide open as the wind is vigorously blowing the curtain.

Me: "This woman left the door open."

I mummer to myself, the rain has stopped. It's still cloudy though, I shut the door and fix the curtains.

Now I can sleep.

"Wake up."

I hear another whisper and ignore it, it must be because I am so sleepy hence, I'm starting to hear things.

"WAKE UP!!!"

An authoritative voice booms in my ear as if reprimanding me for sleeping.

I jump in fright, MaSibiya didn't hear it. She's still snoring as if there's no tomorrow.

Me: "MaSibiya."

I nudge her, she doesn't move.

Me: "MaSibiya, vuka maan." (Wake up.)

She tosses and turns the other way, continues with her snores.

Dammit, I know this woman to be a light sleeper. What's wrong with her today?

I could be hallucinating, I need to sleep it off. I close my eyes and feel myself falling into a nice deep slumber.

"WAKE UP!!!"

The same commanding voice jolts me from the sleep and a glass shatters as if someone threw it against the wall. I turn to my left, there are pieces of glass on the floor.

Me: "Who is there?"

Silence.

Me: "Show yourself you coward?"

Silence.

This woman doesn't wake up after all this, what the hell is wrong with her.

Me: "Vuka mfazi." (Wake up woman)

I shout nudging her, she tosses again but, doesn't wake up. I opt not to wake her again. How will I explain this? She will think I'm going crazy.

I get off the bed, take incense (impepha) from the drawer and burn it, the smoke hovers around the room. Now I will sleep like a baby, those evil spirits have no chance against this.

"WAKE UP!!!"

Me: "Shit!!!"

I scream as I jump from the bed, sweating and breathless. It's light outside. This shit happened the whole night, I didn't sleep a wink. MaSibiya turns, opens her eyes and sits up.

MaSibiya: "Good morning baba."

Me: "Nxa."

I furiously get off the bed and leave the room.

To be continued...



50\*

MBUSO\*

I'm woken up by my phone ringing and answer without checking the caller Id.

Me: "Yes."

"Hey, we need you here."

It's Nkomo.

Me: "What happened?"

I get up from the floor, Lelo is sleeping on the couch. We must've fallen asleep while watching TV.

Me: "Is Randall okay?"

Nkomo: "He's very much okay. He's awake and his father is here."

Me: "Okay, give me an hour."

Nkomo: "Another thing, something happened to Styles and I need you to tell Randall the news. He doesn't trust me and I know he will throw me out the moment he sees me in his house."

Me: "What happened to Styles? And, why can't you ask Neo to tell him."

Nkomo: "Neo is a clown, he's not the best person to break the news. I will fill you in about Styles when you get here.

Me: "Okay."

Lelo opens her eyes just as I bid Nkomo goodbye. She swipes the back of hand over her mouth and hides away.

Me: "Too late, I saw your crusty face."

She giggles.

Lelo: "You don't look any better."

She throws back as she glances at me.

Me: "Did you sleep well?"

She sits up and stretches her body while, yawning.

Lelo: "I did thanks."

Me: "Good, because that scream scared me. Honestly, I was afraid to go back to sleep. Who



screams like that anyway?"

The attempt to make her laugh works.

Lelo: "Liar."

Me: "Would I lie to you?"

I sing the words, causing her to laugh.

Me: "I'm making breakfast."

Lelo: "Don't get me wrong, you're a good cook and I enjoyed last night's supper but, I don't think Spaghetti and meatballs are ideal for breakfast."

I frown at her sally.

Me: "Hey, I bought groceries yesterday remember? If you think supper was nice, you haven't tasted my French toast."

Lelo: "Really?"

Me: "Yes, now go and take a bath. You have an interview at 12pm."

Lelo: "No I don't."

I forgot to tell her.

Me: "I spoke to a doctor friend of mine, she works at that hospital you love so dearly."

She rolls her eyes, smiling.

Me: "So, you missy could be employed by the end of today."

Lelo: "Oh my God, Mbuso, thank you so much. I owe you a lot."

Me: "Yeah, yeah. Now go and take that bath."

She laughs and hurries upstairs.

AMARA\*

Mkhize ambles into the room and shuts the door, I don't like the look on his face.

My heart starts racing.

If he tries anything, I won't be able to escape as I am stuck on this bed.

Me: "What are you doing here?"

Mkhize: "You're going to be my wife Amara, soon we'll be sharing a bed and this very bedroom. I'm allowed to be here."

He ambles to me and for the life of me, I want to scream.

He sits on the edge of the bed and starts stroking my braids, I am disgusted by his touch, it's nauseating.

Me: "Don't touch me."

I shake my head.

Mkhize: "My touch will be all you're getting after the wedding. So, why not start now?"

Me: "Please, I don't want this. I don't want to be here."

Mkhize: "I know but, this place will grow on you."

Me: "Why are you doing this?"

I feel my tears build up, I will not cry in front of him. I chastise myself, if I want to make it out of here, I have to remain strong.

Mkhize: "Your uncle owes me, he couldn't pay me and you were the only priceless thing he had."

Me: "So the story about knowing my father was a lie."

He laughs.

Mkhize: "Ah, Zulu. That man was weak and he trusted people too much, I knew it was going to be his down fall. I knew him pretty well, we were best of friends and started a taxi business together."

Me: "You had him killed? It was you who killed my parents?"

He laughs.

Mkhize: "Oh, Amara. I didn't say that, it's wrong to go around assuming things."

He gets up, leaving me confused.

RANDALL\*

Raven joins me on the balcony, I have been sitting here since I woke up. The sun is out in all of its glory. I hardly slept last night thinking about Amara, this room reminds me of her. Her scent still hovers around, and I feel suffocated that she isn't with me.

Me: "Bro."

He smiles.

Ravels: "It feels good to hear you call me that."

I forgot how mushy he is.



I reply with a distant smile.

Raven: "What's wrong? Something is bothering you?"

He asks as he sees through me.

Me: "Someone was taken from me."

Raven: "And that someone holds your heart?"

I scowl at his question.

Me: "All I know is, it feels like something heavy is sitting on my chest. I was spoiled, I got so used to being around her. Now, she feels like a distant memory."

Raven: "She fell for another man?"

Me: "There's so much I need to fill you on."

Raven: "I'm all ears."

I need to speak to Styles first before airing out everything to Raven, I haven't seen him in years. He probably vents everything to that old man, my father is a god as far as Raven is concerned. I will not trust blindly, he's my brother but, that also means nothing. Blood is not always thicker than water.

Me: "Where is that man?"

He sneers.

Raven: "That man is your father."

Me: "Please, you're making me uncomfortable."

He laughs.

Raven: "You can't run away from him Uze."

He's amused by himself.

Me: "Fuck off Uzoma."

Raven: "Shit, I hate that name."

Me: "Tell me about it."

Raven: "You need to speak to him, you know he will never let anyone take over the throne. You were chosen heir apparent, you can't escape from your birth right."

He dives into a conversation I despise.

Me: "If you're on his side so much, why don't you take over from him?"

Raven: "You know that's not how it works."

Me: "Maybe you should join your father wherever he is because you're starting to get on my nerves."

He chortles, I don't see what's funny about what I said.

Raven: "You're still arrogant I see and the anger in your heart refuses to depart from you."

Me: "Rav, not now bro."

Raven: "Then when Randy? Father is not willing to stay in the country for long, he has responsibilities back home."

Me: "Then he should go home. What's stopping him? I have my own shit to deal with."

I snap at him.

"Papa."

Liyana's sweet voice drags us away from this gnawing subject, Raven grabs her and puts her on his lap, as she jumps to throw herself in my arms. She frowns at him.

Raven: "Hi, princess."

She doesn't look happy.

Raven: "Dammit Randy, she's the splitting image of you."

Me: "Should I be worried?"

He laughs.

Raven: "Well, she might look like you but, she is beautiful."

He taunts me, Liyana shuffles as she tries to get off.

Raven: "Your father is still in pain princess so, be careful with that hug."

She still throws herself at me.

Me: "How are you my baby?"

Liyana: "Fine."

She responds playing with the shoulder sling, supporting my arm.

Liyana: "Is it painful?"

Me: "A little."

Liyana: "What happened papa?"

Me: "I fell."

I lie.

Liyana: "Is that why you were sleeping? I thought you had died and went to heaven."

I look at Raven, a pucker has grown between his eye brows showcasing concern.

Me: "Remember what I said princess, I will always come back for you and papa always keeps his promises."

She nods and rests her head on my chest.

Raven: "I'm still waiting for my introduction."

Me: "You still love being the centre of attention?"

Raven: "I am my father's son."

He laughs and I recall my grandfather's words. Raven worships my father, it will break him if the truth were to come out.

Me: "Funny how we look more like mother than we do him."

I throw a joke in, to brush off this awkward moment.

Raven: "I look more like mother while you are that old man's twin."

Me: "I refuse."

Looking at Raven now, I see that he doesn't have a single tint of my father's features. It's a good thing him and I look alike or else he would've noticed how he is different from all the Okolie children.

To be continued...

51\*

STYLES\*

I have never been so close to death before and what I went through has made me see life in a different light. Nkomo proved himself loyal, I can only hope Randall will see that as well.

Sethu walks in as the door opens, her eyes widen when they fall on me. I'm guessing, she thought I wouldn't be awake so soon.

Sethu: "Good morning sir."

She drops her gaze, losing to the staring contest.

Me: "Hi."

Sethu: "I didn't think you would come back to us so soon."

She expresses as she toddles towards the bed and starts fixing the sheets.

Me: "I wasn't fighting alone so, I couldn't disappoint those who were counting on me."

She stops and glances at me, I can't really make out the look in her eyes.

Sethu: "You are lucky to have people by your side, that thing is rare."

Me: "You helped me a lot too and I don't know how to thank you."

Her eyes must love whatever is on the floor.

Me: "Sethu."

She raises them.

Me: "You are a rare breed you know that? I wouldn't be alive if it weren't for you."

There they go to the floor again and a slight smile flashes on her face, her hand flies to her mouth and in agitation starts biting the nail on her pinky finger.

I'm probably making her jumpy.

Sethu: "It's nothing sir, I was doing my job."

She expresses while indulging on her nail, it's kind of a weird thing to observe.

Me: "Trusting a man with a gun in his hand and a bullet hole on his stomach while there's a shooting that, clearly is bravery. If your job title requires that then, damn I respect nurses."

She giggles and continues on her nail biting voyage.

Me: "Do I make you nervous Sethu?"

She glances at me and shakes her head nervously.

Me: "You seem to enjoy biting on that nail, careful, you might eat your whole finger."

She rapidly removes it and hides her hand in the pockets of her scrubs.

Sethu: "I'm sorry, I'm just..."

Me: "Nervous?"

She turns and checks on the drip, my assumptions are confirmed.

Me: "Has anyone come to see me?"

I should divert the conversation, the poor girl is uncomfortable.

Sethu: "No sir."

Me: "I need to go home."

She turns back, her eyes are on me but, they also keep running everywhere.

Sethu: "You can't, you just had surgery."

Me: "I will heal at home, my brother needs me."

She grabs my hand as I try to pull out the needle stuck in my veins, I frown at her.

Sethu: "If anything happens to you, I will be blamed sir. Mr. Mkhize said to look after you. Your life is in my hands right now and I can't let you leave this hospital. Please, don't."

She pleads, as a small crease forms between her eye brows, her tired eyes standing in agreement with her words. I glance at her hand on mine, with the same frown on my face and she lets go.

Me: "Were you working the grave shift?"

She nods.

Me: "Shouldn't you be at home sleeping?"

Sethu: "I will go after Mr. Mkhize has come sir."

Me: "Call me Styles, you make me feel old when you call me sir. Surely, I don't look that old."

She fights a smile.

Sethu: "Mr. Styles, I will go and call the doctor."

Me: "Okay, Miss Sethu."

Her eyes widen at my response.

Me: "You are being formal so, it's fair that I return the courtesy."

She tries to fight another smile but, fails dismally.



Sethu: "I'm sorry sir... I mean Styles."

She shies away as my name leaves her mouth and hurries out the door.

RANDALL\*

I have been trying to call Styles but, his number rings unanswered. Raven and my father went back to the hotel to freshen up because they didn't bring their luggage, even if they did, I wouldn't allow him to stay in my house. Neo saunters into my room, his habit of not knocking will piss me off one day.

Neo: "Bozza, ugrand mara?" (Are you okay?)

He settles on a chair beside me.

Me: "Do I look okay Neo?"

Neo: "I know hore leoatla leo le lebe le nkile motho oa hau, but we will get her back. Don't worry bozza." (That ugly fool took your person.)

How can I not worry when Amara is alone with that pig?

Me: "You're damn right I will get her back, Mkhize will pay for what he did."

Neo: "Kea utloa bozza. Entlek tell me about the rain. That thing only happens on TV, ziyawa e Ghana neh." (I hear you, boss.) (It's falling in Ghana.)

I'm not going to entertain his craziness.

Me: "Have you spoken to Styles? Did he say what time he'll be here?"

Neo: "Bozza, Stylos eyy..." (Boss, Styles hey.)

Me: "What?"

The look on his face says it's bad.

Neo: "Eish, Stylos o ne a nahana hore ke Rabobi but, they showed him flames." (Styles thought he was Spiderman but, they dealt with him.)

He prattles on and I fail to piece his words together.

Me: "Will someone tell me where the fuck is Styles and why does my house reek of a Mkhize?"

I ask, upon seeing Nkomo walk in, the nerve he has to be under the same roof as me.

Nkomo: "That's fair and I deserve it."

Me: "You got guts Mkhize."

He scowls at me.

Nkomo: "Don't call me that."

Me: "You cannot deny what you are."

I grab my crutch and use it to stand up, Neo grabs my hand so to help.

Me: "Don't."

I stop him and he pulls away.

Neo: "Uze, what's wrong? Why so much anger bozza?" (Boss.)

Me: "Fuck off Neo, get the fuck out of my face. Do you know what this son of a bitch did?"

I rumble, he steps back.

Nkomo: "Styles called me here."

I chortle at this disclosure.

Me: "He wouldn't do that, he knows how much I despise the ground you walk on."

Nkomo: "Randall..."

Me: "Surely Nkomo, you do not think I have forgiven your little stunt?"

Nkomo: "That's in the past Randall..."

Me: "The past? You betrayed me you piece of shit, I wouldn't be surprised if you brought Franco here to take Amara."

Neo: "Bozza..."

Me: "Stay out of this Neo, it has nothing to do with you."

Nkomo: "It was a mistake Randall, I told you."

He raises his voice, he's lucky I'm injured.

Me: "It wasn't a mistake, it's clearly who you are. It's in your blood. Okay, let's say Styles did ask you for help. What is to say, you will not turn on him when you're put on the spot?"

Nkomo: "I would never do that, I despise Mkhize just as much as you do, if not more."

I huff.

Me: "Let me remind you Nkomo, Styles can be a psycho when provoked and Mkhize has a tendency of rubbing him off the wrong way. He can't stop, it's almost like he's obsessed and knowing Styles, he will punish Mkhize's kin, just to see the old man suffer. Are you willing to stick around for that?"

He gulps, this statement is making him uncomfortable.



Me: "That's right, think about it. Will you stand back while Styles tortures your siblings? That old man is a good father, I have to give him that. He might have killed your mother but, damn he loves you and would take a bullet for you. So, who knows? We might just use you as bait."

Neo: "Shit, oga you're scaring me now. Ha re jikelani bozza, sena se wrong." (Boss we don't turn our backs on each other, this is wrong.)

Me: "Tell that to this bastard, he doesn't know what loyalty is."

Neo: "Forgive and forget bozza." (Boss.)

I shoot him a cold stare.

He moves back, his hands raised, apologetically.

NTOMBI\*

We are having late breakfast in front of the TV, there's a knock at the door. Petunia gets up to open. A tall full figured woman walks in, she literally pushes Petunia aside, as she lets herself into my house.

Petunia: "Haibo sisi? Kwenzakalani egoli?" (What's happening in Johannesburg?)

Me: "And then, ungubani wena?" (Who are you?)

She frowns at me and I could swear, I saw her roll her eyes.

Her: "Sanibonani." (Greetings.)

She greets Mhambi and Jonas with respect.

Jonas: "Who are you?"

Jonas does not look happy.

Mashoto: "My name is Mashoto.

Jonas: "Okay that doesn't explain why you just threw yourself in here."

Petunia: "Futhi siyadla, uyadelela wena ngane." (We are eating, you have no respect child.)

Me: "Ngicela ungiphumele kwami wesisi." (Please get out of my house.)

I shout as I get up on my feet, she gives me the dirty look again.

Petunia: "Haibo! Phuma ntombazane." (Get out girl.)

Mhambi: "Petunia wait, there's a reason why she is here."

Jonas: "Kumele asho ke isizatho sakhe. Will you stand there the whole day and not say anything." (She must state her reason.)

He raises his voice.

Mhambi: "Khuluma ntombazane, ufunani?" (Speak girl. What do you want?)

Mashoto: "I am Moses' wife and I'm pregnant with his baby."

She drops a bomb that spins my world and throws me on the floor as I faint.

NOMBULELO\*

Mbuso dropped me at the hospital, he said he'll fetch me when I am done. I had to decline, I'm used to taking taxis and I don't want to be spoiled. He probably has things to do anyway.

I tread to the office where he said I'd find the doctor.

"Come in."

A feminine voice yells from the other side of the door, I open it and walk in to find an elegant young black woman, dressed in a white doctor's coat. She raises her eye brows, I don't see a smile coming out of that haughty face.

Me: "Good day."

Her: "Yes."

She says looking at me like I bathed in mud, before coming here.

Me: "Mbuso Xaba sent me here."

I feel awkward standing by the door. Will she ever offer me a seat?

Her: "Doctor Xaba?"

I nod.

Her: "Mmmh, so, you're the intern?"

I don't know if she's asking or telling me.

I don't respond.

Her: "Are you just going to stand there or sit? Your contract is ready, you just need to sign it."

I already feel intimidated by her, the look she's giving me isn't helping at all. I toddle to the chair and settle down. She's glaring at me and it's a heavy glare.

Me: "Your name?"

She inquires with an attitude, as she hands me the contract, it has four pages so I don't read it.

Me: "Will you not interview me first?"

Her: "The contract is in front of you that, clearly states you won't be interviewed."

Someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed today.

Her: "Sign on the first page and initial the rest."

I do as she says.

Her: "I still don't have your name."

That time I see it written on the contract.

Me: "Nombulelo."

I tell her anyway.

Her: "I see so, what did you do for Mbuso to get you this job?"

Me: "Excuse me?"

Her: "He didn't tell you? You're not an intern sisi, you start work tomorrow as a nurse. He spoke to the higher powers, surely you must have done something. You scratch my back, I scratch yours type of thing?"

I am shocked by her assumptions.

Me: "I am not that type of a person doctor, Mbuso is my friend."

Now, I can say it with confidence.

She cackles.

Her: "Yeah, sure he is. I doubt it though, you're not the type of person he hangs around with. Believe me, I have met his friends. You're more of a kasi type of girl while Mbuso is... well, you've seen him right."

She spews the words out with so much attitude and a grin clicks on her mouth.

Me: "Mbuso told me that you're a doctor, I didn't know your job entails judging people as well."

She frowns at my retort, I slide the papers to her.

Me: "Thank you for your time doctor, I will report for work tomorrow morning."

I rejoinder and leave.

To be continued...

52\*

RANDALL\*

The fact that Nkomo is thinking about this and doesn't have an answer for me, shows that, when push comes to shove, he will betray us.

Me: "Get the fuck out of my house now."

I command.

Nkomo: "I don't want to be here either, Stylos wanted help when you were shot and Amara was taken."

Me: "Don't fucking say her name you piece of shit."

Neo: "Oga please now, biko. Let's calm down." (Please.)

Me: "Neo, you don't want to piss me off, believe me."

Neo: "I know you're angry but, this will not solve anything and it certainly will not bring Amara back. You two have to put aside your differences and work together. Stylos is out of the game and we can't face Mkhize limping like this, he will..."

Me: "Wait. What do you mean Stylos is out of the game?"

Nkomo: "He was shot when he went to rescue Amara at the hospital."

What am I hearing?

Me: "Amara is in the hospital? Why is she in the hospital?"

They go quiet on me and I am losing it.

Me: "I asked you a question? Why the fuck is Amara in the hospital?"

Nkomo: "They had an accident that same night, Musa didn't make it and Franco escaped with a few scratches."

Me: "I don't care about those two fuckers, I want to know if Amara is okay and where is my brother?"

Neo: "Mkhize took her Uze, Stylos tried his best. I told him not to go alone, vele, who goes to war alone? Nahana bozza, Stylos ene ena le linoha. Boma black mamba, anaconda daar. That, shit head Franco shot him and Mkhize walked away with Amara?" (He unleashed a den of snakes.)

My head spins as I fail to apprehend what Neo is telling me, I sit back on the chair.

Nkomo: "You were not there Neo."

Neo: "Kea tseba, I still tell it better than you." (I know.)

Me: "Please tell me he's alive."

My heart drops at the thought of him lying dead in a coffin.

Nkomo: "He is, he's at Bara."

Me: "Neo, take me to him."

Neo: "Sho sho Uze." (Okay Uze.)

Me: "Call me Uze again."

He smiles.

Me: "No, call me Uze again."

He laughs as he scratches his head.

Neo: "Sorry bozza." (Boss.)

Mbuso walks in, I guess my room belongs to the public now.

Neo: "We don't need you now dokotela, ungaphindela emuva." (You can go back now doctor.)

Mbuso: "I'm not here for you."

Nkomo: "While you're here, maybe you should check on Neo's brain. He needs treatment."

Mbuso: "This one is beyond help."

Neo: "It's okay, I'm used to having haters. Uze, let's go."

Nkomo: "I'm coming with."

Why am I tolerating him?

Mbuso: "Where is everyone going?"

Neo: "To see Stylos at the hospital."

Mbuso: "Randall can't go anywhere, you just woke up. You need to take it easy."

Me: "If you know I will not listen to you. Why do you bother?"

He chuckles.

Mbuso: "Yep, this is the Randall I know, rude as fuck."

Neo: "I think I have heard enough swearing today, you guys are toxic."

Me: "Can we go please."

Mbuso: "I'm coming too."

With great difficulty I manage to make it down the stairs, Chioma sees me from the kitchen and marches to me.

Me: "I am going out, if my father comes around make sure he doesn't meet Liyana. Raven is informed, I don't want him to see her yet."

Chioma: "Why Uze?"

Me: "It's family matters Chioma, just keep my daughter away from that man."

Chioma: "Is he a danger to her."

Me: "What's with the curiosity? Can't you do as I say? I have so much to deal with right now, will you help me with this at least."

Chioma: "Sorry, I'll do that."

Me: "Thank you, that wasn't hard now was it?"

NTOMBI\*

This home wrecker was made to sit, I don't know why Jonas hasn't thrown her out of the house. Petunia poured cold water on my face, this is how I was woken up and I have been crying since.

Jonas: "What did you say your name was again?"

Mashoto: "Mashoto Mugwena.

Mhambi: "Didn't your parents teach you any respect Mashoto? Is this what is done in the Mugwena family, you walk in people's houses without being invited in?"

Mashoto: "Ngiyaxolisa baba but, this is my house too. Moses is my husband."

She retorts rudely, with her head bowed still.

Me: "Uyahlanya, Moses is married to me and only me sisi." (You're crazy.)

I yell at her while trying to fight the urge to attack her.

Mhambi: "Ntombi awume tuu." (Ntombi wait.)

Jonas: "Awusho sisi, what brings you here really?" (Tell us.)

Mashoto: "Moses has been paying lobola in instalment for the past six months, yesterday my father called me and told me that it has been paid in full."

Petunia laughs out loud.

Petunia: "Ayikho lento, ntombazane? You're saying your lobola was paid in instalments? This has to be a joke." (There is no such thing.)

Jonas: "Moses is capable of anything."

Mashoto: "I have a letter from my father explaining everything, he's in Venda and he couldn't



come to joburg due to my mother being sick.”

She takes out a white envelop from her bag.

Jonas: “Such disrespect wesisi. Listen here, you have approached the wrong people, we are his in-laws. You see this woman.”

He points at me, she knows me alright. The disgusted look on her face says so.

Jonas: “This is Moses’ wife, they have been married for fifteen years. You come here and claim that you are married to Moses and are carrying his child without any proof and this man you seek, is not here to confirm your allegations.”

Mashoto: “I hear you baba but...”

Jonas: “Angiyena ubaba wakho. I suggest you leave, I will tell Moses you were here when he gets back from wherever he is. As for now, we cannot entertain you.” (I am not your father.)

Mashoto: “I’m not going anywhere, this is my husband’s house.”

Petunia: “Haibo ntombazane, hamba.” (Leave girl.)

I’m tongue tied.

Mhambi: “Ntombazane, go home because this will not end well. Call your father or write him a letter or whatever it is that you people do and let him know that he needs to speak to the Mngoma family. We have nothing to do with that.” (Girl.)

She folds her arms across her chest and sits back, gesturing that she’s not moving. I feel every inch of me burning with rage, I grab a butter knife on the table and target her. She screams and runs out the door.

Me: “I’ll kill you if you come back here again.”

I shout with rage.

Mashoto: “I’ll come back, Moses is my husband whether you like it or not and I will prove it.”

She yells before walking away. I see Martha peeking through the fence, she sees me and waves with a smile on her face. I know she takes joy in seeing me hurt, I roll my eyes at her and shut the door.

Jonas and Mhambi are still seated as if nothing happened, Petunia is finishing up her food. They have no care in the world about what was just revealed.

Me: “I know you guys hate Moses but, I am your sister and we just found out that my husband got another woman pregnant. Why are you not alarmed? You should be going crazy.”

Petunia: “Not only did he get her pregnant Ntombi, he married her as well.”

She says smirking, as she gulps on a glass of juice.

Why is this making her happy?

Me: "Bhuti?" (Brother.)

Jonas: "I heard you Ntombi, let us wait for Moses to come back. His family will have to be informed about this matter. It's his job to do that, I will not involve myself in their matters."

Defeated and hurt, I throw myself on the couch.

Mhambi: "I think it's time we get the police involved in this, Moses has been gone for too long."

Jonas: "Do you know how many missing persons' files are stacked up at the police station? It will take forever to find him. I know how to bring Moses back."

Mhambi: "What do you mean Jonas? What do you have up your sleeve?"

Jonas: "Let's just say, our dear late brother will bring Moses back home."

He laughs, I am scared to even ask what he means by that.

STYLES\*

I hear voices outside my door, Neo's voice is the loudest. Do I even have the strength for him?

My jaw literally drops when my eyes fall on Randall. Neo, Nkomo and Mbuso are following behind him.

Randall: "You stubborn bastard, you escaped from the clutches of death."

He smiles, I laugh at his comment.

Me: "You're the stubborn one, death had you by the neck but, look at you standing here."

He laughs.

Neo: "Awww, I just love happy reunions. You two are too cute man."

I will have to endure his foolishness, I guess.

Me: "You scared me Randy, I thought you were dead when I found you. I swear, I never want to feel like that again."

Randall chortles.

Randall: "I think that bullet did a number on you. What the hell are you saying to me?"

I laugh at his stupid retort and wince in pain.

Me: "I'm just happy that my brother is alive and well."

He sighs.

Randall: "Me too."

Neo: "Okay, re shebelle days of our lives now. Bo Brady le John Black, you can cut it out now."

Mbuso laughs while Nkomo shakes his head.

Me: "You're still stupid."

Nkomo: "Styles, you were out for a day, somethings will never change."

Neo glares at him.

Mbuso: "You look better, for someone who almost died."

Me: "I feel better."

Neo: "What happened to the snakes? Entlek Stylos, what were you thinking vele? I heard you had people in wheel chairs running. You're a miracle worker, they should pay you for this."

How can I not laugh at this? I see Mbuso struggling with his laugh while, Nkomo is laughing freely. Randall looks defeated, it must be the whole Amara situation.

Nkomo: "Ntwana, why do you keep changing the story? You'll lend us in jail wena." (Boy.) (You.)

Neo: "That's what you told me Nkomo, se ke oa hana." (Don't deny it.)

Me: "I need a laptop, there's no time to waste. Mkhize plans on marrying Amara in three days."

I introduce, leering at a distressed Randall. He scowls, hearing my announcement. He will never be at peace until he has Amara by his side.

Randall: "That son of a bitch."

He growls as he settles down on a chair.

Mbuso: "I know someone who works here, I can borrow their laptop."

Nkomo: "The wedding has been postponed, my uncle's funeral will be this weekend. So, the wedding is set to be next Saturday."

Nkomo reveals.

Randall: "How do you know all of this?"

I see the hatred he has for him in his eyes, Nkomo will never gain Randall's trust, no matter what he does.

Nkomo: "My brother."

Randall sniggers coldly.

Randall: "I still say we can't trust him Styles, I don't know how you brought him into my house."

Neo: "I still say forgive and forget bozza." (Boss.)

Neo jumps in, Randall doesn't pay heed to his remark.

Me: "I had no other choice Randy, a lot has happened. I had to think fast, if I wasn't shot, Amara would be with you."

Randall: "We have to get her Styles, it's been too long. I'm losing my mind here."

Nkomo: "We will get her back Randall."

He's really trying to reach out but Randall will not have it.

Me: "He's right, Mbuso get me that laptop. I need to trace her, Mkhize likes ambushing people right? It's time to give him a taste of his own medicine."

Neo: "Oa bona Stylos, joale ua bua. Dokotela sicela ilaptop." (You see Styles, now you're talking. Can we please have the laptop doctor?)

Mbuso saunters out of the room.

MKHIZE\*

Franco comes limping into my office, he looks like hell.

Me: "What's wrong with you? Are you on drugs?"

Franco: "I swear if someone asks me that again, I will put a bullet through their head."

Me: "Franco, you look like a drug addict. How else would you explain this panic on your face? Aren't you supposed to be in the hospital?"

He wipes his sweat away.

Franco: "You have to help me man, there's an old man and he's following me. I couldn't stay in that hospital anymore, it's haunted. Whatever was in that room, keeps following me. I had to change hotel rooms three times, I don't know what to do anymore. He won't leave me alone and he won't let me sleep."

Me: "You're definitely on drugs."

He grabs the collar of my shirt, rage and terror written on his sweaty face.

Franco: "I am not on fucking drugs man, there is something out there and it's after my life."

I push him off of me.

Me: "I think you should go home."

He freezes as his eyes widen like he's seeing a ghost.

Franco: "Do you hear that?"

He says and turns towards the door.

Franco: "It's coming, do something please. Make it stop."

Maybe there is something, he is engulfed by fear and that is something one can not fake.

Franco: "What the hell do you want from me? Get the fuck out of here."

He shouts while glancing at the door.

Or, maybe he is seeing things. There is no one there.

He staggers back and falls on his butt, a scream escapes his mouth as he covers his face with his hands.

Franco: "No, leave me alone. Leave me alone."

He screams, I am standing here mystified by everything.

Me: "Franco?"

I shout. He doesn't respond but continues screaming and cursing as if I am not in the room.

Franco: "Get away from me you devil."

He screams, suddenly I feel a heavy presence hovering about, in the room. Chills run through my body.

Me: "Who are you? Get out of my house, you have no business here."

I express, fear is tugging at me as well, it takes a while for whatever it is to depart. Franco looks up at me, his body quivering. I have never seen him so afraid before.

Franco: "He's gone but, he will come back, he always comes back."

He expresses.

What the hell just happened?

To be continued...

53\*

AMARA\*

I am so frustrated, I hate that I am here and I hate that I am stuck on this bed. This room is suffocating me and I am losing my wits trying to grasp for air.

Kazi: "Amara."

Kazi whispers as she dashes into the room, she has this excited look on her face. I leer at her bouncing towards me, she hands me a phone.

Kazi: "Someone wants to speak to you, be quick I'll watch out for the door."

She says in an emergency tone, I don't understand as to who would want to speak to me.

Me: "Who is it?"

Kazi: "Just take it."

She pushes it in my hand, gestures that I should speak and hurries to guard the door.

Me: "Hello."

"Me hemma." (My queen.)

My heart thuds so hard against my chest that it feels like I'm about to have a heart attack. It can't be, no, unless it was all an act.

Randall: "Amara? Hello?"

I hear panic in his voice as I go silent, I'm too shocked to speak.

Randall: "Hello?"

Me: "Randall?"

It's his turn to go quiet.

Randall: "Please say that again."

He pleads, almost sounding emotional.

Randall: "You said my name and God, it sounded so good coming from your mouth. Please say it again me hemma." (My queen.)

I am overwhelmed by the sound of his voice, Randall is alive. He is alive, I feel my emotions build up into a powerful surge. They engulf me within a miniscule.

Kazi looks at me with worry.

Randall: "Amara, I will get you out of there. Remember my promise, you belong with me and I am coming for you."

He assures me when he finds a reason behind my sudden burst of tears.

Me: "You're alive?"

I finally say.

Randall: "I'm here."

The thought makes me tear up again, I didn't think I would hear his voice again.

Me: "Randall, this man says he..."

Randall: "I know, don't worry, I will get you out of there. Don't try anything as yet, Mkhize is dangerous and he won't hesitate to kill you if you piss him off."

Me: "I'm tired."

I confess my weariness.

Randall: "You have been through so much Amara when all of this is over, I promise, I will give you nothing but peace. You're going to be okay"

He says, I can only shed tears at the sound of his voice. Kazi jerks in shock and runs to me, she grabs the phone from my hand. I'm taken by her act as I look up at her, then I hear voices from outside the door. She quickly hides the phone in her pocket and keeps herself busy as she checks my temperature and pulse. The door opens and Mkhize walks in, he takes a few steps toward us and stops far enough.

Mkhize: "Nurse."

Kazi turns to gawk at him.

Kazi: "Yes, sir."

Mkhize: "How is she?"

Kazi: "She's getting better."

I roll my eyes.

Does he even care? This seems to be more about fulfilling his sick desires.

Mkhize: "Good because we have a wedding next weekend."

I gag at the thought, I would literally, rather die.

Mkhize: "The house will be crowded from tonight, family members are coming for my brother's funeral. Tomorrow I want you to stay with Amara, no one else should enter this room."

Kazi: "Yes sir."

He looks at me before walking out.

Kazi: "That old man makes my skin crawl."

She shivers as she declares.

Me: "How did you get to Randall?"

I have been meaning to ask.

Kazi: "Well, Styles sent me here to spy on Mkhize. This was before you were kidnapped. Remember how I couldn't get a hold of him?"

Me: "Yes, Styles was shot. The last time I saw him, he wasn't looking good. So, I kind of figured that maybe he died."

Kazi: "Well, he's very much alive. He actually called me while I was in the kitchen and said Randall needed to speak to you, I was shocked."

Me: "Yeah, I can't believe he's alive. Now I'm more eager to leave this place, I want to see him."

I confess what my heart holds, she smiles.

Kazi: "You will, soon. For now, you just have to endure this prison."

I sigh, as she reminds me of my current situation.

NOMBULELO\*

My mood dropped since the interview, I have tried to think positive but, the doctor really got to me. I opted to clean the house, I need to keep busy. It will definitely help me forget, I miss Amara so much. We would be laughing this whole thing off, I would even forget why I was upset.

Mbuso walks in just as I finish cleaning the lounge, he looks surprised, probably because he said not to clean the house.

I toss myself on the couch and heave a sigh of exhaustion.

Mbuso: "And then?"

I shrug my shoulders.

Me: "Aren't you supposed to be at work?"

Mbuso: "I'm on a lunch break, I wanted to check on you and hear how the interview went. You were not answering your phone."

Me: "It's on the charger upstairs."





Mbuso: "Okay. Why are you cleaning?"

Me: "To clear my head."

Mbuso: "Didn't you get the job?"

He settles next to me.

Me: "You mean the job I got before I even signed the contract?"

Mbuso: "Is that why you're blue?"

Me: "Can I ask you something?"

He nods.

Me: "What do you think of me?"

His eyes buck, I caught him off guard with this one.

Mbuso: "Where is this coming from?"

Me: "Just a thought."

He clears his throat and shifts on his seat.

Me: "Forget I asked."

I proclaim and attempt to get up, he grabs my arm gently, pulling me back down.

Okay.

He's looking into my eyes and I should be looking away right about now.

I don't.

Mbuso: "Where is this coming from Lelo? Did Namhla say something?"

Me: "That's her name?"

He furrows his eye brows.

Mbuso: "She said something, didn't she?"

Me: "I said forget it Mbuso, it's not important. I tend to overthink, it's my biggest trait."

I try to get up but, he grabs my hand again and pulls me to him. I fall on his chest and he smashes his lips on mine, before I could scoot away from him. I'm too shocked to return the kiss but, he's not stopping. I am compelled to return it as his tongue plunges into my mouth, causing me to moan.

My cheeks are buried on his palms, I find myself leaning back on the couch as he gently pushes against me. His hand leaves my cheek and he dips it under my t-shirt. I feel a tingling feeling on my stomach when his warm hand leisurely slides up, making its way to my bust. The kiss deepens and I know if I let it continue, it will escalate to something he might regret. He's

probably doing me a favour.

I seize his hand the moment he grabs my breast and push it away while, trying to pull out from the kiss.

Me: "Mbuso."

I muffle against his lips, he pulls back and looks at me. He's a few inches from my face, I can feel his warm breath fanning my face. A ghostly smile dances on his mouth.

Mbuso: "This, is what I think of you."

He pecks my lips after that soft whisper that has me shivering.

Mbuso: "You're a beautiful woman Lelo, don't ever let any other woman convince you otherwise. Banomona." (They are jealous.)

He finishes, having me giggle.

I believe him though, the look in his eyes says I should. His weight is still on me and I'm not lying when I say it feels right. His eyes scan my lips and I foresee another kiss coming. My predictions come to pass, as he takes my lips again sending me on another roll of excitement. The only lips I have ever tasted were Zuma's and this feels different. In a nice way, different.

Mbuso: "I have been wanting to do this for a while now."

I shy away at his remark.

Mbuso: "And I want to do this every day, if you permit me. I promise to never stop kissing you."

His statement throws me into a stage of laughter.

Me: "Which show did you get this line from?"

He titters.

Mbuso: "Hey, I used to be a poet back in college. I believe I still have it."

Me: "Well, Mr. Poet. Your line needs polishing, it's too soapy."

He laughs before he welcomes a serious look.

Mbuso: "I know you're afraid Lelo because of what you have been through, I have seen the fear in your eyes. I've noticed how you would zone out and drift into nothingness."

He gets up and pulls me with him, I make myself comfortable after pulling my t-shirt down.

Mbuso: "I know that it's too soon for you to jump into another relationship but, I want to be that person you can count on. I want to be the one that takes your pain away, if you would let me."

I blink in attempt to fight my tears.

Me: "Okay, this one is definitely from a movie."

I crack a joke, he laughs.

Mbuso: "Will you let me?"

He's not letting this go.

I want to, I find him very attractive and I am drawn to him. I have wondered how it would be like to be loved by a person like Mbuso but, my heart yearns for the love of the one who broke me.

I nod, I deserve to be happy.

He smiles, genuinely and pulls me into another insatiable kiss.

STYLES\*

Me: "Is she okay?"

Randall: "I think so, we got disconnected. We have to get her out."

Me: "You know it might take us a while right? I'll speak to Kazi, we have to find a way to stall the wedding."

Randall: "If anyone can do it, then it's you." Neo Nkomo and Mbuso left a while ago, Randall refuses to leave my side.

Me: "Mkhize thinks you're dead you know that right?"

Randall: "Isn't that good news? I can't wait to see his face when he sees me."

Me: "This war is weighing me down now, I think it's time I finally start a family."

Randall: "A family? This, from a man who doesn't believe in marriage nor does he want kids? Franco should've shot you sooner, this is great man."

He laughs as he mocks me.

Me: "Near death experiences can have a huge impact on your life."

Randall: "Believe me I know, Mr. Okolie is in the country."

He discloses.

Me: "Oh! I hope you two didn't have a wrestling match."

He laughs.

Randall: "No, I think he comes in peace. There's something I never told you Styles, I'm married."

He says it like it's not shocking.

Me: "What?"

I am perplexed, he hauls a sigh, as he roughly brushes his head.

Randall: "Yeah, traditionally. I woke up one day and was told that I'm a husband to someone I have never met, I was eighteen. Apparently, whoever will take over from the throne, a wife is chosen for him. I have always known this growing up but, was against it. Father knew I didn't want it, my mother was against it as well. We came to an agreement that we will no longer practice this custom, I don't know what clicked in my father's head."

Me: "He married you off?"

He nods sadly.

Me: "Wait, I don't understand. How did you get married without being present at the wedding?"

My question tickles him.

Randall: "There's some ritual they do with the girl's family, if your child is absent your father can give consent on your behalf."

Me: "So, it was a traditional wedding?"

Randall: "If you can put it that way, that's the night I decided to run. I knew I would never be free from his control, he would always make decisions for me. That's why I hated being reminded that I'm royalty, it brought back all those memories. I looked up to that man Styles, we were inseparable and leaving my family broke me. My father's betrayal has made me the person I am, I have bottled this up my whole life."

I see a pang of hurt in his eyes, Randall has never been this emotional before.

Me: "What's going to happen now?"

Randall: "Why do you think he's here? He wants me back, no one else can take over the throne but me."

Me: "Your brother can step in on your behalf."

Randall: "He's not my father's son, although he is recognized as one, they want an Okolie blood."

Me: "Randall, you need to speak to him, tell him how you feel. Now I see the reason behind your brokenness."

He frowns.

Randall: "Brokenness?"

Me: "Yes, lack of trust in people. The wrath that's holding you captive and shutting people out. All these are the emotions you feel towards your father hence, you reflect them on other people. Bottling things up only breaks you bruh."

He smiles a little as he carefully scans me, I laugh at his stupidity.

Randall: "Doctor Sishi?"



He taunts, I know what he's getting at.

Randall: "I respect hospitals, wow, you're a psychologist now."

Me: "Hey, you know I'm right. Think about it Randy, if you want Amara in your life you have to heal for her. Your wrath will come to play once in a while and Amara will get tired of it and leave you."

Randall: "Thank you for painting the picture."

He hates the thought of being without her, I know him too well.

Me: "People judge you from a distance because they don't really know you but, I know you're not that bad."

Randall: "Frankly, I couldn't care less what people think of me."

True but...

Me: "I know but, we need people. No one is a loner in this world and you being drawn to Amara proves it. Speaking of Amara, you need to divorce that woman whoever she is."

I laugh causing him to shake his head in distress.

Randall: "Divorce? A blood covenant was made between us, remember I said a wife is chosen for you at birth. That's when they call a priest who performs the ritual, two innocent infants who have no clue what is being done to them. If that's not witchcraft then, I don't know. Only a priest can break that covenant, if the girl's family declines. They request a replacement, it has to be someone who is after me or before me."

Me: "In your case Raven?"

He laughs as if it's a joke.

Randall: "He loves my father but, he would never agree to this. Raven can also be stubborn."

Me: "He loves you too, maybe he just might ..."

He ponders upon it as he stares into space.

Randall: "I can't be without Amara bruh, I don't see myself with anyone else but her."

His confession shocks me.

Me: "And when did we decide this? You have always been denying that you love her."

Randall: "You are not the only one with a near death experience."

I laugh.

Randall: "That night when they took her, the fear in her eyes and when she pleaded for my life. Something popped and I knew."

Me: "Thank God, I was beginning to worry."

He snickers.

Me: "It took us being shot to view life from a different perspective."

"You were shot Styles?"

Shit! Khethu.

She's standing at the door, her hands folded across her chest.

To be continued...



54\*

NKOMO\*

I went back to Randall's house, he might not want me here but, I am not aborting mission. I will see this through, it could also be my chance to avenge my mother's death.

I walk in to find Chioma arguing with Olivia in the kitchen.

Me: "What's going on?"

Olivia: "I want to see my child and this woman will not let me."

I know her to be nothing but, disrespectful and rude. She thinks the world owes her something.

Chioma: "She is not allowed anywhere near the child."

Olivia: "She's my daughter, I have every right to see her. Now that her father is gone, I'm the only parent she has."

Styles could be right, maybe Olivia is the mole, telling her the truth would be risky.

Me: "I think it's better if you leave."

She laughs.

Olivia: "Who's going to make me? I can get you people arrested for kidnapping a child."

I forgot to mention that she can be crazy too, I have to think fast.

Me: "Liyana is not here, her grandmother took her."

She scowls and makes a face. She knows nothing about Randall's life, this should work.

Olivia: "What grandmother? I haven't met any of Randall's relatives."

I manage to cause confusion in her head, I should polish it now.

Me: "When his family heard of his death, they came and took Liyana."

Olivia: "Where did they take my baby? I have to get her back, she can't live with strangers."

Done...

Me: "I don't know but, I promise to find out for you."

Olivia: "How could Randall do this to me?"

Chioma: "What did Randall do Olivia?"

Olivia: "He took my baby from me and then gets himself killed."

Me: "Who told you Randall was killed? He could've died in his sleep or had a heart attack. Where did you hear the news from? No one else knows but us."

She becomes restless and clears her throat.

Olivia: "I have to go."

She announces and pounces out the door, leaving Chioma and I stunned.

Chioma: "That woman has exposed Liya to some disgusting things."

She states, she looks peeved by the thought of Olivia.

Me: "What disgusting things?"

She huffs.

Chioma: "Ask Neo, he'll tell you."

NOMBULELO\*

Me: "Are you not going back to work?"

We've been sitting on the couch sharing everything there is to know about each other. Mbuso is lying down with his feet stretched out and his head resting on my thighs, his hands keep themselves occupied with the strands of my dreads.

Mbuso: "Why would I want to go back to that boring place when I can spend time with my girlfriend?"

I smile at him.

Me: "You said girlfriend."

Mbuso: "Yes, you're my girlfriend."

Me: "I like the sound of that, boyfriend."

I lean over and peck his lips, he deepens the kiss when I try to pull out. I feel my heart banging against my chest with every move.

Mbuso: "I am not going to get tired of this."

He articulates with a smile on his face.

Me: "Yeah right, I will make sure to remind you, when I have forgotten how your kisses taste like."

My words have him snickering, I have come to know that Mbuso is a laugher and it's kind of therapeutic. He has an unquestionable positive demeanour, it makes me want to be around him all the time.



Mbuso: "I will not give you a chance to complain."

Me: "Mmmhhh?"

Mbuso: "I'm taking you out on a date tonight by the way."

Me: "Okay, that's sudden."

Mbuso: "Not really, I have wasted enough time."

Me: "Meaning?"

Mbuso: "According to my calculations, we're supposed to have sex after three dates. So, we're going out tonight and twice tomorrow."

This is funny, he smiles when I guffaw and starts laughing as well, as I struggle to control myself.

Me: "I think you're in the wrong profession, you should take up comedy really."

I'm being sarcastic and he gets it as he sniggers. I take his left hand to inspect his fifth finger, wanting to know the story behind him losing half of his nail.

Me: "What happened here?"

He chortles.

Mbuso: "I almost forgot about this, it was such a long time ago. I was a rebellious child who didn't listen to his mother when she said don't play with scissors."

Me: "And, you cut your finger?"

Mbuso: "I was trying to fix my bike, that plan didn't go well."

He laughs, there's a loud knock at the door. He frowns seemingly annoyed by it.

Mbuso: "The owner of the house is here, we should evacuate."

He puns as he gets up, I laugh in response to it.

Mbuso: "Seriously, who knocks like that?"

Me: "The landlord."

I respond with a laugh, he opens the door. A tall man in a black suit and a vintage cap stands at the door, he grimaces at Mbuso the moment his eyes fall on him.

Mbuso: "Baba?"

Mbuso turns to me and I jump from my seat.

STYLES\*



Me: "Baby."

She frowns.

Khethu: "Don't baby me Styles. What is going on? Who shot you?"

Me: "How did you know where to find me?"

She walks in.

Khethu: "I followed Randall and the guys, I heard them talking about you in his room."

Randall: "You were eavesdropping?"

Privacy is everything to Randall, he appears to be riled by Khethu's curtness.

Khethu: "I was passing that's when I heard Nkomo telling you that Styles was shot. I can't believe you kept this from me."

Me: "I didn't want you to worry."

Khethu: "I was worried still. What's going Styles? First Randy was shot, then you? Are you two back in that life again?"

This is what I was trying to avoid and her giving me a speech about being a better person and living by the law.

Me: "No, you know we left that life a long time ago."

I lie, she will never understand.

Khethu: "Randall, I know Styles will never tell me the truth."

Randall: "Styles will never lie to you Khethu."

Khethu: "He is lying to me right now. Is this about Amara? Is she the reason why you two are in this situation?"

Randall glances at me, I also don't know how she knows about her. So, I shrug my shoulders. Khethu will go crazy if she finds out that Randall was keeping a girl against her wish. She might crack and probably tell her father.

Me: "Baby..."

Khethu: "Before you say anything Styles, just know that if you lie to me. I will find out the truth."

We have done such a great job in hiding this from her so far.

Randall: "Who told you about Amara?"

Khethu: "It doesn't matter. Apparently, you two are looking for her. Who is she?"

Randall: "She's my girlfriend."

That was fast, he ogles at me, gesturing with his eyes that he's got this.

Randall: "We had a little fight and she left in a fit of rage, she turned off her phone and no one knows where she is."

I think she believes it.

Khethu: "You have a girlfriend Randall?"

Randall: "You know me, I like to keep my life private."

Her eyes lock with mine and in a second they are teary.

Khethu: "Aww, my poor baby."

She swoops to me and cradles me in a hug, I widen my eyes at Randall and he shrugs his shoulders. He looks as confused as I am.

Khethu: "Look at you Styles, I don't like seeing you like this. Does it hurt?"

She cups my cheeks.

Me: "I'm okay baby."

She presses her lips on mine, the kiss lingers on till Randall clears his throat.

Randall: "If you two want me to take pictures, I don't mind. I just didn't bring my phone though."

Khethu: "Funny."

Randall: "Watching two people kiss? There's nothing funny about that."

He joshers, causing me to chortle, Khethu accepts a smile.

Khethu: "You still haven't told me about the bloodbath we found at Randall's house and why you two were shot. Clearly you guys are at war with someone out there."

She won't let this slide, I hear Randall release a sigh of defeat.

Me: "There are some things you shouldn't know Khethu, for your own protection. I wouldn't be able to take it, if anything were to happen to you."

Khethu: "So there is something?"

Randall: "Who doesn't have enemies? We're business men and it's normal that we have rivals who want to take us down."

She doesn't look convinced.

Randall: "You worry too much, relax. You're stressing Styles out, look at him. Poor baby."

She giggles and pecks my lips before taking a look of worry.

Khethu: "Tata has been arrested, he was transferred to prison. They won't let us see him."

I'm not surprised by that.

Me: "Oh!"

Her frown says she didn't expect this reaction from me.

Khethu: "Is that it? Oh? My grandfather has been arrested Styles. Won't you ask why or how he is?"

Me: "Why was he arrested?"

She sighs.

Khethu: "Rape. Can you believe that? It's just impossible, tata is too much of a good person Styles. People love and respect him, he would never do such a heinous act."

Me: "Baby, maybe we should let the court decide that."

She releases an incredulous gasp.

Khethu: "Are you saying he's guilty?"

Me: "I didn't say that, people are never who we think they are. You think you know someone only, to find out that they were living a double life, snakes are real baby and..."

Khethu: "I can't believe you Styles, you just called my grandfather a snake. You think he did it, you think he raped that girl."

Tears fill up in her eyes as she glances at me with nothing but disappointment.

Me: "Khethu."

I take her hand and she yanks it away.

Me: "I'm just stating my opinion I'm not convicting him so, it really doesn't matter what I think, does it?"

Khethu: "It does to me, I need you to support me in this."

Me: "And I do, whole heartedly. I wouldn't want you to be hurt or anything, you know I will do anything to protect you my love."

She softens up, the nod she gives me proves it.

Khethu: "I want to see him, dad has been trying but, no luck. How do they transfer him to a maximum prison Styles? Can't you do something?"

She's asking for the impossible.

Me: "What can I do?"

Khethu: "You know people right? Use your connections and let me meet with him."

Then my plans will be in vain, that bastard belongs in prison.

Me: "I don't know Khethu, I think we should wait for his bail hearing. If it's prohibited to meet with him then, we shouldn't risk it."

Khethu: "So, you don't want to help me?"

She steps back as she pouts.

Me: "Baby."

Khethu: "Fine, I'll ask Mbongeni to help me. I'm sure he won't even think twice about it."

This is her way of provoking me.

Me: "Where is that coming from Khethu?"

Khethu: "I'm just saying Styles, my man doesn't want to help me. I will ask someone else then."

She is making me angry right now, Randall clears his throat. The turn of this conversation is making him uncomfortable.

Me: "Are you trying to piss me off Khethu?"

Randall: "Styles, I think you should consider."

Me: "I want to know why she is bringing that man into this?"

khethu: "I asked him to represent tata, he agreed."

Me: "Okay, I see. Why ask me for help then if you have found someone to help you?"

Silence.

Me: "We're mute now Khethu?"

Khethu: "I was just saying Styles. Baby look, I know him okay? He is not a rapist, he can't be."

Me: "No one said he was, I was only stating that we should let the court prove his innocence. How Mbongeni dived into this conversation beats me. Using emotional blackmail is childish, you know?"

Khethu: "Sorry."

She folds her arms across her chest and puts a strop on, I can't see her upset.

Me: "I will see what I can do."

She snaps a big smile, her mood fluctuating like a chameleon changing colour.

Khethu: "Thank you baby."

She tattoos my face with kisses, I can only hope that I won't live to regret this. Having Judge Mdluli arrested was the only way he could be stopped.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

55\*

NKOMO\*

I decided to tail Olivia after she left the house, something about her made me very suspicious. I was proven right when I saw her drive up to my father's house. To think Amara is in that house, I have always known Olivia to be sly but, she has outdone herself this time.

I asked my brother Zwelethu to meet outside, I know Mkhize is at home and he is the last person I want to see.

Just as I try to call Zwelethu, he comes running from the gate.

Zwe: "Sorry, ma needed help with something."

Me: "Yeah right, you're still following her around at this age. Umdala ndoda." (You're old man.)

He titters at my response.

Zwe: "I'm only twenty one, give me a break. I still need my mother's love and her cooking."

He smiles widely, revealing all his grown man teeth. He's crazy.

Me: "I feel sorry for the woman you will marry."

Zwe: "Why would you feel sorry for the luckiest woman in the world?"

His question tickles my laugh bone.

Me: "Uyazithanda mtwana ka maSibiya." (MaSiyiba's child, you love yourself.)

He laughs.

Zwe: "Ngiyindodana kaMkhize." (I am the son of Mkhize.)

He says it proudly, if only he knew.

Me: "That is nothing to be proud of."

I squelch in annoyance.

Zwe: "Kungani ungamxoleli uyihlo? I'm sure he's sorry about whatever he did." (Why don't you forgive your father?)

Me: "Anginababa." (I don't have a father.)

Zwelethu is always pushing me towards that man. How can I love a man who killed my mother?

Zwe: "Bhuti..." (Brother.)

Me: "I'm not here for that Zwe, the wedding is next week and I want access to the house."

Zwe: "It's your father's house, you can go in and out as you wish."

Zwelethu has no clue about what is going on around him.

Me: "Zwe you know I can't, I haven't been here in years. If your father sees me here, he will suspect something."

Zwe: "What's up with this wedding anyway?"

Me: "The less you know, the better."

Zwe: "Your father is still taking more wives at his age, imali ihlanyisa abantu madoda." (Money drives people crazy.)

He shakes his head smiling.

Me: "Uyihlo lowo, he's greedy like that. Will you be able to get me in there?" (That's your father.)

Zwe: "Uma said it will be a private wedding only family and you know how big the Mkhizes are, we are a nation on its own."

This boy is full of jokes, I'm glad that he is a happy child, despite having a shitty father like Mkhize.

Zwe: "I'll see what I can do, you should come see the family. Some of them will be arriving tonight."

Trust Mkhize to get married after burying his brother, his brothers can't be happy about this.

Me: "I'm okay, I'll see you at the funeral though."

He fails to hide the disappointed look on his face.

KHETHU\*

I'm put in a waiting room, my grandfather walks in, accompanied by the warden.

My heart breaks at the sight of him, he looks broken and distressed. His body is slouching as he walks towards me, as if defeat and shame are heavily seated on his shoulders. He's wearing formal pants and his crispy blue shirt hangs over his trousers, the prim and proper judge Mdluli has been degraded. He's not the strong man I've known him to be, if my grandmother were to see him right now, she would die.

Me: "Tata."

I pull him in a hug.

Asanda: "My baby."

Warden: "No touching allowed sir."



He addresses with respect, we pull out and sit.

Me: "Unjani?" (How are you?)

Asanda: "Angikhonondi. Unjani ugogo wakho?" (I'm not complaining. How is your grandmother?)

Me: "I haven't spoken to her tata."

Asanda: "I don't want her to find out about this."

Me: "How will we keep it from her? It's all over the news."

He sighs and brushes his bald head.

Asanda: "I doubt she will believe what she sees on TV, she will want to ask me myself."

The trust my grandmother has on him puts a smile on his face but, it's a heart breaking one.

Asanda: "Ugogo wakho uyedwa. Won't you stay with her until this blows over?" (Your grandmother is alone.)

He pleads.

Me: "Sure, I'll do that."

Then I remember, Styles is injured. He also needs me, I can't disappoint my grandfather though.

Me: "Tata? Why are they saying you did this?"

He drops his gaze.

Asanda: "I wish I knew my child, everything will be okay. I promise."

The confidence in his voice that made him who he is, has abandoned him.

Me: "How do you know? You were transferred to this place without being convicted, someone is out there to get you."

He chortles lightly.

Asanda: "You watch too much TV my baby."

Me: "How else do we explain this?"

Asanda: "I don't know Khethu, this will blow off. You shouldn't worry about me, I will be okay. Just take care of your grandmother, this is not good for her health."

Me: "I will."

Warden: "Your time is up."

Me: "Be strong tata, I will get you out. Mbongeni is working on it."

It seems he doesn't have hope in Mbongeni, or he's lost hope in this case in general.

Asanda: "Take care of yourself my baby, I love you, don't ever forget that."

Me: "Tata?"

Why does it sound like he's saying goodbye.

Me: "Tata we will get you out of here, Mbongeni is working on it. Please, don't lose hope."

He cups my cheek.

Asanda: "Umtshele ugogo wakho ukuthi ngiyamthanda." (Tell your grandmother that I love her.)

Me: "Ngizomtshela. I will also tell her that you will be home soon." (I will tell her.)

Warden: "Sir, your time is up. Let's go."

We get up and he hugs me like it's the last time, I feel him shove something into my pocket.

Asanda: "Give this letter to your grandmother, it explains everything."

He whispers into my ear and pulls out of the hug, I don't like the look on his face. I cry as I watch him walk away.

MBUSO\*

This is rather awkward, we are seated on the couch and no one is saying anything. My father's eyes keep running from me to Lelo who is sitting right beside me.

Me: "Would you like anything to drink baba?"

Xaba: "Can I speak to you in private."

I find this rude and judging by the look on his face, he is not fond of this woman sitting beside me.

Lelo: "I'll go to my room."

She offers while standing up.

Xaba: "You live here?"

The shock on his face.

Lelo looks at me, she doesn't know how to answer him.

Me: "Yes, she's renting the extra bedroom."

Shit! This man is intimidating. Thankfully Lelo is understanding.

With a scowl on his face, he watches her while she walks up the stairs till she is out of sight.

Xaba: "Yintombi yakho?" (Is she your girlfriend?)

This man though, I can't hide away from this.



Me: "Yebo baba." (Yes dad.)

His frown grows.

Xaba: "Mmhh! Ngiyabona." (I see.)

He goes quiet for a while, lost in thought.

Xaba: "UNomasonto yena?" (What about Nomasonto?)

Me: "Wenzeni baba?" (What about her?)

Xaba: "Angiyona intanga yakho, uzokhuluma nami ngenhlonipho. Siyezwana?" (I'm not your friend, you will address me with respect. Are we clear?)

Lelo's presence in this house has put him in a foul mood.

Me: "Yebo baba." (Yes, dad.)

Xaba: "Mbuso?"

Me: "Baba?" (Dad?)

Xaba: "How will you explain all of this to Nomasonto, her father already has hopes that you two will one day get married."

Me: "I can't marry her baba, you have seen how spoiled she is. All she talks about is shopping and the next trip to Europe, we have nothing in common."

He knows, he's seen her and how clueless she is.

Xaba: "Do you love this girl?"

Too soon for that but...

Me: "I would like to believe so."

I know she holds a special place in my heart.

Xaba: "I'm not going to get involved in this Mbuso, you have made your bed and you will have to lie on it. I know Nomasonto's father will not take this lying down."

Me: "I will handle them don't worry."

He frowns, he doesn't trust me. This man still sees me as a child.

RANDALL\*

Neo came to fetch me at the hospital, he hasn't stopped talking since we got in the car. I have given up complaining, he just doesn't care at all. I see the royal guards outside as we pull in, I'm not surprised.

Neo: "The king is here."

He tells me what I already know.

Me: "I don't want to face him right now."

I sigh.

Neo: "Entlek, jaive ke eng?" (What's the problem?)

Me: "It's a long story, I'll tell you about it."

Neo: "When bozza? I want to hear it now."

Me: "As you can see, we have visitors."

Neo: "Ai, s'felani." (Why are we suffering?)

We make our way to the house, Raven and my father are in the lounge. Chioma is serving them drinks.

Me: "Neo, please excuse us."

Neo: "Awe, I'm sure there's jollof rice left in the kitchen. Chioma is my big piece of meat there? You know I don't play with my food."

Chioma smiles, she seems skittish.

Neo walks away blabbering.

Segun: "You have a daughter Uze?"

He introduces as I approach them, Chioma looks at me. She wants to explain. What's the use? The truth is out.

I gesture that she leaves us alone.

Segun: "You went and had a child Uze?"

He repeats himself, I settle on a one seater right opposite Raven.

Me: "I am of age, as far as I know."

The anger on his face is evident.

Segun: "What about your wife?"

Me: "What wife?"

Segun: "You're married, in case you have forgotten."

I will never see peace.

Me: "Do not tell me that."

I grunt.

Raven: "Randy hear him out."

Me: "Rav, unless you know how it feels to be married off without your consent. Shut up."

I chastise him, he sits back and crosses his leg over the other while carefully scrutinizing me.

Me: "I was wronged father and not once have I heard you say you're sorry."

Segun: "Sorry for what Uze? For following tradition?"

Me: "Tradition, I wanted nothing to do with."

He shakes his head in disapproval.

Segun: "You can't run from your destiny Uze."

Styles' words replay in my mind.

I have to speak to my father and only he knows the priest who performed the ceremony.

Me: "I have a proposition, I will take over from you if you break this covenant and let me choose my own wife."

Segun: "Is there someone?"

He raises his brows as he questions me, his facial expression says the answer is already no.

Me: "Yes father and I would like to marry her."

He pauses for a while as he broods over my words, Raven glances at me, he looks nervous.

Segun: "Uze? You can't ask me to abandon our customs, our people expect us to live by the book. This is how it's been done, the same thing happened with your mother and me. Your grandparents and their parents."

I sigh heavily, he's not listening to me.

Me: "Clearly, I am wasting my time. Father I just told you that I am willing to take up the throne, just, let me marry the woman I want. Break this covenant and set me free."

Segun: "I'm sorry son, it's not in my power to do so."

Me: "You're the king."

Is he kidding me right now?

Me: "True but, the elders have a say in this as well."

Raven: "Father it is you who takes the final decision. Can't you compromise for your son?"

Raven jumps into my rescue.

Raven: "Would you rather lose your son over this wife we do not know of?"

This should give him something to think about.

Segun: "I have spoken, this will not be discussed again. Uze you need to prepare, we will be leaving for Ghana in two weeks."

He commands and walks away depriving me a chance to dispute, and I am expected to follow his commands just like that? I refuse to be without Amara, not even Segun Okolie will keep me away from her.

Me: "Did you see that Rav? That is the reason I ran, it will be a cold day in hell before I let that man control me."

Raven: "I'm sorry bro."

Me: "Speak to your father Raven or he will never see me again."

To be continued...



\*NOT FOR SENSITIVE READERS\*

MKHIZE\*

Today we bury my younger brother Musa, this day is gloomy. My house is full of people I don't know, his friends and colleagues.

I must say, my sleep has been peaceful for the past two nights, I can't say the same about Franco. He's been calling me none stop, saying there's someone in his hotel room, I don't know what help to get him. He doesn't believe in traditional healing, he will just have to go to church.

People are gathered in the living room, there will be a body viewing before we depart to the cemetery.

The uncles are informed to open the coffin, the room falls into panic and horror when the coffin is flipped open. It's empty, Musa's body is not there.

Me: "Mthunzi, kwenzakalani? Sipi isidumbu somfowethu?" (What's going on Mthunzi? Where is my brother's body?)

I ask my brother who is standing next to me.

Mthunzi: "Angazi." (I don't know.)

Me: "Ngabe ucabanga ukuthi benze iphutha e-mortuary?" (Do you think they made a mistake at mortuary?)

We hear a scream from upstairs, Mthunzi follows me as I run to check. It sounds like MaDlamini, she's still blaring when we get to the top of the stairs.

The scream is coming from my youngest son's room, we scurry in. My ancestors have not prepared me for this, they have failed me. I am traumatised by what we see, Mthunzi releases a disbelieving gasp.

Musa's body is lying on the bed, right next to my twelve year old son Lunga. My heart races fast that I struggle to breathe, MaDlamini is too shocked to take Lunga. I rush to the bed and scoop him up, careful not to touch Musa's body. I realise that Lunga is stiff as I hold him in my arms.

In a second, my brothers have occupied the bedroom, some are screaming with their hands on their heads. Some have fallen on their knees, their eyes popped out of their sockets as shock and horror is written on their faces. Only the strong ones approach the body, they cover it up with a cloth. This is an abomination, I still have a stiff Lunga in my arms and I can't grasp why my precious son is not breathing.

He's not moving.

Me: "Lunga, mfana wami, vula amehlo." (Lunga my son, open your eyes.)

I don't want to think the worst, MaDlamini is wailing right beside me, as she glances at her son. Her face, carrying horror and pain.

Mthunzi: "Yini bafo? Kwenzenjani?" (What's wrong brother?)

Me: "Lunga vuka boy, boy. Ubaba ukhona manje, vuka Mkhize omncane." (Wake up Lunga, dad is here now. Wake up little Mkhize.)

My heart hasn't stopped beating fast and I feel it breaking in pieces.

MaDlamini: "Hayi, indodana yami." (No, my son.)

She screams, carrying her hands on her head.

I place him down and perform CPR on him to no avail, the room falls into loud cries of lamentation. My son is dead, it's unexplainable and I can't seem to comprehend what the course of it might be. I fall back on my butt, my watery eyes transfixed on my son's lifeless body. MaDlamini notices my defeat, she scowls at me.

MaDlamini: "Baba wenzani? ULunga usalele, mvuse." (What are you doing my husband? Lunga is still sleeping, wake him up.)

She pleads as she screams at me, I shake my head in defeat.

Me: "Usishiyile MaDlamini. Usishiyile umfana wethu." (He's gone, our boy is gone.)

I hold my tears back as I break this news to her.

MaDlamini: "Hayi, hayi. Nkulunkulu ngenzeni ukuthi uzongijezisa kanjena?" (God what have I done that you will punish me like this?)

She screams like she is losing her mind, my brother Msizi tries to hold her but, she's unsettled.

Msizi: "Sisi ncese." (Sorry, sis.)

He gives up.

Mthunzi: "Bafo hhayi kanjena. Wenzeni bafo?" (Not like this. What have you done brother?)

I'm swamped by so much anger that I can't even speak, I'm only able to glare at my son's minuscule body. He looks so peaceful, it seems like he will open his eyes.

Msizi: "Ukhuluma ngani bafo?" (What are you talking about brother?)

Mthunzi: "Ngamtshela ukuthi akahlukane nalomfana. Bheka manje, bheka kwenzekeni." (I told him to stay away from that boy, look what has happened now.)

Only now it hits me, everything that has been happening, is because of Randall's death. I killed an Okolie and brought this turmoil upon my family. I spilled their blood and this curse will follow me and my generation to come. I had warned Musa and Franco, I told them not to touch an



Okolie. How am I going to fix this now?

Funani: "Usho ukuthi kungenxa yalokho?" (Do you mean it's because of that?)

Mthunzi: "Yini enye okungaba yiyo?" (What else could it be?)

They debate against themselves, the commotion in this room is giving me a headache. MaDlamini hasn't stopped wailing, MaSibiya walks into the room with Zwelethu. She grasps what has happened and immediately takes a sheet and covers Lunga, MaDlamini screams louder as she sees her son covered with a cloth.

Zwelethu: "Mama wenzani, ngu Lunga lo?" (What are you doing mom? This is Lunga.)

The shock and pain in his voice breaks my heart.

MaSibiya: "Uhambile uLunga wethu mfana wami." (Our Lunga is gone my boy.)

Zwelethu: "No Lunga no."

He yells as he drops to his knees in front of Lunga's body and cries out loud. His cries evoke so much pain in everyone's hearts and the room falls into loud sobs and sniffs, it's real, my son is dead. MaDlamini's cries turn into laughs, we all glance at her in astonishment. She's laughing with tears streaming down her face.

Funani: "Manje?" (And now?)

Funani voices, baffled by her sudden outburst.

MaDlamini sits flat on the floor, her legs stretched forward and multiple loud cackles erupt from her mouth. It takes a while for everyone in the room to realise that she has lost her mind.

MaSibiya: "MaDlamini asambe uyophumula kancane." (Let's go, so you can rest a little.)

MaDlamini: "Ungangibambi." (Don't touch me.)

She screams at her in anger before taking that road of laughter again. This is beyond me, I am the eldest of my five brothers and I have failed them. They are glaring at me with so much hatred in their eyes, it's bad enough that Musa died on my watch.

Zwelethu gets up enraged and runs out the door, no one is sane enough to run after him. There are two dead bodies in this room and a respectable woman who has lost her mind, due to her son's demise. The sound of mourning is louder than anything I have ever heard, now my three wives are trying to calm MaDlamini but, she is having none of it.

AMARA\*

There is so much lamentation in this house, it first began with a woman's screams. Mkhize's brother must have been loved so much, Kazi went to check what is happening. Although she was told not to leave the room, she's a daredevil. The door swings open, she strides in, her hand



is on her chest and she's bug-eyed.

Me: "What happened?"

Kazi: "Lunga just died."

She says incredulously.

Me: "Lunga?"

I have no clue who he is.

Kazi: "He's Mkhize's son, he was only twelve and his life had barely started."

She responds, I think she had built a friendship with this boy.

Me: "Oh my God. What happened?"

She sits on the bed, facing me.

Kazi: "I'm not sure about the details, Zwelethu told me this. Poor boy, he ran out of the house furious. I hope he doesn't do anything stupid."

I can't even comprehend what his mother must be feeling.

Me: "I'm sure he needs time alone."

She nods and we slide into a wave of silence.

Kazi: "Oh, I forgot to tell you. Randall texted, he said he will call soon and I should make sure that I'm around you when he does."

My heart jumps to my throat at the mention of his name, feeling heat threatening my cheeks, I look away.

Kazi: "You're blushing?"

She teases and I roll my eyes at her.

Me: "No I'm not."

I mutter.

Kazi: "You're cute."

She laughs, her phone rings and I instantly become apprehensive. She smiles, swipes the green button and hands me the phone.

Kazi: "Khuluma nomuntu wakho." (Speak to your person.)

She laughs and ambles to the door, I'm suddenly dumbstruck. I haven't spoken to him since that day he called.

Randall: "Hello?"

My heart does that thing again.

Me: "Randall."

Randall: "Me hemma. How are you?" (My queen.)

Me: "I don't know, it feels like I will never leave this place."

He sighs.

Randall: "I can only imagine how you feel, if I could, I would literally walk in there and take you with me. That man is dangerous Amara and we have to tread carefully, I can't be careless with you. He might hurt you, seeing that he's being defeated."

Me: "I understand. Why didn't you call yesterday?"

I don't know how that escaped my mouth.

Randall: "You were waiting for my call?"

He sounds confused, the last time we were in the same room together. I wanted nothing to do with him but, now all I want is him.

I'm sure about one thing though, I miss hearing his voice.

Randall: "I promise you that this time next week, you will be with me and I will never let you leave my side."

Me: "Can't you come sooner Randall?"

Randall: "Amara? Did that man touch you? I swear, I will..."

Me: "No,"

I think I sent off the wrong message when I pleaded for my rescue.

He breathes out a sigh of relief.

Randall: "I will make right, every bad thing I did to you, we're going to start over and I will give you the best of me. You won't ever have to shed a tear again me hemma, as long as I am with you." (My queen.)

I feel a great undulation of shivers go through my body as his promise gives me hope.

Me: "When will you come?"

I can't wait any longer, the need to see him is outgrowing me.

Randall: "Like I said, we need to tread carefully. Soon me hemma, don't grow weary." (My queen.)

Me: "Okay."

I have nothing else to say, I don't want to nag.

Randall: "Do you know this is the most we have said to each other since we met."

He's declares.

We didn't necessarily meet, I was brought to him.

Me: "It is."

Now that he says it.

Randall: "I can't wait to have you with me Amara, nothing seems right without you."

He pours his heart out and I want to do the same but, I'm too enthralled by all these emotions. I ogle at Kazi, she winks at me.

Me: "I can't wait too."

Kazi: "Hurry up girl, someone might walk in."

She warns.

Me: "I have to go now before he comes back."

He goes quiet for a minute.

Randall: "This will end soon, I promise. That man will never lay his eyes on you again."

He grunts, his mood deviates as my words make him disconsolate and I can understand why.

Me: "Bye."

I mutter sadly.

Randall: "Not bye, see you soon me hemma." (My queen.)

The phone goes dead, he didn't even hesitate to drop it.

KHETHU\*

Since Styles is at the hospital, I moved in with my grandmother. I haven't given her the letter yet, I'm afraid that its contents might harm her health. Mbongeni advised me that I should give it to her, it might be something important. I asked him to come over just in case I might need help with consoling her. He got here thirty minutes ago and I still haven't done it.

My grandmother knows about Tata's arrest but, she's not informed about the full story. She probably thinks he was speeding or something, thank God she doesn't watch TV.

We're sitting in the living room, chatting the day away.

Granny: "You're not working today Mbo?"

Mbongeni: "Ngiyasebenza gogo, I just wanted to visit you. I missed my beautiful grandmother. Does tata know how lucky he is to be married to a beautiful woman like you?"

She laughs.

Granny: "Ungadlali ngami wena Mbongeni." (Don't play with me.)

She's blushing, I didn't know old people blush.

Mbongeni: "Hawu, angidlali gogo, iqiniso njena." (I'm not playing grandmother, it's the truth.)

Mbongeni looks at me and gestures that I should go ahead.

Me: "Gogo?" (Grandmother.)

I hand her the white envelope, she takes it.

Granny: "Yini lena?" (What's this?)

Me: "Yincwadi, evela kutata." (It's a letter from grandfather.)

Gogo: "Oh my child, angisenawo amehlo. How am I going to read this?" (I can't see clearly anymore.)

She grabs her reading glasses and puts them on, Mbongeni and I watch her as she takes her time to search each word. She is an educated woman and I'm pretty sure she can still see with those glasses on.

I'm so unsettled, I can't wait to find out what is written there.

Me: "What does it say?"

I ask anxiously, Mbongeni looks at me and I roll my eyes at him. My grandmother's face changes to sadness and tears streak down her face. I get up almost immediately, this calm woman will not reveal anything. She tries to snatch the letter as I grab it from her hold.

Granny: "Oh Khethu my child, don't read that please."

She pleads in a defeated tone, I leer at her then back at the letter.

Me: "Why gogo?"

Granny: "Ngiyacela ngane yami." (Please my child.)

She beseeches, carrying a look of worry.

This makes me more curious. What is written in this letter that has her distressed like this?

Mama

Firstly I want to thank you for being the best partner any man can ever ask for. My best days were spent by your side, you loved me and gave me the respect and position I deserved as your husband. I disgraced you mkami and failed you in more ways than one.

I have a demon, I tried to fight it but, this evil lives in me and it's attached to every cell in my body. Please plead Nobayeni for me, ask her to forgive me. She listens to you, I have sinned against her, against you and against God. I did the most despicable thing a father can do to his child. I hurt our baby. She was only eighteen when I overpowered her.

Khethukuthula is the result of that monstrous act, ask her to forgive me as well. By the time you get this letter, I will be with my ancestors, it's time I overpower this demon and the only way is to end my life.

Also, I cannot face the world after this scandal.

I am too shamed mkami, ngixolele sthandwa sami. Uhambo lwami luphelela lapha. Angisakwazi ukuqhubeka phambili.

(Forgive me my love, my journey ends here, I cannot continue forward.)

Baba.

It feels like a volcano just erupted around me, my head spins as I try to grasp everything I just read. I glance at my grandmother, her head is bowed. I can't really tell what she's feeling, I run my eyes to Mbongeni who's frowning at me in confusion. I read the letter again, maybe I read it wrong. Every word is still the same.

No, this cannot be possible, this explains Nobayeni's hatred towards me. It's his fault that I grew up without my mother. I stagger back as my knees give up on me and throw me on the floor. Mbongeni rushes to me, he tries to help me up but, I push him off.

Granny: "Thethelela ngane yami, find it in your heart to forgive your father." (Forgive my child.)

Did she just say my father?

I am living in a dream, someone has to wake me up. I am too shocked and angry to shed tears. The door opens, Nobayeni and my father walk in. He sees me on the floor with this letter in my hand and flashes to me.

Dad: "Khethu? What happened?"

He squats before me and grabs the letter, as he suspects the reason behind my shock, I study his face while he reads it. He knew, it's written all over his face. He carries a look of pity when he raises his eyes to glance at me.

Dad: "I'm sorry angel, you were not supposed to find out this way."

Only now I feel my tears build up, he enfolds me in his arms as I sob like a child.

His voice aggravates me right now, these people have lied to me my whole life. No one even cared to tell me the truth, I push my father away and bring myself up from the floor.

Me: "Why didn't you tell me?"

I ask him, he can't look into my eyes.

Me: "You lied to me dad, you all lied to me. I have been living a lie all my life."

Nobayeni: "What's going on?"

Mbongeni: "I can't say, something in that letter has made ugogo and Khethu very upset."

Mbongeni explains.

Nobayeni: "A letter from who?"

She snatches the piece of note from my father and reads it, there is no expression on her face, only coldness. She carries so much hate in her heart and I know she will never forgive him.

She goes quiet for a while before clicking her tongue, I'm thinking she will console me but, her eyes haven't tasted me yet. She is trying so hard to avoid looking at me.

She seats next to grandmother who looks like she has given up on life. I know how much she respected my grandfather, she literally worshiped the ground he walked on. These people have been married for over forty years.

Nobayeni: "Mom I'm sorry that your husband was a coward, he felt that suicide was the only way out, instead of owning up to his mistakes."

What is she saying? I look at my father.

Dad: "Tata was found hanging in his cell this morning."

My heart drops.

Me: "Dad?"

I whisper the words out.

Dad: "I'm sorry Khethu, I'm sorry for everything angel."

It doesn't make it any better, my tears take advantage of this situation as they parade down my cheeks. How do I begin to mourn for the man who violated my mother? Also, how do I forget the love he has shown me my whole life?

I whizz to my grandmother's side, she looks emotionless. One, would think that she expected this.

Me: "Gogo?" (Grandmother)

She turns and looks into my teary eyes, her hand flies to my cheek and she gently cups it.

Granny: "You're a strong woman Khethu, you will overcome all of this."

Her tenacious tears only decide to show up now. I wipe them away.

Granny: "I am tired my child, take me to my room. I need to rest, we will talk when I wake up."

She declares softly, my heart breaks, seeing her like this.

To be continued...

57\*

NOMBULELO\*

This man wants me to have dinner with him and his parents, it's too soon if you ask me. I saw Namhla again and it's decided, the woman hates me. Mbuso explained that they once had a thing, she clearly still has feelings for him. I pity her though because I am not walking away from this man, I can't remember the last time I was this happy.

I am able to go through a day without thinking about Zuma, I might still be broken and have trust issues but, Mbuso is helping me heal. Work has been hectic but, I love it. If Amara was here, she would be proud of me.

I just finished my rounds and I'm ready to go, he said he's fetching me after work.

He's not here yet so, I wait for him outside.

"Nombulelo?"

Me: "Malume Jonas?" (Uncle.)

I am shocked to see him here, he takes me into a hug.

Jonas: "You're hiding here?"

Me: "I just started working here."

Jonas: "Lelo, you suffered while your father is alive. Why didn't you call me? I would've come to you."

Me: "I don't know malume, I was overwhelmed by everything. I didn't know my father would turn on me like that."

Jonas: "Your father was wrong Lelo, I want to apologise on his behalf."

I have no answer for that, I am an orphan as far as I know.

Jonas: "Where do you live? Come home, we will take care of you."

I can't go home, not when I have started to heal. I will be reminded of my father's hatred, I know uncle Jonas will force him to take me back but, he will never look at me with love again. Every day I will be reminded of his hatred.



Me: "I can't, my father banned me from the house."

Jonas: "I know all of that Lelo, like I said, I am here now. I will protect you."

I find myself in tears, I wish my father was like him. How I long to hear him say these words to me.

Jonas: "Your father is missing Lelo, no one knows where he is. I think he ran away from his responsibilities."

Me: "Mom called me once to tell me this."

I show no interest in this matter.

Jonas: "You can come home now."

I know this is coming from a good place.

Me: "You have no idea how much I wanted to hear my father utter these words malume. I yearned for them so much that, it's all I thought about. I am finding myself now malume, I have a job and I'm pregnant. A new life awaits me and I need to stand on my own two feet, if I come home, I will only stress all the time because I know that I am not wanted there."

Jonas: "Lelo, I have been searching for you. Won't you at least come home for my sake? Mhambi and Petunia are also there."

Me: "Malume please, don't force me. I will visit home, I promise. Only when I am ready though, my heart is still tone to pieces."

I explain in hopes that he won't continue to push.

Jonas: "I understand, I'm glad that I found you."

Me: "Me too. How is ma holding up?"

He shakes his head.

Jonas: "Things are bad Lelo, things are really bad."

Things got bad when Amara went missing.

Me: "And Amara? Did she tell you about her? She's missing malume and no one knows where she is."

He looks distraught.

Jonas: "There is no news yet but, we will find her. Try not to worry okay."

I nod, I hope she is not dead.

I see Mbuso's car pull up, Lord, I hope he doesn't come here. Uncle Jonas is very old fashioned, he will flip. He won't care to ask who he is, the fact that I am being fetched by a man is enough for him to speculate that he is my lover.



If I wasn't in the situation I am in now, he would've said something about me getting pregnant at a young age.

Me: "I have to go malume, my Uber is here."

He turns his head to the parking lot, I won't even point out the car and I hope he walks away first.

Thank God Mbuso is sitting in the car, he's looking at us curiously. He's a quick thinker, I like that.

Jonas: "Okay my child, do take care of yourself."

Me: "I will malume."

Jonas: "Won't you take my number?"

He reaches out his hand, he wants my phone. I fiddle in my bag, and hand it to him. He types in the number, bids me goodbye and walks away. I march to the car, the moment he is out of sight.

#### STYLES\*

Sethu has been keeping me company, I would've died of boredom in this hospital. She comes to check on me almost all the time and I'm worried that maybe, she's neglecting her work just to take care of me.

Sethu: "I'm telling you, my mother is the funniest person I know. This one time my sister comes home crying because her boyfriend cheated on her. She said and I quote 'he promised me heaven and earth,' my mother responded by saying Ubani owabona enikezwa izulu nohlaba." (Who have you seen being given heaven and earth?)

She vents into laughter, I can't help but laugh along.

Me: "Now I'm convinced, she is funny."

Sethu: "I told you."

She shakes her head while pondering on something only she knows.

Me: "Your mother seems like a fun person to be around."

Sethu: "She is but, can be annoying sometimes. You know what they say, no one can get on your nerves like your mother and the person you're dating. You must have noticed it right?"

She laughs at her own words.

Me: "I would do anything to have my mother annoy me."

Sethu: "If your mother is not annoying then, you are lucky."

Me: "I wouldn't know."

Suddenly her busy eyes pause on mine, she's trying to figure out what I meant by this statement.

Sethu: "Oh! Why do you say so?"

She reveals her curiosity.

Me: "My mother died."

Sethu: "I am so sorry."

Me: "It's okay, it was a long time ago. I was four, she died giving birth to my sister."

I don't know why I am opening up to her, I feel like I can tell her anything.

Sethu: "You were so young."

Me: "At least I had memories of her face but, my sister never got to meet her. Her father was around though, he played both roles in her life and made sure she didn't lack anything."

Sethu: "Her father?"

Me: "Yes, unfortunately my father ran away from his responsibilities before I was even born."

It still hurts to talk about this, rejection is not a nice feeling. Even at this age, I crave for the love of both parents.

Sethu: "I'm sorry."

She gives an impression that she doesn't know what to say.

Me: "My stepfather died a few years later, we were taken to an orphanage. Somehow, we were never separated. She was my reason for breathing and I would do anything to protect her."

Sethu: "You went through so much, I can't imagine my life without my parents."

Me: "That's life, everyone goes through trials and tribulations and only the strongest survive."

Sethu: "Where is your sister? I haven't seen her here yet."

Maybe it's time we drop this, reminiscing on the past will only evoke the pain I have hidden away.

Me: "Tell me about your parents. Do you still live with them? Where are they?"

Her face lights up.

Sethu: "No, I live alone. My parents live in Meredale with my two younger sisters, there are four of us. My mother graced my father's home with four girls."

She giggles at the thought.

Me: "That must be tough for him, surrounded by five women."

I tease and she throws her head back laughing, it's a cute laugh.

Sethu: "We bully him, you know how us, women can be."

She jokes, smiling.

Me: "The power you hold over men? Yes, I have experienced it."

I retort causing her to giggle shyly at my response.

Sethu: "Well, my father is a principal and my mother is a teacher. They've been married for 17 years."

Me: "That's admirable."

Sethu: "It is, I don't think there is a man out there who loves his wife the way my father loves that woman. She's lucky and she knows."

I see the love she has in her eyes for them.

Me: "You said there are four of you?"

She nods.

Sethu: "I have an elder sister, uheaven and earth."

She laughs, it's adorable that she finds herself amusing.

Sethu: "That's what we call her at home, she's thirty and lives in Port Elizabeth. I followed, five years later. My parents took a break for sixteen years, it was just us two till they decided that, they were not complete and needed two more brats."

Sethu is really funny, she talks a lot too. She came across as shy when I first met her, now she can't stop talking. Her shyness tends to seek attention once in a while.

Me: "So the brats are twins?"

She laughs.

Sethu: "No, they are two years apart. Time was not on my mother's side, menopause was knocking."

I think she speaks without thinking or is it because she's a nurse and is used to being around people and conversing with them. She covers her mouth when I laugh at her statement.

Sethu: "I'm sorry, I talk too much don't I? And I'm revealing more than I should."

She wears a soft little frown.

Me: "Not at all, you are a breath of fresh air Sethu."

The shyness I spoke of, pushes through.

We both turn to the door at the sound of someone clearing their throat, Randall stands embracing a confused look on his face.

Sethu jumps up from the chair as if she wasn't supposed to be sitting, her face falls and her finger flies to her mouth.

Randall: "Is it safe to come in?"

Bastard...

Normally I would laugh but, the poor girl looks nervous.

Sethu: "I have work to do, excuse me Mr. Styles."

She announces and pounces out the door, Randall gives me a look and I know he's about to say something.

NOMBULELO\*

Mbuso: "Hello chubby cheeks."

He greets as I jump in the car and pecks my lips, if I was already showing I would be offended. He's lucky I haven't gained baby weight yet.

Me: "Now I'm chubby cheeks?"

Mbuso: "The cutest chubby cheeks, I just want to squeeze them."

He says flinging his hand to my cheek, I shrug it off and sulk.

Mbuso: "It's worse when you're sulking, have you seen anything so cute in your life?"

He always goes an extra mile to make me smile and I'm gleaming like a fool right now.

Mbuso: "Yoh!!! Magwinya." (Fat cakes.)

He expresses and I laugh at his idiocy.

Mbuso: "Now, the world seems a lot lighter."

He declares, glancing at me with a look only he can explain. I only know that I feel amplified when he leers at me like that.

Me: "Can we go now, Trevor Noah?"

I roll my eyes at him as I riposte.

He chortles and starts the car.

Mbuso: "Who was that?"

Me: "My uncle, he wants me to come home."

He gives me a brief look.

Mbuso: "And?"

Me: "I'm not ready."



He seems a bit relieved.

Mbuso: "You know I will support any decision you make, right?"

And I am grateful for that.

Me: "Yes and thank you, for everything."

My politeness causes him to frown.

Mbuso: "It feels weird when you thank me, I do what I do because I care about you and I want you to be happy.

Me: "I know and I'm glad that we share everything."

He clears his throat.

Mbuso: "Now, that you touched on that subject. There is something you need to know."

This doesn't sound good.

Me: "I'm all ears."

Mbuso: "There's an ex."

I didn't see this coming.

Me: "Namhla?"

He makes a face.

Mbuso: "No, her name is Nomasonto. We actually dated back in college, it was a long term relationship. We thought it would last and well, she knew my parents, I knew hers. It came to a point where they thought we were going to get married but, we both wanted different things in life so, we went our separate ways."

I don't know why he's telling me this, I'm uncomfortable.

Mbuso: "We parted on a good note but, she had a tendency of coming back and asking that we try again. She even went to the extent of asking her father to speak to my father."

I smell psycho.

Me: "That's a little extreme."

Mbuso: "I know, I am completely over her. Our parents though are still in that relationship, they will eventually get over it, hopefully. My father is seeing the light, he just needs to pull the others with him. As for Nomasonto, she needs help."

Me: "Okay, should I take this as a warning that there will always be a crazy ex?"

He gives me that brief glance again, I am still trying to figure out what it means.

Mbuso: "I won't let her anywhere near you."

It's not like we're always together.

Me: "I know, I hope there won't be any conflicts."

Mbuso: "I heard mom say she moved to Cape Town, there won't be any conflicts. This is why I want you to meet the parents as the woman in my life, dad accepted it that day. It wasn't whole heartedly but, he wants me to be happy. Mom still needs a little work, she's not fond of the way dating is conducted within our generation."

I pray she's not a monster in-law, I honestly do not have the strength for battles.

Me: "Can we pass by Shoprite, I want fish."

Enough about the crazy ex.

Mbuso: "Fish? You want to have fish for supper."

Me: "I want to have fish now that, fried one from Shoprite."

Mbuso: "Okay, Goku has started demanding I see."

He teases.

Me: "Mbuso, you will feel my wrath if my child is being teased at school because his father calls him Goku."

He looks at me intently as he stops at a traffic light, I smash my hand against my mouth.

What the hell did I just say?

Me: "I'm sorry."

I mumble, without looking at him.

He chortles after a long silent moment.

Mbuso: "Goku will be the most popular kid in school, just because his name is Goku."

He laughs, I'm glad he brushed off the awkwardness.

RANDALL\*

Me: "You're a breath of fresh air?"

He frowns at me.

Styles: "Don't."

He warns, I want to laugh but, I curb it.

Me: "Mr. Styles?"

He sighs deeply.

What did I just walk in to?

Styles: "Randy, don't."

Me: "Hey, you should be thanking me that I walked in and not 'Sherlock Holmes' Khethu. That girl should've been a detective, working right along her father."

He laughs at my suggestion.

Styles: "That's my girl you're talking about."

I position myself on the chair.

Me: "Should I sit here or is Miss Sethu coming back Mr. Styles?"

I clown, he chortles, giving me a warning look.

Styles: "Fuck you Uze."

Me: "Fuck you too Mr. Styles."

He laughs.

Styles: "Cut her some slack, the girl is shy okay."

He speaks for her, I smell something fishy here.

Me: "What's the deal with you two?"

Styles: "I do not know what you're talking about hence, I am not justifying your question with an answer."

He responds brushing me off, this is the same Styles who didn't share his life with anyone before. Heck, I was also kept in the dark about the problems he had with Khethu. It's a good thing I see through him.

Me: "Mdluli gave in."

I introduce the sad news, a pucker grows between his eye brows.

Styles: "Just what I was hoping for, the bastard wasn't as strong as he made the world believe."

Me: "I respected that man, till you told me what he did to Khethu's mom and those little girls he molested. He didn't come across as a paedophile."

Styles: "It's not like they walk around with banners written paedophile, he will pay for his sins in hell. I hope the fire is hot enough. The number of girls who suffered in his hands is huge man, I can't even imagine what they are going through."

Me: "How did he even get them to swear to silence?"

Styles: "Probably threatened to kill them or their parents, you know how innocent kids are. They believe anything an adult says. That bastard, he was a famous judge so, he used his fame to



lure them with the pretext of a children's show, a modelling career and some singing competition where the winner walks away with a great amount of money. There's a studio where he fulfilled his sick desires, he would take advantage of them and then drop them off where he picked them or wherever he felt was okay."

Styles is clearly angered by all this.

Me: "How did you find out anyway?"

Styles: "Neo did most of the work, I polished it. When I found out that Mdluli is Khethu's father, I knew there had to be something else so, I dug deeper. What sick bastard would rape his own child? You would think what she went through wasn't enough, she fell pregnant and by the time she found out, it was too late to abort the baby.

She was forced to live with the reminder of what her father did to her.

I'm not bashing Khethu at all, she's an amazing woman. But Randy, the trauma Nobayeni must have gone through, she couldn't tell anyone about it and she had to sit at the same table with him every night and pretend that everything was okay. Meanwhile, she was dying inside, she couldn't report the rape. Now, I understand her anger.

She had no one, Mdluli had all the money in the world but, didn't think his child needed to see a psychologist. Nobayeni is a victim in all of this, she needs help. Dladla has done a great job in keeping her sane or she would've have cracked long ago."

Me: "What about Khethu? Remember this was about protecting her from the truth."

Styles: "Protecting Khethu was the same as handing those girls over to that evil man. He never would've stopped, this was the only way out."

Me: "How did you get him transferred to a maximum prison?"

He chuckles.

Styles: "Uze, I'm a people's person. I make friends while you're not bothered to even smile at anyone."

Me: "So, I'm supposed to laugh at that?"

He's an idiot, it's proven when he laughs at my comeback.

Styles: "To answer your question, let's just say the minister and I are acquaintances."

Me: "You know Khethu will need you more than ever now?"

He sighs.

Styles: "I didn't mean to hurt her, something had to be done. I couldn't let those girls suffer any longer, their healing will begin now that he's gone."

Me: "Anything done in regards to that?"

Styles: "Yes, I had a lady friend of mine take over this case. She's a social worker, she will visit

the families and probably get the girls to talk.”

Me: “Let me guess, you had something to do with the one who came forth?”

Styles: “Her mother works at the logistics, she had said something about how her daughter is always locked up in her room. She was a bubbly, talkative girl, till one day her demeanour changed, she started talking less and social distanced herself from the family.

Her marks dropped and she pushed all her friends away.

Her dressing changed, she would only wear clothes that covered up her body. That’s when the mother decided to confront her but, she would burst into tears each time. This time I already knew about Mdluli and the skeletons in his closet. I spoke to the lady friend, we went to their house and that’s when the little girl came out, after much reassurance though.

Randall, you should have seen her when she saw me. Poor thing was trembling like a leaf, she burst into tears and hid behind her mother who explained that any male presence freaks her out. I had to wait in the car and believe it or not, I was so close to going to Mdluli’s house and put a bullet through his head. My love for Khethu clogged me.”

My skin is filled with goose bumps at the mention of this, my heart breaks for the little girl. I’m a father myself and would literally kill for my daughter, I can’t even imagine anything like this happening to her. The thought of it kills me.

Me: “I can’t fathom what she must be going through.”

Styles: “She’s getting help and so will the other girls, if there’s anything I can do to stop these paedophiles and molesters, I would do it. I had a sister once and would’ve protected her from such men with my life. And there’s our beautiful Liyana, I swear there’s a bullet in my drawer for any fucker who will mess with her.”

He expresses through greeted teeth, Liyana is lucky to have two fathers.

Me: “Why do you think I had Joseph killed in prison? He touched her man, something died in me that night I found her lying on the floor naked and that son of a bitch was just watching her like it was normal.”

He clamps his teeth in anger.

Styles: “Facts bruh, if you didn’t do it, I would’ve.”

Me: “Those girls need someone to stand up for them and I’m glad you’re taking a stand, I knew you should’ve been a doctor. See, no one knows you like I do.”

He laughs but, there is sadness in it.

Me: “What’s wrong?”

Styles: “Khethu must be hurting right now and I am stuck in this bed.”

Me: “You’re going home tomorrow and speaking of going home, we need to start with the plan of getting Amara out of there.”

Styles: "Yeah, I have a plan."

This saying of his will never grow old.

Randall: "Yes, Mr. Styles."

He laughs.

Styles: "Piss off."

To be continued...



58\*

MKHIZE\*

I couldn't proceed with the funeral, I lost all my strength. My brothers took over, they all went and I was left behind with my sorrows. I have been drinking myself silly in my office, hoping the pain will go away.

There's a knock, Sika walks in.

Me: "Ufunani?" (What do you want?)

Sika: "Baba, that man is here again. He looks crazier than before."

Franco, I am going to kill him. This is all his fault.

Me: "That bastard, tell him to..."

Franco pushes in the office before I could finish my sentence. He's rough looking, dirty and unshaven. The same fear he held that day still lurks around him. Sika positions himself at the door, he's ready for anything just in case Franco tries something stupid.

Franco: "Mkhize, I have lost everything. My money and my business. My people have turned against me, those fuckers say I'm crazy and voted me out of the business. I built them, this is my father's business but, they had the nerve to turn against me."

He tales in a frantic manner, I detest the sight of him right now.

Me: "What are you doing here Franco?"

Franco: "You have to help me please, I need money Mkhize. At least if I go back to Italy, I can start over from there, this old man still follows me. I have tried all churches, I even tried Buddah. Help me please, do those traditional things you do."

He pleads desperately.

Me: "Now you want traditional help? When I offered it before, you insulted my customs Franco."

Franco: "Shit."

He screams.

Franco: "Look, I wasn't in my right state of mind. I know now that there's no way out, I need help and money."

Me: "Franco, you're stupid you know that?"

He frowns at my declaration.

Me: "What did I say when you went to get that girl? Did I not fucking say don't touch the Okolie

boy? Do not even put a single scratch on him? But, no. You wanted to do things your way because you're an idiot."

I shout at him, he looks baffled by what I am telling him.

Franco: "What's going on Mkhize? What does that dead fool have anything to do with this?"

Me: "I told you dammit that you do not kill an Okolie but, I sent two boys to do a grown man's job. You failed Franco and this mistake or whatever you call it will haunt you until your death. My so..."

I can't bring myself to saying it, I sigh as reality hits me again.

Me: "My son is dead, he died a mysterious death."

Franco: "Okay, I still don't believe in this Mkhize. It can't be true, that's all mumbo jumbo."

He retorts ignorantly.

Me: "If this is not real then the old man haunting you is not real. Get the fuck out of my office, if I ever see your face here again, I will kill you."

I yell at him.

Franco: "You can't do this to me man, I put my own life at risk by helping you. Okolie could've killed me but, I risked my life for you Mkhize. You owe me man, you got what you wanted so pay up."

He scratches his head roughly, as he yells at the top of his lungs. He has clearly lost it, I have a good mind to put a bullet through his head. It is his ignorance that has led me to this situation, he's the reason I have lost my son.

Me: "I don't owe you shit Franco, I can't stress the same about you. You owe me my son's life, a life for a life right?"

Franco: "You know what, I don't need you okay? Fuck you Mkhize and go to hell along with your fucking son."

Me: "What did you say to me?"

I grab my gun from the table and aim it at him.

Franco: "I said fuck you and fuck your son. Vai all'inferno Mkhize." (Go to hell.)

He clearly has a death wish.

Franco: "You're not going to shoot me, you don't have it in you. This is why you send people to do your dirty work, you're not men enough. You hide behind your money and the taxi boss status, that's what people fear, not you."

Me: "Fear this, you bastard."

I pull the trigger and shoot him between the head and a single bullet takes him down as his blood splatters all over my floor.

Me: "Sika, khipha lenja." (Take this dog out of here.)

Sika: "Yebo baba." (Yes sir.)

KHETHU\*

Nobayeni is sitting on the couch like she doesn't care, she still hasn't looked at me and I am broken by that fact. I just found out that my grandfather is also my father, my father is not my real father and my mother is my sister. The thought of it is sickening, I don't understand how I am still sane after this revelation.

Mbongeni is still here, I wish he didn't have to see any of this. I am so embarrassed that I have a dysfunctional family.

Dad: "Here."

He hands me a cup of coffee.

Me: "I don't want coffee, I want answers dad. Should I even call you that?"

I yell at him as I push his hand, the cup falls and breaks into pieces.

Dad: "Khethu, I think we should talk about this at home."

He says.

Me: "What home? I don't have a home, I was chased out by my mother or sister. I don't know what to call her."

I vent.

Nobayeni: "Bridgette!!!"

She screams, that's when her cold eyes finally notice me.

Dad: "Khethu, this is not the right time. Your grandfather just died, we have to respect his home."

He gives me a disappointed look.

Me: "Tell me dad. How long was I going to be kept in the dark about my true identity? Is this why Nobayeni hates me? I remind her of my grandfather's shame."

Nobayeni: "Dladla you better speak to your daughter right now or..."

Me: "Or what Nobayeni? What will you do? Haven't you done enough? You should have aborted me, I would've rather died than to face this humiliation."

I yell, I can't stop. This anger is eating me up inside and I have to vent it all out on the ones responsible.

Nobayeni: "Maybe I should've aborted you and spared myself the humiliation of having a

daughter like you.”

She shouts back.

Me: “I hate you Nobayeni.”

I scream at her as her words break me causing me to lash out in anger, Mbongeni tries to take my hand and I yank it away. I know he is about to reprimand me, I am not in the mood to be told what to do.

Nobayeni: “The feeling is mutual Bridgette.”

She ripostes coldly.

Granny: “Khethu ngane yami.” (My child.)

I turn to the sound of my grandmother’s frail voice, she’s slowly toiling towards me .

Granny: “Please iron this shirt. Your grandfather will wear it to work tomorrow, this is his favourite shirt. I remember when I came home with it, he hated it. I knew that one day it will be one of his prized possessions because it’s the first gift I ever got him.”

She hands me a vintage pitch collared shirt, we all leer at her baffled.

Me: “Gogo, utata u...”

Granny: “Help me to the couch my child, my feet are killing me.”

She stretches out her hand to me and I take it reluctantly and lead her to the couch.

She sits back and sighs deeply.

Me: “Are you okay gogo?” (Grandmother.)

Granny: “Yebo ngane yami, don’t forget to iron your grandfather’s shirt. He will be upset when he finds it not ironed.”

She states softly.

Me: “Yebo gogo. Ngikwenzele itiye? Awubukeki ulungile.” (Should I make you some tea? You don’t look okay.)

Granny: “Ayi ngane yami, kuyashisa ngiright. Nobayeni mtwana wami, khulula inhliziyo yakho. Igcwele ulaka, khulula inhliziyo yakho s’thandwa sami. Awuhlali wedwa kulomhlaba, udinga abantu. God works through people my child. How will you heal if you don’t let anyone in?” (No, I’m okay. It’s hot. Nobayeni my child, release your heart, It’s full of anger. You don’t live alone in this world, you need people.)

Nobayeni rolls her eyes. I don’t like the way my grandmother is speaking.

Me: “Gogo, are you okay?”

She giggles.

Granny: "Khethu, you keep asking me if I'm okay. Why wouldn't I be? Ngifuna ukulala kancane." (I want to sleep a little.)

But, she just woke up.

Granny: "Please wake me up when your grandfather comes back from work, don't forget to iron his shirt and leave his food in the pot. I will dish up for him. She declares.

Me: "Gogo, akesihambe kancane ukuze uthole umoya omusha." (Let's take a walk a bit, so you can get fresh air.)

I suggest, she shakes her head as she pats my thigh.

Granny: "Cha, ngikhathele." (No, I'm tired.)

She shuts her eyes while declaring.

I glance at my father, he has the same worried look. Nobayeni seems to suspect something as well. I watch my grandmother attentively and she doesn't look okay.

Me: "Dad."

I panic, he rushes to her and feels her pulse.

This time I'm heaving, I'm struggling to breathe, it feels like a truck is sitting on my chest.

He steps back, his head bowed and sighs.

Dad: "I'm sorry."

He whispers under his breath.

A loud scream evades from my mouth, Mbongeni catches me into his arms as I stagger back almost falling on the floor.

Mbongeni: "I've got you."

I wail in his arms.

Nobayeni: "Dladla what is it?"

Dad: "She's gone Nobayeni."

Nobayeni: "What? Dladla you're too old for jokes, don't you think?"

She says, while she strides to the couch where my grandmother is and nudges her.

Nobayeni: "Mom."

Dad: "She's dead Nobayeni, I'm sorry."

He declares as he pulls her back but, she fights him.

Nobayeni: "No Dladla, don't touch me. My mother is not weak like that, she can't just die."



Her voice breaks as her emotions take over her. My father hugs her from behind and he pulls her away from my grandmother.

She lets out a painful heart wrenching cry, I feel a need to comfort her as I have never seen my mother so emotional before. But, I am too weak to move. How can so much heartache happen in a day?

Me: "I can't breathe, Mbo I can't breathe."

I express as I pull away from his arms.

My father looks at me, I know he's worried but, he can't leave his hysterical wife.

Mbongeni cups my cheeks.

Mbongeni: "Khethu, you need to calm down. You're having a panic attack, I need you to breathe okay. Follow my lead."

I follow his lead as he counts my breathing.

Mbongeni whisks me up in his arms, the moment I'm steady and takes me to a guest bedroom. I didn't want to leave my grandmother's side but also, I can't stand to see her like that.

NKOMO\*

Zwelethu called me crying and I had to fetch him and bring him to my house as I couldn't take him to Randall's. He hasn't told me what the problem is, it's late now and I know that his mother is worried sick.

He has not stopped playing video games since I brought him home, he refuses to eat. His tears are occasionally falling from his eyes and he has given up wiping them.

Me: "You need to eat Zwe."

He doesn't respond, his eyes are engrossed on the TV screen.

Me: "Zwe?"

Silence.

This is enough.

I turn off the TV, he sits back and folds his arms across his chest, I sit beside him.

Me: "What is it Zwe? Did something happen at home?"

He nods and muffles a cry.

Me: "Will you tell me or should I keep asking?"

Zwe: "It's Lunga, he... he..."



He falls into a painful cry and I fail to understand what has happened that has upset him. I hold him in my arms and let him cry it out.

Me: "Zwe, ma is probably worried sick about you. Your phone has been off, don't you think you should inform her of your whereabouts?"

Zwe: "I will."

He states with an abrasive throat.

Me: "Talk me bafo. What happened to Lunga?" (Brother.)

Zwe: "He's dead bhuti." (Brother.)

Me: "What?"

This news is earth shattering.

Me: "How?"

He shrugs.

Zwe: "I didn't ask, I ran out of the house."

Me: "You know you have to go home right?"

Zwe: "I can't go back there bhuti please, let me stay here with you."

Me: "Fine, you can stay but, you have to call ma and let her know that you're okay."

Zwe: "I will."

I have to find out what happened to my brother.

RANDALL\*

Segun will not leave me alone, it's funny how I always find this man in my house. We should just agree to disagree.

Me: "You know Raven, you should choose where your loyalty lies. With me or with your father."

I state as I join them in the patio, the way Segun has made himself comfortable, you'd swear he supports me completely.

Raven: "If I am forced to pick sides, I might as well split myself into two."

He retorts.

Segun: "Don't be ridiculous Uze."

He grimaces at me.

Me: "Oh father, how I wish you would do away with that name. It is a reminder that you will always have the upper hand, even in your death, I know you will never let this be."

Segun: "You speak of my death while I stand before you Uze? Is this what you wish for your father?"

Me: "How can I wish something I have never tasted? I have been gone from you for too long so, whether you live or perish. It will make no difference to me."

He scowls and shifts to the edge of his seat.

Segun: "I see this life you have chosen has taught you impudence, there was a time you never talked back at me. You obeyed every word I gave with no complaints whatsoever."

This is exactly what he wants, a robot he can control.

Me: "Like you said father, there was a time and I was a boy then, I am a man now. I'm capable to think for myself and make my own decisions."

Segun: "Yet your words prove otherwise Uze, you claim to be a man but you have chosen a life of crime. Really Uze? Blood money? Is this how you have built your life?"

I leer at Raven, he shrugs and clears his throat.

Me: "Is there anything you can do with your time father but, investigate me?"

Segun: "I did well by investigating you Uze, look at the mess you have made with your life. You were safe under my wing but, like a stupid little boy you ran thinking you would make it out there."

Me: "Father do not reprimand me as if I am a child, I do not take lightly to insults."

I snap at him, he gets up on his feet as he accepts a look of rage.

Segun: "Listen to you, speaking to your father as if he is your mate. I gave you everything son, you had all the money in the world Uze. Why settle for this life?"

Me: "Do not call me that, father."

This is him saying I control you, not once has he ever called me by my first name.

Segun: "I will call you whatever I want, you are my son. I gave you this bloody name, you will not tell me what to do. Do you hear me boy?"

He shouts, Raven gets up, he wants to jump in but, he is afraid of standing up to this man.

I need to control myself, my mother will kill me when she finds out that I raised my voice at her husband even worse, the king.

Me: "Why are you in my house Father?"

I ask calmly.

Segun: "Is this what you have become Uze Okolie? A criminal with no respect and has no regard

for human life? What didn't I give you son? What made you succumb to this kind of life? Don't you fear the gods?"

I laugh at his question.

Me: "The gods? This is why I ran, you pushing things down my throat. The stupid wife you're obsessed about, customs and your repression. I wanted to be free and be my own person, I wanted to do things in my own terms. With no one to dictate my life, you don't know how peaceful I have been living. I never asked to be a prince, I don't want to take over from you if I have to jump at your every command. I refuse to be you father. Ask Raven, he is after all your shadow. No offense Rav."

Raven: "None taken bro."

He raises his hands with a smirk.

I stagger back a little as a hot sensation kisses my cheek, damn, this old man is still strong. I didn't see that slap coming.

Segun: "I will kill you before I let you disrespect me like that, you hear?"

He shouts.

Raven: "Father, what have you done? You just hit your own son."

Raven is shocked at this, not once has this man ever laid a finger on any of his children. He might be hard and strict but, corporal punishment is not something he practised.

Me: "Father, I want you to listen to me and listen well. I have found love for myself, I am going to bring her and you will bless us. Otherwise I am not Segun Okolie's son, if you think you're hard headed then, you do not know me."

Segun: "Are you threatening me boy?"

He scowls at me.

Me: "How can I threaten my own father? I am just stating. I will not live my life without this woman, if it means I have to die fighting to be with her then, it shall be done."

Segun: "Who is this jezebel that has..."

Me: "SEGUN!!!"

I yell at him as I grab him by his shirt, Raven is between us in flash. He's pulling me away from him but, my hands hold a tight grip.

Raven: "Randall, Liya is here, let go of him."

He whispers. I turn to my baby who's glancing at us with fear in her eyes, I pull back swiftly and hurry to take her in my arms.

Segun: "Uze."



He calls me as I attempt to walk away, I stop and turn to him.

Segun: "I would like to meet her, she is part of you and I cannot deny her."

This man does not know where he stands and I am not sure I want him anywhere near my child. I leer at Liyana who has her arms hooked around my neck, I can't really hide her from him forever."

Me: "Princess, I want you to meet someone."

I introduce.

Liyana: "Who is it papa? Is it the man who hit you? I don't want to meet him."

She saw all of that? I hate exposing my child to such things.

Me: "I think you should meet him, he is not a bad person."

Liyana: "But he hit you papa."

She caresses my throbbing cheek, I smile at her.

Me: "You see, just as you are my daughter and I can chastise you, he is my father and he's allowed to rebuke me if I am wrong."

Liyana: "Still, he hit you. You never hit me papa."

She is an Okolie alright, her stubbornness testifies for her.

Raven: "Princess, won't you let him explain why he did what he did?"

Raven speaks, he's always jumping to my rescue. Liyana ponders upon it, then nods once.

I put her down and my father ambles to her and takes her up in his arms.

I hope I do not live to regret this.

He sits down with her on his lap, Liyana looks comfortable.

Segun: "Do you know who I am princess?"

She shakes her head.

Segun: "I am your nana." (Grandfather.)

He says.

Liyana: "Grandfather?"

He nods with an emotional smile on his face.

Liyana: "You are my papa's argya." (Father.)

He shoots me a proud look, it's clear he didn't expect to hear her to know that word.

Segun: "Yes, I'm a king, your papa is a prince and you my love are a princ..."



Me: "Okay, that's enough."

I take her from him, Liyana doesn't know anything about this royalty. Only I will tell her when I feel the time is right, Segun is a great manipulator and I cannot trust him at this moment.

To be continued...

59\*

RANDALL\*

Styles is being discharged today, finally we can get on with this plan. I need Amara with me.

It's a Monday afternoon, right after 12pm. I have to be at the hospital around 2pm.

Me: "Chioma."

I shout for her as I saunter down the stairs, she hurries to me from the kitchen.

Chioma: "Uze?"

Me: "Where is Liya, I can't find her anywhere."

Chioma: "She's in the patio with Neo."

There's a knock at the door, she hurries to open.

Nkomo marches in looking flustered, I thought I told him to leave my house.

Me: "What the hell are you doing here?"

Nkomo: "What did you do to my brother you bastard?"

He groans while walking towards the stairs, I meet him half way.

Me: "What are you talking about?"

Nkomo: "You killed my brother Scar."

Me: "Don't call me that."

Nkomo: "What should I call you? It is who you are. A heartless bastard who kills innocent children."

I have no idea what he's talking about.

Me: "Nkomo, if you came to my house to insult me. Rather leave before I hurt you."

Nkomo: "Tell me why you did it. What did that innocent boy do to you?"

Me: "What the fuck are you talking about? Will you stand there and cry like a bitch or explain yourself?"

Nkomo: "My little brother died suddenly, yesterday, no one knows how his death came about. I know it was you Randall, you managed to get into that house and kill him. I know how your bloody mind works, you're sick like that."

He grunts at me, I huff.

Me: "Don't you think if I had found my way into Mkhize's house, the only thing I would've done was to get Amara? I don't play games Nkomo, all I care about right now is getting Amara out of there. I would appreciate it, if you would not come to my house and fucking tell me shit."

He glares at me for a while.

Me: "Look, I don't like you and I doubt I ever will. But, I have a child Nkomo and I would never think of hurting anyone's child. Come to think of it, I warned your father before. You do not challenge the Okolies, I guess he took me for a fool and now he's paying for it. If anyone is to be blamed here, it's that old man of yours. He brought this upon your family, for old time's sake I am sorry for your loss."

I guess I should know how he feels, I would break if I were to lose my brothers.

Nkomo sighs, steps back and settles on a chair. He buries his face in his hands.

"I'd be damned, Uze Okolie knows how to apologise."

Only one person is fond of saying these words. A smile flashes on my face as I turn to meet Styles, he's standing in the foyer with Sethu. His hand is over her shoulder as he's unable to stand on his own.

Me: "How did you get here? I thought you will be discharged at three."

I utter with excitement as I saunter to him and take over from Sethu.

Styles: "I was sick of that place, I couldn't wait anymore."

He explains while I lead him to the couch, he sits back and sighs softly.

Me: "So, you asked Miss Sethu to accompany you? What happened to Uber? You could've called me as well."

I whisper to him.

Styles: "She has a car and offered to take me so, I agreed."

He turns to the door where Sethu is still standing with her head bowed and her hands fidgeting with each other.

Styles: "Sethu, come in. This fool may look scary but, he doesn't bite."

He teases, Nkomo follows behind while Chioma strides back to the kitchen.

Me: "You forgot to leave your dry jokes at the hospital."

He laughs.

Styles: "Who will make you laugh if I had done that, I know you find me funny."

He riposte with a pinch of sarcasm, I chortle, I cannot express how crazy this fool is.

Nkomo: "You look better man."

Nkomo states.

Styles: "I'm surprised you two haven't killed each other, I'm expecting heavy thunder storms tonight."

Another dry joke, Nkomo chortles.

Sethu: "I have to go back now, my shift is not over yet."

Me: "Oh, you're allowed to leave work premises during working hours? That must be nice."

Styles shoots me a cold stare, I smirk at him.

Sethu: "It's my lunch break sir."

She explains, shyly dropping her gaze.

Me: "No, call me Mr. Randall. Sir is too formal, you're Mr. Styles' friend and that makes you my friend. Right Styles?"

His sharp gaze pierces me, I chortle in response.

Me: "I'm kidding Sethu, I'm just trying to get you to relax. You are too edgy."

I express.

Nkomo: "We haven't been formally introduced, I'm Nkomo."

He reaches his hand out to her, she shakes it. Styles exchanges a glance with me, I know he doesn't trust Nkomo as well

Sethu: "Sethu."

She introduces shyly before claiming her hand back.

Styles: "Nkomo, keep your eyes to yourself."

He warns, yeah I saw that look too.

Styles: "Sethu doesn't do fuck boys and she's not attracted to cows as well."

He states. Why do I sense a pang of jealousy?

Nkomo: "Randy was right, you should've left your dry jokes at the hospital."

Styles: "Oh but, I'm not joking. I'm dead serious Nkomo, keep away from her."



I clear my throat while glancing at Styles, he almost rolls his eyes there.

Styles: "Thank you Sethu."

Sethu: "No problem sir."

She states as she glances at him, there's a strange eye glare between them that causes me to clear my throat again.

She bids us goodbye and leaves.

Me: "Well, now that the distraction is out of the way. Let's get to business."

Styles clicks his tongue.

Styles: "You're a fool Uze."

Me: "You need to be careful Styles, I don't see Khethu being comfortable with this new found friendship."

Styles: "Whatever you're implying is all in your head."

Nkomo: "What is he talking about Styles?"

Me: "Why are you still here?"

I question Nkomo who glares at me blankly.

"A meeting without me, ouch I am hurt."

Neo states walking in, hand in hand with Liyana who scurries to Styles upon seeing him.

Liyana: "Uncle Styles."

She chirps and engulfs him in a hug, he titters and showers her with kisses all over her face. Her giggles fill the room, I notice that her clothes are all muddy.

Me: "Neo, really? Mud?"

Neo: "The child wanted to build mud castles, shame on you Uze. You have never taken the child to the beach."

Me: "Princess, go to Chioma so she can get you cleaned up."

Liyana: "But, I want to stay with uncle Styles."

She pouts, Styles doesn't seem to mind that he's now covered in mud.

Me: "Liya?"

I give her a stern look.

Styles: "I'll be here when you're done princess, I promise."

Liyana: "Okay."



She jumps down from his lap and clomps to the kitchen.

Neo: "Stylos, you should get yourself cleaned up."

Here we go.

Styles doesn't acknowledge him, he looks distraught.

AMARA\*

Every day I wake up thinking today is the day Randall will come for me, and every day ends with me disappointed. Mkhize hasn't come to my room, thankfully. Kazi says he looks like hell, I don't feel sorry for him at all. Kazi never talks about the family with me, she knows it makes me uncomfortable and I would rather not hear what the Mkhizes are up to.

I have healed well, I'm able to move about the room. I have also been seeing less of Kazi, I think she was told not attend to me as much.

I'm standing by the window as I hear the door crack open, I turn to meet Mkhize's disconsolate face.

Mkhize: "I have a surprise for you my bride."

He smirks.

Mkhize: "Won't you ask me what it is? You don't even look eager to know."

He pronounces when I don't respond.

Mkhize: "Fine, people say I'm a cruel bastard but, I beg to differ. You are going to love what I have for you."

His mouth forms a sly grin.

Shouldn't this man be mourning his child?

He moves to the side and declares.

Mkhize: "Ngena Sdudla."

He commands, my jaw drops when I see my uncle tread in. His head is bowed in shame and he looks different. He's lost a bit of weight, his face is grubby, it looks like he hasn't had a bath in days. Mkhize tightly presses his two fingers on his nostrils, indicating that there's a foul smell.

Mkhize: "Sorry about that Amara, my dog hasn't had his bath yet. But don't worry, he won't come near you because he knows I will kill him."

He declares, I am disgusted by these two men. My uncle is no different from Mkhize.

Mkhize: "Happy family reunion, don't be long sdudla. I'll just be outside while you two catch up."

He chortles before plodding out and shuts the door behind him, I realise that I am still terrified of this man. I have nothing but, terrible memories of him.

Me: "Are you here to take me home?"

I break the silence, seeing that he's sheepish.

He raises his lassitude eyes and fear teases me, those are the same eyes that always looked at me lustfully. Today there is no life in them.

Moses: "Amara you have to help me."

He pleads, desperation clear in his voice.

Moses: "That man is evil Amara."

Me: "Birds of the same feather flock together."

I throw that in.

Moses: "I know I did you wrong my child and I'm sorry."

Me: "I am not your child, you decided that the day you molested me."

The thought makes me emotional but, I will not cry in front of him. I refuse to give him the gratification of seeing me cry.

Moses: "Amara, I'm a man and what I did to you is not new. Most men do it, we give in to the lust of the flesh and hurt the people we love. It's your job to understand and forgive us."

I can't believe those words just left his mouth, the fact that he's justifying his actions is appalling.

Me: "You are more revolting than I thought, you're inhumane. I am ashamed that my family has to be related to a monster like you."

I yell at him as tears gush down my face.

Moses: "Amara listen to me okay, I'm sorry, I don't know where that came from. Look at me Amara, that man is also keeping me captive. He brought me here to convince you to marry him, he will kill me after the wedding. But, I need you to beg him for my life please."

I am not touched by his pleas at all.

Me: "I will not do that, I have nothing to do with you and that man."

Moses: "What is wrong with you stupid child? Do you like seeing me like this, huh? Think of your aunt, she hasn't seen me in days Amara. She must be worried sick about me."

Me: "You are the most selfish person on the face of the earth, you don't care about anyone but yourself. Not once have you asked me if I was okay."

His cold laugh sends shivers down my spine, if evil had a name then Moses would be it.

Moses: "Amara? So this is you? You have a voice now and you can stand up to me? I never thought I would live to see this day. Tell me, who is it? Who is the fool that gave you this courage? Because I know it's not Mkhize that, fool doesn't have it in him to satisfy a young fresh girl like you."

He exclaims, rubbing his chin and his eyes lustfully stabbing me. I suddenly feel a need to cover up. I fold my arms across my chest and take a step back, as I look away from that perverted gaze.

Me: "Get out."

My voice quavers with rage, Kazi rushes in and stops at the door at the sight of this disgusting man before me.

Moses: "Who are you? Can't you see we are still talking? Get out."

He bellows at her, she yelps in fright but, doesn't move an inch.

Moses: "I said get out of here."

He repeats, Kazi will not move as long as she still sees this fear in my eyes.

Kazi: "Sir, I don't know who you are but, I suggest you leave this room because you do not know who you're messing with."

She threatens him, I have no idea what she means but, she is dead serious.

Moses: "Amara, yiphela lakho leli?" (Is this your cockroach?)

He mocks, his eyes scrutinizing every inch of her. Kazi is not daunted, she stands ground till Mkhize flies into the room.

Mkhize: "Kwenzakalani la?" (What's going on here?)

He came back wearing an angry look.

Moses: "Siqedile ukukhuluma baba." (We are done talking sir.)

Moses flashes him a big smile.

Mkhize: "Voetsek, ngubani ubaba wakho?" (Who is your father?)

He roars, Moses drops his head. That arrogance he had is gone, like it was never there.

Moses: "Ngiyaxolisa." (I'm sorry.)

Mkhize: "Ngiyaxolisa bani?" (I'm sorry who?)

Moses looks at me, he's wearing a crown of shame now. He drops his gaze, I never thought I would see the day.

Moses: "Ngiyaxolisa nkosi." (I'm sorry master.)

Mkhize: "I didn't hear you, say it louder."



Mkhize grunts, this is weird I must say.

Moses heaves a sigh.

Moses: "Ngiyaxolisa nkosi." (I'm sorry master.)

He bellows.

Whatever is happening here, he deserves it and I am not going to plead for his life. My aunt will be better off without him anyway.

Mkhize: "Asambe sdudla, I hope my bride will take to consideration what you said." (Let's go.)

He states leading Moses out, I drop to my knees as I am finally able to breathe. Kazi rushes to me and helps me to a chair.

Kazi: "Are you okay?"

I shake my head positively.

Kazi: "Who is that man? Something about him is not right hey."

Me: "My uncle."

Kazi: "Your uncle?"

She says it like she knows him, I can only wonder what is behind the look on her face.

RANDALL\*

Styles: "I need to go see Khethu."

He explains the reason behind his melancholy mood.

Me: "Have you spoken to her?"

Styles: "She's not taking my calls, I left multiple missed calls but, she hasn't responded to any off them."

He states lowly.

Neo: "What happened to her is sad gents, life is no one's friend. Imagine finding out your life is not what you thought it was then, lose the most important people in your life. Khethu is a strong woman gents."

He's right.

Styles: "I have a feeling she is shutting me out and I want to be there for her."

Me: "You can Styles, she's probably too stressed to speak."



Styles: "That is the same woman who literally shared everything with me."

He fails to hide the sadness in his voice.

Neo: "Mara bozza, you need to understand. That old fool Mdluli hung himself, the bastard knew his wife was sick and his death could cause her health to deteriorate. How selfish can a person be hee? You know what, I feel Khethu's pain."

He sniffs, we glare at him, trying to find a motivation behind his tears.

Me: "Are you crying Neo?"

He sends his hand to his face and swipes it once over his eyes.

Nkomo: "This grown ass man is crying?"

He states with a baffled look on his face.

Neo: "Voetsek, I'm not crying. You morskont."

He retorts, the breaking of his voice proves him a liar.

Neo: "I miss my mother gents."

He sniffs as he gets up from his seat, our eyes follow his movement.

Neo: "I'm going to call my mother."

He declares, sniffing away to the kitchen, Nkomo can't control himself. He blares in laughter, I turn to Styles who is wrestling with his own hilarity.

Me: "What the hell just happened?"

I enquire as I am still confounded by Neo's emotional episode.

Styles: "Neo has feelings after all, I thought the guy was only a clown, literally."

A silent moment takes over the room as we mull over the past events and the effects they had on our loved ones.

Nkomo: "There's something you guys should know."

Nkomo introduces.

Nkomo: "The ambush and Amara being taken was all Olivia."

He spews the words out, leaving me dazed.

Me: "How do you know?"

Nkomo: "She was here when you were at the hospital with Styles, apparently she found out about your death and came to get Liyana. I followed her when she left the house only for her to lead me to Mkhize's house so, I put two and two together."

Me: "I am going to kill that woman."

I rumble, jumping up to my feet.

Styles: "You are not going anywhere Randy, not now."

He pronounces sternly.

Me: "What the hell Styles? She is the reason Amara is not with me and you expect me to let it go."

Styles: "I didn't say let it go man, just don't do anything irrational now. You heard what Nkomo said, she's working with Mkhize. One mistake and you will put Amara's life in jeopardy."

I understand what he's saying but, Olivia is testing me and I swear she will pay for this. I see Chioma marching to the lounge with Neo following behind, he's trying to stop her. But, she is not having it, something has upset her greatly.

Me: "What's wrong?"

I enquire the second she stops in front of me.

Chioma: "Uze, I feel bad for keeping this from you, as Liyana's father you have every right to know the truth."

She is scaring me right now and I do not scare easily.

Me: "What truth Chioma?"

Neo: "Eish."

He scratches his head in frustration.

Me: "What the hell is going on?"

Chioma: "Liyana was exposed to something no child should ever have to see."

Me: "What was Liyana exposed to?"

She appears to be too afraid to speak.

Me: "Neo, what is Chioma talking about? What was my baby exposed to?"

Neo: "Eish Chioma is putting me on the spot now. This thing will drive you crazy bozza." (Boss.)

I don't get why they would introduce this to me only to stall it, they are driving me insane right now.

Me: "Neo, I'm already going crazy. What the hell happened to my baby?"

I rumble.

Neo: "Olivia and Joseph exposed Liyana to their sexual scenes."

Me: "What did you say?"

Styles: "Neo please tell me I heard wrong."



Styles grunts as he pulls himself up.

Chioma: "Liya told us everything, how she walked in on them in the living room and Joseph explained to the child what they were doing."

I feel my head spinning at the sound of Chioma's words.

Styles: "What does that mean? You people are not making sense."

Neo: "How else should we explain it Stylos? The child saw those two having sex and not one of them was ashamed, instead that fool Joseph locked her outside, after telling the child that he needs to finish what he started."

This is how it feels when people poke you.

I grab my keys from the table and hurtle towards the door.

Styles: "Randall where are you going?"

He shouts after me.

Me: "I have an itch and I'm going to scratch it."

I yell back.

I hear their feet treading behind me, no one will stop me.

To be continued...





60\*

RANDALL\*

I'm driving full speed to Boksburg, I switched off my humanity when Neo explained to me what Liyana was subjected to. My phones rings, it's Styles.

I know he will want to stop me, he always does this.

I answer anyway.

Styles: "You will turn that car around Randall and come back home."

He demands.

Me: "That is not happening."

Styles: "Randall, she is the mother of your child. Do you want Liyana to grow up without a mother?"

Me: "Liyana deserves better than Olivia."

Styles: "You mean Amara?"

Me: "You damn right."

Styles: "I know you love Amara Randall but, she can never be Liyana's real mother. What will you tell the child when she asks about her?"

Dammit.

Me: "Styles, is this your way of trying to talk me out of this?"

Styles: "You know I'm telling the truth, though."

And it annoys me sometimes, the fact that he can talk me out of things.

Me: "What do I do with this rage inside me Styles? I need to feed it."

Styles: "For now? Nothing. Go back home to Liyana, she needs you. Remember, Olivia thinks you're dead. Approaching her like this will alarm Mkhize, right now his guard is down. We are talking about your Amara Randy, let's save her first then, we will deal with Olivia."

This man needs to shut up before I change I mind.

Me: "Must you always be that voice of reason? Can't you be on the other team for once?"

Styles: "Someone has to be on the good side."

I find myself pulling up at the gate, the house lights are on.

Me: "Too late, I'm here."

Styles: "What the hell Randall, turn that car around."

Me: "Relax, I'll just have a little fun. I won't kill her, Olivia will beg me to kill her once I'm done. As for her running to Mkhize, that's a wish she will never get. I will imprison her in her own house."

Styles: "What are you going to do to her?"

Me: "Styles, a real man never kisses and tell."

He sighs at my response.

Styles: "Randall..."

I cut the call before he speaks further, that angel side of him miffs me at times. I'm going to need back up here, I know who to call.

"Umkhonto omkhulu owanqoba izitha zakhe ezinamandla." (The great spear that conquered his strongest enemies.)

This man is always extreme, this is how he answers his phone.

Me: "Mkhonto, bring two of your best guys. I will send you the location."

Mkhonto: "Who is the fool that has dug his own grave? I'm craving a funeral. When last did I eat seven colours?"

I'll say it again, he is extra.

Me: "Sorry to disappoint you man, you won't be feeding your craving this time."

Mkhonto: "Eish, ngamla. You're an enemy of progress yazi." (Boss. You know.)

He returns.

Me: "Give me your best Mkhonto, I don't want rats who'll mess up my plans."

Mkhonto: "Uphethwe yimi ngamla." (I got you, boss.)

I know he does.

The gate is not locked as always, I tread in and knock.

The door cracks open, her eyes widen in shock and her jaw drops at the sight of me. I greet her with a smirk.

Olivia: "Randall?"

She almost chokes my name out.

Me: "What's wrong Olivia? You look like you've seen a ghost?"

I taunt as I amble in, she plods back, her gaze still on me. I use my leg to shut the door, while I toil towards her.

## STYLES\*

I didn't expect this fool Mbongeni to open the door, I had to go to Khethu. I couldn't sleep without seeing her. His face changes when he sees me.

Mbongeni: "What are you doing here?"

The nerve.

Me: "I came to see my woman. What are you doing here?"

Mbongeni: "Khethu is sleeping."

Me: "I will join her then."

He blocks the door as I try to walk in.

Me: "If you want me to walk over your dead body that, can be easily arranged."

He huffs.

Mbongeni: "You are nothing but, a white collar criminal, you and that, what's his face? You commit white collar crimes and that is the only reason you are not locked up in prison where you belong."

He has the nerve to taunt me.

Me: "I don't like your face boy, now move before I rearrange it."

Mbongeni: "I am not afraid of you."

Me: "Who the fuck do you think you are? Khethu doesn't need you here, if my memory serves me right. She left you for me, now grow a pair and get the hell out of here."

Mbongeni: "One day Khethu will see you for the trash you really are."

Me: "Wow, Trash? Fancy. Get the fuck out of my way."

I push him aside and he pushes me. That alone is enough for me to retaliate, I punch him and my blow sends him crashing on the floor.

He directs his hand to his mouth and wipes out the blood that has painted his lips.

Me: "I don't fight little boys, I put them in a corner. Now, go do your time out mfana." (Boy.)

Nobayeni comes running.

Nobayeni: "What have you done?"

She helps him up.

Me: "I'm here to see Khethu."

Nobayeni: "You're not welcome here, get out."

She snaps at me, I understand her anger but, I'm not going anywhere.

Mbongeni: "This man just assaulted me, arrest him commissioner."

He snitches when Dladla strolls into the room.

Dladla: "Styles?"

He glances at me, the man looks broken.

Me: "I'm here to see Khethu."

Dladla: "Khethu is in her room."

He points it out.

Mbongeni: "Commissioner, I want to press charges. This criminal assaulted me."

He cries like a baby.

Dladla: "I didn't see anything Mbongeni, if you want to press charges you know where the station is. My child is in there hurting and you're here acting like a hormonal teenager."

Mbongeni glares at me, he can't believe Dladla is censuring him. I smirk at his stupidity.

Nobayeni: "No one respects my mother's house."

She whinges while walking away.

Nobayeni walking away? That's a first.

Dladla: "Go ahead Sishi, she's been waiting for you."

Me: "Thank you."

It's not hard to find Khethu's room. The house is a single story house, it's big alright, her grandmother apparently wasn't fond of stairs. So, Mdluli built her this family home. This is where Khethu mostly grew up, she's always been the only child. Nobayeni was too broken to mother more kids, she failed to mother Khethu and having more children would have been toxic for her and the children.

I guess she did well by tying her tubes.

I open the door to Khethu's bedroom, she's curled up in a ball on her bed. Her puffy red eyes fall on me and my presence seems to conjure the pain, as a heart breaking sob gust out of her mouth. My heart breaks as her cries fill my ears, I scramble on the bed and take her in my arms. She descends in my encirclement and holds on to me like she's afraid of letting go, as she yowls on my chest.

Me: "I'm here now, I'm here my love."



I assure her. How do you comfort someone who has lost loved ones?

NOMBULELO\*

Mbuso brought pizza home, I swear this eccentric fetish he has for Pizza is superfluous. He should do away with it, for a doctor, he eats unhealthy.

We're watching a movie on the couch, while he's having a love affair with slices of pizza. The only thing I can stomach at the moment is this fish I bought, I don't think I have tasted anything so divine.

I feel his gaze stabbing me from the side of my face, I turn and find him glaring at my food.

Me: "You can ask if you want some. There's more where this came from."

Mbuso: "I'm okay thanks."

Me: "Okay. Why are you staring then?"

Mbuso: "Is that all you're going to have?"

He makes a face.

Me: "It's better than that pizza you're stuffing your face with."

Mbuso: "Not from this view, fish face."

He boos and has me laughing.

Me: "Call me fish face again and I will shove this fish bone down your throat."

I threaten with the bone in hand, Mbuso gurgles and raises his hands in surrender.

Mbuso: "I like this you know?"

He blurts out after receiving a serious look, I smile waiting for him to explain his randomness.

Mbuso: "You, us. I like how you're not uptight and are free-spirited. You make a man want to send cows to your father."

He spews, I see him holding a laugh but, mine is disrespectful. It surges out of my mouth only for it to be contagious as Mbuso dives into a trundle of laughter.

Me: "You are the cheesiest person I have ever met."

Mbuso: "And, who said doctors were serious snorty brats?"

I giggle at his question.

Me: "That's the attitude you all carry."

Mbuso: "We save lives for a living, we're the real super heroes. Let us walk on water, please."

He's funny. I'm still baffled by the thought that this man is mine, he literally saw me and wanted me. Mbuso is not from a wealthy family, his parents are pensioners who worked hard to put their child through medical school. Hence, the small apartment and not working at a large hospital. He is as humbled as they come.

Me: "No one is stopping you."

His eyes scan my lips, he leans over and pecks them. There's that thing that says I want more so, I straddle him and cage his lips with mine. His hands grip my waist as he deepens the kiss, he pulls back and makes a face.

Mbuso: "You taste like fish."

Don't I know this saga? I laugh and cover my mouth, I totally forgot about the stubborn smell and taste of fish.

Mbuso: "Tell Goku, I'm not happy with his food cravings."

Me: "I'll pass on the message."

He sniggers before pulling me back into another deep kiss.

Mbuso: "Gosh, I want you so bad."

His declaration sends a surge of shivers down my spine, I'm lost in his kisses in a jiffy. I circle my arms around his neck as his tongue in my mouth drops my body into a pool of heat. With his hands on my waist, he lays me down on the couch without breaking the kiss, his hand travels up from my stomach to find that treasure he had been searching for when we first kissed. He's triumphant in attaining it, I'm wearing a bra. He stops, raises his heavy-lidded eyes to goggle at me.

To be continued...



61\*

STYLES\*

Me: "I'm sorry I wasn't there when you needed me."

Her head is resting on my chest, she has stopped crying but, her body is trembling. I thought holding her in my arms will make it stop, she is too shaken and I feel like a failure.

Khethu: "You're here now."

She responds with a low husky tone.

Me: "And I will always be here."

I press my lips on the top of her head.

Me: "How is your mother holding up?"

She must be taking it hard.

Khethu: "I don't know, I don't think it matters to me how she is. That woman hates me Styles, even after finding out the truth, she's still hostile towards me. Is it my fault that my grandfather raped her?"

She's becoming emotional again.

Me: "Baby, don't. I don't want you getting upset, you know I can't see tears in your eyes."

Khethu: "Why am I in so much pain Styles? What wrong did I do to deserve such punishment?"

Me: "You are a good woman Khethukuthula Dladla, don't ever doubt that. And, you're not alone in this. I'm here, your parents are here."

She raises her head – tears well up in her puffy red eyes, her lower lip quivers. She scrunches her jaw, as if to hold back the tears threatening her eyes.

Me: "Baby, no."

I whisper softly and she burst into inconsolable tears, I pull her back into my arms.

Khethu: "I'm sorry Styles, this is all too much to take in."

She says through her snuffles.

Me: "Don't do this to yourself baby, please."

There's a knock at the door, Dladla walks in.

Dladla: "I would like a moment with my daughter please."

Khethu looks up at him with a frown on her face.

Khethu: "What do you want?"

She sniffs.

Dladla: "I want to make sure you're okay angel."

Khethu: "I'm fine."

She swipes her hand over her eyes, wiping away her tears.

Dladla: "I was thinking we could take a walk in the garden, you've been locked up in this room for hours."

He's trying to reach out to her.

Khethu: "I'm fine dad, please."

It doesn't seem like Dladla is about to give up on his daughter. Maybe I should give them space, I jump off the bed.

Khethu: "Where are you going?"

She frowns at me.

Me: "Giving you space."

Khethu: "I don't want you to go Styles."

Okay, I look at Dladla. He scans me with an intrusive look on his face.

Dladla: "What happened to you? You look pale."

If he finds out I was shot, he will want to play police officer.

Me: "I'm fine."

Actually, I should've rested a bit. My body is not strong enough yet. He turns to Khethu.

Dladla: "Angel, I'll make that special coffee you like."

Khethu: "I don't want anything."

This is going to be a long road.

When Khethu shuts down, she pushes everyone away. I hope this will not affect our relationship in the long run.

Me: "He's trying Khethu, won't you meet him half way?"

I add my opinion, she hates what I just said. Her face doesn't hide her emotions pretty well.

Khethu: "Styles, if I want coffee, I will make it myself."

She retorts, Dladla looks hurt.



Dladla: "Okay angel, I will be here if you need anything."

He slouches to peck her forehead but, she tilts her head to the side.

He's hurt by her gesture, he saunters out of the room and closes the door.

Me: "Your father is hurting too, you know?"

Khethu: "He has been lying to me my whole life."

Me: "Only to protect you from the truth, this would've hurt you anyway Khethu and this is what he was trying to avoid."

I can't let her find out that I knew, it will take our relationship to a point of no return.

Khethu: "You don't think I deserved to know why my own mother hated me, I spent my life trying to get her to love me Styles. Clearly I was the fool, it was never going to happen because I remind her of a painful past."

Me: "Let's not talk about it anymore, it's only making you upset."

Khethu: "Promise you will never lie to me Styles."

She looks into my eyes, as she asks for the impossible. How can I make a promise I can't keep.

I settle back on the bed and take her hand in mine, I send it to my mouth and plant a kiss on her palm.

Me: "You know I'm not perfect right?"

Khethu: "I know, I also know you will never hurt me intentionally."

True.

Me: "I will never dream of hurting you baby. I love you."

Khethu: "I love you."

I peck her lips.

Khethu: "Won't you hold me?"

I cradle her in my arms, as she rests her head on my chest, we fall into silence.

RANDALL\*

Olivia: "I thought you were dead."

She declares while moving back.

Me: "Just like that? Olivia, you must think little of me. I am so disappointed in you."

She squeals as her back hits against the wall, I have her cornered.

I clench my hand on her neck and squeeze tight, depriving her of breath. She grabs my hand as she frantically tries to pull away.

Me: "You wanted to see my wrath right? You wanted to see this person standing before you? I told you not to test me Olivia."

So far, I am calm, despite this fury inside me.

Her eyes pop out and her face turns blue. She's smothering and I seem to like what I see. I let her go, she falls down, coughs crudely and wheezes while rubbing away the pain on her neck.

Olivia: "What the hell are you doing Randall? You almost killed me."

She coughs out the words.

Me: "I haven't started with you yet."

Her eyes widen in shock.

Olivia: "What did I do?"

Me: "It's what you didn't do, you failed to protect your child from that fool, Joseph."

Olivia: "What did Liya tell you? She's lying."

She stumers.

Me: "How do you know she lied, if you don't know what she told me?"

Silence.

Me: "I'm listening."

I say calmly.

Olivia: "Well, whatever it is. She lied, Liya lies a lot Randall. She even got in trouble at school because of that."

Me: "That's enough, I will not here another word against my child."

Olivia: "It's true Randall."

Me: "Enough with the games Olivia."

I grab her hand and pull her up.

Me: "I want to hear you plead for your life."

Olivia: "Randy please, I'm sorry."

she implores as she sees the seriousness on my face.

Me: "Take off your clothes."

My command has her frowning in confusion.

Olivia: "What?"

Me: "You heard me."

Olivia: "Randy please."

Me: "I said... take... off... your clothes."

I growl, she screams and heeds my command. She's left in her under garments, I grab her hand and lug her to the kitchen. I push the kitchen chair to her.

Me: "Sit."

She ogles at me in shock but, sits anyway.

Me: "Tell me Olivia. Do you know how drowning feels like?"

She shakes her head.

Me: "Would you like to experience it?"

I shoot her a sly grin.

Olivia: "Please Randall, I'm sorry. Yes, I'm a bad mother but, I love my baby."

Me: "Shut up Olivia. What do you know about love?"

Olivia: "I'm sorry, I was high and it never happened again I promise."

She finally reveals the truth.

Me: "Now, you're accepting that you're a junkie and you exposed Liya to shit."

She shakes her head.

Olivia: "I'm only human, I was tempted."

She justifies her malicious acts.

Me: "Tempted? I see."

I open the pantry and find a 5litre bucket, I fill it with cold water and ice. I place it on the kitchen table. All this while, she is watching my movements in suspense. She has no clue what I have in store for her.

I find a cloth in one of the cabinets, it's big enough so, it will do.

Olivia: "What are you going to do with those Randall?"

Her voice quivers with fear.

Me: "Drowning lessons, you need them, right?"

She opens her mouth to speak but, nothing comes out. Tears well up in her eyes, she knows I'm

not playing.

There's a knock at the kitchen door that, must be Mkhonto's men.

Me: "Come in."

I sing while grinning at a terrified Olivia. Two big men walk in.

Me: "Just in time, there's a hose pipe outside, plug it on the tap and bring it here."

I instruct one of them, he nods and ambles out.

Me: "Place this over her head."

A command, to the other guy as I hand him the towel.

Olivia: "Randall please, think of Liyana. Don't do this."

Her voice is starting to annoy me.

Me: "Is this how Liyana pleaded when your boyfriend was drowning her?"

The towel is placed over her head, I set a timer to 30 seconds, grab the bucket of water and pour it over her head while this guy holds her down.

She's retching and flailing her arms. The timer stops, I remove the towel. I watch her as she desperately tries to catch her breath.

Me: "How is the experience?"

She stifles a sob.

Olivia: "Please, no more."

Me: "But, you haven't answered me Olivia. Is this how my baby pleaded for her life when Joseph was drowning her?"

Olivia: "I don't know Randall, I don't know."

Me: "You are disgusting Olivia. You exposed your child to things she's not meant to see. Why would you be so heartless towards your own flesh and blood?"

Olivia: "I was an idiot, I failed her as a mother. Joseph wanted to explore, he..."

Me: "Don't tell me that shit."

Olivia: "I'm sorry."

Me: "You know what? You are not worth it, if you were not Liyana's mother you would be dead."

The guy comes back with the hose pipe.

Me: "Leave that, I want you to pull out every telephone cable in this house. If there's Wi-Fi disconnect it. This woman is not to leave this house, I don't want any loop holes. You will guard this place till I tell you otherwise and burn those phones along with hers."



"Yes, boss."

The one guy responds and they scatter around the house at my command.

Me: "Go put on some clothes."

She jumps and scurries back to the living room, I follow behind. She's done in no time.

Olivia: "You're not going to kill me?"

She appears to be thrilled by the thought.

Me: "Lucky for you, Liyana needs you. But, you are still going to pay for what you and Joseph did. I also know that you worked along with Mkhize and Franco, Amara is not with me because of you."

Her jaw drops.

Me: "What happened? You thought I would never find out? I will always be a step ahead of you Olivia, now you will be locked up in this house."

Olivia: "You can't do that Randall."

Me: "Watch me, I know you don't have anyone. Joseph was the only thing you had in life so, no one will be visiting you. If you think Mkhize will come to your rescue then, you have another thing coming. That old geezer is busy nursing his broken heart. If you try anything Olivia, those men will kill you. You won't make it to the gate."

Olivia: "If you let me go, I will get you Amara. I will bring her to you, I promise."

"Done boss, there's only one telephone and no Wi-Fi."

One of the men states as they march back to the kitchen.

Me: "Good, get to your positions."

They nod and walk out.

Olivia: "Randall, you can't leave me alone with those men."

Me: "This is to make sure that you don't leave the house because I am not done with you, don't worry, they won't bother you. As long as you behave."

Her eyes scream hatred.

Olivia: "You're a monster Randall, I regret ever meeting you."

I chortle at her words, if only she knew.

Me: "Oh Olivia, I like the sound of that. But hey, what can we do? You saw a beast and couldn't control your hormones. Look, where we are today."

Olivia: "I hate you."

Just what I wanted.

Me: "Please say it again, I have never heard a sweeter sound than this."

She rolls her eyes in frustration.

Me: "Okay, I should get going. Till we meet again baby mama."

I pat her cheek, she shrugs my hand away with a disgusted look on her face. This is my cue, though I am not satisfied with what I have done. This wrath still burns in me, Styles just had to be himself. I would've dealt with Olivia my own way, I am sick of her thinking she can get away with anything only because she is the mother of my child. One more slip up from her and I will have her reunited with Joseph.

NOMBULELO\*

Mbuso: "I want to feel your skin on mine Lelo, I want to make love to you."

I think he's asking for approval, this is a first for me.

I smile, gesturing my consent. He perks my lips before removing my t-shirt, he takes off his and smirks at me. He buries his head on the curve of my neck as he plants wet kisses that, leave my body covered in good bumps.

I raise my upper body at the feel of his hand on my back, allowing him to unstrap my bra. It loosens in one clip and I gasp as I see it fly across the room. Not wasting anytime, his hand reaches for that treasure it had been longing for. I shiver at the feel of his hand rubbing and squeezing my breast, while his lips keep my face entertained with wet kisses.

He scrapes his lips on my neck, kissing, biting and blowing soft breaths. I am helpless under him, there is no turning back now. His mouth finds its way to my lips again and his tongue plummets into my mouth, in a desperate search for mine. My heart flutters, I have never been kissed like this before. I didn't even know such kisses existed, Mbuso has built this deep need in me and I want more of him with every touch.

Me: "Mbuso."

I intone.

I almost cannot recognize him with those small eyes.

Mbuso gets up and I bashfully watch him remove his jeans, his eyes are on me but they keep wondering about. He's done in a jiffy and jumps to my jeans, I see him gulp as he notices I have no underwear on. He's timidly staring down there, I'm thinking he will get over what he is seeing. But, he's not moving. I'm lying on my back, on this blue couch like a thanksgiving turkey that's ready to be put in the oven.

Me: "Mbuso."

I snap him out of wherever he was, he blinks. Good, he's still alive.

He's on top of me again, there's a look between us and I have no clue what is being said. The moment is rather awkward, he wants to kiss me again, I see it in his eyes.

Why is he not doing it then?

The nakedness between us seems to have made him nervous, you would think he is a virgin. This is the same man who was kissing me defiantly a while ago. Maybe, I should make the first move, this staring contest will not take me to my destination.

Our teeth collide, as we both reach for that kiss. I pull back, same time as him, he frowns softly.

What the hell Mbuso?

What happened to that boldness you held a few seconds ago?

This man is beginning to annoy me, he better rid that awkward look on his face.

Me: "What happened?"

I hope he has a good answer for this, he clears his throat and his eyes buck.

Mbuso: "Sorry, I'm just nervous."

He mutters, clearing his throat. I want to roll my eyes so bad right now.

Me: "Maybe we should stop."



I wear my irritation on my face.

Mbuso: "No... I want to do this."

I narrow my eyes at him, his weight is on me and his warm breath is hitting my face. This cannot be in vain.

Me: "Do I make you nervous?"

The throat again.

I will take that as a yes.

Me: "I want to do this, I want to be yours Mbuso."

Someone has to take a stand.

My words seem to give him the confidence he had lost.

He takes my lips prisoner again, no teeth shattering this time. He grazes his lips down to my chest, his warm breath whiffing my skin and he slowly licks my nipples, I shiver as he slurps my nipple. While, his warm manly rough hand has settled for my thighs.

He's touching me in all the right places, my hand plays a part in rubbing his head, he's back up in a jiffy, leaving kisses here and there. I glide my hands up on both sides of his chest. Running them down to his lower torso, his chocolate brown skin gleams, I could almost lick it.

Me: "You be looking like a snack."

I tease, with a naughty smile, he chortles and grins at me. I taste his lips, the insatiable kiss builds an electrifying sensation all over my body.

I'm wet and ready for him, I open my legs wider, giving him access to my most sacred part. I grit my hands on his back as he slips in. I feel streams of sensual pleasure run through my body as he thrusts in and out of me, now I'm convinced that he was being an idiot.



I'm moaning and he's groaning, it's an experience like no other.

No other man has ever entered me besides Zuma and this feels just right, it's like he knows how I want to be touched and kissed. The soft whispers in my ear, I don't know what he's saying but... baby yes...

I feel an adrenaline light-headed rush to my head and a throbbing from between my legs. It gushes through my whole body, building a deep physical relief, like screaming. I dig my nails on his back as I take in this startling feeling that has me powerless and screaming for more.

I moan louder, as I reach my destination, while he groans in my ear. He pulls out and falls back on the other side of the couch, the room is filled with the sound of our heavy breathing.

Me: "That was something."

I utter between deep breaths, Mbuso raises his head and looks at me with a distant smile.

Mbuso: "It was?"

He's looking for assurance. I know he was amazing.

Me: "It was."

I respond, blushing. A silly smile embraces his face.

Me: "I still can't believe I make you nervous."

He titters.

Mbuso: "Made. Past tense, it won't happen again."

Me: "Ok'salayo and I'm not convinced that it won't happen again." (Still.)

I tease and giggle as he jumps on me.

Mbuso: "Let's do it again."



He proposes, his dissipated eyes stabbing at me voraciously.

Me: "Just to prove me wrong?"

Mbuso: "Maybe."

He smiles and steals my lips.

To be continued...



62\*

KHETHU\*

I can't really get a second with Styles, without Randall jumping in. He has been on that phone call for a while now and I am getting frustrated. I'm lying on my back on the bed, waiting for him to finish the phone call.

He's leaning against the bed headboard, his leg bent and the other stretched out.

Styles: "Please tell me you didn't do it."

{Listens.}

Styles: "Well, I'm glad you changed your mind."

{Listens.}

Styles: "No, I'm sleeping over. Khethu needs me."

I roll my eyes.

Styles: "Sure bro, make sure Liya is okay."

I give him a miffed look, he bids him goodbye and drops the call.

Me: "Was that Randall?"

I know it was him.

Styles: "Yes."

Me: "He can't go a day without talking to you, hey."

He furrows his brows while judging me with his eyes.

Styles: "Randall is going through something Khethu."

Me: "I'm also going through something Styles."

Styles: "I know, that's why I'm here."

Me: "It's not enough if you spend most of the time talking to him."

Styles: "Can we not go there, please."

Me: "Whatever Styles."

He grimaces, he doesn't like my words.

Styles: "What's the problem?"

Me: "Nothing."

Styles: "Do you know Randall cares about you right?"

I roll my eyes.

Styles: "I don't get your issue with him, he's not a bad person."

This, right here is what I hate, Styles always standing up for Randall.

Me: "Yeah sure he's not."

I huff.

Styles: "I'm still waiting for the part where you tell me what your problem with Randall is."

Does he not see what I see?

Me: "Except for the fact that he bosses over you. Nothing."

His face changes as he sneers at me.

Styles: "Where did you get that idea from?"

Me: "I see it."

Styles: "You're seeing things."

He pulls back, this is what piques me. His mood changes when I try to warn him about his friend.

Me: "I'm not, Styles. When Randall calls, you jump. When he says come, you run to him without a thought to it. You forget everything around you and Randall becomes the only thing that matters."

I let it all out.

Styles: "If you had siblings, you would understand."

He reacts through gnashed teeth, he's upset.

Me: "You're not related to Randall Styles, you don't have to let him control you."

Styles: "I am related to him, he's my brother. You know I had no one when I met Randall, he was the only person who actually stayed when everyone left. Even my sister left me Khethu, Randall was there. I had convinced myself that I was cursed and gave up on life but, he stayed. You have no idea what we have been through together."

Me: "So, he feels like you owe him? That's low."

Styles: "Wow! I'm not having this conversation with you Khethu."

Me: "Well, tough Styles, we're going to have this conversation because I am tired of competing with your friend. I am mourning and going through shit but, I can't even have all of you. For, how long must we split you into two?"

Styles: "Not long enough if you keep this attitude, I am tired of this Khethu. You're seeing things and making up your own conclusions, I don't want to fight with you. You're in pain, can't I support you in peace? This little obsession you have over Randall must stop, it's unattractive."

He snaps at me, there was a time I said, I'm yet to experience his wrath and I think it's reflecting in his eyes right now. He gets up and plods towards the door.

Me: "Styles wait."

He turns to me, I pout.

Me: "I'm sorry, I won't bring him up anymore."

He leans back against the door and releases a long sigh of exhaustion.

Styles: "I'm going to get some air."

Me: "I'm tired of being in this room. Can we go out for some air together?"

Styles: "Where do you want to go?"

Me: "Anywhere but, here."

He reaches his hand out to me, I jump from the bed and take it.

RANDALL\*

Days later.

Today is the day we execute our plan. My house is too crowded so, we are gathered at Styles' house. Khethu is not home, she is at her grandmother's house. The funeral was on Wednesday, she is taking everything bad.

She has become this angry person and refuses to speak to someone, Styles has given up trying. He seems drained as well, he's not the Styles I know. I think they are having problems, Styles hasn't revealed much.

Just that she watches him like a hawk, calls him none stop when he's not home and starts unnecessary fights. We're gathered in the lounge.

My mind is muddled as I notice scratch marks on his arm.

Me: "Did you get a cat?"

I pry, he is not a cat person. He frowns at me, confusion teasing him for a moment there, before he figures out the reason for my inquiry.

Styles: "No."

He says as he pulls down the sleeves of his t-shirt, those look like nail marks.

Me: "What happened to your arm then?"

Styles: "I must have scratched myself or something, I don't know Randall."

His voice says stop grilling me, I won't continue but, I know Khethu did this to him.

Neo: "What are you two whispering about?"

Me: "Who's whispering?"

Neo: "Uena le Stylos." (You and Styles.)

Styles: "Can we get started?"

I forgot to mention that he's been grumpy.

Neo looks at me and points at Styles with his eye brows, I shrug. I have no explanation for his mood swings.

Styles: "This is what's going to happen. There will be a police raid, I have the whole swart team on standby."

Neo: "Swart team Stylos? I have a family ntwana, mme wa ka o batla hore ke troue. That old woman wants a daughter in-law. How will I give her one when I'm locked up in jail?" (My mother wants me to get married.)

Styles: "Why would you go to jail?"

Neo: "Batho bao ha ba nthate Stylos, you won't believe the encounters I have had with them." (Those people don't like me.)

Nkomo: "Neo, I'm pretty sure those aren't real cops."

Styles: "They are."

Me: "Is that a good idea man?"

Styles and his dealings, I know he has connections but, we have to be careful about this.

Styles: "You guys haven't listened to my plan yet."

Neo: "It's enough that you said swart team, it can't be good."

Me: "I agree with Neo, we're going after Mkhize. It's not going to be a pretty scene, people will end up dead."

Styles: "Will you please listen."

He raises his voice, we give him the attention he seeks.

Styles: "Randy, remember that guy who hooked us up with the police cars and helicopters."

Me: "Yeah."

Styles: "He's a big one at the station. He got us the whole swart team, they are going to raid

Mkhize's house."

Nkomo: "Raid?"

Styles: "Yes, a drug raid."

Neo: "Let me get this straight, you planted drugs kwa Mkhize? Nkomo, did you hear that?"

Neo though.

Styles: "Damn! I should've done that."

Me: "So there are no drugs?"

Styles: "The plan of the swart team is to distract them while we go in and get Amara."

Nkomo: "Cool, that sounds good."

Neo: "Man as long as those people stay out of my way, then I'm in."

Nkomo: "What's up with you and the men in blue?"

Neo: "I have found myself on the wrong side of the law plenty of times. Where do you think I got money to build that little business I have? This is the real world man, o nahana hore Harriet Khoza o rata ho ba drug queen? Clean money doesn't come easy." (Do you think Harriet Khoza loves being a drug queen?)

He's right.

Me: "No one is perfect in this room, we all have our flaws."

Neo: "Bozza, I'm an angel compared to you and Stylos."

Me: "You talk too much Neo."

He huffs.

Styles spreads a map out on the table.

Neo: "Stylos, a map mara? You're losing your touch. What happened to technology?"

Styles: "Neo shut your ass up."

He chuckles.

Neo: "Desperate times call for desperate measures, ba bolela sena." (They mean this.)

Styles sighs before he continues to draw on the map, we glance in suspense.

Styles: "This is the map to his house, we're going to enter through the west wing. There are about twenty guards there."

Neo: "Twenty guards and four of us? This is a death chase."

Nkomo: "Not only are there twenty guards Neo, there's armed taxi drivers as well."



Me: "We can get help, Mkhonto can bring his crew."

I suggest.

Styles: "No, we can't trust anyone."

Nkomo: "We can take them down, we've done this before."

Styles: "He's right. Amara is being kept in the east wing, there's the same number of guards. Two of them are guarding her door, Kazi will be waiting for us there. She will deal with them."

Neo: "Joang?" (How?)

Styles: "She knows what to do."

Neo laughs.

Neo: "Ai that other gender."

Nkomo chuckles, he's beginning to find Neo amusing.

Me: "I'll get Amara."

I offer.

Styles: "No Randy, you're too emotionally involved in this, you might risk it."

Me: "I'm getting Amara, Styles."

I push, sternly. He glances at me for a while, then shrugs.

Styles: "Okay. We'll go in separate cars, we can't risk riding together. It will look suspicious."

Neo: "With Nkomo in the car, yes, it will look suspicious."

Nkomo: "Uyinja ntwana." (You're a dog.)

Styles: "Guys listen, we have to be smart about this. Randall, after you get Amara, use the back door. There will be a car and a driver waiting for you, I'm pretty sure Mkhize will be after you."

Me: "Got it."

Neo: "Nna ke tla etsa eng?" (What will I do?)

Styles: "We'll be on standby just in case our cover is blown, that's when the party will begin."

He sniggers.

Neo: "Can't I be in the car waiting for Uze and his Miss?"

Styles: "No."

Neo: "Umuntu uyafa moes namhlanje. I'm going to call my mother so, she can lead me to the salvation prayer. If I die at least I'll go to heaven." (I'm going to die today.)

He mumbles as he gets up, Nkomo laughs.



MOSES\*

<<<Thula thul, thula baba, thula sana. >>> (Keep quiet my child. Keep quiet my baby.)

<<< Thul'u babuzo fika, ekuseni. >>> (Be quiet, daddy will be home by dawn.)

I have been hearing this song for the past few days, I think I'm losing my mind due to being locked up here. At first it sounded like it was in my head but, it gets real with each passing day. I must be losing my mind honestly. Who wouldn't, after being incarcerated in a room as small as a toilet? My bedroom is bigger than this dump.

There's a single metal bed and a blanket, the bastard didn't give me a pillow to rest my head at night, I have to use my arm. They gave me a bucket to use when I need to go. Mkhize said why should I live like a king when I'm going to die soon? That man has so much hatred in his heart, he has no compassion. At times I wonder how he was able to find wives for himself, no human would want to associate themselves with such an evil man.

I shut my ears trying to clog the song, it's getting louder.

Wait! That voice, I know that voice.

<<< Thula thul, thula baba, thula sana. >>> (Keep quiet my child, keep quiet my baby.)

<<< Thul'u babuzo fika, ekuseni. >>> (Be quiet, daddy will be home by dawn.)

No, I recognize this voice. I have heard it somewhere. Why does it instil fear in me? I get up from the bed as the singing gets louder, I think there's someone in the room with me. I can feel their presence, the singing turns into sniffs.

Me: "Hayyi!!!"

I scream and jerk back as a male figure appears next to me, he's sitting on the floor. His back is against the wall and his head is bowed, like he's in agony. His presence alone is enough to make my body shudder in fear, drips of sweat instantly fall from my face.

Me: "Ungubani wena?" (Who are you?)

I force my voice out and it breaks as it leaves my mouth.

"Ingane yami iyakhala, mthulise." (My child is crying, pacify her.)

He snivels with a broken heart.

I know that voice, my mind fails to recall where I have heard it.

Me: "Ungubani?" (Who are you?)

This is the only thing I can say, I'm too petrified to converse with this celestial being.

He raises his head and I scream in fright and tumble on the floor when my eyes recognize the familiar face.

Me: "Hayyi, Vusamazulu? Hayyi, ufile wena, ufile." (No, you're dead.)

I scream.

Zulu: "Ingane yami iyakhala Moses, mthulise." (My child is crying Moses, pacify her.)

Me: "Hayyi, is'poki, hayyi, hayyi. Sizani, sizani." (No, a ghost. Help, help.)

Zulu: <<< Thula thul, thula baba, thula sana. >>> (Keep quiet my child, keep quiet my baby.)

<<< Thul'u babuzo fika, ekuseni. >>> (Be quiet, daddy will be home in the morning.)

He sings as he drops his head and vanishes like he was never there, I squawk and everything blacks out.

To be continued...



NTOMBI\*

“Jonas uthi wenzeni?” (What did you do?)

I shout as I tread behind him, he came to my room and dropped a bomb on me that he went to see someone who cast a spell on Moses. He is not even ashamed of telling me this.

He stops and turns furiously, the look in his eyes has me staggering back in fear.

Jonas: “Uthi Jonas kubani wena? Usuyadelela Ntombi neh?” (Who are you calling Jonas? You’re disrespectful now?)

Me: “How will I respect someone who doesn’t respect my home?”

I shout, he laughs and turns to proceed with his walk.

Me: “Jonas ngikhuluma nawe? Wenzeni kumyeni wami?” (I’m talking to you Jonas. What did you do to my husband?)

I scream behind him, we get to the living area, this is when he stops to give me the attention I want.

Jonas: “Ungizwile Ntombi, that useless husband of yours will pay for all his evil deeds. Uzohlanya uMoses, uzozulazula emigwaqweni, ememeza izono zakhe. Uyabona yonke le Vaal? They will know how evil Moses is, Ngingu Jonas kayi one mina, uphunyuka bamphethe.” (Moses will lose his mind, he will roam around the streets confessing his sins. All of Vaal will know about it. No one messes with me.)

I can’t believe my brother has done this to me.

Me: “Jonas, ngiyakucela bhuti wami, reverse the curse please. Moses is my husband, ngizoyitholaphi enye indoda. Look at me, I’m damaged goods. Who will love me like this?” (Please my brother. Where will I get another man?)

Jonas: “Eyy! Waze wangiphoxa wesisi, vuka Ntombi. Impilo akuyona indoda.” (You have disappointed me sister, wake up. Life is not all about a man.)

Me: “Jonas ungayenzi lento ngiyakucela.” (Please don’t do this.)

Jonas: “It’s done Ntombi, uVusamazulu uzo dealer naye uMoses.” (Vusamazulu will deal with Moses.)

Me: “Hayyi bhuti.” (No brother.)

I wail as I see Mhambi walk in the house with Petunia.

Mhambi: “Manje?” (And then?)

I rush to him.

Me: "Mhambi, ubhut' Jonas uphazamisa umphefumulo waka Nkosiyabo." (Jonas is disturbing Nkosiyabo's soul.)

Mhambi: "Haibo! Kanjani?" (How?)

Jonas: "Bengishilo Mhambi ukuthi u Zulu uzo dealer no Moses. Sesifikile isikhathi mfowethu, oShenge bazoyilwa le mpi." (I told you Mhambi that, Zulu will deal with Moses, the time has come for our ancestors to fight our battles.)

Me: "Do you hear him Mhambi? Ubuthakathi lobu." (This is witchcraft.)

Mhambi: "Hayi Ntombi, yicebo elihle leli. Umyeni wakho usihlulile. Nkosiyabo Vusamazulu Buthelezi, ilwele indodakazi yakho. Lwela igazi lakho Shenge, Sokwalisa, Phungashe, Mnyamana kaNgqengelele! Mnandi ngamondi! Wen' owadliwa 'zindlovukazi zamlobolela! Nina zinyawo ezimahhele, enaganis' izintombi nanganye nangambili. Angeke uze usiphoxe Zulu, buyisa indodakazi yakho ekhaya."

(No, Ntombi. This is a good idea, your husband has defeated us. Nkosiyabo Vusamazulu Buthelezi, fight for your daughter. Fight for your blood.) (Clans praises.) (You will never disappoint us Zulu, bring your daughter home.)

I scream and carry my hands on my head, my heart breaks for Moses. Even Mhambi has turned his back on me.

Jonas: "Makube njalo." (Let it happen.)

Me: "Mhambi wenzani? Wenzani Mhambi." (Mhambi what are you doing?)

I yell, they glare at me, as if I am crazy.

They don't care about these tears streaming down my face. Who do I turn to when everyone has turned against me?

Petunia: "Thula Ntombi, okok'qala you are not a Buthelezi wena. Usuyingxenye yomndeni wakwa Mngoma. That's why you don't care about Amara, ubusy Moses this, Moses that.

Uzokungwcaba yedwa loyo Moses ndini." (Shut up Ntombi, firstly, you are not a Buthelezi. Moses will bury you alone.)

She screams at me and that aggravates me.

Me: "Ukhuluma ngani wena Petunia. Just because you're married to my brother, doesn't mean you can come here with your two cents. You're a non-factor Petunia, you don't add value to this family. You couldn't even give ubhuti izingane zesilisa. Umuzi wakho ugcwele izintombi zodwa, kuyafana nokuthi uyi nyumba wena." (Why are you talking Petunia? You failed to give my brother male children, you are like a barren woman.)

I yelp back at her with so much rage, I don't care what anyone thinks anymore.

Jonas slaps me across my face, his slap sends me to the floor.

I look up at him, this is the second time he has laid his filthy hands on me.

Jonas: "Ngizokubulala wena Ntombi, yezwa? Qhubeka ngalokuhlanya kwakho, I will not allow you to disrespect my brother in my presence. Mhambi is quiet and soft but, I will not tolerate your bullshit." (I will kill you Ntombi, you hear? Carry on with your craziness.)

Me: "Uyangishaya Jonas." (You hit me Jonas?)

Jonas: "Uyaqhubeka nokungibiza Jonas? Uhlanyiswa yini Notmbi? Tell us so, we can get you help." (You continue to call me by my name? What's making you lose your mind?)

Me: "Ngicela niphume kwami, nonke." (Get out of my house all of you.)

I howl as I bring myself up from the floor.

Jonas: "Wena no Moses niyasikweleta, we are not going anywhere until Amara walks through that door." (You and Moses owe us.)

Me: "Nifuna ukubona ubuthakathi? Ngizonikhombisa ubuthakathi." (You want to see witchcraft? I will show you witchcraft.)

Jonas has done his worst, I am no longer afraid of his next move.

I storm out of the house and bang the door behind me.

STYLES\*

My mood has gotten better, spending time with these idiots has helped. They literally push my troubles aside. The plan is on, we are waiting for night time then, we strike. We are still hanging in the lounge, conversing and reminiscing on old times. I can't believe I grew up with these idiots.

Neo: "Stylos, do you remember that sugar mama you dated."

What is life without Neo?

Nkomo: "Who says sugar mama anymore, it's bless-er."

Nkomo corrects him.

Neo: "Bless-er yani wena, that woman was just old with no money. What did she bless you with Stylos?" (What bless-er?)

He frowns at me, I shake my head. He expects me to answer that?

Randall: "Monthly groceries, 20rands, if he was lucky, 50rands."

Randall's response earns him a stern look from me, he's supposed to be on my side. Neo is about to grill me, he can't breathe without doing it.

Neo: "Yoh, Stylos. Uno le desperate neh." (You were desperate Styles.)

Me: "I don't know what you people are talking about."

I deny.

Neo: "Such a fresh memory mara Stylos, wena le Uze lived in Hillbrow. Remember that old woman Comfort man?" (You and Uze.)

Nkomo: "Neo, are you sure it was Styles and not you? I'm surprised that you remember her name yet, it was a long time ago."

Randall: "Please ask him, I also want to know."

I'm glad to see that Randall is starting to warm up to Nkomo.

Neo rolls his eyes, literally. His baby mama must be behind this.

Neo: "Ke mubi so? Phela di magriza be ne ba rata legoa." (Ugly like this? The old women loved this white man.)

Nkomo cracks up.

Nkomo: "I thought I was the only one who saw your ugliness, honestly ntwana I didn't know how to tell you."

Neo: "Ok'salayo ha ke o fetise oena, eeyy the Mkhizes are ugly gents." (I'm not as ugly as you.)

Nkomo clicks his tongue, it's good not to argue with Neo, he delivers painful comebacks.

Randall chuckles at Neo's response, this is a first.

Me: "I was a player back then, but Khethu came and tamed me."

Randall: "More like put you on a leash."

Whatever he means by that, I choose not to take it to heart. Khethu is strong-willed but, that tends to get into her head and it clashes with her insecurities. I miss her so much, I miss the Khethu I fell in love with. The Khethu I knew before her grandparents died, the Khethu I knew before her true identity was revealed.

I feel like I live with a Nobayeni in my house, it's only been a few days and she has turned into this angry person I can not recognize.

She fights me at every chance she gets, if there is nothing to fight about, she will find something. I can't share this with Randall or anyone. How do I tell my brother that my woman puts her hands on me and I cannot bring myself to restrain her? I let her get away with it, maybe this is her way of dealing with her pain.

Neo: "Stylos, tell us how you fought Comfort's husband? I hear that old man threw mean punches."

I will never hear the end of this.

Me: "Who told you that?"

He looks at Randall who clears his throat with a ghostly smile on his face.

Me: "Hey, she lied about being married okay. I don't know what got into me, sleeping with an older woman. Eish, that old man almost dislocated my jaw, sometimes I can still feel the pain. I never looked at an older woman from that day."

These fools are laughing at me, Randall accepts a low chortle. He better not laugh out loud.

Neo: "Mr. Casanova, Mr. Lover-lover."

Neo hums.

Me: "I was in my early twenties, don't be hard on me."

Neo: "Eyy! But, you lived Stylos. Some of us made babies with the first woman we banged. Tshidi udom gents, yoh. I have never met a woman as stupid as her." (Tshidi is dumb.)

He expresses, his facial expression is the funniest.

Nkomo: "Udom vele, any woman who opens her legs for you has to be dumb." (She is dumb.)

Neo and Nkomo's love-hate relationship will never grow old.

Neo: "Nkomo, us'kang tester ntwana. I know IT, you'll wake up a married man in the morning, aan 'n ou vroue." (Don't test me Nkomo.) (To an old woman.)

Nkomo looks at me and I nod trying to suppress my laugh.

Neo: "Ere askies bhuti Neo and I will have mercy on you. Anyway, I will be doing you a favour, seeing that your father wants to be Jacob Zuma. I doubt there are woman left out there. Eish! I should've made a move on Khethu, before Stylos showed his ugly ass. No offence bozza but, I am more handsome than you."

He smirks at me.

Randall: "Only Styles, can handle Khethu. Neo, respect her. She's taken, know your limits man."

Randall phrases as he shifts to the edge of the couch. He's seated on a one seater, sipping on a glass of Whiskey. I know him to smoke his sorrows away but, right now he is on his third glass. There is no sign of him being tipsy though, we keep losing him to nothingness as he zones out.

Me: "Thank you Randy. Stop looking at my woman wena Neo."

Neo: "Nwank you Nwandy." (Thank you Randy.)

He imitates me in a mocking way.

Nkomo: "I don't know which black magic will restrain you Neo, I give up."

Neo: "Stylos, Uze, you heard it from the horse's mouth. Bayaloya kwa Mkhize." (They practice black magic at the Mkhizes.)

Nkomo is officially drained, the look on his face says he's defeated. I leer at Randall, he keeps checking the time on his wrist watch. He's restless and I know the reason behind that.

Me: "If that watch could speak, it would tell you to stop staring."

I throw that in, he raises his eyes to ogle at me.

Randall: "I think it's broken, time is not moving."

We laugh at him.

Me: "Don't worry Randy, you will be with Amara tonight."

He worries too much.

Neo: "Love humbles men like Uze, the world is coming to an end."

Randall: "Your world will come to an end if you don't shut up."

Nkomo snickers and Neo gives him a black look in return.

Neo: "U tseha eng?" (What are you laughing at?)

The atmosphere changes when the front door opens and Kethu walks in. she glares at us.

Neo: "Ndlovukazi. Yazi ngibona umuntu uma ngibona wena." (Queen, I see a human when I see you.)

Trust Neo to be the first to open his big mouth.

She doesn't acknowledge his presence, her eyes are glued on me.

Neo: "And then?"

He whispers to Randall who doesn't respond.

Me: "Baby, I didn't know you were coming today. You should've called me, to fetch you."

She doesn't say anything but, treads up the upstairs. I won't lie, I am embarrassed by her impudence. She is not a fan of these men but, greeting wouldn't have killed her.

I know I should follow her by the look she gave me.

Me: "Sorry guys, she must have had a bad day, you know how hard things have been for her lately."

I justify her insolence. They don't respond but, stare at me. I can't really tell what Neo and Nkomo are thinking but, Randall's glare screams pity.

I get up and follow Khethu.

My spirit drops as I tramp up the stairs, I know she is upset and I will have to pacify her.

NOMBULELO\*





I'm woken up by Mbuso, I don't know when I fell asleep. I have been sleeping a lot lately. I frown at him, seeing that he's all dressed up.

Mbuso: "Wake up chubby cheeks."

Me: "You're only waking me up now? You bathed and got dressed while I was sleeping, you should've woken me up."

Mbuso: "And disturb your snoring session? I don't think so."

Me: "I don't snore."

I gasp.

Mbuso: "And I'm not a doctor."

He sniggers, having me roll my eyes at him.

Me: "Where are you going?"

I query as I sit up from the bed, we share a bed now. I feel like things are moving too fast and no matter how I want to slow down, I can't. I am at my happiest and I have become addicted to it.

Mbuso: "I have to go to work, there's an emergency."

Me: "Okay, I'll go back to sleep then. I won't cook by the way."

Mbuso: "That's all right, I'll bring pizza."

The thought of pizza makes me gag.

Me: "What should I cook? Pap or Rice?"

He laughs.

Mbuso: "You should take a walk or something. Don't sleep your life away, you'll fall asleep when giving birth."

His statement throws me into a roll of laughter.

Me: "That's is not possible, doc."

Mbuso: "Asazi." (We don't know.)

Me: "Bring me that fish, please."

He makes that face again.

Mbuso: "How about tinned fish? You can eat it with pap, that thing cannot be healthy for Goku."

Me: "It's all he wants and he's in control, not me."

Mbuso: "I think I should refer you to a dietician."

Me: "Let me guess, doctor friend?"

He nods.

Me: "Female?"

He sends his hand behind his neck and rubs it while snickering like an idiot.

Mbuso: "Well, yes."

This changes my mood.

Me: "Mmmhhh, another Namhla?"

He sits next to me.

Mbuso: "No, not another Namhla."

I roll my eyes.

Mbuso: "Are we jealous?"

Nonsense.

Me: "Mina? Jealous of who? Have you seen me Mbuso?"

He throws his head back and laughs like a kid.

Mbuso: "Yes, I have seen you. I see you and my eyes like what they see."

He gives me a naughty smile as he runs his hand on my thigh, he dips his head on the arc of my neck, leaving trails of kisses.

Me: "Aren't you going to work?"

Mbuso: "I'll be quick."

He continues kissing my neck trailing down to my collar bone, I shiver at his wet kisses.

Me: "Mbuso you'll be late."

My chest is rising and falling as I have become breathless.

Mbuso: "Two minutes."

He whispers, I push him off of me. His face welcomes a confused frown.

Me: "Two minutes with who?"

He's still confused as he raises his eye brows.

Mbuso: "Okay three minutes."

He's stupid.

Me: "I will not put out for you, go to work."

He titters before taking in a laugh.



Mbuso: "But, I won't be able to focus. If a patient dies, it will be on you."

Did I say he's stupid? I say it again, Mbuso is stupid.

I cheer his stupidity on, as I fail to suppress my laugh.

Me: "Mbuso, go to work."

He chuckles, pecks my lips and gets up.

Me: "Listen."

He turns to me.

Me: "Come back early."

I gesture a secret, he grins impishly. Jogs back to me and smashes his lips on mine, the kiss leaves me with hot flashes.

Mbuso: "The surgery will take three minutes."

He clowns, he's funny. I watch him as he walks out the door.

To be continued...



NTOMBI\*

The house has been quiet since that incident with my brothers, Jonas and Mhambi went out, I have no idea where they are. Petunia is in my kitchen as usual, I think she has gained weight since they came here.

With the rate she's going, she won't fit in her clothes by the time they leave my house. I'm lying on the couch watching TV, I need to get my mind off of things and so far this is the only way. Someone knocks at the door, I am too lazy to get up.

Me: "Petu, Ngicela uvule umyango." (Please open the door.)

I shout to her, I can hear the loud sound of dishes.

There's no response from her, she's still angry.

I drag my body up and tread towards the door. I'm already frustrated by the loud knocking and Petunia's noise in the kitchen.

Me: "Haibo, don't break my dishes."

I yell, she doesn't respond but, the noise gets louder. I roll my eyes, crack the door open and here is Martha, standing on my door step.

Me: "Ufunani?" (What do you want?)

Martha: "Hawu Ntombi. Can I come in?"

She pushes her way in, before I could invite her.

Me: "Ufunani Martha?" (What do you want?)

Martha: "I came to check on you hawu. Unjani chomie yami?" (How are you my friend?)

She sits on my sofa, grabs the TV remote and starts channel searching.

Me: "Martha what is this?"

I'm confused by her sudden visit.

Martha: "Hlala pansi weNtombi, sixoxe." (Sit down Ntombi and let's chat.)

Seeing that she is not going anywhere, I sit next to her.

Martha: "How is everyone?"

Okay.



Me: "Why are you asking me this?"

This is very odd.

Martha: "Am I not like family?"

No, you're not.

Me: "Martha, I don't have time to entertain you."

Martha: "How is Lelo, Ntombi? Why doesn't she visit you?"

Me: "Haibo, you know why."

Martha: "Hayyi, ngiyabuza nje. How is her baby? Is it growing?" (I'm just asking.)

Why is she being Random?

Me: "Martha, I don't know why you are in my house and why you're bringing Lelo up. Your sudden visit nje is strange."

Martha: "Kanti why uso Ntombi? Awunginiki ngisho ne Oros. My throat is dry yazi." (Why are you like this? You won't even give me a glass of Oros.)

This woman is annoying me, Petunia strolls into the room. They exchange looks with Martha, these two have never met before but, it looks like they hate each other.

Petunia: "Ntombi, unesivakashi?" (You have a visitor?)

She gives Martha a dirty look.

Martha: "Isivakashi la, nguwe." (The visitor is you.)

Petunia: "Haibo! Awuhlali la wena nje." (You don't live here.)

Me: "Do you two know each other?"

They keep quiet for a while, Petunia clicks her tongue and walks back to the kitchen.

Martha: "Lo mfazi. Ngiyam'zonda, ngiyam'zonda." (I hate that woman.)

She expresses in a high pitched voice.

How can she hate someone she has never met?

Me: "How do you know Petunia?"

She hides her face away from me.

Martha: "I don't know her."

Me: "But, you said you hate her."

Martha: "Did I say that? I meant she has an annoying face."

I don't know what's going on and why Martha is lying about knowing Petunia.

Martha: "Let me go Ntombi, I have to cook before load shedding. You know we are not safe in this place, if it's not electricity, it's the water. That's the price we pay for being poor."

I refuse and I reject.

Me: "Martha, if you want to speak poverty into your life, do not involve me in it. I'm not suffering, my husband has money. "

She better know.

She laughs out loud.

Martha: "Yiphi indoda Ntombi? Everyone knows that he is missing, asazi if he's missing or he ran away with another woman." (Which husband?)

She's saying this to me in my house.

Me: "Hamba Martha, leave my house." (Go.)

Martha: "Don't worry, I was leaving anyway."

She gets up, I follow her to the door. She stops, turns to me.

Martha: "Tell Nombulelo to call me or give me her numbers."

She's honestly acting weird.

Me: "Uyifunani ingane yami Martha?" (What do you want from my child?)

Martha: "Lelo is like my child Ntombi, I just want to know if she is okay."

Me: "She's fine. Bye Martha."

I shut the door on her face.

What on earth did she want?

STYLES\*

I find Khethu sitting on the bed, she's waiting for me. Her demeanour is that of anger. She looks up at me as I close door, I am not up for this.

Me: "What was that about?"

Khethu: "What are they doing here Styles?"

Here we go.

Me: "I don't know what you mean by that."

Khethu: "Your friends are all over the house Styles, the next thing they will expect me to cook for



them.”

Me: “No one expects you to cook for them Khethu.”

Khethu: “If I don’t cook, they will judge me and say I’m a bad woman because I don’t cook for my man and his friends.”

Me: “What the hell?”

Khethu: “You know I’m right Styles.”

Me: “No, I don’t.”

Khethu: “So, you’re saying I’m making things up, you’re calling me crazy.”

Me: “Don’t put words in my mouth Khethu.”

Khethu: “Whatever, I want your friends out of the house, it’s getting late, I’m tired and I have a headache.”

This is what I have to put up with every day.

Me: “They are not going anywhere, I don’t know what your problem is Khethu but, you can’t come here and make demands like that. You said you will be at your grandmother’s house for a week...”

She jerks up from the bed, her face carrying nothing but, rage.

Khethu: “Oh! You don’t want me in your house anymore? Is that it? Would you rather live with those gangsters?”

She cuts me, before I finish and shouts while at it.

Me: “Do not raise your voice at me, I am not a child.”

I snap at her.

Khethu: “I will raise my voice at you Styles. What happened to you? This is not you, you are not the type of person that hangs with a group of people. You don’t sit idle in the house, entertaining yourself with alcohol and meaningless conversations, look what they have turned you into.”

She shouts, I have let her get away with shouting at me.

Me: “What the fuck is wrong you?”

Khethu: “What is wrong with me is that, I have taken a back seat in your life, I was home alone Styles. Do you know that? I expected you to come and be with me, that’s why I came back here. I didn’t know your attention was already taken by Randall.”

Me: “It’s always about Randall, isn’t it?”

Khethu: “Yes, you made it about him. If Randall was a woman, you would cheat on me with him and not be sorry about it. This is how deep he is in our lives and frankly I’m getting tired of him.”

This woman is losing her mind, I don't know when she became obsessive but, it's not a cute sight.

Me: "KHETHU!!!"

I raise my hand in an attempt to slap her but, her terrified face stops me as she winces before I could touch her. I sigh deeply and step back, it's only been once that I have laid a hand on her and I hated myself for it.

Why does she have to be like this? I can't even tell anyone about it lest, they see me as a man who can't keep his home intact.

Me: "You are not the woman I fell in love with, you have become this bitter person who complains about everything and everyone. I am tired of this shit Khethu."

I throw these words in her face, she rolls her eyes at me. Clearly my words mean nothing to her.

Me: "You know what? I'm glad, I didn't marry you, I would have subjected myself to a life of imprisonment."

Her jaw drops at my words.

Dazed, she ogles her big eyes at me.

I'm not staying for this, we're always going around in circles. Talking about the same thing, it appears that she doesn't want the arguments to end.

Me: "I'm done, you want us out of the house right? We will leave the house, you can stay here alone since you enjoy your own company."

I stride towards the door, before I make it there, something whacks my head. I drop my head to see a shoe, she just threw one of her heels at me.

Me: "What the..."

She scurries to me and begins throwing punches and slaps on my face and chest. I hold her, constraining her hands but, she's so adamant in releasing her anger on me.

Me: "Khethu stop."

I snap.

Khethu: "I hate you Styles, I hate you."

She screams while fighting me, she pushes me against the wall and continues with her punches, I don't know where she gets the strength from. I finally push her back, she screams and targets me again. Khethu is so adamant in wanting to impart pain on me, it's not the punches that hurt but- her actions, her words and her insolence.

Her body gives up as she loses strength. She finally draws back, the rise and fall of her chest visible under her shirt. I take a step towards her, I want to hold her. I didn't mean to push her.

Khethu: "You're an idiot. How dare you say this to me? If you never wanted to marry me. Why did



you let me fall for you?"

She screams while swaying her hands around. This is not normal, Khethu is battling demons and I have to help her. Her attitude is justifiable, I have to give her all my support. She is though, making it hard for me because she pushes me away when I try. As drained and tired as I am, it hurts me to see her like this.

Me: "Baby."

I take her hand and she yanks it away, her anger is still in control.

Khethu: "Don't baby me, I gave you everything. All of me, four years of my life Styles and this is how you thank me?"

She's crying, I hate seeing her in tears.

Me: "Khethu, I'm sorry. I didn't mean what I said, you know I love you, right?"

She huffs.

Khethu: "You have a funny way of showing it."

I should avoid getting her upset.

Me: "Listen, the guys and I had a meeting. We were in the middle of it when you walked in and since you need space, we'll go finish it at Randall's house."

I introduce, I doubt she likes the idea. She furiously marches to the door, locks it and puts the key in her bust.

Khethu: "Randall again Styles, really? Why are you obsessed over him?"

I'm done.

Me: "You know what, given a choice to choose, I would choose Randall over you. You know why Khethu? He respects me, he treats me like I'm human. All those guys in the living room, give me the peace that you fail to give. All you do is nag and it's exhausting. Dammit, I am trying here. I want to love you and take care of you and you're not letting me. You have built this wall around you and by God Khethu, I hope by the time you decide to break it down, it won't be too late because I am tired of being on the other side of the wall."

To think she would understand, no. She cackles and claps once.

Khethu: "Oh Styles, if you ever choose Randall or anyone over me. I will kill myself."

Me: "You wouldn't dare."

Khethu: "Try me, this relationship is forever Styles. Till death do us part, married or not. No one will reap from where I have sown."

Me: "Who are you and what did you do to my Khethu?"

Khethu: "Your Khethu is still here, she's just tired of your bullshit."



She utters.

RANDALL\*

Khethu is so loud, the only voice we can hear is hers. She has been at it for a while now. Styles is soft spoken hence, Khethu mistakes that for weakness.

I think it's time I intervene, before they kill each other. I can't believe this is the same Khethu who was quiet and kind, she had a mouth alright but, she had limits too.

Now, she speaks to Styles anyway she likes. I have a feeling that she abuses him physical, Styles will not speak out. He has an image to uphold, he won't be the first man to be a victim of domestic violence.

There are men out there who can't put their hands on a woman, Styles is one of them. Khethu clearly knows that hence, she takes advantage of that and does whatever she pleases with him.

Nkomo: "Maybe we should give them space, this has become uncomfortable."

I wish they didn't have to hear this, I hate what is happening to my brother.

Neo: "From what I am hearing, Khethu is the loudest. She's breathing fire and from what I have seen on those serial killer documentaries, the woman ends up killing the man in a fit of rage and cries self-defence and you know what society will do? We will believe her because she is a woman. Men are already painted as monsters because of the men who fall under the saying 'men are trash'. Good or not, we are demons in the eyes of the world. If something happens to Stylos, bozza, his name will be dragged down and buried with him. While the world calls Khethu a hero for fighting for herself."

Neo has never spoken so much sense in his life, no way am I going to let anything happen to my brother.

Me: "I'm going to stop this."

I announce as I get up.

Neo: "Who is going to save Amara when Khethu cuts your head off?"

I praised him too soon.

Nkomo: "I think Randy should intervene, clearly this is not stopping."

Neo: "Don't say I didn't tell you. Pass me the remote, I think Chiefs is playing today."

It's right in front of him. I ignore him and scurry up the stairs.

Styles: "Khethu give me the key now."

Khethu: "No Styles, we will stay in this room together you're not going anywhere."

Styles: "I said give me the key, open this damn door."

It appears she has locked them inside, maybe I should break it down. Styles cannot live like this, I can't let this happen to him. He deserves better.

I knock twice and they go quiet.

Me: "Styles."

I hear Khethu let out a mocking cackle.

Styles: "What is it Randall?"

Me: "Are you guys okay?"

Khethu: "We're fine Randall, leave us alone."

Khethu yells in annoyance, I'm not leaving him in there.

Me: "Styles open the door."

Styles: "Randall we're still busy, I'll be down in a while."

I know he doesn't want me to see the pain in his eyes, if I could, I would rip out the love he has for Khethu in his heart. This woman has proven to be toxic.

Me: "Styles, it's either you open the door or I will break it down and you know I will."

Khethu: "This is what I was saying Styles, he won't leave us alone."

I grab the door handle and twist it, I am getting Styles out of there.

Styles: "Randy relax, I'll open the door."

He sounds annoyed.

Khethu: "Styles?"

Styles: "Give me the key."

He demands, it takes a while for him to open. He immediately drops his eyes the moment they meet mine, his face is flushed and painted with scratches.

Khethu is sitting on the bed with her arms folded across her chest, she looks very upset.

Me: "Let's go."

Styles: "You guys go ahead, I'll meet you at the house."

He must be insane, if he thinks I will leave him alone with this crazy woman.

Me: "I'm not leaving this house without you Styles."

Styles: "Randall, I said I will meet you at the house."

Me: "And, I said I'm not leaving."

He sighs, turns to look at Khethu. I don't like the look she's giving him right now.

Styles: "Let's go."

He walks past me, Khethu looks surprised. She wants to stop him but, my firm look prevents her from doing so. I follow Styles, we manage to make it out of the house.

Me: "I forgot my phone."

Neo: "Hurry, ke lapile. I want to eat before we go." (I'm hungry.)

I scurry back to the house, the plan is to talk to Khethu. I want to know what her problem is, I see her running down the stairs as I walk in. She probably thought that, she will stop Styles.

Me: "Are you looking for Styles?"

She glares at me without answering.

Me: "I don't know what you're playing at Khethu but, Styles is a good man. He doesn't deserve what you are doing to him."

She cackles.

Khethu: "This is ironic, I have always known that you are the third person in this relationship."

Me: "I feel sorry for you. When did you become this person?"

She crosses her arms over her chest and scowls.

Khethu: "Did Styles send you back here?"

She raises her eye brows, the impudence.

Me: "You're pathetic, you know that?"

She rolls her eyes.

Khethu: "No Randall, I do not know that. But, I know that three is a crowd. You need to butt out of our relationship."

She declares foully.

Me: "Listen here woman, if I find out that you're abusing that man. I will fuck you up. The only reason Styles lets you get away with everything is because he loves you, my brother deserves better."

She frowns at my finger, pointed at her.

Khethu: "Oh, please. What do you know? This, from a man who doesn't know how to love a woman. For how long will you hide under that brother title? I know that, you just want to control Styles and have him do all your dirty work."

Me: "What did you say?"

She huffs.

Khethu: "I'm not afraid of you Randall, your threats don't faze me. My father is a police commissioner. Remember, I know about all your shenanigans. If you continue like this Randall, I will sing like a bird."

Her words have me chuckling in disbelief.

Me: "Listen here sisi, I am not Styles. You will not talk to me like that, continue with your shit and not even your father will stop me from teaching you respect."

She cackles, this woman has surely changed. This undaunted attitude has her on a high horse, I will bring her crashing down.

Khethu: "Please, get out of my house."

She demands with so much arrogance, I smirk, as I toil towards her. She takes one step back, fear teasing her a bit there.

Me: "Oh, Khethukuthula. What sadness I see upon you. I can only hope that, you will heed my words. I'm a nice person Khethu but, I can be a beast when I want to and trust me, you do not want to see that side of me. Touch my brother and we're going shopping for your coffin."

She steps back, her eyes popped out and gulps in fear.

Me: "One more thing, Styles doesn't have to know about this discussion. You are already stepping on his dignity, we don't want you crushing it any further. I hope we won't have this conversation again."

I like the fear in her eyes, if only she knew how I feed on it. I amble out, leaving the door open.

To be continued...



65\*

MKHIZE\*

This fool fainted, apparently the guard said he heard him scream and when he came to check, Moses was lying flat on the floor. I use the old trick to wake him up... Cold water.

Me: "Wake up sdudla."

He jumps as the water splashes over his face.

Moses: "Vusamazulu."

He screams while browsing the room, he looks like he has seen a ghost.

Me: "What's wrong with you?"

Moses: "Mkhize, get me out of this room please. Vusamazulu was here."

He pleads as he grabs my leg, I push him off and he falls back.

Me: "Are you crazy? Zulu is dead."

I remind him.

Moses: "I saw him, he was here."

Me: "Argh shame, solitary confinement is a bitch. Look at you sdudla, you are losing your mind."

"Baba." (Boss.)

Sika shouts as he dashes in.

Me: "Yini?" (What is it?)

Sika: "The police are here."

Me: "Amapoyisa?" (The police?)

Sika: "They said they have a search warrant."

This puzzles me because I have been careful with these things, I have rats who work with the police.

Me: "Something is up Sika. I'm going to find out what this is all about."

Moses: "Mkhize please, don't leave me in here."

He pleads, coward.

Me: "Let's go Sika, lock the door behind you."

I have better things to worry about.

AMARA\*

The door is kicked open and my heart jumps to my throat, as a familiar figure towers over me and swiftly but, gradually pushes me against the wall. I look up at the face I had missed so much and my mind cannot comprehend, how he could be standing before me.

I had been restlessly waiting for this day that it seems so unreal right now. I raise my hand to his face, letting my fingers softly trail every inch of his skin. A soft frown takes over his facial expression.

Me: "Randall?"

I almost cannot recognise my voice as I whisper the name that has been my hope for the past days.

His eyes become watery, he blinks once, trying to hold back the tears.

Randall: "Me hemma." (My queen.)

He whispers softly.

This name has never done anything to me before, today it has me feeling overwhelmed and weak in the knees.

He grabs my waist and I shiver at his cold hands on my skin. He's glancing into my eyes, he scans my lips before, ravenously claiming them. I'm caught off guard... At first it's a weird feeling but, I'm knocked into my senses by my heart. These are the very lips I had been longing for.

I feel a tingling in my stomach and a rush of blood in my veins making me hot due to his kiss and his hands inside my top, gently circling on my skin.

A weird sensation runs through my body as he pushes his tongue in my mouth.

At this point, my breathing is racing at the same rate with my heart.

I can feel my body trembling at his touch, as he kisses me without giving me a chance to breathe.

He frees my lips leaving me panting and my chest heaving.

I flinch at the sudden sound of gun shots, Randall takes my hand and lugs me outside the bedroom. It is only now that I notice the gun in his hand, I didn't see him pull it out.

We're marching down a long corridor, he's walking fast and I have to jog occasionally as my small feet fail to keep up with his pace.

I haven't seen Kazi today, it could be her day off.

A man with a gun approaches from the corner, Randall takes him down with one shot. He looks at me as if to check if I am okay, he leads me towards a back door.

The gun shots seem to be coming from behind us, I have no idea what is going on. I'm terrified to my wits, I haven't had much luck lately. I could be shot from the back at this escape, my biggest fear is dying. Before, I could look death in the eye and mock it but, now that I have found this person who could possibly be my reason for living, death has become an enemy.

We tread down the metal stairs, I look at his hand holding mine.

I am following this man who is lugging me to a place I do not know, he appears to be unflinching.

How can he be calm at a time like this? Another man approaches running up the stairs, he shoots at us. Randall pushes me to the side as he shoots this man, I fall on my butt and grab the stair railing for balance.

The man tumbles down the stairs, he's dead. Randall takes my hand, brings me and inspects me for injuries.

Randall: "Are you alright?"

Me: "Can you stop killing people."

He frowns at me and continues dragging me down the stairs. We exit through some brown door and it leads us to a back yard.

It's night time and this area is surrounded by bright lights, the gun shots sound louder from here, it's almost deafening. Two men dressed in police uniform are standing at the gate, one of them spots us and nudges his partner. They approach us, we meet half way.

It registers in my mind that I have been rescued and will be sent back to my family.

"Randall?"

Randall frowns and nods.

Why is he not hiding this gun?

"We're with Styles, the car is ready."

The cop continues.

Randall nods again, he hasn't let go of my hand. We follow the policemen through a small gate.

"OKOLIE!!!"

We all turn to the sound of Mkhize's roars, he opens fire and so do the cops. Randall pulls me behind a wall.

One of the men is shot, I can't see where but, he's still alive.

"Go, I will hold him back."



He groans as he's lying on the ground, Mkhize is still shooting. He can't see us though, we follow the other cop to a police car. He gets in the driver's seat, Randall and I jump in the back, and we speed off.

I turn back to see, Mkhize shoot the policeman we left behind, multiple times without remorse, two more big men join him, they jump into a car that's parked on the side of the road. They are following us.

I turn to look at Randall, he's also seeing what I see.

Randall: "Don't worry, it will be over soon."

He assures me.

Randall: "Step it up man."

He commands the cop, he nods.

"They could catch up, this car is not that fast."

The man responds.

I can't seem to twig what is going on, if these men are police officers. Where is the back up?

Even in my befuddled state, I have qualms about this situation.

Randall: "Shit! Where is Styles?"

Randall growls.

"We left him behind, it's a war zone out there."

I scream and duck as a bullet pierces through the rear windshield. Randall places his hand on my back, shielding my upper body which lands on his lap.

Randall: "Stay down Amara."

The car begins lurching out of control, I raise my head to see the cop slanted over to the passenger's side. The bullet went through his head, I scream and smash my hand against my mouth, silencing myself.

Randall: "Stay down, I'm going to take over the wheel."

He jumps over to the driver's side, pushes the dead body to the passenger's side. He opens the door and uses his foot to push him out, that is a human being he just abandoned there.

He speeds off, there are still gun shots coming from behind us. Mkhize and his men are still shooting.

KHETHU\*

I have lost my cool calling Styles, he is not taking my calls. Since he left the house with his friends, it's past 10pm, he's usually at home around this time. I have been bad to him lately, I really don't know what's wrong with me.

I seem to have this urge to fight with him, and I am still baffled by the fact that he tolerates my shit.

I fear losing Styles to someone else, I fear losing him to Randall. He seems to love him more than me, I know he regards Randall as his brother. I just hate the bond they have, Randall is a bad boy. He hides behind his money and his calmness but, I see through him. I know what they used to do, how they made money for a living.

Drug dealings, smuggling guns and Rhino poaching, to name a few. When they opened the logistics company, Styles promised that he will never go back to the life of crime. I can't really trust that, I have a feeling that something big is going on at Randall's house and Styles is a part of it. I can't tell him anything as he always takes his side, he can't hear a word against Randall.

I dislike that and it just makes me hate Randall.

My phone rings, it must be Styles.

Gosh!

What does he want?

Me: "Mbongeni."

Mbongeni: "You don't sound happy to hear from me."

Why is he calling me at this time of the night?

Me: "Do you know what time it is? I have a man Mbongeni, you can't be calling me at this time."

Mbongeni: "Sorry, I wanted to check up on you. I was at gogo's house and your father said you went back to Stina's house."

I know he pretends not to know his name.

Me: "Styles, his name is Styles and yes, I went back."

Mbongeni: "Why are you with that man Khethu? He is not good for you."

This man is adding up to my frustrations.

Me: "I'm waiting for a phone call Mbongeni, sorry I can't chat."

Mbongeni: "Can I at least take you out for coffee tomorrow?"

Me: "Where is your girlfriend Mbo? I doubt she is okay with you calling me at this time of the night."

Mbongeni: "We're not serious."

Me: "That is not what it looked like to me."

Mbongeni: "We agreed on, no strings attached, I haven't really been in a serious relationship since you left me."

Can he get over that already?

Me: "Look, I have to go. Styles will call me and find the phone busy."

Mbongeni: "Is he not home? If I was your man, I would be home with you right now."

Mbongeni is draining me.

Me: "Goodbye Mbongeni."

Mbongeni: "Okay, I'll call you regarding our coffee date."

I drop the call, I am not going anywhere with him.

Where the hell is Styles? Why hasn't he called me yet?

RANDALL\*

Mkhize is still tailing us, he has seized fire. That old man just won't give up, he won't accept defeat. He is not getting Amara, now that I have her, I will not let her out of my sight.

She's lying on the back seat of the car, I saw fear in her eyes. I'm surprised though by her strength, she seems different.

She is not the fragile Amara that Styles brought to my house that night, I am glad in a way. You can imagine how astounded I was when she touched my face and returned my kiss. She didn't push me away this time, at first it felt surreal as I failed to grasp what was going on.

Styles had given orders according to his plan, get Amara and get out.

The plan went out the window when I saw her, everything fell away. It was just me and her. My heart danced to the sound of her voice calling out to me, my name rolling out of her mouth, only made me want to taste her lips, it was all my mind could occupy.

Now, I can barely think straight after that kiss.

Me: "Take this, don't get up. Press 4 and the put the phone on speaker when Styles answers."

I hold her the phone, his number is on speed dial.

Styles: "Randall."

He answers immediately, I can hear gun shots in the back ground.

Me: "Are you okay?"

He chuckles.

Styles: "I'm talking to you aren't I?"

Me: "Mkhize is after us, your men are down."

I deliver the sad news.

Styles: "Where are you guys?"

Me: "We're headed for the high way, this is risky Styles. That monkey will draw us attention, and we're driving a police car."

Styles: "I want you to take a left before the off ramp. There's a bridge there, you won't miss it. There will be about ten buses parked in a triangular motion."

Me: "Styles, we won't have time to get out of the car and hide inside a bus."

Styles: "You won't have to get out of the car, you keep driving and we'll meet at the agreed location. There will be a chopper, if I am not there in fifteen minutes, you two should leave. The guys and I will make a plan."

Me: "I am not leaving without you Styles."

Styles: "Your stubbornness Randy will get us killed."

Me: "Styles, I am serious."

Styles: "Well, so am I. Get Amara home, she's been through so much."

Dammit, he knows how to get to me.

Me: "You better make it out of there Styles or I will come to hell and get you myself."

He chortles, he doesn't take me serious.

Styles: "Hell is not ready for me bro, I still have Mkhize to deal with."

If I know Styles, he won't get himself killed.

Styles: "So, you turn left at the bridge, the drivers know about your arrival. They are armed just in case, mkhulu tries something. They know which car you're driving but, just to be sure, hoot three times. They will make a way for you and block Mkhize's car. The moment he approaches, they will blast the head lights, there's a guy on standby with a spot light as well. This will give you time to escape."

He finishes.

Me: "When did you think of this?"

He sighs.

Styles: "You still don't know me Randy, I'm seriously going to disown you."

Styles goes quiet for a while, we hear more gun shots in the back ground. I think he's in a shootout with someone.

Me: "Styles are you there?"

I briefly look back at Amara, she looks shaken as her hand is trembling in fear.

Me: "Give me the phone me hemma." (My queen.)

She hands it to me.

Me: "We'll be out of this soon."

I ease her worries in hopes that she will take comfort in my words.

Me: "Styles?"

I hope he is okay.

Styles: "Randy."

He sounds out of breath.

Me: "Are you okay?"

I leer through the rear view mirror, Mkhize is still behind us. That hard-headed bastard.

Styles: "Yeah, this is the most fun I have had in months. Why didn't you tell me that gun shooting is therapeutic? It's even better when you hit the target."

Me: "P.I.C man." (Passenger In Car.)

Amara will think us to be monsters who enjoy killing people.

Styles: "Sorry."

He snickers.

Me: "You're sick you know that, you should go paint balling. That's what normal people do."

He laughs.

Styles: "You should see Neo man, running around like a headless chicken. That man is a coward but, he ducks bullets like a pro. Death is chasing him but hey, the man is fast. He wants to live."

He laughs uncontrollably.

Me: "Where is he?"

Styles: "I don't know, I saw him run to Nkomo a while ago. He's using him as a shield."

This has me laughing, I can almost see Neo.

Me: "Neo, better come back alive."

Styles: "He will, don't worry."

Me: "Mkhonto will be there with his men."

I know he said he doesn't trust him, I do. Mkhonto is loyal only if you're loyal to him.

Styles: "Good, we need more men."

Okay...

Me: "I see the bridge."

Styles: "How far is Mkhize?"

I leer through the rear view mirror.

Me: "Not that far, I'm surprised he hasn't opened fire."

Styles: "There are cameras on that road. Shit, I'll call you back Randy."

He drops the call after grunting.

Me: "Amara, are you okay?"

She's too quiet.

Amara: "Yes."

She whispers softly.

Me: "I know you're scared but, nothing will happen to you. That man won't get to you."

She doesn't respond, I turn the car left like Styles had said. I can't see Mkhize's car anymore, it takes a while till I see the buses. They are blocking the road, I hoot three times, the first four in front move. They open a small a path, enough for the car to pass. They close the path the moment we are in the arch.

Me: "You can sit up me hemma." (My queen.)

She gets up, I can see her through the mirror.

Me: "Are you okay?"

She nods.

There are no cars on this side of the road.

To be continued...



NKOMO\*

I knew there were going to be a lot of men in this yard, not this much though. I have been running around shooting at people, Styles does it so flawlessly like it's a video game. I haven't seen Mkhize anywhere, he must have gone after Randall. That bastard is disgusting, chasing after a young girl. We need back up or else we are not making it out of here.

I haven't seen my family, Mkhize's brothers are not in sight as well. They must have turned on him when Lunga died, they all knew about the Okolie curse. My father is just too stubborn to listen to anyone.

"Nkomo."

I turn to see Neo run to me, I'm hiding behind a beam. The shooting is still going on, it's a good thing the swart team left. This would definitely be on the 8pm news.

Neo crashes on top of me as soon as he gets to me.

Neo: "Yoh ntwana, gwa nyiwa mo." (It's bad, here boy.)

He's heaving and he looks terrified.

Me: "Are you okay?"

He ogles at me like I cussed at him.

Neo: "Do I like okay to you Nkomo? I killed two people today ntwana, I have never killed anyone in my life. Not even those annoying flies at my mother's house, today I killed a whole human."

He sounds frantic.

Me: "Relax, you'll get over it."

Neo: "Get over what? This is the same as selling my soul to the devil, oh modimo. I'm going to hell, I won't survive in hell Nkomo. The devil will make me his play toy, I'm too handsome for hell nna." (Oh, God.)

The drama.

Me: "Calm down Neo."

Neo: "Yoh Modimo." (God.)

He screams when a bullet hits the top of this structure we're leaning on, shielding behind me. I turn to see a man shooting at us, I open fire and take him down with two bullets. I'm surprised the neighbours haven't called the police.

Neo: "I think we should surrender, Stylos is out there playing with bullets like it's new year's eve.



Dai man will get us killed Nkomo. Ha ke batle ho shoa nna. Let's surrender." (I don't want to die.)

He gabbles on panicky, I grab his shirt and pull him back as he gets up with his hands raised. This fool will get himself killed.

Me: "You're going to get us killed. What the hell is your problem?"

Neo: "Ntwana, whether we surrender or not. We are dying today."

Neo is such a coward, I have never seen so much fear in one's eyes before.

Me: "I don't know about you but, I am walking out of this alive."

Neo: "Nkomo ntwana, borrow me your phone I want to call my mother and tell her I love her. Mine fell when I was ducking bullets."

He nudges me.

Me: "Neo man stop."

I spot a man sneaking up on us, he's on Neo's side. He can't see him because he's occupied with his blabbering.

Me: "Neo watch out."

I howl, as the man aims the gun at him, Neo turns rapidly and shoots him. That was a good one.

Neo: "Your shit, nyamao."

He yells at the man.

Okay... He's panicking.

Neo: "Nna, I didn't sign up for this man. If I don't make it, find Khensani and tell her I love her."

Me: "Who's Khensani?"

I give him a confused look.

Neo: "She's this beautiful girl who lives next door my house, I call her thunder thighs."

He smiles.

Me: "Does Khensani know that you exist?"

He mopes at me.

Neo: "She will, once you tell her about me. Tell her I died a hero."

I can only shake my head at his absurdity.

I see Styles running past the gate, his body is hunched as he's ducking bullets. He's shooting everywhere and anywhere hitting the targets at every aim.

How the hell is he so good at this?



While Neo and I are hiding like cowards.

Neo: "tjeer, cava Stylos ntwana. Ke Chuck Norris." (Look at Styles, he's like Chuck Norris.)

He expresses in disbelief.

Styles sees us and frowns, I'm sure he is probably wondering why we are hiding.

Neo: "Ai Stylos, this is his daily bread moes."

He continues, I can only squat here in shame. We need to get back in the game. People drop dead where ever Styles passes, he's like a bloody plague.

He's really handling his gun well, I wouldn't want to cross his path.

We turn our heads as we hear a loud hoot, two Quantums drive in. There are men inside, some are peeking out the windows with different types of guns drawn out.

Neo: "Yoh, Yoh, Yoh. Hai madoda, satane oang mpatla vandag. Kea ko liheleng, this is what happens when you're surrounded by Zulu men." (The devil wants me today, I'm going to hell.)

I'm choosing to ignore him, Mkhonto jumps out of the Quantum. He has a whole team with him who start shooting the moment their feet hit the concrete ground. Randall must have called him.

He looks at me and smirks.

Me: "Now, the fun begins."

I declare as I jump up and begin shooting, leaving Neo leaning against the beam.

MOSES\*

I'm walking down the dark empty streets of this suburban community, there are not much cars passing by. I'm trying to hitch hike, no one is stopping for me. They probably think I'm crazy anyway- a dirty black man, walking down the streets of a rich neighbourhood, trying to catch a ride.

Home is far from here, I don't know where town is. Pretoria is new to me, if it happens that I get to the town. I will have to beg for money so, I can take a taxi home. Same applies, when I get to joburg.

Moses Mngoma, you have money stacked up somewhere in your house but, you have been degraded to a beggar. What's the worst that could happen now?

That evil man Mkhize, trampled on my dignity. I left it somewhere in his house. When I get home, I will take my money and I will run. Mkhize will kill me if he finds me.

Thankfully for the street lights, I don't have to walk in the dark.

I managed to escape that hovel when one of the guards brought me food, I overpowered him and took advantage of the commotion outside to escape. On my way out I spotted Amara, with some fool dragging her. I don't know if she was being rescued or what.

Why do I feel like someone is following me?

I turn around, there's no one.

The quietness of the night suddenly seems scary, the hairs on the back of my neck stand. I send my hand to rub off the unsettling feeling and pick up my pace. Out of the blue, my body is sweltering and dribs of sweat leak down to my eyes, its bitterness blinds me causing me to rub my eyes, briskly. It's in the middle of winter. I cannot explain why I'm sweating and burning.

I hear a pair of foot prints tread behind me, I'm too terrified to turn and inspect, not knowing what I will see. I double my steps, walking faster than I normally would. The footsteps pick up as well, at this time my t-shirt is damp from my perspiration.

Should I turn and see?

If it were a person, they would have said something by now. The only sounds resonating are my deep breaths, the footsteps and my heart robustly, thudding against my chest. Fear is densely hovering about, as if it were teasing me.

I scream as I feel a cold hand grab my arm, forcing me swivel. There's no one, the dim streets are empty, I can't hear the gun shots anymore. I must be far from Mkhize's house.

Who grabbed my arm though?

I turn to trek faster this time, my knees are wobbly and I feel a need to stop and take a break but, I am too horrified. My stomach is in knots, due to the fear that has engulfed me, causing me to release gas. I rub my hands at the discomfort on my belly.

<<< Thula thul, thula baba, thula sana. >>> (Keep quiet my child, keep quiet my baby.)

<<< Thul' ubabuzo fika, ekuseni. >>> (Be quiet, daddy will be home in the morning.)

Me: "Hayyi." (No.)

He's back, Vusamazulu is back.

"Moses, Moses."

He whispers my name with a ghostly voice.

I feel asphyxiated by the horror that has come upon me, something is compelling me to turn. I swing around pivoting on my heel.

Me: "Zu... Zulu."

My voice shakes as I gasp his name in fear, he's standing before me with his head bowed. I can't see his face, the only thing I see are drops of blood falling from his face to the top of his shoes.



Zulu: "Indodakazi yami ilahlekile, indodakazi yami ilahlekile. Indodakazi yami ilahlekile." (My daughter is missing.)

He whispers these words repeatedly, this is all about Amara. Even when I have gotten rid of her, she won't let me be in peace. I open my mouth to speak, I can't get a word out. My throat is clogged by fear.

Zulu: "Buyisa indodakazi yami ekhaya." (Take my daughter back home.)

His whispers are bone chilling and I can't grasp how I am standing before a ghost.

Me: "Ng... ngiyeke... angisiye... owakubulala." (Leave me alone, I am not the one who killed you.)

He raises his face and I scream at the ghastly view, blood is oozing out of his eyes. He's crying blood tears as his face holds a look of agony.

Me: "Hayyi... Zulu... hayyi." (No Zulu, no.)

I scream, trying to move but, my feet are stuck to the ground. He slowly tilts his head to the side, his blood shot eyes glaring at me.

Zulu: "Indodakazi yami ilahlekile, busiya indodakazi yami ekhaya." (My daughter is missing, bring my daughter back home.)

He echoes like a broken record, I press my palms on my ears and clench my eyes as his voice torments me. Suddenly, it goes quiet.

Gradually, I open my eyes to see no one before me. He's gone. The trails of blood are gone, I'm left questioning my sanity. I feel a soginess on my pants, only to realise that I have wet myself.

## STYLES\*

That was a hectic battle we had back there, I'm glad we made it out alive. A lot of people died, Mkhonto came through with his people. Nkomo drove home with Neo, I told him to go to his house as his presence will alarm Amara.

It's right after 2am, I have so many missed calls from Khethu. I was too busy to attend to them, I hope she will understand but, I know that I am fooling myself. That word doesn't exist in her vocabulary anymore.

I notice smoke coming from my house, as I turn on my street.

There's a fire, my house is on fire.

God no, Khethu is there.

Waiting for the gate to open is taking longer than usual, as my impatience has grown.

I dash out of the car and notice that the smoke is coming from behind the house. I rush there, only to find Khethu standing in front of a big fire, she has a bottle of gasoline in her hand and a box of matches. Thinking she wants to jump in, I rush to her and pull her away.

Me: "Baby, are you okay?"

I cradle her cheeks in the palm of my hands, she's been crying. Her eyes are red.

Khethu: "Where have you been Styles?"

Me: "I was with Randall."

Her face changes.

Khethu: "Is that why you were not answering your phone?"

Her calmness is scaring me.

Me: "My phone was in the car, I'm sorry baby. You knew I was coming back, that's no reason to want to jump in the fire."

She pushes me away, a frown building up on her face.

Khethu: "Oh no, that fire is not for me."

She states coldly.

Me: "What were you doing then?"

Now that she mentioned it, it doesn't smell like wood burning there.

Khethu: "All your clothes are in that fire Styles, I am not going to take your shit."

The bomb she drops leaves me astounded.

Me: "What?"

I probably heard wrong.

Khethu: "Yes, I burnt all your clothes."

She says it so calmly as if it's a normal thing to do.

Khethu: "You know that irking, aggravating feeling when you call someone and they don't answer their phone. That feeling stings, Styles. All I could think about was that you're probably fucking some bitch, while I wait for you at home like a stupid, clueless, submissive house wife. I wanted to burn you but, I love you too much so, I opted for your clothes."

She explains her insanity with a blank expression on her face.

Me: "Khethu?"

I say in a gasp.

Khethu: "Hayi suka." (Get out here.)

She pushes me, making way for her to pass and walks away leaving me bewildered. I have to get out of here, I'm about this close to retaliating. Then again, she might burn my house down if I leave. I have no choice but, to go in that house and face her demons.

RANDALL\*

We finally made it home safe, I haven't heard from Styles yet. I have to call him once Amara has settled in. The house is dark, I open the door and lead her in. She's toddling and scanning her surroundings, as if this is her first time here. I reach for the light switch on the wall, close to the door. She turns to look at me as she holds a look of confusion.

Me: "What is it me hemma?" (My queen.)

She shakes her head.

Me: "Something is on your mind Amara. Won't you tell me what it is?"

Amara: "I'm just afraid that I will wake up tomorrow only to find that, this is all a dream."

She states shyly, I smirk at her fears.

Me: "This is not a dream, you're here."

I take her hand, she looks at it, then at me.

Amara: "What if he comes back? He was able to get to me in this house."

I understand her worries.

Me: "That will not happen again me hemma, you're back with me and I am not letting you go. This is the beginning of everything, a new life for us Amara. I will wipe away all your tears, I am not perfect but, I will try to be the best person for you."

I intertwine my fingers with hers and carefully examine her expression, I thought she would be uncomfortable at this.

Amara: "Thank you for saving me."

I flash her a simper, she doesn't really have to thank me.

Me: "Do you need to take a bath?"

She shakes head.

Me: "Let me take you to bed then. It's almost dawn."

With her hand in mine, I lead her up the stairs. I sneer at the thought that, she lets me hold her hand, this could mean that she is beginning to trust me.

We get to the bedroom.

Me: "Will you be okay?"

She raises her eyes to leer at me and nods reluctantly, before turning to look towards the bed. It hits me that, the last time she was here, I killed a man in her presence, right in this room.

Me: "Maybe a different room will do."

I suggest and lead her out, before she responds.

The room is comfortable and has everything, her facial expression confirms that she will be okay. I watch her as she toddles to the bed and sits.

I can't bring myself to leaving her alone, she's looking at me and the need to be with her grows.

How do I walk out now?

My phone beeps, it's a message from Styles.

Styles: {Home safe, talk tomorrow.}

Me: {My house around 12pm.}

I raise my head to look at Amara.

Me: "Can I ask you something me hemma?" (My queen.)

Amara: "Yes."

She whispers softly, I see a bit of shyness in her.

I saunter to her, she drops her gaze as my stabbing gawp holds her eyes.

Me: "Can I hold you."

Her eyes rush up, she leers at me. The worst thing right now would be for her to reject me. Patience is no friend of mine, I won't be able to sleep without her by my side.

She doesn't say anything but, crawls on the bed and lies down. I don't know if this is a yes, I am willing to take a chance though. I kick off my shoes and ascend on the bed, I cage her in my arms. She's a bit stiff so, knowing her weakness, I bury my face on the crook of her neck and plant a soft kiss. She loosens up and in a while I hear her soft snores.

STYLES\*

We never have visitors sleep over so, the guest bedrooms have no bedding. I dread, having to go into my bedroom to get a blanket, I'm not going to sleep in the same room as Khethu.

I walk in to find her laying on the bed, she's in her sleepwear. She sits up and watches me as I saunter in. I grab the extra blanket on the bed without making any eye contact.

Khethu: "Where are you going?"

Me: "The guest room."

Khethu: "You've never slept in the guest room before."

Me: "There's a first time for everything."

Khethu: "Styles, you are not leaving me alone in this room."

Me: "I am not sleeping in the same room with your crazy ass."

I toil towards the door, she runs before me and locks the door again.

Me: "What the fuck Khethu? This again?"

She snatches the blanket from me and tosses it on the bed.

Khethu: "I am not going to sleep alone in our bed Styles. Why would you want to do this to me? Is there another woman?"

Me: "If this is candid camera then, the joke is on me. I give up."

I state, as I brows around the room.

Khethu: "It's not funny Styles."

She snaps.

Me: "If there was another woman, I would be with her right now. I can't be coming home to this. You're driving me crazy Khethu, one would think you're possessed. What is wrong with you?"

Khethu: "Nothing is wrong with me."

She frowns in that.

Me: "There's nothing wrong with you? You burnt all my clothes and you say there's nothing wrong with you."

Khethu: "You compelled me to do it, in a way it's your fault. What man comes home to his woman at 2am? If you behave Styles, I will also behave."

I honestly have no words for this.

Me: "I am behaved Khethu, you're the one who is losing her mind here."

She raises her hand to slap me, I block it before it reaches my cheek. She widens her eyes at me before accepting a frown.

She grabs my left hand and dips her teeth in my thumb joint, I feel them sink in as I try to pull her head away.

Me: "Khethu stop it."

I yell, as the pain shoots through my whole arm, I wouldn't be surprised if she comes back with a

piece of flesh. I finally push her off, she's heaving as she looks at me with rage. I inspect my hand that, now has prints of her teeth, I need to put this in ice.

Me: "You need help khethu."

Khethu: "I refuse to be treated like trash Styles. Do I not deserve your respect?"

Such hypocrisy.

Me: "It's 2 in the morning and you have the energy to fight?"

Khethu: "I'm not fighting Styles, I am standing up for my rights."

What the hell does she mean?

Me: "What rights? What is it that I'm doing wrong?"

Khethu: "My rights as your woman. You don't treat me right Styles, you have adopted this dominant behaviour."

She screams, I don't have the strength to argue back.

Me: "Give me the key, I am tired and I want to go to bed."

She Frowns at me and rolls her eyes in the process.

Khethu: "The only bed you will be sleeping on, is this one."

She states, pointing at the bed. The key is back in her bust again, she toddles to bed and gets under the covers. I'm left standing in the middle of the room, flabbergasted.

Why am I not able to put her to order?

I hate that I love her so much.

Khethu: "Will you stand there all night or come to bed? And, please switch off the light, it's too bright."

She asks and commands as she raises her head, no way am I sleeping on that bed with her.

I grab the extra blanket, spread it on the floor, drop the pillow and lie down. She's watching me with a disgusted look, as I do this.

To be continued...



67\*

A week later.

NOMBULELO\*

"I want that baby in your womb, give it to me."

Me: "Mbuso!!!"

I jump up screaming from the bed, waking Mbuso up as well.

Mbuso: "What's wrong?"

He puts his hand on my back.

Me: "I had that dream again."

My heart is beating fast and my knees are weak, this happens every night now. I keep dreaming of that woman, saying she wants my baby.

Mbuso: "We have to do something Lelo, having the same dream repeatedly cannot be good."

Me: "I need water."

He reaches to his side of the bed and gets me a glass. Mbuso and I have been sharing a bed since, he was right about the nervousness not happening again.

Me: "Thanks."

I gulp it down in one go.

Mbuso: "What do you think this could be?"

Me: "I don't know, if I did, I would've found a solution."

Mbuso: "Maybe you should see someone about it."

Me: "A sangoma?" (A traditional healer?)

Mbuso: "Whoever you're comfortable with."

This could be spiritual, maybe I should consider it.

Me: "There's something I can't shake off, this woman tormenting my dreams. I think I have seen her somewhere."

Mbuso: "She shows her face now?"

Me: "No, her face is always hidden. Her body though, Mbuso I have seen her before but, I can't put the puzzle together."

Mbuso: "I have a friend who knows someone, the woman is a prophet. We can go see her."

Me: "I guess it's time I find clarification."

I hope Zuma has nothing to do with this, he was into muti (traditional medicine.) He said his mother told him that, 90% of people use it and when you don't, all their bad luck falls on you. I thought it to be absurd.

Mbuso: "Yeah, I don't want anything bad to happen to you and Goku."

I smile and roll my eyes.

Me: "Ey that name. If I wanted to date a Japanese, I would have, you know?"

He laughs.

Mbuso: "Huh!!! Poor guy, he wouldn't have been able to handle a strong, phenomenal black woman."

I didn't know this is how he thinks of me.

Me: "You are a romantic, you know that?"

He grins.

Mbuso: "I said the right words and earned me a title as the world's most romantic man."

He taps his shoulder, I laugh at him.

Me: "Relax, don't get carried away. I'm not done."

He frowns.

Me: "You are a romantic, you just don't show it often. It's hidden but, I like you the way you are."

Mbuso: "Thank you for bursting my bubble."

He pouts.

Me: "I wouldn't change a thing about you, you're perfect."

That smile on his face...

Mbuso: "I didn't hear that, say it again."

I roll my eyes as I smile at his silliness.

Me: "You're perfect."

He stands on the bed as he jumps with excitement.

Mbuso: "You hear that world? My woman thinks I'm perfect."

He announces loudly, if it wasn't in wee hours of the morning, the neighbours would be knocking on our door.

Me: "Mbuso, you do realize that, it's in the middle of the night, right?"

He kneels in front of me, his eyes smiling at me.

Mbuso: "I don't care, people must know that I am the luckiest man alive."

A side I don't see often as he's always clowning.

Me: "You're sweet."

Mbuso: "I know right?"

He pecks my lips.

This happiness scares me, it almost feels like it will be snatched away from me like everything I held dear. I don't know what I would do if I were to lose this man, I'm not prepared for it.

STYLES\*

I wake up with Khethu straddling me and planting kisses on my body, she smiles when my eyes meet hers.

Me: "What are you doing?"

Khethu: "Kissing my man."

She smiles and pecks my lips while trying to take off my t-shirt.

Me: "I'm not in the mood."

I try to push her off, she clenches her legs around my waist.

Khethu: "Come on Styles, I need you. What do you want me to do with myself?"

She tattoos kisses all over my face and gently bites my ear, usually this would make me weak and I would give in to her. Today I am repulsed by her kisses.

Me: "I said, I'm not in the mood."

I push her off harder this time and she falls to her side of the bed, I quickly get up and put on a t-shirt.

Khethu: "Now, you're not man enough to make love to your woman? You can't get it up anymore Styles?"

Her words break me and aggravate me at the same time. I grip her arm, pulling her off the bed, she crushes on my chest. She's glaring up at me with a smug look on her face.

Me: "How dare you say that to me? I have tolerated your nonsense long enough."

I grate.

Khethu: "What will you do Styles? Hit me? Do it, hit me Styles. Remember I'm a woman, the moment I run out of this house and scream Gender Based Violence. People will come to my rescue, at this point, the whole country is against you. There are trends going on, on social media, I'm sure you've seen them. 'How about if you see a woman abused, beat that nigga challenge.' No one will believe a man over a woman thanks to the GBV campaign."

I push her off.

Me: "You're sick."

I grab my phone and march out of the room.

Khethu: "Where are you going Styles?"

She strides after me as I scurry down the stairs. I grab the car keys from the kitchen counter, she tries to take them from me but, is unsuccessful.

Khethu: "Styles!!!"

She screams at me, I ignore her as I tread outside. My car is parked in the drive way.

Khethu: "Styles don't go."

She screams, as I plod to the car. She picks up a stone and throws it at me. I duck and it hits the car window, she's on my face by the time I bring myself up. She catches me off guard and tackles me, pushing me on the ground. She straddles me as she throws punch after punch on my face. My hands are on her waist, trying to pull her off of me.

Khethu: "You are trash Styles Sishi."

She screams repeatedly.

I manage to lift her up and shove her to the side. She rips off the sleeve of her top, it beats me where she got the strength from. She starts pushing me against the car and boxing me with her tiny hands.

Khethu: "Gender based violence. Help, gender based violence."

She screams her lungs out, while throwing herself at me, making it look like I'm attacking her.

Me: "Khethu stop."

I restrain her hands, in hopes that she will calm down but, this just makes her scream even louder.

Khethu: "Gender based violence."

She carries on with this repetition.

I see a couple from across the street march out of their house. This is bad for me, they will believe her words, the only thing is to get out of here.

"Hey, what are you doing?"

The man yells, as he runs to us.

I shove Khethu to the side, gently and jump in the car. Her face says she can't believe that I'm leaving. My phone rings as I drive away. I check the caller ID, hoping it's not her.

It's Sethu, we've actually been talking almost every day now. We have hung out a couple of times, she is a fun person to be around.

Me: "Nurse."

She giggles.

Sethu: "I just thought of you and had to call."

She states, this is new. She's not usually this bold.

Me: "It's good to know that someone out there, is thinking of me."

She giggles.

Sethu: "Can I tell you something? Please don't laugh or think I'm weird."

Me: "I'm all ears."

Sethu: "While running my rounds, I felt this need to pray for you."

That's also new.

Me: "Okay."

How do I respond to this?

Sethu: "Are you okay Mr. Styles? Something is not right."

Me: "I'm fine."

I lie, I'm actually dying inside. My pride won't let me speak out.

Sethu: "Okay, you know you can talk to me, right? My pastor's favourite saying is 'a problem shared is a problem solved.'"

The sound of her voice holds a smile.

Me: "You're a church girl?"

I didn't know, she laughs.

Sethu: "If that's a thing, yes, I go to church on Sundays when I'm not working. You should come with, some time."

I laugh.

Me: "I'm not really a church person, God would literally send St. Michael to stop me from

entering those doors.”

I think she would laugh but...

Sethu: “God is not a respecter of persons Mr. Styles. He accepts us all with our flaws and mistakes. He wants you just the way you are.”

This is getting uncomfortable for me.

Me: “Is this a free sermon or should I tithe after this?”

I joke and this time she laughs.

Sethu: “You’re funny.”

Speaking to her, I realize that I have forgotten about my troubles. My heart feels a bit lighter and there seems to be a tad bit of hope that everything will be okay.

Me: “Thank you for the call Sethu.”

I mean it.

Sethu: “No problem, I’m here if you want to talk and I’m praying for you.”

This means a lot although, I am not a believer.

Me: “Thank you.”

Sethu: “Bye.”

I cut the call and my phone rings again, it’s Khethu. I put it on silent, I am done with her.

RANDALL\*

Styles looks like hell, that woman has finally managed to drag him down. It’s been over ten days and Khethu is still at it, she refuses to get help. Styles spends most of his time in my house, if he’s not here, he’s with Sethu. Their friendship has blossomed, his face lights up when she is brought up.

He tells me a story about how Khethu attacked him at a restaurant.

Styles: “I decided that we go out, maybe spending time together was what we need.”

{FLASH BACK}

The waitress takes our orders, this time I notice that her attitude has changed, she keeps shooting daggers at me and eyeing the poor lady. The waitress gives me the friendly customer smile and walks off.

khethu: "What was that?"

I'm already taken aback by her conduct.

Me: "What?"

I sense an argument, I know how her face looks when she's about to start. She has become contentious.

Khethu: "You were looking at her Styles. Is she pretty? You think she's pretty, right?"

Me: "Please don't start."

Khethu: "I'm not starting anything, you started it by undressing the waitress with your eyes."

I sigh heavily.

Me: "Khethu you're seeing things, we're in public, do not start an argument with me."

Khethu: "Why don't we call her over so, you can tell her how beautiful she is. Who knows, maybe you can go shag her in the toilets?"

I clench my jaw at her words.

Me: "Don't fucking talk to me like that."

I growl at her, she responds with a grin.

Khethu: "That's the truth, you're clearly an aspiring man whore like your friend Randall."

She spews out the words, I'm not hurt by her insolence anymore. It now aggravates me.

Me: "Go to hell Khethu, I'm out of here."

I get up, she jumps and pushes me back on the seat. She has this cold emotionless expression.

Khethu: "You're not going anywhere, we're going to sit down and eat like we planned."

She's saying this while throwing slaps at me, I shield them with my hands. People are watching, some are taking videos and pictures. This is when the manager comes and asks her to leave the eatery. She's adamant and refuses to leave, I walked out and drive home, leaving her screaming my name.

{END OF FLASH BACK}

Styles: "I'm tired Randy, people keep empowering our women but, who comes to talk to us about regaining our dignity and lends a listening ear."

He's finally opening up to me, after being in denial for so long.

I found him waiting for me in the back yard, I have to give it to Styles. One would turn to alcohol or drugs just to numb the pain yet, he remained who he is.

Styles: "I don't know that woman in my house, she's manipulative and abusive. She drags me down at every chance she gets, I haven't been able to touch her you know and that has frustrated her so much. She would insult my manhood to a point where I give in and sleep with her, and believe me when I say, I feel like shit after."

I'm going to kill that woman, I had no idea it had come this far.

Styles: "Men have been sexually abused in conflicts, it's not completely out there because it's a hidden issue. It's not like I can't fight back, I guess my love for her has led me here. I let her get away with everything."

Me: "It's not love anymore bruh, it's pity. You feel like you owe her, you have been together for over four years and letting go of a long term relationship is not easy."

He sighs, as he ponders upon my words.

Styles: "You know I let her do whatever she wants because I thought she needed to heal from losing her grandparents but, it didn't stop. She started with pinching me even in public. It turned to scratches, then outburst of anger and escalated to punches and slaps. She would attack me for speaking to a female and assume that I am sleeping with that person. I can't even sleep in the guest room because she locks the door and when I'm able to get out, she follows me there. Statistics support the fact that women make up the majority of victims of gender based violence but, what about men and boys who are also victims?"

Me: "This is enough Styles, you cannot live in bondage. Khethu must go."

Styles: "Where will she go Randy? I'm all she knows."

Me: "Styles I'm not kidding man, get that woman out of your house or I will do it. She won't be the first woman to be dumped after a long term relationship. Khethu is old enough to be held accountable for her actions, you both consented to this relationship and you don't owe her shit."

Styles: "Khethu is broken Randall, I need to help her."

Me: "You see this, right here? This, is the hold she has on you. She's got you by the hook and she knows it, Styles I am not going to bury you. Do you hear me? She will eventually kill you, you know that right?"

He's not saying anything.

Me: "Okay, you want to talk statistics? Let's talk statistics, Styles. You're not the first man to be a victim of domestic violence, 40% of men are victims of gender based violence and men are more likely to be killed during encounters. If you do not send Khethu away, she will kill you. I know as a man it's hard to speak out, people will laugh in your face and say you're not man enough. Why do you let your woman wear the pants in the house? They will call you all sort of names. They speak from a distance because they are not in your situation. It's not because you're weak but, you're a real man. The ones who mock you for not hitting a woman, they are half men. It's them whom women should be afraid of because if tables were turned, clearly they would turn to violence. I'm not going to lie bruh, the world needs more men like you, you're a protector and I am fucking proud of you."



A tear falls from his eye, he wipes it off swiftly.

Styles: "My spirit is broken Randall, I stay awake every night thinking of ways to kill myself. I have fallen into depression, I lost my self-respect and my dignity. That woman has left me feeling powerless and empty."

Me: "We will get you help."

Styles: "No, I don't want anyone knowing about this. Promise me Randall, you will not tell a single soul, not even Neo and Nkomo."

Me: "I will never to do that to you, we're brothers and I've got you. Can I ask you for something though?"

He scowls at me.

Me: "Please, let me get that demon out of your house, once I'm done with her..."

Styles: "No, I know how you deal with people. I am done with Khethu, I will send her back to her father."

Me: "Khethu is a disgrace to women, there are woman who are suffering out there in the hands of monsters."

Styles: "Can you believe she's using the GBV campaign as her defence."

Me: "That is low, I'm still waiting for permission to deal with her."

He shakes his head.

Styles: "I know how you deal with people, look what you've done with Olivia. You have kept her prisoner in her own house."

Me: "I'm not done with her yet."

Styles: "I know. How is Amara?"

My favourite thing to talk about.

Styles: "I can't believe you have a woman in your bed, no woman has ever graced your bed."

Me: "We are back to being idiots? Thanks for the memo."

He might laugh but, I can see the pain in his eyes.

Me: "Amara is okay, she's settling in. I fear that she might want to see her family."

Styles: "Has she brought it up?"

Me: "No, I know she's thinking about it though."

Styles: "Do you think maybe you should take her there?"

Bad idea.

Me: "No, that baboon Mkhize is still out there and that son of a bitch Moses."

Styles: "Mkhize is as sly as a fox. He won't show himself anytime soon, he's ashamed. He lost a battle, his wife has gone crazy and his brothers have turned against him. He doesn't have the courage to show his face but, I know he will be back for revenge."

Me: "Can't we just kill him?"

Styles: "That son of a bitch has escaped death many times, his ancestors are with him."

That means nothing.

Me: "I think it's time we turn the tables, let him be with his ancestors. I'm tired of seeing his ugly face."

He chortles and shakes his head.

Styles: "You need to control that hunger that man still has to suffer. I want everyone he holds dear to turn against him, including his family. Family means a lot to Mkhize, you noticed how he couldn't deal with Nkomo turning against him. Once he's all alone, we attack. We take his business and leave him with nothing. I want to see Mkhize washing taxis at the rank, I want to see him beg for money. I am going to turn that man into a hobo."

Me: "I like the sound of that. So, you want to take over his business?"

Styles: "What will I do with a taxi business? I know a guy, Kenneth Mkhize. He owns taxis, he is one ruthless son of a gun."

Me: "Great! Another Mkhize man?"

He chortles.

Styles: "They are not related, Kenneth would really love this gift."

Me: "I see. Who is he?"

Styles: "You don't want to know him, trust me."

He laughs.

I don't know what that means but, I know that Mkhize deserves everything that's coming to him.

To be continued...

68\*

RANDALL\*

Things with Amara are going okay, we are taking it one step at a time. She has awkward moments which I try to brush off, she's a bit shy around me. But, she will get a hang of it. I like seeing her being free around the house, it's different because this time, she's not locked up in a room.

Speaking of a room, my obsession over her has brought me to her bedroom every night. The longing to hold her in my arms is always greater than me.

I see her plodding down the foyer, she's headed upstairs.

I sneak up behind her and corner her against the wall, she stifles a yelp. Her mind was somewhere else.

Me: "It's just me."

I say softly.

This zombie mode of hers worries me.

Amara: "You scared me."

She sighs.

Me: "You should stop thinking a lot, your brain will burst."

She forces a smile.

I am not going to ask what the problem is because I can't fix it at the moment. But, I can assure her that, she will see her family one day.

Me: "You know why you can't see them right?"

She nods.

Me: "What do you want, me hemma? Tell me and I will give it to you." (My queen.)

She shakes her head.

Amara: "Nothing, the fact that I'm here with you is enough."

I smirk at her answer, I didn't expect her to say this. There is more though, her eyes say it.

She silently glances at me, I can't tell what she's thinking. I wish she would tell me what is on her mind. Being this close to her I am overcome by the urge to kiss her. She sees me scrutinizing her lips, I circle my hand on her waist and pull her close to me, shutting the space between us. Her hands fall on my upper arms, she's diffidently glancing up at me.



Me: "You're mine to keep, me hemma." (My queen.)

She closes her eyes and bites her lower lip when I lean over to take her lips into mine. Her body trembles under my touch, as I suck on her lips. I smirk through the kiss when I realize that, she's not letting me in. So, I nip her lower lip, she stifles a moan and I'm in. My tongue finds hers and in a moment we are lost in this unquenchable kiss.

"Get a room."

Amara flinches and pulls back at the sound of Raven's voice, this man has bad timing.

I turn around and here he is, in my foyer with a grin on his face.

I growl at him, he laughs in return.

Me: "I think it's time I get a dog, for unwanted visitors."

He laughs and toddles to us.

Raven: "So, this is the woman who has kept my brother in exile?"

He thinks he's funny, Amara smiles.

Raven takes her hand and kisses it, I don't know why he should practice his courtesy on other people's women. Amara still holds a welcoming smile.

Raven: "Raven Okolie, the handsome brother."

He introduces.

Raven: "You must be Amara?"

Amara: "Yes, pleasure to meet you Raven."

Raven: "The pleasure is mine. I know my brother is ugly but, you don't have to do him a favour. We'd understand if you leave him, think of the kids. Or, is it their problem?"

She laughs.

Amara: "It's their problem."

She responds with a laugh, as she glances at me, I shake my head. Raven is crazy.

Me: "If I remember correctly, I bought an axe last week. It will slice through that hand nicely, keep holding her hand Rav. I will do the honours of removing it."

I declare, they both laugh.

Amara: "Who will greet me like this if you cut off his hand?"

I smirk at her.

Me: "I'm here, aren't I? You don't need his old brittle hand."

She laughs while Raven chortles.

Raven: "You're a hater."

Me: "Now, that you two have met. Raven please, let your feet lead you back where you came from, we were in the middle of something."

I wink at Amara, she shies away from me while, trying to suppress a smile.

Raven: "Please, stop. I'm still in the room and I'm not going anywhere."

He makes a face.

Amara: "I'm going to find Chioma."

Me: "Thanks a lot Raven. Why are you in my house, again?"

He laughs.

Raven: "It was nice meeting you Amara."

Amara: "Like wise."

She responds as she beams at me reticently. I watch her walk up the stairs till she's out of sight.

Raven: "Tie her around your waist, why don't you?"

He mocks me.

Me: "Piss off."

He sneers and follows me to the patio.

Me: "Where is your father?"

I inquire as I position myself on a chair.

Raven: "He's not back yet. Grandma is sick, Randall, she's been sick for a while now. The doctors had given her six months to live, she's still holding on. She says she will not join her husband until she sees you."

Me: "I don't believe it."

Raven: "Why?"

He frowns.

Me: "Raven, that man will do anything for me to go back to Ghana. Heck, he'll even fake his own death."

Raven: "But, it's true Randy."

Me: "Really? Where is she?"

Raven: "She's at some hospital in Accra."

Me: "Have you been there to see her?"

Raven: "Not really, father said something about her being under quarantine."

His face holds deep expressions of confusion.

Me: "I rest my case."

Raven: "Why would he lie about his mother like this?"

Me: "Because he is a sick narcissist, who takes pride in dominating over people. I'm sorry Rav but, your father is messed up. Tell him to stay away from me and he should stay in Ghana."

Raven: "What about your calling?"

Me: "What calling? Funny how nana said Amara is my chosen one but, your father keeps pushing his bride down my throat. I am tired Raven, I don't want to fight him."

He shakes his head, he disagrees with me. If it were him in my shoes, he would adhere that old man's commands.

Raven: "I think you and father need to come to a conclusion, I don't want him to be disappointed Randy. Everything he's ever done is for his kids, the least we can do is be open minded about this."

His statement has me sniggering in disbelief.

Me: "If you're going to tell me that shit, then stay away from me."

Raven: "Uze."

He gasps.

Me: "You are your father's son, I see he has taught you well."

Raven: "Will you really sit there and insult me? I am your elder brother."

Me: "I'm not insulting you Uzoma, I am just stating the truth. Do you know, you sound like him right now? I would think he cloned himself before leaving."

He titters.

Raven: "You are stubborn as shit."

Me: "I learnt from the best hence, father and I can never get along."

He sighs deeply as he sits back on the chair.

Raven: "I give up."

Me: "Thank you."

NTOMBI\*



My brothers thought they had the upper hand, I will show them that I can do just as much.

I called Moses's uncles over, I told them everything that Jonas and Mhambi have done to their son. Jonas' face is priceless right now, he was shocked when Zakhele, Moses' brother and Ndumiso his uncle walked through the door early this morning. They have been going back and forth about this issue, I don't care how they come to a conclusion. I want my husband found and home safe.

This living room, suddenly seems smaller with everyone in it. Petunia, like the good wife she is, is in my kitchen working hard to impress these people. When Moses is found I want them out of my house.

Zakhele: "This is a tough issue. How are we going to solve it?"

This one likes speaking English, he's the middle child. Moses is the first born and they have a sister, who lives somewhere in this country. We are not best of friends so, I don't bother about her.

Jonas: "The only way to solve this, is for Moses to come and atone for his sins. Your brother has sinned against my family, he sold our child."

Jonas has a smart mouth.

Zakhele: "I'm sure there is an explanation for this, you say that our bride is the one who told you this? Moses was not around to speak for himself, Ntombi must have exaggerated things a bit."

Jonas: "Awukahle wena. A bit? Your brother trafficked our child, finish and klaar." (Hold on.)

I don't know why uncle Ndumiso is quiet, he's been drinking that beer since they sat down. Jonas offered them alcohol, he knows once they are drunk, it will be easy to get through to them.

Me: "Trafficked bhuti? Haibo, ihaba?" (You're exaggerating it.)

He gives me a cold look.

Mhambi: "Ufunani la Ntombi? You're supposed to be in the kitchen, helping Petunia cook." (What are you doing here Ntombi?)

Me: "I'm standing in for my husband, I know bad things will be said about him in his absence. I am here to make sure that doesn't happen."

I respond while glaring at Jonas, he shakes his head in disbelief.

Jonas: "Uyabona le, yinkinga yakho Ntombi. You think you can stand up against me wena?" (You see, this is your problem.)

Me: "Bhuti, you put a curse on my husband. Do you expect me to laugh about that?"

Zakhele: "I don't blame Ntombi for standing up for her husband, it is her duty as his wife to fight his battles."

Mhambi "Heyi, amasimba lawo. Uthi udadewethu asekele udoti?" (That's bullshit. You're saying

my sister should support shit?)

Njabulo: "Baba, asilwi. Yehlisa umoya." (Calm down, we are not fighting.)

Now, he decides to speak.

Jonas: "Lalelani la, the only reason you people are still calm about this, is because we threatened to get Moses arrested." (Listen here.)

He's right, they were livid when they got here. Till Jonas told them he will open a case against Moses, only then, did they want to speak in a civilized manner. It is safe to say that my brothers have become my biggest enemies.

Uncle Njabulo and Zakhele have dropped their heads in shame. Their visit is supposed to be working in my favour, I'm starting to think I made a mistake.

Njabulo: "Kukhona indlela esingalungisisa ngayo lendaba." (There is a way we can fix this.)

Mhambi: "Qhubeka." (Continue.)

Njabulo: "We can ask the ancestors to find her for us."

Jonas: "Who's ancestors?"

He grimaces at them.

Zakhele: "Your ancestors because she is of your blood."

Jonas: "Shame, my ancestors are busy. I am not going to disturb them over nonsense."

Zakhele: "Please bafo, let's talk like men. Surely you cannot let my brother suffer like this. My father must be turning in his grave, Moses was his favourite child."

Jonas: "Let him turn, he must turn in his graze. His son has become a disgrace. I married my sister to your family, thinking you will protect her. Look what you have turned her into, a 'yes woman'. She agrees with everything Moses does, she thinks the world of that man. How do you think that makes us feel?"

He is so dramatic.

Me: "Bhuti please, don't speak about me as if I am not in the room."

Jonas: "Ntombi, ngicela singaxabani tu. I know you want us out of your house and we will go once our child has come home." (Let's not argue please.)

Zakhele: "Bafo, on behalf of my brother, we would like to apologise for what has happened to your family. I am asking that we work together in this, let's help each other."

Mhambi: "Ai Jonas, labantu angathi abasizwa." (These people are not listening to us.)

We are disturbed by a loud knock at the door. This house is always busy.

I get up to open.





Me: "Tebogo? Ufunani?" (What do you want?)

She's wheezing.

Tebogo: "Ntombi, hurry. Moses is outside he's talking to himself and chasing people."

STYLES\*

I regret going back home, Khethu began barking at me, the moment I stepped into the house. I found her sitting on the couch like she was waiting for something.

We've been at it since and I have made a decision, this is not the life I want.

Me: "It's over, I want you out of the house by morning."

Khethu: "I'm not going anywhere."

Me: "Oh, yes you are."

Khethu: "I will kill myself."

This old trick.

Me: "Go ahead, the world would be a much better place."

Her jaw drops.

Khethu: "Styles, you don't mean that."

If only she knew.

Me: "I mean every word, you're abusive Khethu and it's sickening."

Khethu: "I'm sorry Styles, look I'll change. I'll be better for you, for us."

She places her hands on my chest, I push them off.

Me: "There is no us anymore Khethu, it's too late to fix anything."

Khethu: "Don't you love me anymore?"

She's crying, her tears don't do anything to me anymore. She can cry me a river and I will not be thrown.

Me: "No, I don't. You took your love back, literally ripped it out of my heart. All that I have for you now is pity."

Khethu: "Styles you can't do this to me."

She screams with tears streaking down her face.

Me: "Watch me."

She grabs a cushion and throws it at me, I catch it and toss it back on the couch.

Khethu: "I will tell Daddy everything I know about you and Randall, I swear Styles. Don't dare me."

Me: "I dare you Khethu, go ahead. It will be like singing him a lullaby, Dladla won't be able to do anything. You think I'm a scientist for show? No baby, I have the world in the palm of my hand. I have tolerated your bullshit long enough. I felt sorry for you Khethu because of what you've been through. And, you used that to destroy me. Look at me Khethukuthula. You killed me, I can't walk in public without feeling like people are judging me and can see my shame and my downfall. I can't walk with my head held high because of you."

I yell at her.

Khethu: "I'm sorry Styles, please. You can't leave me, I'll die without you."

Me: "That's not my problem anymore."

She grabs her hair and screams.

Khethu: "Styles, you can't do this to me."

Watching her pace up and down the living room like a crazy person, proves to me that she needs help. She furiously marches to the kitchen, this doesn't look good. I stagger back, as she runs back with a bread knife in her hand, she targets me. I grab her hand and pull it away from her.

Khethu: "I hate you."

She yells, I'm used to hearing these words.

Me: "I'm going out, don't wait up. I'm not coming home tonight and I want you out of my house by morning."

I announce firmly, and toddle to the door.

Khethu: "Styles don't leave me please, don't leave me."

She scream cries, as she drops to her knees, the old Styles would turn and embrace her in his arms. But, she killed him. I shut the door behind me and dash to my car, I can hear her cries from here. I will have to call Dladla, comforting her is his job now.

NTOMBI\*

Everyone ran out of the house to see what Tebogo was talking about, we find Moses on the streets chasing people. He's screaming at them, trying to high five them and laughing at them. I almost can't recognize him, he's dirty, unshaven and he's lost a lot of weight. My heart breaks into a thousand pieces, I glance at Jonas and Mhambi who have sly grins on their faces. Petunia is also here, she's ogling at Moses in wonder, her hands pasted on her hips and her jaw dropped.



Njabulo and Zakhele look defeated, I guess I called them late. My husband has lost his mind.

Me: "Oh Moses Nkosi yami." (My God.)

I exclaim in tears.

Moses: "I sold her, I sold Amara."

He keeps grabbing people's hands while confessing his iniquities. Some scream, while others push him.

Me: "Jonas is this what you wanted? You wanted to embarrass me like this? Now, I'm going to be a laughing stock in this whole neighbourhood. My enemies are rejoicing, they have waited for this day and my dear brother has made it possible for them."

I yell at him, he frowns at me like I'm crazy.

Jonas: "This is nothing Ntombi, buka." (Watch.)

He has no care at all, I stand on the streets helpless while my husband is being laughed at. I spot Martha across the street, she's laughing delightfully. I have no clue what I have done to that woman, her hatred for me seems to run deep.

Moses: "I sold Amara, ngim'thengisile." (I sold her.)

He laughs out loud as if he's being tickled.

Moses: "I sold Amara."

He turns it into a song as he breaks into a dance. This is embarrassing.

I march to him and grab his hand, he frowns at me, confusion building up on his face. There's a terrible foul smell coming from him.

What happened to you Moses?

Me: "Moses, asambe." (Let's go.)

Moses: "Ntombi?"

He says softly, leering at me like he's recalling something.

Moses: "Ntombi, I sold Amara for money. We're rich Ntombi, don't tell anyone okay."

He whispers and presses his forefinger on his lips.

Moses: "Sshhh."

He does the dance again and stops, people are laughing and taking videos.

Moses burst into another episode of crazy laughter, it diminishes in a flash. He transfixes his gaze next to me, for a while there, it seems like he's seeing someone. It's just me, no one is brave enough to come close to him. Not even his brother and uncle.

Moses: "Zulu, ula?" (Zulu you're here?)

I turn to my side, there's no one here.

Moses: "Zulu ngiyithengisile indodakazi yakho." (Zulu, I sold your daughter.)

He continues with his dance, after expressing loudly.

I am finished.

To be continued...



69\*

STYLES\*

I find myself parked outside Sethu's building, this is where I was led. I don't know whether by anger or my heart. At this moment it appears that, only this woman can give me the peace I need. I have been here once, to drop her off.

I take the elevator to the second floor, a few more steps bring me in front of her door. Flat number 23, I hope I got it right.

I knock twice, there is no answer. Maybe this was a bad idea, I cannot be running to another woman for comfort.

My feet lead me down the passage, as I saunter back to the elevator, I have to get out of here.

"Mr. Styles."

Her sweet voice numbs my body and I cannot walk further so, I turn. She smiles at me and this is when it hits me. That peaceful look on her face is what I came here for. I tread back to her, she's holding the burglar door, while standing in the door way. Her eyes drop when my gaze refuses to leave her face.

Me: "Hi."

I softly greet, she raises her eyes and there, is that smile.

Sethu: "Hi."

We're standing here with no words said, only glancing at each other. She's the first to give in.

Sethu: "Would you like to come in."

I nod, responding to her question.

She steps aside to let me in but, I gesture that she goes in first. I tread after her and she turns to close the door before leading me to the living room. The corridor is small, it only takes a few steps to get to the living area.

Sethu: "Can I get you anything to drink?"

I shake my head, negatively.

Sethu: "Okay, you can have a sit."

She points to a two seater red couch, there's a small table in the middle of the room and a one seater blue couch. It's a colourful space.

Me: "We're you busy? I hope I didn't interrupt anything."

I ask and say when I see a movie that has been paused.

Sethu: "I was bored so, I was trying to push time. I don't really have much friends, this is what I do in my spare time."

I nod, as I take a sit. She settles at the far end corner of the couch.

Me: "What movie is it?"

Her smile fills her face.

Sethu: "50 first dates, it's a chick flick. I'm a huge fan, I actually binge on chick flicks. They are very therapeutic, you should try it."

This is what I like, her talkativeness and how she is so unaware of it.

Me: "Watch people fall in and out of love while playing hard to get with each other, not my idea of therapy. The story line is always predictable, you can tell from the moment they say hi to each other that these two will either end up together or not."

She laughs and that just tickles my heart, the heaviness I felt when I drove here is perishing.

Sethu: "Okay, now you're spoiling it for me."

Me: "It's true though. Let me guess, 50 first dates, the girl has a short-term memory loss. She can't remember anything that happened the day before, so every morning the guy has to woo her again. He wins her at the end and they sail away on a boat and live happily ever after."

She falls back on the couch laughing, I can only sit here and watch with a smile on my face. Can anything ever be so peaceful?

Sethu: "You have watched it right?"

Me: "I don't watch TV, I'd rather read a book or invent something."

She smiles gently, we have that quiet moment that always seems to sneak up on us.

Sethu: "So, what brings you here? It's not every day I am graced with your presence"

Me: "I also don't know, I was driving and found myself here."

The moment again, she clears her throat as she looks away from me.

Sethu: "Okay, since you're not fond of watching TV. How about some music?"

Me: "No, don't stop the movie on my account. Maybe it's time I become human and do what humans do."

The laugh embraces her again, she finds me staring and stops.

Me: "Are you always this happy?"

She smiles.

Sethu: "life is hard enough, we can't be grumpy all the time."

Me: "Well, your presence is healing. You give me so much peace Sethu, it could be because you're a nurse."

I throw that in, to rid the awkwardness.

She giggles.

Me: "You're so adorable when you laugh, you're a like a kitten. My little kitten."

She drops her eyes and that nail biting habit visits her again, as her cheeks flush.

I shift closer to her and remove the hand from her mouth, she rapidly looks up at me.

Me: "I thought that pinky finger has lost its taste."

I utter, still holding her hand in mine, she smiles.

Sethu: "Force of habit."

She declares.

Me: "Do you do that with everyone, or is it just me?"

I'm not getting an answer, I take her chin and bring her face up. Her brown eyes shyly leer at me. I bring my face close to hers, she closes her eyes and her lips form an O, inviting me to kiss her. I smirk at this delectable gesture, I take time to study her face as she has her eyes closed.

This is what I want, this is what I would want to come home to every night. She eventually opens her eyes to find me staring, the shyness teases her again. She drops her head blushing, I bring it up yet again.

Me: "Sethu, I'm a straight forward person. I want to kiss you so bad right now but, I don't want to take advantage of you. You know that I was seeing someone right?"

She nods, seemingly looking sad.

Me: "I was in a toxic relationship, I couldn't leave because I had been with her for a long time. I thought I owed it to her, to fight for us but, I was only fooling myself. Remember that day we met?"

She looks up at me and nods.

Sethu: "The day you played James Bond?"

She laughs, having me snigger in return.

Me: "Something about you captured me, I didn't know it then but, as I got to know you, it started revealing itself. I would look for you in everything and everyone, I would hear your sweet laughter in public only to turn and be disappointed. This is me saying that, you are that missing piece in my life Sethu, there's this void in me that only you can fill. I know this because I feel complete when I'm with you."

Sethu: "Styles, I don't know what to say."

Me: "Say you will be mine, I want you to be my kitten. Will you be my kitten Sethu?"

Tears drop from her eyes, she brushes them away and sniffs. I'm looking at her, waiting for an answer. I don't know what I will do if she denies me, after pouring my heart out like this.

Sethu: "The last relationship I was in, I was hurt real bad. I promised myself that I will never let a man hurt me like that again."

I can see the pain she holds in her eyes, she must have been really hurt by this person.

Me: "What did he do to you?"

Her face takes a soft frown.

Sethu: "I found him in bed with Lebo, in this very house. They were having sex on my bed, he wasn't even sorry. He said I lacked something that Lebo had, I wasn't open minded, I guess."

Me: "Wait! Lebo, your nurse friend?"

She nods.

Me: "You two are still friends?"

I'm puzzled by this fact.

Sethu: "She's actually my cousin, I can't really disown family, can I?"

On which planet does this girl live?

Me: "Toxic is toxic Sethu, family or not. Do you realize that you're in the company of a snake and it won't be long till it bites you again?"

She sighs.

Sethu: "My mom said I should forgive her, she is her sister's child. She said mistakes happen and that you can never turn against your blood, you never know what life might bring you tomorrow."

The one mistake parents make.

Me: "That's bullshit, no offence to your mom. Sethu, parents are not always right. Wisdom is not one's age, just because someone is older, it does not mean that they know better. Children have found themselves in dire situations because of the decisions made by their parents, thinking they know better. If I were you, I would do away with Lebo. I'm not saying hate her, just distance yourself from her."

She mulls upon my words as she bites her lower lip, I'm tempted to taste them.

Sethu: "I will think about it, she is not a bad person though."

Me: "How do you do that? How do you see good in everyone?"

She shrugs.



Me: "You're a good woman Sethu, if you let me in. I promise that I will take care of your heart."

Sethu: "You're a wonderful man Styles, you have a kind heart but, I think you need to heal before you jump into another relationship."

That stings...

Me: "Heal?"

Sethu: "Yes, you need to get over her first. I'm not going to be a rebound. I can be a friend though, I'll be here whenever you need me."

Me: "I'll take that, for now."

She giggles.

Me: "You won't give up on me right?"

I know I have a long way to go.

Sethu: "I've got you."

I like the sound of that.

Me: "In that case, play all the chick flick movies you got. They're therapeutic, right?"

She laughs and nods.

NOMBULELO\*

It's my lunch break, I'm standing in the corridors with my colleague Brenda and we're about to go out for lunch. She's hasn't clocked out yet.

Me: "Ten minutes has passed already, hurry, I'm hungry."

She's signing some papers that were meant to be submitted before lunch.

Brenda: "Relax sana, the way you're going on, one would think that you're pregnant."

I am pregnant... I don't tell her that, though.

Me: "Hey, I'm hungry Brenda, hau."

Namhla: "Askies sisi." (Excuse me.)

Brenda and I turn to look at her, she's peeking through her office door.

Namhla: "Come to my office."

She demands, she still holds that attitude. I look at Brenda who's also annoyed by this.

Me: "Is she calling me or you?"



I ask Brenda, she shrugs her shoulders and rolls her eyes.

Namhla: "The new comer."

She states pointing at me before going back to her office.

Oh no she didn't...

Brenda rolls her eyes again.

Brenda: "Namhla is such a bitch."

She states.

Me: "What's her problem anyway?"

Brenda: "The doctor title has her flying high, she fucking thinks she's better than everyone around here."

I laugh.

Me: "Did you just say the F word?"

Brenda: "Don't you say it?"

Me: "It's not imprinted on my tongue, it tends to come out when I'm extremely angry."

She laughs.

Brenda: "Oh, you innocent soul. How old are you?"

Me: "Really, Brenda?"

My question amuses her.

Brenda: "I'm kidding, you should go see what that bitch wants."

I like this girl, Brenda just turned 35. She lies about her age though and tells people that she's twenty one. She's funny, she says the world is yours. You can be whatever you want to be.

Me: "I'm already bored. What can she possibly want?"

Brenda: "Go find out, in the meantime, I'm going to order fish and chips."

Me: "Okay, I'll meet you there."

She nods. I walk in Namhla's office to find her sitting back on her chair. She gives me her famous stare.

Namhla: "You didn't knock."

Me: "The door was open."

Namhla: "That doesn't give you the right to just budge in here."

Me: "You called me here."

She scabs my body from top to bottom, I am not bothered by that. She takes her wallet from the table, pulls out a 100rand note and reaches out her hand to me.

Namhla: "Get me a cup of coffee and some snacks."

Wow.

Me: "Excuse me?"

Namhla: "I said..."

Me: "I heard what you said doctor, I do not run errands for you."

Namhla: "What's your name again?"

I feel like smacking that smug off her face.

Me: "Lelo."

Namhla: "Yeah. I'm a busy doctor, okay? I have lives to saves."

Me: "That's my problem because?"

Namhla: "Your rudeness is not cute."

Me: "I'm not trying to be cute doctor."

She grimaces at me.

Namhla "I wonder what Mbuso has seen in a woman like you."

Me: "Hold it right there sisi, you know nothing about me. I would appreciate it, if you keep out of my private life."

Namhla: "Mmmhhh, unomlomo neh?" (You have a smart mouth.)

Me: "Are we done doctor? It's my lunch break and I need to eat."

She doesn't respond, instead glares at me. That look is deadly.

Namhla: "Do you know, you are not qualified to be a fulltime nurse. You're only here because of Mbuso, otherwise you would be mopping floors."

This woman...

She has probably seen my age and thinks she can speak to me like this.

Me: "Doctor uyamfuna uMbuso?" (Do you want Mbuso?)

Her eyes buck and her jaw drops. I bombed her with this one.

Me: "No, I'm just asking. You can't insult me, without mentioning him. I came here to work, not to quarrel over a man. If Mbuso wants you, he will approach you. As for me, leave me out of this. I am not about to fight over a man with a 29 year old woman. Umdala doctor, act your age."  
(You're old.)

Namhla: "How dare you speak to me like this? I will have you reported."

She growls, I don't care. She's not my boss.

Me: "Go ahead, you're the one harassing me. This is a government hospital, not your private practice. If you want an assistant, hire one. I'm not interested."

She clicks her tongue and rolls her eyes at me, I roll mine back before walking out. I crush into Brenda the second I exit the door, she almost falls but, regains her balance.

Brenda: "Damn sana." (Friend.)

Me: "We're you listening in?"

She laughs and applauds me.

Brenda: "You put her in her place. That bitch will never open her big mouth again."

Me: "She's full of shit."

I only realize now that, she has made me upset.

Brenda: "She is yena shame, so vele you're dating Doctor Mbuso?"

I give her a questioning look. How does she know him?

Brenda: "He usually helps out at this hospital when it's busy."

Me: "Oh, and doc thinks she has some hold over him. I don't even want to know what they had together."

Brenda laughs, I'm not surprised by her approach on Namhla. That woman looks down on everyone in this place.

Brenda: "Let's go eat, I want to hear everything."

She laughs as she takes my hand.

AMARA\*

It's been a week since I was rescued. I can't really say, how life is like with Randall. I know though that, I enjoy being around him, he won't leave my side. He obsesses over everything, I have never had someone care for me like this.

Sometimes I feel him watching me, only to turn and find him glancing, I noticed how he doesn't smile much.

He's funny too but, he doesn't know it.

This one time I laughed at something he said, he had this shocked look on his face. Then, went on to ask if he had said something wrong. That, was more hilarious than the joke.



I was introduced to Liyana, she's a sweetheart. She and Chioma are inseparable, Liyana follows her everywhere. I told Randall about seeing Olivia at Mkhize's house, he didn't say anything.

I have gotten used to living here, I still have this desire to see my family. I'm yet to bring it up, somehow I feel like it is a sensitive topic because of how our paths met.

He did explain why I can't see them now.

I swear Chioma watches more television than anyone I have ever met. Liyana is with her, she's slanting back on the couch, looking bored. She gives me a lazy smile, as I walk into the living room.

Me: "What's wrong?"

I settle next to her, she shifts close to me and places her head on my shoulder.

Liyana: "Chichi won't let me watch cartoons Mara."

She calls me Mara.

Chioma: "You're only allowed thirty minutes of TV, your time is up."

Me: "I'm sure we can compromise."

Chioma looks at me and shakes her head, you can't take her away from her shows.

I don't know what she's watching but, I doubt Liyana should be seeing any of this. It looks like a Telenovela about some drug cartel. I can't say anything lest, she thinks I want to control things.

Missy is sulking here beside me.

Liyana: "Mommy has that white powder too, she puts it in my dinner."

The child drops a bomb, Chioma turns to her immediately while I'm still trying to grasp what she just said.

"What?"

We jerk up at the sound of Randall's voice. His face is carrying daggers, I have seen that look before. That day when I attempted to kill myself, he rushes to Liyana and kneels before her.

Randall: "What did you say princess?"

This child knows nothing, her face is so innocent.

Liyana: "That powder on TV, mommy has it. I have seen her put it in her nose too."

She repeats, Randall looks scary right now.

Randall: "You said something else, that she puts it in your food?"

She nods innocently, as she plays with the sleeves of her jersey. I think he's scaring her.

Liyana: "What is it papa? Mommy didn't tell me what it was, she only said, it will help me sleep. Is it medicine?"

I'm watching Randall's expression, his rage intensifies. He drops his head, hiding his face from the child.

Me: "Liya, are you sure it wasn't salt or sugar?"

She shakes her head, as she leers up at me.

Liyana: "It didn't taste like it."

Me: "Did she only put it in your food?"

Liyana: "Yes but, she and uncle Joseph put it in their nose."

She declares, Randall raises his head. I see the tears that have welled up in his eyes. I feel an uneasiness in my heart, somehow I don't like those tears. I place my hand on his shoulder and he runs his eyes to me.

Me: "Are you okay?"

I whisper, he drops his eyes. Takes Liyana into his arms and sits flat on the floor. She carries this confused look, as she can't grasp what is wrong with her father.

Randall: "Liya?"

He calls out to her, her head is resting on his chest.

Liyana: "Yes, papa."

Randall: "I'm sorry I couldn't protect you, my princess, I'm sorry I wasn't there to keep you safe."

He expresses emotionally, Liyana tries to move out of his arms but, he's not letting go.

Liyana: "Papa mmhh mmhh."

He's holding her a little too tight.

I think he's crying, I can't see his face.

I leer at Chioma, she has turned off the TV. She's also watching them, Liyana looks scared, she doesn't understand what's wrong with her father.

Me: "Randy, you're scaring her."

I place my hand on his shoulder again. He pulls her out of his arms, kisses her cheek.

Randall: "Go to Chioma princess."

She skips to her, Randall turns to me. A knot stands on his forehead, for the first time his eyes are not looking straight at me.

Randall: "I'm going out for a while. Will you be okay?"

I nod, I can't stop him from going out but, I have misgivings about this outing of his. He rises from the floor, I get up as well and tail him as he moseys to the door.

He turns to me, his eyes are concealing something.

Me: "Are you okay."

I need to know this.

A pucker grows between his eye brows, before his mouth accepts a sneer, he leans over and brushes my cheek with his lips. His cheek falls on mine and I hear him breathe a sigh of lassitude.

Randall: "I'll be okay."

He states softly and rushes out of the door without meeting my eyes.

To be continued...



70\*

RANDALL\*

My tears are blinding my vision, wiping them has proven futile. I had to rush out of the house, I didn't want Amara to see me in tears. There is a tightening on my chest that makes me want to scream, this rage is suffocating me.

Dammit!!!

I have to call Styles, maybe his sanity will calm me down. Liyana's words keep replaying in my mind, they are tormenting me. I'm driving on the four lane high way, headed to Boksburg.

I'm losing my mind at the thought of Liyana being fed drugs, there were never signs. Unless I was too busy to notice them.

A loud honk jolts me back from the painful memory lane. I lurch the car to the side, as I dodge a big truck and park on the side of the road. My heart is vigorously thudding against my chest. The driver sticks his hand out and shows me the middle finger.

That was a close one.

I speed dial Styles, he answers immediately. He never disappoints me with this.

Styles: "Wait, pause it."

He sounds happy.

Me: "Pause what?"

Styles: "I'm not talking to you."

Me: "Olivia fed Liyana drugs."

I introduce.

Styles: "What?"

Me: "I'm going to kill her."

Styles: "Randall?"

Me: "The reason I am telling you this is because you're my brother and I don't want you thinking the worst of me, when you find out what I have done."

Styles: "Hold on."

I hear shuffling in the back ground.

Styles: "Randy."



Me: "Where are you?"

Styles: "Sethu's, I had to go outside for privacy. Randall, I think you should get her arrested. I fear you might hate yourself for killing the mother of your child."

I shouldn't have called him.

Me: "When that loan shark killed Asa and you went for his whole family. Did I object Styles?"

Styles: "That's not the same Randy, that bastard meant nothing to me."

Me: Olivia means nothing to me, I was so ready to give it all up and forget the old Randall for Amara."

Styles: "You mean Scar?"

Me: "He wants blood and I have to feed him."

Styles: "Randy don't, you will hate yourself after this."

He has gone crazy.

Me: "No, you're not stopping me this time Styles. Unless you have another way to pacify this anger."

He sighs.

Styles: "I don't like this ruthless side of you."

Me: "People ask for it. Have you seen Liyana Styles? She's a baby. I let everything Olivia did to my child slide but, not this time."

Styles: "I can only hope that you won't live to regret this."

Me: "Bye Styles."

I cut the call, his words always get me thinking.

Maybe today is not her day to die however, I will make her wish for death.

Mbuso might have what I need to make Olivia suffer.

Mbuso: "Randall?"

This is how he answers my calls.

Me: "I know I'm not your favourite person, at least sound happy to hear from me."

He chortles.

Mbuso: "Calls from you are not always pleasant."

Me: "It's good to know you understand me so well."

Mbuso: "Who shot you this time?"



Me: "You're a funny doctor, nice."

Mbuso: "Yet, I wait for the day you will laugh at my jokes."

I sneer at his sally.

Me: "I need a defibrillator A.S.A.P and an adrenalin."

Mbuso: "Why? You're not a doctor."

Me: "Are you going to help me or not?"

Mbuso: "Randy I don't want to get into trouble please."

Me: "Trouble with who? Mbuso you... never mind."

I drop the call, I'm asking the wrong person.

Me: {You want your precious Olivia alive, have a defibrillator and an adrenalin delivered at her house.}

I text Styles.

NTOMBI\*

There's a commotion in the living room, my brothers are arguing with uncle Njabulo and Zakhele. Seeing the state Moses is in, made them angry. Uncle demands they pay a cow for the damage they did to Moses. Jonas and Mhambi are not having it.

Me: "Eish! Moses stop splashing me with water."

I'm bathing him, I finally managed to get him in the house. He hasn't stopped singing and talking to Nkosiyabo. I don't know if he's really here, maybe losing his mind has made him hallucinate.

Moses: "Ntombi we are rich."

He splashes water on my face as he says this.

Me: "Moses man."

He looks at me and laughs.

Me: "Sukuma." (Get up.)

I instruct him, as I hold him a gown.

Moses: "Eyy, sizothini. Bathi sisukume Zulu, nalamanzi aseyabanda." (What can we say Zulu, they want us to get up and this water is cold.)

I roll my eyes, I'm tired of this.

I wrap the gown around him, we pass the living room on our way to the bedroom. Petunia cackles loudly.

Petunia: "Yeah neh, yimpilo yasegoli le. Ngiyayivuma." (This is the joburg life.)

Moses: "Jonas, akekho uAmara. Ngiyithengisile leya ngane. I sold your niece Jonas." (Amara is not here, I sold her.)

He laughs as he claps his hands, Jonas clicks his tongue in return. Moses attentively glares at Mhambi, as if searching him.

Moses: "Mhambi, usasela? Uhamba nini kanti wena. My wife and I want to enjoy our money in peace." (Mhambi, you're still here? When are you leaving?)

Can he shut up already? He's making things worse.

Me: "Moses thula." (Keep quiet.)

Jonas shakes his head.

Jonas: "This should be a lesson to all evil people out there, impilo akuyona into yokudlala. The bible says what goes around comes back around." (Life is not to be played with.)

Which bible is he reading?

Zakhele: "Are you insulting us bafo?"

Jonas: "No, I'm telling the truth."

Petunia: "Cha bhuti. It says there is no peace for the wicked."

Petunia and her big mouth, I hate her.

Jonas: "Yes that. Moses will never see peace, until Amara is back home."

He insists.

Moses: "I sold Amara, she's not coming back."

He sings, I smash my hand on his mouth to silence him. I am tired of hearing him chant these words.

Me: "Tomorrow I am taking my husband to see S'godi, he will fix him. Bhuti Jonas, you are not the only one who can consult. When Moses is better, he will deal with all of you."

Jonas laughs.

Jonas: "Yenza okubonayo Ntombi." (Do what you see fit.)

Mhambi: "Uyadlala lo? Do you know the Buthelezi wena? I think you have forgotten which family you were born in. Asidlali, siyanyathela." (We don't play.)

Petunia: "Ntombi awusho? Iphi ingane yakho? Did you tell your in-laws that you and your husband ousted your only child out of this house?" (Tell me, where is your child?)

Zakhele: "What? Ntombi? You said Lelo found a job and moved out so she can be closer to work."

He raises his voice at me, Petunia laughs out loud and claps her hands.

I click my tongue and lead Moses to our bedroom.

I wish he can stop singing.

STYLES\*

Spending the day with Sethu was just what I needed, she really is a breath of fresh air. I haven't felt at peace in a while.

Who needs therapy when I have her? I have faced enough humiliation with Khethu and I'm glad that I finally ended things with her, I have no regrets about my decision. Though, I feel sorry for her. She has been a part of my life for a long time, I had gotten used to her.

I'm driving to a hotel, I would've gone to Randall's house but, I don't want to crowd his space. Amara needs time to adjust.

I still can't believe what Olivia did, I would kill for Liyana and I know Olivia has to pay for what she did. But, the girl will need her mother one day.

Judging from the text Randall sent, it seems he has thought twice about killing her, he has something in that sick mind of his though. I know he is going to torture her.

My phone rings, it's Dladla. I hope he has done what I asked him to.

Me: "Dladla."

I greet.

Dladla: "What have you done to my daughter Sishi?"

The sound of his voice is not welcoming.

Me: "What did she tell you?"

Dladla: "You asked her to leave your house."

Me: "I did."

Dladla: "Will you explain what happened or wear your arrogance on your sleeve?"

Me: "Your daughter needs help Dladla."

Dladla: "Are you saying she's crazy?"

Me: "However you want to put it."

He huffs, I can sense anger in his voice. Khethu must have cooked up some story.

Dladla: "I never liked you Sishi."

Me: "Tell me something I don't know."

Dladla: "You used Khethu and now that you're done with her, you throw her away like she's some piece of trash."

This man is clearly in the dark.

Me: "No one has ever loved that woman, the way I loved her. Married or not, Khethu was my life."

Dladla: "Was? You're a typical man Sishi. What happened to that love, then?"

Me: "What did Khethu tell you exactly Dladla? I mean, it doesn't matter what I say, you have already decided that I am to blame for this failed relationship."

Dladla: "She has no reason to lie to me."

This is a waste of time.

Me: "Okay, in that case, I have nothing else to say to you."

Dladla: "If anything happens to my daughter, I am coming for you."

Me: "Okay."

Dladla: "You're a piece of shit, you that?"

Me: "Get your daughter out of my house Dladla. I want nothing to do with her, sit Khethu down and ask her what really happened. Get her help before she unravels and stop assuming things."

Dladla: "Fine, I will talk to her. If I find out that you have been abusing her, I will put you behind bars and throw away the key."

Me: "We're done here."

I hang up, Khethu has been calling me since. There is a part of me that, wants to know how she is doing. But, answering her calls will be like taking ten steps back.

NOMBULELO\*

Brenda lives in the CBD, she takes taxis. So, I decided to take a taxi home. I texted Mbuso and told him not to fetch me, he replied with 'okay'. I don't know what he meant by that, I decided not to dwell on it.

Brenda: "Are you working tomorrow?"

Me: "No."

Brenda: "Can we exchange? I need a day off."

Me: "Nope."

She rolls her eyes as she jumps into her taxi.

Me: "Bye."

I wave as I walk past, taxis to Randburg are on the third lane.

"Nombulelo."

Dammit, I know that voice. It's Martha, I ignore her and pick up my pace.

"Nombulelo Mngoma, I know it's you."

Shit!!!

I stop and turn to find her marching towards me.

What does she want?

I feign a smile.

Me: "Mam Martha."

She puts her hand on my shoulder as she stops before me.

Martha: "Yoh ngikhathele ngane yami. My feet are killing me, I just came from the hospital. My poor feet are swollen, I can't even sleep at night." (I'm tired my child.)

I move back a little, gesturing that, she removes her hand from me.

I'm also tired.

Me: "Oh, askies." (Sorry.)

Martha: "Did you hear that your father is back home and he has lost his mind?"

Me: "What?"

I know he was missing.

Martha: "I feel sorry for your mother, the shame she must be going through."

I have to go see him, he is my father and he still holds a special place in my heart.

Me: "Mam Martha, I have to go. There's one taxi left."

I don't have time for neighbourhood gossips and knowing Martha, she never stops.

Martha: "Oh okay, kodwa wena unjani? How is your baby?" (How are you?)

She slouches and places her hand on my belly, I feel a need to drift back. She rises and looks at me but, not directly.

Me: "I'm okay mam Martha, you know I have been having a strange dream, about a woman coming to me, saying she wants my baby."

Martha: "I'm sure it's just a dream Lelo. You should drink warm milk before going to bed, it will help you sleep peacefully."

She utters while, trying so hard to avoid looking into my eyes.

Me: "I doubt it's just a dream, it keeps repeating itself. There is obviously something here."

Her eyes meet mine and she instantly drops them and walks away without saying a word.

As I watch her, I realise that her body structure is that of the woman in my dreams. I could be seeing things though.

I jump in the taxi, I'm the last one in so, we move.

Suddenly, I feel my head spinning, and a discomfort in my belly. It suffocates me a bit. I crack a window open, just enough for some air, knowing people will complain about the wind.

I rest my head on the window as I try to breathe.

"Uright sisi?" (Are you okay?)

A lady next to me enquires. I nod.

I'm lying, I'm not okay. It feels like I will pass out anytime.

"You don't look fine, you're sweating. Here, drink some water."

She hands me a water bottle, I don't want to seem weird so, I take it. I'm not going to drink it though, I'm pregnant and the world is an evil place.

I fiddle for my phone in my bag, I need to call Mbuso.

Me: "Are you home?"

I ask when he answers.

Mbuso: "Yes. Where are you?"

Me: "In a taxi. Please meet me at the gate, I'm not okay."

Mbuso: "What happened?"

Me: "I don't know, I think it's something I ate."

Mbuso: "Okay, you'll find me there."

I feel creeped out after meeting up with Martha, I can't shake the feeling that she's the woman in my dreams.

To be continued...





Edit with WPS Office



71\*

OLIVIA\*

I still can't believe that Randall put me under lockdown in my house, there are men guarding the house and that has made it hard for me to escape.

Randall said he is not done with me and I fear what he might have in mind. I'm locked up in my bedroom, being surrounded by strange men I do not know is scary. I jump from the bed when I hear the door shut, whoever is in my house just banged the door.

Me: "Who is there? What do you want in my house? Randall said you're not allowed to enter."

I yell, I do not trust them at all.

"Not even me Olivia? I thought you might need to see a familiar face."

Randall speaks from the other side of the door, this is my chance to plead him, to let me go. I open the door and fall on my knees in front of him, I hope he falls for my tears.

Me: "Randall, I'm sorry. Please forgive me, I have learnt my lesson. Let me make up for my mistakes, I will be a better mother to our baby."

I cry, gripping on his leg.

He's not saying anything, it feels like forever.

Me: "Randall?"

I can't comprehend why he's so quiet. I feel a heavy presence which compels me to look up. I meet his sly grin, it sends shivers down my spine. I bring myself up from the floor. He looks scary, he's holding a superior confidence gesture. Straight pose, and his hands on his back.

Me: "Why are you back Randall?"

He tilts his head to the side as his grin grows.

Randall: "You didn't think I would abandon you now, did you? I'm sorry I took too long."

Me: "I don't like the look on your face."

He is scaring me.

Randall: "What look?"

He brings his hands forward, revealing a rope.

Me: "What are you doing with that?"

Randall: "How did those drowning lessons go the last time? I forgot to ask."

Me: "Randy?"

Randall: "I need to know if we're making progress."

He has something up his sleeve and I can't possibly make out what it could be, his face and demeanour are calm, he speaks with a soft tone as if having a conversation with a friend.

I'm done feigning tears, real ones show up and parade on my face.

He takes up a look of confusion.

Randall: "What happened? Why are you crying?"

He interrogates, softly.

Me: "What are you going to do with that rope Randall?"

I cry.

Randall: "Oh, Olivia. Why do you want me to keep repeating myself? I told you, drowning lessons or breathing lessons rather. You need to pass them this time, okay? We're going to try a different technique, not hard but, a bit complicated."

He utters. I think of running but, where will I go? The house is heavily guarded.

Me: "Randy I.."

Randall: "Who's Randy? I'm Randall to you, we're not friends."

The door opens and one of the men walk in, carrying a small box.

"Boss, your package has arrived."

He announces while standing behind him, Randall tilts his head to the side to leer at the man. He slowly turns to me and smirks.

Randall: "Perfect, we can begin."

He hands him the rope, the man takes it and ties it into a noose. It hits me now, he wants to hang me.

I turn and run, headed to the kitchen. I feel an arm roughly circle around my waist and pull me back. I look up to see Randall.

Randall: "Class is not over Olivia, I don't remember dismissing you either. Where are you going?"

He whispers softly. I think I would be less afraid if he shouts at me and if he's anger showed on his face. This quietness of his, is the scariest thing I have ever seen.

Me: "Please, don't kill me."

I plead as he lugs me back to the living room.

Randall: "Who said anything about killing? I am not going to kill you."

I glare at him as he stands with his hands in his pockets. The man instructed to tie the rope is done with his task.

Me: "Then, what is the rope for?"

Randall: "Illustrations."

Me: "What do you mean?"

He grins.

Randall: "I love this teacher, student relationship. You ask and I answer."

Cold unsettling chills rush through me, at his answer.

I run my eyes back to the man who has tied the rope over the wooden beam on the ceiling and placed a chair under it.

Me: "Randall please, tell me what I did, so I can ask for forgiveness."

I cry, I can't stop.

Randall: "What you did cannot be forgiven Olivia?"

He's starting to annoy me with his calm demeanour.

Me: "Randall, I have been locked up here, I didn't do anything."

I yell. He looks at me like I am losing my mind.

Randall: "Oh really? What about feeding drugs to a 10 year old?"

Oh Gosh! I didn't think Liyana would know what it was.

Randall: "What happened? You can't speak now?"

I sigh.

Me: "Why do you keep listening to Liya Randall? She's a child, she doesn't know how to speak the truth."

His expression changes, only now his rage takes over his face.

Randall: "Don't fuck with me Olivia. Children only speak the truth, Liyana is ten. She doesn't know the difference between right and wrong."

Me: "Liyana is a problem child, you'll see for yourself."

He grimaces at me.

Randall: "Woman, you better stop lying. You're only pissing me off."

Me: "I'm not lying."

I bellow at him.



Randall: "Fuck you Olivia. Not once has that child asked for you. Why is that? Children are closest to their mothers, they don't go a day without wanting them. Liya's story is different, I thought it was because Chioma filled that void but, no. She has no connection with you, you fucking abused my baby."

He grits his teeth, his eyes red and full of fury.

Me: "I'm sorry Randall, I'm sorry."

Randall: "The person you should be apologising to, is not here. I swear, I will make sure that she forgets you ever existed. I will wipe out every memory she has of you."

Me: "You can't do that, I mothered her. She's my baby."

I yell at him.

Randall: "Please, don't disgrace real mothers out there. You, claiming to be a mother is blasphemy."

He glances at the man guarding the rope and nods, I don't know what that means. The man marches towards me, I try to run but, he grabs me and pins me against the wall. I scream as he binds my hands from the back. He turns me back around and drags me to the trap they have laid for me.

Me: "Randall I'm sorry."

I scream, his face is impassive. The man lifts me up and places me on the chair, I wiggle my body and he catches me as I fall.

Randall: "We can do this the whole night Olivia, I got time."

He smirks at me, as he delivers with a deadpan voice.

Me: "Please, I'm sorry."

I plead.

Me: "I don't want to die."

The man puts me up on the chair again and places the noose over my neck.

I'm desperately staring at Randall, crying my eyes out.

Me: "Randy please, don't do this. You said you won't kill me."

He ignores me like I am not even here.

He takes the box from the table, rips it open and pulls out a defibrillator and an adrenalin. I watch in horror as my mind cannot grasp what he plans to do with those. He looks at this man who is constraining me on this chair and nods. The man pushes the chair and I dangle in the air, as the noose clenches around my neck.

I feel pressure in my throat and my eyes begin to water, I am overtaken by the desperate urge to

breath. In a while, I taste something extremely sour in my mouth. Suddenly, it feels like a match has been lit in the middle of my chest and the fire grows. I feel my lungs starting to close.

I gulp and gasp for breath, my head spins as I try gasping for air. The fast rate of my heart slows in beat. I feel life slipping away, as my sight starts to close in on me.

This is it. This is the end of me.

I slip into darkness.

NOMBULELO\*

I'm curled up, half naked on the tiled floor in the living room. My body is sweltering and my womb feels like, it's being sliced with a razor blade. I've been tossing and turning, Mbuso has lost hope. He says he can't see anything wrong with me and I can't take any pills due to being pregnant.

At first, I thought I was having a miscarriage but, I'm not bleeding.

Me: "Mbuso!!!"

I scream, as I feel an excruciating pain in my womb, he comes running with a bucket of water and a towel. He's been cooling my body with a cold towel, not once have I shed a tear. The pain is too much that my tears have failed me.

Mbuso: "What's wrong?"

He asks, his eyes are widened in fear.

Me: "It hurts."

I yell the words out.

He kneels in front of me, wrings the towel and starts tapping my body. I shrug his hand away as the coldness intensifies the pain.

Me: "Wait, Mbuso there's something in this room."

He carries a confused look.

Me: "Can you hear that? It's a baby crying."

Mbuso: "Lelo there's nothing. I can't hear anything."

Me: "Listen man."

I can hear it loud and clear, it's in the room and its cries are agonizing.

Mbuso: "Lelo, there's nothing."



Me: "How can you not hear it? Unless? Oh God, I'm losing my mind."

I express in fear, he wipes the dribs of sweat on my forehead. I shrug his hand again.

Me: "Get it to stop."

I scream as I cover my ears, he doesn't know what to do. I see it on his face, he's panicking.

Me: "AAHHH!!!"

I scream, as another pain slices over my womb.

Me: "My baby, I can't lose my baby."

Mbuso: "Calm down Lelo, please."

Me: "Why are you not doing anything?"

Mbuso: "What do you want me to do?"

He yells back, looking defeated.

Me: "Make that baby sound stop, it's tormenting me."

I shout and clench my arms around my stomach, the pain is too much. I cannot lose this baby, I have grown to love it. I send my hands back on my ears, trying to clog the crying baby sound.

Me: "Make it stop please."

I plead, my hands keep going back and forth between my stomach and my ears. Mbuso presses his palms on my ears as I grab my stomach, the pain feels like strong period pains, only a hundred times worse.

Mbuso: "Lelo, tell me what to do. I can't stand this anymore."

He looks helpless.

Me: "Do you believe in God?"

He nods swiftly.

Me: "Then pray for me."

I scream.

He has a light bulb moment.

Mbuso: "My mother, she goes to church."

He expresses as he rushes to get his phone on the kitchen counter.

Me: "Mbuso, there's something in this room."

I yell. This heavy presence is the same as the one I felt in my dreams. Only this time it feels more real than anything, he kneels before me as he dials a number. He has put the phone on

loud speaker.

Mom: "Mbuso?"

She sounds wide awake.

Mbuso: "Mom, there's something wrong with Lelo. She's in pain and she's hearing things. I think she's under a spiritual attack."

He explains in a panicky tone.

Mom: "So, what do you want me to do?"

I clench my teeth and groan as another excruciating pain hits me.

Mbuso: "Please pray for her."

Mom: "Do you know what time it is, Mbuso?"

Mbuso: "Mom, she's pregnant and she's been dreaming of a woman asking for her baby."

This is how we break the news, she is not going to like this.

Mom: "Ini? Mbuso, uyahlanya? Sowuhamba umithisa wena?" (Are you crazy? So, now you go around planting babies.)

She raises her voice, this is the least of my worries right now.

Me: "God, make it stop. Please make that sound stop. I can't take it anymore."

I howl in agony, tossing and turning on the cold floor. This cry of a baby seems to be getting louder and it intensifies the pain in my womb. I have never had an abortion but, I am sure this is how it feels like. It's as if someone is pulling the fetus out.

Mbuso: "Mom please, not now. I need you, there is something in this house and I can feel it too."

He pleads desperately, as he looks at me pitifully.

Mom: "Okay, put the phone on speaker."

Mbuso: "It's on speaker."

Mom: "Sisi, we are going to pray. I need you to open your heart and receive this prayer, you have to believe with all your heart and have no doubts. The enemy feeds on fear and it senses when you're drenched in fear."

She explains.

Chills ripple through me when I perceive that, there is someone out there, who is really after my baby.

I nod vigorously, as I clench my eyes due to the pain on my belly. God please, let my baby be okay.

Mbuso: "She agrees mom."

He speaks on my behalf.

Mom: "Join hands and place your hand on her womb, we need to stand in agreement."

He takes my hand and places the other on my stomach, I rest my hand on top of his.

Mom: "Father we come before You in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. We thank You Lord that you are able and there is nothing impossible with you.

Who else can we turn to but You, the author and the finisher of our faith? Father I bring your beloved Nombulelo, before You. Fight for her Lord. Your word says 'I have given you authority to trample under serpents and scorpions and all of the power of the enemy and nothing shall by any means hurt you.' Right now in the name of Jesus Christ and with this authority You have bestowed upon us Lord, I come against every works of darkness. I speak death over every power of the enemy, I declare it powerless and null and void. You evil and foul spirit, I command you, right now to loose your grip over this child and go back to the pits of hell where you came from. You have no right over her and her child, loose and let go in the name of Jesus. Nombulelo I cover you with the blood of Jesus, I speak life over you and your baby. You shall live and not die, in the name of Jesus. We thank you Lord that it is done, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen."

Mbuso: "Amen."

He declares while anxiously looking at me, the sound of the baby crying stopped when she started commanding and the heavy presence seized. The pain is still here but, it's bearable. I can breathe now.

Mbuso: "How are you feeling?"

He inquires as he sits me up.

Mom: "How is she?"

Me: "Thank you mama, the pain is subsiding."

Mbuso: "And the baby crying? Can you still hear it?"

Me: "No, it's gone."

Mom: "Mbuso, take a glass of water. Pray over it and sprinkle the water in every room. Do this, before you go to bed."

Mbuso helps me to the couch, while his mother gives instructions, he settles next to me.

Mbuso: "Okay."

Mom: "Come and see me tomorrow ne ntombi yakho." (With your girlfriend.)

We exchange glances, he suddenly looks nervous.

Mbuso: "Yes mom."

Mom: "Ai Mbuso, nihamba nijola nani." (You go around dating whoever.)



Mbuso chortles, it must be a joke. I accept a smile.

Mom: "Nilale kahle." (Good night.)

Mbuso: "Good night mom."

Me: "Thank you again, mama."

She hangs up.

Mbuso: "You should take a bath, before going to bed."

I give him a weak smile.

Me: "What the hell was that?"

Mbuso: "I don't know and I don't know what you were hearing but, I felt something in this house."

Me: "We have to seek help, I am not losing my baby Mbuso."

Mbuso: "You won't, Goku is not going anywhere. Tomorrow after seeing mom, we'll go see that prophet."

I nod, then I remember.

Me: "I think I saw her today, the woman in my dreams. She's my mother's friend."

He welcomes a confused expression.

Mbuso: "Are you sure?"

Me: "Yeah, she couldn't look me straight in the eye. I felt strange when she touched my belly, that's when the uneasiness began."

Mbuso: "Really Lelo? The bump is not even visible yet and you let people touch your stomach. It didn't cross your mind that maybe something is up?"

Me: "She caught me off guard that witch. I hope she's burning wherever she is."

Mbuso: "What can she possibly want from you?"

Me: "Beats me."

He sighs.

Mbuso: "Go bath, while I sprinkle the water. You smell like sweat."

Me: "Only now you notice."

He sniggers.

RANDALL\*

Olivia is brought down and laid on the floor, her face has turned into a sickening colour. I check her pulse, there's nothing. She has gone into cardiac arrest.

Me: "Pass me the defibrillator."

I instruct the guard, he leers at me in confusion.

Me: "That machine on the table."

He nods and rushes to get it, he hands it me.

I turn it on by pressing the green button, I peel off the sticky pads and attach them on each side of her chest, after tearing her shirt off. I move back as I wait for the defibrillator to shock her, it sends a message that the shock has been delivered. There are no signs of life so, I repeat the process.

Her chest expands a little as her breath is brought back into her body. She's weak and unable to open her eyes fully.

"What's that for boss?"

The guard enquires, as he observes me prepare the adrenalin.

Me: "This is my magic wand, this baby right here will re-direct blood towards her heart and her lungs. It will get her blood pumping and give oxygen to her brain. The moment it reaches her heart, the heart will rush oxygenated blood to her muscles."

I explain while I inject the adrenalin into her veins.

"So, you're bringing her back to life?"

His voice is covered in shock.

Me: "Yes, this is the cherry on top, I will make this woman taste death and just as she embraces it, I will bring her back to life."

"Eish saan." (Man.)

He expresses in disbelief.

Wide-eyed, Olivia jolts upright with a gasp. She instantly grips my hand, her eyes are enflamed.

Me: "Welcome back."

Olivia: "Please Randall."

She cries, grasping the plan I have for her.

Me: "You want to go again? That's the plan anyway."

She shakes her head crying.

Olivia: "Don't, please, rather kill me once."

I push her off of me.

Me: "I'm sorry to be the barrier of bad news Olivia but, death will never find you. Not anytime soon anyway, you will look for it. You will crave for it and when you taste it, I will jolt you back to life. Thanks to this little partner of mine here."

I hold up the defibrillator, she glares at it with her eyes popped out.

Me: "Technology is a bitch, isn't it?"

Olivia: "You're evil."

She screams in my face.

Me: "Keep the insults coming, they won't change your situation."

I get up and amble towards the door.

Me: "Oh by the way Olivia, since you like drugs so much. My friend here, will supply you with as much as you like."

Her jaw drops, I think I just brought Christmas right at her door step.

I leer at the guard and he nods.

Me: "Methamphetamine and cocaine, these are the deadliest. Which one did you feed my baby?"

She drops her head in shame.

Me: "Okay, picture this Olivia. Cardiac damage- elevated heart rate, convulsion, stroke and even a heart attack. These two drugs are the devil himself."

Olivia: "I won't take them."

Me: "You don't have a choice, really. This gentleman will pump them in your system."

She shakes her head in disagreement.

Olivia: "I will kill myself."

Me: "Great, I knew you would love the game of life and death."

Olivia: "Have mercy on me please, let me atone for my sins."

Me: "I'll see you next time, we need to continue with our lessons."

She scream cries, as I exit the door.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

72\*

AMARA\*

I jerk up from my sleep as if I had forgotten something, only to realize that, I fell asleep waiting for Randall. His bedside is empty, I leer at the clock on the bedside table as I turn on the side lamp. It's 3:30am.

Maybe he's sleeping in his room, I still can't bring myself into entering that room. I can still see that man's dead body lying on the floor.

As I jump off the bed, I see him. He's sitting in the balcony.

It's cold outside. Why is he sitting there?

I toddle there and open the door, he turns. He's smoking, I have never seen him smoke before but, I have smelt the nicotine on him. He presses the cigarette on the ash tray. I watch it as the smoke dies down.

Me: "Randall."

He gets up, he's wearing that usual frown on his face. He takes my hand into his and pulls me to him. The strong smell of nicotine hits my nostrils, it's a familiar smell but, I have never smelt it so strongly before. Today it's nauseating.

I'm able to conquer the stomach-turning feeling as I rest my head on his chest, I can hear the beating of his heart. It's forcefully pounding against his chest.

Me: "Are you okay?"

This thing with Liyana must have hit him hard, I have noticed how he treats her like something that would crack the moment it drops. He is so sensitive with her.

I move out of his arms, when he doesn't respond.

He doesn't look directly at me but, takes a sit and pulls me to sit on his lap. I put my arm over his shoulders, as his large arms circle around my waist, he buries his head on my chest and we sit there with no words said.

It's cold out here, this body heat is not helping. We might as well be sitting in the freezer. I want to tell him but, I sense he's emotional and probably, this helps him. His cold hands glide under my nightwear and they settle on my stomach, his touch always makes me shiver. He reaches up to kiss my neck and grazes his lips down to my collar bone, he plants a few soft kisses there.

I don't know what he's thinking or what he wants, but this gesture has my body trembling.

I look at him and he raises his head to gaze at me raptly. He pulls my face closer and his lips brush on mine. Not a teaser but, passionate and demanding what he knows to be his. I'm already lost in his embrace. My senses are on vacation at this point, as my brain has shut them down, compelling me not to think straight.

This man is not talkative, I have come to find that he speaks with his heart. This slow and soft kiss is full of promises, he wants this and I have never felt more wanted in my life, than at this moment.

Randall: "Amara."

He whispers slowly, each letter lingering under his breath as if to savor the moment. I nuzzle his cheek on my hand and we break apart for air, I shift from his lap as he gets up. I think I know what his eyes are saying to me, he takes my hand and leisurely leads me back into the bedroom.

I barely have time to react, before he rams his lips on mine, having me gasp, as the breath from my lungs ascends.

I gulp, while watching him strip off his t-shirt, his hands drop to my hips and he pulls me to him and my palms fall on his bare chest.

He snuggles his face on my neck, dropping wet kisses and leads his lips to mine, I lock my hands around his neck, feebly pulling him down. He has me in that heated kiss in a second.

Gently, he pushes against me. I'm lying on the bed, on my back in an instant, with the weight of his body tenderly holding me down.

I'm overwhelmed by his insatiable appetite, as his hands map every part of me. His tongue pushes against the ridge of my lips, sinking its way into my mouth. He's grinding on me leisurely and my mind completely shuts off as I lose my sanity. A rush of warmth fills my head and spreads through my body in a miniature. I trail my fingers up and down his spine in a circular motion,

I cannot recall a time when he kissed me without his tongue claiming mine.

His kiss is not scripted like those of telenovelas but, drenched in its own sizzling passion. It tells his story that, this is who he is, imperfect. He is not a robot or a duplicate of those romantic idols.

His lips depart from mine, leaving its memory behind and a numbness from that ravenous kiss. In so little time this has become my obsession, I can hardly breathe when he is around me.

I shiver at his smirk and my eyes shy away from his intense gaze. I raise my hands as he strips off my clothing, leaving me bare, with just an undergarment on. This is a sight that has only been exposed to me and having him leering at me with those heavy-lidded eyes, causes me to glide my arm over my bust. It's that look and that smirk on his face that, has birthed this sudden shyness. He takes my hand away, revealing my breasts.

A shudder hits me when he goes on to bite my neck and I yap in pain and pleasure.

Randall: "Did you like that, me hemma?" (My queen.)

He whispers and I shiver at the satisfying wave of chills, rushing through my body.

He grazes his lips down to my bust, my body trembles uncontrollably under him, as his warm breath fans my chest and the warmth of his tongue taste my breast. He sluggishly licks my breast and I grab his shoulder whimpering in pleasure, I am not prepared for this, I search for the urge to push away but, can't find it.

Me: "Randall."

I whisper, at the feel of his hand on my hip. I gulp as he grips my underwear slowly, pushing it down. I'm completely exposed, I raise my head to see him trace his lips down to my belly. He gradually circles his warm tongue around my belly button and I feel a ticklish sensation in my stomach. He raises his eyes and gives me a smirk before, continuing to draw the wet circles around my belly button. My head falls back and I am declared powerless.

He gently inserts a finger inside me, I wince in pain pressing my thighs together. I raise my head to meet the soft scowl on his face, the lustful look in his eyes compel me to drop my head back.

He continues to gently push his finger inside me, I clench my eyes at the uncomfortable feeling which vanishes the moment he begins jolting his finger in and out of me. With his other hand he rubs my abdomen.

He lightly bites and nibbles the skin on my stomach before he presses his tongue in my belly button. I lose my mind in this euphoric sensation and the toe curling experience, as he moves his finger around and adds another one. I bite my lower lip before a loud moan escapes my mouth as his thrusts increase.

He rubs his hand around my belly button like he's massaging me, I'm aroused by this motion and I feel my abdominal muscles contract.

My orgasm engulfs me, forcing a scream to erupt from my mouth, my vision dims a bit due to so much pleasure. I raise my head to look up at him and find him staring with a smirk embracing his face. He brings himself up and takes me into an wolfy kiss

MBUSO\*

I stride into the bedroom, to meet Lelo sitting up. She smiles as our eyes meet.

Me: "You're still alive?"

I tease, settling on the edge of the bed and she responds with a smile.

This woman gave me such a fright last night, I have never felt so helpless in my life.

Lelo: "I'm still alive."

Me: "Ey, Generations had nothing on you, idrama sisi." (You were so dramatic.)

She shakes her head, smiling.

Lelo: "I'm still creeped out you know. How can people be so evil?"

Me: "It's sad. Did you sleep well though?"

She smiles, genuinely.

Lelo: "Like a baby."

Me: "We'll go to the hospital, before going to my mom's. Then later, we'll go see the prophet."

Lelo: "Why the hospital? I'm fine."

Me: "I just want to see if Goku is still craving fried fish."

She drops into laughter.

Lelo: "You have defeated me with this name."

Me: "I told you, I'm sticking to it."

Lelo: "Lucky me."

She ripostes, as she rolls her eyes.

Me: "You know if I was paid a thousand each time you rolled your eyes, I would be a rich man by now."

I spew the words out, causing her to laugh.

Lelo: "It's better than swearing, don't you think?"

This girl though.

Me: "I wouldn't know, on the real though. I'm glad you're okay, you gave me a fright last night. What was I going to say to your parents if something had happened to you?"

Her face changes to that of sadness.

Lelo: "Believe me, my parents have better things to worry about."

I don't like that, it needs to change.

Me: "Give them time, they will come around eventually."

She nods.

Lelo: "Let me bath so, we get going. Do you think I should bring something for your mom?"

Me: "Like?"

Lelo: "I don't know, wine? That's what they do on TV right."



Me: "It's not date my family, she just wants to talk."

My retort has her laughing out loud.

Lelo: "Hopefully, I doubt she'll be thrilled to know that your girlfriend is pregnant with another man's child."

Knowing my mom, she might want to dismiss this relationship.

Me: "We're adults, she has no say in this."

Lelo: "Do you know African moms? They can be a special kind of crazy when it comes to their beloved sons."

True.

My mom can be a little too controlling and obsessive sometimes.

Lelo: "Lelo 0 and Nomasonto 1."

She mocks.

Me: "You mean Lelo 100 and Nomasonto minus zero."

I refuse to let her drown over this, she smiles and leans over to peck my lips.

Lelo: "Thank you for being my crutch."

Me: "Ouch!!! A crutch, really? This is what I have become?"

She laughs.

Lelo: "You're my supporter hau, and I appreciate everything you do for me."

We're getting deep.

Me: "And, I will continue to do more, if you keep those chubby cheeks."

She rolls her eyes.

Me: "And, if you stop rolling those eyes."

Lelo: "Ai, let's leave it then."

She jumps off the bed with a giggle.

Me: "It's going to happen you know?"

I utter as she steps out of the bedroom.

Lelo: "Never."

She hollers back. I might be smitten.



## STYLES\*

It's midday and hopefully Kethu is gone, Dladla had said he was going to fetch her. I hope he did.

Khethu left the gate wide open, she was probably angry. I don't blame her though, I think I was rather hard on her.

I duck as a brick hits the windshield of my car, jolting me back to reality.

Me: "What the hell?"

I cuss when my eyes fall on Khethu, she's standing in front of the car with a baseball bat in her hand. She's still wearing yesterday's clothes, jeans and a shirt. Her hair is all messed up. All though hard to maintain, this woman has always kept her crown neat. I don't know what is on her mind but, I don't like the look in her eyes.

Why is she still here?

She swings the bat, hitting the bonnet of the car. She runs to my side and smashes the window, leaving a big crack.

Khethu: "Get out of the car Styles."

She screams, as she bashes my car with the bat, the windshield receives two more blows. The bonnet is dented, she has completely destroyed it.

Me: "What the hell are you doing?"

I howl at her, she can't hear me due to her screams.

Khethu: "You think you can use me and throw me away like that?"

She yells bashing the car once more. Suddenly I hear a loud screeching sound of a car. It lurches in full speed as it parks in front of mine, it's Randall and Neo is with him. He furiously dashes out of the car and charges towards Khethu, fear is visible in her eyes as she staggers back. Knowing Randall he's not going to have mercy on her.

He snatches the baseball bat from her and tosses it to the side, my jaw drops when one hard slap sends Khethu flying. That look on Randall's face, I saw it the day he attacked Nkomo for assaulting Amara.

He charges her again, she scoots back, using her hands and legs. I have never seen such fear in her eyes, Khethu winces in pain as Randall grabs her by the hair and begins dragging her towards the house. She has her hands gript on his wrist, trying to get him off of her. At this point I'm outside the car, standing next to Neo who has his hands on his head and watching this unfold with wonder and shock.

Neo: "Stylos, oga o tlo bhodisa medi ea hao. Mo stope." (Boss will kill your girlfriend, stop him.)

It's midday, the neighbours are at work and the streets are empty. These neighbours are too nosy, someone might be watching through the window.

It puzzles me that, Khethu is not screaming, only silent cries leave her mouth.

Me: "Randy?"

I yell, rushing after them, he lugs her to the back yard.

Me: "Randall stop."

I command.

He pays no heed to me, Khethu is in tears and blood is leaking from her mouth, from that slap he gave her. He pulls her up and sends another slap on the other cheek and it throws her down.

I jump in front of him when he attempts to grab her hair again.

Me: "Are you crazy? She's a woman, you could get arrested."

I don't like the look in his eyes, he grimaces at me and growls.

Me: "Would you calm down Randall?"

I look at Khethu who is on the floor with her head bowed, she's snivelling. I would think she would be bowling her eyes out after those slaps.

Randall pushes me aside again and attempts to grab her, Neo jumps on him and pulls him back.

Randall: "Get off me."

He groans, as he pushes Neo.

Randall: "Next time you dare do that to my brother, I will kill you."

He quietly grunts at her before, marching to the house.

Me: "Neo follow him, I will take care of Khethu."

Neo: "Are you sure Stylos?"

It doesn't look like he trusts her.

Me: "Just go."

Neo: "If you die at the hands of a woman, I will not be coming to your funeral. Your obituary will be enough for me to pay my last respects."

He states while glaring at Khethu, I thought he had a crush on her.

Me: "Neo..."

Neo: "Hai!! Le wena Stylos, oratana le le hlanya? Phela Tshidi oso." (You're dating a crazy woman, Tshidi is also like this.)

He retorts while, I help Khethu get up.

Me: "Are you okay?"

She doesn't respond, only her tears speak for her. Neo is giving her a weird look while he scrutinizes her from head to toe.

Neo: "So, beautiful girls are crazy vele? Nna I won't die for a beautiful girl, Stylos."

Sometimes I forget that he never stops.

Khethu: "Piss off Neo."

She shouts at him.

Okay...

Neo: "Yoh, askies. Sharp Stylos." (Sorry, bye Styles.)

He hurries into the house.

She pushes me off the moment he's out of sight.

Khethu: "You see what your friend did to me Styles."

She yells.

Me: "What about what you did Khethu? What the hell was that?"

She wears a frown.

Khethu: "You didn't sleep at home and you were not taking my calls. What did you expect me to do?"

This girl has lost her mind.

Me: "Seriously? What part of it's over, don't you understand?"

Khethu: "I don't believe you Styles, you love me too much to let me go."

Me: "Khethu, I don't want you anymore, you need to go back home."

Khethu: "I know you're angry Styles and I messed up but, we can fix this. We can fix us, please."

She pastes her hand on my chest and leans up to peck my lips, I shift back before her lips could brush mine.

Me: "This cannot be fixed anymore, there was a time when I pleaded with you Khethu that we fix us. I was desperate and needed you but, you were too selfish to understand."

Khethu: "Styles please..."

She wraps her arms around my waist.

"Get your filthy hands off of him."

Randall grunts from behind, I turn to meet his scowled face. He's standing with his hands rammed in his pockets. Khethu quickly pulls away and steps back.

Me: "Randall, I've got this."

He ambles towards us.

Randall: "That's not what it looks like, from where I'm standing."

Me: "I am not a child."

Randall: "I am still older than you so, that means I can chastise you if you're treading on the wrong path."

He can be annoying sometimes.

Khethu: "You see Styles? This is what I was talking about, he wants you to be his robot."

This doesn't even make sense.

Randall glowers at her.

Randall: "You need to get your shit and get out of this house."

Khethu: "I'm not going anywhere."

Me: "Randy, I've got this."

Randall: "Sisi, let's go. I want to see you pack and I will personally see you out."

This man can be so stubborn.

Me: "Randall would you stop."

Why is he so angry?

Randall: "If I let this go, this woman will wake up in your bed tomorrow morning. She used to be your weakness, remember? Khethu knows which buttons to press, to get you to do what she wants. Who knows, she might even stab you in your sleep."

He expresses, Khethu seems too afraid to speak. I don't understand, she's never been this quiet in Randall's presence.

Neo: "Is it safe to come out?"

He peeks through the door, Khethu rolls her eyes.

Randall: "Hey, let's go."

He grabs her arm and lugs her into the house, I sigh and follow them in. Randall can be so stubborn.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

NOMBULELO\*

Mbuso's mother can pray, I have to give her that. But, the woman is not kind. You would think, there are two different people. The look she is giving me right now, if I could hide, I would. We're in the sitting room, Mbuso is sitting beside me, he's holding my hand and I don't know why. I am already uncomfortable with his mother, glaring at me like I want to take away her favourite toy.

Mom: "Is there a reason to hold hands? She is not going anywhere, unfortunately."

I don't know what she means by that.

Mbuso: "This, is fine mom."

He retorts, I try pulling my hand but, his grip is too strong.

I'm experiencing his stubbornness for the first time.

Mom: "Mmhhh, awusho Mbuso. What is the rush? Why did you get her pregnant?" (Tell me.)

Straight to the point, I see.

Mbuso: "Mom this is between Lelo and I, it's our private matter."

Mom: "Your private matter? Is this how you talk to me now?"

He didn't say anything wrong.

Me: "Mama, he didn't mean it like..."

Mom: "I wasn't talking to you ntombazane." (Girl.)

Okay...

Mbuso: "Maybe we should go, seeing that we are not wanted here."

He suggests. I hope Mbuso doesn't cause drama, I don't want to be that girlfriend, the one who has beef with her boyfriend's mother. My life is complicated enough.

He gets up, pulling me with him. I stiffen my body, I'm not going anywhere. He must speak to his mother.

Mbuso: "Lelo, let's go."

Me: "Your mother is not done, Mbuso."

I plead with my eyes, he frowns, sighs and sits back down.

Mom: "Mbuso, you are being controlled by a woman now."

Maybe we should go.

Mbuso: "Mom, will you stop, please? You said you wanted to see us, right? We're here now."

I'm also annoyed by her.

She cackles and claps once, I have no idea what that motion means. She doesn't like me, though.

Mom: "I spoke to Zodwa, she's a prophetess at my church. I told her about your issue and asked her to come over."

That's nice of her, maybe she's not so bad.

Me: "Siyabonga ma." (Thank you.)

She scrutinizes me, before rolling her eyes.

Mom: "I'm doing this for my son, I don't want your demons following him."

She says I have demons.

Wow.

Mbuso: "Mom enough with the insults, please."

Mom: "Ngiyasho nje." (I'm just saying.)

"Koko, koko." (Knock, knock.)

A woman shouts from the kitchen.

Mom: "Ngena Zodwa." (Come in Zodwa.)

She shouts back.

An average height, chubby woman walks in, she has a church outfit on. A dress that covers her knees and a head wrap.

She sits next to Mbuso's mom.

Zodwa: "Sanibonani." (Greetings)

She greets and we return the salutation.

Mom: "Zodwa, this is her."

This woman does not waste time. Zodwa glances at me with a frown, she sighs and shakes her head. Mbuso looks at me, he's worried and I'm terrified, clearly this woman is seeing something.

Zodwa: "Okay, let me get to it. I have a prayer meeting to get to."

She announces, as she stands and walks to me.

Zodwa: "Guqa sisi." (Kneel)

I kneel on the carpet, Mbuso moves the coffee table to make space.

Zodwa puts her hand on my head and prays in tongues. When she's done, she instructs that, I sit, as she goes back to her seat.

Zodwa: "I see a woman, she lives among you. You know her to be kind but, she hides behind that kindness. This woman is jealous of your mother, she wants her life. She's the reason the father of your child turned against you."

Great, now Mbuso's mom knows that, the baby is not his. I'm afraid to even raise my head, knowing her look will send me to an early grave.

Zodwa: "Unesichitho sisi, her plan is that, nothing should go well for you. No matter what you do. Mbuso will also eventually turn on you, not because he wants to but, it's that curse that has been cast upon you. The father of your child loves you, he had plans to marry you. She saw that and cursed your relationship." (You have a curse.)

I lose my sanity to what I'm hearing, I look at Mbuso. He is not a happy person right now, his jaw is clamped and he's glaring at Zodwa.

Me: "Who is she? Why is she doing this to me?"

Zodwa: "I cannot give her name but, I can describe her. She's tall, big boned and is always wearing the same doek on her head. That woman is forever asking about your wellbeing, she visits your mother in the pretext of friendship while, she wants to see if her curse is working."

Me: "But, what does she want from me? Why does she hate me?"

She's definitely describing Martha.

Zodwa: "It's not you she hates, it's your mother. She knows that seeing you suffer will break your mother's heart. You, prospering means, your mother will prosper as well."

I don't understand.

Me: "But, why?"

Zodwa: "My dear, you would be surprised by what jealousy makes people do. It is after all, one of the seven deadly sins. This woman has nothing, no children, no husband. She wants your mother to be like her, and she will stop at nothing to make it happen. Right now there is a war at home, you are away from home because of her. Your father being the person that he is, is all her doing."

Me: "How do we fix this?"

Zodwa: "I will need to speak to your parents first, for now this is all I was shown. Maybe more will be revealed when I see your parents."

Me: "What about the dreams, there's a woman in..."

Zodwa: "That's her, she wants your baby. She wants to turn it into a zombie. The baby will give her the power she needs to finally destroy your family, she will control everything in that house."



From finances to decision making, everything will fall apart.”

This is too much to take in, Mbuso looks spooked.

Zodwa: “I need you to get a white cloth, bring it to me and I will pray for it. Put it on your pillow when you go to bed or wrap it around your belly. She won’t be able to get to you.”

Me: “Okay.”

Zodwa: “Mbuso will need to be cleansed as well, you two have connected through intimacy. This curse follows him, his life will eventually spiral out of control.”

Mom: “Kanjani manje Zodwa?” (How?)

Zodwa: “Like I said, their souls connected when they slept together.”

Mom: “So, my son is under a curse? Mbuso, uyabona ukuthi wenzeni?” (Look what you’ve done.)

She raises her voice.

Mbuso: “What did I do? I can’t choose who to love mom, Lelo is here and she’s not going anywhere.”

Did he say love?

Mom: “What about the father of her child?”

Mbuso: “What about him?”

Mom: “You can’t raise another man’s child.”

Mbuso: “As far as I know, Lelo is expecting my child and I will not have this conversation with you.”

I glance at him and I am comforted by the look on his face that says, he will help me through this.

Mom: “Asazi.” (I don’t know anymore.)

This is one unhappy woman.

NTOMBI\*

To think S’godhi was going to help me, that wizard proved to be useless. He said there’s nothing he can do to help Moses, only the person who cast the curse can reverse it. Moses will never be free from Nkosiyabo and until Amara is found, he will not gain his sanity. How can Jonas be so evil? Now I understand why he laughed when I announced that, I was going to take Moses to a healer.

Walking down the streets with him is so difficult, he keeps chasing people. They run and he stops and laughs at them, he picks up some little kid on the street, who's about 5 or 6 years old and starts spinning him.

Moses: "Hello boy, boy. Hello, mubiza. Mfana kababa, umfana kababa wena." (Daddy's boy, you are daddy's boy.)

He plays with him, the little kid looks puzzled.

Me: "Moses, put him down."

I command.

Moses: "Ntombi, awuboni ifana nami lengane? Yingane yami le. Ngasho, kuSusan ukuthi ngeyami lengane, yena waphika, athi yingane yaka Jafta. Cabanga nje, Jafta can't have children, he's infertile." (I told Susan that, this is my child. She denied it and said he's Jafta's child. Imagine.)

This just makes me so angry, if it were not for the love I have for him. I would've killed him.

Me: "Yehlisa lengane maan." (Put the child down.)

Moses: "Bye, bye boy, boy. Ubaba uzokubona yezwa?" (Dad will see you later.)

He puts him down and the boy scurries away to his house.

I have heard people say Susan's child looks like Moses, I guess I didn't want to believe it hence, I brushed them off. Now that he's mentioned it, the resemblance is great.

I don't know how long I will be able to hold on to this man.

Jonas: "Ahh senibuyile?" (You're back.)

He expresses as we walk through the door.

Moses: "Jonas, yazi uma ngibona wena, inhliziyo yami iyajabula maan. Awusho s'bali, uzongithengela nini ingudu?" (My heart jumps when I see you. Tell me, when will you buy me a bottle of beer?)

He says as he throws himself on the couch, his brother and uncle are still here. I can see how this hurts them. Mhambi is watching TV, him and Petunia are characters. She's obsessed with my kitchen, while Mhambi can't stop watching my TV.

Jonas: "You're still crazy Moses? I thought your wife said she will fix you."

He laughs, as he leers at me.

Me: "S'godi can't help me, athi only you can reverse this curse or Amara's return."

He laughs, he's enjoying this.

Moses: "Ssshh, uZulu uyakhuluma." (Zulu is talking.)

He's staring at the empty space beside him.

We all glance at him, this is no longer shocking.

Moses: "Ohh, usho uAmara Zulu?" (You mean Amara?)

He bursts into laughter.

Moses: "Hayi madoda, leya ngane. Ubengibamba kamnandi, the problem is that her hands were too shaky maan, shit. I hated how she cried a lot, 'nywe nywe uncle please, stop. Don't do this, I don't want, stop. Nywe nywe. Yoh bekungathi ngingam'bulala. Kodwa hayi, uMoses omcane yena, hayi shame. Ubeyifuna leya ngane kodwa ke, nge bhadi lami, wayelokhu ewa, when I wanted to penetrate her, angazi kanjani. Mangithi ngiyi faka emlomeni, yoh, yoh, yoh imemeze ingane."

(That child guys, she used to touch me in a nice way.) (I felt like killing her, I was aroused by her. But, I couldn't get it up. I don't know why. When I tried to put it in her mouth, she would scream.)

There is a deadly silence in the room, even Petunia who came from the kitchen looks shocked. She usually screams when a bomb is dropped, today she is tongue tied. Jonas has his jaw clenched, Mhambi holds an impassive expression. Moses' brother and uncle carry disappointed looks, I wouldn't be surprised if they walk out on him.

I have always been afraid this day would come, Moses has killed me. Petunia and I scream when Jonas jumps on Moses and punches him as he straddles him.

Me: "Jonas leave him."

I scream, I can't get any closer. He's too violent.

He keeps throwing punches at a defenceless Moses, the man is mentally disturbed. He can't defend himself.

Me: "Zakhele, help him please. Jonas is going to kill him."

Zakhele looks away.

I won't even bother with Njabulo, he's wasted. These men are calmly sitting down, while my husband is being beaten.

Me: "Mhambi please stop him, please."

I plead, Mhambi walks away.

I carry my hands on my head, feeling defeated. Zakhele finally gets up and pulls Jonas back.

Jonas: "Ngiyeke, ngizoyibulala lenja." (Leave me, I will kill this bastard.)

He fails to push him away, Zakhele is big boned compared to Jonas.

The room erupts with screams and gasps when Mhambi marches back with a gun aimed at Moses, I'm in front of him in a flash. Moses looks confused. He doesn't seem to know what is going on.

Me: "Mhambi wenzani?" (What are you doing?)

I scream at him, his face is so cold. If I move from Moses Mhambi will kill him.

Mhambi: "Move Ntombi."

He grunts.

Me: "No, you're going to kill my husband."

Mhambi: "Ntombi I said move or I will go through you."

Me: "Mhambi ngiyakucela. He didn't mean any of this." (Please.)

I plead.

Petunia: "Ntombi ubuwazi?" (You knew?)

I can't miss the shock in her voice, she shouldn't even talk to me.

Jonas: "Is it true Ntombi? You knew Moses was molesting Amara?"

His voice is coated with pain, I drop my head in shame and Petunia screams. Dammit...

Why is she always screaming?

Mhambi: "Ntombi? Ngane kababa? Wenzeni, wenzeni Ntombi?" (What have you done my sister?)

Only now, his face becomes emotional.

Jonas: "Khuluma Ntombi? You knew Moses was molesting that child?"

He howls at me, as he grabs my arms and shakes me.

Me: "Yebo, yebo bengazi." (Yes, I knew.)

I scream out loud, everyone gasps in astonishment.

My famous tears parade down my cheeks, I have no need for them anymore, as they always fail me. There was once a time when they would plead for me.

Me: "I have always known that he has a wondering eye, I endured it as long as, he didn't cheat on me and if he did, it was better that I didn't know. This changed when we had Nombulelo, I always wondered why he never wanted to change her diapers. He would walk out of the room when I undress her, or take a towel and cover her. I thought he was being protective as a man since, the rate of sexual violence in this country is among the highest in the world. But, as she grew up, he would look at her in a strange way. I didn't understand it, till I literally saw his eyes turn lustful. My world shattered that, my husband would undress a ten year old, his own child with his eyes."

Petunia is in tears, the men are glaring at me with shock. I'm still shielding my weakened husband from Mhambi's gun. Since I have started this, I might as well finish it.

Me: "I was afraid that one day, he will forget his fatherly love and give in to his desires. I knew about Amara."

Petunia: "Ntombi you knew?"

Me: "Yes and for me it was better because Lelo was safe. I saw him one day masturbating while watching Amara take a bath, that's when I found out. She was fourteen but, I had my suspicions before that. You can't imagine how shocked I was but, that meant my Lelo was safe."

Jonas: "Ntombi. How could you?"

He queries softly, I see defeat covering him.

Me: "How could I what Jonas? How could I protect my daughter? If given a chance, I would do it again."

Petunia rushes to me and slaps me, I fall back on Moses who pushes me off of him. How do I never see her slaps coming? This witch will pay one day for each one. I'm surprised Moses hasn't said a word.

Mhambi: "Is this why you took Amara? You didn't want us to take her because of this Ntombi? You said it will be better, if she grows up in Joburg where there's better opportunities and that Nombulelo needed a friend. Kanti you wanted to feed your husband's sick desires."

He yells at me, Mhambi never raises his voice. That gun on his hand looks like it's about to go off, the anger his face holds is scary.

Me: "I'm sorry, I had to protect my child."

Petunia: "What child? The very same husband you're protecting, threw her out. Moses has always been trash Ntombi and you have always cheered him on, usaqhubeka." (You continue to cheer him on.)

Mhambi: "No more, this ends here now."

He screams before a gun goes off.

KHETHU\*

Randall called my father over, he made sure that all my bags are packed. I hate him, he will pay for this one day.

Randall: "I don't understand why you seek answers from Styles, your daughter holds everything that you need to know."

He speaks with so much arrogance, my father wasn't even offered a seat or a glass of water. We're all standing in the living room, throwing words at each other.

Dad: "Who are you? What part did you play in this relationship?"

Randall: "Does it matter?"

I don't know why he thinks he can stand up to my father and those hands in his pockets scream disrespect.

Dad: "It matters alright, I will squash you boy. No one hurts my child, I can arrest you for assaulting a woman."

Randall: "By all means, go ahead."

Styles: "Dladla, we don't want any trouble."

Randall: "Styles, these people are nothing to you anymore. You don't have to take their shit."

Dad: "There's two of you Sishi but, this one is worse. I didn't know they still make your kind. You're full of shit boy."

He mocks.

Randall: "Styles. Is this what you had to put up with for four years? Bullshit from father and daughter?"

Styles: "Randy no."

Me: "That is not fair, I have been a good woman to Styles. I gave him my whole life."

Randall: "No one has disputed that Khethu, it's what you have become that we do not condone."

Dad: "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

He moves closer to Randall who is not at all daunted, to say I hate this man would be an understatement. Styles would be with me if it weren't for him.

Randall: "Commissioner, I'm pretty sure you have seen the red flags. Your daughter is obsessed with this man and we keep telling you. I'm not sure if that has registering in your head, yet. Everyone has seen it, surely, your fatherly love cannot blind you like that."

Me: "He's lying dad, it's because of him that Styles and I have broken up. He manipulated him and turned him against me."

Randall sniggers, as he glares at me.

Styles: "Stop lying Khethu. When will you own up to your mistakes?"

Me: "What mistakes Styles? All I ever did was love you, for four years I put up with you. I stayed and compromised, even when you didn't want to marry me."

Randall: "Oh, here we go."

Me: "If it weren't for Randall, we would be fixing things. Randall is controlling you, that's why you treat me like this."

Styles: "You see this Dladla, this is why I can't do this anymore. Your child has no respect for me."

Dad: "Respect is earned boy, not taken."

I see Randall's face change.

Randall: "That's it, get your daughter and leave now."

He commands.

Dad: "You don't get to speak to me like that."

Randall: "Can we not play house, commissioner? Take your daughter and get out."

Me: "Styles? Will you let him speak to my father like this? I gave you four years of my life and..."

Randall: "This is getting boring, sisi take your four years and leave my brother's house."

I look at dad, he's defeated.

Me: "Daddy?"

Dad: "Let's go angel."

He declares.

Me: "No, daddy. I am not leaving Styles, he's my life."

Dad: "Khethu there's nothing we can do now, let's go and stop embarrassing yourself."

He takes my hand, I yank it away instead.

Me: "No, I am not going anywhere with you."

Dad: "Khethu stop!!!"

He yells.

Dad: "You have humiliated me enough, now get yourself in the car."

This man has never yelled at me like this.

I look at Styles, his eyes are cold. The spark he had before, is no longer present, he now looks at me with the eyes of a stranger. I love this man, I can't leave without him. The thought of being without him kills me.

Me: "Styles."

I drop on my knees before him, he steps back.

Neo: "Ai miss K, no man. Where is your dignity maan? You're embarrassing yourself, come on, have self-respect."

Neo complains, as he walks in from the kitchen, I shoot him a black look.

Styles: "khethu get up."

Me: "Baby, look at me. It's me, your only eye, remember? You love me Styles, we love each other."

I scream, when I feel someone clutch my arm and pull me up. It's Randall, he's dragging me towards the door.

Me: "Let me go."

I shout.

He lugs me outside, dad follows behind him with my luggage.

I try to run back in but, Randall blocks the door.

Me: "Styles, baby please. Don't do this to me."

I peek in, crying out to Styles, he turns away.

Me: "I will kill myself Styles, my death will be on you."

Randall shuts the door on my face. How dare he?"

I bang the door and try to open it, he has locked it from the inside.

Me: "Styles please, open this door."

Dad: "Khethu stop, let's go."

He grabs my hand and I yank it.

Dad: "I will treat you like a child if you insist on acting like one. You know I have never laid a hand on you Khethu but, you are forcing me right now."

Me: "I don't care, kill me if you have to. I am not leaving Styles."

I yell at him.

He doesn't understand my feelings, no one does.

Dad: "Kethukuthula, let's go."

He commands, I know that voice, he's angry.

Me: "Styles open the door please."

I cry as I bang on the door, my father grabs my hand and drags me to the car screaming.

Me: "Let me go, dad please, let me go. You don't understand, I need him."

He opens the passenger door, shoves me inside and closes it. I open the door, he gives me a stern look and pushes it shut.

Dad: "Open that door Khethu and I will beat your ass up on this street."

His threats force me to remain, my heart is breaking and I can't breathe. How will I leave without the love of my life? Oh God! How will I endure waking up without him next to me?

To be continued...





Edit with WPS Office

MKHIZE\*

MaSibiya: "Baba, umaDlamini akaphilile. Kuzofanele athole usizo." (MaDlamini is not well, she will have to get help.)

Me: "Usizo, nina nikhona nje?" (Help, when you guys are here?)

MaSibiya: "Useyasihlula baba, we tried kodwa hayi." (She has become difficult.)

Me: "MaSibiya, inkinga ikuphi? Ngoba anisebenzi, you're always sitting at home, gossiping the whole day. UmaDlamini ngumnewenu, kuzomele nim'nakelele." (MaDlamini is your sister-wife, you have to look after her.)

MaSibiya has become a nuisance, she comes to my office every day to tell me the same thing. MaDlamini's situation has worsened, she throws tantrums. She hits her sister-wives and sometimes, we would wake with loud music playing, to find her dancing and cooking up a storm in the kitchen. Her reason would be that, it's Christmas. It has come to a point where we lock her up in her room, when we go to bed.

Me: "MaSibiya, you are the eldest and I expect better from you. MaDlamini will get help, don't worry things will go back to normal soon."

MaSibiya: "Wena baba uhlezi uthi soon, kodwa ayifiki leyo soon." (You're always saying soon and it's not happening.)

She's sulking.

Me: "We MaSibiya, ngicela uphume la. Phuma, I don't want to see you in my office again unless, you're bringing me food. Nxa." (Please get out.)

I howl at her, she frowns and marches out with her lips pouted.

These woman will drive me crazy.

"Baba."

Sika says as he walks in.

Sika: "Mkhonto is here."

Me: "Let him in."

He hesitates, he has something in his mind.

Me: "Ufun' ukuthini?" (What do you want to say?)

Sika: "Ingabe yicebo elihle lelo baba? Messing with Scar is dangerous, look what happened to Lunga and MaDlamini." (Is this a good idea?)

Me: "Ingakho nje ngifuna ukuphindisela. My boy died but, Okolie is still alive. This time I will go to war with the Mkhizes, my ancestors will not fail me this time around." (That's why I want revenge.)

Sika: "Ingabe lithini icebo lakho baba?" (What is your plan?)

Me: "I will have Okolie's child, I will raise her in my own way. I want to turn her into a killing machine, I will instil so much hatred in her heart for her father. I will make her believe he sold her to me. Sithi isiZulu 'sigoqe sisasemanzi. That little girl will be my revenge, she will kill her own father. Then I want to see, if the Okolie curse will fall upon her. Won't that be a cherry on top, killing two birds with one stone?" (There's a saying in Zulu 'fold it while it's still wet.)

Sika: "Lihle icebo lakho baba, kodwa kee, uMkhonto angim'thembi." (Your plan is good but, I don't trust Mkhonto.)

Me: "Mkhonto loves money, he grew up in the slumps. Those idiots will do anything for money, show him a thousand rand and he will go crazy."

He chortles.

Sika: "Leya ngane yona? They took her baba." (What about that girl?)

Me: "Ungakhathazeki ngaloyo, I still have my dog Moses. He can run but, he can't hide. Moses owes me and one way or the other, he will pay me back. Even if it means, I have to take his daughter, I will do it." (Don't worry about her.)

He laughs.

Sika: "Eyy baba, you like them young neh."

Me: "Uyabona umuzi wami ugcewele izalukazi, ngisafuna ukuphila mina Sika." (My house is full of old women, I still want to enjoy life.)

He laughs.

Sika: "Hai kee, let me call this fool."

He opens the door and gestures that Mkhonto comes in.

I get up as he strides in. This bastard has not heard what I have to say but, he's already grumpy.

Me: "UMkhonto omkhulu, owanqoba izitha zakhe ezinamandla." (The great spear that conquered his strongest enemies.)

He frowns at my friendly face.

Mkhonto: "Yimi lo." (That's me.)

He groans, as he scowls at me. Sika doesn't like this.

Me: "Hlala pansi nsizwa." (Sit down man.)

Mkhonto: "Angihlali nezitha zami." (I do not dwell with my enemies.)

Me: "Haibo! Kusekela nini siyizitha?" (Since, when are we enemies?)

Mkhonto: "Ufunani Mkhize?" (What do you want?)

Me: "Okay, let me get to the point. There's a cockroach that won't leave my house, I need you to squash it for me."

Mkhonto: "Wena uhlulwa yini?" (Why can't you do it?)

Me: "I can do it, kodwa ngiyazi ukuthi wena ungayenza umsebenzi ongcono." (I know you will do a better job.)

He stares for a while as if mulling upon my words.

Mkhonto: "Igama?" (Name?)

I'm getting through to him.

Me: "Scar."

His frown grows.

Mkhonto: "Okolie?"

Me: "Yes."

He smirks and I know it's done.

Me: "Ngifuna indodakazi yakhe." (I want his daughter.)

I introduce my plan.

Me: "I know about the Okolie curse. You cannot shed their blood, so there won't be any bloodshed. I want that child in my house."

Mkhonto: "Angisebenzi mahala Mkhulu." (I don't work for free.)

I knew it.

Me: "Sika?"

He grabs a bag of money from under the table and places it on top.

Me: "Ngiyazi ukuthi lolu lulimi lwakho." (I know this is your language.)

He crumples his eye brows.

Mkhonto: "Ngiyabona, futhi inuka kamnandi." (I see and it smells nice.)

Me: "Ibale." (Count it.)

Mkhonto: "Awuthi ngiyodla amathambo wenqoda." (Let me go think about it first.)

I didn't expect this, I leer at Sika who raises his eyes brows in return.

Me: "Don't take long."

He nods and turns to walk.

Mkhonto: "Awu suke endleni mfana." (Get out of the way boy.)

He growls at Sika who's standing at the door, Mkhonto is as scary as he sounds. He looks like the type you would run away from when you meet him on the streets. Sika moves, looking like he's ready to fight. Mkhonto turns to look at me.

Mkhonto: "Ngizolinyathela iphela lakho." (I will squash your cockroach.)

He declares before walking away.

Sika: "Nja, nxa." (Dog.)

I laugh at him, he's intimidated by Mkhonto.

AMARA\*

Randall wasn't in bed when I woke up this morning. I was glad in a way because I was a little embarrassed about what happened between us. I didn't know how I would face him this morning, it was all I could think about, as I laid on his chest last night.

To think I wanted more and I thought he would go further, I was a little disappointed. That's when the shame was built, wanting more of him. I have never wanted anything so bad in my life.

It's getting late now and he's not home yet, I have been stretching my neck at the sound of every door opening or a door bell.

I can only entertain thoughts of him, I find myself biting my lips when I think about that toe curling experience.

Chioma: "You have grown restless waiting for Uze."

I'm sitting with Chioma in the living room, she's binging again. Liyana is sleeping in her room, Randall hasn't seen her since yesterday, I hope he's not avoiding her.

Me: "I'm not waiting for him."

I lie.

"Who are you not waiting for?"

I turn to meet his face, close enough to feel his breath on my face. He suddenly cages me on the couch, his eyes perusing my lips. I gulp as my heart thuds against my chest, I look away while he leans closer to my face, the tip of his nose touching mine. This is awkward, Chioma is still sitting right across me.

Me: "Randall, Chioma is here."

I whisper.

Randall: "It's just us, me hemma." (My queen.)

He states, his lusty gaze stabbing me. I tilt my head to the side, to find Chioma gone.

I can barely take my eyes off of his, as he crawls on the couch, adjusting himself on me. He burrows his face on the curve of my neck and begins biting and kissing it, an unwelcomed moan escapes my mouth, as an upsurge of heat rushes in my body. I support myself with my elbows, as his body gently presses against mine, pushing me down. My efforts are fruitless, when my back crashes on the couch, declaring Randall victorious.

I'm heaving and breathless, as he carries on to bite and suck on my neck and I can hardly think straight due to this sudden action.

Me: "Randall?"

I whisper, trying to catch my breath.

Randall: "Me hemma." (My queen.)

He whispers back, before he bites my earlobe, and continues to plant kisses on the most sensitive parts of my neck.

Me: "What are you doing?"

My breathlessness has me feeling mortified.

Randall: "I want you, Amara."

He whispers into my ear and I feel a tint of warm moist as he licks it.

He brings his face to mine and takes my lower lip with his teeth, gently biting it, I feel him smirk at this scene while he slowly pulls my lip. My body shudders and he takes my lips prisoner, not giving me a chance to protest. His tongue finds mine in a jiffy, as he greedily kisses me, like he's been craving for it. I did say this is my obsession, I can only breathe in this moment.

My heartbeat quickens along with my pulse, my blood pressure rises. I feel a throbbing on my clitoris and a sudden wetness. The shuddering of my body intensifies when he slips his hand under my shirt, leading it towards my breast and softly grabs it.

"This is not how I imagined meeting my brother after so many years."

A females voice pulls us out of this heated moment. I press my hand on Randall's chest, as I try to get him off me. He's not moving instead, nuzzles his face on my neck and sighs deeply. His hand is still resting on my breast, like he doesn't want to let go of this moment.

Me: "Randall, there's someone."

I can only whisper, as it feels like something has clogged my throat.

He presses his lips on my neck and they linger on. Now my body trembles from the embarrassment of having him on top of me with someone standing in the room.

Whoever they are, clears their throat.

Me: "Randy."

Another desperate whisper, he groans and moves from me, pulling me up with him. He does not look like a happy man, I find it a bit funny.

We turn to see a young girl, probably in her late teen years. She stands with her hands pasted on her hips and a gently smile on her face.

"But, carry on and pretend I am not in the room. I'll just stand here and watch, this is better than Nollywood."

She laughs.

Randall: "So, this is the type of thing you watch on TV? Does mother know this or should I tell her?"

He pushes his hands in the pocket of his jeans, as he questions.

"She watches it with me, in fact, she's the one who got me addicted."

Randall: "Well, maybe I should send you to boarding school."

"Too late, your father beat you to it."

She responds, I stand beside him confused, with a thudding heart and my blood pressure slowing down. The hot flashes are still threatening me and I can only think of hiding. They are having a strange conversation and I can't make out what it's really about.

Randall: "Ifeanyi?"

Her mouth forms a wide smile.

Ife: "In the flesh."

He rushes to her, puts his hands on her waist and swoops her up. He twirls her around as she giggles like a child, I have seen him do this with Liyana. He places her down and pulls her into an emotional hug, I hear her sniff, softly.

Ife: "What kind of a brother are you, leaving his sister behind?"

She expresses, while holding on to him.

Randall: "It wasn't my intention to hurt you."

Ife: "Well you did but, that's all in the past."

She pulls out and wipes her tears.

Ife: "I know you're happy to see me brother but, control your emotions."

She laughs through her tears, Randall shakes his head. I am yet, to see him laugh or smile genuinely.

Randall: "You're still forward, I see. Last time I saw you, you were still sucking your thumb and

trailing behind mother with your grip on her skirt.”

She giggles.

Ife: “I have grown.”

She twirls for him.

Randall: “And, you look like your mother.”

Ife: “Only prettier.”

Randall: “I won’t tell if you don’t.”

She laughs.

Ife: “My lips are sealed, that woman has snow white tendencies. She won’t leave the mirror alone.”

Randall: “I thought she would grow out of it.”

Ife: “That’s Mrs. Okolie for you.”

Her eyes fall on me and she smiles.

Ife: “Who’s that?”

She moves away from him and marches to me.

Ife: “Hi.”

She extends her hand, she’s a bubbly one.

Ife: “Ifeanyi Okolie. You can call me Ife, if you like. I am Randy’s first love.”

She introduces.

Me: “Amara, I guess, I’m his second love.”

That just slipped out of my mouth, I run my eyes at Randall and he simpers, looking self-satisfied.

Ife: “You’re cute.”

She states, smiling.

Ife: “Did you hear that brother? My place in your life is secured.”

Randall walks up to us, scowling softly.

Randall: “We’ll just let you believe that.”

He teases and she laughs, after rolling her eyes.

We settle down on the couch, she sits next to Randall with her arm around his and her head on his shoulder. I’m on the far end of the couch, he stretches his hand to take mine and shifts to



me a bit.

Randall: "How did you get here?"

Ife: "I came with argya, he's at the hotel with..." (Father.)

She pauses, raises her head to leer at me. I sense that she wants to say something but, not in my presence.

I notice that Randall's facial expression has changed.

Randall: "Amara, this is the baby of the family."

Ife: "I'm not a baby."

Randall: "She has a smart mouth, don't mind her. If you feel like you're annoyed by her talkativeness please, do tell her, or she will never stop."

I can only laugh at his words.

NOMBULELO\*

The ride home was quiet, there's this awkwardness between us. This is a first, this man talks a lot. I guess it must be what the prophetess said about Zuma, I noticed how his face changed when she mentioned him.

He went upstairs and I have been standing in the kitchen, trying to gather my thoughts. I am still baffled by everything and I can't grasp how all of this is happening to me. The fact that Mbuso could be cursed because of me, doesn't sit well with me.

"Whatever you're making, I would like some too."

I turn to Mbuso's voice and I realize that, I'm holding a loaf of bread.

Me: "Bread and fish paste?"

He frowns.

Mbuso: "I'll wait for supper thanks."

He walks up to me as he says this, I want to laugh but, my heart is heavy. He stops before me.

Mbuso: "I don't care what the prophetess said, I am not letting you go Lelo and no one is taking you away from me."

I know where this is coming from.

Me: "By anyone, you mean Zuma?"

He glares at me.



Mbuso: "I mean anyone."

Me: "Mbuso, I will never go back to him. I don't care if he did all of that willingly or under a curse, I'm here with you. This is where I want to be."

I assure him.

Mbuso: "It better be."

He's going back to the Mbuso I know.

Mbuso: "Or, I will find that witch and ask her to teach me black magic so, I can make that fool disappear."

And, he's back.

Me: "Nah, bad joke."

Mbuso: "Really?"

He makes a face.

I nod, smiling.

Mbuso: "Dammit, just when I thought I was getting better. I was ready to join Trevor Noah."

I laugh, this is the Mbuso I know. He welcomes a serious look.

Mbuso: "We will fight this together Lelo, I promise. We will fight this curse and whoever this woman is."

I believe him.

Me: "And, your mother."

He sighs and slouches his body, his hands dangling in air. I can't help but, laugh.

Mbuso: "I'm already drained."

He mocks.

Me: "Mbuso, she knows that you're not the father of the baby."

He takes my hand into his.

Mbuso: "Whoever said Goku is not my son is a liar. I don't want to hear these words come out of your mouth Lelo. I have committed myself to you and everything you come with, Goku will not know that I am not his father until he is of age."

Deep.

Me: "You speak of forever?"

I say it in a form of a question just in case, I'm being too forward.

Mbuso: "You think this is a game? Girl you got me hooked."

I laugh at his retort.

Me: "Mbuso Xaba, you are one crazy man."

Mbuso: "I have been called many things in life, this is not new."

He clowns.

Mbuso: "You know I've got you right?"

I nod, we hardly ever have these serious moments.

Mbuso: "Come here."

He enfolds me in his arms. We have a long way to go.

To be continued...



NTOMBI\*

Someone called the police upon hearing a gun shot, I suspect that gossipier Martha. She always has her head over my fence. I can't believe my brother shot at me. If he had moved his hand an inch, the bullet would've hit me. Jonas is outside talking to the police, I wish he would stand up for me, the way he does for Mhambi.

Mhambi's gun is registered, Jonas explained that it went off when Mhambi was cleaning it. Maybe a night in jail will do him good. Moses is sleeping, in our room. Even in his sleep he keeps chanting his sins and calling out to Nkosiyabo, I think I should call upon the Buthelezi ancestors and ask them to pardon my husband. I know Moses is not perfect but, that man is my husband.

Me: "Mhambi, tomorrow morning I want you and Petunia out of my house."

Petunia cackles loudly.

Petunia: "We are not leaving Ntombi, khohlwa sisi. Angim'boni mina uAmara la." (Forget it, I don't see Amara here.)

Me: "I don't care Petunia, Leave my house. When your darling Amara comes back, I will send her to you."

Mhambi thinks he can shoot at me and get away with it?

Mhambi: "Ntombi, ngiyakuthanda sisi, kodwa uzofa kabuhlungu wena. I already see your end and it's not good." (I love you my sister but, you will die a painful death.)

Me: "Mhambi you're cursing me?"

Mhambi: "I am not cursing you Ntombi, this is the truth. You will pay for what you and Moses did."

Hypocrite.

Me: "What about what you did Mhambi?"

Petunia: "What did he do?"

Me: "He almost killed me and that is a crime. I have a good mind to go out there and tell the police the truth."

Mhambi: "You're a disgrace to the family."

He snaps at me.

Zakhele: "Let's calm down, fighting like this will not solve anything. What's done is done. What we need to do now is come up with a solution, Moses cannot remain in this position."

Njabulo: "Ngivumelana no Zakhele, ingakho bengikhuluma nomfowethu namhlanje. We have decided to take Moses back to KZN, there is a man there who will help him." (I agree with Zakhele. I was talking to my brother today.)

Uncle Njabulo has said something sensible for once, he is useful after all.

Me: "That's a good idea."

Jonas: "No, it's not."

He declares, as he closes the door shut and plods to a seat..

Jonas: "Niyamthanda loMoses wenu. This man is not going anywhere." (You love this Moses of yours.)

Zakhele: "You can't stop us."

Jonas: "You think?"

Me: "Bhuti yini inkinga yakho vele?" (What's your problem brother?)

Jonas: "Ungazongibuza udoti, wena Ntombi." (Don't ask me shit.)

Petunia: "Ntombi you can't see what's happening here? You are standing up for an abuser."

Me: "No Petunia, I am standing up for my husband. Mina no Moses, siyofa s'lahlane. My husband will be okay." (Till death do us a part.)

Jonas: "Kanti umendo uso? Mhambi, anisangitsheli?" (Why didn't you tell me that marriage is like this?)

Mhambi: "Cha Jonas, udlisiwe lomuntu. Ayikho lendaba yakhe no Moses." (She was given a love portion. This is insane.)

Moses: "Akadlisiwe uNtombi Mhambi. Angazi ngo Petu, Petu, ngoba hayi uyalithanda I kishi lami. The way to a man's heart is through his stomach and Petu is living up to it, in my kitchen, cooking my food. How much do you eat Mhambi?" (She wasn't fed a love portion, I don't know about Petunia who she loves my kitchen.)

When did he wake up? Then again, he never sleeps for hours.

Jonas: "Yoh angeke, Zakhele khuzani bo." (Warn him.)

Moses settles next to Njabulo.

Moses: "Jonas buka." (Look.)

He shows him the scar on his forehead, Jonas frowns at him.

Moses: "Ntombi did this to me. Yoh unamandla lo mfazi, yimbokodo. Ungamboni ezacile. She's a bull fighter this one." (This woman is strong, she's a rock. Don't let her small body fool you.)

Petunia: "Kwasuka lokhu." (Here we go.)

Me: "Moses, let's go to bed."

Moses: "Cha Ntombi, I'm telling my in-laws about you hau." (No.)

He dismisses me.

Moses: "Mhambi awusho, uPetu uke wakubeka isandla?" (Has Petunia ever hit you?)

Mhambi: "I don't have time for this."

He clicks his tongue, gets up and walks to his room.

Moses: "Ohho. Ngizoxoxela wena ke Jonas. It's important that you know the type of a woman your sister is. UNTombi lo, engam'lobola ngenkomo eziyi seven. Kodwa Jonas, uzocela isibaya sonke? Lalela phela, lomfazi uyadelela. Akangiboni uNtombi. " (I'll tell Jonas the story. I paid a bride price of seven cows and Ntombi is disrespectful.)

This fool...

You would think he was given a truth serum.

Jonas: "Ntombi?"

Me: "Yini bhuti. This is your doing, deal with it." (What brother?)

Moses: "Malum' uNjabulo. It's a good thing that you're here, ukhona umuntu esengim'bonile. Isphalaphala seNtombi. UMashoto wami, eey, lowamfazi. You should see her when she walks, kunyakaza umhlaba." (I have found a beautiful woman, my Mashoto. The earth shakes when she walks.)

Moses does not respect me. How dare he do this to me?

Have I not been embarrassed enough?

Me: "ungijwayela kabi wena Moses. Uzonya yezwa?" (You're disrespecting me Moses.)

I shout at him.

Njabulo: "Habe! Makoti." (Really? My in-law?)

Me: "Hayi malume, ngikhathele mina ngo Moses. All he does is cheat on me and I have to put up with it." (I'm tired of Moses.)

Moses: "Uyabona malume, ngishilo ukuthi uNtombi uyadelela." (I did say that Ntombi is disrespectful.)

Me: "Bring Mashoto to this house and I will kill her, try me Moses, try me."

I shout.

Jonas: "UMashoto wenzeni Ntombi? It's your husband who can't seem to keep his pants down."

Petunia: "Athi ukhathele ngo Moses." (She says, she's tired of Moses.)

She cackles.

Petunia: "But, you continue to protect him. Do we look like fools to you Ntombi? You seem to be enjoying this, you're busy hiding behind Moses' pot belly, playing the perfect wife."

Me: "At least I stand up for my husband."

Petunia: "Please, ngiyakucela. Stop using that title, you might as well take a dog from the streets and call it your husband. Awushadile wena Ntombi, marriage is a beautiful thing and I don't know what to call this thing you have with Moses." (You're not married.)

Me: "Your true colours keep revealing themselves Petunia, you are an evil woman."

Petunia: "Uthini?" (What did you say?)

She shouts at me.

Me: "You heard me."

I retort.

Zakhele: "This is beyond me, I don't know anymore."

I grab Moses hand.

Me: "Asambe wena." (Let's go.)

He laughs as he gets up, we depart to our room.

RANDALL\*

I knew Amara was mine to have the moment I laid eyes on her, my need for her has grown after last night. I wanted to conquer her body and finally make her mine to claim but, she was feeble, as she trembled in my arms.

I couldn't expose her to my huge frame, so I opted for a different form of pleasure. I want her to get used to the feeling, she might appear strong but, I still see her as my fragile Amara.

I had to leave early this morning because I knew that I would struggle to keep away from her. I could hardly sleep a wink last night, trying to fight the urge to take her into my arms. I was wrong in thinking that, her kisses were enough. They give me life. But, I am convinced that there is a thirst in me so deep that, it can only be quenched by our souls connecting.

I could hardly control myself when I saw her, as I walked through the door, everything around me fell away and she was all I could see.

The urge to have her intensified, I became selfish as I pushed to feed the need that, I have for her. I am selfish with her, I only want her to myself.

The fact that, she sometimes drifts away into thoughts of her family, evokes a kind of jealousy I have never known.



I want her to yearn for me, to need me and let me love her the way I would.

My father being back from Ghana is not a good thing, I wish he would've stayed there. He will cause nothing but, conflict for me and Amara. I don't want to fight him but, if push comes to shove, I will fight for what is rightfully mine. I can't comprehend why he insists on pushing this woman on me, I will not give in to his ways.

Raven just came, we're seated in the back yard with Ife. I opted for this place as I don't want Amara to overhear our conversation.

Me: "That man never listens."

They just told me that he brought his bride with.

Ife: "Argya has defeated mother. Who are you?" (Father.)

Me: "His son, he better not mess things up for me."

Raven: "Don't you want to meet her, at least?"

Raven has issues, honestly.

Me: "Is this why you came to my house?"

Raven: "I'm just asking Randy, I know I would want to meet my supposed wife."

My trust for Raven is beginning to waver, he gives that man too much credit.

Me: "No, Rav. I don't want to meet her. I want nothing to do with her, I will eliminate anything that threatens my relationship with Amara."

Ife: "Why would you even ask him that, Raven? This is the same reason he left us, you want him to run again?"

Her mood has changed.

Me: "There won't be any running this time Ife, I will stand ground. Days of Segun, controlling me, fell away 16 years ago."

Ife: "There must be another way for you take up the throne and not be with that woman."

Her words get me thinking.

Me: "Find the priest who performed the ritual and have him break the covenant."

Raven: "Where will we find him? No one knows him, except for father."

Me: "Nana said something to me when I was in a comma, only Amara will help me rule. That, without her, I will lose myself and nothing will go right for me."

Ife: "Amara is for you brother, clearly the gods gave her to you. I don't understand why argya is so hung up on that woman." (Father.)

Who can ever understand the things he does? He is a dictator after all and doesn't care about



anyone's opinion.

Ife: "Tell me brother. How did you court Amara?"

Me: "Court?"

Ife: "Gosh! Don't tell me, you don't know that a woman has to be pursued before you claim her. How did you two end up together?"

Me: "It's none of your business."

Ife: "Brother come on, please tell me. I want all the details, I want to know how romantic my brother is."

Raven laughs.

Ife talks too much.

Raven: "Uze and Romance? That's like water and oil."

Ife rolls her eyes.

Ife: "Oh please, not everyone is like you. Besides, he grew up here and I hear South African men are romantic."

I doubt this is a right conversation to have with a seventeen year old.

Me: "What men? Are you looking at men now Ife?"

She rolls her eyes.

Ife: "Argh brother please, I am a teenager and my hormones are active. Shoot me for being human."

Raven: "My friend shut up. What hormones? I don't blame you, I blame your mother. These telenovelas are getting into your head."

He snaps at her in annoyance.

Me: "Please tell me father sent you to a convent."

Ife: "Why would he do that? It's bad enough that I was sent to a boarding school."

She pouts.

Me: "Rav, talk to your sister."

Ife: "Please, I am okay."

She complains.

Ife: "I can't say the same about you. You know a girl is not yours until you actually woo her and express your undying love for her, otherwise you are single brother."

Me: "I don't know this language you speak Ife. What I know is that Amara is mine, pursued or



not.”

Ife: “Argh, I feel sorry for her. Imagine a guy claiming you to be his, and he didn’t even work to get you. That’s boring.”

Me: “Boring is that mouth of yours that, won’t keep shut.”

“Uze, you have a visitor.”

I turn to Chioma’s voice, to see Mkhonto standing next to her.

Why is here?”

Me: “Excuse me.”

Raven: “Is everything okay?”

Not that I would tell him if it weren’t, he’s my father’s stooge.

Having no answer for Raven, I walk up to Mkhonto.

Me: “You, in my house cannot be good.”

Mkhonto: “A word?”

Me: “This way.”

He follows me to the patio.

Mkhonto: “Mkhize approached me today.”

He introduces as we get there.

Me: “I see.”

Mkhonto: “He wants to bring you down.”

I’m not surprised.

Me: “And, he wants you to do it?”

Mkhonto: “Yes, he’s after the little miss. I don’t know what he’s planning but, it seems big.”

Just when I thought the old man had grown tired.

Me: “That son of a bitch, he better not be eyeing my child. I will pluck his eyes out.”

Mkhonto: “I doubt he wants to make her his wife.”

Me: “Explain.”

Mkhonto: “I overheard him say that, he will make her a killing machine, she will be the one to kill you.”

Me: “Bloody coward. What about you?”

He frowns.

Mkhonto: "What about me?"

Me: "Mkhize obviously promised to pay you handsomely, we both know you need the money. Why snitch?"

Mkhonto: "Let's just say I'm not a fan of snakes, I don't trust him."

Me: "I see."

Mkhonto: "I'm serious Scar, I will not take this deal. I came here to warn you, that old man is hungry for revenge. I saw it in his eyes and he will do anything to taste it."

He's right, I can never underestimate Mkhize.

Me: "Thanks for the heads up, I won't forget this."

Mkhonto: "Sho sho."

He turns and begins to walk away.

Me: "You won't name your price?"

He stops and looks at me.

Mkhonto: "Just loyalty Scar, I know one day, I will need a favour from you."

Me: "Fair enough."

He nods and continues to walk away, I have to call Styles.

KHETHU\*

Me: "What are we doing here?"

My father just pulled up outside his house. I can't go back into that house, considering the way I left. Nobayeni and I had a huge fight about Styles and painful words were said, words that can never be taken back. Now, I am back here and it is embarrassing for me. I have failed to keep a man and Nobayeni will throw her favourite words in my face, 'I told you so'.

Dad: "This is your house angel."

Me: "No, this is Nobayeni's house."

Dad: "Don't you think it's time you two make things right? She is your mother Khethu."

Me: "I don't want anything to do with her and I am not going in that house."

He sighs.



Dad: "Khethu I am tired, okay? I don't know what you want from me, I'm trying to help you here."

Me: "If you want to help me dad then, give me my Styles back."

My heart is shattered and no one understands it.

Dad: "He doesn't want you anymore."

Me: "Don't tell me that dad, he loves me, I know he does. We're going through a rough patch, it happens. No relationship is perfect."

There is still this hope inside me that, Styles will come back to me.

Dad: "Khethu, if that man loves you, he wouldn't have thrown you out of his house."

Me: "Styles didn't throw me out, it was Randall. This is all his fault."

I sit back and fold my arms across my chest, I can feel his gaze on me.

Dad: "I've had enough, get out of the car."

He commands, firmly.

Me: "I said, I am not going in that house. Take me back to Styles."

He jumps out of the car, rushes to my side and pulls me out, after opening the door.

Me: "Dad no, let me go."

"You're back?"

Nobayeni utters as she appears through the garage door. I roll my eyes at her.

Me: "Dad, can I have your car keys."

I need to get out of here.

Dad: "Why?"

Me: "Just give me the keys."

I raise my voice at him, Nobayeni chortles.

Dad: "Why do you have to be so difficult? Let me help you Khethu."

Is he kidding me?

Me: "I don't need help dad, the only thing I need right now is Styles."

Dad: "Would you stop? I am tired of hearing that name."

Nobayeni: "What has happened to you Bridgette? You are not the same person that left this house years ago, it's as if life has dealt with you."

Who is she, to talk?

Me: "You happened to me Nobayeni, you did this to me. You broke me with your lack of love, you treated me like I was the worst thing that has ever happened to you."

Nobayeni: "This is rich, you're blaming me for your failures."

Me: "I am blaming you, I have trust issues because of you. I have always been afraid that Styles will leave me and because of that, I couldn't be the best for him. I couldn't love him the way he deserved to be loved."

Nobayeni: "Oh, Bridgette. You are your father's child, he was a hypocrite too, you know? Thought he was better than everyone and he damned walked it too."

Dad: "KHETHU!!!"

He shouts, as he catches Nobayeni, after I have punched her. She's holding her eye, while glaring at me. It happened so fast, her words made me so angry.

Dad: "What have you done? What the hell is wrong with you?"

He yells.

Me: "You people are what's wrong with me, I hate you and I don't need you."

I shout before grabbing my bag from the car. I'm getting out of here.

Nobayeni: "That's right, run. It's all you ever do anyway."

She yells after me, as I walk away.

Dad: "Khethu come back, don't leave like this."

Me: "I am done dad."

I yell back.

To be continued...

76\*

STYLES\*

Me: "When are you going back to Pretoria?"

Neo has moved in, he didn't ask me if he could. The guy came with a bag and chose a bedroom for himself.

Neo: "You don't want me anymore?"

Me: "I don't want you?"

I frown at him, he gives me a strange look.

Neo: "Ai Stylos, sies man. The things you entertain in that mind of yours. It should be illegal. Anyway, I can't go to Uze's house. The whole of Ghana is there, his father is scary you know."

He explains his reason for being in my house.

Me: "So, you thought it best to come and take over my kitchen."

He's cooking pap, or trying to rather. I don't know if it should smell like this.

Neo: "Khethu is gone, otherwise this kitchen will be abandoned."

He reminds me, I can't think about her right now. She is a sensitive topic.

I clear my throat.

Me: "Listen, I'm going out for a while."

Neo: "To see Uze?"

Me: "My life does not revolve around Randall."

He chuckles.

Neo: "Who told you that? Wena le Uze ngamathe no limi. You know Khethu was kind of right in way, by being jealous of your friendship. You two can't stay away from each other." (You and Randall are inseparable.)

He doesn't know what Kethu and I have been going through.

Me: "You should learn to shut up sometimes, Neo, it helps. Go hiking or something."

Neo: "Dinthe tsama kgoa? If I want to take a walk, I'll walk to the taxi rank. Why must I risk bophelo baka by walking up a hill full of rocks?" (Those things are for white people.) (My life.)

I give up.

Me: "I'm out, don't burn my house down."

Neo: "Who are you going to see Stylos?"

Me: "Goodbye, Neo."

He laughs.

It doesn't take long to get to the south, it's a Saturday and there's less cars on the road.

Something keeps leading me to this woman and whatever it is, is way beyond me. I won't try to fight it, this is what I want. I want to feel alive again.

I see her, she's standing with Lebo. She can't see me so, I sneak up behind her.

Me: "Hey."

I whisper softly in her ear, she swivels and I meet her wide eyes. She sighs, in relief.

Me: "Did I scare you?"

She smiles and shakes her head.

Lebo: "Sethu, we're still busy. Can you entertain your visitor later?"

Sethu: "I'll be with you now, you can go ahead."

Lebo rolls her eyes before, walking off.

Sethu: "What are you doing here Mr. Styles?"

Me: "I thought I should come see you."

Sethu: "I'm at work so, I can't really chat."

Me: "I know but, your shift starts at 5pm, right?"

She nods.

Me: "Great, that gives us time."

She accepts a confused look.

Sethu: "Time for what?"

Me: "I want to take you somewhere."

Sethu: "I can't go anywhere at the moment, I don't want to be late for work."

Me: "You won't, I promise."

She hesitates, her expression says she's keen.

Sethu: "Okay."

She smiles, I think I can get used to this smile.

Me: "Let's go."

Sethu: "Let me inform Lebo, she will be upset if I don't tell her that I'm going out."

Me: "She won't even notice that you're gone."

I take her hand, she leers at it, then back at me.

Me: "May I please, hold your hand Miss Sethu?"

She drops her gaze reticently, I will take this as a yes.

Sethu: "Where are we going?"

She digs, as we get in the car.

Me: "Fox street."

Sethu: "In Joburg?"

Me: "You sound surprised."

I give her a brief look as I pull out from the parking lot.

Sethu: "I didn't think we would be going that far."

She responds, anxiously.

Me: "It's not far, it's just 10 minutes away from here."

She releases a worried sigh.

Sethu: "What's there?"

Me: "Food, there's a place called Mad Giant, they have the best burgers. You'll love them."

She giggles.

Me: "Okay, did I just score me a point?"

She giggles again.

Sethu: "Say food again and you'll score yourself another point."

This actually makes me laugh.

Me: "So, you're a foodie?"

Sethu: "Who isn't? There is something intimate about one's relationship with food, forget painting, poetry or writing. Food is art."

I leer at her to find her smiling, there's a passion on her face as if she talks about her first love.

Me: "You must really love food, then."

Sethu: "I actually wanted to be a chef but, my dad said it's not something I could lean towards,



career wise. I didn't know what else to do and nursing was the next interesting thing I could find. I love it too but, culinary is my first love."

Me: "Maybe one day I'll get to taste your food."

She giggles, she does a lot of those.

Sethu: "Maybe."

Me: "We're here."

I announce, as I take a turn into the parking lot. It doesn't take us long to get our food, we settle inside. I knew she would love it, the little smile on her face says it. I have never seen anyone so happy when eating, it's a beautiful sight to behold. She stops as she finds me watching her, her gaze drops.

Me: "What happened?"

Sethu: "You're staring."

Her declaration has me sneering.

Me: "I wasn't staring at you but, your food. I want to taste it."

I express softly, her eyes shoot up to leer at me. I knew this would get her attention.

Sethu: "I don't share my food."

She responds nervously, as she raises her hand to her mouth in attempts to lick off the source that has glazed the tips of her fingers. I grab her hand to stop her, her gaze rises again to encounter my intense glance. This time her eyes are coated with introversion.

Me: "Let me do the honours."

I offer, my voice carrying a soft tone.

I bring her thumb to my mouth before she could protest, wanting to see her reaction, I keep my gaze on her. She draws a deep shuddering breath, as I suck on her thumb, this causes me to smirk. This act, leaves a lenient frown on her face. She has fallen under my hypnotic gaze, as she fails to look away. Usually, her eyes would be all over the place by now. I clear my throat, she blinks and leisurely pulls her hand away.

Me: "It's not bad."

I express. Her fifth finger seeks refuge between the seams of her lips, she will never get over this habit of biting her nail.

I frown at her shyness.

Me: "Miss Sethu, I'm completely sure that, the food tastes better than that nail."

I win, as a smile flashes on her face.

Sethu: "I'm suddenly full."



Me: "Okay, we'll get takeaway?"

She agrees with a nod, I like her shy nature and her innocence.

AMARA\*

I flinch when a pair of large arms tightly grip my waist and turn me around. I look up to see Randall's spellbinding eyes.

Me: "Randall?"

Randall: "Are you hiding from me?"

He brings his face closer to mine as he inquires, I shake my head. My heart is already palpitating.

I look for a way out of his embrace but, can't find any, as he has me caged in his arms. We're in the kitchen and anyone can walk in.

Me: "I was... going to make something to eat. Are you hungry?"

I announce between my breaths, trying to move my face away from his.

He clutches my cheeks with his fingers, tilts my head to the side and caresses the area around my neck before burying his face on it. He doesn't say anything but, nibbles on my neck.

Me: "Randall."

I gasp out his name, as his grip on my waist tightens.

Randall: "I'm hungry for you, Amara."

He nibbles, licks and blows on the nape of my neck.

If my heart didn't flutter at the sight of him. I would think him to be a pervert, he has an insatiable appetite and can't keep his hands to himself.

I feel my feet leave the floor, only to apprehend that, he has slightly lifted me up. I gasp, as he pins me against the wall and smashes his lips on mine, his kiss is gentle but, firm. My feet taste the ground again, before he presses his body against mine.

He strays his kisses to my neck, ears and cheeks. The tips of his fingers glide down my arm and find their way to my pelvic bone. The sensation of his warm breath and his lips on my skin, send me on a journey, I am unable to return from. I can barely hold still, as I get aroused by this, it has me craving for him more than anything.

Randall: "I have a need for you Amara, I want to taste every inch of your body."

He declares in undertone, as he dominates over me. My breathing has gone on a path of its own,

with his, rushing behind. My knees wobble, as his strong arm tightly grips around my waist.

I manage to tap back to reality, when I feel his hand sink through the waist of my pants. This is risky, there is a child in the house. I get a quick escape from his hungry clutches, and trudge towards the sink, while trying so hard to pull myself together. It's suddenly hot in here and I need to catch my breath.

Randall: "You can't escape from me forever, you know?"

He declares under his breath, I turn to find him smirking at me while, standing with his hands rammed in his pockets. In a flash, I have my head dipped in the fridge, as if searching for something. I'm trying to stop myself from blushing.

Me: "Would you like something to eat?"

I find a way out of this embarrassing situation, he doesn't respond.

Okay...

He's probably not hungry.

Randall: "Tell me about this courtship?"

He introduces, I glance at him as he carries an inquisitive look.

Me: "Courtship?"

I close the fridge, and lean against the sink, facing him.

Randall: "Yes, apparently women want to be courted before, they belong to someone."

I smile at him. How does he not know this?

Me: "Have you never courted a woman before?"

He doesn't say anything but, rather stares at me. I think I'm supposed to guess his answer.

Me: "Courtship is when you seek the affections of a woman, take her out on dates."

Randall: "Like coffee?"

He is clueless.

Me: "Yes, or dinner. Surprise her with gifts, it doesn't have to be extreme. Women like the simplest things in life, like flowers, a box of chocolates. A text, out of the ordinary. It lets us know that, you haven't forgotten our existence. Also, we keep a respectful distance with little intimacy or none at all."

He scowls.

Randall: "Who came up with this nonsense? How will I go a day without touching you?"

I laugh at his statement.

Me: "Well, it's how things are."

Randall: "Okay, basically, this is all about getting attention right?"

Me: "In a way but, it's not as bad as you make it sound. It's nice to feel wanted by someone special, a sense of belonging."

Randall: "Can't I just tell you that I want you? That should be enough."

He's funny.

Me: "You are not schooled in this, are you?"

He walks up to me, sends his hand on my waist and pulls me to him. I crush on his chest, I'm afraid to look up at him.

Randall: "Shouldn't this be enough? The burning desire we have for each other?"

He says softly, my heart is getting too excited. I doubt I want to take that trip again, I know I will fail to control myself this time.

Me: "It should but, this relationship thing is complicated."

Randall: "We will uncomplicated it."

I leer up at him, as a giggle swooshes out of my mouth. Now, I can't look away. His enthralling gaze has numbed me.

Randall: "I don't know when you became important to me Amara but, I know I want to be with you. I have been longing for this, I have been searching for you."

Not a man of many words and I certainly did not expect this, I don't know what to say. He's always spoken of his feelings in an insatiable way and this gentleness is new.

Randall: "Won't you teach me how to love you, me hemma? I want to do this right." (My queen.)

I cuddle his cheeks in my hands, as he leans his face closer to mine. I think I want to taste his kisses, again.

"Don't you guys have a room? You can take mine."

We turn at her call.

Randall: "Why do you have a room in my house?"

Ife: "It is my brother's house, I ought to have one."

Randall: "Your timing Ifeanyi..."

He's miffed.

Ife: "Is perfect right?"

She grins at him. I try to pull out of Randall's arms but, he's not letting go.

Randall: "Please, follow your father."

She giggles.

Ife: "I beg jo, I'm tired of that face. I've been looking at it my whole life."

She strides in and pulls me away from him, he takes up a frown.

Ife: "Amara, don't let this man fool you. He has to work to get you, give him a hard time. Make him beg, trust me, you'll thank me later."

Randall: "This is what they mean when they say the devil comes to destroy."

She sticks her tongue out at him.

Randall: "Why are you in my house daughter of Segun?"

Ife: "Uze's father is here, he wants to see you."

Randall glances at me, as he holds a gloomy expression.

Randall: "I'll be there."

She nods and I think the glower on his face has her walking away.

Me: "What's wrong?"

He sighs, heavily.

Randall: "I want you to meet my father."

Me: "Okay."

He doesn't seem happy.

Randall: "Whatever he says, don't take it to heart. He's old and that affects his brain."

I should be laughing at this but, I don't. I suddenly feel a gnawing pain in my stomach.

Me: "Should I be worried?"

He shakes his head with a frown that, seems permanent.

NOMBULELO\*

I have been delaying to call my uncle, I need to announce my arrival before going there.

Mbuso: "Will you take a day off tomorrow?"

Me: "Yes, I want to do this and get it over with."

Mbuso: "I can talk to the supervisor if you like."

Me: "No, you have done enough for me. I don't want people thinking that I get special treatment."

Mbuso: "Special treatment is for special people and you, chubby cheeks are special."

He declares, as he turns from the bathroom mirror to glance at me. I'm sitting on the edge of the bath tub, watching him shave his beard. He called me in here to ask me this, this man couldn't wait to finish and come to the living room.

Me: "Your sweetness seems to be growing lately, take it down a notch. We don't want people thinking I gave you love portion."

He laughs.

Mbuso: "Never, those things don't work on me. My mother is a prayer warrior."

He retorts with irony.

Me: "That she is."

And a pain.

Mbuso: "What time does your uncle go to bed?"

Me: "I don't know, why?"

His question puts a frown on my face.

Mbuso: "You haven't called him yet."

I sigh.

Me: "Let me do it now."

Mbuso: "Put him on speaker, just in case I need to defend my baby."

He's crazy, I look at his mirror reflection as we wait for my uncle to answer. He appears anxious while leering at me.

Jonas: "Nombulelo."

Me: "Malume, unjani?" (How are you?)

Jonas: "Yimpilo ngane yami. Ngabe yonke into iright?" (It's life. Is everything okay?)

Me: "Not really malume, I need to come and see you tomorrow. Actaully uma no baba." (Mom and dad.)

Jonas: "Your father is not well at the moment."

He confesses.

Me: "I know but, this is important. Please, let mom know."

Jonas: "I will."

Me: "Ngiyabonga malume." (Thank you uncle.)

Jonas: "Okay my child, I will see you then. Bye."

Me: "Bye."

I hang up.

Mbuso: "That went well."

Me: "It did. I'm not looking forward to tomorrow, I dread going to that house. The memories I have of that place are not pleasant."

Mbuso: "I can come with, if you like."

He chuckles, as he slumps over to wash his face, he's silly.

Me: "If you want to be a victim of my uncle's belt then, yes."

He laughs.

Mbuso: "You're going to be fine, you'll see."

He takes my hand and leads me out of the bathroom.

Me: "I hope so."

We tramp down the stairs.

Mbuso: "If your father tries anything, remember that Goku is a super saiyan."

Me: "Oh gosh!!! Ngafa ngo Goku." (Must I suffer with this name?)

I laugh, and he pulls me into his arms.

Mbuso: "This was my plan, I missed your laugh today."

I frown at his casualness.

Me: "Okay."

He chuckles.

Mbuso: "You look so much better when you laugh and I like it."

Me: "Thanks... I guess. You're being weird."

A pucker grows between his eye brows, as he tightens his arms around me.

Mbuso: "Oho, I'm trying to be romantic here. I don't want you to start complaining and comparing me to Azwindini, my acting is bad, you know."

I'm thrown into a stage of laughter.

Mbuso: "I'm serious."

I'm done, and finally declaring him crazy. I don't know why but, the way he's holding me is seriously turning me on right now. His eyes surf my lips, we're thinking the same thing. He leans down and takes over my lips, his hands are tightly gript on my waist. I stand on my toes as I loop my arms over his neck, somewhat drawing him down.

To be continued...





RANDALL\*

I walk into the lounge with Amara trailing beside me, Segun is seated on the couch with Liyana on his lap. He grimaces upon seeing Amara. Liyana jumps from his lap and skips towards me, I catch her and scoop her up.

Liyana: "Papa, nana said he will take me to Ghana to meet my grandmother." (Grandfather.)

Her introduction doesn't sit well with me.

I send my gaze to him, he's glaring at me.

Me: "Ife, please take Liya with you."

Liyana: "But, I want to sit with nana." (Grandfather.)

Ife: "Liya, let's go get some ice cream. We'll bring nana some, too." (Grandfather.)

I place her down and she scurries away before Ife.

Me: "Father, I would appreciate it if you would stop filling my daughter's head with nonsense."

I warn him, he doesn't seem fazed.

Segun: "Who is the maiden with you?"

He's held this question from the moment we walked in, I glance at Amara who's holding a look of worry. She might still be dwelling upon the words I introduced, before we left the kitchen.

Me: "This is Amara, she is the one I have been telling you about."

I take her hand into mine to realize that hers is trembling. My father approving her would mean a lot to me.

He scowls at my reply.

Segun: "You did not mention any woman to me."

He rejoinders rudely and lies in the process.

Me: "Before we have this conversation, bear in mind that we are all adults and I will not tolerate any disrespect towards Amara."

Segun: "Are you chastising me Uze?"

I guess my request fell on deaf ears.

Me: "Father, I need you to respect my home and the people in it. That's all I ask, please sit."

He hesitates before settling down, Amara positions herself next to me.

Segun: "Uze, there is someone you need to meet."

I saw this coming, Amara cannot know about that woman. We have barely started and I can't lose her.

Me: "This topic is off the table father, can we please not bring people that are not here into this conversation."

Segun: "How do you expect me to ignore something that is there?"

He growls, he's quick to anger.

Me: "The only thing that exists for me at this moment is this woman right here, I don't know anything else, but her."

Segun: "Uze, you surely cannot deny your destiny."

He's being adamant.

Me: "Father, I have introduced Amara to you. Not once have you acknowledged her presence."

Segun: "I have not come for that Uze. Who is this Amara you speak of? From which blood line is she from?"

Amara: "Buthelezi sir. I'm from the Buthelezi clan."

Her answer puts a frown on his face, I take her hand into mine and this appears to aggravate Segun.

Segun: "Who gave you permission to speak?"

He lashes out at her.

Me: "Segun Okolie, mind who you're speaking to?"

I return the lash, as I pull Amara up with me.

Segun: "My subjects do not address me unless given permission."

His stubbornness takes over.

Me: "How dare you? Get the hell out of my house."

I growl at him and he shoots up from the seat as his face shows nothing but rage.

Amara: "Randall?"

She gasps in shock.

Segun: "Uze, I don't care how old you think you are. I am still your father, you do not talk to me like that."

Me: "You are nothing but, a dictator."

He sighs deeply.

Segun: "Listen to me son, I came here in peace. Your bride..."

Me: "Don't say it, don't even say it, or I swear I will forget that your blood runs in my veins."

I howl at him.

Amara: "Randy."

She nudges my hand as she whispers my name, I see the fear she has for this man. This is Segun Okolie, he can be intimidating. Hence, Raven bows down to him.

Segun: "No child of mine has ever spoken to me in this manner."

Ife marches into the room, anger plastered on her face.

Ife: "Amara, come with me."

She takes her hand and leads her away after giving my father an unpleasant look.

Me: "I only asked you for one simple thing and you couldn't give it to me."

Segun: "How do I give the impossible Uze."

Me: "What is so impossible about respecting Amara?"

Segun: "Who is she that I have to respect her?"

He shouts.

Me: "She's the only woman who holds my heart and father mark this. Today is the last day you ever get to talk to her in manner. This is not Ghana, you do not call the shots here."

Segun: "You are my son and you will do whatever I tell you, I brought Ruth to meet you and she's outside in the car."

He dared to bring her in my premises.

Me: "You did what?"

Segun: "Meet her Uze, you..."

Me: "Get her out of here."

I growl.

Segun: "I will not do that, that girl is your wife Uze..."

He snaps.

Me: "Don't tell me that shit, get out of my house."

"Randall!!!"

I'm about this close to disowning Raven, I swear he gets on my nerves each time he stands up

for this man.

Raven: "You seem to be forgetting that this is your father, you cannot speak to him like this."

Wow.

Me: "Raven, stay out of this."

Raven: "How can I sit back while you disrespect our father?"

He saunters towards me and stands right before me, his expression says he wants to fight me.

Me: "Get out of my face Raven."

Raven: "Someone needs to knock some sense into you Randall, you have gone overboard."

Me: "What are you talking about?"

Raven: "Bro, you ran from home. From your responsibilities, you disobeyed your father and chose to be a prodigal son."

Me: "I chose to be free, Raven."

Raven: "No, you chose to be selfish. Do you know how it felt to live under your shadow? Everything I did, I was compared to you. 'If Uze was here, he would have done this. Uze doesn't speak to me like this. Uze does it better than you.' This has been my life for the past sixteen years Randall, I could never be better in the eyes of everyone. I was overshadowed by your ghost, father does not see me. All he cares about is you."

He confesses in anger.

Me: "You blame me for all that?"

Raven: "Yes, I blame you Uze. You don't care about anyone but yourself."

Me: "Maybe you should've done better Rav, do not drag me into your problems. I was living peacefully until you people came."

Segun: "I am done with your stubbornness Uze, Ruth is your wife and..."

I grab him by the scruff of his shirt.

Me: "Say that to me one more time, say it father. I dare you."

I growl at him, Raven pushes me back but, my grip on Segun stands.

Raven: "This is insane Uze, let go of him now."

Me: "Your father keeps spewing shit, warn him Raven. I have no wife, the woman out there means nothing to me."

Segun: "It doesn't matter what you say, you two are bonded by blood."

This is not worth it, this old man is not daunted and he stands by his decision.

Raven finally manages to push me away, I push him back and he staggers.

Me: "Is there something I need to know Uzoma? Did you slither in my house or you came as a brother?"

He clenches his teeth while glaring at me, providing no answer to my question.

Segun: "This anger of yours will not get you anywhere."

Me: "You seem to be concealing a secret Segun. What is it that you have done? Why are you so bent on me being with this woman I have never met?"

Segun: "I don't know what you are talking about."

Me: "Really? Your eyes speak a different story, I hope you did not sell my soul for your evil desires."

Segun: "Uze, I am your father."

Me: "That does not mean anything if you refuse to act the part. You did something all those years ago and you're afraid that if I don't take this woman, something will happen to you. I will not play this game with you Segun, leave my house."

Segun: "You will regret this Uze, I promise you and don't think I am letting this go. One day you will come begging and I will be waiting for you."

I chortle at his response.

Me: "Get out of my house and Raven, follow him."

He gives me a black look before, he furiously marches out. Raven follows behind him, I guess I am on my own now.

KHETHU\*

The smell of fresh coffee tickles my nostrils, slowly pulling me out of a deep slumber. I remember this scent. It's been long since he's made it for me. He knows that I can't start my day without it, I smile as I open my eyes.

Me: "Styles, you..."

My mouth rejects my words at the sight of Mbongeni, he's holding a cup of coffee.

Dammit...

For a moment I was back home with Styles.

Mbongeni: "Sorry it's just me."

He smiles, I bring my body up.

Me: "What time is it?"

Mbongeni: "Nine, I made you coffee just the way you like it."

He holds me the cup, I take it and place it on side of the bed. Yesterday I called Mbongeni to get me, I needed a friend. Someone who will listen and not judge me. I know he wants to be more than friends and sleeping over has probably given him the wrong impression.

Me: "I'm sorry I took over your bed last night."

He smiles.

Mbongeni: "You don't hear me complaining. How did you sleep?"

Me: "Okay, I guess. Where is my phone?"

I fiddle on the sheets in search for it.

Mbongeni: "I don't know, it must be under your pillow or something."

Me: "It's not here."

I jump off the bed as I grab the pillow, I panic when I don't find it. I strip the bed, tossing everything on the floor.

Mbongeni: "Khethu calm down."

Why is he telling me this?

Me: "I can't find my bloody phone dammit."

I feel a tightening on my chest, my breathing quickens. What if it's off and Styles is calling me? He will think that I don't want to speak to him?

Me: "No, no, no."

I kneel by the foot of the bed, as I peek underneath it.

My anxiety grows when I find nothing.

Mbongeni: "What's going on Khethu?"

Me: "I can't find my phone Mbo, help me find it please."

Mbongeni: "It's obviously somewhere in the house, relax."

Me: "Don't tell me to relax, Styles must be calling me. He's probably worried sick."

He follows me, as I march out of the bedroom to the living room.

Mbongeni: "Khethu you can't do this to yourself, this is not okay."

Me: "What's not okay? I just want my phone, will you help me look for it or not?"

Mbongeni: "There's your phone there, on the kitchen counter."



I turn towards the kitchen, my heart relaxes, as I see it. Mbongeni watches me as I rush to grab it.

There are no messages from Styles, the only thing it holds are endless messages from my father and missed calls, this breaks me.

I raise my eyes to leer at Mbongeni, I don't know what that look means and I don't care.

Mbongeni: "You deserve better you know."

I roll my eyes.

Me: "Styles is the better that I deserve."

Mbongeni: "How can you still want him after how he treated you?"

Me: "You don't know anything Mbongeni, I came to you because I needed a friend."

Mbongeni: "And, I am trying to be that friend Khethu, that man has always been a loser. Honestly, I saw this day coming."

Me: "Please, not now."

I utter, as I tread back to the bedroom to get my bag.

Mbongeni: "Where are you going?"

Me: "Why? You want to keep tabs on me?"

Mbongeni: "It's still early Khethu and you haven't had anything to eat."

Me: "I'm not hungry."

I stroll out after putting on my shoes, Mbongeni keeps trailing behind me and it's getting annoying.

Mbongeni: "Khethu please, don't go."

Me: "Thank you for everything."

I pace out of the door, leaving him standing there.

AMARA\*

Me: "Chioma."

I call as I plod into the kitchen, she's preparing breakfast.

Chioma: "You're up early."

Me: "Where is Randall?"

Chioma: "He left early this morning, he said something about a meeting. He didn't give details."

She explains.

Me: "Is he always like this?"

She shoots me a questioning look.

Me: "He doesn't communicate, I think he's clueless when it comes to relationships."

She smiles.

Chioma: "I don't really know much about his private life or how he's like when he's with a girl. The thing with him is that he's mysterious, it's hard to read him."

Ife bolts into the kitchen, singing at the top of her lungs. Chioma frowns at her and she laughs.

Chioma: "Not everyone is a morning person, Ife."

Ife: "I think everyone should upgrade to that."

She greets me with a smile, I return it.

Ife: "Where is brother?"

She's asking me by the way.

Me: "I don't know."

Ife: "How can you not know where your man is? Girl, you must track him down, know his every move. How many steps he takes a day, how many drops of water he drinks and most importantly, how many women he talks to. Trust me, people are thirsty out there and they want to drink from your cup."

This has me laughing, Ife is way different from Randall. She is out there, while he's reserved, Raven is a mixture of both.

Chioma: "How old are you again?"

Chioma can't believe what she just said that.

Ife: "Seventeen and loving it."

She smiles widely, Chioma shakes her head and continues with her cooking.

Amara: "You're happy this morning, considering what happened yesterday."

This is how I choose to introduce the topic, I need to know what the drama was about.

Ife: "Life is too short to take Segun Okolie serious."

She pulls a chair and sits, I position myself opposite her.

Me: "What was that about?"



Her face changes to that of concern.

Ife: "Brother didn't tell you?"

He would've if he spoke much.

Me: "No, the last time I saw him was when you pulled me away."

She sighs.

Ife: "I don't know then, wait for him to come back, he will explain."

She is hiding something.

Ife: "My brother needs Dr. Love."

She states randomly.

Me: "Why is that?"

Ife: "He sucks at this love thing, I bet, you feel like you're dating a Zombie. He's too serious, he doesn't report his comings and goings. He is clueless when it comes to relationships."

Me: "And you think Dr. Love will fix him."

Ife: "With a snap of a finger."

I laugh.

How can one have so much energy?

Ife: "What has he been doing all this time? He's 34 for crying out loud."

Chioma: "You should start acting your age Ifeanyi, your smart mouth will get you into trouble. Uze is your elder brother, watch what you say about him."

Chioma reprimands her, I doubt she meant any harm.

Me: "Is Liyana still sleeping?"

I decide to change the topic, Ife doesn't seem to like being reproached.

Chioma: "I'll go check."

She strolls out and Ife rolls her eyes.

Ife: "Old people are boring."

She declares as she toddles to open Chioma's pots, her face lights up in seeing the contents of it. I can only sit here and wonder where Randall might be. The argument he had with his father has me worried, it seems they are at longer-heads with each other about something deep.

NOMBULELO\*



Ntombi: "Lelo?"

I was hoping she won't be the one to open the door.

Me: "Hi mom."

There's an awkward moment before she takes me into an embrace.

Ntombi: "Come in"

She paves a way for me, this is a full house. The first person I see is my father, he's sitting on the couch and he looks out of it, as he's staring into space. It hurts to see him like this and I want to embrace him so, he knows that he's not alone.

Jonas: "Ungakhali Lelo, your father will be okay. Life is not always kind." (Don't cry.)

He states when I wipe my tears.

Mhambi: "Oh my child, how are you"

I shake his hand with a smile.

Me: "I'm fine Malume." (Uncle.)

Aunt Petunia hugs me, I proceed to sit next to my father. I know he is the last person I wanted to see but, now that I see him. My heart breaks for him.

Me: "What happened to him mom?"

She huffs.

Ntombi: "Ask your uncle, he tells the story better."

Okay.

There is tension in this room.

Jonas: "Don't stress the child Ntombi."

Petunia: "Lelo, my child. Would you like something to eat or drink?"

My mother frowns at her, I have no idea what's going here, it seems big though.

Ntombi: "UNombulelo ngeyami ingane, I will make her something to eat." (She's my child.)

I see uncle Jonas shake his head in disapproval.

Me: "I'm fine mom."

What the hell is going on?

Moses: "Nombulelo? Ntombi, where is my baby?"

He seems to be back to his senses.

Me: "I'm here baba."

He turns to me, his eyes fill up with tears, as he cradles my cheeks.

Moses: "My baby, you came back? Ubaba uyaxolisa, ngiyaxolisa sthandwa sami." (Dad is sorry, I'm sorry my love.)

Tears cascade down his cheeks, I fail to comprehend why he is emotional. Last time I was here he ousted me out like I meant nothing to him.

Me: "Baba?" (Dad?)

My tears fail me as well.

Moses: "Ubaba uzokusa ecrèche, yezwa? And I will fetch you, then we'll go and buy ice cream." (Dad will take you to crèche.)

His words prove that he is not at all normal.

Mhambi: "Nombulelo suka lapho." (Move from there.)

I don't understand his request.

Me: "Yindaba malume?" (Why uncle?)

Moses: "Hayi Mhambi, umona ngowani? Nombulelo is my child, you left yours back in the bush." (Why are you jealous Mhambi?)

Jonas: "Mhambi relax, this is not the time."

Ntombi: "Lelo, you said there's something important you need to share."

She gets to it.

Me: "Yes, I have been having dreams of a woman asking for my baby."

My father rests his head on my shoulder as I introduce, he starts humming a lullaby.

Me: "The dreams happen every night and so I decided to see a prophet and she told me that there's a woman who is after you, mom."

Ntombi: "Mina?" She looks shocked.

Me: "Yes, she wants to see your downfall. She's the reason behind your suffering."

They listen attentively as I narrate the saga.

Petunia: "I think I know who it is."

All eyes fall on her at her declaration.

Ntombi: "Tell us."

Petunia: "Your friend Ntombi, the one who is always here."

She means Martha, Tebogo is hardly ever here.

Me: "That's what I guessed too."

Ntombi: "Martha?"

Petunia: "Yes, I once saw her jump over the fence in the middle of the night."

Huh!!!

Ntombi: "Yoh, yoh, yoh. Petunia, wena bowuyaphi ngalesosikhathi? Uyavuka nawe kanti?"  
(Where were you going at this time of the night? Are you also a witch?)

My mother looks shocked while, as Petunia is piqued by her assumptions.

Petunia: "Ntombi, just so you know. I see things, I have a third eye."

Ntombi: "Ilihlo lesithathu Petunia, hayi suka, ungazodlala ngathi wena." (A third eye, please. You're kidding us.)

She laughs, I see the tension between these two. They have never been best of friends but, peace was kept among them.

Jonas: "Ntombi lalela tuu." (Listen.)

Ntombi: "Listen to what Bhuti Jonas? Petunia just confessed that she's a witch and she goes on to say that Martha is the one after my life."

Mhambi: "Petunia is right, she has a gift of seeing the supernatural."

My mother accepts a frown.

Ntombi: "Is that why Martha said she hates you?"

Petunia: "Yes, it's because I saw her. Actually, she comes here every night and turns back when she finds me awake. That woman will not give up."

Jonas: "Nombulelo, go ahead and tell her that we would like to see her."

Me: "Okay, maybe she will help dad as well."

He shakes his head.

Jonas: "Your father will get help somewhere else, don't worry about anything. We will fix this and your baby will be fine."

Ntombi: "Why would Martha do this to me? What did I ever do to her?"

She sounds extremely hurt. They have been friends for a very long time.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

78\*

STYLES\*

There's a knock at the door.

Neo: "I'll get it."

He offers to open.

Me: "No, I'll get it."

I rush towards the door but, he beats me to it.

Me: "Don't open my door shirtless, Neo."

Neo: "Too late."

He grins as he swings it wide open. Randall walks in, he raises his brows as he glares at Neo.

Neo: "Someone didn't get it all this morning."

Randall: "What's up with you?"

He scowls at his appearance.

Neo: "What's up with you?"

Randall shakes his head and glances at me.

Me: "You look like you've been hit by a truck."

Randall: "I've been hit by reality."

Me: "What happened?"

Neo: "Did I not say it? You two are always together, I think I'm also getting jealous. Am I the other friend, the irrelevant one?"

Me: "Really?"

Neo: "Kea botsa Stylos. Oga yena o heartbroken and the first person he thinks about is you." (I'm just asking.)

Randall: "Who is heartbroken?"

He laughs as he steps back from Randall.

Me: "Let's go to the kitchen, I was going to make something to eat."

Neo grins.

Neo: "Yes, yes. I'm going to enjoy living here."

He expresses in excitement.

Me: "Don't get used to it, I'm in a good mood today."

Neo: "Is it that lady you went to see yesterday?"

He's too forward.

Randall: "Who?"

He asks inquisitively as he sits on a high chair.

Neo: "Stylos had a date last night, he came home late."

Randall frowns at him.

Randall: "Okay, you're dating?"

He shoots me a concerned look.

Me: "It wasn't a date, I went to see Sethu. We went out for an early supper."

Randall: "So, it was a date?"

Me: "I will not answer that."

Neo: "Wa bona, secrets bozza. There's only one explanation, baya jola." (He's keeping secrets. They are dating.)

He's digging in my fridge.

Me: "Neo, stay out of my business."

Randall: "Take it easy Styles, you just had your heartbroken."

He tends to worry too much.

Me: "I know what I'm doing Randy, I feel alive when I'm around her."

Neo: "Alive? Oa mo rata Stylos?" (You love her?)

He questions, before gulping down milk from the container, I can't find the strength to stop him.

Randall: "I see where Neo is going with this, he might not say it directly because he's stupid. Khethu just moved out, you need time to yourself. You can't seek solace from another woman. Rebounds are like this. They feel great, because that person washes away the pain in your heart. They make you feel like everything is okay and once you're healed, you'll leave the poor girl heartbroken."

Me: "I will never do that to her, she's too precious."

Neo: "Precious?"

He cackles.

Me: "What is that supposed to mean?"

Neo: "Nothing bozza." (Boss.)

He shakes his head.

Me: "Spit it out, now."

Neo: "If you say you care about this girl, then I suggest you keep your distance from her Stylos. I have been a rebound before and it never ends well. Yoh, I loved that girl. She went back to that fool after I mended her broken heart."

Randall: "You went in, knowing?"

Neo: "I was kept in the dark, women are evil kea u joetsa." (I'm telling you.)

This is a different Neo.

Me: "Believe me when I say Sethu is different, I know what I'm doing. I won't jump in a lake full of crocodiles."

Neo: "Hai, rather jump once, because women... Entlek wena why u rata bo Sethu le bo Khethu? This almost seems like you're replacing Khethu for Sethu." (Why do you like the names Khethu and Sethu.)

Randall: "That was probably by chance Neo."

Me: "It was, Sethu is different. She's fragile and innocent and she speaks to me like I actually matter."

Neo: "Uska khauta ngwana oa batho ntwana." (Don't hurt the poor child.)

Me: "Neo, am I that bad?"

He laughs.

Neo: "Are tse." (We don't know.)

Randall: "I hope you know what you're doing Styles."

Randall has become too sensitive since the Khethu issue.

Me: "I know what I'm doing, I will protect her from my heart."

Randall: "I wish I had the confidence to say the same about Amara."

Me: "Why? Is it Mkhize again?"

Randall: "Segun, he brought that woman with him."

I was afraid this day would come.



Me: "Let me kill her."

He scowls at me as he swipes his hand over his head.

Randall: "What did you say?"

Neo: "Mr. Peacemaker? Ke uena o?" (Is this you?)

I know it's shocking but, it's not that bad.

Styles: "You would kill for me right? Let me kill her."

Randall smirks.

Randall: "Music to my ears."

Neo: "No man, we haven't had breakfast yet and you want to kill people."

Randall: "I like the idea but, I'll do it. I can't let you kill for me."

He offers.

Me: "Hear my plan first, it won't be an ordinary death."

They look confused, I have to settle down for this.

Me: "She will die of an unknown virus."

Neo: "Corona?"

Me: "No, this one will eat away her flesh."

Randall: "How Styles?"

Me: "Have you seen someone with Leprosy or boils? We are going to give her the best of both. The symptoms will be that of leprosy, blisters, weight loss and painful joints. The difference is that, there is no cure for this virus, it's a bacteria that will eat her up from the inside. It will crush all her organs till they shut down, the doctors won't even find anything."

Neo: "Stylos you need Jesus wena."

Randall: "I like the plan though."

Neo: "No oga, this is wahala. U ne u le kae maobane Stylos? Because I swear you were dinning with the devil and not Sethu." (This is a problem boss. Where were you yesterday Styles?)

Me: "Funny Neo."

Neo: "No Stylos man, seriously. You are sick."

Me: "I'm not sick, I just come up with plans. While you talk too much."

He sniggers.

Randall: "What about Segun? He is so obsessed over that woman."

Me: "Segun must go back to Ghana, you know I don't touch family right? Neo can deal with him."

Neo: "O batla nna ke bhodise taima ya oga. Never, I refuse. I see the devil gave you a message, tell him you didn't find me." (You want me to kill Randall's father?)

Randall: "Neo would you stop being dramatic?"

Me: "Yeah relax, you just have to block him from entering the country."

Neo: "Oh! Ua bua nou Stylos." (Now, you're talking.)

I knew he would love this.

Me: "You need to change the expiry date on his visa, Ife will get us his passport. Once he reaches Ghana, we block him from entering the country. We wipe him off the system completely."

Randall: "But, he'll be able to apply for another visa."

Me: "We block everything, birth certificate and Id number. Mr Segun will become a prisoner in his own country."

Randall: "So, we're completely wiping him off?"

Me: "Not really, he just won't be able to apply for travel documents."

Neo: "Okay, I'm good with IT but, not that good."

Me: "I'll guide you don't worry. I hate that man, no offence Randy."

Randall: "None taken. That man is holding a deep secret Styles, I need to know what it is."

Me: "Got it."

Randall: "Let's do it, then we can deal with Mkhize."

Me: "Leave Mkhize to me Randy, you concentrate on Amara."

He smirks.

NOMBULELO\*

Uncle Jonas offered to drop me off at home, leaving my father was hard. I still cannot seem to grasp his state, he is like a child and would occasionally lose touch with reality. I have a feeling something big is happening in that house.

Me: "Thank you for dropping me off."

He just pulled up at the complex gate.

I don't want him to drive in lest, he sees Mbuso.

Jonas: "Will you walk from here? I don't mind driving in."

Me: "I'm fine really besides, I need the walk."

Jonas: "Okay, let me get going then."

Me: "Okay."

I jump out of the car after bidding him goodbye.

He's not driving away. He's watching me, let me walk faster so, he leaves.

I scream when I feel a tight grip encircle around my waist from the back.

"Hey, it's me."

Mbuso...

Gosh!

Me: "What are you doing sneaking up on me like that? My uncle is here."

I whisper in hopes that he will let go.

Mbuso: "Where and why are we whispering?"

He whispers back.

Me: "Behind you."

Jonas: "Yeyi wena mfana, wenzani?" (What are you doing boy?)

Mbuso: "Shit!"

He cusses in a ghostly tone.

Mbuso pulls away from me in flash and swivels to my uncle. This man was not meant to see this.

Mbuso: "Unjani baba." (How are you sir?)

A sound of nervousness covers his voice.

Jonas: "Angiyena ubaba wakho." (I am not your father.)

He retorts with a temper.

Me: "Uncle, this is my friend Mbuso."

Jonas: "Mbuso from where? Do you live with this boy Lelo?"

He's disappointed.

Mbuso glances at me.



Me: "We don't live together, we share a flat."

My turn to lie, this man will drag me back to my father's house if he finds out we're in a relationship.

Mbuso steals a glance from me, I hope he understands.

Jonas: "Is it just the two of you? Lelo you can't be living with a boy, these things don't know how to control their hormones."

I am not trying to hear any of that.

Me: "No, there's another girl. It's just the three of us."

He squints his eyes, he doesn't believe me. I'm bad at lying, Mbuso should come up with something too. I nudge him, he slightly shrugs his shoulders.

Jonas: "Where is this girl? I want to see her."

Nothing prepared me for this.

Mbuso: "She's at work baba."

Great, his brain still works. Uncle frowns at Mbuso, the poor guy is nervous enough.

Jonas: "Where is the father of your child? Is it this fool?"

I knew it...

This man is too smart for me.

Me: "Malume?" (Uncle?)

Jonas: "Ungizwile." (You heard me.)

What do I say? I already lied about Mbuso not being my partner and I am not about to mention that idiot Zuma, he doesn't deserve this title.

Jonas: "I'm waiting."

Me: "I don't want to talk about it."

I mummer under my breath.

Jonas: "Angizwanga." (I didn't hear you.)

Me: "I said I don't want to talk about it."

I say, loud enough for him to hear.

He's not happy.

Jonas: "What does that mean? I want to know who the father of that baby is."

He insists.

Mbuso: "Baba..."

Uncle's raised hand, prevents Mbuso from speaking any further.

Jonas: "I am not talking to you, boy. You said you're roommates, right?"

Mbuso nods, we're in a dilemma. A position where we can't say or gesture anything but, Mbuso is nodding.

This man though.

I need a great escape, uncle Jonas will not let this go.

Jonas: "Why are you still here then? Go."

No, no. He can't leave me to face him alone, I shift a bit closer to him, motioning that he better not move an inch.

Jonas: "What are you doing?"

He's too suspicious for my liking.

Me: "Nothing."

Where is my manna from heaven? This man is stressing me out.

His phone rings.

There it is, I am saved.

Mbuso and I exchange glances, he's also wondering why this old man is not answering his phone. Instead, he's glaring at us like we'll run the moment he blinks.

Me: "Malume your phone is ringing."

He frowns at us before attending to his calls, it seems to be important.

Jonas: "I have to go Lelo, I'm not done with you."

Me: "Uhambe kahle malume." (Goodbye uncle.)

He gives Mbuso an uncomfortable look, I literally felt it.

We don't wait for him but, in unison turn and begin treading towards the gate.

Mbuso: "So, when I come to pay lobola. Will he be present?"

The hints this man gives lately, I love how he sees a future with me.

Me: "Front row sit, he'll be the one leading everything."

Mbuso: "Dammit, I don't see him giving you away."

He's still nervous.

Mbuso: "Do you think he's still there? I have a feeling he's watching us, I feel his eyes stabbing

me.”

I turn to check.

Mbuso: “No, don’t look.”

He whispers.

I knew he was scared of him back there but, hey, this man is terrified.

Me: “Malume.”

I call out.

Mbuso swivels to find no one. He laughs when I burst out laughing.

Mbuso: “This is not good, I’m a doctor but, I can’t stop myself from getting a heart attack.”

Me: “Sorry.”

I express in amusement.

Mbuso: “Your uncle is something else.”

He declares with a gentle smile.

Is it possible for one to be so happy? Sometimes it feels like a dream and I will wake up to reality.

Me: “I love you.”

I remember days when my mother would reprimand me for my forwardness, I should’ve listened. Look where it has gotten me to and this awkward look on his face is not helping at all.

I walk on, due to his silence, leaving him behind. I don’t know if I caught him off guard or he doesn’t feel the same.

I feel like an idiot.

AMARA\*

Liyana comes running to me and hands me a sunflower, I smile at her.

Me: “What’s this for?”

She giggles and points behind me, I turn to find Randall watching me.

Me: “Thank you Liya.”

She giggles and runs off.

I turn back to Randall who is ambling towards me.

Me: "What's this for?"

Randall: "I'm courting you, you said it's the simple things that count, right?"

Me: "Thank you."

He keeps an intense gaze on me.

Randall: "There's something I need to tell you, me hemma." (My queen.)

I'm not sure if I should think serious of this matter, his expression hasn't changed.

Me: "What is it?"

Randall: "Let's sit."

He pulls me down next to him.

Randall: "I haven't told you much about myself."

Actually he hasn't told me anything about himself, I don't respond but, wait for him to continue.

Randall: "That man you saw yesterday is my father, Segun Okolie."

I figured that one out.

Randall: "This is a past I don't like to talk about but, I can't keep this from you. I was born into royalty, being the second son of my father. From birth, I was chosen to take over from him. It has been for generations that, the one who is heir apparent, a wife is chosen for him. I have always been against it and my father understood. We agreed that I would choose my own wife. Segun being himself decided to go against me and married me off."

His words shake the earth from beneath me.

Me: "I'm not sure I follow."

He clears his throat, as he shuffles on his seat.

Randall: "I don't know how it was done but, with the help of a traditionalist, my father performed a marriage ritual where, I was married off to some woman."

Me: "You have a wife?"

He frowns.

Randall: "No, I don't have a wife."

He squelches between his teeth, attesting this a sensitive topic.

Me: "But you just said."

Randall: "I know, I don't know what happened that day. I wasn't there Amara. My family believes in customs and traditions, it's been practiced for centuries. What my father did is a first though, for some reason he is desperate for me to accept this person. I don't mind taking over from him, if I have to do it with the one my heart chose. I couldn't keep you in the dark."



He explains.

My mind is blank, I have no words at all.

Randall: "Say something."

His eyes search for answers in mine.

Me: "I don't know what to say."

I can feel a twitch of hurt in my heart.

Me: "What does this mean for us?"

I have gotten used to him in so little time. Will I be able to be away from him?

Randall: "Nothing will change Amara, I'm not letting you go."

He declares with a sobered expression.

Me: "Is that why your father was saying those things to me?"

Randall: "Yeah, he's not letting this go."

Me: "But, I don't understand. You're married?"

My mind is buffering me from this information.

Randall: "I am not married, like I said. I wasn't present when this ritual took place."

All of this drains me.

Randall: "I need you to trust me, I will fix this."

Me: "How? Randall, you're married."

I'm still trying to grasp this whole thing hence, the repetition.

Randall: "Stop saying that please."

He grunts, as he gives me a sharp look. He appears to be frustrated by this.

Randall: "I would rather we talk about something else."

He states, studying my face. My blood churns as he leans his face closer to mine, I scoot away, only for him to pull me back to him.

Me: "Can't you think of anything else but, this? Your animal lust controls you."

I mumble as his lips meander over my face, he sniggers.

Randall: "I am fascinated by you Amara."

He gives a reason for his perverted random acts, as he trails the tips of his fingers on my cheek.



To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

SETHU\*

When I first met Mr. Styles, I had no idea that we would be this close. My life has changed since he came, I look forward to the next day because I get to see him. I haven't disclosed my brokenness to him, it's been over a year since the betrayal and I can't seem to get over it.

Each time I see Lebo, the image of her and Ntokozo naked in my bed flashes over me. I don't know if I should hate her for what she did, my mother has forced me to overlook her mistakes. I trust that woman's judgement, she is my mother and she will never do anything to hurt me. Although, it seems she loves Lebo more.

There are times when I would catch Lebo glaring at me, her looks can be bone chilling.

Lebo loves the spotlight, she falls sick when no one gives her attention. I think she is convinced that life is a competition, choosing the same career wasn't by chance. She was studying beauty therapy and the moment news got out that I was studying Nursing, she dropped her course and came to nursing.

I remember when I bought my car, something small to get me from A to B. Her comment was that, she can do better. A few months later she went and got herself a bigger car.

The same happened with Ntokozo, only, she didn't get someone else. She went for him, after months of trying to convince me that he was bad for me. She would tell me stories about how she saw him with some girl and how Ntokozo would make passes at her. Her input put a strain in our relationship, Ntokozo and I were on each other's throats all the time.

Peace ceased to exist in our relationship, it came to a point where he would lay a hand on me. One slap became two and before I knew it, he would have his way with me. I would leave him only to go back when he comes pleading. The abuse didn't stop, I stayed because I loved him.

Sleeping with my cousin was the final straw, I left and never looked back.

Lebo: "What the hell are you doing?"

She budges into my house, I am used to this. Lebo hardly ever knocks, there are days when she would sleep over without asking. I can't really protest because she's family.

Me: "What did I do?"

Lebo: "With that man Sethu. I saw you leave with him."

Oh, that.

Me: "He's my friend, so?"

A mocking laugh escapes her mouth.

Lebo: "You've got to be kidding me. Surely you can't be this stupid, a man like him does not befriend girls like you."

Me: "Girls like me?"

She rolls her eyes, it's her favourite thing to do.

Lebo: "Yeah. You know what I mean."

Me: "No Lebo, I don't know what you mean, please explain."

Lebo: "You don't have to be dramatic about this Sethu, I am just looking out for you."

She ripostes as she scans my body with her eyes.

Me: "I don't need you looking out for me, I've got this."

Lebo: "That's not what it looks like, maybe I should tell aunt that, you're entertaining men in your house."

This is her, this is the type of person she is.

Me: "What is your problem with him? He didn't do anything to you?"

She is used to calling the shots.

Lebo: "I'm trying to look out for you Sethu, I know how naïve you can be. You think everyone has a halo."

Me: "Like, how I thought you had a halo, before you slept with my boyfriend."

She rolls her eyes at me.

Lebo: "That was a mistake."

She mumbles as she throws herself on my couch.

Me: "Okay so, you slipped and fell on his dick more than once?"

I return rudely.

Lebo: "Hey, you don't have to speak to me like that. And, why must you dwell on the past Sethu? Geez, get over it already."

She spits the words out as she folds her arms. Lebo is arrogant and condescending, she's inconsiderate and thinks the world of herself.

Me: "I was about to go to bed, I had a long night. Please leave."

She tilts her head slightly to the side and narrows her eyes at me.

Lebo: "Ngempela? You're throwing me out of your place?" (Really?)

Me: "I'm not throwing you out, I'm simply asking you to leave because I'm tired and I need to sleep."

She gives me an unpleasant stare before clicking her tongue. She jumps up, I draw back when she furiously treads towards me. She's known to be violent.

Lebo: "Wena, uzonya. That low life will destroy you, watch." (You will regret this.)

She bangs my door on her way out.

AMARA\*

I thought I was okay but, now it's beginning to cut so deep. The thought of Randall belonging to someone else suffocates me, I know he says he wants nothing to do with her. Am I wrong though, to want him to belong to me alone?

His father carries hatred in his eyes and that is enough to know that his blessings will never dwell among us. What path will we take when he refuses to accept me? We can't go astray, I would definitely lose my way.

Randall: "Amara, Amara."

I blink at the sound of his voice calling me, as he waves his hand to snap me out.

Randall: "I've been talking to you, you drifted away."

Me: "Sorry. What was that?"

We haven't left the lounge.

Randall: "You're lost in thought."

He gives me a stern look as he reaches for my hand.

Ife: "Brother hurry it's Liyana."

Ife scurries down the stairs, .

Randall: "What's wrong with Liya?"

Ife: "She's having a seizure, I don't know what happened."

She explains.

Randall: "What?"

Randall jumps up and scuttles up the stairs, taking two steps at a time.

We rush after him.

Randall: "Liya!"

He howls dashing into her room, her tiny body is convulsing on the floor and her mouth is forming.

Randall: "Liyana."

Me: "What happened?"

Ife: "I don't know, we were sitting, then she just fell and..."

Her sobs take over her words.

Randall: "Call an ambulance."

He instructs, strange how panic is not visible on him. This calm demeanour of his scares me sometimes.

Ife runs out of the room, I think to get her phone. Randall gently turns Liya onto one side while holding her head.

Randall: "Pass me the pillow."

I oblige, he cushions her head with it.

Me: "What's wrong with her?"

I ask the obvious.

Randall: "I don't know, this has never happened before."

Chioma lurches into the room and immediately falls into a panic mode.

Randall: "Dammit."

He growls seeing that his method is failing, as the seizures increase.

Me: "Randall, tell me what to do."

Chioma: "What is happening to her?"

She queries, Randall looks helpless.

Randall: "Where is Ife?"

He pays no attention to our interrogation. Ife has been gone for too long, she should be back by now. I bump into her, as I start to flee towards the door.

Ife: "Brother, agya wants to speak to you. I brought basil, he said to make her sniff it." (Father.)

He peeks sideways at her, with a miffed expression.

Randall: "Did you call an ambulance?"

He blatantly ignores her announcement.

Ife: "Agya called before I could do it, he wants to speak to you. He can help Liya. Please give her this brother." (Father.)

Randall hesitates, I know he's about to protest.

Randall: "Chioma, call an ambulance."

She fiddles for her phone at his command.

Ife: "Brother..."

I take the basil from Ife, use my fingers to squash it and break it into pieces, releasing the aroma.

I know Randall is at daggers-drawn with his father but, this is not the time to be selfish.

With my eyes pleading on behalf of this child who's caught up between these two men, I reach out my hand to Randall, he needs to put his stubbornness aside and think of Liyana.

He grimaces at me as if chiding me.

Me: "Please take it, do it for Liya."

I beseech, desperately.

Reluctantly, he snatches it. We watch, as he waves it over her nostrils, it doesn't take long for the seizure to slow down. She's finally able to breathe on her own.

Randall: "Princess."

He sits her up, before scooping her up in his arms and lays her on the bed.

Randall: "Are you okay?"

She nods slowly, fatigue showing on her face.

STYLES\*

The plan to destroy Mkhize is in motion, I called Kenneth over. Like Neo, Kenneth is an old friend.

Neo has been distant since Kenneth got here, he can't believe how the guy has changed.

Me: "Neo, you need to stop staring. You're making the man uncomfortable."

Neo: "Stylos, I don't understand the friends you keep. You like devil worshippers, neh?"

I think Kenneth heard him. I don't know about him being a devil worshiper but, I know he is part of a brotherhood. I have no idea what is being done there, the church or gathering rather, is at night.

Me: "Stop."

Neo: "I think I'm the only normal friend you have, le Uze is almost like this one."

He continues, his prattling will get him in trouble one day.

Kenneth can hear everything, the scowl on his face says he's not thrilled.

Me: "You're embarrassing me."

Neo: "Kenneth ntwana, o reng? It's been long, you've changed hey." (How are you?)

Now, he's smiling. I thought Kenneth creeped him out.

Kenneth: "You're still the same."

He refuses to return the smile, I doubt he knows how to.

Neo: "Yeah, black don't crack ntwana." (Boy.)

It's time I wrap this up.

Neo: "Do you know Nkomo, he's also a Mkhize."

Then again, Neo will not give me a chance. Kenneth shakes his head, negatively.

Neo: "You should meet him, maybe you'll see a resemblance."

Kenneth: "I would know if Mkhize was my father."

Neo: "Oh, ka nnete? Joang?" (Really? How?)

Kenneth: "My father died, I killed him."

He delivers his riposte in a deadpan voice. Neo gulps, that's enough to shut him up.

Kenneth: "Styles, I'll hear from you."

Me: "Sure, I'll call you."

Neo: "Sho sho Kenny."

Bad move Neo, he detests being called that.

Kenneth: "You should come to my church Neo, you'll love it."

His smirk shuts Neo up, I have never seen him speechless before. It's kind of funny.

Me: "I will make sure to drop him off, you said it's at 12am right?"

Neo: "Huh?"

His eyes pop open.

Kenneth: "On the dot."

Neo's face is priceless right now.

Neo: "Stylos, I know I can be a pain in the ass mara ntwana, uskai chunna dai ding. That man is a devil worshipper and you just accepted an invitation to his church. You know they take these things serious right?" (Don't that.)

He complains as I shut the door.

Me: "Relax, he was kidding."

Neo: "Oh, okay. But, is he really in a cult."

He digs.

Me: "Maybe."

He shakes his head.

Neo: "Eh, eh, Stylos. Bona le hlanya la hao." (Look at your crazy girlfriend.)

I turn to where he's pointing, to see Khethu peeking through the kitchen window.

Me: "What the hell is she doing here?"

I march towards the kitchen, she smiles and waves, as she sees me approaching.

Neo: "Ereng number yako Sterkfontein?" (What's Sterkfontein's number?)

He pulls out his phone, I give him a warning look.

Khethu smiles widely as I open the window. I won't open the door for her lest, she sees it as an invite.

Khethu: "Hi."

I feel a pang of hurt as my eyes scan her body, her eyes fall heavy with exhaustion, she looks drained and not in her right state.

Me: "What are you doing here?"

Khethu: "Can I please come in?"

Me: "How did you get through the gate?"

Khethu: "I used my keys. Won't you let me in?"

The smile still remains.

Me: "Go home Khethu."

Her eyes water in response to my request.

Khethu: "I had a fight with my mother, I can't go back there."

I don't think I can stand this. What have I done to this woman?

Khethu: "Remember how you used to make me feel better when she would fight me, you





protected me. I miss that Styles, I miss you.”

Tears show up and stride down her cheeks, she doesn't bother to wipe them.

I know how hurt she would be, after Nobayeni has had her way with her, I can almost feel the pain that has glossed her eyes.

Me: “You can come in, I'll call your father.”

Neo: “He eh! Come in where? She is not entering this house.”

Neo protests, I forgot he was standing here.

Me: “Neo, she needs help.”

Neo: “Help ea eng, she must go to her father's house for help.” (Help for what?)

Khethu: “Neo, this is not your house. Why are you here anyway?”

She argues.

Neo: “Uena u batla eng mona.” (What do you want here?)

Choosing to ignore him, I toil towards the exit door. He runs after me and blocks my way.

Me: “What the hell is wrong with you?”

I have never seen him so angry.

Neo: “Nothing, mara something is definitely wrong with you. I respect you Stylos but, if you open for le hlanya eo I will...” (That crazy person.)

Me: “What will you do?”

I ask firmly. He scratches his head nervously.

Neo: “Eish saan! I will call Uze, he won't hesitate to put her out and I hope he teaches you a lesson too. You deserve a beating for being blinded by her.”

Khethu: “Styles, open.”

She knocks on the window, I twist my head to ogle at her. She's desperate, I'm caught between a rock and a hard place.”

Neo is serious with this threat.

Khethu: “Styles open.”

She has grown restless.

Neo: “Yey tsamaea, ha re na ho u bulela.” (Get out of here, we're not opening.)

He yells.

Khethu: “Styles baby, open please.”



Neo: "Ke tla fonela Uze nou." (I will call Uze now.)

Me: "You're full of shit."

Neo: "Yeah, ok'salayo, hana ho kena." (She's still not getting in.)

I opt to walk away before I give in to this weakness I have for her.

Khethu: "Styles, where are you going?"

She shouts after me.

Neo: "Styles ya eng, styles ya eng? Tsamaea sisi ha re u batle mona." (Stop calling Styles, go, we don't want you here.)

The way he goes on, I would think he knows about the abuse.

To be continued...



80\*

NOMBULELO\*

Mbuso is something else, this is the second time he is being awkward with me. First it was when we made love for the first time, now this. I express my feelings for him and he goes zombie on me.

Me: "Mbuso?"

He's in the kitchen, I don't know what he's making. I have a feeling he's avoiding me.

Mbuso: "Yes."

He doesn't twirl to look at me, this compels me to release a sigh.

Me: "I love you."

I express, this ought to get his attention. He stops and finally acknowledges me.

Me: "Won't you say something?"

He does that thing when he's nervous, flings his hand behind his neck and rubs it. I watch him as he strolls to me, he takes my hand.

Mbuso: "I heard what you said Lelo. Do you mean it though?"

What is he asking me?

Me: "I wouldn't have said it if I didn't."

Mbuso: "You're a strong woman Lelo, it's one of the things I admire about you. I'm not sure though, if you are over him..."

Me: "Really?"

I draw my hand away, I should've known this.

Me: "You think I'm still hung up on Zuma?"

Mbuso: "Not hung up but, Lelo your wounds were so deep. I nursed them remember."

Me: "Yes and I am healed. Mbuso I wouldn't say something I don't mean."

Mbuso: "I just want you to be sure about this, the heart is a fragile organ."

Me: "Don't play doctor with me Mbuso. What is the problem here? Is it because I said it first?"

I pull back from him.

Mbuso: "You know it's not."

Me: "Then what is it?"

He's not providing me with an answer.

Me: "Wow."

I am so close to clicking my tongue, he's annoying me.

His tight grip on my arm stops me from walking away, I wriggle for freedom, he proves to be stronger.

Mbuso: "Don't walk away please, let me explain."

He frees my hand from his clutch, I step back as I cross my arms. This better be good.

Mbuso: "That day when you were ready to kill that man, I saw how deep he cut you and I knew it will take a while for you to get over him. It hasn't been long..."

Me: "Are you saying it's impossible to love someone in a small space of time?"

Mbuso: "No."

Me: "What are you saying then, Mbuso?"

I'm getting frustrated.

Mbuso: "Love is a beautiful thing Lelo and I know it's what I feel for you."

Me: "What is the problem then? You're talking Mbuso but, you're not making sense."

He opens his mouth to speak and is stopped by his phone ringing.

Me: "Please don't answer it."

I want clarity, he can't leave me hanging.

He checks the caller Id and sighs.

Mbuso: "I'm sorry, I have to take this."

I watch him as he answers the call, I want to walk away but, I need to know about this thing he keeps in his heart.

Mbuso: "What is it?"

<Listens>

Mbuso: "Can't you take her to the hospital?"

<Listen>

He huffs.

Mbuso: "Trust you to give such a reply."

I am growing impatient.

Mbuso: "Relax, I'm on my way. You know its time you accept that you are nothing without me."

He chuckles before hanging up.

Me: "You're leaving?"

Mbuso: "I have a house call. Can we finish this when I get back?"

Me: "Go."

Mbuso: "I won't be long."

I shrug my shoulders and toddle to sit on the couch.

Mbuso: "Lelo."

He wants to say something.

Me: "Hamba Mbuso." (Go.)

He sighs as he lets his feet guide him out.

AMARA\*

Liyanaa is better now, she's sitting on her bed with her head resting on Randall's chest. Randall refuses to speak to his father, he doesn't want to hear anything. I plan to convince him, his father seems to know something about Liyana's sudden seizure. We know Liyana to be as healthy as a horse.

Me: "How did your father know that basil leaves will work?"

I ask as I settle on the bed opposite him.

Randall: "Beats me."

He shows lack of interest.

Me: "Don't you think you should speak to him."

I take his hand, he keeps his gaze transfixed on me, as his fingers fondly dance on mine.

Randall: "I doubt, I want to hear what he has to say."

Me: "What if it's about Liya? It could be important."

He accepts a frown, I'm probably annoying him.

Me: "Before you say anything, think about it please."

He sighs. He draws his hand away, I can still feel the trail of his fingers on mine.

I might be pushing him to do something he doesn't want.



This man needs to learn how to communicate though.

Ife plods in the room, holding up a phone. The girl looks sapped.

Ife: "Brother, Segun Okolie is going to make my head explode. I swear I'm this close to turning off my phone, he's interrupting my live stream."

She complains, holding out the phone to Randall. He's not taking it, instead continues to caress Liya's back. She's falling asleep.

Ife: "This is a disaster, these two men want to see me dead. Brother I cannot be stressing like this, I'll age fast."

I smile at her innocence, Randall still holds a puckered brow.

Randall: "Drop the call Ifeanyi."

He demands sternly.

She carries an irked look, before rolling her eyes at him, he's not moved at all.

I don't know if I should intervene. Seeing how her brother is unwavering, Ife places the phone on her ear.

Ife: "Your highness, the prince refuses to speak to you. Please I beg, leave my phone alone. I have a life agya and you're disturbing me." (Father.)

She expresses with a note of sarcasm, drops the call, ogles at Randall and rolls her eyes before, walking out. He doesn't seem to care at all.

Me: "Randall, may I please have a word with your stubbornness?"

I jest.

With one brow curved, he studies my features. I shy away from his intense gaze.

Randall: "I like it when you say my name."

His prominent smirk takes over his mouth, I am trying to hold a serious conversation and he chooses to take a different route.

"Guys."

Mbuso saunters in, I get up from the bed to give him space.

Randall: "You surely took your time."

Mbuso: "It shows I didn't fly here, I'm human."

His comeback has Randall sniggering.

Mbuso: "How is she?"

Me: "She's hasn't said anything yet."

Randall: "She seems to be okay though, she doesn't have a temperature."

Randall gently lays Liyana's head on the pillow and gives space for Mbuso to do his job. Watching him work reminds me of Lelo, she loves medicine.

Me: "My cousin Lelo wanted to be a doctor, I remember growing up, how she would play doctor with her dolls."

I exclaim, as I fail to hold back my thoughts.

Mbuso: "Wait! Did you say Lelo?"

He leers at me with his eyes popped out.

Me: "Yes, you know her?"

He glares at Randall, they exchange looks.

Me: "Do you know Nombulelo?"

I pry as my impatience grows, maybe this could be my chance of seeing her without going to my house. Maybe Mbuso can bring her to me, Mkhize must have no knowledge of Nombulelo hence, he has no reason to have her followed.

Mbuso: "No... My Lelo is... Nompumelelo."

He stammers and pops my bubble with his response.

Randall: "How is she, Mbuso?"

He inquires, about Liyana.

Mbuso: "I honestly don't see anything wrong with her, maybe you should take her to the hospital just to be sure."

Randall: "Are you doubting your skills there, doc? Never thought I would see the day."

He derides, having Mbuso chuckle in reaction.

Mbuso: "I'm the best you got but, a second opinion would be good."

Randall: "Ahh! There it is, you can't really let go of that ego."

He chortles.

Mbuso: "What can I say, I am a blessing."

He retorts as he wraps up, leaving Randall speechless. The two have a weird friendship, if I could call it that.

Mbuso: "Let her sleep for now, there's nothing wrong with her."

Me: "How do we explain the fits?"

Mbuso: "Hence, I said get a second opinion. Have you thought that, maybe this could be

spiritual?"

Randall: "Spiritual how?"

He has already decided that he doesn't like this conversation.

Mbuso: "You know, ancestors and stuff."

Randall: "When did you upgrade to being a traditionalist?"

Mbuso: "The things I've heard and seen, the past few days tapped me back to my roots."

He illuminates, Randall is not okay with this.

Randall: "That's good for you, not for me. I'm keeping my daughter away from those things."

Mbuso: "I understand but, you know sometimes children pay for their parent's mistakes."

Randall: "What are you implying Mbuso?"

He grunts.

He did say that, he's not fond of tradition and customs.

Mbuso: "I'm just shading light, think about it. I'll take my leave."

Chioma walks in as Randall leads Mbuso out.

Chioma: "Is she okay?"

Me: "Yes."

Chioma: "It's strange how this suddenly just happened, there's something going on here."

She voices.

Me: "Mbuso mentioned that it could be spiritual."

Chioma: "It's possible."

Me: "Well, whatever it is. Randall will fix it, he has to."

She smiles at me.

Chioma: "You have grown fond of him?"

Okay.

Me: "He's become very important to me."

Chioma: "I'm glad, you both deserve to be happy."

Me: "I guess."

"Amara."

I leer over as his voice calls out to me, he's standing at the door way.



Randall: "Come with me."

Me: "You'll stay with Liyana?"

She nods, smiling. I follow Randall to our bedroom.

Randall: "I have something for you."

He states when we get there.

I smile at his announcement, as he rams his hand in his pocket.

Me: "What is it?"

He comes out with this piece of chomp chocolate and hands it to me.

Me: "Chomp?"

This is why he pulled me out of Liyana's room. Wow...

Randall: "It doesn't have to be big right?"

I laugh at his sweet gesture.

Me: "I know this isn't your idea, who do I give credit to?"

He laughs, for the first time, he laughs.

Randall: "Liya, she said a flower should come with chocolate."

Me: "She's sweet."

Randall: "Your lips are sweet."

He utters as he's drawn back into that world of lust, this man and his wolfish nature. How do I even quench it?

He gracefully catches me by the waist, pulling me to him and I collide with his chest.

Randall: "Can I taste them?"

Momentarily, he drops his gaze to my mouth and takes his time to lean over my face.

I'm denied a chance to refuse him when he kisses me.

SETHU\*

I rush to the sitting area at the sound of my phone ringing, it's my mother.

Me: "Mom."

I greet.



Mom: "What is this, I hear Sethu?"

Me: "What?"

Mom: "You're gallivanting with some drug dealer. How can you be so careless?"

This screams Lebo, she lies like this.

Me: "Let me guess, Lebo told you this right?"

Mom: "Does it matter? You're not even going to deny it Sethu?"

Me: "I didn't do anything wrong mom, Lebo is lying. Remember how she lied about Ntokozo."

Mom: "Why would she lie to me?"

She always takes her side.

Me: "I don't know. Why do you choose to believe her over me?"

Mom: "Don't start Sethu, you know I never take sides."

Me: "That's not how it seems to me, you believe every word that comes out of her mouth."

Mom: "You also didn't deny the accusation."

Me: "I have to get ready for work."

Mom: "Your father says you should come home next week, he wants to speak to you."

I don't want to know what he wants.

Me: "I can't make it, I have work."

Mom: "You'll take a day off."

I'm not shocked by her suggestion.

Me: "I can't take a day off mom, I've taken too much of those."

She sighs.

Mom: "One more will not hurt."

She will never understand.

Me: "I will see what I can do, bye."

I hang up before she speaks further, Lebo went and ran her mouth. She twisted the whole thing, I have noticed how she despises Styles. I will not heed her advice, Styles has come to be important to me in this small space of time.

I think he needs a friend as much as I do. He might not say it but, I have noticed how hurt he is. He doesn't have that poise he had when I first saw him, he appears to be broken and I am willing to help him through whatever he's going through. If tables were turned, I am undeniably

confident that, he will do the same.

NOMBULELO\*

Me: "Mbuso, you forgot your key ag..."

There's a tall black man on my door step, I thought it was Mbuso. He's been gone for too long, maybe my impatience is dragging the time.

"Sawubona Nkosazana." (Greetings lady.)

He greets with a smile.

Me: "Hello."

"Is Mbuso around?"

Me: "He's not, sorry."

He stares for a while, this is uncomfortable.

"Is it okay if I wait for him? I can't get a hold of him."

His question has me scowling.

Me: "You can, outside."

He smiles.

"Okay, you're being cautious and that's wise. The world is a sick place."

Why is he still talking to me? I don't respond, I'm trying to be polite but my rudeness is knocking.

"Ngiyabonga, I'll try his number again." (Thank you.)

He utters, holding on to that smile.

Me: "Do that."

I push the door close, something is jamming it. I send my eyes to inspect, this stranger is blocking it with his foot. I look up at him and he has this smirk on his face, he thinks this is amusing.

Me: "Can I help you bhuti?"

He grins.

"Bhuti?" (Brother?)

I narrow my eyes at him.

"I wasn't told I have a sister out there, as far as I know, my father has sons. This definitely calls



for a family meeting.”

The stupid smile on his face says, he’s trying to crack a joke. I don’t know this man and I don’t know why he thinks he can conversate with me. This is South Africa, I’m already at risk by standing here with him.

Me: “Bhuti, Mbuso is not around at the moment. Please, I’ll let him know you were here.”

He chortles.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable. It’s just not every day that, I come across a pretty lady.”

He expresses with a low tone.

Is he? No... He’s not flirting with me, right?

I am officially uncomfortable.

Me: “Goodbye, bhuti.” (Brother.)

He grins widely.

I shut the door on his face, I am not one to entertain strange men.

To be continued...



81\*

AMARA\*

Ife: "What did you say he gave you?"

The words swirls with amusement while she gives me an inquisitive look.

Randall is something else, he is definitely different and that's what makes him special. I have come to like everything about him, including that permanent pucker between his eye brows. There is a bit of innocence in him and it comes out when he's courting me, he's like a little kid who has no clue how to woo a girl.

Ife found me smiling to myself in the living room and her curiosity took over. She's seated on the couch across me, ogling at me as if I'm about to narrate the greatest story ever told.

Ife: "He's hopeless, I give up."

She throws her hands up in defeat.

Me: "It's your fault."

Ife: "What did I do?"

Me: "You put these ideas in his head, now he's trying too hard."

I almost feel for him, my heart is already his and I don't mind if he pursues me or not.

Ife: "Trust me, you will thank me, the last thing you want is to be married to a man who is not romantic."

Me: "Randall is romantic."

I defend him, she makes a face.

Ife: "Yeah right, tell me one romantic thing he's done."

I can think of many.

Ife: "And don't tell me about those stolen kisses, the moments where he corners and the sweet nothings he whispers in your ear."

That's actually the route I was taking.

She waves her hand at this. Is she even allowed to observe her brother like this?

Ife: "That is not romance, it's him being hot blooded."

She doesn't give me a chance to defend Randall.

Me: "Okay, that's enough."

She laughs.

Ife: "It's true though."

She protest in amusement.

Me: "You do know this is your brother we're talking about right?"

Ife: "And, we're both girls so, this conversation is not going anywhere."

She's smart.

Ife: "Can I see it?"

She can't stop laughing, I pull out the chocolate from my pocket and she grabs it with a smile plastered on her face.

Ife: "Keep it, this will be a nice story to tell your kids one day."

My heart jumps in excitement at the thought of having Randall's kids, I haven't thought that far yet and I don't know if he dreams of being a father one day.

Me: "Is that even possible, it will have moulds by then."

Ife: "It doesn't matter, people keep dead roses for years."

She expresses.

She burst into laughter when she sees Randall walk into the lounge, the confused look on his face is humorous.

Randall: "What are we laughing at?"

He inquires as he sits beside me.

Ife: "Chomp, brother?"

She adds more life to her laugh. Randall glances at me, his face carrying a lenient frown. He doesn't find this funny at all.

Randall: "You laugh at anything so, I'm not surprised that you would find this funny."

Ife: "But, it is funny brother, I need to tweet this."

Her phone is always on her hand.

Randall: "So, you talk about me when I'm not around? I like that."

He questions while giving me a seductive smile, I shift back as he leans closer.

Me: "No, I don't."

I protest, he doesn't believe me as he chortles. His hand goes around my waist and he pulls me closer. He gently bites my earlobe, his warm breath on my skin has me shivering and embarrassment washes over me.



Randall has no timing. I tilt my head to glance at Ife, she's engrossed on her phone, thankfully. This gives me a chance to reprimand him.

Randall: "I want to kiss you right now, I can't breathe."

He whispers softly in my ear, and the shudder targets me again. This man can't control himself.

I use my hands to build a bridge between us, it's uncomfortable enough that Ife is here. He's not backing down as he continues to press his body on mine.

Me: "Randall."

My voice has given in to him. He's not stopping but, continues to shower me with kisses. My heart thumps against my chest, as he nuzzles his head on my neck and places a lingering kiss on the space between my neck and collarbone. He knows where my weakness is. He mildly blows on the same spot and his breath hitting against my chest declares me powerless.

I clutch my hand on his lap as I heave for breathe.

Me: "Ife... is here."

My stupid voice gives me away as it tells him that I am turned on by this act.

Ife: "Seriously, if I have to see you two kissing again, I will hang myself. I have seen enough for the day."

I pull away from his tight grip in a jiff, I drop my gaze as I feel my cheeks burn up. I need a place to hide.

Randall: "This is what happens when you move into someone's home without their permission."

He retorts, not hiding his piqued tone. Ife giggles.

Ife: "I have to give it to you brother, you are the clingiest man I know."

Randall: "You know clingy men Ifeanyi?"

This is funny, she takes deep breaths in search of tranquillity.

Ife: "Wow, one can't say anything in this house without her words being twisted. Brother, you do know that I will start dating soon, right?"

Randall: "Not if I have anything to do with it."

Ife: "I knew it, I knew it. You want to kill me abi?" (Right?)

Me: "You'll die if you don't date?"

Ife: "Of embarrassment, yes. I am this close to being an Instagram influencer. That is one tough job to have, I need a man to complete the image."

She explains, much to Randall's annoyance.

Randall: "Will you shut up? When are you going back to Ghana anyway?"

Ife: "Not anytime soon."

Speaking of Ghana.

Me: "Randall."

He turns his gaze to me.

Me: "I've been thinking, maybe I should have a talk with him."

Randall: "Who?"

Ifeanyi gives me a look I cannot make out but, I think she knows who I'm talking about.

Me: "Your father."

Randall: "No."

Me: "Maybe, I can get through to him."

Ife: "Forget it, no one can get through to that old man. His wife stands defeated till today, one person you can get through to is that woman they call Ruth."

Randall: "Ifeanyi."

He chides her.

Ife: "It's just a suggestion brother and she's in the country so..."

Me: "She's here?"

Randall heaves a deep sigh of infuriation.

Randall: "Yes and you are staying away from her."

He commands firmly, I have noticed how this issue brings out his beastly side.

Me: "I think it's a good idea."

He thinks it's stupid.

Randall: "Well it's not, you don't know her Amara. What if she was taught to be territorial? I have a feeling, she grew up in the clutches of Segun. This could be risky."

Me: "You could come with."

I don't know why I'm insisting so much, what I know is that, I'm afraid I might lose him one day.

Ife: "I agree with brother, this could put your life at risk. Agya and Ruth's parents would have dinner parties at the house, they are close. You would swear she's his daughter, mom has never been fond of her, though. Possibilities are, she's a robot who agrees to everything he says."

Me: "How do we fix it then?"

He scrutinises me, searching for an answer as to why I'm pushing this.



Randall: "Who are you and what have you done to my fragile Amara?"

I don't know what he means by this.

Me: "I'm serious Randall."

Ife: "She's worried Brother, I would be too. Ruth is lucky she has to face you. I would knock all her teeth out."

She pulls a face at this declaration.

Me: "I have a feeling Ruth was convinced that you are in this as well. She probably thinks you regard her as your wife."

He hates what I just said, the furrowed brow testifies of it.

Ife huffs.

Ife: "Have you met Ruth? You see Barbie and Ruth? Put them in the same room and they will match perfectly. That girl was taught to walk, talk and float like a princess. She can't see where she's going because her nose goes before her, she's conceited."

She speaks of her with so much resentment.

Randall: "I need you to stop worrying Amara, I told you, I will fix this."

I look down in defeat, he raises my head to give me an assuring glance. I tend to worry too much.

Randall: "I've got this, you have to trust me."

His piercing gaze assures me.

Ife: "Don't worry, Segun will one day grow tired of fighting. I can't believe Raven is still trailing behind him, grovelling. He is shameless."

She graces us with her eye rolling moment.

Randall: "Raven is your brother and we don't bash each other."

Ife: "I'm just saying brother, it makes me so angry."

She grumbles.

Randall: "You will talk to him, if you feel that he has done you wrong. My quarrels with Raven have nothing to do with you Ife."

He chides her firmly. I have noticed something about her, she hates discipline.

Ife: "Whatever."

"How come I didn't get an invite to the family meeting?"

Styles' voice catches our attention, he's with a man about the same age as him. He carries a friendly face and a permanent smile.

Randall: "I didn't know you were coming over."

"Stylos misses you oga, I was literally dragged out of the house."

His gives an explanation in a sarcastic tone.

Styles: "Neo is exaggerating."

Styles denies.

Ife: "Who is this?"

Ife jumps in as she ogles at Styles. I don't know when she got to him but, she's standing before him, shamelessly checking him out. Styles smiles at her.

Styles: "Ifeanyi Okolie, we finally meet."

Her jaw drops.

Ife: "You know my name? He knows my name."

The excitement in her tone is loud, Styles chuckles.

Styles: "Of course I know your name. You're the girl who gave me a hard time on social media, you never gave up posting your brother."

She gasps.

Ife: "That was you? You're the one who blocked my pages?"

He smiles.

Randall: "I couldn't risk your father finding me."

Ife: "Mmhh, a man with brains, I like."

She reaches out her hand to Styles as she shoots him seductive smile. Am I the only one who can see that this child is flirting with this man? Styles shakes her hand.

Styles: "It's finally nice to meet you."

Randall: "Styles is like a brother to me, meaning that he's your brother too and you will address him as brother."

Yeah! He saw that too.

Ife: "What? No way, I'm not doing that. There's a reason God did not make us siblings. Please brother, let's not mess with God's will."

Her riposte has me laughing.

Randall: "What is your problem? I will pluck those eyes out if you keep glaring at him like that."

Ife: "Brother please, let me appreciate God's creation."

She persist, lfe is the epitome of teenager. Her hormones are on another level.

Styles should be uncomfortable but, he's not. He's actually blushing, I don't blame him. Who wouldn't blush when being complimented?

Neo: "Let the sister appreciate, brother ah ah."

I'm guessing he likes clowning.

Randall: "This is Neo."

Neo: "I'm the handsome one."

He stretches out his hand to me, I think he will shake it but, kisses it instead.

Neo: "We finally meet, the woman who has melted the heart of Uze Okolie."

I smile at his salutation.

Me: "Nice to meet you Neo."

Randall: "Neo, let go of that hand."

Neo: "I'm waiting for me hemma to tell me." (My queen.)

Styles: "Wrong move Neo, I might have tolerated it with Khethu but, Uze is a different story. His jealousy runs deep."

Styles states while laughing.

Neo: "Ai me hemma, did you hear that? If anything happens to me, Uze did it." (My queen.)

He's funny.

Randall: "Styles, you sure know how to spoil someone's day. Why did you bring him?"

Styles laughs.

Styles: "How are you?"

Me: "Fine, the last time I saw you, you were playing hero."

He chortles.

Styles: "Don't remind me."

KHETHU\*

I was so close to getting back with Styles, I saw how it hurt him to see me in tears. If it weren't for Neo, I would be with him now. Why does he keep the friends he has? They don't support him and the decisions he makes. Time and time he has chosen them over me, I have always come



second in his life. I refuse to let go of him, Styles is mine and no one will keep us apart.

I find myself back at Mbongeni's place, this is better than being surrounded by my parent's negativity. I don't need that kind of stress.

"Hey."

I greet when he opens the door, he's not surprised that I came back.

Mbongeni: "Come in."

He paves a way for me as I stride in.

Mbongeni: "I was about to eat, would you like to join me?"

Me: "I'm not hungry."

Mbongeni: "What's wrong Khethu?"

He sees the pain in my eyes.

Me: "It hurts Mbo, I'm in so much pain and I can't take it anymore."

My tears fail me as I burst into a painful sob.

He pulls me into a tight embrace and like my emotions could sense that, I'm being comforted, they engulf me.

Mbongeni: "Everything will be okay, I promise."

Me: "How? I just want things to go back to the way they were. I want my Styles back."

I jerk out of his arms.

Me: "No one told me heartbreak would hurt this much, I can't breathe Mbongeni. I feel like there's something stuck on my chest, my heart is heavy."

Mbongeni: "Khethu, don't do this to yourself please."

Me: "Please help me Mbo, help me get him back."

Mbongeni: "How will I do that Khethu? You know we don't see eye to eye, you need to forget him."

Me: "You're asking me for the impossible."

I thought he would make me feel better.

Mbongeni: "It is possible, you need to put yourself first and forget about him. It's the only way you will be able to heal, your heart is broken and it wants him but, you need to take control. Don't be a slave to heartache."

This is not what I want to hear.

Me: "Why don't you understand me Styles?"



A knot builds up on his forehead.”

Me: “I’m sorry, I meant Mbongeni?”

He sighs deeply.

Mbongeni: “I will help you get through this, you’re not alone. I can assure you that.”

He takes me back into his arms.

NOMBULELO\*

“Lelo, wake up.”

I open my eyes to the sound of Mbuso’s voice.

He smiles.

Mbuso: “I swear I will never get used to your crusty face.”

He mocks, as he takes the remote to turn off the TV.

Me: “You’re back? There was someone here looking for you.”

I say, bringing myself to a sitting position, while leering up at him.

Mbuso: “Who?”

Me: “I didn’t ask, he was creeping me out.”

Mbuso: “Oh.”

He accepts a moment of silence, I’m done with these random awkward moments. We should be past that stage already.

Me: “I didn’t cook, I was tired.”

Mbuso: “That’s alright, I brought food.”

Me: “Okay.”

Mbuso: “Can I ask you something?”

He seems nervous, I gesture that he continues.

Mbuso: “What was your cousin’s name? The one who went missing, you never told me her name.”

When did we get here?

Me: “Amara, why?”

Mbuso: "Nothing, I'm just asking. Have they found her yet?"

He knows I would've told him, I talk about her more than anything.

Me: "Nope."

The silent moment again.

Me: "Mbuso..."

Mbuso: "Lelo, I'm sorry for being a jerk."

He drops next to me.

Me: "Hey, I'm offended. That's my man you're calling a jerk."

He smiles.

Mbuso: "You mean so much to me, although I might not say it much often. I don't want to rush this."

Me: "Too late, we had sex and I'm pregnant."

He laughs, genuinely.

Mbuso: "Damn, are we that far in? I didn't realise it."

He jests, I love how he makes me laugh. I love this man and I wish he could see how he's in my heart.

Mbuso: "I love you, I know I love you because you are all I think about. You make me laugh and bring out the best in me. You're literally the only one who laughs at my stupidity. You get my lame jokes and I love that little spark in your eyes when you look at me. Dammit, it's the best feeling in the world. You're constantly on my mind and you're the only woman who has wanted me for me."

I stifle a sob, these are tears of joy.

Mbuso: "You're crying? This is why I didn't want to tell you that I love you, I knew you were going to cry."

Even in serious moments, he must crack a joke.

I jab his shoulder.

Mbuso: "Ouch."

He rubs the pain away.

Mbuso: "Some people get kisses after expressing their love and I get a painful blow."

He clowns, I can't help but, laugh.

Me: "Sorry."

I cradle his cheeks into my palms, his eyes remain on mine.

Me: "Thank you for loving me, I promise to try and be the best for you."

He shakes his head in disapproval.

Mbuso: "You are the best for me Lelo and I don't want you to try and be something you're not. I doubt I would like you, if you were someone else, I like this version of you."

He throws in a jest at the end.

Me: "I love you Xaba."

Mbuso: "And, I love you, my chubby cheeks."

He squeezes my cheeks causing me to laugh, this is before he captures my lips and we fall into an insatiable kiss. Suddenly the kiss feels different, it has my heart thudding against my chest and my veins pulsating briskly.

Mbuso: "Shoo, now that, that's out of the way. I can breathe and eat without my stomach turning."

He states as he jumps from the couch.

I'm selling him. I can't...

Me: "Really? You've got to be kidding me."

Mbuso: "Hey, I was holding my breath the whole time."

He confesses while plodding to the kitchen. I glide behind him and I'm stopped by the aroma of pizza as it tickles my nostrils, this man wants to kill me. An uncomfortable queasy feeling nudges at me, the bathroom is too far and I won't make it. Nausea scrabbles at my throat, I try to force the bile down but, it subdues me.

Mbuso: "Lelo?"

I make it to the kitchen sink and lurch forward as my stomach contracts violently, forcing everything out. I spot Mbuso with the corner of my eye, he's standing beside me. I gently push him off. He can't see this, it's revolting. He persist on staying.

He opens the tap water to wash out the repulsive chunks of food that has splattered in the sink, while rubbing my back. The pungent stench plunders my nostrils, forcing me to retch repeatedly till, only clear liquid evades from my mouth. My throat burns from the stomach acid, I wash my mouth and gurgle.

Mbuso: "Here drink this."

He holds out a glass of water, I glance at him as I wipe my teary eyes.

The water eases the discomfort in my throat.

Mbuso: "You okay?"



Me: "Yeah."

Mbuso: "It's the pizza, right?"

I don't get his obsession with that greasy food.

Me: "Can I open the door, the smell is still hovering about."

I plead at the feel of my stomach turning again.

Mbuso: "I'll do it, come sit."

He leads me to a couch, before gliding to open the door. He turns to me and smiles like an idiot, I don't know why he's smiling but it has me laughing. He's cute and stupid and I'm in love.

To be continued...





82\*

RANDALL\*

Neo: "What's for supper? I miss Chioma's cooking."

Neo exclaims as we enter the patio.

Me: "I don't know, you can go and ask her."

Neo: "No, I'll let her surprise me. The food tastes better like that."

We settle down on the chairs, while Styles throws wood into the fire place.

Neo: "You seem distant oga, what's wrong?"

Styles: "I noticed too."

Me: "Its Liya, her condition worries me."

Styles: "I called Doctor Lawson after you sent me the text, you're scheduled for 12pm tomorrow."

He announces as he settles down.

Me: "If Mbuso says he can't see anything then, I doubt he will."

I protest, I don't want my child to be pricked with needles and pumped with medication. Liyana has been through enough.

Neo: "Yeah, dokotela oa tseba dintho tsa hae." (The doctor knows his stuff.)

Me: "Mbuso thinks it could be spiritual."

I introduce, this has been on my mind.

Neo: "It's possible, remember maSonto, Stylos?"

Narked, Styles scratches his head. He's also not a fan.

Styles: "She said Liya needs to go to Ghana that, there's a dark cloud following her and this only puts her life in danger."

He explains as he digs into my memory.

Me: "You told me that, I doubt it's the case. The Okolies protect their own, they do not implant fear or harm. If they have a message, they find ways to get it through."

This is what I know.

Styles: "You should look at other alternatives Randall. What explains this sudden seizure? Is there a history of epilepsy in your family?"

Me: "Not at all, somehow Segun knew what was happening to Liya."

This bugs me.

Neo: "Like a vision?"

Me: "If you want to put it like that."

Neo: "Uze, what if this is his way of getting to you?"

This man gets wiser every day.

Me: "What do you mean? You think he did something to my child?"

Styles: "It's possible, your old man wants you back in Ghana, by hook or crook and he is desperate. He will do anything to get you there, even hurt his grandchild. From what you have told me about him, he doesn't have a back bone."

I see where Styles is going with this.

Me: "If that's true Styles, then I will kill him."

Neo: "There's a problem there, killing him would be deadly to you and your family."

Neo seems to be growing up and I am liking the new version of him.

Styles: "Maybe you should speak to maSonto."

Me: "Tradition, Styles?"

Neo: "Why not? You believe that the Okolie ancestors protect you, is this not the same as believing in traditional healing?"

Me: "I thought I was beginning to like the matured you but, I change my mind now."

He laughs.

Neo: "I have always been matured bozza, you two wanted me to act different nje."

He defends himself.

Styles: "Yeah right, you can't be matured even if I paid you a million."

Styles retorts, I sense a bit of tension between them.

Neo: "Firstly, ha u na million eo so, that statement is off." (You don't have that million.)

I'm proven right, Styles is bothered about something and Neo has this I don't care attitude.

Me: "Okay, spit it out you two. It hasn't been a week since you moved in together and you're already having a couple's quarrel."

Styles gives me an irked look, he finds my sarcasm rather dry.

Neo: "Stylos oang koatele bozza, because I chased that crazy girl away." (Styles is upset with



me.)

Neo explains.

Me: "Khethu?"

I knew she would come back but, not this soon.

Neo: "She came to the house this morning. A re Styles I'm your only eye, open for me. Nahana. Ka bona hore Stylos mo, mongole a hae a tetebela. Uze, nna ha ke dlali ntwana. I had to act fast." (Imagine. I saw that his knees were weak. I don't play.)

Styles: "Neo, I told you to keep your mouth shut."

He growls at him.

Neo: "He eh bozza, Uze must know." (No boss.)

Me: "Styles, you can't do that to yourself. Khethu is a danger to you, you need to stay away."

He hates that I'm censuring him but, when Styles falls in love, he falls hard. I know Khethu still holds a special place in his heart.

Styles: "That woman was once everything to me, I can't abandon her when she's going through something."

He states, he's serious about this.

Neo: "I tried oga and I'm tired, speak to your friend tuu." (Boss.)

He waves his hand, dismissing the subject.

Me: "Styles, I'm not going to give you a lecture, you're a grown ass man and I will not run after you. But know this, if that woman dares to hurt you. I swear Styles, I will make her pay and not even you, will stop me."

He grimaces at me as he tilts his head to the side, I find his acts inscrutable. After what Khethu did to him, he should want nothing to do with her.

Styles: "We're not here for that, you said Mbuso is dating Amara's sister."

I glare at him, I know that look. He will give in to Khethu's cries.

Neo: "Dokotela oa jola?" (The doctor is in a relationship?)

Why is he shocked?

Me: "I think so, the look on his face said it."

Neo: "Yah neh, ho monate mo." (It's nice here.)

Styles: "It's not really a big deal if they are dating, Amara won't leave you."

I'm not really sure about that, Amara hasn't truly expressed her feelings.

Me: "Amara craves to see her family again and I'm afraid that if she meets up with her cousin, she will convince her to go back home. I won't be able to protect her when she's far from me. Mkhize is a sick bastard who preys on young women, he fought to get to Amara. He literally took her from under my nose, she won't be safe in that house."

Styles: "You're right, we need to deal with Mkhize first. Speak to Mbuso and tell him to keep his mouth shut."

Neo: "Dokotela oa jola vele?" (The doctor is really in a relationship?)

He still dwells on that. I can't, with Neo.

NTOMBI\*

I don't know what to do with Moses anymore, his condition is deteriorating. He sleeps less, if not more. He would go a day or two without sleeping at all, Petunia doesn't want to help me with him. I had to take leave from work, so I can look after him fulltime. His brother and uncle went back home, with a promise that they will come back. I doubt, though.

I hardly take Moses out for walks, he still chases people and enjoys it when they run from him. He's like a puppy that wants to play all the time.

Moses: "Zulu is telling me to go find his child."

Nkosiyabo has killed me, he will not leave my husband in peace.

Me: "Uthini Moses?" (What are you saying Moses?)

I still entertain this nonsense. He's seated on the floor entertaining himself with God knows what.

Moses: "He says I must go find his child, Ntombi awutshela uZulu ukuthi asiyifuni leya ngane la." (Tell him that we don't want that child here.)

This is draining, I had to take Moses to our room because Jonas was complaining about his guffawing. He did this to my husband and still whines. I have lost hope. Where will we begin to look for Amara?

Moses: "Hayi Zulu, hayi. Ikinga yakho ukuthi awulaleli? Ngiyakutshela ukuthi uAmara asim'funi la." (Your problem is that you don't listen, I told you that we don't want Amara here.)

He screams as he covers his ears.

Me: "Moses, yini?" (What is it?)

Moses: "Ntombi, tshela uZulu maan, tell him I don't want to bring that child in my house." (Tell Zulu.)

He's angry, I haven't seen him this upset since he's lost his mind.

“Ntombi, what’s wrong?”

Petunia runs in my room as if it’s hers.

Ntombi: “Ufunani Petunia?” (What do you want Petunia?)

I yell at her.

Petunia: “I heard Moses scream.”

Since when does she care about my husband?

Me: “So?”

I want her out of my room.

Petunia: “Haibo Ntombi! What wrong have I committed?”

This only makes me so angry, it’s their fault that my husband has lost his mind. Nkosiyabo won’t leave him in peace, I hope Moses will recover from this horrific experience or he will never be the same again.

Me: “Petunia voetsek.” (Piss off.)

Her eyes pop open.

Petunia: “Ntombi uyangithuka?” (You’re swearing at me?)

She gasps in shock.

Moses: “Yeah voetsek Petunia, wena no Mhambi, voetsekani emzini wami.” (Yes, piss off Petunia. You and Mhambi must leave my house.)

Me: “Umzilwe, umyeni wami.” (You heard my husband.)

I give her a patronising glare.

Petunia: “Hayi ke, wena nalo myeni wakho, nizoqina. We are not going anywhere.” (You and your husband will be strong.)

Me: “Get out of my room Petunia.”

I shout, seeing her standing there makes me want to gag. How did these people enter my house? Everything went downhill when they showed up. Moses wouldn’t be in this situation.

Moses: “Zulu nawe hayi. Isicefe ngesani sbali.” (Why are you being a nuisance brother in-law?)

He yells.

Me: “Petunia phuma.” (Get out.)

I shout at her, this should be enough to get her out of my room. She clicks her tongue as she strolls out.

Moses: “Zulu angifuni, I’m not going to look for her.”

He's annoying me right now.

Me: "Thula nawe maan." (Keep quiet.)

I snap at him. For, how long do I have to endure this? I'm not a bad person, I don't deserve this. Martha is to blame for this dark cloud over my family. I will show her what I am made of, she likes being a witch, right?

I will show her what we do to witches in this place.

SETHU\*

Lebo and I have been arguing in the parking lot, she stopped me when I jumped out of the car. I think she was waiting for me.

Lebo: "I had to tell aunt, maybe she will knock some sense into you."

She raises her voice, I can never have a normal conversation with her.

Me: "You didn't have to tell her anything and you lied, you made up a story about Styles being a drug dealer."

She huffs, it states that she cares nothing about me. I can't recall a day when Lebo respected me and my friends.

Lebo: "It was the only way they could take this serious."

Her reasoning is stupid but, this is Lebo. She thinks herself to be wise.

Me: "Why do you want me to stay away from Styles? Why do you hate him so much?"

I search, I can't find a better reason for her bitterness. If it were up to her, I would be locked up in a box away from humanity.

Lebo: "Please, I don't even know the guy."

Her eyes flicker, I know this look pretty well.

Me: "Exactly, you don't know him yet, you have made up your mind that he is a bad person."

Lebo: "Made up my mind? You were there during the shoot out and why is he not in jail?"

She shouts, her voice has to be louder than mine anyway. It's the way she wants it, it's bad enough that she has a high-pitched voice. How do I compete with that?

Me: "Don't be like that Lebo, you have no idea what was happening that day."

I retort, suddenly afraid of what her conniving mind is entertaining.

Lebo: "I know what I saw and I heard there's an investigation going on. If I go to the police station and tell them what I know..."



Heard from who? Unless she's been stalking him. She's capable of anything, I wouldn't be surprised if Lebo is the snake who gave Eve the forbidden fruit.

Me: "You wouldn't dare."

Lebo: "Try me."

The cold curtness in her tone shakes me.

Me: "Do it Lebo and you will see."

I know how to stand up for myself, I just want peace to reign in this dysfunctional family.

Lebo: "What will you do Sethu? I'm not afraid of you, I will report that thug. He belongs in jail."

But, then again. She will not let peace embrace us.

She pushes on wanting to get Styles arrested.

Me: "You stay the hell away from Styles, you hear me?"

I did not fight for Ntokozo, he had crushed my soul and broke my strength while at it but, I will fight for Styles. Cousin dearest will not harm him. If I have to push against her demons, then so be it.

She cackles as she claps once.

Lebo: "You're defending him now? Is little Miss Sethu catching feelings?"

She mocks me, this is so childish.

I don't have time for this. I will not entertain her, I swivel to walk away but she rushes after me and blocks my footpath.

I move to the side and she moves with me, she has this smug on her face and I want to wipe it off but, I refuse to stoop to her level.

Me: "Let me pass Lebo."

I demand sternly, I'm not a violent person. She's provoking me, I still refuse to debase myself. I am better than this.

Lebo: "We're not done."

"I think you are."

When did he get here?

I forgot he said he was coming, Lebo rolls her eyes and furiously slithers away. Who would've thought? The fearless Lebo is deterred.

Styles: "You cannot let her speak to you like that."

He looks down at me after ambling towards me. Recognizing the worry in his tone, I become defensive. He has too much on his plate, I wouldn't want him to stress about me.

Me: "I can handle her."

Styles: "I know but, you're letting her bully you. You shouldn't take shit from her."

Me: "Mr. Styles, let's not talk about her please. My day has gone down the drain."

I dismiss him, curtly. Lebo sure knows how to crush one's spirit.

Styles: "How about we do something about that?"

He offers smiling down at me, I'm clueless as to what he's planning. He is mysterious after all. His expressions are capped, he hides them well.

Me: "I'm not in the mood for anything Mr. Styles."

Styles: "I will not take that, you're working the grave shift and melancholy is not a good friend to keep, the night is long."

Me: "I don't know."

Styles: "Please, let me make your day better. I want to take care of you kitten."

My heart is forward, I don't know why it's jumping like this. It better not get me in trouble.

Me: "What do you have in mind?"

How can I say no when he's looking at me like this? He accepts a gentle smile, it's contagious as I return it.

Styles: "Where is your car?"

I twist my head back to point at it.

Styles: "Give me the keys, I'll drive."

Me: "Why don't we take yours? I only have enough fuel to get me back home, patrol is not kind these days."

He laughs, I've noticed how he laughs at my jokes. I'm not the funniest person to walk the face of the earth. Ntokozo would literally tell me to stop it and grow up.

Styles: "We'll fill up on the way."

He takes my hand and leads me to my car, this is a habit he has adapted. And he hasn't stopped holding my hand, I'm not complaining. This is hope that, there are kind people who reside in this world.

To be continued...



SETHU\*

We get to our destination, I thought we were going to another eatery. I'm surprised that he has brought me to a dog shelter, this man is full of surprises. I watch him in wonder as he jumps out of the car, he's not going to explain why we are here. I follow behind and wait for him as he strides to me.

Me: "Dog shelter?"

He smiles.

Styles: "I hear pets are therapeutic, they can reduce stress, anxiety and depression. You're feeling down so, this will help and get this, it also eases loneliness."

Me: "Loneliness? I'm not lonely. How can I be, when you're with me?"

I leer up at him as I declare, he smiles and circles his hand on my waist. He pulls me into him, my hands fall on his chest.

Styles: "I'm not usually attracted to short girls but, you do it for me. You're cute and adorable."

Did he just say cute and adorable?

I will let this slide.

Me: "I don't think I appreciate being called short, I'm the average height. The normal height, while you decided that God needed to go a little higher."

He laughs, before there's a quiet moment. We still get many of those, his eyes find my lips and I am tempted to taste his. This could be a mistake. He probably hasn't gotten over the woman that he once loved. I have been hurt before and I will not set myself up for another disappointment.

I pull away from his arms, last time I checked we were friends.

Me: "Okay, I hope you won't make me get a dog, I'm terrified of dogs."

I state as we glide to towards the entrance.

He laughs at my statement.

I don't need pet therapy, his laugh is more than enough.

Styles: "Why? Dogs are cute."

Me: "Like you said, I'm short and short girls can't run. I'll be in trouble if the dog chases me."

His head falls back, as he indulges on another roll of laughter.



We're approached by a guy dressed in uniform, who leads us to the cages. I get to pat a few puppies, only ones, I think won't bite me. Styles is right, they are therapeutic. I have my own demons I'm fighting and he has no clue how much this means to me, there are times when I feel like giving up.

Mr. Styles reminds me of how God works through people, he must be the one sent to guide me. This just proves to me that, when God shows up, he shows off. No one has ever been so gentle and kind to me. After Ntokozo, I couldn't let any man in. I was terrified of men and thought they were all monsters who were out to get me.

How I let this one in, is a mystery. Maybe it could be that, we are both broken and in need of a friend.

Styles: "Care to share your thoughts?"

He snaps his fingers when he notices me staring into space, we're seated at an eatery in Park Town. I will be late for work if I keep following him.

Me: "I was thinking, how lucky I am to have a..."

Styles: "Please don't say friend."

He cuts me as he predicts my words.

Styles: "You can't come back from that."

Me: "How did you know what I was going to say?"

Styles: "I saw it coming and I will not let you friend zone me."

I didn't realize that's what I was about to do.

Me: "What do we call this then?"

Styles: "It's untitled at the moment and I'm comfortable with it."

I'm okay with it too, as long as he's here.

Styles: "What's your deal breaker in a relationship?"

This is rather random.

Me: "Well, cheating. I'm not good at sharing."

Styles: "That's it?"

Me: "There's more but, I can't think of anything right now. I haven't really thought about dating, I'm trying to stay single so, I can find myself."

Did I just reveal that?

The inquisitive look on his face says he's about to ask why I'm on a path to self-discovery.

Styles: "What led you to this path?"



I said it.

Me: "The ex, he took something from me, something I can never get back."

It still feels like yesterday when this happened, there is no getting over it.

Styles: "What did he do? Was it the cheating?"

I'm not ready to share the details.

Me: "No, maybe."

Styles: "You can talk to me about it, you know that right?"

And this is what I appreciate about him.

Me: "I do."

Styles: "This seems deep, did you get help?"

Me: "You know African Parents, they will tell you that therapy is for white people and we should sleep it off."

I think I'm becoming emotional.

Styles: "Yeah but, that is wrong. You need to speak to someone about your problems."

Me: "My mother used to say take your problems to God and go to sleep. This is how I was able to store them away."

Styles: "Won't you tell me what it is, I want to help you. I want to remove that pain in your eyes."

This makes me more emotional. I shake my head, maybe one day I will open up to him. This is the first time I am given a platform to share my pain and the urge is there but, I know that I will break down. For now, the memory is better hidden.

Me: "Look at the time, I'm going to be late."

I inspect my phone as I utter, he doesn't respond but, leers at me. I don't know what he's thinking.

I bring myself up from the chair, this is when he moves.

Styles: "When is your birthday?"

He queries as he takes my hand, leading me outside.

Me: "October third, why?"

Styles: "I'm getting you a puppy."

Hell no.

Me: "Where will that puppy stay? I know it definitely won't be in my house."

He laughs.

Styles: "We'll see about that, when you fall in love with it."

Me: "I doubt that will happen."

I dread going back to work, Lebo is there and she's the last person I want to see.

AMARA\*

I find Ife in her room, she's laying on the bed with her feet up, while listening to Bob Marley. I didn't expect this honestly, this is not the type of music her age group listens to.

Me: "You have great taste."

She raises her head at the sound of my voice.

Ife: "Hey, I didn't see you there."

Me: "Can I come in?"

Ife: "Sure."

I stride in and sit myself on the edge of her bed.

Me: "So, Bob Marley?"

She giggles.

Ife: "I am yet, to hear a musician with such pure harmony, his songs are clean. There's no vulgar, nothing that will bring me into a depression mode."

People can surprise you.

Me: "Wow, I'm impressed."

Ife: "You thought I was into trap music?"

Me: "I won't lie."

She laughs.

Ife: "Where is brother? I'm surprised he let you out of his sight. You two are too much, really."

Ife talks a lot, she always has something to say.

Me: "He went out, I need to ask you something."

Ife: "I'm all ears."

This is it, I have to voice out my worries.

Me: "I need to meet up with Ruth."

I introduce, her mouth flies open.

Ife: "Do you have a death wish? Brother will kill you, I know you're his weakness. I have seen it but, don't use that to your advantage."

I haven't said much and she has already concluded.

Me: "Ife, this is the only way, you said it yourself that, I can actually get through to her."

Ife: "Yes but, he's against it. You want to do this without his knowledge right?"

I nod.

Surprisingly, this is tormenting me. I can't get it out of my mind, Randall is royalty, it's his destiny and he can't deny it.

Ife: "I'm sorry but, I can't let you do that."

Me: "Ife please, not knowing what's going on is torture."

I plead, desperately.

Ife: "I get where you're coming from Amara and I completely understand but, brother forbid it."

She releases a heavy sigh.

Ife: "You're afraid of losing him, aren't you?"

I have never been afraid of anything in my life.

Me: "There's a big possibility that one day, he will agree to your father's demands."

She shakes her head, the disappointed look on her face, has me dropping my gaze.

Ife: "You see, this is why you two need to date. Go through the courtship stage, get to know each other. Amara, what you're telling me now, proves that you don't know him at all. Brother stands up for what he believes in. He doesn't follow, he's a leader. My father might try every trick in the book to get him to do what he wants but, brother will not bend."

Me: "I hear you, I don't know how to stop worrying. It's all I think about Ife."

Ife: "Listen to Bob Marley and stop attracting negative energy."

I laugh at her retort.

Me: "I don't want to lose Randall"

Ife: "You won't now, stop worrying. You're only tormenting yourself."

She's right.

There's a sudden knock on the door, Randall is back.

Ife: "Yes."

She yells, my heart starts hammering. I'm suddenly nervous and eager to see his face. It all comes crashing down when Raven steps in, he looks weary and anger resides on his face. He briefly glares at me, before turning his eyes to his sister, I'm not certain about the scowl on his face that, has me feeling like I have done something wrong.

Raven: "Where is Uze?"

He's upset, his voice snitches on him.

Ife: "We are not robots brother, surely you won't die if you greet us."

He grimaces at her, he's not here for chit chat. I fail to find the friendly face he is known for.

Raven: "Where is Uze?"

He repeats, completely shutting her out.

Ife: "You're his brother, you should know where he is."

Raven: "Ifeanyi, don't piss me off, father wants to speak to him. Why has he not been taking his calls?"

Ife rolls her eyes.

Ife: "I don't know Raven, you should ask him that."

Me: "I think he went to see a friend or something like that."

His eyes finally fall on me but, it's not a cordial mien.

Ife: "What the hell is your problem Raven?"

Raven: "What?"

He growls.

Ife: "Amara is talking to you, there's no reason for you to be rude."

Raven: "Please, I do not entertain peasants."

Wow.

I didn't expect this from him, Raven of all people. He loves Randall, he was, for this relationship. What has happened now? Why is he calling me names?

Ife jumps from the bed.

Ife: "What did you say Uzoma?"

She toddles towards him, she's upset.

Raven: "Whose side are you on Ifeanyi? Have you seen your father and how miserable he is?"



Ife cackles, I'm on my feet now as Ife looks like she's about to attack her brother.

Ife: "Side Raven? This is not about taking sides, this is about right and wrong. My brother is not a puppet, he will not be controlled by Segun."

Raven: "Watch your mouth little girl, that is your father you're addressing by name."

He snaps at her, as he moves from the door way, treading towards her. This does not look good.

Ife: "I wish he wasn't my father, can one be so unlucky to be fathered by Segun Okolie? And you, Raven. You have always been his shadow but, I never thought you would turn on your brother."

She raises her voice, his words have evoked a certain anger in her.

Raven: "Like I said, you're a child Ife and you will not understand anything."

Ife: "I am not a child, I see what is happening. You think I haven't seen brother's pain, it hurts him that his brother and father do not support him."

Maybe I should intervene, this argument is getting heated.

Me: "Ife..."

Raven: "You stay out of this, it's because of you that, Uze refuses to see reason."

Okay, I should have kept my mouth shut.

Ife: "Don't speak to her like that, you seem to forget whose house you're in."

Raven: "Listen, I am not fazed by your threats Ifeanyi, I have tolerated your tone long enough. I'm your elder brother, you need to show respect."

Ife: "Well, you need to act like an elder brother."

She yells at him.

Raven: "Ifeanyi, speak to me like that again and I will smack you back to your mother's compound."

He yells back as he charges at her. Fear plastered on her face, she takes a few steps back.

Ife is audacious, she's a fighter like Randall. Here she is, standing up against her brother. I fail to find a motive behind Raven's blatant behaviour, it could be that his father has gotten to him. Just yesterday, he was on Randall's side. I fear that Segun could have the same effect on Randall, he appears to be good at brainwashing people.

Ife: "Get out of here, Raven, leave."

She points to the door as she yells at him.

Raven: "I will be back, tell that brother of yours that his days of disrespecting my father are over. I will not sit and watch my father drown in sorrows because his son refuses to submit."

He growls at her before storming out, without as much acknowledging me.

Me: "Ife."

She's trying to calm herself down as she counts her breaths.

Ife: "I hate him."

Me: "You don't mean that."

She turns to look at me.

Ife: "Oh I do, you don't know the things they have done with father. Those people are evil Amara, I heard things in that house. Things you would be shocked to hear, they think I'm in the dark."

She's scaring me right now. What could she possibly be talking about?

Me: "What things Ife?"

I probably shouldn't be prying.

She sighs and walks to sit on her bed, my eyes watch her movements as I wait for an answer.

Ife: "I can't tell you, it will only put your life in danger."

She raises her eyes to look at me.

Ife: "Please, don't tell brother what I said."

She pleads, this seems deep.

Me: "I won't."

I thought I was worried but now, my mind is muddled. This is bigger than me.

Will Randall and I ever have peace?

MBUSO\*

Trust Randall to expect me to jump when he barks, I had to leave Lelo alone at home as he commanded that we meet. He's waiting for me at a coffee shop, he's seated inside with a white coffee mug before him.

The place is not crowded, it's a peaceful space. I should bring Lelo here, somewhere away from the rabble in Randburg and Sebokeng. She needs to distress, she's going through so much.

Randall sees me and gives me a smug look as I approach.

Me: "You know you should stop commanding me around, I have a life."

I complain, as I get to him.

Randall: "Well, you're here, If you had a problem, you wouldn't have bothered to come."



The smug, I think I know what this is about. He gestures that I sit, I settle down opposite him.

Randall: "Coffee?"

Me: "I don't want to spoil my appetite, Lelo cooked."

I throw that in, knowing that he's put two and two together. He sneers at me.

Randall: "So, it's true?"

Me: "Yes."

Randall: "What are you planning to achieve with this?"

Randall doesn't surprise me anymore.

Me: "I don't know what you mean by that and before you sum up your own conclusions, I didn't know they were related when I met her."

Randall: "Now, you know."

I don't trust the look on his face.

Me: "I'm not sure what you're trying to say."

He slouches over, places his arms on the table and ogles into my eyes. Intimidated? Yes. There's a way he looks at you that makes you feel small.

Randall: "Mbuso, I don't want that girl knowing Amara's whereabouts."

Me: "Are you asking me to keep a secret from her?"

He smirks.

Randall: "I'm not asking Mbuso, I'm telling you."

Me: "If I say no?"

He sits back and scrutinizes me under an intense gaze, it has me frowning as I'm struggling to read his expression.

Randall: "I doubt that's something you would like to know."

Son of a bitch.

Me: "I can't lie to her, we just started something great. You should understand since you have fallen in love, yourself."

Randall: "Don't tell me shit, Mbuso. I don't want to be the reason your fling, doesn't make it to six months."

Me: "Are you threatening me, Randall?"

He shakes his head in denial, the smug bastard. He's dishing out threats.



He drops his eyes on the table, I see an A4 brown envelop.

Randall: "Go ahead, indulge."

He places his palm on it and slides it across the table.

Me: "What's in this?"

Randall: "Open it."

He says.

My curiosity controls me as I flip it open, the contents shake my world. It's pictures of Nomasonto, she's with a little boy about the age of three. I don't understand why he's showing me this. Could this be? I raise my eyes to him.

Can he get rid of that smirk on his face?

Me: "What the hell is this?"

Randall: "That's your college sweetheart, you don't remember her?"

Me: "Don't play games with me Randall. Why are you showing me these pictures? What do I have to do with her and this kid?"

Randall: "I know it's not my place to tell you but, congratulations. You're a big brother."

Everything around me collapses. What does he mean by big brother?

Me: "Where did you get this?"

Randall: "I have my ways."

Me: "Would you stop and tell me where you got this."

Randall: "What help will that do Mbuso? Daddy had an affair with your miss and a baby came out of that. I know mommy is fragile and her heart will not survive this news."

Me: "You wouldn't dare."

He scowls at me.

Randall: "I don't play, when it comes to Amara, telling her cousin about this will only bring trouble. You know what she will do? She will leave you because you lied to her, the poor girl has been through enough already. A cheating abusive ex, do you think she will stay with a liar?"

Me: "How do I know that the child is my father's? It could be anyone's."

Randall: "You missed a paper there, right between those two photographs. That's the DNA test, it's a match. The little man is a Xaba, I was shocked too you know. Who would've thought that Mr. Xaba would..."

Me: "What do you want from me?"

I cut him off, I respect my father and knowing such about him, makes me see him differently

Randall sneers at me, he enjoys torturing people.

Randall: "Now, we're reaching a compromise. Keep your mouth shut about Amara till I know she's safe."

He commands.

Me: "Done and I'm keeping these."

Randall: "Suit yourself but, if mommy dearest finds them, whatever happens to her will be on you."

Me: "That is for me to worry about."

I can't let it happen, she will die. I know my father has a wondering eye, he's had affairs before. I can't grasp why he would go for my former lover, my mother won't survive this. She loves that man, her whole world is built around him.

Randall: "Okay, one more thing. There's more where that came from, just in case you decide to change your mind."

Bastard.

Me: "Why are you doing this Randall?"

Randall: "I wouldn't have done it, if you didn't fall for Amara's cousin. You're an honest man Mbuso and you can't lie to save your life. Amara and my daughter's lives are in danger, as long as Mkhize is out there, I need to deal with him first. Then, your girlfriend can have the family reunion she's been dreaming of."

Me: "You know, what lying to her will do to us?"

Why am I asking him this, he doesn't care.

Randall: "I'm sure you can make her see reason, she might be angry a day or two but, she'll come around."

He doesn't know what he's talking about, Lelo will never trust me again.

Randall: "I have to go, this was nice. We should do it again, like old pals."

He exclaims before striding away. I need to speak to my father, that old shameless bastard.

To be continued...

STYLES\*

I get home around 9pm to find Neo on the couch, lying on his back. He has a wet towel over his face and like always, he's t-shirtless. I bang the door shut, to get his attention. He jumps up in fright, terror plastered on his face. He eases when he sees me, standing before him.

Me: "I think I might stop coming home, if this is what I will find."

He releases a deep sigh as he lies back down, it tells me that something is not okay. Neo is always jolly, nothing can bring him down. You literally have to work hard for it.

Me: "What's wrong with you?"

Neo: "Eish Stylos, Tshidi wants to keep my child away from me."

His words have my eyes widening in shock, Neo loves his child. He would die for that little boy.

Me: "She can't do that."

Neo: "She can, she's the mother."

He states in a sad, low tone.

Me: "Why does she want to do this?"

He huffs as he removes the towel from his face, he's been crying. His eyes are red.

Neo: "Mosadi o u batla chelete." (That woman wants money.)

Me: "Neo, you have to pay maintenance, I didn't think you would be this irresponsible."

Neo: "I pay pap geld every month without fail Stylos, I work my ass off for my son. I do everything for him, mara Tshidi u batla more." (I pay maintenance, but Tshidi wants more.)

Me: "I don't understand Neo, she can't do this to you."

Then again, Tshidi is as crazy as they get. She once overdosed the child with cough medicine just to get Neo's attention, she called him in the middle of the night, saying the baby was sick.

Neo: "There's nothing I can do Stylos, I have to go to Pretoria in the morning. She said that, she's taking him to her mother in P.E. Tshidi u tlo nyela kea u joetsa. This is not the first time Stylos. Tell me, how do I deal with this? I am tired of having to beg her to see my son. Did she make that child alone? I have never seen a woman get herself pregnant, mara with Tshidi anything is possible." (Tshidi will pay, I'm telling you.)

At the end of the day, he is still Neo. His personality is something else.

I have to hinder myself from laughing.

Me: "You can fight for custody, prove that she is not a good mother. The court will rule in your favour."

He rubs his head as he mulls over my words. I bring myself down on a one seater, I wish there was a way to help him.

Neo: "That's a good idea but, my child needs his mother. I don't want him to grow up without her Stylos. I grew up without a father and I know how it feels to crave for the other half. I don't want my son to go through that."

I know very well what he's talking about. I grew up without both parents.

Me: "Give her the money then, there's no other way."

Neo: "Yoh, ten stina every month. Where will I get that kind of money?" (Ten thousand.)

I almost choke on my spit as he mentions this.

Me: "That woman has lost her mind."

Neo: "She lost her mind a long time ago, ha ke tsebe hore ne ke etsang ha ke robola le eena. I must have been drunk that day because ha ke mo sheba nou, I ask myself did I really take off my clothes for that fool. Ai tlof tlof e monati Stylos but it has its consequences." (I don't know what I was doing when I slept with her.) (When I look at her now.) (Sex is nice Styles.)

I have heard more than enough, my poor ears.

Me: "Fuck you Neo, you're revealing too much man."

He chuckles as he looks at me.

Neo: "Hau Stylos, we're both adults here."

He retorts, with a confused look. He really doesn't see anything wrong with what he just said.

Me: "I will let this slide because you're sad."

He lies back on the couch.

Neo: "Eish, bophelo baka bofedile." (My life is over.)

He's exaggerating it a bit.

Me: "Your life is not over Neo."

Neo: "It is Stylos, ten stina? Where will I get that? My company barely makes enough." (Ten thousand.)

Me: "Maybe I can help."

He swiftly jumps and scowls at me.

Neo: "That's why Khethu is like that, it's that stupid soft heart of yours."

Insults? Really?

Me: "I'm offering my help and you trash my heart?"

Neo: "No, not at all. Stylos, you want to give Tshidi ten thousand. That woman has a boyfriend. Do you know what they will do with that money? It's not for the baby, it's for her and that ugly pig."

Me: "I wasn't going to give her money, maybe come to an agreement with her. Tshidi must have a dark past Neo. There's something we can use against her, surely."

He frowns at the sound of my words, I'm not certain if he likes the idea.

Neo: "I'll have a look into it, I still have to go and stop her, from taking my son away."

Me: "Do that, you have rights over him as his father, as much as she does."

Neo doesn't deserve any of this, if Tshidi doesn't falter, I will have to take matters into my own hands.

Neo: "Where did you go Stylos? I didn't cook, you know I can only make pap and I'm tired of eating amasi because wena you come home with a full stomach. You don't bother to bring me food." (Sour milk.)

He's back to his crazy self.

RANDALL\*

I walk in the room to find Amara seated on the bed, she's already in her night wear. Her face carries a ghost of a smile as she glances up at me.

Me: "Hey."

Amara: "You're back?"

Me: "Can we talk?"

I place myself before her.

Me: "Tell me how you feel about not seeing your family?"

Amara: "Well, I think about them every day, especially Lelo. She was my best friend and I can't express how much I miss her."

This proves me right, she craves to see them again.

Me: "Your aunt? Tell me about her."

My sudden interest in her family, has her frowning in confusion.

Amara: "Aunt was hardly at home, she's a nurse. It was mostly Lelo and I and my uncle. I miss her too though, she's the closest thing I have to a mother. Are you sure I can't meet up with

them?"

The desperation in her voice worries me.

Me: "You will see them soon, Mkhize is a very smart man. We cannot underestimate him, he's very devious."

How do I tell her that, I'm being selfish with her? Amara doesn't express herself much, her shyness still holds power over her. I'm not sure about her feelings towards me.

Me: "Amara, this is a first for me you, know?"

Amara: "What?"

Me: "This thing."

She frowns at me, I'm clearly not making sense. How do I say this?

Me: "My heart feels things I am not familiar with."

Amara: "Like love?"

I didn't expect her to say this, I have always swayed away from this topic when Styles would bring it up. Today it is staring at me in the face and there is no escaping it.

Amara: "You seem to be clueless as to what love is Mr. Okolie, you're different. You express yourself physically while, normal people use words."

She speaks in a soft voice.

Amara: "Love is more than just being interested in someone physically, it's an emotional attachment. Lelo was dating this guy, she spoke about him all the time. Some days I would fall asleep while, she recites her day to day life with him. There was this spark in her eyes, when she mentioned his name. She loved him. I was oblivious to the feeling and the word itself. I knew it from her and she would tell me that love is two sided, you both need to be on the boat and share the stirring wheel. You can't be too demanding and you need to understand that your partner had a life before you came and asking them to give it up is selfish."

I sigh as I see her point, my selfishness controls me.

Me: "I guess I am selfish, I am selfish with you Amara. It bothers me that, when you meet them you will forget about me."

I utter as I justify my greed, she takes my hand into hers.

Amara: "How can I forget the one person who has changed my life? Is it even possible for me to forget the one who has my heart?"

When I first saw Amara, she gave the impression of a delicate and frail soul. I must have misjudged her, her true self leaves me in disbelief each time it is revealed.

I am taken by her confession, while as, I can't bring myself to express my feelings. I scoot closer to her, terminating the distance between us.

Amara: "We just spoke about this."

She giggles.

Me: "I can't help it, you do things to me."

My response, as I pull her a little closer.

"Are you guys dressed? Can I come in?"

Ife's voice stops me as I'm about to claim Amara's lips, I run my eyes to her and she has this smile on her face.

Me: "You're smiling? The girl has bad timing."

She twitters.

Amara: "She calls it perfect timing in her world, and we are, in Ife's world."

I shake my head at her words.

Ife: "Are you dressed yet? I'm tired of covering my eyes."

Her stupid statement is accompanied by a giggle, this child refuses to see me happy. I turn to glance at her, she's standing at the door with her hand over her eyes, I have never seen such craziness in my life. There's a bit of my mother in her and somehow her presence in this house eases my heart.

Me: "My friend remove that hand, you de craze." (Are you crazy?)

She rapidly removes it and her jaw drops instantly.

Ife: "Brother? You can speak pidgin?"

The shock in her voice has Amara laughing, Ife toddles, a soft laugh escaping her mouth with every step she takes.

Me: "Neo taught me."

That man speaks pidgin like it's his second language, he is smart like that.

Ife: "Neo is that cute guy right?"

She's starting.

Me: "I will not justify your stupid question with an answer."

She rolls her eyes.

Amara: "Yes, Neo is the cute one."

Amara jumps in with an amused tone, she smiles and shrugs her shoulders when I glance at her.

Amara: "Ife said it, not me, I was just..."



Ife: "No, you didn't say anything wrong Amara. Brother needs to know that, we are women, we see, we appreciate and if possible, we touch."

She states.

How does she hold a happy note all the time? I wish I was free-spirited as her, with no care in the world.

Me: "Well, you both need to know that when you touch, you will lose your fingers and if possible your life."

They laugh.

Ife: "We will die happy women then."

Should I be worried about her raging hormones, Segun and mother are too focused with their lives. It makes me wonder if they raised this child right, I hope they didn't neglect her. Ifeanyi is good at hiding her emotions. She hides behind that bubbly personality. I know one thing though, I will protect her with my life.

Ife: "Though, I prefer Styles. I should've come to the country sooner. He can be my insta bae, I will dress him and..."

Me: "Hey, I will stitch that mouth together and you will never say another word again."

Her mouth flies open, before she smashes her hand on it. Amara is encouraging Ife's craziness with her laughter. I jerk up when Amara screams and dashes towards Ife.

Me: "What happened?"

Amara: "There's something on the bed."

She responds in panic.

Ife peeks over and gasps.

Ife: "Brother, something is moving under the sheets."

They both look alarmed, I take a glance and see it. Screams erupt from their mouths when I pull the sheets, revealing a green snake.

Me: "Step back."

I instruct as I toss the sheet back on the bed, to cover the snake.

Ife: "How did a snake get here?"

Amara: "I've been sitting on that bed for over thirty minutes."

She proclaims in a gasp, as she clings on to Ife.

Me: "Who was here?"

They glare at each other, words unspoken but their eyes say enough.



Me: "Someone was here. Who was it?"

Ife: "Raven but, I doubt he entered the room."

Me: "What did he want?"

They exchange the glance again.

Ife: "He said agya wants to see you." (Father.)

I know they are concealing something from me.

Me: "Amara, tell me what Raven wanted."

She opens her mouth to speak but, Ife nudges her.

Me: "I saw that Ifeanyi. Look, there's a snake in this room and someone put it here."

This is a guest room and Raven doesn't know that I share a room with Amara. It could be that Segun sent him. I know my brother, he will never do this to me.

Ife: "Brother, Raven was angry. He said a lot of things and that you need to stop stressing his father. Apparently, he blames Amara for your behaviour towards agya." (Father.)

Me: "You guys get out of here, I will take care of this."

I watch them as they turn to walk away.

Me: "Amara."

She swivels.

I saunter to her and frame her cheeks with my palms.

Me: "Are you okay?"

Amara: "Yes, I'm fine. You should be careful."

I peck her lips before gesturing that, they leave. It's time I pay Segun a visit.

MBUSO\*

Insomnia has decided to pay me a visit tonight, my mind is disarranged. My father's disgusting acts are keeping my head busy.

Lelo is sleeping peaceful next to me, you would swear that she has no care in the world. These trials we're going through cannot be in vain, something has to pay off. I hope we will make it till the end. Zodwa's words haven't left me. She said I will leave Lelo one day, it seems impossible from this view. How can I leave the only person who makes me feel alive?

The fact that Zuma loves her makes my blood boil, he can't have love in his heart for this

woman, not after what he did to her. I swear I will protect her from him.

We are set to see Zodwa in three days, this will be before she meets Lelo's family. I turn to glance at Lelo as she tosses and turns on the bed, it appears that she's having a bad dream.

Me: "Lelo."

I nudge her, she stops. It must be over, I turn to switch on the bed side lamp. I think I'm not seeing clearly, her body is vibrating. It's too subtle to see so, I zoom in a little closer. A crease forms on her sweaty forehead as she releases light moans. She's fighting something in her dream.

Me: "Lelo wake up."

I shrug her harder this time, instead she tosses and turns. It can't be that woman again, I have had it with her.

Lelo: "Mbuso!!!"

She shouts as she jerks up from the bed.

Me: "I'm here Lelo."

I rub her back at this declaration. Her breathing quickens and fear takes over her face, tears threaten her eyes. Her mind is telling her something and it doesn't look good.

Lelo: "Mbuso, turn on the light. It's too dark, I can't see anything."

Her disembodied voice swooshes through my ears, causing confusion in my mind.

Me: "Lelo, the light is on."

Lelo: "Why is it dark then? Mbuso, why is it dark?"

Her voices quavers in terror and shock, this can't be. I kneel before her, tears torrent down her cheeks, revealing the level of her fear. Her quick breathes heighten, she flails her arms in search of me. I take them as they find my face, this induces her panic. She grasps that her eye sight has left her.

Lelo: "Mbuso."

She cries.

Mbuso: "Lelo calm down, I need you to calm."

Lelo: "I can't see anything Mbuso. Why can't I see anything?"

Her fingers desperately fall on her eyes, vigorously rubbing them. I grab her hands to stop her.

Me: "Lelo calm down please."

I raise my voice. I'm also terrified but, I can't lose it now, not when she needs me.

She takes it down a bit but, panic still claims her face.



Me: "Close your eyes for me love."

She shakes her head, I frame her face in my hands.

Me: "I need you to work with me Lelo, I'm here."

She slowly closes them, I do a countdown from five.

Me: "Open them."

Lord let this work, anxiously I glance at her, hoping for the best.

Lelo: "I can't see anything, I can't see, Mbuso."

She cries loudly this time.

Me: "Okay, listen. I'm going to get my bag so, I can check your eyes, okay?"

Her hand finds mine as she grips it, she shakes her head.

Me: "Lelo, I know you're scared. I won't leave the room, it's in the wardrobe. It will only take a second."

She gradually lets go, she hasn't stopped crying. I grab the slit lamp and rush back to her, she finds my hand again as he feels the bed moving. This woman is strong, anyone would be going crazy at this revelation.

Me: "Okay, I'm going to inspect your eyes."

She nods, while she swipes her hand over her face, wiping the tears that have taken over her plump cheeks. I'm not an eye doctor but, I see nothing wrong with her eyes. They are perfectly fine, her sudden blindness comes as a shock.

Lelo: "Mbuso? What is it?"

Her impatience speaks out in a low desperate tone.

Me: "Uhh... There's nothing wrong, with your eyes."

I spew out the words, anxiety targets her again.

Lelo: "Then, what is wrong with me?"

Me: "I don't know Lelo."

Lelo: "Mbuso you're the doctor, do something."

She scream cries as she shakes my hand, my heart breaks for her. This could be that woman, there's no other explanation.

Me: "Lelo, we have to go to the hospital."

Lelo: "What will they do for me there Mbuso, you said my eyes are perfectly fine."

Me: "We need to call Zodwa."



I offer.

If my predictions are right then, Zodwa will help Lelo.

Lelo: "You think it's her, she did this to me?"

I sense pain and hurt in her voice.

Me: "I'm thinking out of the box."

She stifles sobs as tears continue to streak down her face.

Lelo: "It's not fair Mbuso. What did I do to that woman? We trust adults because they are meant to look after us. What do we do when they turn on us like this? I grew up in her presence Mbuso. Why is she so bent on hurting me?"

Her cries leave me, feeling weak. I want to protect her from all the bad things this world has to offer.

Me: "This will pass Lelo, if it is a curse, you will be fine. I promise, I will fight this battle with you, love."

I assure her, pulling her into my arms. My phone rings, Lelo holds on to me when I try to grab it. Her cries have occupied this bedroom, if there was a way to make her stop I would.

Me: "Lelo, let me get the phone."

I don't know if it's my sixth sense but, something urges me to answer the call.

She breaks out of the hug slowly, her hand though, refuses to let go of mine.

Things are getting stranger by the moment.

Me: "It's mam Zodwa."

I announce as I answer and put her on speaker, Lelo accepts a restless expression.

Me: "Mam' Zodwa?"

Zodwa: "Mbuso, what has happened to that child? I heard a voice telling me to wake up and pray for her."

She states, Lelo looks as shocked as I am.

Mbuso: "Mam' Zodwa, Lelo has lost her eye sight."

Zodwa: "Where is she?"

Me: "She's here."

My eyes are kept on her, I hate the fear and pain that has engulfed her.

Zodwa: "Lelo, my child. You are not alone, someone up there is looking after you. You will come out victorious, your enemies will not dance on your grave because you will live and not die. Shame will not know you my child, it will embrace only your enemies. Take heart that, you are



not alone, someone is fighting for you.”

Zodwa’s words bring her into a river of tears, I take her hand in mine.

Me: “What should we do mam’ Zodwa? Lelo is terrified, please help us.”

Lelo: “Mbuso, my eyes are on fire, my eyes are burning.”

She screams, while rubbing her eyes.

Zodwa: “The enemy is fighting, they know that you are aware of the truth.”

Lelo: “Mbuso help me, please.”

She screams.

Dammit!!! I grab the glass of water on the bed side and begin to splash it over her eyes.

Zodwa: “Mbuso did you buy the white cloth?”

Me: “Yes.”

Zodwa: “Take it now and place it over her head, I will pray for her.”

I jump and rush to the drawer, my heart breaks each time Lelo’s painful cries fill my ears. She’s lying on the bed now, her hands pressed on her eyes, tossing and turning. Zodwa proceeds to comfort her with her words.

I sit up a sobbing Lelo and place the cloth over her head.

Me: “I’m done mam’ Zodwa.”

Lelo: “Mbuso.”

My name desperately escapes her mouth in a painful sob.

Me: “It’s going to be okay Lelo, you’re going to be okay.”

I don’t know if it will be okay, my hope has been shattered by her heart wrenching cries. Comforting her is all I can do. As a doctor, I have never come to a position where I felt useless.

Zodwa: “Place both your hands on her head, I will pray now.”

I do as she says, the urge to hold Lelo in my arms has escalated. I need her to be okay. How can one go through so much in life? Is this the price she has to pay for her parents? What about her innocence?

She is only a child who is still discovering herself. I will make sure she doesn’t shed any tears after all of this is over.

We agree with Zodwa when she’s done.

Zodwa: “You can remove the cloth but, place it on her pillow when she sleeps. How are your eyes Lelo?”

Lelo: "There's an irritation but, the fire is gone."

She responds in a husky tone as her voice tries to recover from that gruelling crying marathon.

Zodwa: "You won't regain your sight now, it could be in the morning. If you wake up like this, come to me first thing. Don't wonder about but, come to me first."

Me: "Okay, but will she be okay."

I glance at her as she sniffs away, calmness appears to be taking over her.

Zodwa: "She will be fine, the enemy has been moved out of the way, she has grown tired. Lelo will sleep peacefully, all of this will be over soon."

My hope is restored with these words, I take Lelo's hand into mine.

Me: "Thank you mam' Zodwa."

Lelo fails to get a word out.

Zodwa: "I'm expecting you in the morning, don't drag this any longer. This is war and you will conquer."

Me: "Thank you ma."

I hang up and pull Lelo in my arms, she claps my t-shirt as she rests her head on my chest.

Me: "You will be okay, I promise."

I intend to keep this promise.

To be continued...



85\*

MBUSO\*

My eyes slowly open and instantly meet the glorious morning light, the curtains are drawn and Lelo is standing by the window. I can only see her back, my heart drops as yesterday's events flash in my head.

I pray that she has gained her sight back, I get out of bed and trail towards her. She flinches when I hold her from behind, my hands settle on her stomach. I nuzzle my face on the crook of her neck.

Me: "Morning Goku's mom."

She places her hands on mine and releases a deep sigh.

Lelo: "Hey, did the light wake you? I'm sorry. I wanted to embrace it, I can't get enough of it."

I jerk from the embrace and gradually turn her to face me, she smiles with tears in her eyes as her eyes meet mine. I have never seen a more peaceful sight in my life.

Me: "You can see?"

She nods, her smile widening as more tears of joy gush out of her eyes.

Lelo: "I can see your face."

She traces the edges of my face with her fingers.

Lelo: "I didn't think I would see this annoying face again."

I laugh at her statement, she lets her fingers play around my ears.

Lelo: "And these big ears."

She tickles my laugh bone.

Lelo: "I thought I would never see my son's face Mbuso."

I send my hand to her face to wipe her tears away.

Me: "Stop crying now, your eyes will complain. They have been through enough already."

She laughs.

Me: "I'm glad you're okay, you scared me Lelo. You can't do that to a grown ass man, I will die before my time."

She places her hand on my mouth as a scowl takes over her face, she shakes her head.

Lelo: "Don't say that, please. Terrible things have been happening, we can't joke like that."





Me: "Sorry. How are you feeling though?"

She sighs.

Lelo: "Tired and drained."

It shows on her face.

Me: "This will be over soon."

Lelo: "Yeah. Did you sleep well?"

She worries about me, while she's the one suffering.

Me: "I did, I see you've bathed."

Lelo: "I woke up very early today."

Me: "Okay, let me get ready."

Lelo: "I'll make something to eat while you bath."

Me: "We can have last night's leftovers, you're tired. You shouldn't be slaving in the kitchen."

She frowns in response.

Lelo: "You and leftovers, I'm going to make breakfast."

Me: "Just so you know, leftovers are the best."

She makes a face.

Lelo: "Not everyone will agree with you."

I laugh.

Me: "Okay, kiss me before I go."

She frowns and pulls back.

Lelo: "Kiss who?"

Me: "The man who loves you."

She shakes her head as I pout my lips.

Lelo: "The man who loves me should brush his teeth first, I've been holding my breath since you turned me around."

I laugh at her retort.

Me: "This is the same woman who can't get enough of my kisses, I'm going on strike. I don't want to hear any complaints."

Lelo: "What are we striking for?"

Me: "No kissing because I have been told, I have morning breath, I want an apology and kisses every morning when I wake up."

She laughs.

Lelo: "Hayi strike on doctor. Maybe one day your cries will be heard."

She mocks.

Me: "Lelo, I'm not entering that bathroom until I get my good morning kiss."

She blows me a kiss.

Lelo: "Hambo geza ke." (Go bath then.)

She has me laughing.

Me: "Fine, I'm still striking."

Lelo: "Okay mba." (A peck.)

Me: "Mba?" (A peck.)

I complain.

Lelo: "Ngikunika isandla, ufuna ingalo yonke, habe." (I give you a hand, you want the whole arm.)

This woman though.

Me: "Okay, mba." (A peck.)

she leans closer to peck my lips, I pull her into a deep kiss.

Lelo: "Mmmhh mmhh."

She moans as she fights to push me back, not giving all her strength on this, lets me know that she wants it as much.

Me: "I love you."

I express as I pull away from the kiss.

Lelo: "You cheated Mbuso, now I will go on strike."

Me: "I would like to see you try."

I peck her lips before treading towards the door.

Lelo: "Mbuso."

I stop and swivel.

Lelo: "I love you."

Me: "I know, who wouldn't love me anyway?"

She rolls her eyes at me, before I toil out of the bedroom.

STYLES\*

"I'm coming."

Her voice resounds from the other side of the door, my heart led me to her door step again. The urge to see her again was great, I couldn't fight it anymore. I smile as the door flies open and she stands before me.

Sethu: "You're here."

Me: "I brought breakfast, I hold up a brown paper bag with muffins inside.

She smiles and paves a way for me to get in.

Me: "I hope you have coffee, I don't do well with teabags."

I announce, she giggles.

Sethu: "I have coffee."

I follow her to the kitchen, the kettle is on and there's a cup on the counter.

Sethu: "I was about to make some tea, your timing is perfect."

Me: "You just go home?"

She nods.

Sethu: "I can't sleep without a cup of tea."

A fact revealed.

Me: "I take half a teaspoon."

I say, when she grabs a cup for me.

Sethu: "What did you bring?"

She takes the paper bag from the counter and opens it. She dips her head and a smile embraces her face as she sniffs in, the aroma.

Sethu: "Blueberry muffins? My favourite."

She states, before moving to pour the boiling water in the cup.

We plod to the living room with our food.

Me: "How was work? Did the therapy work?"

She giggles.

Sethu: "It was okay, I think the therapy worked."

Me: "I'm glad. When is your day off?"

Sethu: "Today actually, why do you ask?"

Me: "Because I want to spend the day with you."

Sethu: "I won't be good company, I'll probably be sleeping the whole time."

Me: "I don't mind, as long as I'm here with you."

She smiles.

Sethu: "It's strange how we met and today you're sitting in my living room."

Me: "Yeah, it feels like a long time ago."

I respond with a smile, she returns it.

Sethu: "I'm glad you're here, Mr. Styles."

Me: "I'm glad I'm here with you, Miss Sethu."

She drops her gaze as my eyes remain on her, I can only smirk at her innocence. We are disturbed by a sudden knock at the door, she takes up a soft frown.

Me: "What's wrong?"

She sighs.

Sethu: "I know that knock, there's only one person who knocks like she owns this place."

I give her a questioning look as I wait for her explanation.

Sethu: "My dear cousin."

She says as she gets up.

Me: "Shouldn't she be home sleeping?"

Sethu: "She lives in a flat opposite this one."

She rolls her eyes at this, something is up with this girl. I sit back on the sofa as Sethu toils to open the door.

Lebo: "I left my lunch box the other day."

I can hear her from here.

Sethu: "No, you didn't."

Lebo: "I did, the purple Tupperware."



Sethu: "I doubt but, I will look for it and bring it to you."

Lebo: "Mmhh, okay. Can I use the toilet?"

Sethu: "You just left your place Lebo."

Lebo: "So, I need to use the toilet now. Why are you blocking the door way, anyway? Who are you with?"

Her voice has become defensive and hostile.

Sethu: "Goodbye Lebo."

Lebo: "Hell no, I want to see who you're hiding in there."

Sethu: "Please move your foot from the door."

She pleads, sounding miffed.

Lebo: "No, I want to see who is in there."

Maybe I should indulge her since she's so persistent, I get up and amble towards the exit. Bug-eyed, her jaw drops upon seeing me. I stand behind Sethu and wrap my arm around her waist, I place a kiss on the top of her head.

Me: "Everything okay, Kitten?"

She doesn't say anything for a while before she answers in a whisper.

Sethu: "Yes, Lebo was just leaving."

Me: "Okay, your tea is getting cold."

This is to piss Lebo more, I don't understand her bullying this innocent soul. Her days are numbered.

Lebo: "Sethu?"

She says in a gasp, almost unable to grasp what she's seeing.

Lebo: " You went against your own mother and..."

I shut the door on her face, stopping her from speaking any further.

Sethu jerks out of my hold and turns to leer up at me.

Sethu: "What have you done? She will run and tell my parents."

The fear in her eyes is visible.

Me: "So? You're twenty five Sethu, you're allowed to have a man in your life."

Lebo: "Sethu open the door now, you're acting like a bitch you know that? You're selling body Sethu? Aunt will be disappointed in you, Sethu open."

She yells, furiously as she bangs the door.

Sethu: "You see Styles? This is bad, this is bad."

I see the panic in her eyes.

Me: "Relax Sethu, you need to put your foot down and stand up against that bully, okay? I want you to open that door and tell her to get lost before I drag her out. She turns to open the door, Lebo is still standing here. Her face holds an angry look.

Lebo: "Usuya feba Se..." (you're a prostitute now?)

She doesn't finish with her rude words as Sethu laps her across the face, she holds her cheek in disbelief.

Lebo: "Sethu?"

Lebo is finding it hard to believe what just happened.

Sethu: "Don't ever call me a prostitute again, I'm done with you Lebo. I thought I would never say this but, I am cutting ties with you. You're toxic, you and I are no longer related."

Sethu remains calm although, anger is visible in her tone.

Lebo: "There's no such thing, I'm your cousin Sethu whether you like it or not. You can never get rid of me."

Her words prove that she's self-centred.

Sethu: "Yes I can and I just did. Don't come to my house anymore, don't call me. When you see me at work, turn the other direction. I am done with you, making me feel like I am worthless."

In have never been so proud in my life.

Lebo rolls her eyes.

Lebo: "When did you become so bold? Is it the dick? It's been too long since you had it and just one taste Sethu, you grow wings."

She sends a contemptuous laugh.

This little bitch, I have to stop myself from slapping her across the face. I don't want to scare Sethu, she's been through enough with that peace of shit Ntokozo.

Me: "Get out of here."

I snap at her, she responds with a black look.

Sethu: "You're dead to me Lebo."

Lebo: "You can't do that, I will tell aunt everything."

Sethu: "Go ahead, I don't care anymore."

I'm tempted to bang this door shut but, Sethu needs to speak her mind.

Lebo: "You think this man will love you? He will drop you like a hot potatoe, you're not lovable Sethu."

She yells in her face.

Me: "Hey, fuck off."

I growl at her, she raises her eyes to glare at me. I see a tint of fear on her face, her stubbornness rubs me off the wrong way.

Sethu: "I feel sorry for you Lebo, you're miserable, that's why you're so obsessed with my life. What I do is not your business, you stay the hell away from me."

Lebo: "Sethu you're talking to me..."

That's it, I'm done. I shut the door on her face, Sethu turns to glance at me.

I shrug my shoulders.

Me: "Sorry, her voice was annoying me."

She giggles, I didn't think she was this strong.

Sethu: "That actually felt good, telling her off. I have dreamt of this day."

I smile at her confession.

Me: "I'm proud of you, you did good."

I'm rewarded with a smile for my words.

Sethu: "Now that, that's done. Let us finish our breakfast."

She states as she toddles back to the living room.

Me: "I need another cup, I hate lukewarm tea."

My proclamation has her laughing, Lebo doesn't have the courage to knock again. She better walk away, I think I should pay her a little visit. I know she will not stop harassing Sethu.

AMARA\*

I can get used to this, waking up with him next to me. Had I imagined this before? Well, my circumstances did not allow me. I failed to imagine life beyond the walls of my uncle's house, beyond his depraved lust and assault. Fate kept me incarcerated in all of that and made me believe that, that was all there was to life.

People definitely meet in different ways, our meeting wasn't normal nor blissful.

It's not a perfect story to boast about but, its turns brought about this moment right here. To say I'm grateful, would not be enough.



He's lying on his back, his one hand supporting his head and the other somewhere between the sheets.

I place my hand on his chest after scooting closer to him, as I inspect his facial features.

I smile to myself at the permanent pucker on his forehead, he frowns a lot and now, it won't depart from him. As if he feels me watching him, his eyes slowly but, surely open. I can only smile at him as his gaze has me, shying away like a love struck teenager.

Randall: "Is this what a good morning looks like?"

His first words.

I frown at him as his question leaves me in a wave of confusion. He grabs my arm and pulls me to him, these chest colliding moments happen frequently, I've lost count.

Randall: "I have always wondered what's good about a morning when people would utter those words, I've thought them to be stupid really. Now, I see what they meant, they must've have experienced such moments in their lives. To wake up beside a woman who holds your heart."

That was a mouth full, he's learning. Pretty soon he will be expressing himself verbally and not just with physical touch.

Me: "Did you recite those in your dreams?"

His brow curves as if probing for an answer to my sarcastic question.

Me: "You seem to be poetic this morning my prince."

He smiles, literally.

Today I'm in the presence of a different Randall.

Randall: "Say that again."

Me: "What?"

Randall: "Prince, you said I'm your..."

The stupid smile on his face remains.

Me: "I have done enough ego stroking for the day, I think I'll retire for now."

He chortles lowly.

Randall: "Ego huh?"

He brings his face closer to mine as if wanting to kiss me, he buries my cheek in his hand.

Me: "Yes, ego... You seem to be self-assured this morning."

To deny that I'm losing it with these gestures of his, would be stupid of me.

Randall: "You give me that confidence me hemma." (My queen.)



His eyes abandon the joker in him as they accept a deep appearance.

Randall: "Besides, who else to stroke this ego you speak of, if not you?"

He smirks, biting his lower lip. The deep stare is gone, only a lustful gaze claims his eyes.

Me: "We should get up, I'm hungry."

I gulp as his closeness has me nervous. My palms are sweating, my heart is palpitating. My breathing is on a fast lane to god-knows where, the tip of his nose touches mine before his lips brush against mine.

Randall: "I'm hungry too."

He declares against my lips, seductively.

Randall: "Let me taste you, me hemma." (My queen)

He whispers softly, before capturing my lips.

Caught up in the moment, I find myself moaning softly to his wolfish kiss. My chest is against his, as he's tightly holding me. Can a kiss be so deep that it leaves me emotional?

He supports my back as he flips us over without breaking the moment, his weight holds me down. Our tongues duel, creating a harmony in this heated kiss. His hand goes in search of something under my t-shirt, it glides up and in split a moment my breast is cupped in the palm of his hand. His lips leave mine to explore parts of my face, they graze my chin and settle on the curve of my neck. This is my weak spot, it leaves my knees wobbly and my blood pressure rising.

Randall: "I want to worship every inch of you. Tell me how this feels, me hemma." (My queen.)

He whispers as he lightly caresses my breast and nipples.

Randall: "I want to touch you right, coach me."

His voice and warm breath tickling my ear has me shuddering with pleasure.

How do I give a reply to his statement when he's left me breathless? I sink my hands under his t-shirt before they create a rise and fall on his bare back.

There's a sudden knock at the door, I wait for him to stop but, he doesn't.

Me: "Randall, there's a knock."

I whisper, fighting to catch my breath, he ignores me as he continues with a desperate need to reach his goal.

Whoever is out there, is not leaving.

Me: "Randall."

He entices me in another avid kiss, as if silencing me.

"Papa, open the door."



He stops, raises his head to glance at me with half-lidded eyes.

Randall: "That's it, everyone is moving out of this house."

He's piqued, I can only smile at his craziness.

To be continued...



STYLES\*

I'm at the right place, the door swings open after two knocks. Her physical demeanour and her body language tell me, she wasn't expecting to see me here.

Me: "Hi, Lebo."

I smile at her, she's holds on to a frown.

Me: "Can I come in?"

Lebo: "What are you doing here?"

She asks, each time I meet her, she's always feisty and rude. Now, she stands humbled before me.

Me: "There's no privacy in this corridor, won't you let me in."

I smile warmly, the creases on her forehead line up and the frown disappears.

She makes way for me to enter, I stride in and she shuts the door.

I slap her across the face just as she turns, she screams while she falls.

Me: "That, is for calling Sethu a prostitute."

She looks up at me, her hand pasted on her cheek.

Me: "Sorry, I don't usually do this. My hand was itching so, I needed to scratch it. Thanks for the help."

She gets up while giving me a cold look.

Me: "What's wrong Lebo? You're always blabbering, you can't speak now?"

She shakes her head as her eyes receive a flood of tears.

Me: "Stay away from Sethu, that slap she gave you will be nothing compared to what I will do to you."

Lebo: "How dare you..."

She barks the words out.

Me: "You can still speak? Wow. So tell me Lebo, how much did that car out there cost? Surely nursing doesn't pay that much."

Lebo: "What are you talking about?"

Anger has taken over her voice.

Me: "No, relax. That's your problem, you always want to talk. Won't you listen for once? Today we turn the tables, I speak and you listen."

She wipes her tears as she tries to look daunted.

Lebo: "What do you want from me?"

I did say she's stubborn.

Me: "Let's see what we have, it's printed in my mind. The illegal abortions operated at the hospital, selling new born babies and presenting the mothers with dead ones. The list is endless, I think I'm forgetting something else."

I have never seen fear embrace one, so beautifully.

Me: "Remind me Lebo, something about working along with Green Pastures burials."

Her jaw drops, if her eyes could go wider, they would.

Me: "It's coming to me."

I tilt my head to the side as I shoot her a sly grin, she stifles a sob and covers her mouth with her hand.

Me: "Yes, I remember now. That old bastard Cele pays you to get him dead bodies for his funeral parlour and you play God with people's lives, you decide their fate. I am shocked really, who would've thought? You look like the girl next door, so innocent. What will your mother think when she finds out that, her little girl kills people and sells babies for a living?"

Lebo: "That's all a lie, you're trying to scare me."

She howls, her voice quavers with fear.

Me: "Oh, is it? Cele is in police custody as we speak, he confessed everything."

She gasps in shock.

Lebo: "Please, don't report me. I don't want to go to jail."

Now, she confesses.

Me: "You deserve a punishment worse than jail, also it would be an insult to death if you were killed. What is it you were saying the other day? I'll get him arrested? The one who will be going to jail here is you."

Lebo: "I'll snitch on you, I'll tell the police everything I know about you."

She yells, she's so dramatic.

Me: "What is it that you know about me? Do tell."

Lebo: "The shooting at the hospital, the snakes and the two police men who were killed."

Me: "What shooting? As far as everyone is concerned, there was no shooting. The police officers died during a drug raid in Alex. Were you not informed?"

She's tongue tied.

Lebo: "Sethu is damaged goods, no man can ever look at her. Has she told you about the scars on her body? No man can bare that revolting sight."

Just when I think she will stop, I grab her neck and pin her against the wall.

I clutch my hand on her throat. This comes as a shock to her, her eyes are widened. She grabs my wrist, trying to loosen the tight grip.

Me: "Listen to me you stupid bitch, one more word against that girl. I swear to god, I will kill you."

She struggles against my hand, I let go and she drops to the floor.

Lebo: "I'm not scared of you."

She coughs out the words, I'm actually impressed by her fighting spirit.

Me: "If I were you, I would be scared of me."

There's a knock at the door, she glares at me and screams.

Lebo: "Help, he's trying to kill me. Help me please."

Me: "Ah, stop with the drama, I'm actually expecting a guest."

She gasps.

I open the door for Mphoja, he's a detective and an acquaintance.

Me: "Perfect timing skhulu."

He chuckles.

Mphoja: "Well, you leave me no choice Sishi."

He walks in.

Mphoja: "Is this her?"

He asks upon seeing Lebo.

Me: "Yep, it's time we let the skeletons out of the closet. Make sure she rots in jail, if she comes out, I will kill her myself."

Mphoja: "Done."

Me: "Do your job skhulu."

Mphoja: "Yey, move ousie." (Sister.)

He grabs her in an attempt to handcuff her, she pushes him off but, he manages to restrain her.

Lebo: "No, please. I didn't do anything, I'm innocent."

She screams as she's being handcuffed.

Lebo: "Please Styles, don't do this. Sethu will hate you when she finds out what you did to her cousin."

Me: "Take the trash out man."

Mphoja drags her out screaming and pleading.

NOBAYENI\*

Success is nothing when you don't have your loved ones with you. I am very much aware of what I have done to Bridgette, the neglect she had to endure all her life. I know she craves for a mother's love and I want to give it to her but, I can't look at her without seeing my father assaulting me. This has birthed the hatred I have for her.

Dladla has been a good man, he accepted my child and loved her more than I could. How do I help Bridgette, when I have my own demons to face?

There was a time when I was madly in love with Dladla but, I was too broken to give myself to someone completely.

Me: "Dladla."

He's in the kitchen cooking.

Dladla: "I'm making Khethu's favourite."

She hasn't come home yet.

Me: "I see, have you spoken to her though?"

Dladla: "No, at least she's with Mbongeni"

He draws a deep sigh.

Dladla: "I need you to speak to her."

Me: "Why me?"

Dladla: "You're her mother Noba and she needs you right now."

I find it hard to believe his words, I doubt she and I will ever make peace.

Me: "After what she did to me Dladla, I don't think it's wise that I approach her."

He walks up to me, takes my hand and leads me to a chair. He settles opposite me, Dladla is a gentle soul. I have been too caught up in my wars that, I failed to appreciate him.

Dladla: "It's time Noba, it's time for you to stop fighting this and embrace your child. I have seen how you push her away with your words and actions but, deep down you want to mother her."

He is right, I can't seem to let her in and I blame myself for her life spiralling.

Me: "It's not easy Dladla, I'm broken. I will just drag her down with me."

Dladla: "Then we get you both help, you never healed after the assault. You bottled everything inside and your rage fell upon your child, it's been too long, it's time to let go. Khethu needs you, I can't help her."

How do I fix what I have broken? Where do I even begin?

RANDALL\*

I think I spend most of my time with Styles than I do at home, he called me over and it sounded urgent.

Me: "Styles."

Styles: "Just in time."

Me: "Time for what?"

He smiles and makes way for me to enter, there's a man seated on the couch. He's about the same age as us, his dark clothes seem to match his demeanour and his face is unwelcoming.

I turn to Styles as he shuts the door.

Me: "Are we having a party?"

Styles chuckles, the man gets up and carries his hands on his back.

Styles: "Randall, meet Kenneth Mkhize."

Okay, this is the great Kenneth I've been hearing about.

Kenneth: "Just Kenneth."

He responds with a dark tone, I don't like the aura hovering around him.

Styles: "Yes, sorry. This is my brother Randall Okolie, the one I told you about."

I notice a twitch in his eyes at the mention of my name.

Me: "Just Randall."

I respond.

Kenneth: "I see."



Styles: "Let's sit."

Me: "I have a meeting with Raven and Segun, can we make this quick? Whatever it is."

Kenneth clears his throat as we sit, he seems to be a bit uncomfortable.

Me: "Is everything okay Mkhize?"

He scowls at me.

Kenneth: "Like I said, just Kenneth."

Me: "My bad, Kenneth. You seem edgy."

Styles clears his throat, I glance at him and he shakes his head.

Kenneth: "Styles, why am I here?"

He seems too eager to leave.

Styles: "Okay, let me not beat around the bush, tell me about Segun Okolie."

He says while glaring at Kenneth who gives him a deep frown.

Kenneth: "Who is that?"

Styles: "Come on Kenneth, let's not play games."

Kenneth: "No one is playing games here."

Styles is on to something, he never tells me his plans, he just drags me into them.

Me: "You, seem to be playing games Mkhize."

I opt to play along, I trust this bastard of mine.

Kenneth: "Who the fuck is this idiot?"

He grunts at me, there is something he knows about Segun.

Styles: "Don't mind him please, he's rude like that."

Kenneth: "Well, I know how to deal with rude people."

I sneer at his words, if this fucker has anything to do with my family. He better speak up or so help me God.

Me: "Listen here Mkhize..."

Styles: "Randy, not everything is an ambush. Relax, Kenneth is my friend just as you are."

Me: "Nonsense."

Kenneth: "Watch your back boy."

He threatens, I'm fazed.





Me: "Styles, speak to your friend."

Styles: "Gosh, can we please have a normal conversation here."

Kenneth: "Why are you poking a snake in a hole, Styles? It will bite you."

There it is.

Me: "So, you do know Segun Okolie? This name has made you uncomfortable from the moment it was mentioned."

Kenneth: "You people don't know what you're messing with."

Me: "What or who?"

Kenneth: "I should take my leave."

He gets up along with Styles.

Me: "Don't leave on my account."

I state.

Why is he running away?

Styles: "Kenneth, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable."

Kenneth: "Who said I was uncomfortable? Your friend here stinks, I don't like his stench."

He growls at me, there's a dark presence that seem to accompany this bastard.

Me: "The feeling's mutual, Mkhize."

I riposte while getting up, he grimaces at me. His black stare doesn't shake me.

Kenneth: "Mkhize se poes." (Mkhize is your ass.)

His rejoinder has me snickering.

Styles: "Grow up guys please, this is not a nice sight."

Styles jumps in.

Styles: "We'll be working together in bringing Mkhize down and you two are already throwing daggers at each other."

Me: "I'm not working with this ass hole."

I grunt, Kenneth huffs.

Kenneth: "You're playing with fire boy, watch your mouth."

He saunters towards me.

Me: "You watch your mouth Mkhize."

I know this name aggravates him.

Styles: "Are you two done with your little romance or should I get you a room?"

I huff at his question.

Where did he get this idiot?

Kenneth: "I'm out of here."

He ambles out and leaves the door wide open, Styles moves to close it.

Styles: "What the hell Randall? That man is in a cult. Do you know what they do there?"

He's freaking out.

Me: "I don't care, keep him away from me."

He laughs coldly as he positions himself down.

Me: "Why were you asking about Segun? What does he have to do with him?"

Styles: "I think Segun and raven are part of that cult, I'm not sure yet. Apparently the headquarters are in Ghana."

Me: "A cult?"

Styles: "That old man is capable of anything, you should know that by now."

True.

Me: "There was a snake in Amara's bed last night, I think Raven put it there."

Thinking about it makes me so angry all over again.

Styles: "I'm not surprised hey, those two are evil."

Me: "It definitely suits Segun not Raven. He's my brother Styles."

Styles: "Blood does not make you family, you learnt that the hard way with Segun years ago. The bastard is still after you, he will never rest. Now that we know what he's up to, we need to find his motive behind, wanting to unite you with that woman."

Me: "I could just kill him you know."

The urge is there.

Styles: "It won't be easy, it's a different story with Ruth. The virus is ready, it's just craving for a host."

He chuckles, he takes pride in his inventions.

Me: "That was quick."

Styles: "You know me, I don't waste time."

Me: "How will she be exposed to it?"

Styles: "That's the tricky part, I thought a pair of earrings will do. The moment she wears them, the virus will spread to her ears. It only survives in warm places and the spread will take about a few minutes."

I should be terrified of this man. You'd think he's weak when Khethu is involved and then he goes and does something like this.

Me: "How will she get the earrings?"

Styles: "You are not going to like this."

I don't like the look, he's giving me.

Styles: "Well, since she is here for you Randy, I thought maybe..."

I saw this coming.

Me: "Forget it, I am not going anywhere near her."

Styles: "It's the only way Randall."

Me: "There has to be another way Styles, I want nothing to do with her."

Styles: "I know and I get you bruh but, we can't ask Ife. You know women, she will try them on."

Me: "Ife is out, she's too innocent."

Styles: "My point exactly, so you will approach her with a gift. I'm pretty sure she hasn't been told how you really feel about this arrangement, she will be ecstatic. She'll probably even wear them every day."

He sniggers.

Is it okay that he's enjoying this?

Me: "I don't know Styles, I don't want to see her face."

Styles: "What should we do then?"

Me: "I don't know, you're the genius, think of something."

He growls, I'm annoying him.

Styles: "Your stubbornness stinks."

He hisses.

Styles: "How is it going with Ife getting the passport?"

Me: "She doesn't want to see him, we have to think of something else."

Styles: "Don't worry, I'll make a plan. Neo is occupied at the moment."

He introduces.

Me: "Is he okay?"

Styles: "Tshidi wants to keep him away from his son, she wants money."

Me: "I'm not surprised, that girl is insane."

Styles: "Yeah, Neo is strong. He will find a way out, he better or he will never be the same if he loses that boy."

This is the honest truth, Neo lives for that boy.

Me: "I know, he's smart. He will think of something."

Styles: "Although I have plan B just in case his, doesn't work out."

He states with a grin.

Me: "Doesn't that brain of yours ever get tired?"

He laughs.

Styles: "That would be the end of me."

I actually believe that too, this is Styles. It's who he is and it's what he does best.

To be continued...

87\*

MBUSO\*

We're driving home from Zodwa's house, she gave Lelo holy water and prayed over the white cloth. She said to use it for the time being.

Me: "I'll drop you off at home, I need to meet up with my father."

I present my story to her, Lelo has been too quiet since we got in the car.

Lelo: "Okay."

I give her a brief look.

Me: "Do you want to talk about it?"

She sighs heavily, she's hardly ever sad.

Lelo: "I'm worried about my baby."

Me: "He's fine, you have nothing to worry about."

The sigh again.

Lelo: "I don't know Mbuso, so much has been happening. You know my problems began when I fell pregnant. First Amara went missing, Zuma turned out to be trash and now this."

I hate it when she mentions that idiot's name.

Me: "Try not to think so much Lelo, stress is not good for the baby."

Lelo: "I can't help it, Mbuso what if my son is cursed?"

I sense worry in her tone.

Me: "Don't say that please, mam' Zodwa explained why all of this is happening. There's a wicked woman out there, who doesn't want to see you happy. She will be dealt with, she will pay for all her evil deeds."

I hate it when Lelo stresses like this. I take her hand into mine while trying to focus on the road, she glances at me and flashes a quick smile.

Me: "You know Goku will have grey hair when he's born?"

This ought to get her attention.

Lelo: "What?"

Her brows rise as her face takes up a confused expression.

Me: "Yes, you'll give birth to an old man. What do they call them? Soncle, a baby who looks like an old man." (Son/uncle.)

She gasps in shock, tears fill up in her eyes. Wrong time to crack a joke, she's sensitive at the moment.

Lelo: "Did mam' Zodwa tell you this?"

Me: "No, I'm kidding. I was just trying to make you laugh."

She clenches her eyes and breathes deeply.

Me: "I'm sorry, I didn't..."

Lelo: "It's okay, my mind is occupied that it failed to accept your biltong joke."

Okay.

Controlling my laugh has become a mission, she looks at me with a sweet smile on her face. Usually she'd laugh along with me, today she can only stretch a smile. I'll take anything she gives, if it means her heart is gratified at this present moment.

Me: "Are my jokes that dry?"

She nods.

Lelo: "So dry."

She clowns.

Me: "Okay, I'll stop."

Lelo: "No, no. They might be dry but, they get me through the day."

Me: "I see, in that case, beg me."

She makes a face.

Lelo: "I'm sorry, what?"

Me: "Beg me to keep them coming or I'll stop."

Lelo: "Shame, I have already nursed that big head of yours. If I keep this up, it will surely explode."

She states in a sarcastic tone, swaying her away, from her problems worked. Her face no longer holds a frown.

Lelo: "Mbuso watch out?"

She screams, there's a loud screeching sound as I lurch the car to the side, shirking the man who's crossing the street. I manage to gain control of it and park on the side of the road.

Me: "Lelo are you okay?"

She's my first thought, she nods while trying to catch her breath.

Lelo: "I'm fine, are you okay?"

Me: "Yeah, who is that idiot?"

She shrugs her shoulders, I dash out of the car to check if I didn't hit anyone.

I'm being tested here.

"What the hell were trying to do?"

I twist my head back to the car, Lelo is frozen I don't know if she's shocked or afraid but, her eyes are amplified. They are engrossed on this idiot. We had to bump into him today, of all days.

Zuma: "Were you trying to kill me? This is the problem with people that have cars, you think the road belongs to you."

He's yelling and I fail to find the reason behind that. The man is not injured at all.

Me: "Look, I'm sorry. I didn't see you there."

Zuma: "Sorry? I should report you for reckless driving."

Why is he pushing this? My eyes keep going back and forth, from him to Lelo. She hasn't removed her eyes from him, I can't seem to grasp what this means. Zoda's words flood my mind and a wave of worry rushes over me. Is she still affected by him? He doesn't deserve those tears flooding in her eyes, the fact that she's crying for him cuts deep. This one is too busy focused on complaining that he can't see Lelo in the car.

Me: "Look, I said I'm sorry, excuse me."

Zuma: "Wait, I know you from somewhere."

He speaks as I start to walk away, I was hoping that he wouldn't recognize me.

Zuma: "You're..."

Like he figured out something he turns his head to the car, his mouth forms a grin as his eyes find Lelo. She's sniveling now.

Why does she allow him to see her in tears? He will take joy in them.

Zuma: "Nombulelo?"

Me: "You stay away from her."

I demand, I know that look. Most idiots have them, he's about to approach her and apologise for his stupidity.

Zuma: "Nombulelo."

He rushes to her side of the car, she turns her head to look at him.

Why is she entertaining him?

This man was once her weakness, I saw how she cried for him.

Me: "Hey, get away from her."

I yell as I rush to him, I am ready to fight for her.

Zuma: "Lelo, how are you? I've been looking for you. Can we talk, sthandwa sam'?" (My love.)

My biggest fear just came to pass, this is when I wish we hadn't met Zoda. Lelo was better off thinking this man hated her, now she knows he has love for her in his heart.

Me: "Piss off man."

I push him and he pushes me back.

Zuma: "Watch it cheese boy, that's my woman in there."

Me: "She is nothing to you, you bastard."

Zuma: "Who are you?"

He barks at me.

Me: "The man in her life now and I will protect her from the likes of you. You will never, ever come near her as long as I'm around."

Lelo: "Mbuso let's go."

When did she get out of the car?"

She's still in tears.

Zuma: "Lelo, can we talk baby please? Talk to your Zuzu, sthandwa sami." (My love.)

I can't stand to hear him call her that, I turn to walk back to the car. He hurries after me, headed for Lelo. She stands frozen, tears streaking her face and wide-eyed. Her body is trembling, I can't tell if it's from fear or his touch.

Zuma: "Lelo, are you okay? I'm sorry, I'm sorry for everything I did to you."

He pleads while leering into her eyes. Why is she not pulling away from him? She should be disgusted by his touch, this man is the real embodiment of trash.

I have never accepted such anger before.

I push him away from her, followed by a blow that sends him crashing on the floor.

Me: "How dare you touch her?"

I howl.

Lelo: "Mbuso?"

She screams as it suddenly registers to her what I have done, she's squatting before him in flash, inspecting his wounded lip. My heart has never felt such pain before, I never saw this coming.



Lelo: "Are you okay?"

He nods while coldly glaring at me, she helps him up.

Me: "Lelo, what is this?"

Lelo: "You didn't have to hit him."

Her eyes abandon me as she says this, it's as if he's all she could see and I have ceased to exist in her world.

Zuma: "I'm fine sthandwa sami." (My love.)

Me: "Will you stop calling her that?"

I snap, I can't lose her, especially not to this idiot. How does she still care for him after what he did to her?

Me: "Lelo let's go."

Zuma: "Please, give me a chance to explain. I haven't been able to sleep Lelo, I went to Everton in search for you but, your uncles were there. I couldn't get in the house, I just need one minute."

He pleads, I can hear the desperation in his tone. That's it, I will not stand for this. I rush to her and grab her hand, she doesn't protest as I lug her towards the car. I open the door for her and wait for her to get in, she turns back at him and another sting targets my heart,

I told her, I told Lelo that she hasn't healed yet. This is my fault, I took things too fast. I expressed myself too soon. I couldn't wait to have her that, I pushed reality out the window and now I'm facing the consequences of my actions. One day everything seems perfect and the next it all comes crashing before you.

This is going to be a long drive back home.

STYLES\*

Me: "Hey, I came as soon as I could."

We're at Bara hospital, Sethu called me saying her mother was brought to the hospital. I had to drop everything and rush to her.

Sethu: "Mom is not okay, she had a panic attack."

I see her mother is as dramatic as Lebo.

Me: "Why?"

Sethu: "She was with my aunt when she received a call that Lebo has been arrested. Can you believe Lebo has been arrested?"

Me: "Not really, it suits her though."

She gasps.

Me: "I'm sorry, is there anything I can do?"

Sethu: "You're here, it's more than enough."

Me: "Have you heard anything since you brought her here."

Sethu: "No, my father is on the way. He was at work when we heard the news."

I find it strange that her mother would be this hurt by her niece's arrested.

Me: "What about Lebo's mom?"

She turns to point at a woman who's seated on a bench, she could be in her late fifties. She has a calm poise, you'd swear that her daughter is not caught up in some shit.

Me: "That's Lebo's mother?"

She nods.

Me: "Does she know about Lebo?"

Sethu: "Yes. "

I might be reading too much into this but, these two women are concealing a secret. How is she calm while Sethu's mother suffers an attack upon hearing the news?

Me: "Okay, is it wise for me to be here?"

Sethu: "I don't understand?"

Me: "You said your father is on his way."

She bites her pinky finger, I haven't seen that in a while. I take her hand and she glances up at me, I smile at her shyness. She will never let go of this trait, I doubt I want her to change.

Me: "Did I tell you how much I like you?"

She takes a soft frown due to my random question.

Me: "I like you a lot, you have no idea, you are such great company and I enjoy talking to you."

She smiles and drops her gaze.

"Sethu?"

The firm feminine voice, compels her to pull her hand away from me and swivel.

Sethu: "Aunty."

Aunt: "Who is this young man?"

Sethu: "Aunty?"



I'm standing next to Sethu, too close if I might add and this is probably sending the wrong message to the woman. Sethu seems to have a certain fear for her elders, it could be respect, I'm not quite sure. I can hear her breathing quicken, confirming her fears.

Aunt: "The man next to you, he was holding your hand. Is he my son in-law?"

I think I'm going to like aunty.

Sethu: "No, aunty he's my friend."

I will pretend that she didn't say that word.

Her aunt smiles at me.

Aunt: "Is that what it's called now? In my days it was called a relationship."

Sethu drops her gaze reticently.

Aunt: "Young man, you have my daughter blushing. What's the story?"

She's carries a warm welcoming smile, she's officially my favourite.

Me: "There's a story brewing but, she won't admit to anything aunty because she's shy."

Sethu looks up at me, she smiles when I wink at her.

Aunty: "I know her, she's very shy. My child deserves to be happy, treat her right my son."

Me: "I will aunty."

I declare as I take Sethu's hand, she tries to pull it away. My grip stands.

Sethu: "Aunty, it's not like that."

Aunty: "I might be old Sethu but, I see these things."

Sethu: "I'm going to walk him out."

Aunty: "Okay, go well young man."

Me: "I will aunty."

Sethu: "What was that?"

She asks as we walk away.

Me: "The truth."

Sethu: "No, you lied to my aunt."

Me: "Can I hold your hand? I'm used to holding your hand while we walk."

I decide to move away from this topic.

I reach for her hand, she hides it from me.

Me: "Don't be shy kitten."

She laughs.

Sethu: "Are you teaming up with my aunt to mock me?"

Me: "I wouldn't do that."

Sethu: "That woman is funny though, she's different from my mother. Don't get me wrong I love my mother but, she's always pointing out my mistakes. I think she expects me to be perfect and forgets that I'm human."

Me: "She probably wants the best for you."

She huffs.

Sethu: "I wish I saw it like that but, that's not the message she brings across. Aunty is different, she's always encouraging me."

Me: "You seem to be fond of her"

Sethu: "I am, she's more like a mother to me."

I reach out to take her hand, she doesn't object but, a smile passes through her face. I think I'm winning her heart.

Me: "Have you been camping before?"

Sethu: "No."

Me: "I want take you camping."

I take her other hand as we stop at the exit door.

Sethu: "In the woods?"

Her tone has me laughing.

Me: "What's wrong with the woods?"

Sethu: "You're asking a black person, what's wrong with the woods?"

Me: "Hey, it's a peaceful place. You're surrounded by nature and everything else falls away, if you thought puppies were therapeutic, wait till you get to the woods."

Sethu: "I'd choose puppies anytime."

She states in a sarcastic tone.

Me: "You're missing out you know."

Sethu: "It's fine, let me miss out."

She has me laughing, this is peace right here. I am sick of trying to pretend that I can live without her, if I could tell her what's in my heart, I would do it without any hesitation. Her

shyness derides her as my deep gaze stabs her eyes.

Sethu: "Thank you for being here."

She proclaims bashfully, at this point I am tempted to hold her. I incircle my arms around her, pulling her into a bear-hug. It takes a while for her to hold me back, I smile as her arms hook around my neck. This is the first time I hold her like this and damn, it feels so good. Everything around me fades away and only she exist in this moment. Nothing else matters but, having her in my arms.

I feel a forceful grip as she's being pulled away from me, I look up to see a middle aged men. He looks angry as hell, Sethu is terrified as she's being hauled away by this man.

Me: "Hey, what are you doing?"

He stops and shoots me a stabbing gaze.

Him: "You stay the hell away from my daughter."

He growls while pointing at me with his forefinger. This is her father? What is wrong with this family? This girl is old enough, she is not a child. Why are they so protective of her.

Sethu: "Dad please, you're hurting me."

He has a tight grip on her upper arm.

Him: "I'm not going to talk to you now, we will talk at home. Your mother is lying on a hospital bed and you're busy hugging strange men in hospital corridors."

He snaps at her, she flinches as he tightens the grip on her arm.

These people are obsessed over this girl, there is no question that, Sethu's life is loaded with riddles. Digging in her privacy would be wrong of me, I want her to completely trust me and hopefully one day she will open up.

Me: "Sir you're hurting her."

He scowls.

Him: "Stay away from my daughter."

He demands as he lugs her away, she ogles at me and gestures that she's sorry. I can't stay away, I am more eager now, to have her in my life and this family will hand her to me.

RANDALL\*

I opted that we meet at a restaurant than at my house, I plan to confront Raven about his sudden change of character. It worries me that he's not on my side.

I see him walking in with Segun, Raven besides him as if Segun is a magnet that pulls him closer.

I can hardly recognize him, this old man is controlling my brother and I will have to rescue him from his clutches, Segun knows Raven's weakness and he, himself is that. Surely a narcissist like him can't care about someone who is not his blood.

I will have to ask mother how Raven was brought about.

I rise up as they approach my table.

Me: "Brother."

He nods, not his usual greeting. I don't blame him but, this old man beside him.

Segun: "You are a tough man to reach Uze, you banned me from your house and refuse to meet with me."

He's always crabby.

Me: "We're here now father, let's get to it. I have things to do."

I sit, they follow after.

Me: "I'm not going to stretch this. What was your goal when you planted the snake in my house?"

Raven drops his gaze, I will not blame him for this.

Segun: "What are you trying to say Uze? When did I come to your house?"

He will deny it, it's a given.

Me: "You sent my brother to my house to do your dirty work Segun."

Raven: "Is this what you think of me Uze?"

Me: "I don't blame you Raven, father has brainwashed you."

Raven: "Are you saying I can't think for myself?"

Me: "I'm clearly saying that father is using you, you're my brother Rav. We grew up together, I don't know you to be this type of a person."

Raven: "People change Uze, you left and I had to grow up, that meant change."

Segun: "Uze, this is not why we wanted to meet."

Me: "Why am I here then?"

Segun: "Your grandmother has passed away, surely you can't miss her funeral."

This can't be true.

Me: "You're lying."

Segun: "We can get your mother on video call now, if you don't believe me."

I look at Raven, his eyes are red. He's been crying.

Raven: "It's true, she's gone man."

Me: "Is this a joke father? How far will you go to get me to adhere to your demands?"

Segun: "Why would I lie about my mother Uze?"

I don't know what to believe, the look on their faces are that of sadness. Then again, they could be lying to me.

Segun: "Liyana's life is at risk, you have to bring her home."

Me: "She is home."

Segun: "You know what I mean."

Me: "How did you know she was sick that day?"

I would like to hear this one.

Segun: "Just like I knew where to find you."

This man is quick to thinking.

"If it isn't the Okolie bastard."

I look up to see Mkhize, this fool has the audacity to approach me.

Me: "You have some nerve, coming here."

I pull my chair back as I get up.

Mkhize: "This is a public space Okolie."

He retorts.

Me: "Keep your distance from me, I don't get why you thought you could approach me."

He laughs.

Mkhize: "Just to tell you that I'm on to you Okolie, you can't steal from me and think I will applaud you for it."

Me: "Mkhize, get out of my sight before I lose my cool with you."

Segun: "Is everything okay?"

He stands up as he enquires.

Me: "Nothing I can't handle."

I respond, dismissing his sudden need to help.

Mkhize: "I'll be out of your sight, don't worry, just know that I am not a quitter Okolie. I will have what belongs to me."

Segun: "Are you threatening my son?"



He growls at him, Mkhize grins in return.

Mkhize: "Not a threat but, a promise."

Me: "Over my dead body."

He laughs.

Mkhize: "Oh, Okolie. Careful what you wish for."

Me: "You have a death wish Mkhize, talking to me like this."

He laughs before walking away. Where did he get the confidence that he carries.

Segun: "Uze."

Me: "Raven, can I have a word with you?"

Segun better not interfere in my life.

Raven hesitates a bit.

Raven: "I'll be back father."

Segun appears to be against this, in silence we amble out of the restaurant.

Raven: "What is it?"

He asks as we get to the car, there's coldness in his voice.

Me: "What's going on with you Raven?"

Raven: "What do you mean?"

His demeanour tells me that he is not interested in talking to me."

Me: "You've changed, I don't understand. You're not the Raven I met when I opened my eyes that day, that was my brother and I don't know who I'm looking at right now."

Raven: "I haven't changed bro, this is the real me. While you on the other hand."

Me: "Raven, don't you see what he's doing? Don't let him come between us, you're my brother and I need you on my side."

Raven: "Father and I need you on our side too Randy, can't you stop for once and see things from his view?"

I am talking to a wall here.

Me: "You want me to accept that woman as my wife?"

Raven: "No, that's not it. I want you to give father a chance."

Me: "Rav, you know very well that father will never let me marry the woman I have chosen."

Raven: "We can convince him, after you have become King, his heart will be at peace when



you're seated on the throne. He'll have to agree to your needs."

He is not making any sense, clearly this will not blow over any time soon.

Me: "You know taking up the throne would mean that I give consent to this sham of a marriage."

I try to make him see reason, he nods.

Raven: "I know you love Amara and one day you will get to be with her, just fulfil your duties first then..."

He has clearly lost his mind.

Me: "You want me to ask her to wait for me while I live with another woman?"

I'm trying to make sense of this, my mind still refuses to accept that my brother has turned to this person.

Raven: "If she loves you, she will wait."

The nerve of this man.

Me: "You're crazy, I don't know what Segun has been feeding you brother but, you have surely lost your mind."

He chortles, I don't see anything funny here.

Raven: "I'm the only one who is sane at the moment, you're thinking with your heart Randy, while father is controlled by his repression."

Me: "What you're telling me Rav shows that, you don't care about Amara, is this why you tried to kill her?"

He flickers his eyes as he tries to hide them from me.

Raven: "I don't know what you're talking about."

Of course he will deny it.

Me: "Take your father back to Ghana and I won't make it to the funeral. Send my condolences to mother."

Raven: Randall don't do this, you're making a mistake."

He calls out as I jump into the car.

To be continued...

KHETHU\*

Mbongeni: "Can we please talk about what happened? You've been crying since this morning."

I scoot away from him as he sits next to me, I can't look at him right now. What have I done? I would never do this, I would never do this to Styles. I woke up naked in Mbongeni's arms this morning, I was drinking my sorrows away last night. I don't know what his excuse was but, we must've been too drunk. One thing led to another and I feel so dirty, I have lost the strength to move from this couch.

Me: "Why did you let this happen Mbongeni? How could you let this happen?"

Mbongeni: "Khethu I swear, you gave consent. I didn't force myself on you, I swear."

He panics.

Me: "I know dammit but, I was vulnerable. You know I would never hurt Styles like this, you're supposed to be my friend."

I yell at him, he is such an idiot.

Mbongeni: "I'm sorry."

Me: "Sorry doesn't fix this. How do I turn back time now? What will he think of me when he finds out?"

I wipe my tears as I look at him, he doesn't care about this, he's looking at me like I have lost my mind.

Mbongeni: "Why are you doing this to yourself?"

Me: "What are you talking about?"

Mbongeni: "This obsession you have over that man, he doesn't want you Khethu. How else do you want him to spell it for you?"

I don't like his tone.

Me: "You wouldn't understand Mbongeni and I am not obsessed over him, I love him. Its not the same thing, Styles loves me. I have seen how he looks at me, the way he touched me when he made love to me. If that's not love then I don't know what is."

He clenches his jaw upon hearing my words, I don't get how this offends him.

Mbongeni: "Your father thinks you have to go for therapy."

He spits the shocking words out.

Me: "So you and my father have been discussing me? Does he know that we slept together as well?"

His mouth slightly opens, he's dumbfounded by my choice of words.

Mbongeni: "Is this your mission now Khethu, pushing everyone away?"

Me: "I don't know what you're talking about, suddenly people think that I have lost my mind and that I need therapy. There's nothing wrong with me. Go back and tell my father that."

Mbongeni: "I think you do, you're hung up on that guy who doesn't care about you. This is not you Khethu, I know you to be strong and independent. You are not defined by a man, you are Khethukuthula Dladla."

He reminds me of my past self, I am no longer living in that era. That was before my whole life revolved around Styles, I was young and thought I had the world in the palm of my hands.

Me: "Can you not do this please, I need to get out of here."

He sighs, I can't stay here with him anymore.

Mbongeni: "Where will you go? I want to take care of you, please."

Me: "You can't take care of me Mbongeni, I will find my own way out of this situation."

Mbongeni: "Khethu please, let me in. Making love to you last night was the best feeling in the world, you don't know how much I have longed for that moment."

He takes my hand into his, I know that he's always had feelings for me but, I can't reciprocate. My heart longs for Styles, it knows him alone.

Mbongeni: "Let me help you heal and I promise, I will love you like no one has ever been loved before."

He's looking into my eyes, he means what he says but, I can't.

Me: "You're a good man Mbo but..."

Mbongeni: "I'm not good enough for you?"

His voice is laced with disappointment.

Me: "One day, you will find someone who will love and appreciate you."

Mbongeni: "Why can't it be you?"

Me: "I won't be able to love you like you want me to."

Mbongeni: "I'll take anything you give me Khethu and gradually, I will win your love."

He buries my cheeks in his hands and leans closer, I can't make the same mistake twice.

Me: "Mbongeni please, stop."

I move away from his embrace, he sighs in frustration.

Mbongeni: "That's okay, I will wait for you. One day I will be all you need."

I don't see that happening.

Me: "Please take me to my grandmother's house."

He nods.

How can I accept his love? I have nothing to give him in return.

NTOMBI\*

This house has become a war zone, there is no peace. These people came with a dark cloud in my house, if it's not Moses screaming and shouting like a lunatic, it's Petunia and I on each other's throats.

I rush to the living room to get the door, these people don't even bother to get up and open the door.

Me: "Am I the only one who can hear the knock? I have to run from my room just to open the door while you people are sitting idle."

I raise my voice at them only to receive blank stares. If only Moses could regain his senses, he would chase them out in a split second.

Me: "It's my house anyway, I will do it myself."

I retort when they don't say anything.

Me: "Ngiyeza." (I'm coming.)

I shout.

Who is banging my door like this?

I furiously open the door, ready to give them a piece of my mind. My heart drops to the pit of my stomach at the sight of Mkhize on my door step.

Mkhize: "Sanibonani ekhaya." (Greetings.)

Lord no, what is he doing here. Moses scurries to hide behind me, he's stupid. He should've ran to the bedroom.

Mkhize: "Bengisacela usizo, ngilahle umgodoyi wami. Ngiyathemba ukuthi yiwo loya ocashe emva kwa sis'Ntombi." (May you please help me, I lost my dog. I hope that's the one hiding behind you Ntombi.)

He grins at me, I hear Moses snivelling behind me.

Jonas: "Who are you?"

Jonas and Mhambi are on their feet, they are puzzled by the presence of this old man. He's let himself in, along with his guard.

Mkhize: "Sorry, I should've introduced myself. Igama nguMkhize. Moses is my property."

This is bad, I knew this day was coming.

Jonas: "How can another man be your property?"

Jonas is bold to be talking to this man, I'm failing to get a word out.

Mkhize: "Clearly, he didn't tell you. Moses, tell them that you belong to me."

He peeks over to catch a glimpse of Moses who is clutching my jersey like a little kid and his head is pressed on my back.

Me: "Please Mkhize, Moses is not well at the moment."

Mkhize: "Please what? I don't understand what you are saying Ntombi."

Anger takes over his expression, I have to protect Moses. This man is cruel, he will kill my husband.

Me: "Please give us time to pay you back."

He catches me off guard with his loud mocking laugh that, has me staggering back, Moses moves with me.

Mkhize: "Where will you get that kind of money sisi?"

Me: "We will make a plan."

He takes another joy ride of laughter.

Mkhize: "Sika, umhlaba uzokuthoba. Unurse athi she will make a plan, cabanga, one million Sika." (The world will humble you, the nurse says she will make a plan of getting one million.)

Mhambi: "What is going on here? What money is he talking about Ntombi?"

The universe has conspired against me.

Jonas: "Is this the man who bought Amara?"

He's glaring at me with disgust in his eyes. Moses has finished me, it's problem after problem with him.

Mkhize: "Cha bhuti, I didn't buy her. This man owes me and when he couldn't pay, he promised me that girl. I have come to collect." (No brother.)

Petunia: "Lapho bengicabanga ukuthi sengizwile konke, you people are evil." (Just when I thought I have heard it all.)

She always has something to say.

Jonas: "Ntombi, this is what you have been up to?"



He yells, Jonas must know that I am not his child.

Mhambi: "That poor girl has endured so much, she was left in the hands of the devil. I should've known, I should've protected her."

Since when is Mhambi so sensitive?

Jonas: "Ntombi, how could you? How could you do this?"

Me: "It wasn't me bhuti, it was Moses." (Brother.)

I will not take the blame for everything.

Jonas: "You encouraged it, just like you encouraged every evil thing he did."

He shouts.

I will be deaf by the time they leave my house, I am always yelled at.

Mkhize: "Moses, why are you hiding behind your wife's skirt? Come out of there."

Moses stifles a sob.

Me: "Moses is sick please, spare him."

I plead on his behalf.

Moses: "Ntombi ngisize." (Help me Ntombi.)

Petunia: "I say he must take him, Moses deserves whatever punishment he gets."

Jonas: "You will burn in hell wena Moses, there must have been red flags. I gave my innocent sister to you, look what you have done to her."

He's still shouting.

Me: "Jonas please, you're scaring him."

Jonas: "Hayi voetsek, you are stupid Ntombi."

He marches towards me as he yells, I will not let him slap me this time.

Jonas: "Lalela la Ntombi, I am disowning you. We are no longer siblings and I will make sure that the family back home does the same."

I knew Jonas was angry with me but, he is taking it too far.

Me: "Jonas you can't do that."

I am quick to cry.

Mhambi: "He did and I agree with him."

Me: "Bhuti no. Ningangilahli ngiyanicela." (Don't abandon me, please.)

Petunia: "Idrama uyayithanda we Ntombi, angazi ukuthi ukhalelani. You brought this upon

yourself.”

Can one’s voice be so annoying?

Mkhize: “Argh shame, I don’t want to intrude but, ngicela uMoses.” (Can I have Moses?)

He’s not letting this go.

Me: “No.”

I cry, my tears mean nothing to him. It’s worth a try, he must have a soft spot in his heart.

Mkhize: “Sika, thatha lenja sihambe.” (Take this dog, so we can go.)

He commands, Sika pushes me aside but, Moses clasps his arms around me, as he begins to cry. There’s a tug of war as Sika pulls a stubborn Moses from me.

Me: “Mkhize please, tell him to stop.”

I scream as his tears break my heart.

Sika: “Yeka lomuntu wena.” (Let this person go.)

He commands sternly.

Moses: “Mkhize ngiyaxolisa, ngiyaxolisa.” (I’m sorry Mkhize.)

The house is filled with our cries, my siblings are watching with blank stares.

Me: “Bhuti Jonas, msiza. Ngiyacela bhuti, siza umyeni wam.” (Please help my husband.

I scream for help, Mhambi sits and folds his arms across his chest, Petunia is watching in wonder while Jonas shakes his head in disgust.

Sika: “Inenkani lenja baba.” (This dog is stubborn boss.)

He proclaims while pulling Moses away from me.

Mkhize: “Sika, ungehlulwa yilaba bantu?” (You can’t be defeated by these people.)

Sika pushes me away and I land on the floor, I cry as I watch him drag my husband.

Moses: “Ntombi, don’t let them take me away, save me please.”

He yells, his voice is coated with fear.

Me: “No, please don’t take him.”

I crawl to Mkhize and kneel before him, just a while ago it was Moses, kneeling before this man and today I am pleading for his life.

Me: “Please, Mkhize. I am begging you, don’t take him away. Moses has lost his mind, he’s sick. He is like a child, he doesn’t understand what is happening. He is not aware of his surroundings, please spare my husband.”



I plead, he grimaces while glaring down at me, before a sly grin appears on his mouth.

Mkhize: "Hawu Ntombi, awusho ngani ukuthi lento isiyahlanya? What will I do with a crazy dog?" (Why didn't you tell me that, he has lost his mind?)

He laughs as if he finds this funny, Moses hasn't stopped crying like a child.

Mkhize: "Okay, I will leave him for now. Kodwa uhlale wazi ukuthi uyangikweleta and I will be back.)

I nod as I wipe my tears, Mkhize plods out followed by Sika. Moses runs and falls before me, he puts his arms around me while weeping. I can't help but, weep with him.

Petunia: "Hehehe, hai suka." (Get out of here.)

I hear Petunia cackle, they can think whatever they want. I will fight for this man.

AMARA\*

I'm standing behind the stove checking on the food, I opted to cook today. Chioma was against it but, she eventually agreed.

I gape into the blank spaces between the stove and the subway tiled wall, my mind travelling entertaining thoughts of Randall, there's a way he handles situations. He remains calm about everything, there could be a fire around us but, he remains unflinching. He is hurt and feels betrayed by his brother turning on him, he doesn't show it but, I see it in his eyes, each time Raven's name is brought up.

"Women tend to burn pots, when they think too much while cooking."

Randall's voice sounds from behind me, forcing me to turn with a smile. I have been longing to see him.

Randall: "It's the same as women chatting on WhatsApp while cooking."

He adds.

One would say he's serious, looking at that wrinkle on his forehead.

Me: "What about men? Don't they get lost in their thoughts and burn pots as well?"

I riposte, with my fists pressed on my hips. Randall snickers and begins to potter towards me.

Randall: "The problem there is that, men cannot multitask, we finish whatever we're doing, before moving on to the next task and that includes getting lost in our own thoughts. We think after we've ate and cleared the dishes. That's when we take time to ourselves, either on the couch or anywhere you feel comfortable and the thinking begins."



He says still moving close to me, I catch the familiar glance in his eyes.

I laugh at his comeback as I have never heard it before.

Me: "Wow, now I'm convinced that men tend to think a lot. How do you do it? What's bothering you?"

He stands before me and smirks as I look up at him.

Randall: "Multiple things."

He says, pondering.

Me: "And, yet you cannot multitask."

Randall: "I don't know about other men but, I don't struggle with Multitasking."

He responds, dropping his eyes on my lips as if wanting to taste them.

Me: "Really? I'll believe it, the day I see it."

My comment.

Randall: "Why wait? I can show you now."

He offers as his arms swirl around me.

This time, I find myself giggling as I grasp what might be on his mind.

Me: "We're in the..."

My words are jammed by his lips claiming mine, a tender but, slow fervent kiss, one I would struggle to get out of because his kisses have become my very own drug.

My back is against the kitchen cabinet as his body presses on mine, he runs his hand down to my thigh and it settles on my bare skin. It gently undulates on my thigh while he continues to kiss me. He savages my mouth with his tongue, forcing a soft deep moan out of me. A sudden heat rushes through my body as his hand travels up to my hip bone, the need for him increases.

My heart jumps to my throat when he grabs the hem of my underwear. The current heat of energy increases as he brings my leg to straddle his hip and pushes his hands beneath my undergarment, gently squeezing my butt. I gasp when he whisk me up and places me on the counter.

I've lost my sanity but, my mind still works as it reminds me that we are in the kitchen.

He doesn't give me a chance to speak as he's back to kissing me ravenously this time, his one hand is lightly gripped of my braids and the other squeezing my thigh.

Although he started the game, I can't ignore the fact that I want him so bad in the midst of all this intimacy. I clutch my hands on his back as he pulls my hair a little tighter.

His lips find their way to the sensitive parts of my neck, leaving me gasping for air and my chest in a rise and fall movement.

Me: "Randall."

A whisper eludes from my mouth.

Why does he make me so weak? I should've stopped him when I grasped the lustful look in his eyes.

Randall likes to take control but, he knows when to stop. At this point it feels like nothing is encouraging him to do so. His touch and kisses tell me that nothing in the world will stop him from getting what he wants but, there are people in the house, anyone could walk in.

My mind is very much aware of this fact, the will to stop him has abandoned me. I feel hypnotized at this moment as he takes over my whole being, increasing my sexual desire.

He lures me into another kiss, his tongue wasting no time in finding mine. He glides his hand up to my breast, this is a part he never forgets to worship.

My mind is telling me things and I am compelled to accede.

Trying to take his t-shirt off now, would be a wrong move but, my hands betray me as I begin to pull it up. The shock on my face when he pulls back must be embarrassing.

Randall: "Are you trying to get me naked, me hemma?" (My queen.)

He whispers as he leans closer, brushing his lips on mine. I am heaving, my heart is drumming against my chest and my blood is as hot as a mid-summer's day.

Me: "Why are you doing this to me Randall?"

I ask, feeling vulnerable and defeated. He bites my lower lip and I feel him smirk, he never smiles so that, theory is out.

My nipples conspire against me too as they harden from his touch. As much as I am aroused by all of this, it's not okay that we are doing it in here. I would never be able to look at anyone if they were to find us in this conceded position.

I let my mind wonder forsaking that blissful moment a bit, before his tongue sends me back with soft moans. I cling to his arms as this glorious, pleasurable sensation engulfs me.

And because he knows what he's doing, he's able to pull away from the kiss. Letting go of everything his hands claimed, I gasp for air. Eyes widened and panting like I have just run a marathon, I stare at him while he smiles down at me. I see another kiss coming as he cups both my cheeks.

Randall: "I told you I can multitask."

He says and nuzzles his face on my neck, planting a lingering kiss. He wants to kill me, this is his plan.

Me: "I'm convinced, you just wanted to punish me for talking too much, right?"

I'm surprised that I can still speak.

He chortles and shakes his head, I'm left numb by the wave of pleasure. Will I ever be able to quench his insatiable appetite?

Randall: "I like it when you talk to me, don't ever stop."

He exclaims softly, while tattooing me with kisses.

To be continued...



## NOMBULELO\*

I really messed up with Mbuso, I don't know what happened when I saw Zuma. My mind froze, everything around me came to a standstill and I found myself crying as all the painful memories came flooding in. I was reliving the pain at that moment.

My tears were not because of seeing him but, the second my eyes caught a glimpse of him, I could see everything he ever did to me. It was as if a big screen was placed before me and my past was on replay. Him, mocking me and denying his child. The battering, the cheating and the painful words that left me broken. Still, I couldn't see him hurt when Mbuso punched him.

Zuma hurt me and that is something I can never look past, I have learnt to push him out of my heart in this little space of time and I am certain, without a doubt that my heart belongs to Mbuso.

He's aloof and hasn't said a word to me, we just arrived at home and treading up the stairs to our apartment. I'm quietly toddling behind him, accompanied by a pang of guilty that refuses to move from me. Mbuso opens the door, he makes way for me to walk in. I can feel his heavy presence as I swoosh past him, this is how angry he is.

I take a sit while watching him close the door, his eyes refuse to acknowledge me as he marches upstairs. I'm left sitting here and contemplating how I will explain my stupidity. My heart stops as I hear the sound of his footsteps tread down the stairs, he stands before me in a jiffy. I can't take the look of pain in his eyes, I put it there, I hurt the man that I love.

Me: "Mbuso."

Mbuso: "I'm going to meet up with my father, don't forget to steam your body like mam' Zodwa said. Also, sprinkle the holy water around the house before you go to bed. She said to start upstairs."

His voice has never sounded so low, it stings my heart each time it resounds in my ear.

Me: "Aren't you coming back?"

He can't leave me alone in this house besides, I need to explain myself.

Mbuso: "I'll probably be late, don't wait up."

He turns and starts to walk away.

Me: "Mbuso wait."

I rise from my seat.

Mbuso: "What is it?"

He stops in his tracks but, denies me to see his face.

Me: "Can we talk before you go, I need..."

Mbuso: "I can't be here right now Lelo, I feel suffocated by everything."

He exclaims before striding out the door. How am I going to fix this?

My phone rings...

It's my mother, she is the last person I want to talk to right now but, I need to update her on how I went.

Me: "Yebo." (Yes.)

I greet, I will not get too friendly with her. Even after seeing me, she hasn't inquired about my wellbeing nor has she asked about my baby. This goes to show that she cares nothing about me, my father is her priority.

Ntombi: "Hawu, Lelo my baby. Is this how you greet your mother?"

Me: "How else should I greet you mom?"

Ntombi: "At least sound happy to hear from me."

Me: "Happy? Do you know where I live mom? Do you know if I have food on my table, a job or if I am safe?"

Ntombi: "Where is this coming from Lelo?"

Is she this ignorant?

Me: "Mom, I came home the other day and not once did you pull me aside and ask me how I was. All I heard was your father this, your father that. He's all that matters to you, I have been through hell and I am not okay. This is not how I pictured leaving my father's house."

Ntombi: "I was going to call you Lelo and ask if could come home so we can talk."

She's lying.

Me: "Oh really? When?"

Ntombi: "We are talking now, right?"

I sigh at her response.

Me: "What happened to you being a protector? Was I only safe in your womb mom? You brought me into this world to feed me to the wolves, you abandoned me when I needed you the most."

My emotions seek attention and I cannot deny them. I want to take out all my frustrations on her, it's her fault that I am in this dilemma. If she fought for me and kept me safe in her home like a mother should've, I wouldn't be feeling like an orphan.

Ntombi: "Yini inkinga Lelo? Why are you suddenly so deep?" (What's the problem?)

Me: "Wow, this is the first time I'm expressing myself to you after I was thrown out and this is your response to it."

I hate that I'm crying, she summoned these tears.

Ntombi: "Lelo awume kancane tuu, ungibangela umsindo. You know that your father is not feeling well and I have to take care of him, I hardly have time to do anything else. Petunia doesn't help me, all she does is cook and eat my food. I am stressed Lelo and I don't need you adding to my problems."

Frustrated, she snaps.

Me: "You sound so selfish right now mom, all I hear is me, me, me. Dad is all that matters to you anyway. You're afraid that he will leave you and you will be left alone so, it's better that you neglect your child."

I try to make her see her mistakes as a mother.

Ntombi: "Lelo. You know that you will get married one day and I will be alone in this house. What is wrong with me holding on to my husband? Do you want me to die alone my child?"

She answers, sounding annoyed.

Me: "There's enough you to accommodate just dad in your life, I need you too mom. I need a mother, I don't have anyone to talk to. Who do I run to if you have put up this hedge around you?"

I'm done fighting with my tears, I let them do as they please in my eyes.

Ntombi: "Yazi, uyakhuluma kodwa, angizwisisi ukuthi uthini. Ngizwa umsindo nje, ikhanda lami liya duma Nombulelo and I'm tired. Lalela, I will call you tomorrow. I have to feed your father." (You're speaking but, I don't understand what you're saying. All I hear is noise and I have a headache.)

I thought as much, I am appalled by her ignorance.

Me: "When can mam' Zodwa come there? We have to finish this thing."

I ask as I stray away from the painful topic.

Ntombi: "Angazi, maybe this coming weekend." (I don't know.)

She seems not to care about this.

Me: "Okay, bye."

I drop the call, and sit back on the couch. I guess I lost my mother the day I was ousted out of my father's house.

AMARA\*



The conversation keeps going back and forth between Randall and Liyana as we're seated at a dinner table. Given a chance, Liyana talks a lot and Randall does not mind. He calmly entertains her, it's cute. Chioma is too quiet for my liking today, then again, she hardly ever says much when he's around. I hope all is well with her.

Liyana: "Mara?"

I see a flood of questions coming.

Me: "Yes, Liya baby."

Liyana: "Are you my new mommy?"

I choke on my food as her question dribbles me, I have to admit that, I did not see this coming.

I run my eyes to Randall to meet a smug look on his face, as he steals glances at me.

Me: "Why do you ask Liya?"

Liyana: "You share a bedroom with papa, and married people share a bedroom."

She explains, innocently. How does she know this?

I ogle at Randall and gesture that he says something, he shrugs his shoulder as he throws a chunk of meat into his mouth. He's throwing me to the wolves, I see.

Me: "Baby, no one can ever take your mother's place."

Liyana: "I know."

Okay.

Randall: "You do?"

Now, he gives the attention I have been asking for.

Liyana: "Yes but, I don't mind having two mommies."

Is she ten or sixteen?

Randall and I exchange glances, he's also intrigued by this little miss.

Randall: "Two mothers, where did you hear that?"

She giggles.

Liyana: "Ife told me, she asked me how I would feel if you marry another woman. She said it's okay to have two mommies and that I will be lucky because I have two mothers who love me."

Ife is a sweetheart, I can't tell what Randall is thinking. His straight face clogs what's on his mind. Maybe it's time he tells her why I am here and what the future holds for us. I am not sure myself what the future looks like, he hasn't said much really. I follow him as he leads me, maybe it's time I catch a glimpse of the map.

Ife: "Family."

She hums with a high-pitched voice as she strolls into the living room, engrossed on her phone. She's smiling and blushing at whatever is there.

Ife: "Sorry I'm late."

She takes a sit next to me.

Randall: "Where did you go?"

Her jaw drops before she rolls her eyes.

Ife: "I have a life brother."

Randall: "You have a life back in Ghana, not here. Who do you know here? And, don't tell me you were with Raven, I spoke to him."

Ife: "I met some new friends when I went to the mall the other day so, we we're hanging out."

She explains without looking up at him as her phone keeps her busy. A frown deepens on Randall's forehead as he gives her a shrill look, while dissecting her under his gaze.

Randall: "Who are those friends? I want to meet them and they better be girls."

Her eyes buck, she is browned-off by his instantaneous interrogation.

Her voice muffles as she frowns at him.

Ife: "Am I not allowed to go out of this house brother?"

Randall: "You are, as long as it's not to meet boys."

Liyana: "Can I come with Ife, you said you'll take me to see a movie."

Ife: "We'll have to ask Shaka Zulu, here."

She growls as she rolls her eyes, Randall is being too hard on her.

Randall: "I'm trying to keep you safe Ife, I don't want anything to happen to you."

Ife: "Nothing will happen to me brother."

Randall: "That's what you say. You're in a foreign country and you don't know anyone here. How will I explain to mother what happened to her only daughter?"

Ife: "The same way you explained what happened to Uche."

Her frustrations take over as she proclaims with so much brashness, I can't find a reason behind her hostility. She somehow, feels defensive over this. It's not really that big of a big if Randall wants to meet her friends.

His expression says he's not happy about her retort.

Randall: "That is not fair."

His tone has suddenly dropped, I sense a pang of hurt.





Ife: "I'm sorry brother, I didn't mean to say that."

He sighs before getting up.

Randall: "I want to meet those friends you speak of."

He commands and walks away, suddenly the mention of this Uche person has spoiled his mood.

Liyana: "Who is Uche?"

She always has questions, Ife sighs, drops her phone on the table and buries her face in the palm of her hands. My mind hovers around Randall, I need to see if he is okay.

I find him in the back yard, I can only see his back and a cloud of smoke hovering around him. He tilts his head to the side and I get a glimpse of him inhaling the smouldered cigarette, he puffs out the stress in a form of smoke. It seems to ease whatever burden he's carrying on his shoulders.

Me: "Randall."

He twirls at the sound of my voice and turns back around as he continues to smoke. I begin to potter to his direction and upon hearing my footsteps, he drops the cigarette, stubs it out using his foot and turns to me. He narrows his eyes the moment they meet mine as his forehead crumples and I respond with a smile.

Me: "Are you okay?"

He's not expressional hence, I can't tell what he's thinking but, he ogles at me with confusion on his face. This could be an issue he would rather avoid, his mood seemed to change when Ife mentioned Uche. There's a story behind that name and it's not a good one.

Me: "You're smoking."

I try to hint that he can tell me whatever it is that's boring him. Humans make better listeners than the ashes of a cigarette.

He flashes a quick smirk that disappears as fast as it came. Feeling the need to comfort him, I enwrap my arms around his waist and peep up at him.

Randall: "Have I never been okay?"

He tries to hide his sadness behind his resilience.

Me: "You're human Randall, you're allowed to hurt. Do you want to talk about it?"

I'm hoping he would say yes, I need him to open up to me. He shakes his head, before pulling me into a hug. I won't be getting anything out of him tonight.

NTOMBI\*



I have an angry mob gathered on my street, I have managed to convince them that Martha is a witch. It's past 8pm and today I will not give her a chance to fly to my house.

Me: "Martha is the reason our lives are stagnant, her jealousy won't let her see anyone happy in this neighbourhood. You can't even buy bread at the spaza shop without her giving you evil looks because she doesn't have the money to feed herself."

I yell out loud.

"I agree, Martha must go. My six year old son tells me that, she comes to take him every night and they go to people's houses."

A random woman in the crowd voices out.

"She's using our kids to do her evil deeds, she has crossed the limit."

A male voice from the back hollers.

"Yeah, Martha visits my house every day, she never leaves without asking for the toilet. I started noticing white beads just laying around in the house. How did they get there? I suddenly lost my job and I have been working there for ten years."

Another complaint from the crowd.

Me: "Niyabona kee, uzosiqeda lomfazi." (That woman will finish us.)

"Yeah, makashe." (Let her burn.)

Everyone shouts in agreement.

"LET HER BURN!!!"

We all chant in a chorus as we march towards Martha's house, we are fully equipped. Torches, tires, rocks, to name a few.

Me: "MARTHA PHUMA!!!" (Come out Martha.)

I shout as we get to the gate, there is enough noise to alarm her.

"MAKA PHUME!!!" (She must come out.)

The crowd shouts in anger, the door opens barely a crack. She peeks out as she carries a confused expression.

"THERE SHE IS!!!"

They shout upon seeing her.

Martha: "Ntombi, kwenzakalani?" (What's going on?)

She sluggishly treads out, her face says she has no clue as to what's happening.

Martha: "What are you people doing here? What's going on?"



She folds her arms across her chest.

Me: "Enough is enough Martha, sikhathele nguwe." (We are tired of you.)

Martha: "Haibo, ngiyenzi?" (What did I do?)

Me: "You're a witch Martha."

This woman is good at acting, she stands looking innocent.

Martha: "Ntombi, I don't know what you're talking about. This is a crime, you don't go around claiming people are witches."

"Yey, uyaloya we sisi." (You're a witch.)

Some guy growls at her.

Martha: "Ntombi nguwe lo ongenza kanje?" (Ntombi, you're doing this to me?)

She takes up a look of fear.

Me: "I should be asking you this, I thought you were my friend. How could you be so evil Martha?"

Martha: "I don't know what you're talking about, I'm not a witch."

She cries.

Me: "Hayi suka, mthatheni." (Take her.)

I instruct, two men grab her and begin to lug her to the streets.

Martha: "Ntombi stop them, I'm innocent. I didn't do anything."

She screams, my humanity has halted. I seek revenge and justice, just as these people do.

They are shouting, pushing and screaming at her. I'm leading the crowd as we take her to the streets, people will learn today how we deal with witches. Someone pushes her and she crashes on the ground, this seems to fuel the others as they attack her. Some throw stones at her, others are kicking her as she's curled in a ball on the tar road, shielding her body from these beating.

Martha: "Sizani, sizani." (Help me.)

She screams.

Me: "No one is going to help you Martha, you will burn today."

Her eyes widen at my declaration as she lies injured on the ground.

A rubber tire filled with petrol is necklaced around her chest and arms.

Martha: "Ntombi, ngiyakucela. Tell them to stop, please. I'm innocent, I'm innocent bandla." (I'm begging you.)

Her screams are enough to wake the whole neighbourhood, I stand here watching as my friend

is pleading for her life. I provoked this angry crowd, there is no turning back now and I am certain that this is justice. We will finally be free of her, this is worth it. It's the right thing to do, I know it.

I cannot express the amount of hate I feel towards her at this moment, I have blocked her screams from my ears as I think of what my family is going through.

There's blood oozing from her mouth and this scene is worth a thousand pictures.

"Ntombi wenzani." (What are you doing?)

I turn to Tebogo's desperate scream, she rushes to shield Martha from the mob.

Me: "Tebogo move, we don't want to hurt you."

I command with a stern voice.

Tebogo: "No Ntombi, you don't know what you're doing. This is wrong, you have no proof that Martha is doing these things."

She pleads desperately for her.

"Sisi, we don't want to hurt you. Move from here, uzolimala." (You will get hurt.)

This is the man who poured petrol on Martha, he looks as livid as I am.

Tebogo: "You people are making a mistake, please spare her."

I find it odd that Tebogo is imploring on Martha's behalf.

Me: "We have suffered enough with this woman Tebogo, it ends today. Why are you fighting for her? You two are in cahoots together?"

She shakes her head vigorously.

Tebogo: "No, Martha is your friend Ntombi."

Me: "Yoh hayi, Tebogo uyadina maan. She is not my friend, Martha is a witch." (You're annoying.)

Tebogo is getting in the way of my plans. This crowd is hungry for justice and so am I.

"We will burn her as well if she doesn't move from here."

A female voice shouts out in anger and causes an uproar as they charge at them and attack them. Tebogo is innocent she shouldn't be caught up in this, everything is messed up. I can hear her screams as I stand powerless, these people are out of control.

Me: "STOP, STOP!!!"

I scream at the top of my lungs, to no avail. I see Jonas and Petunia run towards me.

Jonas: "What is your problem Ntombi? Are you crazy?"

He roughly grabs my arm and I wince in pain.

Me: "Bhuti, help Tebogo. They are going to kill her."

I beg with tears running down my cheeks, suddenly there are police sirens. I spot a police van lurching towards our direction, they scurry out of the car and immediately start shooting with rubber bullets.

Jonas: "Let's go."

He shouts as he lugs me away, I turn back to see the crowd scatter in mayhem. Tebogo is lying unconscious beside Martha, they killed her. How will I get over this guilt?

To be continued...



90\*

SETHU\*

"I can't believe you, Sethu, after everything you have been through, you let a man come into your life. Why are you careless? Have you not learned a lesson?"

My father has been chastising me since we got home, I don't know why he brought me to his house. I don't want to be here, I want to go home. I miss my space, these people suffocate me.

My mother is sitting on the couch with her head slant to the side, she looks broken and out of it. I'm sitting on the far end of it, it's a three seater. My father is positioned on his favourite chair, these people have had the same sofas for as long as I can remember. Like most old people, they refuse to embrace change. I once offered to buy them new furniture but, my father declined. He said it will not feel the same as they were used to these ones.

Me: "He is not Ntokozo dad, he will never hurt me."

This is one angry old man.

Dad: "How do you know this? You once said the same about Ntokozo, he abused you and you claimed that he did it out of love. We almost buried you Sethu, I will not go through that again."

He's literally saying that, I should stay away from men.

Me: "You won't dad."

He shakes his head, there's no reasoning with this man.

Dad: "I'm not taking chances with you, I want you to stay away from him."

My eyes itch, I want to roll them so bad.

Me: "But dad, Styles is not like that. He's a good man, I just know it."

I can't imagine not seeing him again.

Dad: "Sethu, you're disputing with me?"

This is how it feels being the daughter of a principal, my father is strict and wants things to go his way.

Me: "I'm not."

I drop my gaze, this is what he does to me. I end up submitting to him. This is the reason, I didn't want to come back home, they want to control my life.

Dad: "I don't want to hear about this anymore."

Me: "So, I will stay single my whole life? Don't you think that I want a family of my own?"

Dad: "You will have your own family, choose anyone from church. There are good boys there, who come from good families."

Never.

Me: "Church boys, dad?"

He frowns at my question.

Dad: "Yes, I will not accept anyone else as my son in-law."

Me: "Mom please, talk to dad."

She turns to gaze at me with a gloomy look.

Mom: "Listen to your father Sethu, he's always right."

She proclaims softly, she's still mulling over Lebo's predicament. They are so bent on destroying my life, I'm not going to do what they want.

Me: "Please take me home dad."

I left my car at the hospital, my father insisted that I drive home with them, he didn't trust me to follow behind. Truth be told, I was going to drive home to my place.

Dad: "No, you'll sleep here tonight. We're going to see Lebo tomorrow."

I'm not going there.

Me: "I have work dad, I can't go."

I'm lying, I'm actually off work for three days.

I'm not ready to see her and I doubt that I will ever visit her.

Mom: "Oh Lebo, nkosi yam'. What has she done that has landed her in jail?" (My Lord.)

She's tapped back to reality at the mention of Lebo's name. I should be jealous but, I am used to this.

Me: "Dad please, drop me off."

I will not spend the night here, my mother's mood is draining me.

Dad: "Why must you be stubborn Sethu? You never listen to me, I said.."

He's getting upset.

Me: "I love and respect you dad but, I am not one of your students. I'm your child and I'm old enough to make my own decisions. I have work in the morning, I can't sleep over."

Mom: "Why are you stubborn Sethu?"

I'm done.

Me: "I'll request for an Uber and wait for it outside. Tell the girls I said hi and I will visit them when I'm free."

Their eyes follow me as I stand and begin to walk out, they don't say anything. The streets are empty so, I opt to stand inside the gate, while I request a ride. I notice a familiar car parked across the street, its headlights are on. The door opens and Styles jumps out, he waves with a smile. What is he doing here? How did he know that I would be here?

I twist my head back to the house to see if my father is not trailing behind me, that man treats me like a baby who needs nursing. It's all Ntokozo's fault, he inflicted this fear in him.

I march outside the gate in fear that my father will see Styles, I have already been warned about him and he will not repeat himself. He does not repeat himself.

Me: "What are you doing here?"

I ask Styles as I cross the road, headed to him.

Styles: "Is this how you welcome your potential?"

He doesn't see anything wrong with this.

Me: "Mr. Styles..."

He puts his forefinger against my mouth, pushing my words back.

Styles: "From this day forth, you will not address me as Mr. Styles. I am Styles to you or call me Sishi if you prefer. I speak my mind Sethu, remember I told you this? I'm done playing games, I am going to pursue you and I will have you."

Where is this coming from? Should I tell him what my father said?

Me: "Mr. Styles."

Styles: "Who is that?"

I laugh.

Me: "Styles..."

Is this me agreeing to him pursuing me? It is something that I want though, I'm sure of it.

Me: "How did you find me?"

Styles: "I followed you."

He replies, like following people is normal, I give him a quizzical stare.

Styles: "I know this sounds weird but, I didn't trust your father after he pulled you away like that. I thought he was going to beat you up, the look on his face gave him away."

He explains.

Me: "And you would've heard me scream from here?"



This is probably what he concluded, he pinches the tip of his nose as he clenches his eyes.

Yeah, he really didn't think about this.

Me: "My father might be strict but, he will never lay a hand on me."

Styles: "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to invade your privacy. I was worried and needed to see if you're okay."

Me: "As you can see."

Styles: "What's the story with him anyway?"

Me: "The usual overprotective father."

He smiles and takes my hand.

Styles: "You're going home?"

Me: "That's the plan."

Styles: "Let me take you, then."

He offers.

Me: "Who can say no to a free ride?"

He smiles, my father is asking me to stay away from this. It's impossible, he will have to forgive me.

AMARA\*

The cold breeze is getting stronger as the night grows, we are still in the back yard. I'm sitting beside Randall with my head resting on his shoulder and my arm wrapped around his, the solitude and silence of the night keeps us entertained. It's been over an hour and I have chosen to stay here with him.

Me: "Don't you want to go inside?"

It's freezing out here.

Randall: "You go, I'll follow a bit later."

He stares into space as he replies.

Me: "You'll catch a cold you know and I am not babying anyone."

Finally, he looks at me, or glowers rather.

Randall: "Babying?"

Me: "Yes, I saw it with my father once. The world had to stop just because he had a cold, you'd swear he was dying. It annoyed my mother a lot but, she still took care of him."

Randall: "Well, you will take care of me too, right?"

He browses my lips as he leans closer, this is the Randall I know.

Me: "Nah, like I said. I'm not babying anyone."

Randall: "But, I'm not anyone."

He's still leaning closer, one more move and I get to taste his lips.

Me: "Who are you then?"

Randall: "If I remember correctly, I'm the one who holds your heart."

He whispers and instantly his lips brush against mine, he cups my cheek with the palm of his hand.

Randal: "Fe m'ano." (Kiss me.)

He murmurs, before caging my lips, I don't know what he said but, it did something to me.

"Brother."

Ife's voice compels me to move away from his arms, Randall sighs as he looks away from her. She's fiddling with her fingers while leering at him with guilt on her face.

Ife: "I'm sorry brother."

She says softly, he doesn't acknowledge her.

Randall: "Excuse me."

He gets up and walks away. What is going on with him?

Ife: "Let him be."

She stops me as I start to follow him.

Me: "I have to see if he's okay."

Ife: "He'll be okay, give him space."

Me: "What's going on Ife? Why did his mood change when you mentioned Uche? Who is this person?"

She sighs as I bombard her with questions, she takes my hand and pulls me to a seat.

Ife: "Uche was our sister, she was four years younger than brother. They were inseparable, she followed him everywhere. Brother didn't mind, he loved having her around. One day he had an argument with agya and rushed out of the house in a fit of rage. He took his car without his permission, I guess he wanted to go for a drive, only to realise that Uche was hiding in the back seat. He says he heard sobbing and he turned to find her there, that's when a truck came out of

nowhere and crushed against his car. Uche didn't make it, she died instantly. Brother has blamed himself since." (Father.)

She's on the verge of tears as she recites this sad tale. I can't image what Randall must be feeling.

Me: "Ife I'm sorry."

She shrugs her shoulders, taking a look of sadness.

Ife: "It was a long time ago."

Yes but, Randall is not over it.

Me: "What about Randall? He must be feeling bad right now."

Ife: "I know and I swear, I didn't mean to bring it up."

Me: "Tell me what to do. How do I help him?"

Ife: "Let him be for now, he'll be okay."

Why do I find it hard to believe this?

Me: "Can I try and talk to him? Sometimes we think someone needs to be alone but, on the real, they need a shoulder to cry on. Randall is a loner, he's not the type that, would openly express his feelings."

Ife: "Look at you, knowing your man already."

I almost forgot for a moment that, she is crazy.

Me: "You'd be surprised by what you would learn from someone in a day."

Ife: "Go ahead, maybe he will open up to you."

It's worth a try, I leave her outside as I plod back to the house in search of him. There he is, laid back on the couch. His feet are on the coffee table and his arms folded across his chest. I feel a need to take away his pain. I toddle to him, he doesn't look up. His eyes are far away as his mind is lost somewhere. I rest my head on his shoulder as I sit beside him but, there is no movement from him.

Randall: "I don't want to talk about it."

He predicts.

Me: "Ife told me what happened."

Randall: "I know and we are not going to talk about it."

He dismisses and that's it, I can't push any further.

Randall: "I need coffee."

He says after a long silent moment, I watch him as he gets up.

Randall: "Do you want anything?"

That's funny because he doesn't know his way around the kitchen.

Me: "Can you make coffee?"

Randall: "I make the best."

That's a lie.

He takes my hand and leads me to the kitchen. Hopefully one day he will tell me what he's bottling inside.

MBUSO\*

I couldn't go to my father's house, I need to speak to Lelo. I walk in to find her sitting on the sofa, watching TV, she looks up at me and smiles. I can't return it even if I want to, my heart is heavy.

Me: "Can we talk?"

She turns off the TV as I settle beside her.

Me: "What is it that you want, Lelo?"

Lelo: "I don't understand."

Me: "With me, what are your intensions?"

She takes my hand, I'm not sure what this means, especially after what happened today.

Lelo: "I want to be with you Mbuso, I want you."

Not the answer I was hoping for.

Me: "That's not enough, it doesn't mean anything. You say you want me but, your actions say something else."

She drops her gaze and shakes her head.

Lelo: "I wasn't crying for him Mbuso, I would never do you like that. When I saw Zu..."

That name...

Me: "Please, let's refrain from saying his name for now."

She leers at me with a soft frown, building up on her face.

Lelo: "I was crying because of the pain, seeing him, brought back all those painful memories. They engulfed me so much that, I found myself in tears. I swear Mbuso, it's not what you think. You mean so much to me and I'm sorry."

She explains, I don't know what to believe. Her eyes hold an image of sincerity, I want to believe her but, I know what I saw and I can't seem to get it out of my mind.

Me: "Lelo, you do know that I am not passing time with you. We're both adults here and this is not a game, people's feelings are involved Lelo."

I make sure to look into her eyes, she has to see how serious I am.

Lelo: "I know, I know and I'm an idiot."

Me: "You're not an idiot."

Tears fill up in her eyes, she doesn't usually give in to her emotions.

Lelo: "I am, I hurt you and only an idiot would hurt a good man like you."

I manage to laugh at this.

Lelo: "You forgive me?"

She cradles my cheek, I take her hand and press my lips on her palm. A distant smile takes over her mouth.

Me: "Not until you know that, I am in this and it's hectic."

She laughs.

Me: "On the real Lelo, don't break my heart. I won't be able to take it, today I felt a pang of what it would feel like and it's the worst feeling in the world."

Her tears parade down her cheeks.

Lelo: "I won't Mbuso and I'm sorry, I won't stop saying it till your heart feels better."

She pouts while flickering her lashes.

Lelo: "You haven't told me that you love me today, I'm not okay."

I smile at her silliness.

Me: "You know I love you."

She scoots closer to me and presses her forehead against mine.

Lelo: "I love you, I love you so much it's not even funny anymore."

Her declaration has me snickering, I take this opportunity to taste her lips.

I might act like I'm okay but, it will take me a while to get over this.

Lelo: "You came back early. Did you meet up with your father?"

She enquires as she pulls back from the kiss.

Me: "Am I that bad at kissing that, you think of my father during such a sacred moment?"



She makes a face.

Lelo: "Another bad joke."

She shakes her head, smiling.

Me: "Dammit..."

She laughs before resting her head on my chest, I clasp my arms around her as I hold her closer.

Lelo: "You know when you walked out that door, I thought I would never see you again. I was terrified."

She confesses.

Me: "Where would I go leaving my house?"

She's amused by my question.

Lelo: "Next time we have a disagreement, rather go somewhere in the house, if you feel like you want to be away from me. Just, don't walk out on me."

I didn't know this is how she feels.

Me: "I'll try, my feet control me you know. They don't call me Mr. Long legs for nothing."

She pulls out of the embrace and pinches my arm.

Me: "Ouch."

Lelo: "Will you be serious for once?"

Me: "I'm trying, Martha must've gotten to me. I am finished."

She falls back on the couch as she cascades into a pleasurable laugh, I cannot lose these moments. I will hold on to her and this feeling in my heart.

To be continued...

RANDALL\*

Ife had to remind me of a past I had tried hard to forget, my sweet Uche left me. My recklessness cost her, her life. She was only eleven years old when her life was cut short, I can never forgive myself, I know my parents will never forgive me either.

I love how Amara is worried about me, it tells me that she is falling for me, I have kept this feeling in my heart for too long. Maybe it's about time I express myself but, how do I even do it? Words fail me when she is around, I can only think of having her. Holding her in my arms every night without being able to have her is torture, I think she is ready for me though.

I'm at a shopping centre in the South, I just met up with Styles.

Me: "How are you here?"

Styles: "You said to have Ife followed right? You won't believe who she's been hanging around with."

He reveals as we saunter inside the mall, Ife has been in and out of the house frequently. It got me worried because till today she refuses to let me meet her friends. I have a feeling that she might be seeing someone.

Me: "I'm thinking it's someone I know."

My day cannot get worse than this, my mood drops at the sight of Raven. He's walking towards us, I can't turn back, he has seen me.

Me: "Rav."

He smiles.

Raven: "Uze."

I see he's even adapted to this name, Segun must be proud.

It's hard to ignore the maiden beside him because she's smiling at me, not once has she removed her gaze from me. She's about the same height as him, she looks posh and carries a confidence that screams self-assurance.

Styles and I exchange glances as we have put the puzzle together, I scowl at Raven who's smirking at me. The woman is still staring and her stare aggravates me.

Me: "Haven't your parents told you that it's rude to stare?"

She drops her gaze but, keeps the smile.

Her: "Kose kafa okunu." (I'm sorry my husband.)

Her words evoke a certain anger within me.

Me: "What did you call me?"

She raises her eyes and drops them again, I hate the assurance that she carries. They definitely got her hopes up.

Raven: "Relax bro, she's just happy to see you. She has only seen you in pictures and must be overwhelmed by your presence."

I am tempted to punch the smug look on his face, If betrayal lived in a body then Raven is the carrier.

Me: "What are you doing Raven? What is this?"

I can't express the level of my anger, it feels like it has a life of its own.

Raven: "If Mohammed can't come to the mountain..."

Me: "Fuck you, Raven, you hear me."

I stop him before he finishes his stupid line.

Styles: "Calm down bro, this is not worth it."

I can't calm down.

Raven: "You must be Styles, I've heard a lot about you."

He familiarizes as he stretches out his hand to him, Styles grimaces.

Styles: "Unfortunately, I have heard nothing but shit about you."

He retorts through gritted teeth, Raven chortles as he shakes his head.

Raven: "I can't be that bad."

Styles: "Have you downgraded from a prince to a private investigator Raven?"

I understand his questions. Why is Raven in the South and why is he here with her?

Raven: "My brother here didn't want to meet Ruth so, I had to bring her to him."

Me: "You're stalking me Uzoma?"

Raven: "I wouldn't call it stalking, just keeping an eye on my little brother."

Why is he so sure of himself? I can't seem to put my finger to it.

Me: "You stay away from me, Uzoma. I want nothing to do with this."

Raven: "This, as you call it brother is your destiny, you can run but you can't hide from it."

Me: "Let's go Styles."

My tracks are stopped by a small hand grabbing my arm, I know it's Ruth. I yank my hand away



as I turn back.

Me: "How dare you touch me?"

She drops her gaze.

Ruth: "I'm sorry my husband."

Me: "Don't call me that, I am nothing to you. Whatever these people told you I have nothing to do with it. I don't know you and I have no interest in you."

I hope she is sensible, unlike my brother and father.

Ruth: "But, what will I do if you reject me. I grew up knowing you as my hus..."

Me: "I can't take responsibility for you and what happens in your life, you need to go back where you came from and what it is you think might happen, flee from it."

Styles: "She looks like a smart woman, I'm sure it won't be hard for her."

Ruth: "I apologize but, I will have to decline. I can't walk away from this."

They taught her to be stubborn as well.

Raven: "You're only wasting your time Uze."

He retorts with a smirk on his face, he's got to be hypnotized.

I'm actually wasting my time by entertaining them and I am done.

I turn and tread off, they better not stop me.

Styles: "Your brother has lost his mind."

He states as he ambles beside me.

Me: "I was in the presence of Segun, not Raven."

Styles: "That bastard is darn good."

Suddenly, it feels like there is no way out of this. There is one person who can give me back my hope.

Me: "I need to call Amara."

Styles: "What is he doing here anyway?"

I'm asking myself the same thing.

Me: "I swear those people are driving me crazy."

I grunt as we turn a corner.

Styles: "If you think that they are driving you crazy, have a look over there."

He points towards the food joint, I spot Ife with Mkhonto. They are cosy and too close for my



liking. she screams as I grab her arm.

Ife: "Brother?"

She didn't expect to see me here.

Me: "What the hell Ife? What are you doing with this man? Do you know who he is?"

I snap at her.

Ife: "Brother, let go of my hand."

Mkhonto doesn't look happy to see me or is it the way I'm handling Ife.

Mkhonto: "Eish boss man."

Me: "Don't you talk to me. How dare you Mkhonto? What happened to loyalty? She's my sister, she's only seventeen."

Mkhonto: "Hade boss man, it just happened."

When did they even meet?

Me: "I'm going to deal with you later. As for you Ifeanyi."

Ife: "Brother I'm sorry, I wanted to tell you."

She's crying.

Me: "Is this why you don't want to go back home?"

She finally pulls away from my grip.

Ife: "I'm not going back there, my life is here now. It's with him."

She states with an attitude as she points at Mkhonto, I don't know why he's still here. I charge at her and she hides behind Styles, using him as a shield.

Me: "You better follow me to the car if you know what's good for you."

I begin to stroll away, I am so disappointed in these two. Mkhonto is not the type of a man I would sit with at a dinner table and listen to him tell me stories about his married life with my sister.

NOMBULELO\*

Brenda: "I can't believe your life is a movie Lelo."

Me: "I'm still shocked till today."

It's lunch hour, Brenda and I are in the canteen. I have just narrated to her my reason for missing

work for a few days.

Brenda: "And you know this woman?"

Me: "My mother's best friend, people are evil Brenda."

Brenda: "I know right. I think you should start attending church."

I didn't see this coming, especially from her.

Me: "I never thought of that."

Brenda: "Like you said, it's a spiritual warfare. This is how you fight back, trust me I know."

I didn't know she was a church a person.

Brenda: "I can introduce you to one if you like."

She offers.

Me: "You go to church?"

I'm still shocked, Brenda swears like it's the millennium and the world is ending. She talks about other people than anything else, basically, she's the complete opposite of a church girl.

Brenda: "Yes, I go to church. It's my home, if I'm not at work, I'm at church."

I'm still dumbfounded. Is this what church is lately?

Me: "Where is this place you want to introduce me to?"

She smiles.

Brenda: "Does this you're keen?"

Me: "I'm just asking, I doubt I will have time to go to church."

My mother used to tell that you don't go attending churches, you never know what is really being done there.

Brenda: "It's somewhere in Joburg. How about you come with on Sunday and you'll decide if you like it or not."

She really wants me to come to this church of hers.

Me: "I don't know, let me think about it."

My intuition is nudging at me, her smile fades instantly.

Me: "And then?"

Brenda: "Nothing."

She's suddenly grouchy.

Me: "It's not really a big deal if I come or not."



She shrugs.

Me: "Fine, I'll come with. But, I hope it's not churches that go the whole day."

She smiles widely.

Brenda: "Three hours and were done."

Me: "Maybe Mbuso can tag along hey."

Brenda: "If you want but, I doubt the doctor will be keen."

How does she know his?

Brenda: "It's church, he'll be bored to death."

She explains, I don't know if that's true.

Me: "I'll introduce the idea to him and see."

Brenda: "If you want. How is the good doctor anyway?"

Me: "This is also one topic she never misses, the questions, the probing and her inquisitiveness in our relationship. I could be reading too much into it, Mbuso is a known Doctor at this hospital. Although, he's a freelancer. I spoke to him about this, it's time he gets a job at a bigger hospital."

Me: "He's alright, I think our lunch break is over. Shall we go?"

I am not going to entertain her.

Brenda: "Come on, we have ten minutes left."

Me: "Yeah, I need the bathroom."

Brenda: "Is it the fish again? You should stop feeding the poor child fish, it's almost sad you know."

Whose baby is it again?

Me: "I give Goku wants he wants or else he will give me hard time."

Did I just say that name out loud? She laughs, it's not really that funny. She's not stopping so, this is what my baby will go through. People laughing at his name, I told Mbuso but, he chose to stay with it and it's stuck in my mind. I don't see myself letting go of it.

Brenda: "You're naming your child after a cartoon character?"

She's still laughing, I made her day with this one.

Me: "His father calls him that."

Brenda: "Cute though. How did you two fall pregnant so fast?"

She's in the dark about my dreaded past.

Me: "How does a couple fall pregnant Brenda?"

She raises her hands in defence.

Brenda: "Don't bite my head off, I'm only asking."

I don't want to talk about him with her.

Me: "I'm going back in, I'll see you."

I see a guy approach me as I get up, he looks familiar. He smiles before he gets to me, I'm already narked.

Him: "Nkosazana." (Lady.)

It's the idiot who came looking for Mbuso the other day, I recognize that Zulu accent.

Me: "Can I help you?"

Him: "I saw a familiar face and thought it would be rude of me if I don't greet."

He doesn't know me.

Me: "You saw me once."

Him: "And, would you look at my luck? The universe is on my side."

He's smiling at me and I am not returning it.

Me: "Excuse me."

Him: "Won't you let me buy you lunch."

He speaks as I'm about stride off.

Me: "I just had lunch."

Him: "How about dinner?"

Brenda looks just as annoyed, if I'm reading her expression correctly.

Me: "Why would I want to have dinner with you?"

Why am I entertaining him?

Him: "Because I'm asking nicely, surely you can't deny this smile."

He points to his mouth, I roll my eyes at him. I've been wanting to.

Me: "Was it not you who came to my house looking for Mbuso?"

He squints his eyes.

Him: "In the flesh."

Me: "Thought as much, excuse me."

I walk past him, to have Brenda march behind me.

Brenda: "And then, Iona?"

She asks, trying to keep up with my fast pace.

Me: "I don't know."

Brenda: "Yoh, people like taking chances. Word of advice, don't ever date a Zulu guy. He will sweep you off your feet with his charms and the deep accent, you will melt and you know what he'll do? Uzokukoroba." (He'll mop you.)

What did she just say?

Me: "Too late, I'm dating one."

My instinct tells me to stay clear of that man.

SETHU\*

It's been a week since Lebo's arrest, she refuses to tell us what she did. I heard rumours at work that she was into shady dealings, the gossipers were a little vague on specifics. I haven't been to see her, the temptation is there. She is my cousin after all and I kind of feel bad for her.

"Sethu. Did you see the papers today?"

Tracy, one of my colleagues says, I'm in a patient's room and I doubt this is the time to gossip. Thankfully the patient is sleeping, I sigh as I prepare to give her the attention she wants.

Me: "What is it?"

She hands me the local newspaper, dated today. It states Lebo's sins.

Oh my God, this is bad.

Tracy: "It's sad you know, I always found her to be a bitch but, I never imagined that she would do such a thing."

I glance at her, I don't care about her judgement. I'm flabbergasted rather, this is not my cousin. She wouldn't be this cruel, would she?

Me: "Who else knows about this?"

Tracy: "Basically the whole hospital, rumour has it that Doctor Mayi was the one behind the illegal abortion. Lebo was his puppet."

She states

I have to get home. My parents have to see this.

Me: "Please cover for me."

Tracy: "Where are you going?"

Me: "I need to go home, can I borrow this paper?"

Tracy: "Sure but, you can't leave. You'll get in trouble Sethu."

I know but, this is important

Me: "Please, Tracy. I'll owe you one, I promise."

I state urgently as I rush out of the room, I need to get home. They have to see this. We get to the corridor to see the police dragging Doctor Mayi away.

Mayi: "Don't touch me, I will sue you."

He yells while trying to resist arrest.

Tracy: "Yeah neh. The drama in this place."

She claps once, I still have a journey to take.

I drive home in full speed, the gate is open. My father must be home which is good. I walk in the living room to meet a typical spring cleaning commonplace, Rebecca Malope is playing in the back ground. The curtains have been removed, the sofas are disorganized and the living room is brighter than usual due to the sunlight illuminating through the naked windows.

Me: "Mom."

I spot her squatting behind the couch, she's mopping. She peeks over and smiles at me, it falls away when she notices the grim expression that has captured my face.

Mom: "What happened?"

Slowly, she rises from the floor, leering at me as I'm about to give her the worst news.

Me: "It's Lebo."

She panics, it's visible through her chest as it rises and falls robustly. I think she's about to get another attack.

Mom: "What happened to Lebo? What happened to my baby?"

She has always called her that. I reach out my hand to her, she toddles towards me and snatches the paper from my hand, literally. I watch her expression change to horror as she reads it, everything happens in slow motion, it must be due to shock. The paper goes down first, followed by her, I barely have a chance to catch her.

Me: "Dad."

I scream for my father as I kneel before my mother. My father is probably somewhere in the house.

Me: "Dad, dad."

I scream once more. Being a nurse, panic is the last thing that should come to mind but, as a daughter it's the first thing I let in. I raise my head to see my father rush in from outside, he must've been in the back.

Dad: "What happened?"

Me: "She found out the truth about Lebo and fainted."

Dad: "How? I have been concealing it from her since morning."

Wait! What?

These people don't tell me anything.

Me: "I brought the paper, I didn't know that it would affect her like this."

Dad: "Eish Sethu."

Me: "She will be fine dad, let's get her to bed."

I hook my hands under her armpits while he grabs her ankles, we lift her up and carry her to bed.

Me: "What's going on dad? Why is mom so affected by Lebo like this? I don't understand."

He sighs as he sits on the edge of the bed.

Dad: "Your mother is not well, we can talk about this some other time."

He's dismissing me.

Me: "I want to know now."

He sneers at me.

Dad: "What's wrong with you? Why have you become stubborn?"

When did this become about me?

Dad: "Is it that boy? I know that you're still seeing him."

Gosh...

Me: "I thought we were talking about Lebo."

Dad: "I will take care of your mother, you should go back to work."

He's chasing me away.

Me: "What about Lebo? Will you get her a lawyer?"

Dad: "Her father should take care of that."

That loser.

Me: "You know he won't do anything."



Dad: "I don't know Sethu."

Mom: "Please help Lebo."

My mother has regained consciousness.

Me: "Are you okay mom?"

Mom: "My baby, please help your cousin. Get her out of that place."

What is she asking me?

There's desperation in her eyes.

Okay... I'm officially jealous.

Me: "What will I do?"

She takes my hand.

Mom: "Get her a good lawyer."

Me: "Where will I get money for a lawyer mom?"

Mom: "I know what I'm about to ask you is crazy but Lebo needs you. You are her last hope Sethu, her father is a drunkard, he's useless and my sister is unemployed."

I can't find a way through her words, it's dark. I ogle at my father, the look on his face says he knows where his wife is treading.

Why do I have a feeling that I will not like this?"

Mom: "I know that you have dreams and one day you will fulfil them but now, think of your cousin."

Today is 'let's confuse Sethu day.' Why doesn't she come out and say it?

Me: "What is it that you're asking me to do mom?"

She glances at my father, then back at me. Her expression says she already knows my answer, although oblivious to her questions.

Mom: "Use your investments."

I don't know if I should laugh, cry or call her crazy.

Me: "I'm not going to do that."

Mom: "Sethu please."

Me: "No, that's my money. I worked hard for it, it's my future mom."

Mom: "I know baby and we will pay it back, I promise."

I hate that she's pleading for Lebo.



Me: "Are you in on this dad?"

He shakes his head.

Dad: "I'm only hearing about it now."

Then why is he so calm about it? Am I the only one who sees how crazy this is?

Me: "You're asking to help the very same woman who has made my life a living hell."

Mom: "You can't still be living in the past Sethu, you need to move on. You can't abandon your sister when she needs you."

Wow.

Me: "She is not my sister, she's a flea that sucks all the blood in you."

Dad: "Sethu stop it."

She growls at me.

Me: "No, mom needs to stop. Why would you want to do this to me? Do I mean this much to you guys?"

I refuse to cry over this.

Mom: "My baby."

Me: "Lebo means nothing to me, if you people want to help her, go ahead. But, count me out."

Dad: "We are still your parents, young lady, show respect."

He snaps at me.

Me: "I'm going back to work."

I announce softly before walking away.

Mom: "This is the second time she's walking out on us."

I hear the anger in my mother's voice as I walk out. Not in my wildest dreams did I think that I would live to see this day.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

92\*

AMARA\*

I'm with Chioma in the kitchen as we hear a loud commotion coming from the foyer, it sounds like Ife and she's crying.

Me: "That's Ife."

We scurry out to meet Randall castigating Ife, she's leaning against the stair rail, her arms folded across her chest as she entertains a flood of tears. Styles is sitting on the staircase while watching the whole thing unfold.

Randall: "You lied to me Ifeanyi, I asked you, who were those friends you're always with and you simply said that they are your girlfriends. But, you're gallivanting around town with an old man."

Ife: "He's not old, he's 29."

She responds while wiping away her stubborn tears.

Randall: "Ifeanyi, you're only seventeen. You're barely done with school, I would understand if you were seeing someone your age not Mkhonto."

He howls.

Ife goes quiet on him.

Randall: "How long have you two been seeing each other?"

Silence.

Randall: "I asked you a question? How long have you been seeing that fool?"

He snaps at her and she flinches.

Ife: "It's been a while, three weeks I think."

Randall huffs, her answer seems to aggravate him.

Randall: "Where did you two meet?"

She runs her eyes to me, I think she needs an escape. I can't really get involved not when her brother is chiding her.

Randall: "Will you speak? You're only making things worse for yourself."



Ife: "When he came to the house."

She mutters sheepishly.

Randall: "What?"

He scowls at her as he takes a step closer, I hope he doesn't lay a hand on the poor child.

Ife: "When he came to the house the other day, he found me here in the foyer and we spoke for a while. You were outside with Raven and..."

Randall scrunches his jaw, every word seems to fuel his anger.

Randall: "That bastard, he comes to my house and disrespects me like this. What is wrong with you Ife? Did you really find any of this normal? Did it not cross your mind that he could be using you?"

Ife: "He's not using me."

His words upset her as she pushes out her response in frustration, I see Styles shake his head in disagreement. They must know this Mkhonto guy pretty well.

Styles: "That's the thing Ife, you don't know what you're getting yourself into. That man is known to be a womaniser, almost every second woman you bump into, will tell you their story about him."

Like his friend, they speak in a calm manner. Randall's voice though, is coated with rage.

Ife: "That's not what I saw in his eyes, I mean something to him. I just know it."

She's so adamant with this, she must like him a lot.

Randall: "So, you're ready to play stepmother to a bunch of kids."

This comes as a shock to her as her eyes widen.

Randall: "He didn't tell you, did he?"

She takes up a frown and sulks at the same time.

Ife: "He's still going to tell me."

She believes him to be a good man, the way she stands up for him proves it.

Randall: "Still?"

His brows shoot up as he becomes officious, no way will he let this relationship flourish.

Randall: "Whatever you two were trying to build is over Ifeanyi, I don't want you anywhere near that bastard."

Ifea: "You can't keep me away from him brother, I really like him, please. I know he likes me too."

He raises his hand, dismissing her.

Randall: "Spare me please, I don't want to hear anything about that fool. Do you hear me Ifeanyi? You will never see him again."

The flooding of her tears double up as they speak for the pain in her heart.

Randall: "Even if it means I have to keep you locked up in this house, I will do it."

Ife: "You can't do that, I can't live like a prisoner."

She raises her voice.

Randall: "Watch me."

He steps back as he folds his arms across his chest, he's about to wrap it up.

Ife glances at me before swooshing to my side, she takes my hands into hers.

Ife: "Amara please, help me. Talk to brother for me, he listens to you."

She pleads, I want to help but, the look on Randall's face says not to dispute. Is it too soon for me to say that I have become his weakness and he struggles to deny me? Ife rests her head on my chest as she cries her heart out, I wrap my arms around her.

I look at Randall with soft eyes, he scowls as he looks away. If my gaze can't do the job. What will my words do as they will fall on deaf ears?

Chioma: "Uze, won't you give him a chance."

He turns his head to her, giving her a stern look.

Randall: "Do you know anything about him Chioma?"

He grunts. Chioma shakes her head, his piercing gaze has her dropping hers.

Randall: "No one will voice out about this, I have made my decision."

This fuels Ife's sobs, she pulls out of my embrace to leer at her brother.

Ife: "This is not fair brother, you're a hypocrite."

She yells at him.

Chioma: "Ifeanyi."

Chioma yells at her, Chioma regards Randall as her son and any disrespect towards him, she dismisses it.

Ife: "No, Chioma. Amara is also young, she's eighteen. If she can be with someone your age. Why I can't I be with Mkhonto."

I wish she didn't use this as an escape, Randall's furrowed brows intensify as he charges at Ife. She steps back in fear falling back into my arms, Randall stops.

Randall: "Don't get smart with me Ifeanyi, I want you to get all your things, you're going back to Ghana."

He clamps his teeth as he declares.

Ife: "What? No, I'm not going there. I'd rather go and live with agya if you don't want me here."  
(Father.)

There's a bit of resistance in his eyes, he can't lose Ife too. This will hurt him more, Raven has turned against him and Ife is the only sibling he's left with.

Me: "Ife calm down please, your brother is only looking out for you. He's doing this because he cares, or else he wouldn't bother at all."

Ife: "No Amara, he doesn't care about my feelings. Brother is selfish."

She cries, Chioma shakes her head and strolls back to the kitchen. She has given up reprimanding Ife.

Randall: "Call me anything you want Ife, I will not allow you anywhere near your father and your brother. I will see to it that you get in the plane, my decision is final and don't think of running away. A guard will be appointed to you in the meantime, this is for your safety."

It is rather a bit too much though.

Ife: "You can't do that."

He huffs before dashing up the stairs, my eyes follow Styles as he ambles to us.

Styles: "One day, you will understand why he's doing all this."

He pats her shoulder as he pulls out a ringing phone from his pocket. He looks at the caller Id and a pucker forms between his eye brows.

Styles: "Excuse me, please tell Randy I will call him."

He declares and saunters out of the house, Ife is still holding on to me, her sobs are heart breaking. Maybe I should speak to Randall.

Me: "Stop crying Ife, you're breaking my heart."

I stroke her back to calm her down.

Ife: "I hate him."

Me: "You don't mean that."

Ife: "I do."

She retorts.

Me: "Ife, look at me."

She moves out of my arms, I bury her cheeks in the palm of hands.

Me: "Your brother loves you, you know that, right?"

She shakes her head as she disagrees with me.

Ife: "Why is he doing this then?"

Me: "To protect you, Mkhonto is his friend and he clearly knows him better. If he was a good man, do you think Randall would ask you to stay away from him?"

She covers her mouth with her hand as she mulls upon my words.

Ife: "Then, what should I do with these feelings Amara? He's managed to creep into my heart."

Me: "In so little time?"

Ife: "I'm a Pisces, we fall easily, fast and hard. It sucks, I know."

Her response has me laughing.

Ife: "I can't pretend that he never existed, my heart will remind me of him with each beat."

Me: "You're a Pisces alright, you fall for a guy and suddenly the poetic side of you unravels."

She laughs while wiping her tears.

Me: "Everything will be okay, you'll see. Maybe Randall needs time to adjust to this."

Ife: "He better not take his time, I can't stay away from Mkhonto."

Me: "You need to be patient with him as well, hey and if you want to go back to his good books, you need to apologize for lying to him. You know he hates lies right?"

She nods.

Ife: "I didn't mean to, I knew that brother would be against this relationship."

Me: "Because you're a teenager."

Ife: "You're also a teenager, dating a 34 year old."

She disputes.

Me: "I'm nineteen in two months, besides, the law states that I'm an adult. Ife, has Mkhonto touched you?"

Her eyes buck for a minute as she treads to sit on the stairway, I glide after her and position myself next to her.

Me: "Ife, don't tell me that you've slept with him."

She shakes her head.

Ife: "I wanted to but, he said we should wait till I'm 18 or whatever."

She rolls her eyes.

Okay, maybe he's not a bad guy after all.

Me: "I agree with him, give it time. Randall will come around you'll see."



Her tears are back.

Ife: "He wants to send me back to Ghana."

She sniffs.

Me: "Don't worry about that, I'll speak to him."

I pull her back in my arms.

NTOMBI\*

Tebogo and Martha were taken to the hospital that day, they are both still alive. I don't care about Martha, I wish she died that night. Tebogo is the one I'm worried about. How will I explain myself to her? She will never forgive me.

Jonas is still upset with me, although he disowned me, he still cares about me. Mhambi shows no interest in my life, he's all about Amara coming back, the same goes for Petunia.

I haven't contacted this Zodwa person Lelo speaks of, something keeps delaying me. Each time I grab my phone to call her, I seem to forget who I wanted to call or I'm reminded of something I had to do in the house. My plan is to ask her to help Moses, I'm sick and tired of seeing him like this, he doesn't deserve what's happening to him.

Eating time in this house has been quiet lately, too awkward if you ask me. If it weren't for Moses blabbering or singing during this time, we would literally hear the sound of food grinding in our mouths.

We're having lunch and guess who cooked, the house executive, Petunia. I doubt I remember how to switch on my stove. If she cleans the house the way she cooks, I would really appreciate it but Petunia has to be in the pots.

Moses: "Ntombi, buka lenyama." (Look at this meat.)

He holds up a piece of meat to my face, almost smacking me with it. I tilt my head back in annoyance.

Me: "Eish Moses."

All eyes are on him now.

Moses: "What is this Ntombi? Inyama encane kanje? Hayi Petu, Petu, this is why I have lost so much weight." (It's such a small piece of meat. No Petunia.)

He throws the meat into her plate.

Petunia: "Moses!!!"

She shouts at him. Who the hell does she think she is? Has she heard me shout at her husband?



Me: "Hayi Petunia, don't shout at him. You know that he's not well."

Moses: "Angeke ngidle lento mina Petu, buka inyama yaka Mhambi. Two big pieces, while I get this small thing. Idle wena." (I won't eat it, you do. Look how Mhambi has a big piece of meat.)

Mhambi scowls at him, clicks his tongue and throws a spoonful of rice into his mouth.

Petunia: "Ukhalela ukudla Moses?" (You're complaining about food?)

Why is she asking him this? She knows he's not well.

Me: "Why did you give him a small piece Petunia? You know he loves his meat and Moses is the man of the house, every big piece of meat belongs to him."

She hoots, scornfully.

Petunia: "The man of what?"

She laughs.

Me: "What is that supposed to mean? This is my husband's home so, he is the man of the house."

Petunia: "Uma usho ke wena." (If you say so.)

Me: "What is your problem Petunia?"

She laughs as she continues to eat.

Moses: "Hawu Ntombi, kanti nawe uyabona ukuthi uPetu unenkinga nami? Kudala ngimbona ukuthi uyangifuna lo." (Can you also see that Petunia has a problem with me? I've noticed that she wants me.)

He points at her, this is when he tends to be annoying. When he spews nonsense out of his mouth.

Petunia: "Ini?" (What?)

She yells.

Mhambi: "Uthini wena?" (What are you saying?)

He growls at Moses.

Moses: "Phola Mhambi, phola bo. Your wife hates me because I am married to Ntombi and not her." (Relax Mhambi.)

Jonas: "Ukuthathaphi lokhu?" (Where did you get that?)

Petunia: "This is what it has come to Ntombi? You're disrespecting us like this."

I roll my eyes at her.

Me: "Please, let me eat in peace. I don't want to choke on my food."

Mhambi: "You're condoning this nonsense Ntombi? Petunia is my wife and any disrespect towards her is disrespect towards me, I will not stand for this."

Moses: "Cha, cha Mhambi. Asilwi s'bali, idla inyama yakho. Iphe mina kee uma ungayifuni. Unkosikazi wakho u stingy man." (We're not fighting Mhambi, eat your meat. Give it to me if you don't want it, your wife is stingy.)

Maybe Moses should shut his mouth.

Me: "Bhuti Jonas is to blame for this, he's the one who drove my husband crazy." (Brother.)

Jonas raises his eyes, he gives me a black stare.

Moses: "Huh Ntombi, usadelela namanje? Ubani uhlanya? Jonas, talk to your sister. Ngizomshaya." (You're still disrespectful Ntombi. Who is crazy? I will hit her.)

He pokes my head with a spoon, I shrug his hand away.

Me: "You see Jonas, you better fix my husband. I am tired of this."

He chortles coldly, I can't live like this anymore.

Petunia: "Shame."

She always has a comment.

We're disturbed by a loud knock on the door, I guess I have to get it. Petunia is not leaving that plate alone as if she's a great cook.

Me: "Yoh, yoh, yoh."

I shout at the sight of Mashoto on my door step, this woman has no shame. She's with two middle aged men.

Me: "What are you doing here?"

With a repulsed look on her face, she scans my whole body from head to toe before rolling her eyes.

Mashoto: "I'm here for my husband."

She pushes me aside as she slithers into my house.

Me: "Yey wena." (Hey you.)

I grab her braids, pulling her back. She screams as she clutches my hand.

Me: "Ungijwayela kabi wena sfebe." (You're getting forward with me, you bitch.)

Jonas: "Ntombi stop."

Jonas shouts as he jolts up from his seat.

Me: "I don't want this home wrecker in my house."

I yell while pulling her by her hair, she's screaming and growling.

Moses: "Shotos, sthandwa sami." (Mashoto, my love.)

He rushes to us.

Mashoto turns and without wasting any time she grips my hair, we wrestle while screaming and shouting at each other.

Petunia: "Ayikho lento." (There is no such thing.)

Me: "Uzonya wena sfebe, I will show you today. Awungazi, nja." (You will regret this you bitch, you don't know me, dog.)

I scream at her while tightening the grip on her braids, I flail my leg to get to her stomach. The plan here is to kick her as hard as I could, I want to get rid of that baby she claims lies in her womb. My leg can only reach her upper thighs as she dodges every blow.

Mashoto: "Moses, bamba lenja maan. She will kill your baby." (Get this dog Moses.)

She screams as she pulls my hair tighter, one of her uncles grabs her arm and he pulls her away from my grip. I feel someone pull me back, I turn to find Jonas. He looks angry as hell.

Me: "Ngiyeke Jonas, let me teach this whore a lesson." (Let me go.)

I charge at her but Jonas pulls me back, she clicks her tongue while fixing her hair.

Jonas: "Uyahlanya? This is not how we treat visitors." (Are you insane?)

He grunts.

Me: "What visitor? She literally pushed herself into my house."

Mashoto: "This is also my house, Moses is my husband."

She has the audacity to yell at me in my house, I am going to kill her.

Me: "Moses only has one wife and that's me."

I can't stand that Jonas is holding me back, Mhambi is quietly sitting on the chair and eating like there's nothing going on here.

Mashoto: "Moses baby, tell this old woman that you're my husband."

She turns to him, this idiot has been laughing since we started fighting.

Moses: "Yeah Ntombi, Moshoto is my wife. You two shouldn't fight, it's not right to fight over your husband."

He laughs. I think these people haven't grasped that this man has lost touch with reality.

The uncles look displeased by this scene, clearly this is not what they expected to see when they came here.

Me: "I swear Moses, I will kill her. I will kill this woman."

I squeal while fighting to get out of Jonas' grip.

Jonas: "Ntombi maan. What has gotten into you?"

He roughly pushes me back.

Me: "Bhut' Jonas, you should be throwing this home wrecker out."

Jonas: "I am not throwing anyone out, this has nothing to do with me."

Me: "Bhuti?"

Petunia: "I think the elders should take a sit, please forgive us. This is not how visitors are welcomed in this house."

Petunia jumps in with her two cents, I should kill her as well.

Me: "No one is sitting down."

Mashoto turns towards the couch, I refuse to let her sit on my couch. I manage to loose from Jonas' hold and jump on Mashoto from behind. She screams as she falls, I'm straddling her while pulling her hair. She loses a few braids, I hear Moses laugh out loud and a sudden loud commotion in the room. Her uncles are complaining, Petunia is screaming at me telling me to stop. Jonas is behind me, his grip on my waist as he pulls me back from her.

Mashoto is helped up by one of her uncles.

"Is this what you brought us here for, Mashoto? Such embarrassment and disrespect."

The uncle chastises her, she's crying.

Me: "Ngiyeke bhuti." (Let me go brother.)

I shrug myself from him.

Petunia: "Ntombi this is wrong."

Me: "Shut up, Petunia."

I yell, she rolls her eyes at me. Two police men walk in the house, I Know the door is wide open but, people should learn how to knock.

"Sanibonani." (Greetings.)

One of them says, the house is suddenly quiet.

"We are looking for Ntombi."

Me: "I'm Ntombi."

I respond, I can't seem to grasp why they are looking for me.

"Tebogo Mala has laid a charge of assault against you."

What?



Petunia: "When will this ever end?"

Me: "I didn't do anything."

Jonas: "I told you Ntombi that your actions will bear terrible results."

"You're under arrest, you have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can be used against you in court."

He hand cuffs me.

Me: "No, please. I'm innocent, I didn't do anything."

Mhambi is now on his feet, Jonas has his face buried in the palm of his hands. Petunia is carrying her hands on her head while shaking it and Moses holds a confused look on his face.

Me: "Bhuti, please. Tell them they are mistaken, I'm innocent."

I cry as I plead in desperation.

Moses: "Where are they taking Ntombi?"

His confusion grows as the police officer begins to lug me outside.

Me: "Moses, help me please."

I scream cry.

He runs after us and takes my hand.

Moses: "Ntombi unghambi, unghambi Ntombi." (Ntombi don't go.)

He's crying, Moses has become very sensitive lately.

Mashoto: "Moses come back."

She stands on my door step leering outside at him, Moses won't let go of my hand. The whole family is now outside, watching me being taken away. This has to be a nightmare.

Me: "Mhambi, ngisize, ngiyacela. I can't go to jail, I don't want to go to jail." (Mhambi help me please.)

I yell in tears.

They all look powerless and this is when I lose all hope, the only person fighting for me is Moses and he is not sane enough to understand what is happening. Right now, he looks like a child begging his mother to stay. The police officer pushes him off, he lands on the ground, butt first.

Me: "MOSES!!!"

I scream cry, he's crying with his hand stretched out to me.

Moses: "Ntombi come back, buya Ntombi." (Come back.)

He cries out loud.



I catch a glimpse of Martha from the corner of my eye, I have to take a second look, only to find her smirking at me. Her stares send cold shivers down my spine. She must have convinced Tebogo to do this. She has a bandage around her head and her face is bruised.

Me: "Martha, I'm sorry. Speak to them please, batshele ukuthi angiyenzanga lutho." (Tell them that, I didn't do anything.)

She rolls her eyes and limps back to her house, the whole neighbourhood has come out to watch. These are the same people who were on my side that day and today they stare at me like I'm a monster.

My whole world comes crushing down when I'm thrown into a police van.

## STYLES\*

I had to rush to Sethu when she called me, sounding upset. The door swings open after two knocks, there's sadness in her eyes.

I pull her into my arms the moment she opens the burglar bar. Wide eyed, she gazes up at me. I can hear the sound of her heart thudding against her chest.

Me: "Hi."

I smile, she gulps in return.

Sethu: "Hi."

Her voice seems to fail her as her salutation comes out in a soft whisper, I gradually lean over to her face. I want to taste her lips.

She gulps as her eyes close, her mouth is inviting me in. Our lips lightly brush, as I press my forehead on hers, her breathing quickens at this.

Me: "How are you kitten?"

I whisper softly against her lips, her arms enfold around my upper torso and I pull her into an intimate hug.

I push the door closed, with her still in my arms. We stay in this moment for what seems like a minute before she releases a deep sigh.

She moves out of my arms and glances up at me.

Sethu: "Thank you."

She proclaims softly.

Me: "What happened?"

She leads me to the living room, I settle beside her.

Sethu: "I don't understand my parents anymore, they want me to get Lebo a lawyer and pay for it as well."

Me: "That's absurd."

Sethu: "I know right, I don't know what to do anymore. My mother is determined to get Lebo out, she literally said that I should use my investments. What kind of a mother does that? I'm her daughter, not her."

I haven't seen her this upset.

Me: "Your mother must be very worried about Lebo, it's understandable. She is her sister's child. But, asking you to use your money is insane."

Something is up with that woman.

Me: "You can't help that girl Sethu, she will have to find a way out. The court will provide her with a lawyer."

Sethu: "I won't lift a finger, I know Lebo will throw it back in my face. Once she's out, she will tell me that she didn't ask for it."

Sounds like her.

Me: "I don't like it when you're upset, please try not to think about any of this."

She sighs as I take her hand into mine.

Sethu: "How do I do that, when it's all I think about?"

Me: "Let's do this, how about I make you a cup of coffee? It will help you relax."

She giggles.

Sethu: "I don't drink coffee."

Me: "I know, there's a first time for everything."

She smiles.

Sethu: "I'll do it and get you a cup as well."

I pull her back down as she tries to get up.

Me: "I offered, you sit back and relax. Let me take care of you."

Sethu: "Okay, I can get used to this."

She announces as she puts her feet on the couch, I smile at her.

Me: "You should get used to it, I'm not going to stop."

She giggles, I amble to the kitchen. I have become familiar with everything in it.

All of a sudden the door opens, I peek through at the sound of footsteps. There's a woman in



the corridor, she smiles at me.

“Hi.”

She stretches out her hand towards me.

Me: “Hi?”

My salutation escapes in a form of a question.

“This is new, it’s not every day that you find a man in my sister’s house.”

I don’t know what she means by this, she seems like a chirpy one. Her high-pitched voice is louder than it should be. She’s definitely Sethu’s opposite.

“Sethu, there’s a snack in your kitchen and it’s making tea.”

She yells, I almost clog my ears.

Sethu is in the corridor in a flash, her jaw drops as her eyes fall on her sister.

Sethu: “Ayize? What are you doing here?”

Ayize: “It’s nice to see you too sister.”

She pulls Sethu in for a quick hug.

Sethu: “I’m sorry, it’s just that, I wasn’t expecting you.”

Ayize: “Your parents summoned me, apparently it has something to do with that leech, Lebo.”

She rolls her eyes, it’s confirmed that Lebo is not loved here.

Sethu: “I didn’t think they would call you.”

Ayize: “Here I am.”

Frustration takes over tone.

Ayize: “Enough about them, I don’t want my appetite spoiled.”

She glances at me with a smile.

Ayize: “Will you introduce me or should I do the honours?”

Sethu Smiles.

Sethu: “Mr. Styles, this is my sister Ayize.”

It will take time for her to address me informally.

Ayize: “Mr. Styles huh?”

I’m not sure what to make of her expression.

Sethu: “Sis, this is Mr. Styles.”



The hand again, I take it this time. She holds on to it as I try to pull away.

Ayize: "And, who is Mr. Styles?"

She's smiling at me and her eyes are all over my body. Sethu pulls her hand away as she clears her throat.

Sethu: "He's my..."

Words fail her, she knows I refuse to be called a friend. She glances up at me and I feel a need to answer for her.

Me: "I'm her Styles."

Sethu drops her gaze blushing.

Ayize: "Mmmh, Miss. S has found herself a Mr. Styles. I like, I like."

She exclaims loudly, she nudges Sethu who's shyly smiling beside me.

To be continued...

RANDALL\*

I have always wanted Amara's heart for myself, I knew I conquered her heart when she screamed my name and held on to me as I dominated over her.

I always knew that my heart belongs to her but today I am completely convinced.

I never thought that I would actually utter these words, I was shocked as well when my heart pushed them out.

Now, she lies naked in my arms and it's the greatest feeling in the world. I am tempted beyond anything to wake her and have her again, I want to make love to her all night. Now, that I have tasted her, I'm afraid it has become my obsession.

I take her hand that's resting on my chest and shower it with kisses, I move my lips to her forehead down to her cheeks. She stirs a bit and continues with her sleep, I decide to try a different technique. Leisurely, I push her out of my arms, I wait to see if she will move and she doesn't. I give a mischievous smile at what my mind is planning. She's laying on her back so, I plant slow delicate kisses on her rib cage down to her belly. I take a second to admire her as this feels like a dream, this is how it must feel to be on top of the world.

I kiss her lower belly as I trail my kisses down and gently open her legs. I lightly brush my hand up and down her thighs, creating a circular motion while planting kisses on them. I know the inner thigh is personal, it's pleasing to the touch, this time she starts moving. I feel aroused as my hand dances on her inner thighs, my lips cover every square inch of her skin. This gets me excited as my sensual thoughts increase.

I kiss her down there, before I slowly slide my hand on her lower back, lifting her body up and I plunge my tongue inside her. I hear her shriek before her hands smoothly fall on my head as her hips buck up. Her sweet moans turn to loud moans the minute I begin moving my tongue in and out of her.

Amara: "Oh Randall."

Her breath heaves my name out of her mouth, never has it sounded sweet in one's lips before.

I make quick dashing motions with my tongue, flicking fast along the length of her clitoris. I place my palm below her belly button to keep her hips steady as they move robustly. I stop mid-thrust and raise my head to catch a glimpse of her, she has her eyes closed, her lower lip between her teeth as she bites it.

She raises her head and I meet the confused look on her face, she knows I'm not done and I like the inquisitive look she's giving me now. She shies away from my impish smile.

I move back to kissing her inner thighs mapping my way down to her. I go super slow, entering

her inch by inch with my tongue for what seems like a few minutes.

I leisurely move my mouth around her clitoris, this appears to send her over the edge. When I see that she's losing it, I gently tap with my fingertip in a circular motion and give her a few long licks. She's moaning louder with each quick thrust, filling the room with this beautiful harmony.

She yells with pleasure and this is when I know I've hit the target, my hand keeps the grip bellow her belly button as her body shudders. I raise my gaze at her, she's panting and heaving. I seem to like what I see, I find my way back to her body. Her half-lidded eyes meet mine and a smile embraces her face. I let my hand play around her skin as I wait for her to get back to her senses.

Me: "If I knew you taste this good, I would've tasted you long ago."

I express softly, her shy nature comes to play as she makes a face.

Amara: "If you keep this up, I might just become addicted. Will I be able to go without it?"

She asks inquisitively, this has me chortling. I like this side of her, fierce and not afraid to speak out.

Me: "You'll be fine."

I peck her lips before showering her face with lingering kisses and she holds her fingertips right above my skin moving her hands up and down my spine, this is by far the best feeling.

NOMBULELO\*

I'm at the reception area with Brenda preparing to clock out.

Me: "You can't be serious Brenda. How could you do that to your aunt?"

Should I even say what she just told me? It has to be illegal.

Brenda: "I'm telling you saana. What was she doing dating a man younger than her? The boy was 23, it's a given that he will crave for fresh meat and once we..."

She twirls, looking proud of herself.

Brenda: "... walk through the door, he sees the glow and wants to be in the light."

This woman.

Me: "So, you took your aunt's boyfriend from her, right under her nose?"

There, I said it.

Brenda: "I didn't take him, he was lured in."

Me: "By what?"

I snap at her as I stand shocked by this woman.

Brenda: "I'm young and fresh, is it not obvious? Besides my aunt doesn't have what it takes to keep a man. That old woman needs to stick to her age group, abo Kenneth Mashaba. Maybe, one of them will finally put a ring on it."

Is she being serious right now?

Me: "Not if you have anything to do with it."

She giggles like it's a joke.

Brenda: "What will I do with an old man? I want my bed to move with me saana, I don't want to lie there like a corpse while the idiot is on top of me, fighting to reach his happy ending and forgetting that I have a goal too. The next thing, he gets a heart attack as if he did something."

She rolls her eyes, I have heard it all but, this.

Me: "Do you really have to paint the picture?"

She laughs.

Brenda: "Relax, you're old enough to hear such things."

I'm dubbing her 'the crazy bitch.'

Me: "I bet family gatherings are awkward."

She's having a field day.

Brenda: "Hilarious I tell you, this one time, I actually took him home for Christmas. My aunt went ballistic, we had a one on one in the kitchen. Plates were thrown around and pots were burning, we turned that kitchen into a wrestling ring. Eastern Cape has never been the same after that, she doesn't come home for the holidays anymore."

She laughs as she waves her hand, she's not ashamed of it.

Me: "You fought with an elder."

Brenda: "She's only ten years older, it's not a big deal."

Me: "Haibo! Ok'salayo. You took her man and had the nerve to fight her still." (Still.)

Brenda: "Chini, it's not a big deal. It happens every day."

No, it doesn't. Her response has me sighing.

Me: "Where is this idiot?"

She rolls her eyes.

Brenda: "He bored me, we broke up three months later."

I rest my case.

Me: "You're something else."

Brenda shocks me every time.

“Chubby cheeks.”

I swivel to Mbuso’s voice tickling my ear, he pecks my lips the moment I meet his face.

Me: “Hey, you’re early.”

I didn’t expect him to come inside the hospital. He always waits in the car, there are vultures in this place, namely, Namhla.

Mbuso: “I was done with work and thought I should come early.”

Me: “Okay, let me wrap up here, then we can go.”

Mbuso: “Sure, I’ll be sitting right there.”

He points to a bench where a few visitors are positioned.

Brenda: “Doctor Xaba, how are you? I’m Brenda, her colleague.”

She reaches out her hand to him, Brenda is forward. I really wasn’t planning on introducing them.

Mbuso: “Hi.”

He smiles at her. He must’ve smiled at Namhla like this hence, she can’t stop blabbering about him. I think my jealousy raider just went on, I have never felt insecure about him talking to other women. Maybe other women will do, not this loud-mouth forward lady before me. She’s a go getter, I know when she sees something she likes, nothing will stop her from having it. The story she told me proves it.

Brenda: “We haven’t seen you around in a while. When will you grace us with your presence?”

She’s smiling at him.

Mbuso: “That’s up to the staff, if you guys feel that you’re under pressure.”

She giggles.

Brenda: “Well, we’re always busy and short of staff. Maybe, if you could pop in once a week.”

Am I standing here watching her flirt with him? Is she flirting or are my insecurities mocking me?

Me: “Doctor Xaba is busy, this I know. He barely has time for me as well.”

I take his hand as I declare, and gesture that she should stop. She clears her throat and rolls her eyes at me.

Mbuso: “Now you tell me, I should check my schedule and see where I can squeeze you in.”

He’s starting.

Me: “I refuse, I should be at the top of that schedule?”

He smirks, moves closer and touches his cheek on mine with his hand around my waist.

Mbuso: "As long as I get to be on top of you."

He whispers in my ear and this gets me wet instantly, I hear Brenda clearing her dry throat. I push Mbuso off to meet a naughty grin on his face.

Me: "I'm still at work, don't get carried away."

He pulls me back into his arms, his arm clutches around my waist.

Mbuso: "Let's go home then, I miss you and I want to show you how much."

Pregnant woman alert...

These gestures are not helping with my hormones, I smile, I know that I shouldn't be encouraging him.

Brenda: "Some of us are single and this is not a pretty sight."

Brenda retorts having me pull away from Mbuso.

Me: "Pass me my bag, please."

She rolls her eyes at me before handing it to me.

Me: "See you tomorrow."

Brenda: "Won't you guys drop me home?"

And then?

Me: "You live in Joburg."

Brenda: "Yes."

I wasn't asking her.

Me: "Yes, we're in Sebokeng. So, we have to drive to Joburg then back to Randburg. That's like two trips plus, there's traffic. Sorry babe, maybe next time."

Or never.

Brenda: "Whatever, I'll see you tomorrow."

Okay.

"Mbuso."

Namhla can smell people now, I'm not surprised, that's her job.

Mbuso: "Hi."

Maybe he should lay low on the smile, she slithers to him and throws herself in his arms. I am calm, no worries.

Namhla: "How are you?"

She asks while still holding on to this one way hug.

I should be marking my territory, right about now.

Mbuso is the first to pull away, he glances at me. I try not to be obvious, this is all new to me. I never had competition with Zuma, I was the only one. Little did I know that, my competitor was my friend, who lurked in the dark like a demon.

Mbuso: "I'm okay. You good?"

She's gleaming from ear to ear, this is the first time I'm actually seeing her smile.

Namhla: "Never been better, especially now that I'm seeing you."

Brenda does that throat thing again, I turn to her and she has this disgusted look on her face. I'm glad to know that I'm not the only one who's appalled by this woman.

Namhla: "My mother has been asking about you, you should visit her some time."

She states, she hasn't looked at me once.

Mbuso: "I'm actually kind of busy, hey."

Namhla: "Okay, we're having a braai this weekend. You should come through, she will be happy to see you."

These two dated and had sex. Why is she hung up on him?

Mbuso: "I'll see. What do you think Lelo? Should we go?"

He takes my hand into his, Namhla already hates me for whatever reason and I am not shocked by the black look, she's giving me right now.

Me: "We have that thing remember?"

He frowns at me before he jumps in the train with me.

Mbuso: "Yes, that thing. Sorry, we can't make it."

Her day has been ruined.

Namhla: "Okay, let me know when you change your mind."

She states, I think this is our cue.

Mbuso: "Bye."

She waves before slithering back to where she came from.

Me: "Really? You should visit my mother?"

I introduce as we troll down the corridor.

He laughs, it's not funny.



Mbuso: "Her mother is a retired nurse, she used to work at this hospital."

He explains.

Me: "But, girl seems to be territorial."

Mbuso: "I don't want to talk about her, let's talk about us and the things I want to do to you."

His hand goes around my waist as he pulls me closer and kisses my cheek.

Me: "We're in public, Mbuso."

Mbuso: "So?"

Me: "There are adults around and they are staring."

Mbuso: "Let them, maybe they will learn a thing or two."

I push him off, he's crazy.

RANDALL\*

I received a call from one of the guys saying Olivia was giving them trouble. I have to admit that, I enjoy seeing her suffer. If I didn't see Liyana's pain when I look at Olivia maybe, I would have mercy on her. Her life is hanging by a thread, she has begged me to end it and that's something I will not do. I leave that to her, she's too much of a coward to take her own life.

The house looks like a mess, there's a foul smell that has me gagging the moment it hits my nostrils.

She's laying on the couch, her body facing up, seemingly lost in a flood of thoughts.

Me: "Honey, I'm home."

She jerks up and instantly tears stream down her cheeks.

Olivia: "Randy."

She whispers in a hoarse voice.

Me: "Couldn't you clean up Olivia? This place looks like a pigsty."

She plods towards me, desperation pasted on her face.

Olivia: "Randy, help me. I need a fix, these men don't want to give me. I'm going crazy here."

Her skin is dull, she has self-inflicted wounds from picking at her face. I know this look pretty well, addicts tend to pick at their skin thinking bugs are crawling under it. Her skin has acne breakouts and needle marks. Most of her hair has fallen out and she looks thin and skeletal.

Me: "There's nothing I can do Olivia, I'm not the one with the drugs."



She clenches her teeth.

Olivia: "Please, I'll do anything. Look at me, I'm a mess."

She swipes her hand over her dry mouth before pressing it on her nose and rubs away the irritation.

Me: "Didn't you think that, this is what would happen to Liya if you continued to feed her drugs? Or worse, she could've died."

Olivia: "Liya, my baby. She's fine right? Let me see her, I want to see her, just this once."

She speaks rapidly without stopping.

Me: "I said it last time Olivia, you will never see that little girl again."

Olivia: "Okay, that's fine. Give me a fix Randall then I will stop pursuing her."

She pleads in desperation.

Me: "I can't help you really, the power is not in my hands."

She scratches herself, she looks completely out of it.

Olivia: "This is all your fault."

She screams at me while burying her face in her hands.

Olivia: "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scream. You know I loved you Randy, I would've given you the world."

She puts her arms around my waist and looks up at me.

Me: "Don't touch me."

I push her back, she almost falls but maintains her balance.

Olivia: "I can make you feel good Randy, let me make you happy."

She grabs my coat in an attempt to take it off, I roughly grab her arms.

Me: "I wouldn't touch you, even if you were naked."

She frowns at my grunt.

Olivia: "It's fine, I don't mind. You can do anything to me, I'm a woman Randall and I know that you can't resist a woman."

She states as she unbuttons her shirt, she lets it slip to the floor.

Olivia: "Remember this, you wanted this the day we made Liyana."

What the hell?

Me: "I didn't even know you, until you came to me claiming we had a child together. Cover up

Olivia, you're only embarrassing yourself."

Olivia: "Why are you so cruel?"

She screams as she grips her hair.

Me: "This is only the taste of it, I came to see if you're still alive. I am disappointed, I thought that you would give and kill yourself."

She slowly picks her shirt and wears it.

Randall: "You would do all of us a favour."

Olivia: "I'm not going to die, my baby needs me."

Me: "What baby? You don't have a baby."

Olivia: "You can't deny me my child Randall."

She goes on the scratch journey again, she appears frustrated by whatever is eating her up. She tightens her arms around her upper torso and sniffs.

Me: "I really have to go Olivia, I'm sorry that I can't stay."

She grips my arm as I start to amble towards the door.

Olivia: "No, no, no. Please, don't leave me like this. I won't survive another second, at least give me a pill. Cough medicine or anything please."

Me: "You're pathetic Olivia, go clean yourself and tidy around here."

I yank my hand from her.

Olivia: "Randall!!!!"

She screams out as I shut the door behind me. I can't really say that I pity her, she deserves what's happening to her. If she can think of harming her child, it clearly states that she's not a good parent. Given a chance, she will do it again.

I drive to Styles' house, he texted, saying something happened to Neo.

What could possibly happen to that man? He is more cautious than anyone I know.

I walk in to meet Nkomo seated on the couch sipping on a glass of Whiskey, he nods.

Me: "You're back?"

I amble in, just as Styles strolls in from the kitchen.

Nkomo: "Yeah."

Styles: "I thought you'd be here a while ago."

He sits opposites me.

Me: "I had to see Olivia."

Styles: "How is she?"

I hope his soft side is not about come out.

Me: "Does it matter?"

Styles: "Maybe you shou..."

I saw this coming.

Me: "Don't bother, it's not happening."

He shakes his head.

Me: "What has happened to Neo? Where is he?"

Nkomo: "Tshidi happened, he's at the hospital."

He answers and I can't seem to put together what exactly that woman did to him.

Styles: "She burnt him with boiling water."

I can't say I never saw this coming. Tshidi is a disaster waiting to happen.

Me: "That bitch."

Nkomo: "You can't put anything past her."

Styles: "Nkomo and I are going to see him tomorrow. Will you be able to make it?"

Me: "I don't see why not, if I don't, I will never hear the end of his complaining."

Nkomo: "He'll even bring it up at your funeral."

That's Neo alright.

Me: "He won't let me rest in peace."

Styles laughs.

Styles: "Neo doesn't deserve this, he will have to live with those scars his whole life."

Styles is hurt by this, he's sensitive like that.

Me: "He'll be alright, I know him to be strong."

Styles: "What about Amara and Liyana? Remember Mkhize is after them, you can't leave them unprotected."

He reminds of the dangers that lie ahead.

Me: "I won't be staying there, I'll head back soon after I see him."

Nkomo: "That old man just won't give up."

He's clearly angered by his father's actions.

Me: "He's not doing it because he wants her, it's all about power."

Styles: "I can't wait to see that old fool crash."

The coldness in his tone bears witness of the hatred he has for Mkhize.

Me: "I'm tired of being surrounded by enemies, I want to start my life with Amara."

Styles: "We'll eliminate them one at a time."

He gives a sly grin.

Styles: "I think I have the perfect person who will approach Ruth with this gift."

An idea just flashed through his brain, leaving a frown on his face. He runs his eyes to Nkomo, who is unaware of his twisted plan.

Me: "No, that won't work."

I dispute.

Styles: "It will, I have always known him to be a smooth talker. He knows his way around women."

Nkomo notices that he's the order of topic, he scowls and shrugs his shoulders.

Maybe Styles is right.

Styles: "It's done."

He smiles as he gulps on a glass of whiskey.

Nkomo: "What's done? What are you two on about?"

Styles lets him in on the plan.

Nkomo: "Hell no, I'm not doing that. If this woman is so enthralled by Randall, then she won't give me a second look."

Styles: "She's a woman Nkomo, tell her what she wants to hear. Make her knees weak, make her giggle. You've done it before, and when you have her wrapped around your little finger. You shower her with gifts before presenting the ultimate gift."

Styles is having a thrill at this, he loves it when his plans are coming together.

Me: "Don't catch feelings, you're a Mkhize. You lot are weak as fuck."

He chortles as he rubs his neck.

Nkomo: "I don't like this."

He's hesitant.

Styles: "When last did you have a woman in your bed Nkomo, this is your chance."

Styles is an idiot. Nkomo sneers at him.

Nkomo: "Fuck you."

His frown is fierce as he growls at Styles who sniggers in return.

Styles: "Sorry, I was trying to convince you."

Nkomo: "Fine, I will do it. Don't worry about me catching feelings, I already have my eyes set on someone. Worry about Ruth, I will not entertain her when my mission is complete."

Styles: "Don't worry about that, she won't live too long to chase after you."

Nkomo: "How am I friends with you?"

His question has Styles chortling, I tend to ask myself the same question.

Me: "I need a drink."

My head feels heavy and light-headed at the same time, I don't know what's wrong with me. I stagger back a little as I bring my body up, Styles jerks from his seat and has his hand on my shoulder in a flash.

Styles: "What wrong?"

Me: "My head is spinning."

I rub my forehead with the tips of my fingers.

Styles: "Take a sit, I'll get you a glass of water."

He rushes to the kitchen while I sit back, my vision blurs a little.

Nkomo: "What's wrong man?"

I shrug my shoulders, I turn to Styles who holds out a glass of water to me.

It helps a bit as it eases the light-headedness.

Styles: "How are you feeling?"

He inspects my face.

Me: "I'm fine."

Styles: "Good, for a second there, I thought you could be pregnant."

He and Nkomo laugh, he's crazy.

Me: "I haven't had anything to eat since morning, it's probably that."

Styles: "In that case, I'm going to make you something."

He ambles back to the kitchen, he worries too much sometimes.



To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

95\*

## NOMBULELO\*

Me: "Mbuso, that's my uncle."

He parks at the gate, we just got home from the hospital.

Mbuso: "What is he doing here?"

Me: "Beats me."

Mbuso: "Should I drive through and pretend we didn't see him?"

He's kidding.

Me: "He looks bothered."

Mbuso parks the car on the side of the road, Uncle Jonas makes his way to us. The frown on his face says he doesn't like what he's seeing.

Me: "Malume?" (I jump out of the car.)

Jonus: "The security is very strict here, they wouldn't let me in."

Me: "They are doing their job uncle."

Jonas: "Something has happened with your mother."

My heart drops.

Me: "Yini malume?" (What is it uncle?)

He sighs.

Jonas: "She's been arrested."

Me: "What?"

Mbuso strides to my side, my uncle shoots him a cold stare.

Mbuso: "Sawubona malume." (Greetings uncle.)

Jonas: "Boy."

That's him greeting back.

Me: "I don't understand. How did this happen?"

Jonas: "Martha and that woman Tebogo were attacked by an angry mob, your mother is the one behind it."

Me: "My mother wouldn't do something like this."

Jonas: "I was there, I saw it myself. Tebogo laid charges against her."

Me: "Uncle, we have to get her out, she won't survive in jail."

He sighs.

Jonas: "I know, I came here because I couldn't get through to your phone."

Me: "Sorry, my battery is dead."

Mbuso: "Is there anything we can do?"

Jonas: "This is a family matter, it would be nice if you don't interfere."

I am offended really.

Me: "He just wants to help uncle."

He looks at me like I have just said something stupid.

Jonas: "I was thinking that, I could convince Tebogo to drop the charges."

That's an idea but...

Me: "How are you going to do that?"

Jonas: "The woman loves her bottle, it will speak for me."

I smile at this conniving old man.

Me: "Please do that uncle and get mom out, dad needs her."

His expression changes at the mention of my father.

Jonas: "I have to go, it's getting late."

Me: "Okay, thank you."

He looks at Mbuso, then back at me.

Jonas: "When is Zodwa coming to the house?"

Me: "I don't know, I was waiting for mom."

Jonas: "I'll speak to your mother and let you know. After all of this is over, this boy must take responsibility of you and this child."

Mbuso: "I'll do that malume." (Uncle.)

He nods.



Jonas: "I will call you my child."

Me: "Bye."

We watch him as he jumps into his car and drives off.

SETHU\*

I spot Styles waiting for me at the gate, it's open so, I drive in and park in front of the garage door.

He smiles as I jump out of the car.

Styles: "You found it?"

He pulls me in for a hug.

Me: "Thanks to the GPS."

I utter as I pull away from his warm embrace.

Styles: "It's good to see you here."

He smiles, I don't know what he means by this but it's good to be here.

Styles: "Did you bring your overnight bag?"

Me: "It's in the back."

He opens the back door and pulls out my bag.

Me: "I still don't understand why you want me to sleep over."

Styles: "Because I'm going away tomorrow."

He leads me to the house.

Me: "It's not like you're not coming back."

Styles: "You never know hey, this might be the last time you see me."

Me: "Don't say that please."

I can't stand the thought of not seeing again, I'm not sure about the look he's giving me. I place myself on the sofa.

Styles: "Are you going to sit there like a bride?"

He asks as he smiles at me.

Me: "Funny."

He sniggers.

Styles: "I need help with the food in the kitchen."

This instantly puts a smile on my face.

Me: "Really? What did you make?"

Styles: "Nothing yet, I brought groceries."

He sits on the arm of the chair beside me.

Me: "Why do you need my help?"

He laughs.

Me: "I'm a guest, I will not be touching anything in this house."

I retort as I sit back.

Styles "I can't promise great food hey, I'm not good at cooking."

Me: "Will you let me be the judge of that?"

He grabs my hand as he rises, pulling me up with him.

Styles: "Bummer, I thought that I would finally taste your food today."

Me: "Sad, I know. Maybe next time."

Styles: "That, maybe, is standing in my way."

Me: "I can make the salad, less work for me."

He pulls me to the kitchen with him.

Styles: "Great and more for me."

He complains.

Styles: "I don't eat salad you know, I don't like it."

Me: "You'll love mine, wait till you taste it."

Styles: "This sounds promising, I like."

There's literally groceries on the table, I give him an enquiring look.

Styles: "What? I didn't have time to pack them. I thought maybe you could prepare your signature dish."

Me: "And, how did you know which ingredients to get?"

Styles: "I didn't, I heard that chefs can work with anything. This won't be hard for you."

He responds smiling down at me, if only he knew what his smile does to me. There's a moment

and it has me clearing my throat.

Me: "Let's see what we can come out with."

He gleams. This is what I need after a long day at work, I'm able to forget about my problems as I keep busy in the kitchen. Styles has left everything to me, he's sitting down, sipping on a cup of coffee.

I should've seen this coming, my mother would literally chastise me, if she sees me in this situation. He leaves the kitchen to attend to a call, it's a good thing I'm almost done. I'm stirring the gravy in the pot as I spot a figure outside the window, maybe I'm seeing things due to the darkness. I zoom my eyes, there's someone there. I can't tell if it's a man or a woman, they are facing this direction.

Sethu: "Styles, there's someone outside."

I scream out for him, he comes rushing in.

Styles: "What?"

Me: "I saw someone outside."

Styles: "Are you sure?"

He peeks out the window, as I nod.

He rushes outside to check while I anxiously wait for him. He's back in no time.

Me: "And?"

Styles: "There's no one."

That's impossible..

Me: "I saw someone Styles, I swear."

My voice breaks, he takes my hand.

Styles: "Hey, what's wrong? You're shaking."

He pulls me to a seat.

Me: "I'm sorry, I freaked out. It's just that, I've been getting these calls in the middle of night. The person would breathe over the phone without saying anything."

Styles: "When did it start?"

Me: "A week ago, sometimes I feel like I'm being followed."

Styles: "You should've told me."

He carries a worried look.

Me: "It's probably nothing hey, let me finish up with the cooking."

There's a loud crash as I get up, Styles shields me as he pulls me back. We turn to see a brick on the floor. Someone smashed it through the window.

Styles: "What the hell?"

He grunts as he scurries back outside and shuts the door behind him.

Me: "Styles wait."

I shout after him, he probably didn't hear me. This is dangerous, there is someone out there. What if they hurt him? What should I do?

I want to go after him but, the person could be anywhere. I panic as I wait for him to come back, he's taking forever.

I suddenly hear footsteps, I grab a frying pan, step back and prepare myself for anything. My heart is on my throat. I charge towards the door only to realize that it's Styles.

Styles: "It's me."

He looks flushed.

Me: "Are you okay? I was worried."

Styles: "Whoever was out there is gone."

Me: "Who could it be?"

Styles: "I don't know, this is rather strange."

Me: "Maybe we should call the police."

He shakes his head at my suggestion.

Styles: "I'll take care of this don't worry, let me patch that window then, we can go back to our date. I refuse to let some idiot ruin our day."

I don't know if I'll be comfortable.

Me: "Date?"

He smiles.

Styles: "Yes, date."

Me: "I don't remember you asking me out."

Styles: "This should count as a date right? I was probably misinformed."

Me: "You were definitely misinformed."

He laughs.

RANDALL\*

The house is completely empty and I can't find Amara anywhere, I have searched every room in the house. The lights are dim and the atmosphere is not welcoming, it gives a strange aura.

I get to our room and push it open, she's here standing by the window, I can only see her back.

Me: "Amara, I've been looking for..."

I stop as I see a strange woman standing before her, she has a knife in her hand and the look on her face is deadly. Instantly, I know what she plans to do.

Me: "Get away from her."

I yell, the woman gives a bone chilling grin before plunging the knife into Amara's stomach, she heaves for breath as if taking her last and falls to the floor.

Me: "Amara."

I rush to her and take her in my arms.

Me: "Amara open your eyes."

I plead desperately, she's not moving.

Me: "No, Amara get up, get up."

Fear takes over my whole being, her body is cold and she has no pulse.

I look up to see the woman walk towards me, she's now naked and has a seductive smile on her face. I can't make out her face, I feel a deep rage within me, one I can't control. I want to turn away but, there's a force that's stopping me from moving.

An old man comes in front of me. He raises his hand as he points at the woman, she screams and vanishes like she was never here. He turns and I see my grandfather, he wears a gloomy face. Suddenly I begin to gasp and my heart feels like it's being pricked with a thousand needles.

Me: "I... can't... breathe nana." (Grandfather.)

He reaches his hand out to me.

Okolie: "Eat."

He's referring to the green leaf on his hand."

I take it and throw it in my mouth, its bitterness makes me want to spit it out. My breathing goes back to normal after I swallow it.

Okolie: "Protect her."

He declares and begins to walk out of the room.

"Randall wake up."



I jolt up to the sound of a familiar voice, I glare at Amara as she holds a confused look.

Amara: "You were crying in your sleep."

She states. The dream felt so real, I can still taste the bitterness in my mouth. I feel a rise in my stomach and a rush of gull forcing me to run to the bathroom. With one violent contraction, the contents of my stomach gush out of my mouth. I close the toilet seat as I feel Amara's hand on my shoulder, I rinse my mouth in the sink before I turn to meet her concerned expression.

I have no clue what just happened or how to explain it.

MKHIZE\*

I must say that I have found a great ally to help me get my revenge. I'm expecting him any minute now, there's a knock before Sika walks into my office.

Sika: "Your guest is here, baba." (Boss.)

Me: "Let him in."

He hesitates, he doesn't trust my decisions.

Sika: "Are you sure about this one? The last one turned out to be a snitch."

Me: "This one is different Sika, he approached me himself."

Sika: "Let's hope that he doesn't have bad intentions."

He's always doubtful.

Me: "Relax, let him in."

He sighs and opens the door for my guest, I get up from my seat and shake his hand as he walks up to me.

Me: "That's a firm one."

I refer to his hand shake, he grins.

Him: "You should know that I mean business."

He retorts.

Me: "Please, have a sit."

He pulls a chair.

Me: "Thank you Sika, you can leave us now."

He nods and walks out.

Me: "I must say, I was shocked when you came up with this offer."

Him: "A man's got to do, what he's got to do."

I agree.

Me: "It's going to be fun doing business with you."

He grins.

Him: "I doubt it, I hear you can be a pain in the ass."

I snigger at his answer.

Me: "Those are just rumours."

Him: "Remember, we have different reason why we are doing this and this partnership does not mean that we are friends."

Me: "I completely understand."

Him: "And, no one will die."

Me: "Believe me, I have learnt my lesson the hard way. Never spill an Okolie blood."

Him: "I'm glad we're on the same page."

Me: "Same here."

This is going to be one fun rollercoaster.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

96\*

### STYLES\*

I think I have a clue, who might have vandalized my house last night although I don't see her doing anything like this. I haven't seen Khethu in a while, she calls me frequently and leaves multiple messages.

Today we leave for Pretoria, Nkomo will be here in a while. He's driving with me while Randall will follow behind a bit later.

I'm in the kitchen, I need a strong cup of coffee. Sethu and I hardly slept last night as we chatted the night away, this explains why she's still sleeping.

My heart does something there as I spot her plod to the kitchen, she's still wearing her nightgown.

Sethu: "I would like a cup as well."

Me: "I thought you're sleeping in."

Sethu: "I actually woke up early, around five."

Me: "You should've woken me up."

I hand her a cup of coffee, she leans against the counter and indulges.

Sethu: "It was too early, I couldn't be rude."

Me: "Maybe you should've accepted my offer of sleeping in my room."

She giggles.

I move closer, towering over her. I slip my hand around her, pulling her into me and she places the cup on the counter. Her eyes shyly look into mine, I think she knows what I have in mind.

Sethu: "What are you doing?"

Me: "I've been wanting to do this for a while now."

Sethu: "What?"

She whispers.

Me: "This..."

I'm not sure if this is a good idea, I don't know if it will set her off. I can only hope that she will



not push against this, whatever this is. I cannot put a name to it yet and nameless as it is, I want it. This moment right here is what I have been craving for. Her lips feel just right against mine, I pull her closer while she hooks her arms around my neck.

She drops her head almost immediately as I pull away.

Sethu: "Don't you think we're moving too fast?"

I do but, I can't ignore this anymore.

Me: "I'm tired of thinking, life is short and I want to live it to the fullest. Tomorrow is not promised to us."

She gives me a worried look.

Sethu: "What's wrong Styles? Yesterday you spoke about me not seeing you again and now you're saying life is too short?"

I might have terrified her with my words.

Me: "Nothing, it's just a comment. We have wasted enough time apart, now I want to be with you."

Sethu: "Are you over her?"

Am I really over Khethu? I would like to believe that I am, she meant the world to me once upon a time.

Me: "I'm on my way there."

She sighs, she's disappointed. I can't lie to her.

Sethu: "Then, we can't be together until you're completely over her. I will not be a doormat, I've played that part before and it's not fun."

This woman is wise.

Me: "You're right, look I'm sorry. I'm not sorry about the kiss though, I would do it again if given a chance."

Me: "How did you sleep?"

Sethu: "Okay, I guess."

She takes a sit, her eyes are avoiding me.

Me: "Did you get any calls?"

I have to find out who this person is.

Sethu: "My phone was off all night, I think I should change my number."

Me: "Rather block the number, we'll find a way out of this."

Having your privacy invaded must be terrible, stalkers find pleasure in tormenting people.

Sethu: "At first I thought it was Ntokozo but he's in jail."

I know about that fool, he's serving a twenty year sentence in prison for attempted murder.

Me: "What is he in for?"

Her eyes resist for a bit before she hides her face in the coffee mug, she's not ready to tell me about it. When Lebo told me about her scars, I had to dig. Ntokozo is one brave bastard to want to live after what he did.

Me: "So, I'm leaving today. Are you going to miss me?"

She picks up her crown as she raises her head and smiles. It's better I move away from the sensitive topic, this is also the reason why her father is overprotective. I hope one day she will be comfortable enough to tell me about it."

Sethu: "Not really, I'll finally be able to breathe."

She clowns.

Me: "In that case, I should cancel my trip."

She laughs.

Sethu: "Please, don't spoil my mood, I'm already having a good morning."

She's teasing me.

Me: "That's it, I'm staying."

This sends her laughing.

There's a sudden knock, Nkomo walks in uninvited. He stops at the door way while glancing at us in the kitchen, I don't think we are this close. He looks behind him as if, wanting to turn back but is hesitant about it.

Me: "You lost your manners on the way here?"

Sethu's shyness takes over, she didn't have time to change into proper clothes.

Nkomo: "Sorry, I didn't think you had company."

Me: "Still, it's not our house. It's mine."

He stomps in, completely ignoring my retort.

Nkomo: "Did you guys know there was someone outside your house?"

Me: "What?"

Sethu's jaw drops, her eyes widen in shock.

Nkomo: "There was someone peeking through the window when I pulled up. They ran out of the gate when they saw my car."

It has to be khethu.

Me: "Did you get a look at them?"

Nkomo: "Not really, whoever it was, was wearing a disguise. Baggy clothes, a cap and a hoodie over the top, I think it was a woman though. I could tell from the way they were running."

It's definitely Khethu, she still has the key to the house. Sethu appears to be a bit shaken, she probably thinks it's the stalker. I have to get Khethu to stop, this is getting out of hand.

AMARA\*

I'm sitting on the bed watching Randall getting dressed, he hasn't said a word since he woke up. I know he won't tell me why he was crying in his sleep, this man is too closed off for my liking. I doubt I can stand this for long, he turns and finds me staring. I hold up my hand smiling at him, he shrugs his shoulders.

Gosh!!!

It won't be easy getting him to loosen up.

Me: "Name five important people you would like to meet."

Randall: "Why?"

Grumpy much?

Me: "Just do it."

Randall: "I don't want to meet anyone."

Maybe I shouldn't bother with this one.

Me: "Come on, okay two people then."

He sighs.

Randall: "Why would I want to meet anyone?"

My plan of trying to get him to talk is failing.

Me: "How about, we talk about what happened last night?"

His face changes, I don't know to what because he's always blue.

Randall: "It was just a bad dream."

Me: "That made you vomit?"

He nods and joins me on the bed.

Randall: "There was a strange woman."

He's talking...

Good.

Randall: "I think it was Ruth, she was in my dream."

What do you say when your man tells you that, he dreamt of another woman?

Me: "Oh."

That's all my mind has to offer.

Randall: "Something is going on Amara and I think it's bigger than me."

I'm still on the part where he dreamt about Ruth.

Randall "You know how Raven has turned against me."

I nod.

Still trying to process some things here.

Randall: "He brought her to me the other day."

Me: "Who?"

Randall: "Raven, he followed me to the mall. I was with Styles when he came up to me and she was with him. These people are serious about this and they are pushing in all directions."

This is scary.

Me: "What do you mean it's bigger than you?"

I don't understand this part right here.

He sighs.

Randall: "The dream."

Yes, let's talk about the dream.

Randall: "She was there and..."

He pauses, he's not going to tell me. I thought we were making progress.

Randall: "I should go, it's getting late."

I watch him as he gets up, honestly I am bothered by the fact that he doesn't want to open up to me. I remain seated, feeling frustrated that he's leaving me hanging like he always does. Is this how life with him will be like?

How long will I have to chase after him just to get him to speak to me?

He stops at the door and turns to me, the look on his face says I should follow him. I am not

moving from this bed.

Randall: "Won't you walk me out?"

I'm sure he knows his way out.

Let me move before he kills me with that look, I follow after him. Yes, even today I am still following Randall Okolie. We bump into Ife in the corridor, her eyes are red. She's been crying.

Me: "Hey, what's wrong?"

she sniffs.

Randall: "You better not be crying for that fool."

He grunts, Ife shakes her head.

Ife: "I just spoke to mom, she said that grandmother is alive. Agya lied about everything."  
(Father.)

Randall: "I knew it."

Ife: "She doesn't know why he did what he did and she just found out about grandmother, apparently he hid her in some old age home. What is going on brother? How could agya be so cruel? Mom thought that they buried her, people mourned for her. I can't even imagine the pain everyone felt."

She cries and throws herself in his arms.

Randall: "That old man is sick."

Ife: "I don't want to see him again, I hate him. My mother is in pain, she's all alone and Segun is too selfish to notice."

She pulls away from his arms.

Randall: "Listen, I'm going to Pretoria. Ife, I need you to stay home, no one will leave this house. I asked Chioma to keep an eye on you."

She pouts.

Ife: "Why her? Why not Amara?"

Was she not crying seconds ago?

Randall: "Because Amara can't say no to you and you take advantage of that."

Ife: "That's not true brother, I'm the innocent one here."

She pouts.

Randall: "Still, do not leave the house and that goes for you too Amara."

Where will I go?

Ife: "I'm a prisoner in my brother's house, I should have my own show. Keeping up with the Okolies, the drama in this family is too much."

She complains as she treads back to her room, the only person who can defeat this stubborn man is her.

Randall: "Watch over her and Liya?"

He's asking me by the way, for once, he's not commanding.

Me: "I'll try, although Chioma will do a good job."

I giggle at my lame joke, I will not be expecting a smile from him. He takes my hand as we continue down the stairs.

MKHIZE\*

MaSibiya: "Unjani uNkomo baba?" (How is Nkomo?)

She catches me off guard with this, I give my attention to her. We're in the bedroom, preparing for the day. She's standing in front of the mirror, tying a head wrap over her head.

Me: "Iphuma kuthi lento?" (Where is this coming from?)

MaSibiya: "Ngiyabuza nje baba?" (I'm just asking.)

Her curiosity clearly came from somewhere.

Me: "Why are you asking about Nkomo MaSibiya?"

MaSibiya: "He's your first born baba, I think it's time that he comes back home."

She turns to me, and gulps at the sight of my scowl.

Me: "What did he say to you? Does he want to come home?"

She shakes her head.

MaSibiya: "Nkomo is your heir, we did him wrong by taking his mother away from him."

We have never spoken about this before, I am mystified that she would bring it up.

Me: "We didn't take his mother away, I did. That woman deserved it, she was loose."

She walks to me and sits on the bed.

MaSibiya: "Baba, awucabangi ukuthi abaphansi could be punishing us because your son is estranged from his home. Nkomo should be here teaching his siblings the ways of life, how to be a man and..." (Don't you think that the ancestors.)



I raise my hand to stop her.

Me: "We mfazi, kuvela kuphi konke lokhu?" (Where is all of this coming from?)

MaSibiya: "I think there's a dark cloud surrounding this family, losing uMkhize omcane and MaDlamini losing her mind. These things do not just happen baba, there has to be an explanation." (Little Mkhize.)

Me: "These are your theories MaSibiya, I know what's happening and as the man of the house, I will deal with this my own way."

I retort.

I will not be told what to do.

MaSibiya: "Kodwa baba uNkomo..."

Me: "If he wants to come back home, he will. I refuse to run after a grown ass man, Nkomo knows where his father's house is. We will not speak about this anymore."

She nods and gets up to leave the room, I know MaSibiya to be the most stubborn wife. I also know that she's tired of caring for her sister-wife, there is nothing that I can do. We can't abandon MaDlamini.

SETHU\*

Me: "You can drop me off at South Gate, I'm meeting up with Ayize there. We have to buy groceries for the house, we have been summoned by the elders."

He laughs, giving me a brief look.

Styles: "Is it about your cousin?"

I hope not.

Me: "You never know with those two, at least Ayize is here now. I won't have to face them alone, I'm almost this close to giving in to their demands."

Styles: "You should stand up for yourself Sethu and what you believe in. I agree that they are your parents and you need to respect them but, you have the right to say no. Put your foot down, don't be too soft on them."

I have heard these words from my Sister before and it's what she has done, mom knows that they can't control her hence, they turned to me and seeing that I struggle with the word no, they got too comfortable. Now, I have to live my life in their terms.

Me: "It's easier said than done, my parents can be very persuasive. You would literally sell your soul to the devil if they asked you to."

He shakes his head, he's definitely against this.

Styles "That is not a healthy relationship, you're their daughter not some robot they created in a lab."

He's suddenly angry.

Me: "They brought me into this world and it's my duty to obey."

This is what I was taught, I was brought up with the notion that you obey your parents.

Styles: "I swear Sethu, if you help that woman and she gets out of jail, I will send her back and throw away the key."

Styles doesn't know Lebo that well, the hatred he has towards her baffles me.

Me: "I won't help her, I promise. Ayize will also kill me."

Styles: "Good."

Me: "What's up with you and Lebo anyway?"

He steals a look.

Styles: "I don't like people that mistreat you, that's all."

Okay.

Styles: "Is your sister there, yet? I don't want you waiting there alone."

Me: "I'm not sure, I'll text her and ask. You really don't have to worry about me, you know. I'm a big girl and I can take care of myself."

I have survived the worst.

Styles: "I can't help but worry Sethu, if you're being followed then whoever that person is, has bad intentions."

True.

If they wanted to hurt me though, they would've.

Me: "There's also a big possibility that I'm overthinking things."

Styles: "I'm not taking chances."

He pulls up at the parking lot.

Me: "Thanks, I'll wait inside."

He grabs my hand, stopping me from opening the door.

Me: "What happened?"

Styles: "Let your sister reply first, if she's here then, you can go."



This is too much.

Me: "Styles, there are people here. I doubt anything will happen to me."

Styles: "Like I said, I'm not taking chances. Call her please."

Should I like that he's being protective? This is rather new, it's the kiss isn't it? It must be the kiss, this is how men act once they get a taste of you. I have seen it with Ntokozo when we was pursuing me, when he was still a good man.

Ayize answers just when I'm about to drop the call.

Ayize: "Bitch, where are you?"

She calls me that sometimes, her personality lets her get away with it.

She's yelling, there's noise in the back ground.

Me: "Hey, I'm outside."

Ayize: "Hurry up, I've been waiting for over an hour."

She's inflating, it's only been fifteen minutes.

Me: "Okay, relax I'm coming."

I hang up...

Styles is inspecting the parking surroundings, I should have kept my mouth shut about the stalking. He's paranoid now.

Me: "I have to go Styles."

He turns to me.

Styles: "I'll walk you in."

Lord, what have I gotten myself into?

Me: "Really? Do you see these people here? Nothing will happen to me."

Styles: "No, I want to accompany you. It will give me a chance to stretch my legs."

He's being adamant, I shall let this pass for now but next time...

What am I saying? There will not be a next time, I can't be guarded like this. I need my space.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

97\*

SETHU\*

South gate is full as usual, Ayize opted for it because it's closer to our parent's place. She hates shopping and more than shopping she hates carrying groceries around. I don't know anything that girl loves.

My father had dreams for her like he did for me, he wanted her to be a teacher and work along side them. Ayize wouldn't have it, she hated school and dad's hard hand pushed her to disobedience. She bunked school and flunked her grades just to prove that she can do whatever she wants and they can't control her life.

I see Ayize through the crowd, at the food court, her face is buried on her phone and she's sipping on a milkshake. It makes me wonder what's in it, that girl does not drink milkshakes. She drinks other beverages, alright.

Me: "There she is, you can go back now."

Styles is holding my hand, I was not given a choice.

Styles: "Are you sending me away Miss Sethu?"

Me: "I don't want you to be late, your friend is waiting for you."

Styles: "Let me say hi to sister in-law."

He says sister in-law.

I will not argue.

Me: "What about my car?"

We found that the tyres were slashed, we suspect the imposter.

Styles: "I'll take it to the mechanic, you can use mine while I'm gone. I'll drive with Nkomo."

This will be asking too much.

Me: "That's alright, Ayize is here. I'll use hers."

He shrugs, I don't know what that means. The smile on Ayize's face right now, I need something to wipe it off.

Ayize: "Mr and Mrs. S."

Her high-pitched voice welcomes us, Styles smiles. He seems to like this title.

Styles: "You see, we have a fan. At least I'm loved in the family."

Ayize: "Who doesn't like you? Tell me and I will deal with them."

I want a new sister, where do I sign up? Styles looks at me and wiggles his brows with a smile plastered on his face. This gesture has me dissolving into a pool of reticence.

Styles: "I think Mrs. S here, should handle them, she is a strong woman after all. My strong woman."

His arm goes over my shoulder, to think I wasn't shy enough."

Ayize: "I agree, we just need to tap that into her."

Me: "Don't be silly."

I retort, they are turning against me.

Ayize: "So, you two huh?"

I don't trust that smile.

Ayize: "This is serious vele?"

Styles smiles down at me, he's having a kick at this.

Me: "Styles, you're going to be late."

Ayize will never stop. Styles enwraps his arms around me and I comfortably sink into his embrace. I feel his nose graze my neck as he plants a prolonged kiss that has my skin covered with goose bumps.

Styles: "I'll see you in a few days."

He whispers softly, suddenly I don't want him to let go. I want this moment and I don't want to let go of it. He pulls out, his face refusing to move away from mine. For a moment there I think he will kiss me but, he goes for my cheek.

That's fine...

Styles: "Take care of yourself, kitten."

His sweet whisper jolts my heart to my chest.

Me: "I will."

Ayize: "When is the wedding?"

She has this stupid smile on her face.

Ayize: "I like what I see, umshado lento, guys ai man." (This is a wedding.)

This is where Styles should run and not look back but, he laughs. He's encouraging this crazy woman.



Styles: "Bye Ayize, it was nice to see you again."

Ayize: "You too Mr. S."

She warbles, I am so embarrassed.

He smiles, turns to glance at me and walks off. I think he's taking my heart with him, it's strange that I feel this way because the man is not leaving the country. I am so used to seeing him every day that a few days without seeing him feel like an eternity.

Ayize: "Don't cry sis, he'll be back."

She's mocking me.

Me: "Not funny."

She laughs as we sit back down.

Ayize: "This guy's got you hey?"

The questions commence.

Me: "Styles and I are just friends."

She laughs like a drain, drawing us attention.

Ayize: "Please, that was not a church hug."

Me: "Church hug?"

Where does this come from?

Ayize: "You know those hugs that..."

Me: "I know what a church hug is."

Ayize: "And you slept at his place?"

You can't tell this girl anything.

Me: "Aren't you too old for that milkshake?"

Let's divert this conversation.

Ayize: "I'm not too old for what's inside."

She grins.

Me: "It's not even midday yet."

Ayize: "When has that ever stopped me from living life."

We've had this conversation before and it never ends well, Ayize has lost so much weight. This has been bothering me since she came back, last time I saw her, she was fleshy. Something is eating her up and whatever it is, is affecting her health.

NOMBULELO\*

This is not what I expected to see when I was called to reception, he is the last person that I want to see. I sigh deeply at the sight of Zuma as he stands up from the bench upon seeing me. How did he know where to find me?

I turn to walk back to where I came.

Zuma: "Nombulelo wait."

I hear loud footsteps as he scurries after me, I feel a tight grip on my hand and yank it away as I turn.

Me: "Don't you ever touch me again."

I snap at him.

Zuma: "I'm sorry."

He lifts his hands as if surrendering.

Zuma: "Please, I just need a minute of your time."

His eyes plead on his behalf.

Me: "I'm busy Zuma, and how did you find me?"

Zuma: "I asked around in Everton."

I don't like this.

Me: "What do you want from me?"

Zuma: "I need to talk to you please."

I fold my arms across my chest, this better be good. He nervously scans the corridor.

Zuma: "Can we go somewhere private?"

I don't trust him.

Me: "I am not going anywhere with you, say whatever you want to say here."

I stand my ground, he sighs as he scratches his head.

Zuma: "Okay, sthandwa sami..." (My love.)

Me: "Don't call me that, I am nothing to you."

He drops his gaze.

Zuma: "I'm sorry, Lelo I want to apologize for everything that I have done to you. I was stupid

and..."

Me: "Is this what you came here for Zuma?"

I am wasting my time here.

Zuma: "I want to amend my mistakes and help take care of our baby."

He's here to make me upset, there's no other explanation.

Me: "What baby Zuma? Unless you and Koketso have a child, I don't know what baby you're talking about."

He must not piece me off.

Zuma: "Lelo please, I know I failed you and..."

I never thought I would say this but his voice annoys me.

Me: "Failed me? You fucking broke me Zuma, you treated me like trash. I fought for you but you fought me in return."

I am getting angry.

Zuma: "And I would like to apologise for that."

Me: "Why are you really here?"

Zuma: "I want a chance with my baby."

I am aggravated by his response, every word from his mouth seem to piss me off.

Me: "I don't have your baby."

Zuma: "Lelo please, give me a chance to raise my child, our child, we made him with love remember."

Zuma has some nerve after everything he did to me.

Me: "Just so you know, this child belongs to Mbuso. Is this not what you told me Zuma? You confirmed it yourself so don't come here and tell me shit."

I feel this great need to fight him, I want him to leave me alone and never come back.

Zuma: "Who is this Mbuso idiot anyway, he will never love you like I did."

He retorts rudely, Zuma has always been proud and his ego is bigger than his head.

Me: "Don't talk about him, don't even say his name. He is more of a man than you will ever be."

My words seem to make him angry. The Zuma I was introduced to the day he hit me, the one who kicked me like a dog while I lay defenceless on the floor is starting to come to light.

Zuma: "Don't say that to me, Lelo."

He clamps his teeth.

Zuma: "This child is mine and you can't deny me my rights as its father."

He's teeth remain clenched as he spews these words out of his mouth.

Me: "You're stupid you know that? I'm not surprised, you're stupidity led you into my friend's bed."

He furiously grabs my arm, respect is everything to this foolish, egocentric Zulu man and this just lowers his dignity.

Me: "You want to hit me now? Go ahead, hit me Zuma."

I push him back as I shout, I don't know why I'm shouting, his presence is making me angry. He staggers back as I continue to push him while I let it all out. How dare he think he can say those things to me?

Zuma: "Nombulelo."

He forces a smile as he browses the area, we have become the cast in this hospital hallway.

"Lelo, stop."

Breanda is standing before me shielding this bastard, immediately, my tears fail me.

Brenda: "Lelo."

She tries to pull me in for a hug, I push her off. I don't need a hug, I want this man out of here.

Me: "Get him away from me."

I cry, she nods while wiping away my stubborn tears. These aren't going anywhere, they want to be seen and nothing will stop them from having this moment.

Brenda: "Bhuti, please go. You're making her upset."

He's still standing here.

Zuma: "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you Lelo."

Brenda: "Okay, you should leave now."

Zuma: "I just want to speak to her please."

Me: "No, leave me alone. Get out of here Zuma."

I'm yelling now and people are watching, his presence makes me emotional and I hate him.

Zuma: "No, I can't leave until you hear me out."

Me: "Why are you being persistent?"

Why am I entertaining him?

Me: "I'm done with you Zuma, don't ever come looking for me again."

I spit the words with my tears assisting me, he's not moving.

Brenda: "This man is not going anywhere, clearly. Let's get out of here."

She takes my hand as she drags me away.

Zuma: "Lelo, there's something you need to know."

His voice follows behind me, I choose to ignore him and walk on.

Zuma: "I'm sick Lelo, you need to get tested."

His words numb my whole body as they echo in my ears, gradually I turn to meet the serious look on his face.

Me: "Get tested? For what?"

I whisper softly.

Zuma: "I think you know what I mean."

My head spins as I feel light-headed and myself falling, before everything goes blank.

NTOMBI\*

I walk into the visitor's room accompanied by a female warden, a distressed Jonas is seated on a chair. My tears show up as I realize that I am not alone, although he disowned me, he still cares. He is the only father I know, he raised me when our father passed away.

Me: "Bhuti." (Brother.)

I greet as I get to him and take a sit opposite him.

Jonas: "Unjani Ntonto?" (How are you Ntombi?)

This just sets me high on an emotional ride, he dubbed me with this name and only he called me this.

Me: "I'm scared bhuti Jonas." (Brother.)

He sighs.

Jonas: "I can only imagine."

Me: "It's only been a day and I can't be here anymore."

Jonas: "I plan on speaking to Tebogo and get her to drop the charges."

I doubt she will agree, she despises me.

Me: "How will you do that? She probably hates me."



Jonas: "Leave that to me. How are you keeping up in here?"

Me: "It's terrible bhuti, these women are violent and condescending. I need to leave this place."

Jonas: "I completely understand what you mean, just don't start any fights Ntombi. I know you, you can't keep your mouth shut."

Me: "I will try."

Jonas: "You better, I don't want trouble."

He has no trust in me.

Me: "How is Moses? Who is taking care of him?"

He frowns, I know that Moses is the last person he wants to talk about but, I need to know how my husband is doing.

Jonas: "Mashoto is taking care of him."

Is he saying this to spite me?

Me: "Why is she still in my house bhuti?" (Brother.)

Jonas: "She is his wife, Moses confirmed it."

He retorts and this makes me so angry.

Me: "Moses is not in his right senses to be confirming things."

Jonas: "I don't understand how you're so obsessed with this man."

Me: "I'm not obsessed bhuti, I love him. Moses doesn't believe in polygamy, he would never take a second wife."

Jonas: "Ntombi don't be blinded by this so called love you claim to have for him that man will drag you down with him. I don't see him becoming a better person. Moses is a paedophile, you know what that means, right? He's sexually attracted to children and that is not normal Ntombi. You're my sister and I don't want this life for you, you need to be reunited with your daughter. Help her through this pregnancy and guide her, that girl needs you."

I know what Moses is and I'm very much aware of his actions and I believe he will change one day.

Me: "Lelo knows where home is bhuti, if she wants to come back then nothing will stop her. I can't abandon my husband, not after so many years together. Moses and I have been through so much together and we will get through this as well."

He clamps his teeth upon my stubbornness, Jonas will never understand till he falls in love. That's when he will see that you'd do anything for the person you love.

Me: "I'm a wife bhuti, you gave me away to him and I have to fulfil my duties as his wife no matter how toxic he is. Maybe one day my perseverance will change him, he will see that he's

been doing things the wrong way and want to change for his family.”

Jonas: “I regret the day I let his uncles enter my father’s yard, if I could, I would pay them back the bride price. This is nonsense Ntombi, you’re better than this, come on man.”

He raises his voice not enough to get attention from the prison guard.

Me: “All of you see his actions but, I see his heart. Please don’t offend me by insulting my husband.”

He sighs.

Jonas: “You know what? You are beyond help, I will see what I can do regarding Tebogo.”

He states, looking whitewashed.

Me: “Why are you helping me bhuti? You disowned me the other day.”

He sneers at me.

Jonas: “Because when I look at you, I don’t see this naïve woman in front of me, I see the innocent little girl I raised, I will not let her fall. I promised to hold her hand through life and that’s what I intend to do.”

My heart breaks with these words, Jonas has a big heart. It’s what defines him and it’s sad that he doesn’t have a family to share it with.

NKOMOMO\*

We’re on the road to Pretoria, Styles is driving and Randall is driving behind us.

Me: “Can you turn off the AC, I’m freezing.”

He ogles at me in a flash, frowning.

Me: “What?”

Stlyes: “Won’t you do it yourself?”

I shake my head and turn it off.

Me: “What’s up with you? You have been grumpy since I got to your house.”

He sighs deeply, he’s definitely carrying something on his shoulders.

Styles: “That person you saw outside my house, I think it’s Khethu.”

Me: “Why would you think that?”

Styles: "I have a feeling it's her, she has developed this obsessive behaviour towards me. It's definitely her, man. She comes to my house and peeks through the windows. I think she's stalking Sethu now, she claims to be receiving none stop phone calls through the night. Last night someone threw a brick through the kitchen window, Sethu's car was vandalised. That woman is up to something and it's not good."

It's bizzare to think that Khethu would do such a thing.

Me: "It's possible that it could be someone else."

He shakes his head.

Styles: "It's her alright, it scares me that she might hurt Sethu. I swear Nkomo I will forget that I ever loved her."

He cares so much for this new girl.

Me: "You need to act before it's too late."

It seems, this rejected love is turning into psychotic rage.

Styles: "I'll speak to her father, it miffs me to know that she has succumbed to this life. It's so unlike her, the Khethu, I knew was strong."

Me: "Don't you think breaking her heart pushed her to this? Khethu loved you Styles, she would boast about your love and how you'll never leave her."

Styles: "I loved her just as much and she ruined everything, she trampled on my heart. How do you carry on with a woman like that Nkomo? I was blind in that relationship, I mistook her impudence for feistiness. She would talk down on me and make me feel less of a man, you know how I viewed marriage right? Still, I would have loved her my whole life."

His voice is coated with pain, Styles has never opened up to me before.

Me: "She was confident in your love man, she saw how you would fight the world for her and that gave her the poise."

He sighs, he has been doing a lot of those.

Styles: "It's probably my fault that she has gone downhill, I should have helped her when I ended things. Help her get back to her feet, it has always been just us. I should've known that she would break like this."

I doubt he should be blaming himself for this, if Styles thinks everything is his fault then, he undoubtedly needs help just as Khethu does.

Me: "This can't be your fault Styles, there's an African proverb 'Umenzi kakhalelwa. I'm not saying that she deserves all of this but, she brought it upon herself. Khethu needs to move on Styles." (She did this to herself, don't pity her.)

He rubs his head as if frustrated and consents to another sigh.

Styles: "And Sethu? She feels that she's being followed, she's innocent in all of this. I don't want her caught up in my drama."

He vents.

Me: "Maybe you need to distance yourself from her for now, till things are back to normal."

I would heed this advice.

He shakes his head.

Styles: "Too late for that advice man, I can't stay away from her now, not when she's all I think about."

He hasn't yet told me about his feelings for Sethu.

Me: "You have fallen for her?"

His quick laugh leaves me guessing his answer to my question.

Styles: "I know it sounds crazy because I haven't known her for that long, her innocence captured me."

There's a certain happiness in his voice as he speaks about this woman who has changed his life.

Me: "If that is the case then, you need to protect her and you left her unprotected back there. Someone slashed her tyres and if you think that, it's Khethu then, we haven't seen nothing yet. She has been jilted and she wants what once belonged to her. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, if Khethu is coming for Sethu then she's coming loaded Styles."

Styles: "I won't let her get to her."

Me: "You can't protect Sethu all the time, like now. She's in the public and anything can happen."

Styles: "Maybe I should've stayed but, Sethu is independent, she loves her space."

Me: "She is not the first woman to be stubborn, it's their nature anyway."

He sniggers.

Me: "When logic overtakes reason, the human mind tends to release deadly obsession. Who knows what Khethu is planning as we speak?"

Styles: "Let me call Sethu, I suddenly have an unsettling feeling in my stomach."

All of a sudden there's a loud honk from behind, Styles looks through the rear-view mirror while I turn to see Randall's car spiralling out of control.

Styles: "Something is wrong."

He parks on the side of the road, Randall is able to control his car and park it.

Me: "What just happened?"



We scurry out to meet him dashing out, he's facing down as he staggers a little and bumps his back against the car. He looks like he's about to pass out.

Styles: "What happened Randy?"

He touches his shoulder, Randall has his hand pressed on his forehead.

Randall: "I don't know man. I suddenly felt drowsy, my vision blurred and the next thing there was a bright light and I saw a silhouette as my eyes shut. That's when my car went out of control."

Styles: "Why the sudden fatigue Randall? Are you sleeping less? You need to stop stressing."

Randall: "That's not it bro, I don't know but, somehow this feels abnormal."

Me: "What do you mean?"

Randall: "I don't know, my head feels like it's about to explode."

He groans as he presses his fingers on the corners of his head, he heaves about two times before he rushes to vomit. We watch him while he violently retches, his body slouched and his one hand pressed on his stomach.

It takes a while for him to finish, he draws back and balances his body on the car. Styles rushes to the back seat of the car, grabs a bottle of water and hands it to him. He rinses his mouth, before gulping down a few sips. His eyes are red and teary and he looks pale.

Styles: "You know what, I'll drive with you. Nkomo you go ahead, we'll follow behind."

Me: "Sure."

I march back to the car.

What could possibly be wrong with Randall?

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

98\*

SETHU\*

We got almost everything on the list, this place gets crowded by the second.

We just left the grocery store, headed outside the mall, while carrying grocery bags.

Ayize: "Hey, wait I want to get something here."

She says as we approach a liquor store.

Me: "Where will you drink that?"

Ayize: "In the car, duh."

Me: "You know your mother will smell you the moment you enter the gate."

Ayize: "I'm old enough to drink, please."

She huffs.

Me: "Not in her house."

Ayize: "Woo, ngcwelengcwele. Awume tuu." (Holier than thou, would you stop?)

Me: "Oho."

I wait outside while she enters the shop, a woman approaches me, I can't help but take note of her oddity. She's wearing all black. A blonde weave with a cap and sunglasses, her face is basically hidden.

"Hi, do you know where I can find Clicks?"

She says in a low voice.

Southgate is not that big of a mall, you can't possibly not know where the shops are.

"Sorry, I'm new here so..."

She starts to give a reason for her question.

Me: "You go straight, turn right and..."

I turn to find her staring at me not the direction I'm pointing at, her demeanour gives out negative energy. Scanning her body I notice that she's wearing latex gloves and holding a glass bottle with liquid. She holds her hand up and my intuition kicks in, I duck as she swings the

bottle towards me and a scream evades from my mouth.

“Sethu!!!”

I hear Ayize scream my name, I turn to see her run after that woman.

Ayize: “Vimba, vimba.” (Stop her.)

She screams, people are watching in wonder and that’s all, no one dares to help. I pick up my bag from the floor, to realize that something has burnt through it. Whoever that person was, wanted to burn me with acid, my heart drops at the realization.

Ayize comes back running, she’s wheezing and sweaty.

Ayize: “What are you people looking at? You’re just standing there while someone is being attacked, is this what Ubuntu has turned into? You’re disgusting man.” (Humanity.)

She yells at a group of people gathered around us, they scatter as they continue to mind their business.

Me: “Ayize.”

I whisper as I show her my bag, her eyes fall out in shock.

Ayize: “That witch. I saw her when she approached you, I could tell that she was up to something. Who is she?”

I shake my head.

Ayize: “Are you okay?”

Me: “I don’t know.”

My hands are shaking and my heart hasn’t stopped racing.

Ayize: “Let’s get out of here.”

We take the groceries and toddle out of the mall, I have become very vigilant that the first thing I do when I step out is to check for any strange looking woman in a blonde wig. Being in public suddenly scares me.

STYLES\*

We’re still on the road and Randall seems to be getting worse.

Me: “How are you feeling?”

Randall: “Like I’ve been hit by a truck, seriously. Don’t you have anything I can take?”

He groans as he swipes his hand over his forehead to wipe the drips of sweat forming on his forehead, his lips have turned pale.

Me: "Nothing, we're almost there. We'll have you checked at the hospital. What's going on with you Randy?"

He drops his head back as he clenches his jaw and massages his head.

Randall: "I don't know Styles."

Me: "It could be food poisoning."

He shakes his head.

Randall: "I haven't had anything yet."

Me: "We'll find out what's really going on when we get to the hospital."

Randall: "Mmmhhh."

He makes a sour face and covers his nose. I think he's trying to push down the gull.

Me: "What's wrong?"

Randall: "Pull over."

I hastily stop, he sprints out of the car and is bent over, throwing up again. My phone rings as I jump out, it's Nkomo.

Nkomo: "Is it happening again?"

He speaks first.

Me: "Yeah, he's actually getting worse."

Nkomo: "Should I stop?"

Me: "Maybe you should go ahead, we'll meet you at the hospital."

Nkomo: "Okay."

Randall: "I feel like I'm going to pass out."

He reveals while I pass him bottled water.

Me: "We should get going, so we get to the hospital."

I help him as he slogs to the car, his body feels cold.

Me: "How are you feeling?"

Randall: "I've lost count of the number of times you have asked me this."

He sniggers and sniff.

Me: "I need to know so, I don't panic."

He sits back and shivers as he crosses his arms over his chest. I jog to the driver's side, jump in and start the car.





Randall: "I'm freezing, please turn the heater on."

I hear the sound of his teeth shattering as he exclaims.

Me: "Fuck, Randall don't die on me. What will I say to Liyana and Amara?"

He snickers, he looks etiolated. I can only conclude that it's food poisoning.

Randall: "Death? Really Styles?"

Me: "At this point this is all I could think of, you look like a corpse."

He chortles.

Randall: "I won't die that easily."

Me: "You better not."

Randall: "I had a dream last night where there was a woman in our bedroom, she killed Amara and the next thing, she was walking up to me naked. My grandfather stopped her, he gave me some herb and said that I should eat it. It tasted bitter, when I woke up, I could still taste the bitterness in my mouth and I threw up. "

It took him a while to say these words as he's wheezing for breath.

Me: "That's a strange dream, who was the woman?"

Randall: "I don't know Styles... Since that man came back into my life, strange things have been happening."

Me: "So, you think whatever you ate is the thing that's making you sick?"

He shakes his head.

Randall: "I don't know what to think, my mind is muddled but, I sense a connection. Either Segun is responsible or grandfather is trying to tell me something. He told me to protect Amara and the only people I can think of, who would want to hurt her are my father and Mkhize."

Me: "I'm a scientist bro and this shit is getting creepier by the day."

Randall: "Tell me about it, I have to rush back home, Amara is alone."

Me: "I think I'll drive back with you, Nkomo can stay behind."

Randall: "Whatever happens to me bro, make sure I make it home."

I don't like the tone he's using.

Me: "Don't talk like that, nothing will happen to you. Let's hear what they say at the hospital, if it's beyond us, we'll have to take the traditional route."

Randall: "Yeah, my chest is on fire."

He rubs his chest, it's getting harder for him to speak.

Randall: "I'm struggling to breathe."

He wheezes.

Me: "We're almost there."

There has to be an explanation for this.

MBUSO\*

Brenda: "I think you should leave now, you're not welcomed here."

I hear Brenda's loud voice as I approach the ward Lelo is kept in, it sounds like she's arguing with someone.

"I'm not going anywhere until she tells me to leave."

I know that voice.

Brenda: "Yeyi, you're not wanted here, hamba bhuti." (Go brother.)

She sounds frustrated.

"I said forget it."

Dammit, it's that idiot Zuma. I rush in the ward to find him standing next to a crying a Lelo, she appears to be dazed and in shock. She's lying on the bed while entertaining a flood of tears.

Me: "You son of a bitch."

I charge at Zuma, he staggers back as I push him against the wall. He clenches his jaw, scowls at me while I have him pinned against the wall.

I can't grasp why he could be in here.

Zuma: "I dare you to hit me."

He grunts through gritted teeth.

Brenda: "It's a good thing you're here doctor Xaba, talk to this baboon please. I told him to leave, he's upsetting the poor child."

Me: "What the hell are you doing here?"

I growl.

Zuma: "I came to see the mother of my child."

His response is accompanied by a sly grin, he is one haughty bastard. His words cause me to retaliate as I send a hard blow across his face. It sends him crashing on the floor.

"Mbuso."

Lelo is awakened by this, I can't believe she is ready to fight for him again.

Me: "What is it Lelo? Don't tell me that you're defending him again after everything."

She shakes her head at my reproach.

Lelo: "No, I'm not."

She cries.

Me: "Then let me deal with this bastard."

Brenda: "I agree, this idiot needs to be dealt with. Who shouts for the whole world to hear that they are HIV positive? That is stupidity at its best."

What?

I leer at Lelo, her eyes swell up with more tears before she burst into sobs.

Zuma: "That's not what I did, I only said that I'm..."

Brenda: "Yeyi wena trash ndini, no one cares. Uyinja man." (You're trash and a bastard.)

She retorts, she gives an impression that she's angered by this man just as I am. I don't care about her, my mind is on Lelo. She must be thinking the worst, right now. I rush to her side and envelop her in my arms.

Me: "Don't think about it like that Lelo, remember you tested and were negative."

She pulls out from my embrace, shakes her head as she wipes her tears away.

Lelo: "Mbuso, you know these tests are highly sensitive and may result in a false-negative."

She's right, pregnancy can also cause false results. It's possible to receive a false-negative when in actual fact the virus is present in the body.

Me: "Lelo, I don't want you to think about that right now, you're only upsetting Goku."

She sniffs.

Lelo: "I'm scared, what if I'm infected Mbuso? What am I going to do? My life is over."

Zuma: "Your life is not over Lelo..."

Me: "Shut the fuck up."

There's a deep urge to beat the living day lights out of him, this man only comes to cause havoc.

Zuma: "I didn't mean to upset you Lelo, I thought you needed to know the truth."

He's still talking.

Brenda: "And the only way was to tell the whole world? You might as well have gone to

Reatsotela." (TV show.)

Brenda has no business being here.

Me: "Brenda, thank you, I've got this."

I dismiss her.

Brenda: "Lelo, let me know when you leave."

She pats her shoulder, glares at Zuma and clicks her tongue before marching out.

Lelo: "When did you find out?"

She's talking to him, if it were up to me, she wouldn't even look in his direction. I wish to wipe out every memory she has of him.

He starts to potter towards the bed, I raise my hand to stop him.

Me: "That's close enough."

He sighs.

Zuma: "Koketso is sick, she knew all along but, she was in denial and refused treatment. She confessed to me when her health deteriorated."

Lelo: "The same Kokesto you denied to have an affair with?"

He drops his gaze.

Lelo: "How long has she been sick?"

Zuma: "It's been a while, she started avoiding me. Wouldn't take my calls or respond to my texts, I finally went to look for her at her mother's house. That's when I found her bedridden and..."

I hate this, the sound of his voice and his presence.

Me: "Can we get to the part where you tell us how long you've been keeping this from Lelo."

Zuma: "That day when I bumped into you, I had just come from your place. It's been a while now and I've been wanting to tell you Lelo. I thought about our child..."

This man is good at acting and I know Lelo will start feeling sorry for him.

Me: "What child are you talking about? Don't make me sick ntwana, you are nothing but, a selfish bastard who cares about no one but himself."

He sneers at me, if Lelo was not present in this room I would punched that smug look on his face.

Zuma: "I care about Nombulelo, that's why I'm here. We have a bond that even you can't break."

I hate to admit it but, he's right. Lelo will be stuck with him because of the baby.

Lelo: "Zuma stop, I will not allow you to speak to him like that. I have no relations with you,

Mbuso is the father of this child. He is a Xaba and will be known by the Xaba ancestors."

Zuma: "Angeke, abakithi angeke bayivume lento." (My people will never accept this.)

He raises his voice in anger. How do I begin to let a man like this near the woman I love?

Lelo: "I don't care, my baby will never know you. He will never know anything about your people, you will have no say over him and I swear if you dare come near me or my family again Zuma, you will see a different side of me that you have never seen before."

I stand in awe of this woman.

Zuma: "Nombulelo don't do this to me please, you can't keep me away from my child. The ancestors will punish him, he won't have a healthy life."

I thought as much, emotional black mail. He takes a few steps as he pleads, I stand before him to stop him from moving any further. His words will not affect Goku, they will blow away like chaff before the window.

Me: "That will not happen to my son, I will adopt him if Lelo lets me."

I twist my head to glance at her, she smiles as she wipes her tears.

Me: "That baby will be a Xaba, he will be introduced to the Xaba ancestors and they will protect him."

He huffs.

Zuma: "I'm not going to allow this."

Me: "I would like to see you stop us."

Lelo: "Get out of here Zuma and don't ever come back."

Zuma: "You will pay for this, ngiyindoda yomZulu mina. I will be back." (I'm a Zulu man.)

His threats don't faze me, I watch him as he furiously marches out.

Lelo: "Mbuso."

She whispers, her tears are back. I take her in my arms again.

Me: "We're going to get through this Lelo, I promise. We will have more tests and I know that you're safe, you're safe my love."

She clings on to my t-shirt while sobbing.

SETHU\*

We're in the car, still parked as my phone rings.

It's Styles.

Ayize: "Answer it."

Me: "My voice is shaky, he'll detect that something is wrong and I know Styles, he'll want to return."

Ayize: "He's bound to find out anyway."

She rolls her eyes.

Me: "He won't find out and you will not say a word to him about this, Styles is going through enough already."

Ayize: "Girl please, let the man take care of you."

She grabs my phone, it's too late to stop her.

Ayize: "Mr. S."

Who would she leave that chirpy voice with?

Ayize: "Miss me already?"

She giggles, I side eye her and she sticks her tongue out.

Ayize: "No, I'm okay."

I thought the phone call was for me.

Ayize: "That's exactly what I'll do, you can count on me Mr. S."

For what?

Ayize: "Really? Oh come on."

She laughs out loud, having me clog my ears.

Ayize: "My thoughts exactly, we seem to have a lot of things in common."

What is Styles saying to her that has her blushing and giggling like an idiot.

I gesture that she puts him on speaker, I want to hear this conversation. She frowns at my motion as her eyes dramatically show her vexation.

Ayize: "No, she's driving. She can't speak to you at the moment."

She's a good liar, I should take notes.

She winks at me before her jaw drops.

Ayize: "You want me to put her on speaker?"

I shake my head negatively.

Ayize: "Okay."

Ayize though, she doesn't agree so easily. Why give in to him like this?

Styles: "Kitten."

His voice makes my heart stop.

Me: "Hey, are you there yet?"

I try not to sound shaky.

Styles: "Yeah, we just arrived."

Me: "How is Neo?"

Styles: "We haven't seen him yet, Randall has a migraine. He's been throwing up, they had to book him."

I hear the sadness in his voice.

Me: "Is he going to be okay?"

Styles: "We're waiting for the doctor. How are you?"

He dismisses the topic.

Me: "I'm okay."

I lie.

Styles: "Where are you? Are you home yet?"

The questions begin.

Me: "No..."

Styles: "Why not?"

Where is this coming from?

Me: "We're on our way Styles."

I respond almost immediately, he's suddenly too cautious.

Styles: "I'm sorry, I'm just worried about you."

Ayize mimes that I should tell him, I shake my head.

Ayze: "Tell him."

She yells, my sister has no filter.

Styles: "Tell me what?"

If I tell him, he will worry and want to return. His friend needs him more at the moment and I

cannot be selfish.

Me: "That I miss you."

Ayize rolls her eyes.

Styles: "Is everything okay Sethu?"

Must he be this smart?

Me: "Everything is okay, I promise. Look, we just got home and my father is waiting at the gate. Can we talk later?"

I lie, it's the only way I can get rid of him.

Styles: "I'll call you."

Me: "Bye."

Ayize: "Bye Mr. S."

Styles hangs up, I think I'm a terrible liar.

Ayize: "Umjolo ngiyawesaba. Amanga Sethu?" (I'm scared of relationships, such lies Sethu?)

Me: "You don't understand, his friend needs him."

Ayize: "If you say so, let's go. Hitler and his wife are probably anxious."

She states as she starts the car.

To be continued...





NOMBULELO\*

Mbuso and I got tested before we left the hospital, waiting for the results was torture. Those were the longest thirty minutes of my life. I am thankful for this man who held my hand through everything, Mbuso has proved to me time and again that he's here for the long run. I don't know how I will ever thank him.

The results came back negative, I was thrilled.

Mbuso: "I hope you're thinking about me."

He exclaims as he puts a glass of juice on the counter before me, he's preparing something for lunch. I'm sitting on bar stool while watching him do what he does best.

Me: "I was thinking about how lucky I am to have you in my life."

He gleams.

Mbuso: "I'm flattered honestly."

He places his arms on the counter and leans over to peck my lips, not a norm but, I'll take it.

Me: "Really?"

He nods and goes back to his pots.

Me: "Mbuso."

Mbuso: "Yeah."

He responds while engrossed on his cooking.

Me: "I think I'm ready to tell my family about you."

He raises his eyes and they fall on me.

Mbuso: "You are?"

This comes as a surprise to him.

Me: "Yes, I don't want to hide you anymore. I want to tell my uncle about you."

Mbuso: "Are you sure?"

He ambles back to me.

Me: "When I lost everything, you were the only one that stayed and the only thing that made sense. You became my safe haven, my family should know the man that saved me and brought me back to life."

He places his hand on mine as he looks into my eyes.

Mbuso: "I'm game for whatever you decide. What about Goku? Will you tell them who his real father is."

I haven't thought that far, I want Zuma to be nothing but a distant memory.

Me: "They have to know but also that, I want nothing to do with him, he won't be part of our child's life and my family will have to respect that. I know they are big on tradition but this is my choice and I will stand by it."

Mbuso: "I will stand with you."

He puts a smile on my face with his words.

Me: "Thank you for standing by me."

Mbuso: "Thank you for letting me."

He leans over to kiss me, we're lost in this moment until I smell something.

Me: "Your food is burning."

He kisses me as I speak.

Mbuso: "Yes, it's on fire."

He smiles against my lips, I slightly push him off.

Mbuso: "What happened?"

The confused look on his face is witty.

Me: "The food."

I point to the stove and he swivels and grunts.

Mbuso: "Oh shit."

He cusses as he runs to attend to them, leaving me snickering.

STYLES\*

I have been pacing up and down this hallway, waiting for news regarding Randall.

Nkomo: "Hey. How is he?"

I meet him half way as he approaches.

Me: "I don't know, the doctors are doing some tests. He was struggling to walk when we got here."

Nkomo: "Do you think it's food poisoning?"

Me: "I doubt it, he didn't eat anything today."

Nkomo: "Maybe it's something he ate last night."

Me: "Think Neo, if that was the case then everyone at home would be sick. Chioma confirmed that they are all okay."

Nkomo: "You spoke to Chioma? Did you tell her about him?"

Me: "I don't see the need to worry them."

Nkomo: "Seriously Styles, this is careless of you. What if something happens to him? Don't you think you should inform his family?"

He utters and I can't understand why he's suddenly upset.

Me: "Nothing is going to happen to Randall."

Nkomo: "You don't really know that, I know, you regard him as your brother but he has a family and they need to know what's going on with him."

Me: "What's your problem Nkomo? Since when do you care about him?"

He takes up a look of annoyance as he grimaces at me.

Nkomo: "I'm trying to make you see reason here."

He mumbles.

Me: "I know Randall, he wouldn't want his family to see him like this."

He scratches his head.

Why is he agitated?

Nkomo: "Fine, we'll do it your way then. We'll wait till he dies then, inform his family. My opinion doesn't matter so, whatever."

He complains, I know what I'm doing.

Me: "He is not going to die."

Nkomo: "You said it yourself that, he couldn't walk when you got here."

He squelches, I can't imagine Randall dying. He can't, his life has just started.

Me: "Let's hear what the doctor says first."

He shrugs as he gives up on trying to convince me.

Me: "How is Neo?"

He frowns at me and shakes his head in disapproval, I wait for him to respond but he doesn't.

"Randall Okolie?"

The doctor announces as he approaches.

Me: "Yes. How is he?"

Doctor: "Mr. Okolie is in a critical condition but we can't detect anything wrong with him, the results came back negative."

Me: "That's impossible doc, something is wrong with him."

Doctor: "I suspect food poisoning, which explains the vomiting."

Me: "You're a doctor, you're supposed to know your story not suspect."

I raise my voice at him.

Nkomo: "Styles calm down."

Doctor: "I understand your anger sir, we're doing more tests. In the meantime, what we can do is wait."

He says.

Doctors should know everything. Why is this one clueless?

Me: "Can I see him?"

Doctor: "Sure."

He leaves us with that.

Nkomo: "I think it's time you make that call to Amara, don't say I didn't warn you Styles."

Dammit Randall, you can't do this.

AMARA\*

Ife is teaching Liyana how to bake cookies, the kitchen is a mess. If Chioma were to walk in and find this place like this, she will freak out. I can't say I know my way around the oven so, I opted to prepare lunch for everyone.

Liyana: "Are we going to give papa cookies too?"

She's helping her aunt mix the ingredients while I'm standing in front of the stove trying to cook a lot of things at once.

Ife: "Oh sweetie, papa won't eat these cookies."

Liyana: "Why?"

The poor child sounds disappointed.

Ife: "Well, papa wants a different cookie."

She shoots me a silly look as she gives an answer.

Me: "Ife?"

My mind is quick to grasp what she's saying.

She laughs.

Ife: "It's true."

She continues to laugh, I see she's having a field day at my expense.

Me: "I should ask Chioma to smack that mouth of yours."

She giggles.

Liyana: "Which cookies does he want Ife?"

Me: "Liya baby, these are fine, okay? Your father will love them and you know why?"

She shakes her head.

Me: "Because you made them."

An innocent smile flashes on her face, Ife is still entertained by her stupidity as she mixes the batter.

Ife: "This reminds me of my mother, she loves baking. We used to do this every Sunday morning before everyone woke up, the aroma of her baking made that house feel like a home."

She has a certain spark in her eyes as she speaks of her mother.

Me: "How is she?"

She smiles.

Ife: "She's alright, can be annoying sometimes and a drama queen but, I wouldn't trade her for anything. Did brother tell you that he's half Nigerian and half Ghanaian?"

What does he tell me? He doesn't speak.

Me: "No."

Ife: "Mother is Nigerian hence the native names."

Me: "Do you have an English name?"

Ife: "I do and I hate it."

Me: "What is it?"

Ife: "That name belongs on my birth certificate and that's where it should stay."



She states.

An unexpected suspicion sneaks up on me, it's that feeling when you feel something is not right but you can't put your finger on it.

Me: "Ife, call Randall."

Ife: "What?"

She hurries to me as she sees the worry on my face.

Me: "Something is wrong, call Randall."

I utter softly so not to alarm Liyana, she's very sensitive with her father.

Ife: "Nothing is wrong with Brother, we would know by now if something had happened to him."

Why is my sixth sense urging me then?

Me: "Please Ife, for my sake. I won't stop worrying until I hear his voice."

She washes her hands in the sink before she attends to my request.

Ife: "He's not answering."

Calm down Amara.

Me: "Try again."

I watch her as she listens to the ring tone, I can hear it, that's how loud the volume is. She shakes her head.

Ife: "He's not answering."

I think she's also starting to worry.

Me: "Try Styles."

Ife: "I don't have his number, let me ask Chioma."

She stops at the entrance as she starts to march out of the kitchen, there's a man standing before her and Chioma is standing next to him.

Ife: "Mkhonto?"

She gasps, before they engulf each other in an intimate hug. This is the man Randall warned her to stay away from.

SETHU\*



Me: "You know a little help would be nice?"

Ayize hasn't lifted a finger to help me in this kitchen, I am slaving alone for god-knows what. The parents are in the living room, we haven't been told why we were called here. I wish I didn't care like my sister but, them not saying anything only adds up to my anxiety.

Ayize: "They prefer your cooking, mom doesn't eat my food, remember. She says I don't cook like I'm going to be someone's wife one day."

Mom expects too much from her, sometimes I feel the pressure that they put on her.

Me: "Well, I think my sister is the best cook, I love your cooking."

Ayize: "You're my sister, it's your job to boost my ego."

She pushes her hand in her bag and comes out with an already open beer bottle, takes a few sips and pushes it back in. That's what she's been doing, drinking from the bag while stuck on that chair.

Me: "True, it's also my job to tell you the truth and this is the truth, you can cook. Another truth is that you should put that away, dad is around at least respect him."

Ayize: "Don't start sis' wam, I need this if I'm going to face those two." (My sister.)

She waves her hand, I'm wasting my time here.

Ayize: "Your mom probably has a speech ready for me, I can't face that woman sober."

Me: "For what it's worth, you're the best sister and my favourite. Don't tell the girls I said so."

Ayize: "I better be your favourite."

She takes another short trip into her bag and indulges on a long sip.

Ayize: "Where are those chipmunks anyway, I haven't seen them yet."

Me: "Playing next door."

I notice that she's busy with something on my phone.

My mom walks into the kitchen, this has Ayize hiding her face.

Mom: "Sethu go cover your head, the guest is here."

Me: "What guest mom and why do I have to cover my head? Did someone die?"

Ayize laughs, she's awarded a nasty glare.

Ayize: "Sorry."

She snorts.

Mom: "Wena? Is this the life you chose? Drinking yourself silly? You're a girl Ayize, act like one. Girls your age are married, they are taking care of their husbands while you're busy kissing a bottle all day."

Ayize: "At least I'm kissing something."

She mummurs, mom heard her.

Mom: "This back chatting will not get you anywhere my child."

Ayize: "Mama please, let me live my life."

Mom: "You call this a life Ayize?"

Once she starts, there is no stopping her. Ayize hates it here, she hates being told what to do. Mom and dad continue to drive her away with their constant complaining and their dictatorship.

Ayize: "It's better than being tied down by a man."

She retorts, they really don't see eye to eye.

Mom: "You will remember my words one day."

Ayize: "And I will thank you for them."

Mom shakes her head, she has been defeated by her thirty year old daughter. She walks to the stove and opens the oven.

Mom: "Sethu, add more chicken in the oven. This is not enough, the guest should not starve."

We're back to the guest? Who is it?

Me: "Okay, mom."

Ayize: "Yes Sethu, listen to your mother. You will make a man happy one day."

The sarcasm in her tone.

Me: "Really?"

Mom: "Go clean yourself up wena."

Ayize nods, rudely. I don't know where she gets it from. She has always been rude, I like how she doesn't take nonsense from anyone.

Mom: "Sethu, finish up and change out of those jeans when you're done. Wear a dress or something."

She orders before striding back to the living room.

Ayize: "That woman needs a life."

Me: "She has a life, she's a teacher and she's married with kids."

She huffs.

Ayize: "Boring."

Me: "Who do you think the guest is?"



Ayize: "Your mother is playing match maker sweetie."

She laughs.

Me: "What do you mean?"

Ayize: "You'll see, let's go get you ready mam'fundisi." (Pastor's wife.)

She drags me away, my mother is up to something. A dress and a head wrap? That's church couture, she always has something up her sleeve.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

100\*

RANDALL\*

I cannot recognize my surroundings. I'm at a remote place, standing in front of a river, waiting for something and my mind can't recall what that thing is. The sun is up and it's very hot, the birds are singing and I can hear the sound of the water splashing against the rocks.

I have a feeling I was summoned to this place, I don't want to be here. Something compels me to turn and I see my grandfather walking up to me, he has a sad look on his face. One of someone who is mourning, he stops before me.

Okolie: "I have been waiting for you Uze."

He speaks with so much sadness in his voice.

Me: "Where is this nana? What am I doing here?" (Grandfather.)

I ask hastily.

Okolie: "You're safe here Uze."

Me: "Safe from what?"

Okolie: "It's imperative that you remain here Uze."

He emits as he continues to hold the dejected tone.

Me: "No, nana not again. I can't be here, I can't stay here. Amara needs me, my daughter needs me. They need protection, not me." (Grandfather.)

Okolie: "Follow me."

He leads me to an open space where there are two rocks set opposite each other.

Okolie: "Sit."

He points at a rock that is adorned with animal skin, it appears to be of royalty.

Me: "I cannot sit here nana, I am not worthy." (Grandfather.)

Okolie: "The gods found you fit, this has been prepared for you."

He explains, I can't possibly grasp what it would mean if I take up this seat.

Me: "I want to go home."

I dispute.

Okolie: "Relax my son, you will not be bound to this place just from sitting on this throne. You are royalty and should be treated like one."

I trust his words and so I obey his command, he settles down before me on a lower rock.

Me: "Why am I here?"

Okolie: "I tried to relay a message through your dreams but they were stolen the moment you would wake up."

Me: "I don't understand."

Okolie: "I have come to your dreams plenty of times Uze, to warn you of the dangers you're ought to face. But those dreams were wiped out from your memory."

Me: "My dreams are always a little vague in the morning, sometimes I get a headache from trying to recall them."

I explain the past happenings in my life.

Okolie: "This is the only way I could get through to you."

Me: "You tried to kill me?"

He shakes his head.

Okolie: "I didn't do this to you, the maiden who took your hand did. The sickness was put upon you, I just used it to my advantage, to meet up with you. This was the only way, your dreams are not safe."

He speaks of a maiden who took my hand, I fail to recall who it could be.

Me: "Who is this maiden you speak of nana?" (Grandfather.)

Okolie: "The one your father has chosen for you."

He means Ruth.

Me: "What do you mean my father chose her? Was it not the elders who chose her? It's royal custom so, my father was not alone in this decision making."

Okolie: "My son, you have been kept in the dark for far too long and it's time the truth is revealed to you. There is a great threat upon your life and of those you love."

It's not news to me, it's something I have always known.

Me: "You said to keep Amara safe in the dream."

That's the only dream I remember of him.

He nods.

Me: "Who was the woman?"

Okolie: "Ruth Adaeze, they want to get to you through the spiritual route. The spirit realm is more real than the natural and once they get to your spirit, they will be able to do whatever they want with you. You will become their puppet and adhere to everything they say."

I am shaken to the core by this exposure.

Me: "Who are they nana and why did Ruth kill Amara in my dream?"

Okolie: "My son, you only see with the natural eye hence you can't see what people really are, they are people who walk around with daggers in their hands ready to stab you the moment you turn your back."

He goes again speaking in riddles.

Me: "Is it Raven and agya?" (Father.)

Okolie: "Your father, yes. Raven is just a naïve boy who seeks his father's attention and would bend over for him no matter what."

I have noticed this about Raven, I also know that he would never hurt me. If I have faith in anything then it's this.

SETHU\*

Ayize didn't bother changing, she wouldn't hear any of it, she still insists that these people are here for me.

There's a guy sitting on the couch, small body, no sign that he was once bearded. He almost looks like a teenager or could be in his early twenties, say about, twenty three. He jolts up as he sees me and takes up a smile which I fail to return. Here's a stranger smiling at me like he knows me.

Ayize cackles, that's how disrespectful my beloved sister is. Her puzzle has been solved while I'm still trying to figure mine out. Who is this man and why is he smiling at me?

Mom: "What took you so long Sethu?"

She frowns before taking up a smile.

Mom: "Come and sit my child, this is Kwena."

He reaches out his hand to me, I glance at my father who's quietly sitting on his famous favourite chair. I smell a rat here.

Mom: "Sethu, don't be rude. Kwena is greeting you."

I turn back to my mother who now carries a frustrated look.

Me: "Hi."

He wants me to take his hand as he has it stretched out to me, I am not shaking that hand. I might be agreeing to something I don't know.

Ayize slightly pushes me to the side.

Ayize: "Ayize, I'm the big sister. My parents probably didn't tell you about me, I'm the black sheep of the family not something they would boast about."

She shakes his hand without stopping, the guy looks uncomfortable as he tries to pull his hand from her.

Kwena: "Kwena Maja."

He introduces, finally claiming back his hand.

Mom: "Ayize."

She grunts, this woman fails to hide her anger in the presence of visitors.

Ayize: "I thought I should introduce myself since no one will do the honours."

Mom clicks her tongue, I know she has ten pages ready for her and will tell her off the minute this man walks out the door.

Mom: "Sethu, please sit. There's enough space next to Kwena."

This Kwena guy is still smiling at me, I wish he would stop. It's getting creepy and I'm uncomfortable.

Mom: "Ayize, bring us drinks."

Ayize: "Yoh."

She takes my hand and pulls me to sit next to her on a two seater, making sure there's no space between us.

This means she will not be going into that kitchen anytime soon, my mom has killed my sister a million times with that deadly stare and Ayize is not deterred at all.

Dad: "Ayize, you heard your mother."

Ayize: "Yes dad I heard her but I'm sure our guest is not thirsty yet, although he looks it."

She scans his body at her declaration, Kwena chokes on his spit almost jolting up from the chair. He coughs a couple of times before he's stable.

I know pretty well what Ayize means by this means. I nudge her and she shrugs her shoulders, these old people have no clue whatsoever about the insult their daughter just threw at their guest.

Kwena: "Uhh, I'm fine mom, thank you."

Mom?

Ayize and I exchange glances.

Ayize: "Dad, we have a brother?"

This is my sister, she has the poor guy choking again. If he chokes one more time, he will die.

Dad: "Ayize. Usuyahlanya?" (Are you crazy?)

Ayize: "No, dad. It's just that he referred to mom as mom and as far as we know you don't have a son."

I want to laugh, but my mother's scowl does not allow me.

Mom: "This child has a demon."

Ayize: "Hallelujah!!! It's good we have a pastor here. He will pray for me and mom will finally have the perfect daughter she's always wanted."

Okay, I'm done encouraging her. This is getting serious, at least mom will not start a fight in front of the guest. Her reputation is at stake.

Dad: "You will not do this in front of our guest."

Ayize: "But, he is a pastor dad."

She turns to him.

Ayize: "Kwena? Are you not a pastor?"

He nods nervously.

Ayize: "You see, he just confirmed it."

Mom: "My son please, don't worry about her, she's out spoken."

What she means is that she's a disrespectful little demon who needs Jesus, holy water, anointing oil and isiwasho. (Cleansing water.)

Kwena: "It's okay mom, I was a little edgy before she got here. She has helped me relax."

Liar.

Mom: "Do you remember Kwena?"

She's asking me.

I have never seen him in my life.

Me: "No."

Mom: "He grew up a few houses away from us, you two used to play on the streets together."

It still doesn't ring a bell.

I shake my head, this man is sitting across us, beaming, I'm done.



Ayize: "He's the pastor's arrogant son who used to boast about our tithes and offerings and how many cars his father had. I remember, actually he never wanted to play with anyone, he was better than us."

I have accepted her craziness and I am not shocked anymore. Kwena clears his throat as he shuffles uncomfortably on his seat.

Mom: "Baba, speak to your daughter."

She's had enough.

Dad: "Ayize my daughter, please go dish up for us. Your father is hungry, won't you do this for me."

He uses his daddy's little girl tone, I know Ayize wants to roll her eyes.

Ayize: "Okay, Sethu and I will dish up for everyone."

Mom: "Sethu is staying."

Ayize: "Never, so you can throw her under the bus?"

Mom: "What is wrong with you?"

Dad: "My baby please."

He pleads.

Ayize: "Fine."

She whines.

Ayize: "Back up will come."

She whispers in my ear before toddling to the kitchen, I don't know what she means by that but, I know she will not be doing anything in that kitchen.

Mom: "Well."

She sighs in relief, I know what is happening here and it will be a cold day in hell before I consent to it.

Mom: "Kwena, why don't you sit next to Sethu so you can get to know each other. You both are adults and I'm sure you don't need us to introduce you to each other."

Ayize: "Hehehe."

I turn to Ayize's loud cackle, she's in the kitchen clearly, listening in on the conversation.

Me: "It's okay mom, I like my own space."

Mom: "The couch is big enough to accommodate two people Sethu, I'm sure you can share."

It's not big enough for me and this stranger.



Me: "Mom please, don't."

Kwena: "It's okay mom, this view is perfect."

The smile again, I officially hate it.

Mom: "Do you know that Kwena is a youth pastor? He just got his honours in theology and now works full time at the church."

Not that I care but...

Me: "That's nice."

Mom: "It is."

Kwena: "Yes and I have just started with my masters, pretty soon I will be the youngest highly educated youth pastor in Johannesburg. The youth needs young educated people like us to lead them to the right path."

I feign a smile.

"Shumayela mfundisi." (Preach pastor.)

That's Ayize from the kitchen, I wish to see her face right now.

Mom clicks her tongue, Dad is defeated and Kwena, well, let's just say something is keeping him from walking out that door. Any normal person would have ran the moment Ayize opened her mouth.

Whatever these people are planning will not happen.

AMARA\*

How did Chioma let this man in the house, knowing how Randall feels about him?

Me: "Chioma, please take Liya to her room."

Liyana: "But, I want to bake."

Me: "Baby, we'll finish later, okay."

Liyana: "Why?"

Me: "It's lunch time and you need to freshen up first."

She pouts.

Liyana: "Okay."

Chioma takes her hand and I watch them as they walk away before pulling Ife to the side. Mkhonto doesn't seem to like it.





Ife: "What happened?"

Me: "Why is he here?"

Randall was right, he's not the type of man you would take home to meet your parents. He's about the average male height, has a scar at the top of his left eye brow. His eyes wonder everywhere, if I were to cross paths with him at night I would turn the other way. He's wearing dickies pants, a black leather jacket and a black leather bucket hat. He looks way too old for Ife.

Ife: "He came to see me."

Me: "You called him here?"

Ife: "No, I just told him that brother wasn't around, I didn't think that he would come."

Me: "He has to go."

Ife: "What? No."

She frowns at me.

Me: "Ife, you heard what your brother said. No one is to enter this house in his absence, we can't disobey him."

Ife: "We can sit outside, I promise he won't bother anyone. He's a good man Amara, he won't hurt us."

That look on his face doesn't say he's a good man, he's been glaring at us since I pulled Ife aside.

Me: "Ife tell that man to leave this house now."

What will Randall think of me when he finds out that I allowed this craziness in his house.

Mkhonto: "Sis' wami, I'm sorry I didn't mean to intrude. I wanted to see Ife and this is the only way since she's not allowed to leave the house." (My sister.)

He takes steps closer to us, I'm seriously not comfortable with him here.

Me: "I don't think you should be here, the owner is not around and."

Mkhonto: "I know and again, I'm sorry."

Why does he keep apologising.

Ife: "You don't have to be sorry baby, you did nothing wrong. If anyone is to blame it's me."

It feels weird that she addresses him with a pet name.

Me: "What are you doing?"

I whisper to her, she rolls her eyes at me.

Me: "Ife I'm not kidding, tell this man to leave."

Mkhonto tilts his head to the side as if trying to listen to what we're saying.

Ife: "Fine, you're so boring."

She grunts loudly, Mkhonto frowns.

Ife: "I'm sorry but I can't let you stay here, brother will kill me."

He scratches his head.

Mkhonto: "I understand, sis' wami you are a good woman and I respect you as grootman's woman." (My sister.) (Boss.)

He's talking to me. Why is he telling me this? I don't respond, this man should leave this house now.

There's a sudden unsettling feeling in my stomach.

Mkhonto: "You know I'm not a bad person, circumstances in life lead you to do the craziest things. I love my mother and I can't see anything happen to her."

Me: "Ife please, show him out."

Ife: "Let's go Mkhonto."

He's not moving.

Why is he not moving?

I clench my arms against the kitchen counter as panic overtakes me, I have already predicted his actions. The words he speaks and the look on his face give him away.

Me: "Excuse me."

He pulls out a gun as I begin to toddle out, compelling me to freeze in my tracks. I'm trying to stay calm for Liyana but in reality I want to scream out loud.

Ife: "Mkhonto?"

She draws back from him.

Me: "What do you want?"

I try to control my breathing.

Mkhonto: "Like I said, I'm not a bad person but, those people have my mother and they will kill her if I don't deliver you to them."

Ife: "Mkhonto. Why are you doing this?"

Mkhonto: "It's not personal sweetheart, you're a good girl but I need a real woman."

This bastard, Ife tears up instantly.

Ife: "You were using me?"



Mkhonto: "Not using, I just needed a way in. I was desperate and you seemed to be an easy target, I'm sorry skat, it wasn't my intention to break your fragile heart."

Ife rushes to me and throws herself in my arms as she burst into tears. This is not the time to be crying for a man, we're facing danger.

Me: "There are guards outside, if I scream they will come running in. I suggest you leave."

This threat should work, he shakes his head.

Mkhonto: "Those are my boys, they work for me. You think I would come here without a plan? Okolie doesn't appoint his own staff, he leaves it to the head of security. He doesn't even know half of their names and that's when I saw this as an opportunity."

We're standing here in the middle of the kitchen in each other arms, mystified by this strange man who has a gun in his hand.

Ife: "Mkhonto please, don't hurt us."

She pleads.

Mkhonto: "I won't hurt you, I just want her."

He points the gun at me.

Me: "What do you want from me?"

Mkhonto: "Eish, I told you. There are people who have my mother and they want you in exchange for her."

Me: "Randall will kill you when he finds you."

I know this, I have seen him do it. I have seen him kill a human with no conscious, like it was nothing.

Mkhonto: "I know but the time he gets back I will be gone, he won't find me. Those idiots are stupid I must say, they don't know who they are dealing with. I don't care, as long as they give me my mother back."

Running is not an option and where will I run to?

Me: "At least tell me who they are."

Mkhonto: "I wouldn't know, I was approached by a third person."

Me: "You don't have to do this Mkhonto, please think it through."

He shakes his head, highly disagreeing.

Mkhonto: "Let's move sisi, time is not on my side. I have a plane to catch."

Me: "Please don't do this."

I plead as my tears fail me, Ife clings to my waist.

Ife: "No, don't take her."

She cries.

Mkhonto: "Yey, yeey I don't have time for games."

He pulls her from me but Ife refuses to let go.

Ife: "No, please."

Me: "Please Mkhonto, don't do this."

I cling on to Ife for dear life.

Mkhonto: "You're wasting my time."

He grabs Ife, screaming and pushes her towards the sink. He grips my hand and begins to lug me.

Ife: "Amara."

Ife screams as she runs after us, Mkhonto points a gun at her and that's enough to stop her.

Mkhonto: "I wouldn't if I were you."

She's snivelling in fear and I am trying to look strong for her but failing to control my tears.

I spot Chioma at the top of the stairs, she has her hands on her head and her jaw dropped. I shake my head gesturing that she goes back up, Liyana can't see this. She slowly tramples back upstairs.

Ife: "Amara, I'm sorry."

How do I respond to this? She brought this man to the house after her brother told her to keep away from him.

Mkhonto: "Lock the door skattie, you have to keep the bogeyman out. It's not safe out there."

He winks at her, I'm frozen even to the last few seconds before he drags me out. I have been in the face of danger a couple of times before but, this time feels like it's the last of me.

He was right about the guards, there are about four of them. They follow us outside the gate, leaving the place unguarded. There is a Quantum parked at the gate, a driver is already positioned. The engine is running and the car is ready to drive off, this is when it hits me. I have to fight, if he shoots me, he shoots me. I can't go down without a fight. The minute the guards enter the car and scoot to the back seat, I send my hand to Mkhonto's face and scratch him, he groans. This gives me a chance to pull out of his grip and scurry towards the gate. I don't make it as he grabs my hand, pulling me back to him.

Mkhonto: "Hey, are we going to do this the hard way or the easy way?"

He yells at me, I still choose to fight.

Me: "Let me go."

I scream, this is a suburb, the streets are empty. Houses are far from each other, no one will hear me scream.

We struggle outside the car as I fight for my life. He overpowers me and pulls me into the car, it speeds off the moment he shuts the door.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

101\*

RANDALL\*

Me: "What has Segun done and what are they up to with this Ruth person?"

Okolie: "My son has always had a greedy heart, we noticed it from the time he was young. He wouldn't share his toys with his siblings, he hated it when the other children were given attention. He wanted the spot light, it had to be about Segun or else he would go on a hunger strike and your grandmother couldn't take that. She gave him all the attention he sought while trying her best to make the others feel loved as well. Segun was given everything he wanted, we thought maybe this will change him but, he got worse."

That definitely sounds like Segun, selfish and greedy.

Me: "Why didn't you chastise him like every child?"

Okolie: "I did, with a rod. It seemed to fuel his attitude, I lost hope and patience. A time came for him to be adorned king and take over from me, things went smooth for a few years. I was proud, thinking my son had finally changed, little did we know that his greed was lurking amongst us. He had become a merciless ruler who killed people, any mistake done upon him, you would pay with your life. He robbed people of their taxes and had no mercy on the poor. The gods were angry, they wanted him to step down but their decision could not be revoked not even by them. Segun was chosen from his mother's womb that he will rule so their hands were tied."

Me: "What did you do to stop him?"

Okolie: "What was there to do my son? If the gods were helpless, what more could we have done? Their anger fell upon the kingdom, we lost a lot. Money, businesses, our subjects became greedy and would steal from us. Basically, the kingdom was falling. Segun saw the threat that fell upon the throne, he couldn't imagine not being king and have dominion over everything. That led him to the presence of Chief Bensen Adaeze, that man is evil. He's a leader of a blood cult."

Me: "A blood cult?"

Okolie: "Yes, you sacrifice a family member when you join. Your father was desperate not to lose the throne and to him there was no other solution than to turn to Bensen."

I know Segun to be selfish like I said but this is too much for me to grasp, he cannot be this evil.

Me: "Who did agya sacrifice?" (Father.)

Okolie: "Uche."

Me: "What?"

I choke the question out as my heart skips robustly on my chest.

Okolie: "He had to sacrifice the one he loved the most, those were the rules."

Me: "Nana no." (Grandfather.)

Okolie: "Yes Uze."

Me: "I blamed myself for her death all these years, he blamed me, for her death."

What kind of a father does that?

Okolie: "I know and that's not all. For Bensen to agree to help him save the kingdom, a treaty was made between them that, Bensen's daughter will marry the heir apparent. To seal it off, they performed a ritual where you were married off to his daughter."

Me: "Ruth?"

Okolie: "Yes."

Me: "What about the one that was chosen at my birth?"

Okolie: "Adults follow customs because our elders did, we follow in their footsteps, making the same mistakes they did. The next generation pays for it, Ruth is not the one that was chosen for you. There was a woman."

He speaks in past tense.

Me: "You say was?"

Okolie: "She's dead, they killed her. Segun and Bensen killed her to make way for Ruth and her death automatically broke the blood covenant."

He explains.

Me: "Who is Segun?"

I can't believe I am hearing such things about my father.

Okolie: "Your father sold his soul to the devil, there's no turning back for him. You can't face a cult alone Uze, their plan here is that you fall sick and once you're weak, Segun will tell your mother to convince you to go back to Ghana. That it is the only way for you to heal."

Me: "I will never agree to that."

Okolie: "That's what you think, you will want to live for the one your heart yearns for and will agree to anything. And once you're there, they will trap you."

Me: "You can't let that happen to me nana, I can't be their puppet." (Grandfather.)

I plead desperately.

Okolie: "That is why you're here."

He leans to the side and picks up an African calabash.

Okolie: "Drink this."

He hands it to me, I take a peek inside before sending it to my nose to sniff it.

Okolie: "Drink, it will heal you and wash out the poison in your body. This will also give you the strength to face whatever obstacles will come your way."

I brace myself as I take a small sip of this unknown drink, it's tasteless, almost like water. I take a few more sips before a burning sensation fills my chest, I drop the calabash to press my hand on my chest. Grandfather catches it before it crashes to the ground.

Okolie: "It's working, they won't be able to poison you after this."

Me: "Does it have to hurt?"

He chuckles.

Okolie: "You have always been a cry baby, your wife will have a hard time with you."

I shake my head at his prediction, my chest starts to feel normal again. I leer at him to find him staring back.

Okolie: "Don't be too comfortable Uze, you need to stay vigilant, always. Your life depends on it."

He advices.

Me: "What about Amara?"

Okolie: "They want her out of the way, she's their biggest obstacle at the moment. They know that everything you do, you do for her but take heart my son, nothing will happen to your bride."

Me: "My bride?"

Okolie: "The ancestors have approved, she is one with you now."

He nods repeatedly at this declaration.

Okolie: "Don't trust her with anyone and that includes the little princess, your daughter will be fine. The elders are watching over her, Segun will try to use her just to get to you but, you will know how to protect her. A way will be shown to you."

I understand everything he has said so far but I'm still baffled by why I have to be kept here in the meantime.

Me: "I want to go home nana, it's the only way I can protect them from agya." (Father.)

He nods repeatedly again, this time he sends his hand on his bearded chin to stroke it.

Okolie: "You will, a light has been shown to you Uze. You need to open your eyes."

Me: "What?"

I'm confused, my eyes are open.





Okolie: "Open your eyes Uze, open your eyes."

His voice echoes in my ears as if he's far from me.

Me: "Nana?" (Grandfather.)

My mind is disarrayed as I fail to grasp his request.

"Open your eyes Uze, Open your eyes Randall."

Wait! I know that voice, it sounds like Styles. At his request, I gradually open my eyes. His face is the first thing I see, he smiles.

I scan my eyes to find that I'm in a hospital room.

Styles: "What are you trying to do Okolie?"

This is how I am welcomed, I send my hand to my throat to rub off the scratchiness.

Me: "Water."

It's so dry that it feels like a desert in there, he rushes to the table by the window. There's a half-full jug of water and a plastic cup on the side, he fills the cup and marches back to me.

Me: "Thanks."

I say after taking a few sips.

Styles: "You scared me man."

Me: "I scared me."

He laughs.

Styles: "How are you feeling?"

Me: "That question again."

He smiles as he shakes his head.

SETHU\*

I'm still waiting to be told why I'm in here and why I had to change my clothing for this person.

Me: "Dad, I should go help Ayize in the kitchen."

I want to leave this place.

Mom: "No, she will manage. Kwena is here for you."

There it is.

Me: "Why?"

Mom: "Like we told you, Kwena is a youth pastor. He is ready to take a wife."

Me: "What do I have to do with that?"

Dad: "My child, you have found favour in the eyes of this young man. He wants to take you as his wife."

Does this man hear himself?

Where is Ayize when I need her? She's too quiet now.

Kwena: "Yes Sethu, I have been observing you for a while. You're a humbled woman, you're kind and would make the perfect wife for me."

He speaks as if observing someone is a normal thing to do.

I can't believe my parents have put me in such a position.

Mom: "Out of all the girls at church, Kwena has chosen you."

She holds this proud look on her face.

I'm trying to breathe while processing this whole thing.

Kwena: "My father is opening a branch in Limpopo and wants me to lead the flock there so, after we get married we will move to Limpopo and begin our lives there."

He voices out his vision, I'm numb. Ayize walks back in with three glasses of juice, she shoots me a cold stare. I know she's disappointed in me for not saying anything, she places the glasses on the coffee table. Mom is not happy to see her.

Ayize: "You better speak up or else."

She declares softly.

Mom: "Say something Sethu."

Me: "I don't want to disturb your dreams mom, I'll wait for you to finish."

Mom: "What do you mean?"

Me: "Well, you and this man whoever he is, have already written my life."

Mom: "Sethu?"

Me: "No mom, I'm naïve and stupid, right? I can't think for myself, I don't have the right to live my life because I'm your daughter. Dad honestly, I didn't expect this from you, of all people. You're selling me off to the highest bidder?"

Dad: "No one is selling you off Sethu, this a..."



Me: "Marriage arrangement? What did I ever do to you people? I have lived my life obeying your every command, I couldn't follow my passion because you said it wasn't right for me. I have been nothing but a good daughter to you, I played my part but, I am done."

Mom: "Sethu, this is not the right time."

Me: "Then, when is it mom? When is the right time?"

Mom: "I think Kwena should wait outside..."

Me: "No sit, Kwena. This is your parent's house, you belong here."

I sound too calm while inside I am screaming my lungs out.

Dad: "Sethu stop it, there is a time for this and it's not now."

He yells.

Mom: "Listen to your father Sethu."

Ayize takes my hand into hers, she's encouraging me to continue.

Me: "I'm done listening, it's time that you listen to me. If you people think I will agree to this stupid arrangement then you must be crazy, all of you."

Dad: "SETHU!!!"

He jumps from his chair as he barks at me, there's a sudden explosion from outside. It's so loud that it causes us to hunker down.

Ayize: "What was that?"

She's the first to run out the front door, I follow to find a car in flames. It's parked outside the gate, Ayize is standing with her mouth open and her hands pasted on her waist. A few neighbours have come out to witness the scene.

Someone roughly pushes me aside, I stumble almost falling on Ayize. It's Kwena, he's wide-eyed, his hands are on his head and his jaw dropped.

Ayize: "And then?"

I have no idea what his problem is.

Ayize: "Wait! Don't tell me that's your car."

Kwena: "My brand new car, I just bought it."

He reveals in total shock.

Mom: "Who did this?"

Mom is standing next to him, she's in shock as well. Dad is speechless, he stands with his arms folded across his chest.

Ayize: "This is amazing."

She laughs out loud as she claps her hands.

Kwena drops to his knees, he's unable to speak.

Cars do not just explode in the middle of the day, there's no explanation for this.

AMARA\*

I don't know where we're headed, we've been driving on the highway for a while now. I'm sitting behind the driver with Mkhonto next to me, he has a gun pointed at me.

If Mkhonto is delivering me to my enemies then chances are, they will kill me.

Why go to an extent of kidnapping his mother?

It suddenly pops in my head, what would happen if Randall finds me dead and it hurts. I haven't had the chance to tell him that I love him too.

How will he deal with my death? Will he go on to marry Ruth or will he take another woman? Will he love her the same way he loved me or more? Even in my death, I'm too selfish to imagine him with another woman.

Mkhonto: "What's wrong?"

His growl jolts me back to this terrible reality. The taxi has stopped, I peek over to see a road block before us. There's been an accident, there are police cars, a fire truck and an ambulance at the scene. There are cars parked on the road and citizens observing the accident scene, some look distressed while others are taking pictures. It seems a taxi collided with a small car and both the vehicles are damaged severely, both are in flames.

It's a fatal accident, no one would've survived that crash. I scan my eyes to see three bodies in body-bags. The paramedics are helping the injured people while the police officers go back and forth, inspecting the sight.

Driver: "I think there's been an accident."

The driver speaks, he sounds too calm for someone who's caught up in a kidnapping while there are police officers blocking the road. I flinch as Mkhonto presses a gun on my waist.

Mkhonto: "If you dare scream I will shoot you."

He states and I know one blast will easily send me to my death, his eyes are cold and lack emotion.

Driver: "Grootman, what happened?" (Boss.)

I raise my head as the driver speaks, there's a police officer standing by the window. He has dreadlocks that fall on his shoulders, they are dangling on the side of his face, almost hiding it.

"There's been an accident, you know how these taxi drivers drive. No offence."

The officer says, having the driver chuckle in return. I think he's trying to play it cool so they don't get caught.

Driver: "Offence is taken not given grootman." (Boss.)

Mkhonto has become restless.

Mkhonto: "We are in a hurry, please clear up the road."

The officer looks at Mkhonto, then at me. I try to gesture with my eyes that I'm in danger, if I scream, this man will shoot me with no hesitation. The police man is staring and I'm thinking he's getting it until he turns his attention back to the driver.

Officer: "It will take a while, my boys are on it."

Mkhonto: "We can't wait, do your fucking job and clear this road."

He shouts, the officer raises his brows and smirks at him.

Officer: "That's the plan."

He says, Mkhonto clicks his tongue.

"Bozza, what's going on?" (Boss.)

That's one of his men in the back, Mkhonto turns his head to speak and the driver twists and aims a gun at him. The police officer winks at me as my jaw drops.

"Bozza." (Boss.)

I hear one of the men yell, Mkhonto swiftly turns back, the driver doesn't give him a chance to do anything as he puts a bullet through his temple and he falls back on the chair. I cover my ears at the loud piercing sound of a gunshot, his blood is splashed all over. The sight of it makes me want to gag, I hold my breath to stop myself from throwing up.

I press my hands against my ears as a shooting launches in the taxi. I'm in a sitting position, unable to bend due to the fear that has me paralyzed. The driver sends his hand to pull me down, this time I'm able to grasp my surroundings.

The door is open and there's a man standing here, he's shooting at the men in the back seat. I raise my eyes to see Nkomo. I was lost in terror that I didn't see him open the door, everything happened so fast. The officer is calmly standing next to him as if nothing is happening. I hold my breath as everything falls into silence, the guards must be dead.

Driver: "Get up."

The driver instructs, I slowly raise myself and glance at the ghastly blooded scene. It's nauseating, I have never seen so much blood in my life. Mkhonto's men are lying dead, the taxi is riddled with bullet holes.

I glance at Nkomo, I have no clue what's going on. I don't know what intentions this man has for

me, my heart feels like it's about to jump out of my ribcage, my palms are sweaty and my mind is scrambled.

Nkomo: "You're safe now, Amara."

How do I know this?

I know him and Styles were on the same team that day at the hospital, maybe I am safe. He reaches his hand out to me, I ogle at it. I don't know if I should take it.

Nkomo: "Let's go, or you want to keep these dead men company."

This is risky but, I take his hand anyway and pass over Mkhonto's body.

He shuts the door as I step out.

Me: "What's going on? Please take me home."

I plead, just in case he has devious plans for me. I don't know these men, Nkomo sees me glaring at the officer and the driver who are now standing before us.

Nkomo: "Don't be afraid, we're here to help you. Styles sent us."

I feel a sense of relief and security at the mention of his name.

Nkomo: "This is Kenneth."

He points at the officer with the dreadlocks, he has them tied in a ponytail now. He nods, his demeanour is that of Randall when I first encountered him. He retains a dark mysterious aura, it has the hairs at the back of my neck standing. He towers over all of us, almost the same height as my Randall.

Nkomo: "And this is Siphon."

He points at the driver who smirks at me. He's wearing a pantsula outfit from head to toe. You'd think he's going to a dance competition, he's about the same height as Nkomo. He could be in his mid-twenties if not early.

Nkomo: "Let's go."

Me: "Where are we going?"

Nkomo: "To Styles."

Me: "I have to go home, my baby is alone. There are no guards there and..."

I think of Liyana, she must have heard the screams or seen Ife's distress.

Nkomo: "Don't worry, the house is surrounded."

He starts leading me to a white van, I twist my head to my left to inspect the accident scene. My eyes widen as I see people packing up as if there was a movie scene, the people I thought were dead are folding the body bags. The bystanders are laughing and chatting with the paramedics as they clean up the section. While the police remove the dead bodies from Mkhonto's taxi, this

was all an act. They faked an accident just to stop Mkhonto, I turn to look at Kenneth who is walking along side me. He glances at me.

Kenneth: "Styles is one clever bastard, don't you think?"

Styles did all of this, he went to so much trouble to save me.

Me: "How did he know?"

I ask as we jump into the van, Siphon takes the driver's seat, Kenneth settles on the passenger's seat while Nkomo and I ride at the back.

Nkomo: "Chioma called me, she couldn't get a hold of Styles and Randall. I was on my way to joburg from Pretoria. I called Styles immediately, luckily I found him. We had to think of something quick. The first thing he said was 'I have a plan' and I knew it was done."

Kenneth chortles lowly it's almost inaudible.

Kenneth: "When that man says I have a plan, you know shit is about to get real."

Siphon chortles, I have no clue what they are talking about. But, Styles seems to be a Brainiac. These people are not normal citizens who work a 9 to 5 job, there's more to them than meets the eye.

Me: "Where is Randall?"

Nkomo glances at me.

Nkomo: "He's with Styles, he doesn't know what happened."

How come he doesn't know what happened if he's with Styles.

Me: "Is he okay?"

Nkomo: "He's fine."

I feel a sense of relief, knowing that he's fine brings me peace.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

102\*

### STYLES\*

I'm with Neo in his hospital room, I'm standing by the window while he's busy on the laptop. Randall went to sign release forms. You can't say he almost died, the man looks perfectly fine.

Me: "Is it done?"

I'm on the phone with one of my guys, who I appointed to do a job for me.

"Yes, it was so easy, no one saw a thing."

Me: "Good, that will teach him never to look at my woman."

"Sho ntwana, it was nice doing business with you." (Okay boy.)

Me: "Till next time."

I turn to Neo, he's shaking his head as he glares at me.

Me: "What?"

Neo: "Did you have to bomb the poor guy's car?"

Me: "He's lucky I didn't bomb the car with him in it. He had the nerve to picture a life with Sethu."

I received a message from Sethu's phone, it was Ayize telling me that Sethu was attacked at the mall and there was a pastor at the house who came to ask for her hand in marriage. This angered me and I had to do something to get him out of there, I will make him forget he ever laid his eyes on Sethu.

Neo: "Love makes people do the craziest things."

He declares, he's been on the laptop for a while now.

Me: "I want to keep him busy, I want him to go from one job interview to another that he won't have time to think about Sethu. Wipe him clean, every cent he has transfer it to any charity you see fit."

Neo: "Daddy will help him."

Me: "He won't have the money to do so, they rip people off at that church. We are going to shut it down."

Neo: "Done."



He closes the laptop, I take it from him and place it on a table.

Me: "Great, we'll see what insurance will pay for a car that never existed. I will have him cleaning toilets. How dare he think of marrying my Sethu?"

Neo: "Uyinja Stylos." (You're a dog.)

The head shake again.

Me: "You think I'm a dog? Wait till you see what I do to Tshidi."

Neo: "Eina." (Ouch.)

He flinches as he touches his body.

Me: "What is it? Are you in pain?"

Neo: "Yes, you mentioned her name and I felt pain where she burnt me."

I laugh and he makes a face. I knew he would joke about this.

Me: "You're insane."

Neo: "That witch, I hate her Stylos."

Me: "I hate her too, at least she didn't burn your face."

Neo: "Hey, if I didn't duck Stylos. My beautiful face, nahana. That's what she was aiming for. Tshidi is evil, I have to get custody of my son." (Imagine.)

Me: "Where is he?"

Neo: "He's with my mother."

Me: "I will find her Neo and she will pay for this."

Neo: "Eish yah neh, bophelo." (Life.)

He sighs, this bothers him.

Neo: "What about Amara? 'Na le eena rea tsoana, same WhatsApp group. Bophelo bo re bontsa lintho." (She and I are the same, life is showing us things.)

Me: "She's on her way here with Nkomo."

Neo: "Le mang? Stylos, do you trust Nkomo with her?" (With who?)

Me: "Yes, I know Nkomo is still trying to prove his loyalty. He will do anything, he cares about Randall and is determined to win him back completely."

"Who is winning me back?"

Randall stands at the door.

Honestly, you wouldn't say he was at death's door. He saunters in, I won't tell him that Amara is

on the way with Nkomo and Kenneth, he will freak out. I should let them get here first.

Me: "Nkomo."

I laugh at his reaction.

Randall: "Why is he winning me back?"

He sits.

Neo: "That man loves you Uze. He wants to prove himself worthy of your friendship."

Neo makes it sound weird, Randall's frown grows.

Randall: "I forgave him the day we went to rescue Amara. That doesn't mean we are best friends."

Me: "Well, I'm glad that's how you feel. My title still stands in this brotherhood."

He chortles.

Neo: "Maybe I should leave the room and give you two space, seeing that I am not wanted here."

He complains.

Randall: "You're no longer in pain right? You can talk now."

Randall mocks him, forcing a smile on Neo's face.

Me: "I think Khethu attacked Sethu today."

I say randomly, they frown at me.

Me: "She was attacked at the mall, someone wanted to burn her with acid."

Randall: "It's definitely Kethu."

He still hates her.

Neo: "Stylos, she wanted to burn her face. Yoh, I can't imagine Sethu's face disfigured, she's such a putsununu man. She's so innocent." (She's adorable.)

Me: "That was clearly her goal."

Randall: "Is Sethu okay?"

Me: "She's fine, I have to go back. She needs me."

Randall: "Nkomo can stay behind with Neo."

Neo makes a face due to Randall's suggestion.

Neo: "Shame."

Me: "You won't be alone, at least."

He doesn't like the thought, he still thinks Nkomo is into witchcraft.

Neo: "Ke sharp, mme waka o tla nketela. (My mother will visit me.)

He whines, it's funny.

SETHU\*

Kwena is outside the gate making calls, I don't know to who, probably his insurance company. He's still grieving for his car as if it was his whole life. I think it's time we wrap this up, I want to go home.

Me: "I'm leaving."

Mom: "Sethu don't go."

She grabs my hand as I begin to walk, Ayize pulls it away from her.

Mom: "What the hell is your problem?"

She shouts at Ayize.

Ayize: "You're my problem mama, days of controlling my sister are over."

Mom: "She is my daughter and you cannot tell me how to raise her."

Ayize throws her head back and laughs.

Ayize: "Raise who mama? Sethu is an adult. She's bloody 25, let the girl live her life and stop suffocating her."

Dad: "Ayize!!!"

He barks at her.

Ayize: "Dad, dad please."

She yells

Ayize: "How can you people not see your mistakes? You're abusing this child, I am tired of sitting and watching."

I see Ginger and Mbali run through the gate. It must be the noise that brought them here, it's embarrassing that the neighbours are watching, some even came out wearing morning gowns at this time of the day. That's how nosey the neighbours are here.

Mbali: "Sis Sethu."

The fighting must be scaring them.

Me: "Hey. Why did you come back?"

Ginger: "Why is sis Ze fighting with mom?"

Me: "You guys go inside, I brought you something. It's on your bed."

Mbali: "But, I want to stay here with you sis Sethu."

Ginger: "Me too, I want to see if mom will win this fight."

This child.

Me: "Ginger?"

She shrugs her shoulders as she folds her arms across her chest with an attitude, I see a little Ayize in her.

Mbali: "It's because she's always arguing with mom as well."

Mbali reveals, my mother seems to have anger issues.

Dad: "Ayize, you will not talk to my wife like that."

Ayize: "Okay, fine. I am taking my sister and we are leaving. Sethu will not step foot here until you two get help. Clearly, whatever it is you have is toxic."

Mom: "Ayize shut up, shut your mouth."

She shouts.

Ayize: "Never, if I don't tell you there's something wrong with you, who will? No stranger will tell you the truth and listen to me, if that short shit pastor of yours comes anywhere near my sister, I will castrate him. Sies, are you not ashamed of yourselves? The only thing I saw in that so called pastor's eyes was lust and my sister is too naïve to have noticed."

Dad: "You can't be my daughter, my child would never speak to me like this."

He states with a low tone, Ayize rolls her eyes at him.

Ayize: "Pity, I look like you. I will protect my siblings from you people, I will not let them suffer like I did."

What does she mean? What did they do to her?

Mom: "What is that supposed to mean Ayize?"

She shouts.

Ayize: "You know damn well what it means, you have failed as parents. You failed with me and you have failed with Sethu. I can only hope that Mbali and Ginger do not face the same fate we did."

She yells back, her voice is cracking and I can tell that she's pushing back her tears.

Me: "Ayize, let's go."

I take her hand but, she doesn't move.

Dad: "I never thought I would see the day where my own child would turn against me."

Dad sounds so disappointed.

Ayize: "I never thought I would see the day, my own parents would turn against me."

Okay, they definitely did something to her.

Mom: "You have a demon Ayize, I should take you to church with me."

Ayize: "Oh please, hiding behind the bible mama will not make you a better parent. Does your church know what you did to your child? Do they know that you..."

Mom: "AYIZE!!!"

She grabs the back of her neck as she presses her other hand on Ayize's mouth. Ayize tries to push her off but, mom is big and my sister has lost weight that she almost looks like a teenager. Clearly, she's not strong enough to fight back.

Ginger and Mbali are crying now, I want to take them inside but, I can't leave my sister with these people. They seem to have done something to her and mom doesn't want her to reveal what it is.

Dad: "Leave her mama."

Dad commands, I see tears fall from Ayize's eyes and this has my tears show up as well.

Me: "Mom, let her go."

So much hatred is painted on this woman's face, this is her child. I grab her waist and pull her away from Ayize who wheezes at the first grasp of freedom.

Me: "What are you doing? She was suffocating."

I hold Ayize's shoulder, while she catches her breath.

Ginger: "I hate you mom, I hate you."

Ginger screams at her and runs to the house crying, Mbali follows her. Mom wants to run after them but something keeps her from moving an inch.

Dad: "Oh, my daughter."

Dad only speaks now, this whole time he was watching his wife attack this daughter he speaks of.

Mom: "You demonic child, how dare you try to ruin this family."

She continues to insult her.

Ayize: "The fruit does not fall far from the tree, I am my mother's daughter after all."

Mom: "Get out of my house."

She points at the gate.

Me: "If Ayize leaves this place, I'm going with her and you will never see us again."

Dad: "No, no. No one is going anywhere."

Mom: "Baba, I want her out of my house."

She raises her voice at him, she has never raised her voice at her husband.

Ayize: "Sethu, go get your bag we are leaving this place."

Dad: "No, Ayize don't leave like this. I am not losing my daughters."

There's desperation in his voice.

Ayize: "Too late dad, you lost me years ago when you chose not to fight for me."

She speaks of this again, it leaves me wondering what it is they did to her. Mom's hatred towards her runs deep, there is a story behind it.

I run to the house and grab my bag on the kitchen counter. I come back to find Ayize opening the gate.

Mom clicks her tongue and marches back into the house.

Dad: "Sethu my child please, speak to your sister."

Me: "Goodbye dad."

Kwena: "Sethu, can I call you?"

He rushes in as he sees us approach Ayize's car.

Ayize charges at him.

Ayize: "You stay away from my sister, kortess." (Short man.)

She pushes him and he staggers back almost falling, we jump into the car and drive out of the gate. What has happened to this tight knit family? We were once happy, although Ayize was never around. I always wondered why she visited once a year after she moved out. I don't know the beef she has with our parents but I know that I will follow her to the ends of the earth.

RANDALL\*

Neo is getting better, I know this because he hasn't stopped blabbering.

Me: "I think we should get going Styles, it's getting late."

Noe: "I see, now that you have a woman you rush to get home."

This is why I say he's healed. Styles is laughing at Neo's stupid comment.

Me: "What?"

Neo: "I'm just saying oga, there was a time when you would go home around 12am. Now you can't wait to get home, shame on you."

Styles continues to laugh.

Styles: "His bed is warm now, don't hate Neo."

Neo huffs.

Me: "Let me see those wounds Neo, I think you're faking an injury."

I pull the bed sheet, he grabs it.

Neo: "If you want to lose your appetite, open these bandages. That woman did a number on me, she was definitely sent by the devil. I have never screamed so much in my life, I wanted to die. All I could think about was that, I am not ready to be a dlozi, yeyi ho monate lefatseng." (I'm not ready to be an ancestor, life is good.)

Styles chortles as he shakes his head.

Neo: "That witch ran, I was in so much pain that I couldn't drive. A lady from next door brought me to the hospital, I couldn't think of anything else but the pain."

Styles clenches his teeth as he turns his head towards the window, he's hurt by this.

Me: "Why did she attack you?"

Neo: "She was leaving with my son, their bags were packed and she said that I will never see him again. She will tell him that his father died, that made me angry. The argument started, she was doing most of it. She would shout at the top of her lungs without a care in the world that, our son was in the room.

I didn't care about arguing with her, I wanted to take my son and get out of there. At first he had a confused look on his face, he didn't understand what was going on until Tshidi the dragon raised her voice and started getting violent with me, that's when he cried. I picked him up to take him away from her till she calmed down but she grabbed his hand, pulling him as if he was a bag of rice. I had to let go because he was screaming, she was hurting him."

He clamps his teeth, trying to suppress his anger, Styles' face has changed. The more Neo tells his story the angrier he gets.

Neo: "I didn't see it coming, I just felt this liquid wash over me. I don't know how I ducked or my ancestors pushed me but my handsome face was saved. It took a few seconds to register that I have been burnt with hot liquid. The more my mind registered it, the more the pain intensified. She left the child behind, I ran outside looking for help that's when the lady came running. I didn't scream, I lied about that part."

He has me smiling with this last confession.

Me: "Thankfully it didn't do much damage."

He smiles, Styles is now busy on his phone. He holds a serious expression.

Neo: "I said it, it's the ancestors."

Styles: "Randy, there's something you need to know."

He says out of the blue, I glance at him as I wait for him to speak.

Styles: "Don't freak out okay."

Me: "What is it?"

Neo: "Just agree that you won't freak out Uze, nna kea kula ha ke balte drama mona." (I'm sick, I don't want drama here.)

Styles: "Amara is here."

Me: "No, she's at home with Ife and Liya."

Styles: "No, she's at this hospital and she'll walk through that door any second now."

I'm confused.

Me: "Styles explain."

He narrates the story to me.

Me: "Ife will have it from me, I swear that girl will give me grey hair."

How can she be so stupid?

Styles: "Take it easy on her, she's a child."

I expected this from Styles.

Me: "She is not a child, her actions speak otherwise. I am sending her back home tonight, Neo please book the latest flight to Accra. Chioma will go with her, I don't trust her to travel alone."

I hand him the laptop.

Neo: "I should visit Ghana one day, maybe I will find myself an African queen."

He decides to go off topic.

Styles: "You should do that, you seem to have bad luck with the ones here."

Neo: "Tshidi is not a queen, she's a snake."

He growls, I'm still on the part where Amara's life was at the hands of Kenneth.

Me: "Styles you trusted Amara with Kenneth?"

He frowns at my sudden question.





Styles: "He's my friend, he might be part of a brotherhood but Kenneth doesn't roll like that. He is one loyal bastard."

I still don't trust him.

Me: "You said he's part of Segun's cult that makes him an enemy."

Styles: "That doesn't make him his friend. If Kenneth was an enemy he wouldn't have brought her here."

He's right, I suddenly feel an urge to see her. I shouldn't have left them alone.

Neo: "People will turn on you in life, Mkhonto is the same man we were dodging bullets with kwa Mkhize. Who would've thought that he would turn the gun on us?"

Styles: "He was desperate."

Me: "That doesn't excuse his actions, he should've approached us like he did when Mkhize asked him to work with him."

Neo: "I give you my yes oga, there is no excuse for betrayal."

Me: "Do you know who sent him?"

Styles: "I suspect Segun, who else could it be. And from what your grandfather said, Ruth could be in it too. That Bensen idiot hasn't entered the country."

Neo: "He shouldn't think of it, we burn witches here a re dlali." (We don't play.)

Styles: "He wouldn't, he doesn't do his dirty work. Segun and Ruth are there."

I'm still stumped by this fact.

Me: "How did you get the driver to turn against Mkhonto?"

He smiles as he pulls a seat.

Styles: "Sipho Mndeni, he and Kenneth are like you and I?"

He laughs as I frown at his statement.

Styles: "He's just an ordinary driver at some company. He runs errands for them as well. The day I found out Mkhonto was messing around with Ife, I approached Kenneth for help. You had too much on your plate, I didn't want to stress you. We came up with a plan that Sipho will approach Mkhonto for a job and have him spy for us. Mkhonto must've kept the abduction to himself, he knew we would be on to him if word was out. Sipho informed Kenneth and when Kenneth called me, Nkomo had told me everything. I made calls with the help of Kenneth. We staged this big car accident, Mkhonto was hard core but he wasn't clever."

He chuckles.

Me: "I wish I had drilled his body with bullets, that son of a bitch."

Neo: "You like killing people Uze, ke hore o bua ka eona ka passion." (You speak about it with

passion.)

He snickers.

Me: "The medication has gotten into your head."

Neo: "Eish I feel like a junkie, all I can taste are pills."

Styles: "What is it that you don't complain about?"

Neo: "Niks." (Nothing.)

The door flings open, Amara is standing there with Nkomo.

Neo: "Jesus, I'm healed."

He declares upon seeing Amara.

She smiles as her eyes find me and toddles in.

Amara: "Randall."

I notice how exhausted she looks as I meet her half way. She throws herself in my arms.

Amara: "I was so worried about you."

This should be my line.

Me: "Why would you worry about me? Are you okay?"

Amara: "I'm fine now, you're with me."

She says.

Neo: "Yey Iona, this is not the cast of the Bold, there are sick people here who need attention."

I thought I had gotten used to him but, I was lying to myself. I pull away from her arms as she laughs at Neo's exclamation.

Me: "Attention from who? Where is your mother?"

Styles laughs and pats Neo's shoulder.

Styles: "Don't worry Neo, I will give you all the attention you want."

Neo: "Hai a re e tlohele Stylos." (Let's leave it.)

He whines having Styles laugh at his retort.

Me: "Me hemma." (My queen.)

I cup her face as I peck her lips and pull her in my arms again.

Me: "I just want to hold you."

I declare while placing a lingering kiss on the crook of her neck. I almost lost her again, I have

been too lenient on my enemies.

Neo: "Yoh hai kee, I give up."

He complains, I glance at Nkomo as he stands next to Styles.

Me: "Thank you."

He nods.

Neo: "U sebelitse Khomo ntwana rea leboha." (Good job Nkomo, thank you.)

Nkomo is now used to Neo calling him a cow, he's lost the will to fight.

Styles: "Where's Kenneth?"

Nkomo: "He's outside with Siphon."

Styles: "I should go see him."

He ambles out with Nkomo, I pull Amara back in my arms as I hold her tight.

Neo: "Uze maan. Hai tsek, tsoang mona." (Get out of here.)

This has Amara laughing, the sound of her laugh puts a smile on my face.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

103\*

NTOMBI\*

Tebogo agreed to drop the charges, Jonas says she wants me to pay for the damages. I have to pay with one cow. Where on earth will I get the money to buy a cow?

Me: "And you agreed bhuti?" (Brother.)

I'm asking the obvious, we're in his car on the way home. I was afraid that I would spend another night in jail. This man always comes through for me, I wish he would do the same where Moses is involved but he will not lift a finger.

It's right after 6pm and it's getting dark outside, I'm tired. I want to go home, take a long bath and sleep. Maybe also give Moses that long awaited hug, I don't like the way I left him that day.

Jonas: "I had no choice that woman is smart, I thought beer would enchant her but she wanted more. Those people hurt her pretty good Ntonto, she had a broken jaw, a fractured rib and internal bleeding."

Me: "But I didn't lay a finger on her bhuti, they did. Why did she get in the way anyway?" (Brother.)

He gives me a brief glare, he's not pleased with my words.

Jonas: "She was standing up for her friend, you would've done the same for her."

I don't know if I would've risked my life for someone.

Me: "Bhuti, you know work has been slow lately. I've been struggling financially because I took an unpaid leave to take care of Moses. Tebogo is just greedy."

Jonas: "Maybe it's time you went back to work."

Me: "Who will take care of Moses in my absence?"

Jonas: "Mashoto is there."

Me: "Ini?" (What?)

He's crazy.

Jonas: "It's time that you accept her presence, I thought she would run after seeing Moses' condition and how difficult he can be but, she's still around. She baths him, feeds him and..."

Nonsense.

Me: "Bhuti Jonas ngiyacela tu, stop it. UMoses ngowami, I refuse to share him." (Please, Moses

is mine.)

Jonas: "I'm just telling you what I've observed while you were gone."

I don't care, that man is mine to take care of. Not some home wrecker who thinks she has a claim on him.

Me: "Where does she sleep? Don't tell me that she sleeps in my bedroom."

Jonas: "Hayi, angazi. I don't observe such things." (I don't know.)

He pulls up and parks the car.

Me: "Thank you bhuti, for everything." (Brother.)

I send my gratitude before scurrying out of the car.

Jonas: "Ntombi, don't start any fights in there."

He yells after me.

It feels good to be home, I walk in to find everyone gathered in the living room. Mhambi is engrossed on my TV as usual and yes, I'm still complaining. Petunia is right next to him, they give me quick looks before turning to the screen. That witch Mashoto is sitting next to my husband, she rolls her eyes upon seeing me, places her dirty hand on his head and begins to brush it. Moses shakes his head while pushing her hand away, he appears to be irritated by it.

There's an aroma that welcomes me, it gets my mouth watering and I'm reminded that I'm actually hungry. I hate to say this but, I missed Petunia's cooking.

Moses: "Ntombi."

He smiles, he's only seeing me now. Mashoto pulls him back down as he tries to stand. She must not have heard about me, I can be crazy when I want to.

Moses: "Hayi suka wena." (Move.)

He pushes her and rushes to me, Moshoto clicks her tongue. I'm not thrown by that glare she's giving me.

Moses: "Ntombi ubuyile? Where did you go?" (You're back, Ntombi.)

Me: "I'm back Moses."

He takes my hand, let's forget about that hug. Seeing him next to that woman killed the urge.

Moses: "Uyabona ukuthi awulaleli, ngithe unгахambi Ntombi. Wena wakhetha ukulandela amadoda, amabili futhi. Usuthanda amadoda Ntombi?" (I told you not to leave but you chose to follow two men. You like men now Ntombi?)

There's no use in hoping for his recovery.

Petunia: "Kazi siyophumula nini?" (When will we get a break?)



I don't care about her, Mhambi hasn't acknowledged my presence.

Moses: "Come and sit down. Zulu is also here, don't talk to him, uyangihlukumeza umfowenu. I think it's time he goes back to his house, we don't have space here, kugcwele abo Petunia."  
(Your brother is giving me a hard time.) (Petunia is all over this house.)

Jonas walks in just as Moses declares, it pains me as I am reminded of my husband's situation. It's time I call Zodwa.

Jonas: "Don't look at me, nami angazi." (I also don't know.)

Petunia: "Bhuti, you're back? Can I get you anything to drink?"

The woman of the house speaks.

Jonas: "Cha, ngiright." (No, I'm fine.)

She gets up to make space for him and settles where Moses was seated right beside Mashoto.

Moses is still pulling my hand towards the couch.

Me: "Moses, I don't want to sit. I need to take a bath."

Mashoto: "Moses come sit next to me."

If looks could shoot out daggers, she would be dead by now.

Moses: "Moshoto awume, uNtombi wami usebuyile." (Wait, my Ntombi is back.)

Ntombi: "Yes, I'm back and I'm not going to leave you alone again."

I make sure to look at her as I announce this, she clicks her tongue.

Petunia: "You brought us trouble bhuti Jonas." (Brother.)

She's the second to leave my house after Mashoto.

Moses follows me as I tread to our room, I'm shaken by the muddle before me. The bed is unmade, there are clothes lying on it and on the floor. The room is stuffy and it smells. As I start to inspect, I realize that these are not my clothes. They are Mashoto's, she turned my house into her father's place.

Me: "Moses, what is this?"

Moses: "Mashoto is lazy Ntombi."

He shakes his head as he lies down on the bed.

I will show that witch today, I gather all her clothes, put them in a plastic bag and drag it out. Everyone looks at me as I head to the kitchen, there's a perfect spot outside at the corner of the house. I dump the clothes there, run back to the kitchen to grab a box of matches and paraffin. I pour it over the clothes and set everything on fire. I wait until every single one of them is engulfed in fire, before I plod back into the house.

I guess no one can smell the smoke, they are all watching TV. I fold my arms across my chest as I watch them, Petunia is the first to wiggle her nose, trust her intrusive ass to detect smoke.

Jonas: "Something is burning."

Me: "Something is burning alright, it's that witch's clothes. Next time you enter my room, I will burn you, sfebe." (Bitch.)

She's the first to jump up and run outside, Petunia follows while Mhambi and Jonas remain seated. Jonas looks disappointed.

Jonas: "Why do you like trouble, Ntombi?"

Me: "I will not tolerate nonsense in my house."

I click my tongue as I march back to my room, Moses is standing by the window talking to himself or my brother. I don't know, I'm tired.

SETHU\*

Ayize hasn't stopped sniffing since we left our parent's house, I don't know how to console her anymore. It hurts me to see her like this. I tried to speak to her a while back and she silenced me by raising her hand. I don't want to invade her space.

She pulls up at the gate, the security guard opens it and we drive in. I'm not sure I'm comfortable with this silence anymore. In this piercing silence, we exit the car and take a lift to the second floor. The sniffing has stopped, now she has her jaw clenched, I think anger has taken over the pain.

Me: "What do you want eat?"

She doesn't respond but goes to the bathroom, I decide to make us coffee. Yes, coffee. I have come to love it, thanks to Styles, speaking of him. I miss him, I haven't spoken to him since this morning.

"You're making coffee?"

Ayize walks into the kitchen with these words, I meet her eyes before she hides them. She's been crying again, I don't like this.

Me: "Are you okay?"

She nods without turning to me.

Me: "Please talk to me, I'm here for you."

Ayize: "There's nothing to talk about."

She's holding a pot while playing with the lid, I think she's trying to distract her mind so, she

doesn't think about the pain.

Me: "What happened back there Ayize? Those things you said to mom. What did they do to you?"

Ayize: "Come on that was the alcohol talking."

She denies as her voice quavers, she's going to cry.

I engulf her in my arms, she's a bit taken back and it takes a while for her to hold me back. The pot crashes to the floor, we don't pay attention to it. The hug starts off as a soft embrace, before her arms tighten around me. Her sniffs turn to loud painful sobs that have me crying as well, I know that I need to be strong for her but, my heart breaks at the sound of her cries.

She sinks down to the floor with me wrapped around her, I lay her head on my chest and gently stroke her back.

Me: "I've got you sis, let it all out."

I don't know how long we've been like this, she's quiet now. We have fallen back into another silent moment.

Ayize: "I'm hungry."

She states randomly as she moves out of my arms. She pulls me up with her.

Ayize: "I see, hanging around Mr. S, has made you clingy."

She jokes, running her eyes away from me.

Me: "I'm not clingy."

She laughs as she opens the fridge, this is how she hides her pain, through jokes and sarcasm.

Ayize: "Your fridge girl, no man, awuswabi? There's only water and tomatoes." (Aren't you ashamed?)

I laugh at her comment.

Me: "I haven't had time to buy groceries, I'll do it tomorrow."

I don't think I can stomach going out alone, after what happened today.

Ayize comes out with a can of beer, this can't be her life.

Me: "Don't you think we should eat first?"

We haven't had anything since morning.

Ayize "I'll drink while you cook."

She gulps it down like it's water.

Me: "I was thinking, we should order pizza."

She makes a face, she hates the idea.





Ayize: "I'll go with whatever you get."

Ayize doesn't eat much, this could be the reason behind her weight loss. She used to be anorexic, she would overeat and vomit just so she doesn't gain weight. She told me that it began when she was bashed by her peers for being fleshy, she started by starving herself and measuring the portions of food she consumed.

I managed to get her to eat for my sake, only to find out that she would binge. She'd stick a toothbrush down her throat to force the food out.

That's when I figured out that it was deeper than the bullying. She can't suddenly hate how she looks, her self-esteem had dropped to a zero.

AMARA\*

Randall pulls up at the house and I realize that the drive back home was short. I still cannot believe that I am here beside him, if it were not for Styles, I don't know where I would be right now.

Me: "Please don't be hard on Ife."

I say as we jump out of the car.

Randall: "Not even you can save her from me, I had mercy on her when she fooled around with that man. Then she dared to bring him to my house, my house Amara, where my daughter is. She put everyone's lives in jeopardy."

His anger will not subside until he actually tells her off.

Me: "She was wrong, she thought him to be a good man."

Randall: "Good man or not, Ife disobeyed me. I will not take such disrespect from her, I am sending her back home."

He starts to walk towards the house, I pull his hand. He stops and turns to me with a puckered brow.

Me: "She went through a lot today Randall, at least be kind to her."

Randall: "What did she go through? She's not the one who was held at gun point and abducted. Ifeanyi needs to be disciplined."

I hope he's not talking about thrashing her.

Me: "You're going to hit."

His glower grows, he turns and marches to the house. I'm a few steps behind him, I have to make sure that he doesn't hurt the girl.

Randall: "Ifeanyi."

He calls her as he spots her on the couch with Liyana and Chioma, her eyes are puffy and red.

Liyana: "Papa."

Liyana runs to Randall, he takes her up in his arms and places a kiss on her forehead.

Randall: "How are you my princess?"

Liyana: "I'm fine, Ife and I baked cookies for you."

Randall: "You did."

Liyana: "Aane." (Yes.)

He smiles at her as he squeezes her cheek, the sound of her sweet giggle fills the room. Randall is trying hard to hide his anger, Ife looks terrified. She's fiddling with her hands while her head is dropped.

Me: "Liya baby, won't you greet me as well?"

With a smile on her face she leans over and kisses my cheek, she refuses to leave her father's arms.

Me: "I will take that, next time I want a hug too."

She giggles and hides her face on his shoulder, I see him gesture to Chioma that she takes her.

Randall: "Go with Chioma princess, papa wants to speak to your aunt."

He places her back down, she's sulking but she doesn't say anything.

Chioma: "I'm glad you're okay."

She puts her arms around me, I hold her back.

Me: "Thank you so much Chioma."

I mean it, she smiles before taking Liyana and walks away with her.

Ife: "Kose kakra brother." (I'm sorry brother.)

She's crying.

Randall: "Don't think I will be lenient with you because you're using Akan, I'm very disappointed in you Ifeanyi."

Ife: "I didn't know brother, I thought he..."

Randall: "You thought he loved you? How can you be so careless Ife? How do you bring that man into my house?"

Ife: "I'm sorry."



She wipes her tears, at least he's not shouting at her. His voice is firm though.

Randall: "You've been saying that and it hasn't changed anything. Do you see what your stupidity birthed, Ife? Amara was taken, she could've been killed. Do you realize that?"

Ife: "But she wasn't, she's fine."

Randall: "You still backchat? I'm talking to you and you're giving me an attitude."

He growls at her.

Okay, he's getting angry.

Ife: "I'm sorry."

She drops her head, throws herself on the couch and folds her arms across her chest with the same attitude he's complaining about. She hates being reprimanded.

Randall: "Get up, I'm not done talking to you."

He snaps.

Ife: "I'm tired brother, please."

She mumbles

Randall: "This is why you're like this, I let you get away with anything."

Ife: "What did I do brother, it's not my fault that Mkhonto turned out to be a bad person."

She throws her hand as she raises her voice, I want to intervene but, Ife won't listen to me.

Randall: "You think you're clever abi? Go pack your bags, you're going back home. Your flight leaves at 10pm." (Right?)

Now, she gets up.

Ife: "You can't force me to leave, I'm not going anywhere."

She keeps the attitude, Randall shakes his head before marching up the stairs.

Ife: "Where is he going?"

I think she knows hence the question.

Me: "He's serious Ife, the ticket is booked. I think he's going to get your bags."

Her eyes fall out and swell up with tears.

Ife: "Brother."

She yells as she hurries after him, I trail behind. We find him pulling out a suitcase.

Ife: "Brother stop, I don't want to go back home."

She rushes to him, grabs his hand but, he yanks it away.

Randall: "You put my daughter's life in danger Ifeanyi, you put Amara's life in danger and you think it's not a big deal."

He barks.

Ife: "I didn't know."

He takes her clothes out and tosses them on the bed.

Ife: "I'm sorry brother, please."

She scream cries.

Randall: "Chioma, please pack these for me."

Where did she come from? I didn't see her come in.

Ife grabs Chioma's hand to stop her.

Chioma: "Ife, you were warned and you did not listen."

Chioma can be rough sometimes.

Me: "Maybe you can come back some other time Ife, take a break from all of this."

She shakes her head in disagreement.

Ife: "Please don't send me away."

Randall: "Chioma is going with you to make sure that, you don't run away. I don't trust you."

Ife sits on the bed and sobs, Randall is not moved at all. He takes his phone out, scrolls a bit and puts it on speaker.

Ife: "Who are you calling?"

She questions him upon hearing the ring tone.

Randall: "Your mother, she needs to know that you're on your way back home."

She's given up fighting.

"Private number hello."

Okay...

Randall: "Mother."

There's silence from her side, I don't know about Randall's facial expression, I think he's nervous.

Randall: "Mother?"

Soft sobs evade from the receiving end.

Mom: "Randall? My son?"

She sounds shocked.

Randall: "Yes, mother."

Mom: "Oh my son, I never thought that I would hear your voice again."

She's crying.

Randall: "I'm sorry."

He clamps his teeth, he's fighting back his emotions.

Mom: "I was angry with you all these years that, when Ife came there, I refused to speak to you. My anger has left me after hearing your voice."

Randall: "Mother, can I call you later. I called to let you know that I'm sending your daughter back, please meet her at the airport. There will be an elderly woman accompanying her. Don't be alarmed mom, she's my guardian."

Mom: "Okay, what has Ife done?"

Randall leers at a sobbing Ife.

Randall: "Ask her, you're on speaker."

Mom: "Ife, my baby."

Ife: "Mom."

Mom: "What have you done?"

Ife: "Nothing."

She mumbles.

Randall: "She will fill you in when she gets there, please keep an eye on her."

Mom: "I will do that, you need to call me Uze. I need to see your face. Do you have beard now? Your voice has changed, you're a grown man. Send me pictures of you and your daughter. Your father tells me that you have a beautiful little girl."

His face lights up.

Randall: "Her name is Liyana."

He responds.

Mom: "I want to meet her, I can't come there for now. Please come home Uze, let your mother see you."

He hardens his face at her plea.

Randall: "I have to go, I'll call you later."

Mom: "Okay my son, don't forget to send me the pictures."

Randall: "I will, bye."

He hangs up, glares at Ife and walks out. I didn't expect this kind of attitude from Ife, I thought she would be sorry.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

104\*

SETHU\*

Ayize is back to her bubbly self, she's playing loud music and dancing on the table. I think it's time that we talk about what is eating her up.

I turn the volume down.

Ayize: "And then?"

Me: "It's too loud, the neighbours will complain."

I lie, people make noise here almost every night.

Ayize: "So? It's not our fault that their lives are boring."

She turns the volume back up and continues dancing.

Me: "We need to talk."

I howl, hoping she hears me through the noise.

Ayize: "I can't hear you, the music is loud."

She yells back, dancing her pain away. I know this is what she's doing, she tries anything that will make her numb. I have to turn this thing off.

Ayize: "Stop being boring, Sethu."

My act has her browned-off.

Me: "I'm worried about you."

Ayize: "Don't be, I'm fine."

Me: "You're not fine, tell me what's wrong."

Ayize: "I can't, it will bring back the wounds. I have buried them so far deep."

She sits and grabs a glass of wine from the table, I snatch it from her.

Me: "You have had enough for today."

Ayize: "Don't mother me Sethu, I don't need it."

I make myself comfortable next to her.

Me: "You're hurting and I want to help, I won't let you find solace in a bottle."

Ayize: "You know if your parents cared about me, like you do, I wouldn't be here. I would be far in life."

We're getting somewhere.

Ayize: "My life wouldn't be messed up like this. You're lucky to have Mr. S, you know that?"

We're shifting now.

Ayize: "Someone who would do anything and everything for you, I have seen it in the way he looks at you. You gave him a love portion, didn't you?"

Me: "No."

She titters.

Ayize: "Unamanga, umdlisile." (You're lying, you fed him a love portion.)

We're back to where she hides behind the jokes.

Me: "Imagine doing that besides, he's so smart, he'll smell it before it reaches his mouth."

She giggles as she sits back on the couch.

Ayize: "You got yourself a little Einstein."

Me: "It's scary I tell you, I can never lie to him, he'll see right through me."

Ayize: "It's fine, lie to him wena girl. Men need you to lie to them, they'll think you don't love them if you don't."

That's a myth.

Me: "You're kidding right?"

She smiles.

Ayize: "Yes, don't listen to me. This advice is only reserved for my enemies. I want you to promise me something."

We have moved to making promises, I doubt I will get her to say anything.

Me: "What is it?"

Ayize: "Let him love you, he's ready to give you the world, take it. You don't have to hide anymore baby, not all men are the same. There are good men out there and Mr. S is one of them."

She proclaims, I haven't seen her this serious in a while.

Me: "Mr. S told you all of this?"

She cackles at my question.





Ayize: "I'm a good judge of character, life is too short sethu, allow yourself to be loved. You are not what Ntokozo said you are, you are not the scars on your body. You are not defined by a failed relationship and you're not what the likes of Lebo say you are. She's miserable and would say anything to you so, she feels better about herself. She's intimidated by you and the strength you carry."

I can't grasp why she's giving me this advice but, it has put these tears in my eyes.

Ayize: "You're a strong woman."

I shake my head, I beg to differ.

Me: "I'm not strong, I don't feel strong."

Ayize: "Strength doesn't have to be a physical thing, it's here."

She places her hand against my heart.

Ayize: "...in your heart, and it shines out from you. It's in your will to fight, being able to wake up in the morning and face the world even after it has hurt you. Being able to smile through your pain and hope for a better tomorrow. That little hope that nudges you sometimes, telling you that hey, it's going to be okay. You're a victim Sethu but, you're also a survivor. You made it through the toughest battles in life, you conquered. Any woman who can do that, is a rock, you're my rock."

I stifle a sob, her words have made me so emotional that I can't control my tears.

Me: "Stop, you're making me cry."

She's crying too.

Ayize: "And you're an ugly crier."

I laugh through my tears.

Ayize: "I need you to know this, appreciate what has been given to you. Embrace it and live life like it's your last day on earth. Love hard and strong but, don't go in it blind. Men can be stupid sometimes."

She snickers while wiping her tears.

Ayize: "They can also be evil."

I know this, first hand.

Ayize: "That small percentage with halos on their heads, only a few find them and you my sweet innocent sister, have been blessed with one. Don't lie to him Sethu."

Me: "I doubt I can lie to him."

She disagrees with me.

Ayize: "You're lying, remember what happened this morning at the mall? You lied to him about it."

Me: "That wasn't a lie, I just didn't tell him the truth."

Ayize: "That counts as a lie, don't start off with secrets. Tell him what is bothering you, tell him if he has hurt you or if he's being selfish. Tell him if he's annoying you, tell him when you're hungry that man better feed you and mostly, tell him if you're horny."

Her contagious laugh has me laughing too, Ayize can't be serious for too long.

Me: "You are too much."

She smiles.

Ayize: "I want you to be happy, to love and be loved. Just because someone's son hurt you, it doesn't mean that we should hate all men, it won't be fair to that one percent who are good."

Me: "One percent?"

I'm honoured by the sound of her laughter again.

Ayize: "Yes, your father is a man. Mr. S is a man. We can't punish them because of the monsters out there, who do not know how to value a woman."

I nod, I've stopped wiping my tears. They want to be in control anyway.

Ayize: "Let go of the past and start that healing process, if it means you tag him along with you to therapy, then do it. If talking to someone doesn't do it for you, there are other therapeutic ways. In your case, you love putting ingredients together. Get in that kitchen and cook until you feel better, then call me and I will come and eat the food."

Me: "You don't eat."

She gives me a warm smile and takes my hand.

Ayize: "For you, I will. Promise me, you'll heal."

Me: "If you promise that you'll do the same."

She sighs.

Ayize: "I'm not good at anything so for now, a glass of wine will do."

She states, rubbing her tears away.

Me: "I don't want to hear that."

Ayize: "I know."

Me: "And you should know that I'm here, we will take this journey together. Go to therapy together."

She takes my cheek into the palm of her hand.

Ayize: "You're so innocent you know that?"

Where is this coming from?

Me: "Please."

Ayize: "I'm tired, I'm going to bed."

She states as she plods to her room. The plan was that she tells me what's wrong but she ended up advising me.

AMARA\*

Ife and Chioma are gone, it's a good thing Liyana was sleeping when they left, she would've cried for Chioma. I decided to have an early night, I'm getting ready for bed while Randall is checking up on Liyana.

Me: "How is she?"

That was quick, he's different tonight. His eyes keep searching his surroundings, he also mentioned something about getting rid of the guards outside because they can't be trusted.

Randall: "Sleeping."

He throws himself on the bed, it's a funny scene.

Me: "You're tired?"

Randall: "Very."

He sits up and glances at me with a soft frown. I'm right across the room, fiddling in the drawer.

Randall: "What are you doing?"

Me: "Looking for my night gown."

Randall: "Weren't you wearing one a while ago?"

Me: "I spilled coffee on it."

I can be clumsy.

Randall: "Am I lucky or what? This will save me the hassle of having to undress you."

I look at him and he wiggles his brows with a naughty smile.

Me: "Whatever you're thinking, forget it."

Randall: "Hey, don't burst my bubble. You know the power of attraction?"

I stop and turn to him.

Me: "Attraction?"

Randall: "Yeah, I used the law of attraction to get you and look where you stand today."



Me: "I don't know about that but, I doubt that's what happened."

Randall: "That's exactly what happened. Who would've thought that you'd be sleeping in my bed one day?"

He is so sure of himself.

Me: "Okay, Mr. Okolie. Tell me how this attraction works."

Randall: "It's called the law of attraction me hemma, you tell the universe what you want and believe that you've received it but, it doesn't end there. You have to visualize that you already have that thing and find that feeling of acquiring it. You know the feeling of finally obtaining that thing you've always wanted. Let it stay with you and you will have whatever it is you want." (My queen.)

Me: "So, you visualized me in this room with you at this moment?"

It's good to see a genuine smile on his face.

Randall: "Yes, the difference is that you were naked in this bed and in my arms."

This is funny, he glowers as I hoot with laughter.

Randall: "You don't believe me?"

Unable to give an answer due to my uncontrollable tittering, I agree by turning my head.

Randall: "You know I'm dead serious right? This thing works..."

Me: "Okay, I have heard you Mr. Attraction."

I think I like this side of him, something must have happened in Pretoria. Whatever it is, it's working in my favour.

Randall: "Come to bed, I'm sleepy."

He whines and this is a first.

Me: "Use the law of attraction to lure me there."

He gives out a quick laugh at my retort, this is definitely a new Randall.

Randall: "Or, I can use the quick route and come get you there."

Me: "I need my night gown."

Randall: "Wear anything you find there."

Does Liyana know that her father sulks like she does?

I pull out a pair of thick pyjamas, he grimaces as I throw them on.

Randall: "What's that?"

Me: "It's anything, you said to wear anything."

I state while toddling to the bed.

Randall: "No, that's a blanket."

He rejoinders, this has me snickering.

Randall: "How do we cuddle when you're already wearing a blanket?"

Me: "We won't cuddle then."

I settle on the bed beside him, he scoots closer and lays his head on my lap.

Randall: "I need to feel your skin on mine, and this is getting in my way."

His riposte is accompanied by an inspection on my garment.

Me: "You can visualize."

Randall: "I will never hear the end of this, I should have kept my mouth shut."

Me: "No, you were right in telling me. Now, there will be more visualizing and attracting and stuff."

He smiles up at me, before accepting a heavy sigh.

Me: "What's on your mind?"

I'm hoping he will open up.

Randall: "A lot of things, our lives. When will we ever be at peace? I'm tired of fighting."

I know how he feels, it's exhausting.

Me: "Battles are not meant to last forever, we will get to the other side, one day."

I place my hand on his chest as I brush his head with the other.

Randall: "Hopefully soon and I'm worried about life."

He reveals what's on his mind.

Me: "I think she will be fine."

Randall: "I don't know, she's rebellious. I'm afraid that she'll go astray, she has no one to guide her. Mom is always busy with her duties that she won't entertain her."

Me: "Isn't there someone who can keep an eye on her?"

Randall: "No, my aunts have their own children to deal with."

I know how it feels not to have a guardian, my aunt never bothered to care for me.

Me: "Maybe Chioma can stay with her for a while."

Randall: "I'll have a word with her. I need to sort this thing out with Segun, I need to get him off our backs."

I almost forgot about him and the supposed wife.

Me: "Do you think he will finally bend."

He huffs.

Randall: "That's Segun, he doesn't bend for anything."

Me: "What will you do then?"

He stares at me with a puckered brow, I send my fingers to straighten it and he sniggers in return.

Randall: "Marry me."

He blots out, this comes as a shock.

Me: "What?"

He brings his body up to a sitting position and takes my hand.

Randall: "Yes, let's get married."

Me: "Where is this coming from Randall?"

It's so sudden.

Randall: "My heart."

Me: "Don't you think it's too soon? We just started and these obstacles..."

Randall: "Are we not fighting the battle together?"

Me: "We are."

Randall: "Then let's do it as a married couple, I want this me hemma." (My queen.)

His eyes tell me that he's serious.

Me: "Can we wait?"

Randall: "For what?"

Me: "I don't know, time. What about Ruth?"

My question changes his mood within a blink of an eye.

Randall: "We don't even know this Ruth person, she is nothing to me. You're the one Amara, it's you that I want."

This is overwhelming and I want this too but, not now.

Me: "I want to marry you but, it's too soon. I want to study and be something in life. Not just a house wife, I have dreams too."

This is not the vision I had for my life, I need to fulfil my dreams.

Randall: "I'm sorry, I didn't think about that."

He looks disappointed, he really wants us to get married.

Me: "I'm still here."

Randall: "What do you want to study?"

Me: "I want to be a news anchor."

He takes up a frown.

Randall: "Really?"

Me: "Yeah, it sounds far-fetched, doesn't it?"

Randall: "No, it's actually amazing. I can already see you there."

His words have me smiling as a picture of this dream is painted in my mind.

Randall: "You should go for it, me hemma, we'll look it up once our lives are normal. I'll support you with whatever you want to do." (My queen.)

Who is this man and where is the withdrawn Randall?

Me: "Thank you."

He puts his head back on my lap.

Randall: "So, how long will it take for you to do this course?"

Me: "Four years."

He jolts up, glares at me with a shocked expression.

Randall: "Four years? I will have to wait four years before you become my wife?"

I laugh at his reaction.

Me: "It's not that long."

Randall: "It's not, it's a lifetime. We should do that thing they do in relationships, what do they call it?"

Me: "Compromise?"

Randall: "Definitely."

Me: "I could probably work with that."

Randall: "Okay, let's start now. Listen, I want twelve."

Me: "Twelve what?"

Randall: "Kids."

I have heard it all but, this.

Me: "From who?"

Randall: "You, who else?"

Me: "Oh Randy, it's not going to happen. You can visualize them if you want."

He sniggers at my quip.

Randall: "What have I done? The next thing you will tell me to visualize making love to you."

It's funny the way he says it.

Me: "That could work."

Randall: "That's a dangerous game to play."

He leans over and buries his face on my neck, I stifle a scream when he bites a small part. It's a pleasurable pain, though. He pulls back with a scowl.

Randall: "Why did you scream?"

Me: "You bit me."

He simpers looking pleased with himself.

Randall: "And you liked it, right?"

I nod sheepishly.

He goes back to kissing my neck.

Me: "We should sleep."

Randall: "I think we should start practicing on making those babies, twelve is a big number, me hemma. We have a long way to go." (My queen.)

He has me laughing with delight.

STYLES\*

Sethu opens the door after three knocks, I would think she was standing at the door waiting for me. She smile frowns upon seeing me, this is definitely a surprise. The plan was to spend at least three days in Pretoria.

Sethu: "You're here?"

Me: "I'll pretend that you're happy to see me and try not to boast about it."

I should come here more often if I will be welcomed with such a warm laugh.



I drove straight to her apartment, I had to see if she's okay. I envelop her in my arms as she lets me in, her scent fills my nostrils reminding me that this is my favourite place to be.

Sethu: "What happened? Why are you back so soon?"

Me: "Neo is recovering pretty well, I don't know why he's still in the hospital. Knowing him, he wants attention. But, I would rather give all my attention to you."

Sethu: "Does he know you're bashing him behind his back."

She laughs the words out.

Me: "I made sure to let it all out, before I left the hospital."

Sethu: "What a friend you are."

Me: "I know right, he is one lucky man to have a friend like me."

Sethu: "Oh no! Styles, your head is literally expanding. Careful with the ego, you're pumping it. We don't want your head to explode now."

She throws me into a guffaw with her remark.

Me: "Haven't you heard? Men are selfish with their egos, we need boosting from time to time."

Sethu: "So, there's no one to boost your ego for you? I mean you're working hard at this?"

This is what I love right here, the talkative Sethu.

Me: "I'm still waiting for you to do it, in the meantime, I'll sweat. It's okay."

She cackles with laughter.

Sethu: "I'm glad you're here Styles."

She proclaims as she leads me to the living room, we plop down on the same couch.

Me: "Where is your sister?"

Sethu: "Sleeping."

I cradle her cheek in my hand and steal a kiss, she doesn't respond. This makes me want her more, I gently bite the seam of her lip to wake her. She moans softly and I feel her lips move. I place my hand on her waist to bring her closer to me.

I place my other hand, pulling her down with me as we take each other's lips one at a time. I'm lying flat on my back, my legs touching the floor while she's on top of me. I can feel her lips trembling as we engage in this slow single-lip kiss. I have nothing on my mind but, the need to hold her, to have her in my arms and breathe her in.

She gradually runs her fingers through my hair, it's a soothing feeling that puts me in a comfortable position.

Me: "Hi."



My salutation plants a reticent smile on her face.

Sethu: "Hi."

She diffidently hides her face on my chest.

Me: "You know I missed your face more than the top of your head."

She pushes her head up, not abandoning the bashful look on her face. I love how her fingers have found a home on my hair.

Sethu: "I thought we agreed there won't be any kissing anytime soon."

Me: "That was before some idiot set his eyes on you."

I wasn't planning on telling her but she has to know that I will fight for her.

Sethu: "How did you know?"

Me: "A little birdy told me."

Her mouth falls open.

Sethu: "Ayize told you? I saw her fiddling with my phone, I didn't think that she was texting you."

Me: "I'm glad she did. Would you have told me if she hadn't?"

She drops her eyes, there is a reason behind her shyness towards men. Lebo and Ntokozo must have emanated her insecurities.

Me: "Please, look at me kitten."

Her eyes dawdle back to me.

Me: "I know you're not ready to be with me but, that doesn't mean I will sit back and watch while some idiot takes chances with you. I will fight for you Sethu as much as I will pursue you, I'm here to stay and I will win your heart."

Sethu: "How do I give a heart that's already broken?"

She queries softly.

Me: "You can, just set yourself free from what is binding you."

Sethu: "I don't know Styles."

Me: "Don't you trust me?"

Sethu: "I trust you with my life."

Her confession assures me that we are treading on the right path.

Me: "Then give me a chance to heal your broken heart and bring you back to life."

I plant a lingering kiss on her forehead.

Me: "Won't you let me do that?"

Sethu: "One step at a time?"

Me: "One step a time."

I cradle her cheek into the palm of my hand, before taking her back into an unhurried kiss. This time she doesn't shy away as I draw back.

Me: "I need you to do one thing for me."

Sethu: "What?"

Me: "Be honest with me."

Sethu: "I will."

Me: "Okay so, tell me what happened at the mall today."

She gasps in disbelief.

Sethu: "Ayize is a snitch."

Me: "I'm glad she told me, now I know that we have to be vigilant at all times. I am going to keep you safe Sethu, I will protect you from anything."

She nods as she rests her head on my chest.

Sethu: "Ayize had a fight with mom today."

She reveals something I already know, I probably shouldn't be prying in her life but, this is the only way to keep her safe.

Me: "Is she okay?"

She discharges a long sigh of despair.

Sethu: "I don't know, she won't speak to me. I'm worried about her Styles, I need her to be okay."

Me: "Give her time, she will open up to you when she's ready."

Sethu: "I hope so, drinking her sorrows away won't help."

Sethu is taking this hard, it bothers me that she worries like this when she has her own demons to face.

Me: "Does she like dogs?"

She raises her head to meet a smile on my face.

Sethu: "Don't even humour Styles, you will not get her a dog."

She dismisses my idea.

Me: "I didn't say, I was getting her a dog."

These two sisters have gone through so much in life and they lack a mother's love. Sometimes it's all you need to wash that pain away.

Me: "Does she like dogs though?"

Sethu: "Styles."

Me: "It's only a question."

Sethu: "Yeah."

She responds slowly.

Me: "Let's go to bed, I'm tired."

Sethu: "Are you staying the night?"

Me: "Yes."

Sethu: "Okay, take the couch then."

Me: "If I'm sleeping on the couch then, you're staying with me. We might as well go to bed."

She's overthrown by my remark, I take her hand as we clump to her bedroom.

NOMBULELO\*

Me: "Mbuso your phone is ringing?"

He never has his phone with him, this is why he's unreachable sometimes.

Mbuso: "Please take it, I'm in the bathroom."

I leave my pots and rush to the lounge, this phone has been ringing and whoever is calling must be desperate to reach him.

I grab it from the table to find that it's his mother, I will not be answering it.

Me: "It's your mother."

I yell and hope he grasps from the tone of my voice that I don't want to face his mother. I haven't seen or heard from this woman since that day we were at her house with Zodwa.

Mbuso: "Eish!!!"

Only Mbuso can yell Eish.

I place it back down. I will take that 'eish' as a warning not to answer.

Mbuso: "Please take it."

He stops my tracks with these words. It could be that, I didn't hear correctly, my mind is playing



tricks with me.

Mbuso: "It could be important, please take the call Lelo."

Me: "Mbuso, I can't answer your mother's call."

Mbuso: "Just take a message."

The woman rides on the word respect, she will have my head if I answer this call. According to her, Mbuso and I are not supposed to be living together. The only time I am to be introduced to the family is when he's ready to pay the bride price.

She is yet to voice out her opinions regarding the pregnancy, she hasn't been given a platform yet.

Me: "Forget it, get out of there and come speak to your mother."

Mbuso: "Lelo man, ngiyak'cela." (I'm begging you.)

If he's that desperate, he should wrap it up and get out of there. It's been too long.

Why are we having a mini argument while he's doing whatever it is he's doing in that bathroom and why won't this woman give up on calling? Two missed calls are enough to let you know that the person either is not available or they do not want to speak to you.

Good, she has given up.

I begin to troll back to the kitchen, I've lost the zeal to cook, that woman gets under my skin and it's an itchy feeling or it could be that, my pregnancy doesn't agree with her bad energy.

It's ringing again, I hope it's not her.

Mbuso: "Lelo please, if I could leave this bathroom, I would."

He can hear the phone ringing from there? Why did I bother shouting out for him? I should have kept my mouth shut and let him think that I was sleeping or something.

Mbuso: "I don't want you coming here, it's not pretty."

Normally, I would laugh but, I'm piqued.

Here goes nothing, let her be kind Lord.

Me: "Mbuso's phone, hello."

This is to let her know that I'm not monitoring her son's phone."

Mom: "Where is my son? Why are you answering his phone?"

My message didn't go through to her, maybe I should've have answered it differently.

Me: "Mbuso is busy, he asked me to take a message."

This is how I should've answered.

Mom: "He should know better than to let a woman get his calls for him. What if it was work related?"

That's not a problem, he's a doctor and I'm familiar with that field.

Me: "I'm sorry ma."

I'm not sorry but, let's let her think that she's always right. It makes her feel good about herself.

Mom: "Tell him to call me, it's important."

I cannot miss that rude tone, she might as well cuss at me while at it.

Me: "I will ma."

Mom: "Yey wena ntombazane, angiyena unyoko siyewana?" (I am not your mother girl, are we clear?)

Speechless.

I will not be justifying that sally with an answer. Her hostility towards me is not excused.

Mom: "I will never be your mother sisi, if you think that I will let you slither your way into my son's life. You have another thing coming."

Me: "I don't understand ma."

I stick to the name. What else should I call her? I'm trying to be respectful here but, the woman is not letting me.

Mom: "What is it that you really want with my Mbuso?"

Okay...

I sense that she's the 'you're taking my son away from me' type. I think a female rival would suffice, I would deal with them accordingly but, not his mother. How do I go one on one with his first love?

Me: "I love Mbuso ma."

Mom: "Is that why you want him to raise another man's child? You call that love?"

I can't say that this is the real reason she hates me, she never liked me from the word go.

How do I riposte? She has left me speechless.

Mom: "If you love Mbuso, you will set him free. Let him have a chance to learn how to be a father with his first born. You and that baby you're carrying want to take that privilege from his child, you're invading his space."

I knew I shouldn't have answered this damn call.

Me: "Mbuso is a good man and he wants to be a father to this baby, we will have more children and they won't be treated differently. We'll love them the same."



Mom: "Don't tell me that, if you know what's good for you, you will pack your things and leave my son alone."

Unless she's planning on killing me, I am not moving and inch.

Me: "Mbuso and I love each other, I can't leave just like that. Please understand."

Why am I pleading? It's not like we need her permission.

Mom: "We will see about that."

She hangs up, that is one angry old woman. I need to keep calm for my baby, I've been through the worst. Surely I can survive monster in-law.

I throw the stupid phone on the couch as her words keep ringing in my head.

"Hey, what did my phone do?"

It's only now that he decides to come.

Me: "Sorry."

Mbuso: "What did my mom say that has you upset like this?"

If only you knew.

Me: "The usual, my son, my son, my son."

That's her favourite song, he's already peeved by it and I haven't painted the story yet.

Mbuso: "Don't let her get to you."

Me: "I won't."

At least I'm trying not to."

Me: "She wants me to pack my stuff and leave, my child and I are invading your space."

Mbuso: "That's her opinion, I will have a talk with her."

This is why I love this man, always willing to fight for me.

Me: "Don't, she will think I ran to you."

Mbuso: "Let her think whatever she wants, I don't care. Mom has to know that I'm a man and I refuse to let her interfere with my private life."

He takes my hand.

Mbuso: "Sorry, I made you answer that call. I didn't think she would say those things to you."

Me: "Well."

Mbuso: "I'll fix this."

I believe him, this could be make or break for his mother and I. If she backs off then, I would be

elated but, it's possible that 'the talk' might fuel her zeal to get me out of his life.

Me: "Are you okay? You were in the bathroom for quite a while?"

He follows me as I stroll to the kitchen to check on my pots.

Mbuso: "I'm okay, don't go in there for the next 45 minutes."

I give up with this man and the fact that he holds a serious expression as he declares.

Me: "This is what happens when you eat pizza like your mother made it, that thing is not clean."

He's opening my pots, I should let him cook instead.

Mbuso: "So is the fish you feed my child every day."

That's a quick comeback.

Me: "I have an excuse, I'm pregnant. What's yours?"

Mbuso: "I have a monkey on my back and have to feed my craving."

That cannot be cravings.

Me: "Lame, give me something I can work with here. You're losing the battle Xaba, I'm riding up top."

Mbuso: "I can be grumpy when the craving is not fed and you wouldn't want to face a grumpy Mbuso, he is not kind."

Me: "Damn, a point for you grumpy. You can feast on that greasy thing you call food."

He leans over as his laugh echoes in my ear, I pull back from him.

Me: "Should I get an anema for you? Your stomach needs cleaning."

Mbuso: "I'm a doctor, I know how to solve things including this upset stomach."

The doctor has spoken, I rest my case.

To be continued...





## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

105\*

SETHU\*

Someone taps my shoulder, arousing me from a deep slumber. It's Ayize and she's sitting on the edge of the bed.

Me: "Hey."

I'm wrapped around Styles' arms, I turn to see if he's awake.

Ayize: "He's sleeping."

Me: "What happened?"

Ayize: "I can't sleep."

I can imagine why, I struggled to asleep as well. If Styles wasn't here, I think I would be the one in her room.

Ayize: "Can we go for a walk, I need some air."

The time on my phone says it's around 1am.

Me: "It's not safe, we can sit on the balcony."

Ayize: "Sure."

She walks out with that word, I couldn't help but notice the despondency on her face and in the tone of her voice. I try to move out of Styles' arms so not to wake him up.

Styles: "Is she okay?"

I thought he was sleeping, the whispering must've woken him up.

Me: "I don't know."

Styles: "I think she needs to talk."

Me: "Yeah, I figured as well."

Styles: "I can leave and give you two some privacy."

I still need him here.

Me: "No, don't go. I'll be back."

I stumble out to find Ayize sitting on a chair in the balcony. I brought a throw, it's cold out here.

It's the dead of night, the dark streets are empty with no one in sight. I pull a chair closer to her, she pulls the blanket and covers herself.

Ayize: "This cold has me craving for coffee."

Her first words make me smile, knowing she doesn't drink coffee.

Me: "I can make some."

Ayize: "No, sit with me."

I shift closer to her as I cover my legs with the same blanket and she puts her head on my shoulder.

Ayize: "Those words I said to you, they got me thinking. I can't hide anymore, I'm tired Sethu and I need help."

I can't imagine what her struggle is, her painful words have broken my heart.

Me: "We will get you help."

Ayize: "What if it's too late? It's been too long and I have lived with this my whole life."

My heart drops as I grasp what she could be talking about, I pray to God that she wasn't sexually assaulted. I don't think I can recover from this fact.

Ayize: "I don't know if you remember this, you were too young then. Lebo and I were inseparable, I loved visiting her house because at that time they had more than we did. Her father worked as a manager while her mother was a chef."

My aunt says I got the passion for cooking from her.

Ayize: "Her father was nice, he was different from our parents. They were controlling and too strict for my liking, I liked being at Lebo's house because her father was a fun person to be around. He would play with us and let us eat whatever we wanted while at home, mom monitored everything we ate. She said we were fat, remember?"

I remember, the fridge actually had a key. She would count the slices of bread and the eggs so we don't eat. We were allowed to eat twice a day, she said our bodies were not that of children and we had to cut down.

Ayize: "I hated mom and dad, they controlled us as if we were their students. Dad would tell me where to go, how to stand and how to chew. I envied Lebo's life and I wanted to live with them forever. Her dad actually allowed us to drink, he drank with us."

That was irresponsible of him.

Me: "Why would he do that? You were a child."

Ayize: "He wanted to show us that he's the coolest dad in the world."

Me: "That's nonsense."

Ayize: "I didn't know then, I was only 14 and thought it was cool. This one time he sent Lebo to the shops, when I grabbed my shoes so, I can follow. He told me to stay because he needed help in the kitchen. I had been alone with him before and I thought it was okay, he's my uncle after all."

She clenches her teeth as she tries to subdue her tears.

Ayize: "He didn't waste time after Lebo walked out of that door, he started making these remarks about my body. Saying how he liked my thighs and my butt. He said..."

I take her hand to let her know that I'm still here and I'm listening."

Ayize: "He said he liked how my butt moved in my jeans, my heart stopped Sethu. I have never seen him glaring at me with lust before or did I miss it? Was I so blind that I missed the red flags?"

Me: "You were innocent."

Ayize: "That didn't stop him from assaulting me, he pushed me against the fridge and started touching my breast. I cried and pleaded with him to stop as I pushed him but, it seemed to fuel him because he continued and started to kiss me."

I don't think I'm strong enough to hear this.

Ayize: "I screamed and he slapped me so hard, I fell on the floor. He continued with his assaults, I was disgusted by his hands touching me and his lips on my face. I was powerless, the more I pushed him away, the more he pressed against me. He ripped my clothes and he... he..."

Her voice breaks, she's struggling to speak.

Me: "No, Ayize no."

She blinks a couple of times to push back her tears.

Ayize: "I felt so dirty and useless, I couldn't get him off of me. I just lay powerless on that cold kitchen floor, while he raped me."

Me: "No, please no more, no more."

I can't stop crying but, she hasn't shed a tear. Her tears are locked up somewhere and I know that she desperately wants to let them out.

Ayize: "I begged him to stop Sethu, I begged him to stop but, he didn't. He covered my mouth and I couldn't breathe, I wanted to die. Eventually, I managed to numb my body. I didn't want to feel the pain anymore, I wanted it to be over with. So I lay there like a corpse while he assaulted me, like he had rights over me. When he was done, he forced me to take a bath. I didn't know why but, now I know that he wanted the evidence to be washed out so, it can be his word against mine. I remember how I wailed in that bathroom while scrubbing my body, trying to wash off the feeling of dirt that crawled on my skin. I could still feel him on top of me and his skin on mine. Lebo came back while I was in the bathroom, she wanted to know why I was bathing again. I couldn't answer her, all I could do was cry. I couldn't look at her either, her father

made sure we were never alone. I ran home after that and locked myself in my room.”

I can't imagine how she would've gone through this and we had no clue.

Ayize: “I wanted to tell mom and dad but each time, I would see him on top of me and burst into tears. I didn't want to leave my room, I would make excuses so, I don't go to school. That's when I started starving myself, I thought it was my fault, my body attracted him to me. I wanted to be as thin as I could be, I lied and said I was bullied at school. Your parents finally confronted me about my behaviour, and I blotted it, out of anger because they were shouting at me and calling me an unruly child. Dad said I should go to my room, I'm not sure if they were shocked but, they were too calm for people whose daughter was raped. That night they called me to their bedroom and told me that I shouldn't tell a soul. Mom said she will not have her sister's marriage destroyed because of my lies.”

I am not surprised, mom always puts other people before us.

Ayize: “They said that they will call a meeting with him and have him pay for the damage, at least a goat and that was dad's idea. He seemed to believe me but, mom was the one in control. I was worth a lousy goat to my parents, that man took my innocence and my childhood from me, something I can never get back. The meeting never happened, they continued with their lives while I was dying slowly inside. Lebo's family would come over for the holidays. I remember how I would lock myself in my room, I didn't want to see his face. Knowing he was in the house, laughing and sharing a table with the same parents, who were meant to protect me, killed me. I contemplated suicide a couple of times but I didn't have the strength to go through with it.”

Her tears only show up now, she tries to be strong as she keeps wiping them but, they continue to paint her pain on her face. I haven't said a word, I don't know how to console her.

Ayize: “To think that wasn't enough, I fell pregnant and she took me to some woman's house to abort the baby. It was the most excruciating pain, I thought I was dying. That was the second time I felt violated, this time around my mother was standing in the middle of the room, watching everything. I hate them, I hate them for what they did to me.”

She's sobbing now and it's painful.

Me: “I'm sorry baby, I'm so sorry.”

I know how she feels, I was raped by the man I once loved. Nothing compares to the terrible feeling of being assaulted.

Ayize: “There's this pain in my heart and I can't seem to get rid of it, I've had sleepless nights. I can still see that day as if it happened yesterday. The memory is still fresh in my mind.”

She explodes into loud sobs of lamentation, I pull her into my arms.

Me: “We will get that monster. I promise you, he will pay.”

It's been so long and she had to live with this pain for so many years. She has been dying inside with no one to cry to.

Me: “Does aunt know?”

She wags her head as she fiddles with the blanket. My parents prioritized aunt's marriage over their daughter.

Ayize: "I'm tired Sethu, I want it to stop. I want the nightmares to stop and the voices in my head, telling me that it's my fault. Maybe I gave him signs that, it was okay. Maybe I should have dressed appropriately. He was never punished for his sins, he went on to live his life, while mine stopped and I had no support. I had no one on my side."

My heart pains for her, I want to help her feel better.

Me: "No, it's not your fault Ayize. That man is a monster, you did nothing wrong."

I clasp my arms around her as we cry together.

Ayize: "But, it doesn't feel like it."

Me: "It will, it will my love, I promise."

I'm not convinced by my words but, I need to say something.

Ayize: "I want to feel human again Sethu, I want to trust people again. I want to hold someone's hand and not feel like they are going to hurt me. I want to feel important to someone, please help me. I don't know where to start, I don't have the strength to move. But, I know that I need to heal."

This is a desperate cry for help.

Me: "I will go with you, I'll hold your hand through it all."

I feel someone standing at the door and turn to find Styles, I think he's been there for a while. He's angry, I have seen that look before. It was when he told me that Neo was burnt by his ex-girlfriend. It takes a minute for him to trudge back into the house.

NTOMBI\*

The door bangs loudly, jolting me from my sleep, Moses is not beside me and it's in the early hours of the morning. My watch says it's 3:20am. Where is Moses going? He doesn't sleep much but, he never leaves the room.

I turn the light on and tail him, I find him in the kitchen, trying to open the door. He has the house keys in his hand.

Me: "Moses, wenzani?" (What are you doing?)

He goggles at me.

Moses: "Shh, vula umnyango." (Open the door.)

He's whispering as if he doesn't want to wake anyone up.

Me: "Why should I open the door? It's late Moses."

Moses: "She wants me to open the door."

Me: "Who?"

Moses: "She's outside, she keeps saying that I must open the door."

Lord help me, there's a she ghost now?

Me: "Moses there's no one out there, come to bed."

It's too late for this.

Moses: "But, she wants to come in."

"Ntombi."

I turn to find Jonas standing at the entrance between the kitchen and the living room. He sleeps in the living room, we must've woken him up.

Jonas: "What are you two doing at this time of the night?"

Me: "Moses says there's someone at the door and she's telling him to open it."

Jonas: "People of the night."

He means witches, I thought such things were not said at night.

Moses: "You see, you see, she's angry now. She's leaving."

I am terrified right now, there's a possibility that there's a woman outside this door.

Moses: "Jonas, tshela lomfazi ukuthi angazongichozela ulimi, kanti abafazi banjani." (Tell that woman not to click her tongue at me. What's wrong with women?)

He must be talking about whoever is outside. I know it's Martha, she is the one after my life.

Jonas: "Ntombi, thatha lomuntu wakho tuu. I will keep the keys with me." (Take your husband.)

Me: "Asambe Moses." (Let's go.)

Moses: "Athi uzobuya, angeke ahlulwe yithina." (She says she will come back, she will not be defeated by us.)

Okay, now I'm terrified. This is not a usual thing.

Jonas: "I will burn incense around the house, before going back to sleep."

I think he's scared too.

Me: "Don't forget my room too bhuti." (Brother.)

I don't think I will be able to sleep after this.

Jonas: "I want you to call Zodwa, first thing tomorrow. This is serious and it's time we fix it."

Like, we should fix my husband.

Me: "I will bhuti." (Brother.)

Jonas: "I'll start with your room."

That sounds good.

AMARA\*

"Mara wake up."

I sluggishly open my eyes at the sound of Liyana's voice, she's kneeling on the bed as she carries a smile. Randall is not here, he's an early bird unless, I overslept.

Me: "Hey, why are you up so early?"

I leisurely bring my tired body up, I'm forcing myself here. I want to sleep some more.

Liyana: "It's not early silly."

She's laughing at me.

Me: "Really? What time is it?"

She smiles as she shrugs and hands me my phone.

Liyana: "I still can't tell the time."

She confesses while I glance at the screen on my phone, it's almost 10am. Why didn't Randall wake me up?

Me: "I overslept."

Liyana: "Papa said I must come and wake you up."

Me: "Where is he?"

Liyana: "He's in the kitchen."

I love how she's always giggling, she's a happy child.

Me: "Okay, let me freshen up then we can go and join him."

Liyana: "Mara, I like that you're here."

What a way to wake up.

Me: "Oh my baby."

She falls into my arms as she hooks her tiny arms around my neck.



Me: "I'm happy that I'm here with you."

Liyana: "You won't leave right?"

Me: "Why would I ever leave you? You're my angel."

That twitter again.

Me: "Imagine how bad my day would be without you and you know what?"

She swings her head repeatedly with a lingering smile on her face.

Me: "Today, you gave me the sweetest gift ever."

Liyana: "I didn't give you anything."

A confused look takes over her face.

Me: "You did, I got to see your beautiful face the moment I opened my eyes."

Liyana: "That's a gift?"

Me: "Yes, the biggest. Bigger than this smile on your face."

A titter escapes her mouth, Liyana is a sweet child. How does Olivia live without seeing her daughter? Any mother would lose their mind.

Me: "Maybe I should move to your room so, you're the first person I see every morning."

Liyana: "Yes, please."

She bounces on the bed.

Me: "Don't tell papa about it."

Liyana: "My lips are sealed."

She presses her forefinger on her lips before taking a load of laughter.

I'm glad she's not sulking over Chioma's absence, I hope Ife is doing okay. I know she will not give Chioma a hard time, that woman doesn't take nonsense.

Liyana: "Hurry Mara, I'm hungry."

Liyana is standing next to me as I make the bed, she refuses to go without me, orders from her father.

Me: "I'm almost done Liya baby."

I hear her giggle as I change the course of my direction, she's excited about something. I instantly feel a pair of large hands whisk me up, it's Randall. He puts me on his shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

Me: "Randall put me down."



Randall: "I came to get you, the food is getting cold."

Liyana is laughing and jumping while clapping her hands, she seems to be enjoying this.

Me: "Okay, put me down. I can walk."

Randall: "Not happening."

He refuses as he potters out of the room, Liyana is bouncing behind still entertained by this act. I have given up wagging my legs, I'm fighting a losing battle.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

106\*

KHETHU\*

"She's opening her eyes."

That's Mbongeni's voice, it's confirmed when I see him standing over me. I'm in my old room in my father's house. He and Nobayeni are here as well.

Me: "What's going on? How did I get here?"

Dad: "Mbongeni found you passed out on the streets, a few houses from here. Why were you not using your car?"

I remember getting off a taxi, I was led to my father's house by a certain fear I cannot explain. I wanted to feel safe again and he was the first person that came to mind. My feet felt heavy as I lumbered towards the house, everything became fuzzy, that's when I passed out.

Me: "I left my car at gogo's house." (Grandmother.)

Dad: "Is there something wrong with it?"

Me: "Why is everyone in here?"

Mbongeni: "We're worried about you Khethu."

Me: "You don't have to worry about me, I'm fine."

Their stares make me feel like I have lost my mind, maybe I am losing it. My whole life feels like a dream, Styles has moved on with his life. He's forgotten about me, it's as if I was never there.

Nobayeni: "I didn't know you wear weaves now, blonde is a wild colour and it's not working for you."

Who has she ever complimented?

Dad: "What's going on Khethu? What did you do?"

Me: "What do you mean? I didn't do anything."

I don't like the suspicious look that he's giving me.

Nobayeni: "We're on to you Bridgette, you can't lie to us anymore."

These people are playing with my mind, they can't possibly know what I was up to, unless dad had me followed.

Nobayeni: "What is this?"

She holds up a pregnancy test, in a way, I'm glad that they do not know about my shenanigans but also, they are invading my privacy.

Me: "Were you going through my bag?"

I bark as I stretch my hand to grab it.

Me: "You had no right to touch my things"

Nobayeni: "I was getting your phone and that's when I saw it. How can you be so careless Bridgette?"

Dad: "How do you let that man get you pregnant?"

What? I give Mbongeni a quick glance, he clamps his jaw. He must be thinking what they are thinking. That this baby belongs to Styles.

Nobayeni: "Just when I thought you can't get anymore stupid, you're not a child anymore Bridgette. When will you realize that? How long do we have to run after you to get you to behave?"

Nobayeni thinks she has a right to chide me, only now she decides to take up her role as a mother. I am not about to give her the chance.

Me: "I want all of you to get out."

Dad: "Khethukuthula."

There was a time when I couldn't see pain in my father's eyes, now everything has changed. I don't care how he feels any more, they have been unfair to me.

Nobayeni: "Pushing everyone away yet again, Bridgette?"

Why am I giving her a chance to speak?

Dad: "We need to talk about this baby you're carrying. Does he know?"

He's referring to Styles, he must be referring to him.

Me: "Not yet."

I glance at Mbongeni, I can't tell him that this is his baby. This could be my chance of getting Styles back.

Mbongeni: "Can I please have a word with Khethu."

I think he knows and this is bad.

Dad: "We'll be in the living room."

I watch them as they amble out of the room, I don't want to look at Mbongeni. I'm afraid that my eyes will tell him the truth.

Mbongeni: "Is it mine?"

Me: "What is?"

Mbongeni: "The baby, is it mine?"

Me: "Don't be ridiculous, if it was, I would have told you."

Mbongeni: "Are you sure it's not mine Khethu?"

Me: "More than sure."

I feel his piercing gaze stabbing me.

Mbongeni: "You know if the baby is mine, it will show when it's born? You can't pass it on as his, he will see that he's not the father."

I didn't think about that, they will know the moment the baby comes out.

Me: "Mbongeni, I would like to be alone."

Mbongeni: "Be careful what you ask for Khethu, one day you will wake up and find that you're completely alone. Keep pushing people away like this and you won't like the outcome."

Me: "Please go, I'll call you when I feel better."

He's my only friend at the moment and I can't lose him as well.

Mbongeni: "Fine, we will talk about this baby and I will take responsibility for it."

He leans over to peck my forehead and strides out, I reach for my phone to check if Styles has called yet. How will he remember me when he's busy entertaining another woman? I need to do something about it.

SETHU\*

There's noise coming from the kitchen, loud enough to wake anyone up. This is how Ayize is like in the morning, if you want to have a good morning then have her around. She's playing music on her phone. There's an aroma that also leads me to the kitchen, I find her cooking while dancing.

Ayize: "Hey, you're awake? Finally."

She hums, she's happy today.

Me: "Morning."

I rub my eyes and that has her laughing at me.

Ayize: "You're tired?"

Me: "Very."

My eyes keep searching for Styles.

Ayize: "He went out, he said he'll be back. Don't cry."

She takes pleasure in mocking me.

Me: "What are you making? I thought we didn't have food, where did this come from?"

Ayize: "I bought it, I was hungry so I ran to the shop across the road."

Me: "How are you feeling?"

She sighs, turns to me and gives me a hug.

Ayize: "Thank you for listening to me."

She glances at me and a warm smile takes over her mouth.

Ayize: "This is a start for me, I have a long way to go. It won't be easy though, I'm just glad that I have someone on my side."

Me: "I will always be on your side sis."

Ayize: "I know."

Me: "We can also try church."

She turns back to the stove, I'm treading on a road that she's not familiar with.

Me: "I'm serious Ayize."

Ayize: "I know, you're always serious about this church thing. It's not really for me, I would die of boredom, honestly."

Me: "It's all in your head, if you go there with that mentality then that's exactly what will happen."

She responds with a hefty exhalation, this conversation bores her.

Ayize: "Imagine sitting there while the pastor tells me that drinking is a sin and it will send me straight to hell. Then he goes home and drinks wine with his wife while I'm having my Sunday kos with a glass of Oros. Yoh hai ngiyabonga." (Food.) (No, thank you.)

Me: "I doubt that's what happens."

Ayize: "Ask your pastor if he drinks and watch his facial expression then, come and tell me what you observed."

I decide to help her with breakfast.

Me: "Do you think we should dish up for Styles? He'll probably eat where he is."

Ayize: "Starving the man already, are we?"



That head shake says a lot of things, I'm trying to figure out what.

Me: "I just know that he will get something on the way."

Ayize: "We'll leave him some, just in case."

Me: "Okay."

I watch her movement as she toddles to the fridge and takes out a white mug, she gulps whatever is in there in one go.

Me: "What is that?"

Ayize: "Energy drink, the babalazi is killing me girl." (Hangover.)

She's lying, that's alcohol.

Me: "You're drinking so early in the morning?"

I realize that I have upset her composure as she throws a vexed glare at me.

Ayize: "This is the only way, I can get rid of this hangover."

Me: "Eat something at least."

Ayize: "I will."

She doesn't mean it, I know she will drink the whole day. Seeing that she's no longer interested in finishing what she started, I dish up for us and leave some for Styles.

Me: "There's a scripture that keeps me going you know."

She rewards me with a profound sigh.

Ayize: "You're about to preach, aren't you?"

She grabs her plate, a can of beer and tramples to the living room. I can't force her to change and I don't want to bible bash her but, this could possibly work for her.

Me: "I know you don't like church."

I take a sit on the couch.

Ayize: "If I want to go to a fashion show, I would go to an actual one."

Me: "Church is not really about that, there's more to it than wearing your Sunday best. I believe that what you're going through is a test for your faith. You need to keep going and keep fighting. One thing is for sure, the word will break in. God hears your prayers and sees your tears. You need to let him lead you."

I'm hoping this will touch her heart.

Ayize: "I don't know how to pray. Where do I start? What do I say to a God I have rejected my whole life?"

Me: "Anything, we grew up in church. Unlock your spiritual sense."

Ayize: "Spiritual what?"

Me: "I just made that up."

Her contagious smile compels me to simper.

Me: "If you don't have words, let your heart speak for you and God will hear you. It's a long road but, you'll get there."

Ayize: "When did you grow up?"

I think my words got through to her.

Me: "When I had to start life all over from Ntokozo, I had to push myself to forget him and what he did to me."

Ayize: "Does Mr. S know about him?"

Me: "Yes."

Ayize: "You told him everything?"

Me: "I told him what he needed to know."

Ayize: "You need to open up to him. How will you explain the scars on your body?"

Me: "I don't know, I'll see when I get there."

Ayize: "You better decide soon that man will want to know what happened to his Sethu."

Me: "I'll tell him when the time is right."

I have never spoken out about it, although everyone knows what Ntokozo did to me.

Ayize: "What do you think he'll do to that pig Ntokozo?"

She accepts a mischievous smile.

Me: "What can he possibly do?"

Ayize: "I don't know, something. Castrate him, amputate those skinny legs."

Me: "You watch too much TV, Styles is not capable of that. He's gently and kind."

Ayize: "Gentle and kind is boring, sbwl a gangster love, you know the likes of Kagiso Khoza, a lover and a fighter. Mr. S looks like the type that can handle a gun." (I'm craving.)

The excitement on her face is priceless, anything to make her forget her pain.

Me: "I have said it before and I will say it again, stop watching those things. They are not real."

Ayize: "Argh, you're so boring nurse."

She waves her hand as if shooining me away."

Me: "I'm realistic."

Ayize: "Yes in my world that's classified as boring."

I give up.

NKOMO\*

I'm not really up for this, at first I thought Styles' plan was absurd until he told me what Randall's father has planned for him. It got me thinking, approaching this woman is the only way.

I'm at a restaurant at the bar, I have spotted my target. She's dining alone at a table, she saw me fleeting looks at her a while ago and hasn't stopped gazing at me, since. We have been exchanging a few glances.

"Nkomo, how is it going?"

That's Styles speaking through the earpiece, he's in the car outside.

Me: "I think this could work."

Styles: "Go for it then, don't throw yourself at her, she might suspect something."

I know what I'm doing.

Me: "I've got this Styles."

Styles: "Let's go then."

Ruth sees me approaching her table and takes up a ghost of a smile, at least I know that she will not give me a hard time."

Me: "Hi."

I send her a warm smile, she clears her throat as she raises her eye brows. This is not what I expected.

Me: "I'm sure you know what courtesy is, don't you?"

Ruth: "I'm sorry, I don't know you."

I expected her to be rude, she wears it on her sleeves anyway.

Me: "My name is Sboniso Ndlaleni."

I give her my hand, she carries a soft frown before touching it with the tip of her fingers. It's something, at least there's point of contact.

Ruth: "Ruth Adaeze."

Me: "Adaeze? Are you from Nigeria?"





This is how I slide in.

Ruth: "No, Ghana."

Me: "Ghana? I've been to Ghana once. It's a beautiful country."

She nods with an attitude, I thought this was going great.

Me: "Where in Ghana are you from?"

She raises her brows again, she's going to be a tough nut to crack.

Me: "I'm sorry, is it okay if I sit? Surely a beautiful woman like you cannot be sitting alone at a restaurant."

Ruth: "I'm actually waiting for someone."

Me: "I'll keep you company, until the fool who's making you wait arrives."

I see a little smile, she brushes it off, not letting it stay on for too long.

I take a seat, knowing she will not offer me one. She's playing hard to get, she is a beautiful woman but not my type. The first thing I noticed about her is the thick makeup and the long lashes, she has long nails and uses the tips of her fingers to literally hold everything.

Me: "You said you're from which city in Ghana?"

Ruth: "I didn't."

Told you that she's playing hard to get."

Me: "Ngiyazi, nkosazana, hence the question." (I know my lady.)

Ruth: "What?"

Me: "I said, I know my lady."

Ruth: "What language is that?"

"Nice going Nkomo, let the Mkhizes lead you."

That's Styles through the earpiece, he can hear everything and he's laughing at me. I clear my throat to gesture that he shuts up.

Me: "Zulu, my native language."

I have managed to make her smile, genuinely.

Ruth: "Zulu huh?"

I nod.

Me: "I can teach you if you like."

Ruth: "Maybe."



Me: "Maybe is not an answer ndlovukazi." (Queen.)

I'm winning here, the look on her face confirms it.

Me: "That means queen, I mean that's what I see when I look at you."

This one gets her smiling from ear to ear and flipping her weave back.

Ruth: "Flattery will not get you anywhere Sb..."

She struggles with getting the name out of her mouth.

Me: "Sboniso, call me Sbo."

Ruth: "There's no need, I doubt I'll be seeing you again."

Am I losing my touch? Just when I thought I was making progress.

"Come on Sbo, push man. Get that gold."

Styles again, he's amused by this.

Me: "I have a feeling that, I'll be seeing more of you. How can I meet such a beautiful woman and forget that she exists. My ancestors would definitely punish me."

If I'm observing correctly, she's blushing.

Styles: "Segun is on his way, wrap it up and get out of there. He's seen you before, remember."

Me: "How about I buy you a drink next time?"

Ruth: "I can buy myself one."

Fiesty.

Me: "There's nothing wrong with a man wanting to spoil a lady."

Ruth: "If you're able to find me again, then maybe I might just let you."

Me: "I will hold you to it."

Ruth: "I won't be holding my breath, men tend to forget your face the moment you walk away."

She's unknowingly paving a way for me.

Me: "Such men are idiots, I doubt I'll be able to forget this face. It's not every day that you bump into an African queen."

She blushes at the unexpected compliment. I take her hand and she lets me. I bring it to my mouth, placing a lingering kiss.

Me: "Till next time ndlovukazi." (Queen.)

She sends me away with a candid smile, that wasn't so bad.

"You're losing your touch man, I expected more from you."

Styles gives his opinion as I walk away.

Me: "Hey, I don't get paid for this. She's a tough one."

Styles: "Next time you'll have her giggling, don't worry."

Me: "I'm not worried, are you sure you want to do this?"

Styles: "Smitten already? That was quick."

He scoffs.

Me: "Voetsek Styles." (Piss off.)

Styles: "Don't let the innocent face fool you, she's evil."

Me: "If you say so, I'm not looking forward to this."

Styles: "Quit whining, you've already started, you might as well finish it."

He says it, as if it's easy.

NOMBULELO\*

Time seems to be going slow today, I can't wait for the day to end. I am feeling lazy, my spirit is down and I can't seem to stomach this crowded hospital. My phone rings as I make my way to the cafeteria, it's my mother. We didn't end on a good note the last time we spoke.

Me: "Mom."

Ntombi: "Lelo, I can't get through to Zodwa. I've been calling her since morning."

A salutation would have been nice.

Me: "Maybe she's busy mom, try her phone again later."

I don't have the energy to speak.

Ntombi: "Can you call her for me please?"

Me: "I'll see what I can do, I'm busy at the moment."

Ntombi: "Thanks, please get her to call me."

I doubt Zodwa will do that, mom should be the one to call her.

Me: "I'll let you know when I speak to her."

Ntombi: "How are you my child?"

She probes as I'm about to hang up.

Me: "I'm fine."

Not that she cares.

I spot Brenda at a corner table, she smiles as she sees me.

Ntombi: "When are you coming to visit? Your father has been asking about you?"

Me: "Maybe this weekend, I'm not sure. There's someone I want you to meet."

I take this opportunity to announce my plans.

Ntombi: "Is it a man?"

Me: "Yes."

Ntombi: "The father of your child?"

Brenda smiles widely as I sit opposite her, she pushes my lunch across the table towards me.

Me: "Not really, can we talk later."

Ntombi: "Sure, don't forget to call Zodwa."

Me: "Yes, bye."

Brenda: "Hey, I bought you lunch because you were busy. There's salt and vinegar on your chips, just the way you like it. As for that fish, I feel sorry for that baby in your womb."

She announces as I hang up, I know this one to be stingy. She never buys me anything.

Me: "What's the catch?"

Brenda: "There's no catch."

I don't believe her.

Me: "Okay, how much do I owe you?"

I'm annoying her with my interrogation.

Brenda: "Can't I be nice to a friend?"

We're not friends, I don't think we have reached that stage yet.

Me: "I'm just making sure that I will not be asked for payments one day."

She brushes off my comment by swaying her hand.

Brenda: "So, you're introducing the doctor to the family?"

I'm not sure if that's any of her business but...

Me: "Yeah."

I'll end it at that.

Brenda: "Don't you think it's too soon?"

Me: "No and can we not talk about this? You know that I like to keep my private life private."

She shrugs, her prying gets to me sometimes. I have been betrayed too much to trust people.

To be continued....



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

107\*

STYLES\*

I'm in the car with Nkomo, I have to say I'm impressed with how things went. I didn't think Ruth would crack like that, knowing how she's so obsessed with Randall.

Me: "I think Neo would've done a better job."

He sneers.

Nkomo: "Neo would have ran the moment he saw her, that woman is intimidating. For a second there, it felt like her confidence was sitting right next to her."

I can't agree with that, this man is never intimidated by a woman.

Me: "What is it? She made your knees weak?"

He huffs, Ruth appears to be an undaunted woman but not enough to bring a man like Nkomo to his knees.

Nkomo: "You enjoy mocking me Styles?"

Actually I do.

Me: "You're losing your touch Mkhize."

He hates doing this, we haven't gotten far with our plan yet and already he's drained.

Nkomo: "Call me Mkhize one more time and I will pull out."

Me: "Oh, Mkhize. Threats do not suit you."

He shoots daggers at me.

Nkomo: "I hate that surname man, everything that has to do with that man."

This feud he has with his father has been going on for too long.

Me: "Then change it."

Nkomo: "I will have to do rituals and that means involving him, I'm not ready to follow that man around."

Me: "Go to home affairs and change your surname, stop being a pussy about it."

Nkomo: "You don't get it do you? You don't just change your surname, that's like turning my

back on the Mkhize ancestors.”

Is it that much of a big deal?

Me: “You hate their name anyway, so it won’t make a difference.”

Nkomo: “It will make a huge one, I will be left unprotected.”

It’s getting deep.

Me: “Your mother’s family? You can tap into that.”

Nkomo: “She didn’t have a family, she grew up at an orphanage. There’s nothing that can link me to her family.”

This is news.

Me: “I can help you with that hey, Neo can, actually. Let’s give him something to do while he plays ‘sick’ at the hospital.”

He sniggers at my suggestion.

Nkomo: “You mean search her background?”

Me: “Yes, we’ll start at the orphanage where she grew up. There must be something, a letter, an address. Do you have her birth certificate?”

Nkomo: “No, she had nothing.”

Me: “Okay, I’ll speak to Neo.”

Nkomo: “Do you think her family will accept me? They didn’t want their daughter, I doubt, they’ll want anything to do with me.”

I understand his fears, I have the same fears about my mother’s family. Hence, I can’t bring myself to search for them.

Me: “You’ll see when you get there.”

Nkomo: “Mkhize will die if he finds out.”

Me: “Wouldn’t that be a sight for sore eyes?”

It would be nice if he would stop breathing.

Nkomo: “Your phone is ringing.”

I check the caller Id, Kenneth is calling me. I asked him to find Tshidi for me, he had Siphon search for her. She’s in Joburg and in hiding.

Nkomo: “This guy makes my skin crawl. Is he always this quiet? He looks at you like he’s planning your death.”

Neo has the same complaints, Kenneth is not that bad. He’s just too reserved.

Me: "Kenny."

I send my greeting.

Kenneth: "Should I hang up and start over?"

He's kidding.

Me: "If you have time to waste, be my guest."

Nkomo has accepted a frown, I don't know what that's about.

Kenneth: "We found her, she's in Alex crashing in some guy's place. She's been here for a week and the woman is too relaxed. She thinks no one is coming for her."

Tshidi made a huge mistake by running to Joburg, she literally brought herself to the lion's den.

Me: "Send me the location, I'm on my way."

Kenneth: "Sure."

He hangs up.

MBUSO\*

I took time off work to visit my mother, I want to know what her problem is and why she had to say those things to Lelo. My father walks out of the house as I pull up, this is odd. It's rare to find him here during the day.

Me: "Baba." (Father.)

I greet him with the same respect, he's still my father.

Baba: "This is a surprise."

He shakes my hand, that's a firm touch.

Me: "I came to see mom, is she in?"

Baba: "She went to church, she's been gone since morning. Your mother doesn't love me anymore, I had to eat bread and butter for lunch. I have no one to take care of me. Maybe I should take a second wife."

He clowns, if I didn't know what I know now, I would laugh at this remark.

Me: "I'm sure you can manage baba." (Father.)

Baba: "I try my son. Go inside and get us chairs, it's a bit cold in the house."

I do as he says and bring two plastic chairs.



Baba: "Have I become a nonfactor to you that you only visit your mother?"

He inquires while placing himself down.

Me: "No baba, I have been busy lately and you're never at home."

Baba: "That private practise does not pay you enough to keep you that busy. When will you get a real job Mbuso? You can't let your qualification go to waste."

Me: "That is a real job baba, I love working there. You know it's not about the money."

According to him, I have lowered my standards. My father had big dreams for me, I have never seen him more proud when I graduated. He literally cried tears of joy, I should've taken a video. Nothing makes him cry.

Baba: "Let's leave it, tell me how things are at home?"

I should be asking him this, I haven't spoken to him since I found out about the baby. I didn't know what I would say to him. And now that he's sitting here I can't bring myself to questioning him.

Me: "Things are fine baba."

Baba: "Your mother tells me that you live with that girl and she's pregnant. She also says the baby is not yours."

Mom tells him everything, she should've left it to me. It's not her business to tell.

Me: "It's true."

Baba: "Where is the father? Will you be able to raise a child that is not your own?"

I see she's been drilling through his head.

Me: "That child is mine baba, I love Lelo and I am willing to take up responsibility for her and the child."

He shakes his head in disapproval, mom has finally done it.

Baba: "That's not how we do things in the Xaba family. We don't take other men's responsibilities."

I think I should bring Nomasonto up, he's getting too forward with me.

Me: "With all due respect baba, I know what I'm doing. Lelo is a good woman, you just need to give her a chance. I want her son to have my surname."

Definitely, this is shocking to him.

Baba: "No Mbuso, that child has a father. We cannot accept him in this family."

Me: "It's not up to you baba, I can go through the uncles. They have the final say in terms of introducing the child to the ancestors."

Baba: "Mbuso, why are you pushing this?"

Me: "I'm not pushing anything, like I said, I'm taking responsibility. I will not abandon the woman I love."

Baba: "Angazi ukuthi ngithini manje. Talking to you is pointless, awulaleli Mbuso." (I don't know what to say now, you don't listen.)

He sounds like mom right now, I can smell her in all of this.

Me: "When last did you hear from Nomasonto?"

It's time I divert this conversation before this old man makes me angry.

His eyes buck and he drops them in an instant, they reveal his secret. He might not know about the child but, he's very much aware of his adultery.

Baba: "Why are you asking me this? What do I have to do with her?"

He's stammering, even his voice has given him away.

Me: "I'm just asking, she was more close to you than she was to me."

He widens his eyes as he leers at me, they don't embrace me long because his soul holds a deep dark secret.

Baba: "What are you saying to me Mbuso? What do you mean that she was close to me?"

The tone of his voice has changed too, it's not the slow deep impervious tone anymore but, speaks in fast notes. I have just put my father on a hot seat and he's feeling the heat.

Me: "Yes baba, she was closer to you and mom. I figured that maybe she still came to visit the house."

Baba: "Hai, don't ask me nonsense Mbuso. Go and get me a glass of water."

He clears his throat as he rubs his neck.

Me: "Are you okay?"

He's sweating, he swipes his hand over his forehead to wipe it away.

Baba: "Yeah, the sun is suddenly too hot. Get me some water, please."

Me: "Okay, get in the house if you're feeling hot."

Baba: "I'm coming."

I find it strange that Nomasonto makes him this nervous, does he know about the child now? An affair can't make him palpitate like that.

STYLES\*

Tshidi chose to hide in these informal settlements, Nkomo and I are standing a few feet away from the house Kenneth pointed out, apparently she's in there with a guy presumed to be her boyfriend.

I have done my research on those two, they are definitely an item.

Nkomo: "I say let's go in, it's been too long."

Me: "Let's move a little closer, we'll wait a few more minutes. If she doesn't come out in two minutes, we go in..."

My phone is vibrating, I ram my hands in my pockets to bring it out. Dammit, I forgot to call Sethu. I left a message with Ayize this morning that, I was coming back.

Me: "S'thandwa senhliziyo yami." (Love of my life.)

This should work in my favour, I leer at Nkomo to find him laughing at me.

Sethu: "You're still alive?"

I should have tried it with an accent, dammit.

Me: "Kitten, I was about to call you."

I became distracted by the task at hand that, I forgot about her.

Sethu: "Really?"

Me: "No, I was meant to come back but work kept me busy. I'm sorry."

Sethu: "You could have sent a text message Styles, I thought something happened to you and you were not answering your phone."

It feels good to have someone worry about me.

Me: "My phone is on silent, I'm sorry. I'll come see you once I'm done here."

Sethu: "Don't bother, I'm going to work."

Me: "You're working the grave shift again?"

Nights are quiet and Khethu can easily get to her.

Sethu: "Yes."

Me: "I'll drop you off."

Sethu: "Ayize is dropping me off, don't worry."

She's upset.

Me: "Okay, I'll come and see you at work."



Sethu: "I'll be busy."

Me: "I'm still coming, I'll see you later kitten."

She bids me goodbye with a sigh of desolation.

Nkomo: "The relationship hasn't begun yet and you're already messing up."

Me: "I know how to pacify her, let's deal with this witch."

Nkomo: "I say we go in."

Me: "Let's do it."

We saunter towards the shack, the door opens before we get there. Tshidi walks out, she's carrying a bucket of water. She sees us but doesn't pay any attention. She should know me, she has seen me a couple of times.

There we go, she gradually places her hand over her mouth and the look on her face says she knows me.

I sneer at her, she drops the bucket, turns and scurries towards the house. She doesn't make it there as Nkomo blocks her way before she could step in.

Tshidi: "Who are you?"

She's quick to cry.

Me: "Who am I? Really Tshidi?"

That's a rhetorical question, she knows exactly who I am.

Tshidi: "Thabo."

She screams, Nkomo is quick to think as he pushes her inside. It's a one roomed house, everything is located here from kitchen to bedroom. It reminds me of where most of us came from, Neo and Kenneth as well. Nkomo has no clue about this kind of life.

Thabo jolts up from the bed, he stands with his head and chest held up high.

Thabo: "What's going on here?"

He roars, Tshidi got herself a confident lad. She flitters to his side, her tears haven't given up on her.

Me: "Relax, we're not here for you. It's her we want."

Thabo: "What do you want with her? This is my house,

Me: "Thabo Qumbisa right? Unjani ugoro, Thabo? Were you able to pay for her treatment? What about your little sister? What's her name again? Asanda, yes. That's a beautiful name, my sister's name was Asanda too. It would be sad if that little girl doesn't make it home from school. It would definitely break gogo's heart, and it's already frail." (How is grandma?)

His mouth slowly drops open, his eyes get wider as he stares without blinking.

Me: "Like I said, we want her. This has nothing to do with you."

Tshidi: "Styles please, I didn't do anything."

Me: "Now you remember me?"

Her tears are undoubtedly fake.

Thabo: "Please, let me go. I have no business with her, I only met her a few days back."

Tshidi is shocked by his declaration, she grabs his hand and holds on to him as if her life depends on it.

Tshidi: "Thabo don't leave me alone with these people."

Thabo yanks his hand away, his fearless conduct has dropped to panic.

Me: "Get out of here and you didn't see anything."

Thabo: "Yes, I didn't see anything. In fact, I don't know this woman, I have never seen her in my life."

Just what I want to hear, Tshidi has lost a flood of tears.

Tshidi: "Thabo otlala nnyela sebono sa gago." (You will shit yourself. Your ass.)

Thabo doesn't pay heed to her, he dashes out without taking a second look at her.

Me: "I thought he would never leave, aren't you glad we're alone Tshidi?"

She shakes her.

Tshidi: "Please Styles, I'm sorry. Tell Neo that I'm sorry, I was angry. I don't know what came over me."

I have no sympathy for her dreadful pleas.

Me: "We are going to go for a little ride. Would you like that?"

She puts her hands over her head and a sob escapes her mouth, Nkomo glances at me with a scowl on his face.

Nkomo: "And then? Why is she weeping? Who died?"

Me: "No one, yet."

My comment seems to fuel her wailing.

Me: "Will you shut up? You're giving me a headache."

Tshidi: "What are you going to do to me?"

Me: "I love your curiosity, let's go and find out."

Tshidi: "I'm not going anywhere with you."

Nkomo: "She's shy."

He chortles lowly.

Me: "Let's not fight Tshidi, I'm in a good mood today and lose the attitude, okay. Now let's go, or you want me to drag you out."

With fear plastered on her face, she glares at Nkomo then back at me.

Nkomo: "That's it."

He grabs her and lugs her outside crying, there are not many people outside. This gives us a chance to get to the car.

NOMBULELO\*

It feels like it's been a while since I have been throwing up. Brenda hasn't left my side, I have turned this toilet into my own private room.

Brenda: "You know you can stop yourself from gaging."

I'm slouched over the toilet while she's on the other side of the door.

Me: "Is it safe to do that?"

It doesn't sound safe.

Brenda: "It must be, there are pills that stop your gull from rising."

Me: "I'm pregnant Brenda, I can't be taking pills."

Brenda: "It's just a suggestion."

Why would she want me to stop throwing up? I move out of the toilet, I feel a bit better now.

Brenda gives me an irked look the moment I open the door.

Brenda: "You're such a cry baby Lelo, couldn't you control yourself?"

Okay, why is she scolding me? I glance at her through the mirror reflection, I'm slanting over the sink rinsing my mouth. She's standing against the wall, her arms folded across her chest. She carries an attitude that has me questioning her statement.

Me: "I'm pregnant Brenda, pregnant people vomit we don't ask for it."

She huffs.

Me: "If you don't want to be here then leave, I'm getting sick of your attitude."

Brenda: "I'm just trying to help."



Me: "By telling me to stop throwing up, and giving me an attitude about it?"

Brenda: "Lelo, you don't have to be mean. You're my friend and I can't imagine how you must be feeling, nausea is not a nice thing."

Me: "That's where you're wrong, we're not friends. We're just colleagues and your attitude towards me just proved it."

Brenda: "Hau saana..." (Friend.)

She doesn't get it."

Me: "Don't saana me please, I want to be alone." (Friend.)

Brenda: "Lelo, I'm sorry. I was worried about you, that's all."

I don't believe her.

Me: "Okay, I can take care of myself. If I disgust you, leave."

Brenda: "I understand your anger Lelo and I'll blame it on the pregnancy. I will make you tea with lemon, it will help with the nausea. I'll be in the kitchen."

She leaves me with these words, I doubt I want to see her again today. I should take the rest of the day off. Hopefully they will let me go home.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

108\*

AMARA\*

The breakfast that Randall made this morning was definitely not edible, whoever told him that he can cook lied. He said he learnt by observing Chioma, no wonder his food is terrible, he only watched and didn't practice.

"Mara, Mara come quick, it's papa."

Liyana scampers into the living room, uttering in quick whispers.

Me: "What happened? Is he okay?"

Her sense of urgency has stopped my heart from beating, I can't imagine anything happening to Randall.

Liyana: "He's fine, silly."

Oh, this is what getting a mini heart attack feels like.

Me: "Okay, what is it then baby?"

She places her hands on her hips and takes up a cute little frown.

Liyana: "He's in the kitchen."

Her brows twitch and I'm forced to clog myself from laughing.

Me: "He's allowed to be in the kitchen, Liya baby."

She swipes her head back and forth.

Liyana: "Not when he's cooking Mara, we have to do something."

She declares and her tone says, this is an emergency. The little posture she has taken reminds me of Randall, she is so much like him.

Me: "In that case, let's get that man out of the kitchen."

Liyana: "I think I should tell him, I know how to be gentle with him. He'll be hurt but, less."

Okay.

Me: "I think we should see what he's doing first before we break his heart."

She hugs her chest and nods repeatedly.



Liyana: "It won't make a difference though, papa can't cook. He failed to make me cereal this one time."

I gasp to entertain her guiltless complaints.

Me: "Really?"

Liyana: "Yes, he put sugar in it Mara. Sugar, who puts sugar in cereal?"

I know I do...

She speaks with her hands a lot.

Me: "I am disappointed, sugar in cereal is a no, no."

I'm struggling to hold my laugh.

Liyana: "I know, me too."

She takes my hand.

Liyana: "Come on, let's stop him."

I let her lug me towards the kitchen.

Me: "So we agreed that you'll do the talking right?"

Liyana: "Yes, take notes."

She just said to take notes...

I'm stunned, you'd think she's fifteen.

We get to the kitchen and she points at him before cuddling her chest again. He's wearing an apron, rolled up button-ups to his elbow. Looking at his concentration you would think something great is about to come out of those pots.

I should have come here earlier, I can stand here and watch him all day.

He's bustling around, chopping and steering things in the pot. He holds a confident, assurance pose. His deportment says he's convinced that this is his next great meal.

I am completely turned on by his competence and self-confidence. I have never seen him so focused on anything like this before, he should do this more often. We'll worry about the food later, I could capture this moment on candid.

I'm surged back by an insignificant prick on my hip, I look down at Liyana's scowling face.

Liyana: "Tell him."

She whispers, I thought we agreed that she will speak.

Me: "What happened to you speaking and me taking notes?"

Liyana: "You tell him, I change my mind."

I gasp and she titters forcing Randall to turn. Liyana packs herself behind me, she's throwing me to the wolves.

He furrows a brow, not letting go of the poise on his face.

Randall: "Me hemma, good you're here." (My queen.)

Liyana's here too, cowardly hiding behind me.

Randall: "Come look at this, I found this recipe on line and I think it's coming out great. I was looking at recipes on the internet, I wanted to make something simple for lunch. You won't believe how modest ingredients can make a great dish."

I believe that any normal person knows this.

Randall: "There's this one I want to make for dinner, it's chicken strips with..."

Am I the only person who finds this adorable, his sudden obsession over putting a meal together? It shows that he has passion and is unapologetically himself, I'm literally melting.

Randall: "Why are you standing there? Come closer."

Liyana pulls the hem of my shirt, she wants me to tell him. I can't, not when I'm hooked like this, I just want to fuel his passion.

Me: "What are you making?"

I'm not really curious about it, I just enjoy watching him geek over this. It's undoubtedly the best thing in the world.

I hear Liyana sigh, as she presses her head on my back.

Me: "Liyana's here too."

I snitch.

Randall: "Where?"

She slides out, feigns a smile and sends him a short-lived wave. She is not impressed. We toddle towards him to see what he's raving about, there's a lip-smacking aroma, it can be deceiving though.

Randall: "Great, you two can be my food critiques."

He won't like our honesty.

Liyana: "Papa, Mara wants to tell you something."

This child... Such betrayal.

Randall; "What is it?"

He's back to bristling around.

Me: "I.. uhh... Well... The food this morning was..."

I glance down at Liyana, she's waiting as she impatiently bites the nail on her thumb.

Me: "It was great."

I am not breaking his heart or this newly found passion, he'll get better with time. Liyana smashes the palm of her hand on her forehead.

Randall: "I know."

He knows?

Liyana's jaw drops as she gazes at her father in awe, I'm shocked as well. Did he find that food eatable? He ogle at us before laughing.

Did I say laughing?

Wow, he's actually laughing, it's a quiet one but, it's there. Liyana goes from stunned to smiling and she's laughing in no time. I'm still trying to figure out what the joke is, their titters are contagious though.

Randall: "I'm kidding, I know it was terrible and you two were kind to not tell me. I'm sorry for putting you through that. This is my way of apologizing and making it up to you."

Then he's going to be doing a lot of those unless, he cracks this one.

Me: "It smells great."

Liyana: "Yeah papa."

She has a change of heart.

MKHIZE\*

My brothers called a meeting at Mthunzi's house, they still refuse to set foot in my house. I see three of them packed under a tree, drinking and making merry. When last did I have these moments with them? Msizi sees me drive through the gate and nudges the others, their faces change instantly. I suddenly feel that I am not wanted here. Why summon me, though?

Sika: "Should I come with you baba?" (Boss.)

Me: "Cha Sika, this is a private gathering."

I dash out of the car and saunter to them, not one of them has blinked. I can feel the immensity of their gaze.

Me: "Bafo ninjani kodwa?" (How are you, my brothers?)

No one responds, I find a spot next to Funani. He scoots away at the click of a tongue. I will

pretend that it was not for me.

Me: "Why did you call me here if you will ignore me?"

Mtunzi pulls out a document from his pocket and passes it to me.

Me: "What is this?"

Msizi: "Funda bafo." (Read brother.)

The figures don't match, this is impossible.

Funani: "Ikuphi imali bafo?" (Where is the money brother?)

Me: "I don't understand this, it can't be possible."

I would never betray my brothers, we have peacefully ran this business together.

Msizi: "Yeyi, bafo icacile lento ebhalwe lapho. Every cent in the business account has been transferred into your personal account." (It's clear what's written there.)

Msizi: "Explain yourself bafo. Is this a mistake?" (Brother.)

Funani: "There's no mistake, ubafo is stealing from us." (Brother.)

Funani seems to be the iratest of them all.

Me: "Mthunzi, uvumelana nalento? You know me, I would never betray you like this. You know me better than anyone." (Do you agree with this?)

He shakes his head in disapproval and I know that I'm doomed, if I don't have him on my side.

Mthunzi: "It's true, I know you bafo and I know that you are greedy. It's not just the money. Three taxis went missing last week and rumour has it that your people were seen using those taxis. They were transporting people in secret."

How can this be? I didn't hear anything about missing taxis.

Me: "That can't be true, I don't know anything about the taxis."

Funani: "Then, why are your men driving those taxis and they don't want anyone knowing about it. If you don't want to partner with us anymore, tell us bafo so we do this the right way. Going behind our backs is betrayal."

Me: "So, this is what it has come to? My own brothers accusing me of theft?"

Msizi: "Why are you being defensive? Show us proof, if you're so innocent."

Funani: "Tell us why the money is in your account and bring back the taxis."

Me: "I don't know anything, I am being framed here. Someone transferred that money into my account. Why won't you understand?"

Their persistence forces me to shout. How can they think that I would do such a thing? We have been in this business together for thirty years and suddenly they wake up and decide that they

don't trust me.

Msizi: "I told you that he will deny everything, unamanga lomuntu man." (This person is lying.)

He yells as he points his forefinger at me.

Me: "Bafo angathi uyakholwa ukuthi ukhuluma nobani." (You seem to be forgetting who you're talking to.)

Funani: "Asilwi bafo, sifuna iqiniso." (We're not fighting, we just want the truth.)

Msizi: "Mina ngiyalwa bafo, ngilwela ingane zami. Udlala ngathi lomuntu." (I'm fighting for my kids, this person is playing us.)

Me: "Msizi, it's not my fault that you have a hearing problem. I am your elder brother, don't you dare speak to me like that. Show respect."

He jumps from his seat, I should be the one who's angry not them.

Msizi: "What respect Mkhize, the one you lost when Musa died? When our son Lunga was killed, you have lost that respect you boasted about."

I never thought I would see the day when my brother would speak to me like this.

Me: "I'm done here, call me when you people have decided to grow up so, we can talk and find a way forward."

Funani: "You're running away bafo?" (Brother.)

I ignore him as I amble back to the car. I will be not be engaging in this nonsense.

NOMBULELO\*

Brenda: "Lelo, where are you going?"

I hear her voice as I exit the hospital.

She runs to me with a cup, I presume that's the lemon tea she spoke of.

Me: "I'm going home."

Brenda: "It's not knock off time yet."

Me: "They allowed me to go home, Brenda."

Brenda: "Oh, I guess I will be alone for the rest of the day."

I don't have time for chit chat.

Brenda: "Where's Mbuso?"



Today he's Mbuso, I thought she addressed him as doctor Xaba.

Me: "I'm taking a taxi."

Brenda: "In your condition?"

Me: "I'm not dying, it was just nausea or probably something I ate."

It is something I ate, I have been lucky as far as morning sickness is concerned. It's not as bad as I thought it would be.

Brenda: "I think you should request an Uber or something."

Not everyone has money to splash around.

Me: "Who's going to pay for it?"

Brenda: "Are you not dating a doctor? Or is he the stingy type?"

Funny how Mbuso always dives into our conversations.

Me: "Brenda, I have to go."

I am not sharing my business with her.

Brenda: "Wait, here's your tea. It will help you relax."

I don't want tea.

Me: "I'm okay thanks."

Brenda: "It has lemon, you need it. Imagine throwing up in a taxi."

Maybe she's right, but this tea does not look like it has lemon. It looks like strong black coffee.

Me: "There's lemon in this?"

I take the cup to inspect it.

Brenda: "Yes, I didn't put much though. My mom says it helps ease morning sickness."

If it looks like this, then I doubt it helps, I stretch out my hand to give it back to her. The cup slips out of my hand and crashes on the ground, Brenda shrieks as she shifts back.

Brenda: "What have you done?"

She shouts, I don't appreciate being yelled at.

Me: "Sorry, it just slipped."

Brenda: "What is wrong with you today? First it was the vomiting and now this."

She continues to shout.

Me: "It was a mistake Brenda, will you stop yelling at me?"

Brenda: "Sorry that was my favourite cup."

Me: "I will get you a new one."

I drop my eyes to the ground, to check the damage of the stupid cup and I am astounded by the thick black liquid that is adorned by the glass pieces. Black tea is not meant to look like this, it's almost as if someone spilled liquid charcoal.

Me: "Brenda, what is this?"

She gives me a confused look.

Brenda: "I don't know, that's not what was in the cup."

She's lying to me.

Me: "What the hell is this Brenda? What was in that tea?"

I'm yelling, this makes me angry. What was she trying to do?"

Brenda: "I told you that I don't know."

Me: "You're trying to kill my baby?"

Brenda: "How can you say that? I would never do that to you Lelo."

Me: "You stay the hell away from me or I swear Brenda."

Brenda: "Lelo, you're mistaken. I would never hurt you or your baby."

That's exactly what she wanted to do.

Wait a minute...

Me: "Did you put something in my food?"

She drops her gaze.

Brenda: "That's insane, I'm your friend Lelo."

Me: "Voetsek, nonsense. Ungijwayela kabi wena, if anything happens to my child uzonya Brenda."  
(Piss off, you're getting forward with me. You will shit yourself.)

Brenda: "Lelo, don't leave like this."

She calls after me as I march away.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

109\*

NKOMO\*

I don't know where we are headed to, Styles hasn't revealed his plan yet. He never shares what his twisted mind is telling him. He's driving while I'm sitting in the back seat with Tshidi, she hasn't stopped crying since we left Alexander.

Me: "When are we getting to our destination?"

Styles: "Hold your horses, it's not like you have a woman to get home to."

He chortles, he is definitely having a thrill at this.

Me: "Hey, I'm as nervous as she is. I think I'm more terrified than her, knowing how psycho you can be."

Tshidi glares at me as fear paints her face.

Tshidi: "Styles wa tsenwa?" (Styles is crazy?)

She gasps and her eyes widen as I nod, responding to her question.

Tshidi: "Ke kopa go bua le Neo." (Can I speak to Neo?)

Styles: "Nkomo, see what you have done. You've ruined this road trip, I was enjoying myself and I can't be happy when Tshidi is sad."

The sarcasm.

Tshidi: "Sty... Styles... kea kopa hle, ke batla go bua le Neo." (I'm begging you Styles, can I speak to Neo please?)

She's desperate.

Styles: "What do you want from Neo?"

Tshidi: "I want to apologize."

Styles: "Neo can't entertain anyone at the moment, he's busy attending to his wounds. Some witch burnt him. Can you believe that Tshidi? I knew women were dangerous, I thought it was that, passionate fiery type of dangerous, the one that turns a man on."

I see what he did there with the word fiery. His psychotic persona is kicking in.

Styles: "But, I have been proven wrong. That woman is a whole different breed."



His words have Tshidi trembling like a leaf, she doesn't know what this man has in store for her."

Styles: "Tell me Tshidi. What would you do if someone were to burn you?"

Tshidi: "Nothing."

Tshidi finches due to his scornful guffaw.

Styles: "Nothing? You're a forgiving person Tshidi and I like that, honestly. The world needs more people like you."

The bastard is playing with her emotions.

Tshidi: "Tha... thank you."

He sniggers at her gratitude.

Styles: "You know what I would do?"

Silence, she's snivelling.

Styles: "Are you still there?"

He peeks through the rear view mirror.

Styles: "Is she asleep Nkomo? It must be my driving, I have to drive smoothly because we have a lady on board."

I should be afraid right now.

Me: "She's wide awake man."

Styles: "Why isn't she answering then?"

Me: "Beats me Styles."

Styles: "I hate being ignored Tshidi, it makes me want to burn something."

There we go again with the irony.

Tshidi: "I don't know."

Her voice quavers.

Styles: "You don't know what?"

Tshidi: "I don't know what you would do, if someone were to burn you."

This is what hope looks like, it's that little nudge that tells her that if she cooperates maybe, he won't hurt her.

Styles: "Oh, you're still there. I almost forgot about that."

Me: "Quit playing with the girl Styles."

I reprimand him and he laughs it off.



Styles: "I'm not playing with her Nkomo, I'm just immersed in this beautiful embrace. I love how it blends together with this weather, it ignites a certain desire in me.

He throws in the word 'ignite' and now I have put the pieces together, he plans to burn her. The question is how?

Tshidi: "What would you do, if someone burns you, Styles?"

She wants to know what's in store for her.

Styles: "You know curiosity killed the cat, it doesn't say how it was killed though. I think it was burnt to death."

He laughs, he is not about to get off this rollercoaster. Tshidi scans the car with her eyes, she's looking for an escape.

Me: "Tone it down Styles, the hair at the back of my neck is standing."

He laughs at my revelation. Styles is a laugher, it's always a warm one but right now, this eerie laugh is sending chills through my body.

Styles: "Burn... burn... burn..."

He's singing and it's only now that I hear the song on the radio. It's Ellie Goulding's burn, this man is sick and Tshidi has no clue at all of what's coming.

Me: "You know if I knew that you were going to go crazy, I was going to stay behind. I'd rather chill with Ruth than be here. You are creeping me out man."

Styles: "I am offended Nkomo, I thought we're inseparable."

Me: "Whose child are you?"

This could be the reason behind his psychotic behaviour, he was rejected by his father before he was born and his mother died forcing him to man up at a very young age.

Styles: "Tshidi, here's your favourite song."

He completely ignores my question.

Styles: "Neo tells me that you and fire make one hell of a team."

I don't know anymore.

Tshidi: "It's not true, I have a phobia for fire."

She's lying, the puzzle must be coming together. Her mind is surely, showing her the light.

Styles: "That's sad but, you love this song, don't you? I like it, this is the first time hearing it but, I'm taken. Whoever this artist is, lit the fire in me. I like the part where she says we're burning one hell of something, I instantly picture a certain woman and that gets me excited. In that blazing moment, I glow like a kid in a candy store."

He floods his sentence with hints.



Tshidi: "I want to pee, please pull over."

Her words escape her mouth in a shudder.

Styles: "Right here?"

Tshidi: "Yes."

Styles: "I'm sure there's a garage somewhere. Can't you hold it?"

Tshidi: "No."

Styles: "Should I pull over, Nkomo?"

Me: "I vote against it, we should continue. I think she wants to flee."

I'm stimulating his insanity.

Styles: "Is it true Tshidi? Are you making a fool out of me?"

Tshidi: "No, I... I really want to pee."

She stutters.

Styles: "If Nkomo says it, then it must be true, I'm sorry I can't pull over. Think of fire, it will distract you."

Tshidi: "Are you going to burn me, Styles?"

He dives into an uncanny laugh.

Styles: "Give the girl a price, she's smart after all. A flaring price, she deserves that."

I'm pretty sure Tshidi has died a million times, this fear the he's drilling in her is enough to kill you. Hell, I'm terrified myself.

Tshidi: "Please stop Styles, that's enough. Why are you torturing me?"

She hollers as she wipes her tears.

Styles: "What did I do? I'm only having a conversation with you. Road trips can be boring, someone's got to light it up and no one is putting this fire out baby."

Me: "Your train should stop right here Styles."

It's about time I stop him, Tshidi is terrified enough.

We pass the FNB stadium, headed to Riverlea, he takes a turn on the first left. A few houses later, he parks in front of an abandoned small house. There's a coloured man, leaning against an old rusted broken-down gate. His body is slanted to the side and he's smoking like a chimney. He could be about the same age group as us. What is Styles planning?

Me: "Is this it?"

Styles: "Yeah, let's go."

Tshidi: "Styles, Ke kopa go bua le Neo tu?" (Can I speak to Neo?)

Styles: "Neo is busy sweetheart, we'll try him later, okay."

He jumps out of the car, I follow with a reluctant Tshidi.

"Aweh ma se kind." (Hello, mom's kid.)

The man greets, swinging his body left and right.

Styles: "My broe, hoe gaan dit?" (How are you my bother?)

"Lekker my broe." (Good my brother.)

Styles: "Jammer ons is laat." (Sorry we're late.)

The man chortles as he puffs a cigarette.

"Geen probleem my broe, I'm a very patient man. (No problem my brother.)

Me: "I don't mean to interrupt but..."

I get their attention by clearing my throat.

Styles: "Sorry, this is Keagan."

Okay, I'm guessing he's not going to introduce us to Keagan.

Styles: "Is alles gereed? (Is everything ready?)

Keagan: "Alles is lekker." (Everything is good.)

Keagan gets to know the plan while I'm kept in the dark. Nice one Styles.

AMARA\*

I am done basking over the glory of Randall's passion, seeing this gooey dish before me has killed it, Liyana is as disappointed as I am.

Liyana: "Is it supposed to look like this?"

She makes a face as she pokes the food with a fork.

Randall: "It doesn't look like this on the picture."

He's disappointed too.

Me: "Maybe it tastes better."

I don't know what I'm looking at, it's food but...

Liyana: "My tummy hurts."



Liar, she doesn't want to taste it. She looks at me and pouts, she's looking for an escape and wants me to provide one for her.

Me: "Would you like something else rather?"

She nods with a big smile.

Randall: "No, the food can't go to waste. Everyone will eat this."

Liyana: "Mara..."

She whines, she is not up for this.

Me: "I think the chef should go first."

He glances at me, I shrug.

Randall: "It can't be as bad as it looks."

Our expressions can't hide the truth. He picks a fork, takes a deep breath and scoops a small portion. Liyana makes a sour face while watching her father take this journey. She bursts into laughter as he spits everything out on the plate. He grabs a soviet and wipes his tongue before, gulping down a glass of water.

Randall: "What is this?"

You tell us, you made it.

Liyana: "Sorry papa but, you're a bad cook."

She laughs at him.

Randall: "You guys can't eat this poison."

Liyana: "Awesome."

She yells with elation, trust Liyana to be blunt.

Me: "I'll make us something."

Liyana: "I want to help."

Randall: "Thank you for the vote of confidence."

He's sulking.

Me: "You can try again next time."

Liyana nudges me with her elbows, she thinks this is a bad idea.

Randall: "I saw that Liya."

She covers her mouth clogging a titter.

Randall is a little disappointed, this is what they mean when they talk about big babies. A

crumple gathers between his eye brows as his phone rings, he's not happy about whoever is calling.

Randall: "Yes."

<<<Listens>>>

His eyes fall on Liyana, I can't make out what's on his mind but, the look in his eyes is that of relief.

Randall: "It was bound to happen, take care of it."

<<<Listens>>>

Randall: "Let me know when you're done."

He drops the call and ogles at Liyana who jumps up at the sound of a door knock.

Liyana: "I'll get it."

She's half way there.

Randall: "Liya, don't."

He rushes after her and whisks her up the moment she touches the door Knob.

Randall: "Don't ever do that Liyana, you're too young to be opening doors."

He chastises her.

Liyana: "I'm ten and a half."

Randall: "Yes, you're a baby."

Whoever is at the door continues to knock.

Randall: "It's not safe for you to open for strangers, okay?"

Liyana: "Okay papa."

Randall: "Go to Mara."

He places her down and she scurries to me, we both watch as Randall opens the door. It's Kenneth.

Randall: "Mkhize?"

Kenneth: "Okolie."

I sense tension between the two.

Randall: "I think you're lost."

I doubt he is.

Kenneth: "I'm at the right place."



Randall: "What are you doing in my house?"

Kenneth: "A word, it's about your father."

They both turn to us, I think this is our cue.

Me: "Liya, let's go see what we can find in the kitchen."

I want to know what Kenneth has to say about Segun, hopefully, Randall will tell me when I ask him.

SETHU\*

I don't know why I'm worried about Styles, something doesn't feel right. Ayize says I overthink a lot, I doubt that's the case.

Me: "Something is telling me not to go to work."

Ayize: "How do you mean?"

She's driving me to work.

Me: "You know that feeling you get, like a warning or something. I don't know how to explain it, it's so strong I can't push it away."

It's kind of suffocating a bit, it might have something to do with Styles.

Ayize: "Let's turn this car around then."

Me: "I've been off work for too long, we're short staffed. Tracy keeps complaining that I'm always off."

Ayize: "Who is this Tracy? I will deal with her."

Her reactions are like this sometimes.

Me: "She's my colleague and you're not dealing with her, she's right."

Ayize: "I'm so glad I'm not like you, sisi umuntu uyam'shaya. One slap and they'll never look in your direction." (You must hit people.)

Me: "Not everything should be solved with violence."

She huffs, Ayize has her own beliefs.

Ayize: "I think you're in the wrong field, wena. As a nurse, you need to be tough so, no one walks on your toes. When they see you approaching, batatazele abantu." (People must tremble at the sight of you.)

I am not taking her advice by the way.

Ayize: "Like that witch at the mall, yoh, I'm telling you. If I got my hands on her, I was going to start with that cheap weave on her head."

Me: "Why the violence?"

Ayize: "I grew up in the ghetto, that's how we solve bitches like her. They don't understand when you use words, one klap and you're done." (Slap.)

She speaks with passion, she is a fighter but a lady first and needs to act like one.

Me: "There will be no slapping Ayize."

Ayize: "I'll be here if you change your mind."

Me: "Don't hold your breath."

She finds this funny.

Ayize: "Is Mr. S fetching you or should I wake up early tomorrow?"

Me: "I'll let you know, you never know with him."

Ayize: "He's very mysterious."

I have observed that, it's what makes him who he is and I wouldn't change him for anything.

She pulls up at the hospital parking.

Me: "Thanks."

Ayize: "I'm going in with you."

Me: "Why?"

Ayize: "I want to see something."

I don't trust her tone.

Me: "Something or someone?"

Ayize: "Let's go."

I let her follow me, hoping that she will not do anything stupid. That feeling targets me again, something bad is going to happen.

Ayize: "How is this place at night? Do you see any ghosts?"

Oh Lord.

Me: "I've never seen one, I've heard stories though. There are people who have seen them."

Ayize: "By people, you mean your co-workers?"

Me: "Yes."

Ayize: "And they still work here?"





Me: "Do they have a choice?"

Ayize: "Yes, I would quit same time. No way am I working in a haunted place."

Me: "What hospital doesn't have ghosts?"

Ayize: "Who said I would continue being a nurse? That shit will make me retire early, Sethu mtaka baba, you play with ghost vele?" (My father's child.)

It's not as bad as she makes it sound.

Me: "Come on, that's a bit exaggerated don't you think."

Ayize: "Come and tell me this the day you actually see a ghost."

I'm done entertaining her story, she follows me inside. I can't comprehend why she's doing this, she could be keeping an eye on me.

Ayize: "Okay, coast is clear, I'm going back."

She scans our surroundings with these words.

Me: "Did Styles ask you to keep an eye on me?"

She laughs.

Ayize: "I'm just looking out for you, keep your eyes open and don't be alone."

This must have something to do with what happened at the mall.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

110\*

SETHU\*

Tracy: "Look who's at work? Welcome back."

It's not a friendly greeting, this is her way of complaining.

Me: "I had things to deal with Tracy."

She cackles, I don't understand the attitude, she's a nice person although she can be the staff Radio.

Tracy: "You asked me to take over your shifts Sethu, it was meant to be for a day. You took two, I have my issues too you know."

She should've told me.

Me: "I'm sorry, I didn't know."

Why am I apologizing? I didn't know... Haibo.

Tracy: "Anyway, are you sorted?"

I nod while signing some forms, we're at the reception and she's leaning in against the counter. This is her 'I want to know everything' posture, it comes with the snooping mask she's wearing.

Me: "Yeah, I think I am."

I sense some questions coming.

Tracy: "What's going on?"

You don't need a fortune teller to figure her out.

Me: "Nothing just family issues."

Tracy: "Is it about Lebo? I hear that there's no hope for her."

Tracy has been sent here to dig information.

Me: "No and I wouldn't tell you if it was."

Her lower lip drops, this is her famous 'really' look.

Tracy: "Anyway, look at this."

She puts her hand out, showing me a ring on her finger. It's an engagement ring or she got

married? I don't know her that much to figure out what it could be.

Me: "Wow, you're engaged?"

This is a question slash statement, she will have to clear it out for me.

Tracy: "Yes."

She says like I'm supposed to know.

Me: "Wow, congratulations."

I'm happy for her not that, I care enough to be over the moon.

Tracy: "Thank you."

She beams, the ear to ear kind of smile.

Tracy: "He proposed last night, I was shocked."

Me: "I can imagine."

Not really...

Tracy: "Kay is full of surprises you know, his parents don't like me."

Me: "Oh."

Tracy: "They are pastors and think that their son walks on water, we've been together for two years now and till today they refuse to accept me. I can't figure out how pastors can be so heartless."

It happens.

Me: "They will grow to love you, don't stress about it."

Tracy: "I doubt it, hopefully when the baby is born."

Me: "Baby?"

She's carrying a bag of surprises today.

Tracy: "Yeah, I'm pregnant. Somehow I think that's why he proposed."

Me: "Some men would run and never look back, you got yourself a keeper girl."

She beams again.

Tracy: "I know right, I want you to be one of the bride's maids."

Huh!!! I said, I don't know her that much.

Me: "I'm flattered Tracy but, why would you ask me? I'm sure you have a zoo of friends you can ask."

She laughs.

Tracy: "Zoo? Those monkeys are fake, I like you. You're genuine."

Not a good enough reason but if she insists.

Me: "Can I think about it?"

Tracy: "You're allowed and no is off the table."

Styles should be here by now, my mind is not in this conversation. I should've gone back with Ayize, this feeling is getting deeper and it's starting to scare me.

Tracy: "Who are you looking for?"

She's probing due to my unsettlement, I feel a need to stay vigilant.

Me: "No one."

Tracy: "There was someone here asking about you."

She introduces.

Me: "Who?"

It could've been Styles but, no. Styles would've called.

Tracy: "I don't know, some woman. I think she was on drugs, she was fidgety and kept browsing around. She wouldn't say who she was."

I can't imagine who it could be.

Me: "What did she say? When was this?"

Tracy: Two days ago, she wanted to know about your working hours and what time you get to work. She might as well have asked for your schedule sheet. She said something about an emergency and that she needed your address because she couldn't get through to you."

Me: "Please tell me you didn't give it to her."

Tracy: "I didn't."

This is scary.

Tracy: "What happened?"

My eyes can't keep still, it's possible that the stalker has found my place of work and there's a chance that they are watching me right now.

Me: "Nothing, let's go."

I need to keep myself busy, I will go crazy if I don't.

NKOM0\*

We're in the living area, Tshidi continues to cry desperately and Styles has no care at all. I can only hope that he doesn't kill the poor woman. Keagan disappeared into one of the rooms and we're standing in the middle of the living room, waiting for him.

Tshidi: "Styles please, don't do this."

She pleads.

Styles: "Don't do what Tshidi?"

Tshidi: "Don't kill me please."

Styles: "Who said I'm going to kill you? I don't hurt women Tshidi, I swear I don't. You are God's gift to mankind. Why would I want to hurt such a priceless jewel? Keagan on the other hand is one mean son of a bitch."

He might as well laugh in her face.

Tshidi: "Okay, plead him for me. Tell him not to hurt me please, I have a baby Styles, he needs me."

Styles: "I know sweetheart, I know. Don't worry, everything will be okay. This is just to put you to order. Do you know how much I hate women who abuse men Tshidi? Just as much as I hate men who abuse women. Can't we just live in peace? This whole thing is fucking exhausting. Why won't you share your son with Neo, in peace? He's the father dammit, must he crawl and beg just to see his son? Must he go through fire only because the law is on your side?"

He raises his voice at her, this is the first time since this whole thing began.

Tshidi: "I'm sorry Styles."

She yells back.

Styles: "No, you're not sorry, you don't care about Neo or your son. To you, he's a ticket to getting money you didn't work for. Men have been beaten up, burnt, killed and had their children kept from them by people like you. The moment he leaves you and decides to move on, you go on a crazy rampage and want to control every move he makes. The most sickening part about this is that, you use your son as a ladder. How wicked can you be Tshidi? Why would you hurt such a good man like Neo?"

This seems to be coming from a personal point of view.

Tshidi: "I was angry at him."

Styles: "Why? What wrong did he do? The only crime he did was to love his son. Neo didn't run when you fell pregnant, he stayed like he should have and took full responsibility for his son. You are just a bitter ex who won't let go of the past. Listen to me Tshidi, I will help Neo get custody of his son and I will make sure that you do not get visitation rights. It will be up to him if he wants you to see that child. You're a toxic woman and if that boy grows up in your presence,

he will never come right in life.”

I didn't know Styles felt so passionate about domestic violence.

Tshidi: “I won't bother Neo again, I promise Styles.”

Styles: “Your word means nothing.”

Me: “You belong in jail Tshidi, if I were Neo, I would get you arrested.”

Pondering upon it, it hits me that this is what we are facing in this country and it is a hidden issue or rather no one cares to speak about it. Basically men do not have any form of protection.

Keagan comes back carrying a blow torch, Tshidi screams and hides behind Styles who moves away from her.

Styles: “I want her to feel how it's like to be burnt, just mark the soles of her feet and the palms of her hands.”

Tshidi: “No, please.”

She screams as she carries her hands on her head, she is clearly wasting her tears because Styles is not touched whatsoever.

Styles: “Don't treat her wounds, let's see if she will sleep through the pain. Only in the morning can you dump her at the hospital.”

He gives out his instructions.

Me: “Won't she spill?”

Styles: “Who will listen to her? They will dub her

crazy, I mean, I have some documents proving that Tshidi is a mentally ill arsonist. She sets things on fire just for the fun of it and that makes her a danger to herself and her son.”

When did he think of all of this?

Tshidi: “That's not true.”

Styles: “I know but, the world doesn't know that. Test me if you want Tshidi and I will have you spending your entire life in a stretch jacket.”

Tshidi: “Why are you cruel?”

Styles: “I'm not cruel, justice is cruel.”

Tshidi should keep quiet now before Styles changes his mind about not killing her.

Styles: “I think we should go now Nkomo, I have somewhere to be.”

He ambles towards the door and Tshidi rushes after him, she hooks her arms around his waist from behind and holds on, as if it's a matter of life and death.

Styles: “What are you doing?”

He snaps at her.

Tshidi: "Don't leave me here with him please, take me home."

Her face is pressed on his back while she weeps and Styles is trying to unlock her hands.

Keagan: "I won't bite my skattie, looks can be deceiving but, I have a big heart."

I doubt it and any woman would be scared of that tone.

Styles: "Don't touch me."

He wins in freeing her arms from him and she falls on her knees crying, I almost feel sorry for her. Styles doesn't bother to look back as he walks out, leaving Tshidi screaming.

Me: "What's the plan?"

I ask as we get in the car.

Styles: "There's no plan."

Me: "Is he really going to burn her."

Styles: "Yes."

He answers bluntly.

Me: "And, what will happen after that?"

Styles: "What's with the questions?"

Me: "I want to know what the plan is, surely this is not it."

Styles: "You want to know if he will kill her."

Took the words right out of my mouth.

Styles: "I hate her but, I don't want her dead. Neo loathes violence, he would never forgive me if I kill the mother of his child."

Neo means a lot to him.

Me: "What about the documents you spoke of?"

Styles: "Those are real, one mistake from her and she's going to a psychotic ward. She herself will start believing that she really is crazy."

Me: "You're mean."

Styles: "I am just protecting my own."

If this is protection from him then I'm glad that I'm on his side, I wouldn't want to double cross this man.



RANDALL\*

You can imagine how shocked I was when I saw Kenneth standing at my door step, he is the last person I expected to see here. There is bad blood between us, I felt it the moment we met.

I lead him to the back yard, the weather is good today and winter seems to be passing.

Kenneth: "How is your bride?"

He sounds ancient, I would think I'm speaking to my grandfather.

Me: "She's fine."

Kenneth: "Is she coping since that experience?"

He shouldn't care because he doesn't know her.

Me: "She's stronger than she looks."

He nods as if he does know her.

Kenneth: "I noticed that day, not once did she shed a tear. In the midst of that chaos, she kept her poise."

Me: "Like I said, she's a strong woman."

He sits back and crosses his leg over the other, a pucker grows between his eye brows while, scrutinizing me under his gaze. I can't read the secrets in his mind, he's completely shut off.

Me: "Thank you for saving her, I didn't get the chance that day."

He nods, whatever that means.

Me: "Why did you do it? You don't know her, you don't know me but, you risked your life."

There must be a catch.

Kenneth: "Styles is like a brother to me."

Yeah right.

Me: "You did it for Styles?"

Kenneth: "I came through for a brother and I know he will come through for me when I need him."

He sounds convincing.

Me: "That's all?"

Kenneth: "That's all, I would do it again with no hesitation at all. You have a good woman Okolie."

Where the hell is this coming from?

Me: "What brings you to my house?"





I don't think I like discussing Amara with him, he clears his throat as he shifts on his seat.

Kenneth: "You shouldn't be alive, you know that?"

His deadpan voice lets me know that he's serious.

Me: "Excuse me?"

Kenneth: "That was the plan, the mysterious sickness that suddenly befell you was supposed to send you to your death."

This is not what nana said, he would've told me. (Grandfather.)

Me: "What are you saying Mkhize?"

He frowns, I know he wants to retaliate. He will have to swallow this surname, it's his anyway.

Kenneth: "There's a plan in progress. Apparently, you're supposed to mysteriously die. It will be a hoax, your body will lie dead in a coffin but, it won't be you. It will be a shadow of you."

Me: "I don't understand."

Kenneth: "Your father is an evil man, just like pastors go looking for power to heal the sick and fill churches. Your father went looking for power to save himself and his kingdom."

Me: "I know this, explain the part where I supposedly die."

Could nana have missed this? (Grandfather.)

Kenneth: "Segun has grown desperate after your body rejected the sickness. Like I said, you will mysteriously die. Only, you won't be dead, your body will be taken and replaced with a shadow of you. It's common in witchcraft, where a family member takes someone in the family and turns them into a zombie just to gain power over the family."

How far is Segun willing to go?

Kenneth: "Playing the grieving father, he will come and claim your body. You will be taken to Ghana and buried there, everyone will think that you're dead but, in reality you are ruling your father's kingdom alongside Ruth and her father."

How does he know?"

Me: "Where did you hear this?"

Kenneth: "Puppet? Does it ring a bell?"

My grandfather mentioned it.

Me: "Yes, I was told that Segun wants to make me his puppet."

Again, how is he informed?

Kenneth: "Puppet is a fancy word for zombie, you will be controlled Okolie. This is the only way they can get what they want."

Me: "How do you know?"

Kenneth: "It's no secret that I'm in a brotherhood, Segun is the second in command and I'm right beside him. Your father is not that smart, he's too trustworthy. Their first plan backfired, you must know Okolie that they, will do anything to have you married to Ruth."

I think the only way to get rid of Segun is to send him to his father, that's if his ancestors will accept him.

Me: "Why are you telling me all of this? What's the deal?"

He shifts to the edge of the seat.

Kenneth: "I'm doing it for Styles, you're all he's got."

So, he says.

Me: "What about my brother?"

He simpers.

Kenneth: "Your brother is different from you, I must say, he is very insecure. He tries hard to impress that evil man, he's a yes boy. There's nothing he doesn't agree to, Segun would treat his gardener better than he treats his son. He mocks him in his absence, calls him names and that boy has no clue about it."

Me: "He's a man."

He shrugs as he gets up.

This is what it has come to, I have to save Raven from that evil man.

Kenneth: "I'll leave the rest to you, do what you please with this information."

I lead him out.

Me: "Thank you for this."

Kenneth: "I might not like you Okolie but, you don't deserve what those people want to do to you. I wouldn't wish it on my biggest enemy. Keep your eyes open and keep your family safe."

I watch him as he jumps into the car and drive off, Segun Okolie cannot be my father. How can he have such evil intentions for his son?

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

111\*

SETHU\*

I'm walking down the hallway while trying Styles' number, it rings unanswered and I can't grasp why he's not taking my calls. My body feels stiff and my heart has been racing nonstop, I tried drinking warm water to calm myself down. It didn't work, my mind is telling a million things at once. I want to go home, I have to go home. Let me try Ayize, she always takes my calls. I trust her to do that, I know that I can always depend on her.

"You miss me already?"

That's the first thing she says.

Me: "Where are you?"

Ayize: "On my way home. What happened?"

The sound of my voice has given me away, I'm failing to control it from quavering.

Me: "Please come and get me, something is wrong."

Ayize: "What happened?"

I hear panic in her voice.

How do I explain this?

Me: "I think, I have death anxiety."

Ayize: "Death what?"

Me: "I'm overcome by a fear of dying, Ayize come and get me please."

My emotions take over, I'm a stranger to this feeling and I cannot comprehend why I feel like this.

Ayize: "Shit, hold on. I'm coming, it must be those ghosts. There's probably one behind you right now, that place is scary."

She proclaims, I would laugh if I wasn't this terrified. I have an incoming call, Styles finally decides to call me.

Me: "I have to go, Styles is calling."

Ayize: "Should I still come?"

Me: "Yes, I don't know if he's here or home."

Ayize: "Okay, I'll see you just now."

I answer the call.

Styles: "Kitten, I'm on my way."

Me: "Are you okay Styles?"

At first, I thought the feeling was about him, I'm not so sure anymore.

Styles: "I'm okay, what happened? You sound distressed."

Me: "I don't know, something doesn't feel right."

Styles: "What is it Sethu? Did you see that woman again?"

Me: "No, my sixth sense raider is going crazy right now, I can't help but, feel that something bad is going to happen."

I don't know how to explain it.

Styles: "I knew you shouldn't have gone to work."

Yeah, I never listen.

Styles: "I'm almost there Sethu."

He declares before hanging up.

"SETHU!!!"

I swivel at the loud female voice shouting out my name and a greasy warm liquid splashes on my face, there's an angry woman and she's pouring this liquid on me. There is anger and hate in the way she does this, her eyes are cold and her jaw is clenched. I scream as I shield my face with my hands, this doesn't stop her.

My sense of smell kicks in and conspires together with my mind, as it sends a message to my brain. In a flash, a picture of gasoline comes to light.

It takes a second for me to snap back into reality, my intuition says, run.

This ward is empty, it doesn't have that much people. There's about three of us here, Tracy and two male nurses.

I turn to run the other direction, I don't know where I'm going but, I am running for my life. I hear people scream behind me, something has happened. I turn my head to inspect while running, she has a gun aimed at them.

Who is this woman and what does she want from me?

"Come back you bitch."

She screams like a crazy woman, I see the exit. It's dark outside, if this was a mall, I would run

into a crowd of people. Unfortunately, it's a hospital. Visiting hours are over. The place only holds doctors, nurses and patients. It turns into a remote location by night, anything could happen to me and no one will know about it.

My colleagues are too afraid to run after this woman who has a gun, I can only pray that they have called the police. I can't put my hope in them as well however, I will settle for it. I turn to see her running after me with a gun still in her hand, dammit she's fast. I can't run around with blinkers on, I have to think if I want to survive.

I'm in the parking lot, there are about a few cars. If only I could make it to the road, there are moving cars there. I turn to see if she's still tailing me, she's not there. I might have dodged her, I still have to keep going. I hear a loud single gunshot and that is enough to startle me and bring me crashing down.

"Where do you think you're going?"

I turn to see her striding towards me as she points a gun at me.

Me: "What do you want from me?"

I am terrified out of my wits.

"I just want you out of my way."

Me: "I don't know you, you must have the wrong person."

I haven't done anything wrong to anyone.

"I have the right person, alright?"

She declares coldly.

Me: "Tell me what I did. What wrong did I do to you?"

She swims into an inhumane laugh and I fail to comprehend, what I have to do with this evil person.

"You have set your eyes on someone who doesn't belong to you, Styles is mine."

She screams.

This is...

This is his ex, Styles hasn't said much about her though.

Me: "Khethu?"

Khethu: "He's told you about me? I knew that he still loves me, he will never forget me. You just had to come and stand in my way."

Me: "No, I didn't, Styles is my friend and nothing more."

Will I die because of a man?

Khethu: "You're lying, you're lying. I saw him last night, he came to your apartment and left this morning. What were you two doing?"

She shouts."

Me: "Nothing, we didn't do anything I swear, he's just my friend."

Khethu: "I'm not stupid Sethu. Did you sleep with him?"

I shake my head, negatively.

Khethu: "You slept with him didn't you, didn't you?"

She barks, my eyes are on the gun. If she loses it, she will snap and pull that trigger.

Me: "I promise you, you can ask him if you want."

Khethu: "I'm not stupid, I know Styles, he is a sexual man. He's cheated on me before and lied about it."

Why is she telling me this? She must be talking about a different Styles.

Khethu: "Did he touch you like he touches me? Did he call out your name like he does mine? There's this thing he does when you stroke his hair, it's as if a shock wave goes through his entire body and he shivers. It's the most beautiful thing ever and it lets me know that, he still loves me and wants me."

I can't stand to hear her say these things about Styles, there's a deep urge to block my ears.

Me: "Please don't shoot me, you can have Styles. I don't want him."

She flashes a quick smile.

Khethu: "That's the thing, I have to get you out of the way. You will be like a fly in our relationship, no matter how much we shoo you away, you will keep coming back."

Styles didn't tell me that she's insane, she has lost her mind.

Me: "I will go away, I promise. I will never speak to him again."

I plead for my life, she shakes her head and I am convinced that my words have fallen against a wall.

Me: "I'm sorry Khethu, I'm sorry, please."

I'm apologizing and I don't know why. I didn't do anything wrong.

Khethu: "Save it, you mean nothing to me, just like this stupid apology. Once you're gone, Styles will come back to me."

I have been a good person my whole life, I go to church. I pray every night and read my bible. Was it all in vain? Is being good not worth it at all? What's the point of it? At the end of the day, terrible things still happen to you.

Khethu: "You like playing with fire, don't you? Let's play bitch."

Me: "Please don't hurt me, I don't want to die."

I want to live for my family, I want to live for Styles. I want to live for the memories we haven't made yet.

Khethu: "You don't deserve to live."

She says, as if she has the right to decide my fate, I'm on the ground covered in gasoline. She pulls out a lighter and my world crumbles from beneath me. This is what it feels like to have your life flash before you. It feels so unreal, time hasn't stopped but, it has slowed down and yet it's so fast. It's a mixed muddled confusion. In this mere fraction of a second, I surprisingly come to terms with the probability of death.

Me: "God forgive me for all my sins and take me as I am."

I say a little prayer, if I'm going to die, then I want to die right with God.

Khethu: "Are you praying?"

She laughs insultingly.

Khethu: "Not even God will save you from this fire."

Me: "You're not a bad person Khethu and I forgive you."

Khethu: "Shut up."

I'm wheezing and my heart is fighting to jump out of my chest, as I'm ogling at this lit lighter in her hand. She wants to burn me alive.

It all happens so fast, as a splash of water pours over her, causing her to scream. I move my eyes to the side to meet Styles, he's carrying a bucket. I can't tell the look on his face and I can't say that, it's anger but, it's not a nice glare.

Styles: "Sethu."

He calls as he moves to shield me, Khethu quickly shifts to point the gun at him.

Khethu: "Styles don't."

I see Ayize, she's also here. When did they get here? I was lost in my fear of dying that I missed their paths.

Ayize: "Yey wena, jou bliksem." (You lightning.)

Only Ayize would charge at an armed person. Khethu shoots at her, she yelps as she ducks and falls flat on her stomach.

Styles: "Give me the gun Khethu."

He demands, firmly.

Khethu: "No, move Styles. Can't you see that she's disturbing our piece?"

She's screaming at him.

Styles: "Give me the gun Khethu. Why are you doing this?"

He grunts as he repeats himself. I don't see her giving up soon.

Khethu: "I'm doing it for us Styles, for our baby."

What baby? Styles didn't tell me anything about a baby.

Styles: "What are you talking about?"

Khethu: "I'm pregnant, you're going to be a father."

This is a bad dream, it has to be. This can't be reality, if it is then, it must be a joke.

Styles: "Okay, give me the gun."

He sounds too calm now, I think he's trying to get her to lower the gun.

Khethu: "Didn't you hear what I said? We're going to be parents."

Styles: "I heard you, now give me the gun."

There's a resistance in her eyes, her mind just told her something.

Khethu: "You don't believe me, do you?"

Styles: "I didn't say that."

Khethu: "Then say it, say that you believe me."

She screams.

Styles: "We'll talk about this once you give me that gun."

He's so adamant on getting that pistol from her, she glares at him for a while, before tears fill her eyes. Hopelessness coats her face, as an unknown realization engulfs her. She starts to stagger back as slow as she could.

Styles: "Dammit, Khethu."

He grunts, he's aggravated by her moves.

Khethu: "I'm sorry Styles, I love you too much to let you go."

Ayize: "Mr. S, she's getting away."

She yells as Khethu marches backwards, that gun has given her the power she possesses at the moment.

Ayize is still lying on her stomach, her hands covering her head. I don't blame her, I haven't had the courage to get up. Styles rushes to me the moment Khethu is far enough not to hurt us,



Ayize jolts up and starts to run after Khethu, protesting that, I'm the only one without courage.

Ayize: "Yey moer, jou moer!!!" (You nut.)

She yells at Khethu while speeding to her direction, this is dangerous.

Me: "AYIZE!!!"

I shout, my voice covered in terror. There's another gun shot and Ayize is back on the ground, she shot her. Oh my God, she shot her.

Styles: "Ayize."

We both rush to her, my mind has gone blank. This is scarier than what I just experienced, I can't lose my sister.

Me: "Ayize."

I freeze before her, I'm afraid to touch her. What if she's dead? What will I say to my parents?

"That bitch."

What? I don't know if I should cry or laugh. What is wrong with this girl?

I throw myself in her arms as she brings herself up.

Me: "Don't ever do that to me."

I cry as she holds me back.

Ayize: "I'm fine, relax."

She utters like being shot at, is no big deal and pulls out of my embrace. I still want to hold her. I'm not over this.

Styles: "I'm so sorry kitten."

I hear sincerity in his voice, we need to talk. He places his hand on my shoulder and instantly, I want to find refuge in his arms. Ayize moves back, I think she's giving us space. Her mind is still on Khethu anyway, she hasn't stopped leering at the direction she went.

Styles: "Let me look at you."

He grabs my shoulders, turning me to him. He uses the sleeves of his t-shirt to wipe off the grease on my face.

Styles: "Are you okay?"

My cheeks find shelter in the palms of his hands and I hold on to his wrists.

Styles: "Tell me you're okay Sethu, I need to know if you're okay."

He's looking into my eyes, he needs assurance and I want to say yes but, I can't.

Me: "I almost died Styles, I almost died."



It's registering fully now, I haven't cried any tears yet.

Styles: "I know and I'm sorry. I will keep you safe from now."

Nothing in me says I should believe him, not after what I have experienced and heard. He enfolds me in his arms and it's still the safest place in the world for me.

AMARA\*

Whatever Kenneth came to say has put Randall in a foul mood, he's sitting outside in the back yard. I haven't had the chance to ask him anything, Liyana has been keeping me busy.

I find him still outside and I'm relieved that he's not smoking today.

Me: "Hey."

I scoot closer to him.

Randall: "Where is Liya?"

Me: "She's sleeping."

She wore herself out today.

Me: "Are you okay? What did Kenneth want?"

He turns his head to look at me, his eyes are covered with grief.

Randall: "My father wants to kill me."

I must have heard wrong.

Me: "I'm sorry, what did you say?"

Randall: "It's exactly what you heard, Segun is planning my death."

It cannot be true.

Me: "Did Kenneth tell you this?"

Randall: "I know what you're thinking Amara, he's my father and would never hurt me, right?"

I don't see why a father would want to kill his child.

Me: "It's hard to believe it."

Randall: "I know him, I know what he's capable of."

Me: "Why would he want to kill you though?"

Randall: "For his evil plans."

Something tells me that he will not be revealing much.

Randall: "I'm going to give him what he wants."

I didn't know that I have a hearing problem.

Me: "What?"

Please don't say what I think you said.

Randall: "I'm going to fake my own death."

Life doesn't always give you what you want.

Me: "No."

He scowls at my denial.

Randall: "It's the only way Amara."

Me: "No, it's not the only way. There must be something you can do."

Randall: "This is it, if I fake my death, Segun will back off. He'll go back to Ghana and we'll carry on with our lives."

Clearly it makes sense in his head, not to me. I have never heard of a more stupid idea than this.

Me: "For how long will you play dead?"

Randall: "As long as he's still around."

Me: "And your body? You can't play dead Randall, how will you convince them that you really are dead. They'll want to see your body."

Me: "Styles will make a drug that, will put me to sleep for a while."

Randall must be crazy if he thinks this will work.

Me: "It won't work Randall, do you realise that they will fight for your body? I doubt that your family will agree to bury you here. They will fight to have Liya."

Randall: "I know, this is why we should get married. You will adopt Liya as your own, and we'll draw legal papers where you get rights over me. Meaning that they cannot take my body out of the country without your consent."

I am not going to through this, it's too much.

Me: "No."

Randall: "Amara that man will never leave us alone."

Me: "Surely you can think of something."

He scratches his head as he glares into nothing.

Randall: "I did, it was the first option."

Me: "What is it? I'm sure it's better than this."

Randall: "Put a bullet through his head."

He throws this suggestion with a deadpan voice and a poker face.

Me: "Randall, can't you speak to your mother? Maybe she can talk to him."

Randall: "She's powerless, no one can talk some sense into Segun."

I place my hand on his lap.

Me: "I know it must be terrible to learn that your father is plotting against you but, please, think of Liyana before you make this decision. The pain she will go through, thinking her father has died. No child can endure such pain Randall."

I hope this knocks some sense into him, there has to be another way. He takes my hand into his and intertwines his fingers with mine. He's not saying anything so, I pull myself closer, resting my head on his chest. I feel his arm around me. There is light at the end of the tunnel, we might not see it now however, it's there and that's where we are headed.

NOMBULELO\*

I have a stomach bug, I lost count of the number of times I have been to the bathroom. I have camped here, it's no point trying to leave, if I have to run back the second I step out. There's a knock, I've lost count of those too.

Mbuso: "Lelo, are you okay? Should I come in?"

Mbuso would obviously say that, there's only a few like him.

Me: "No."

Mbuso: "Are you sure?"

He's standing outside the door.

Me: "Hundred percent."

Go away Mbuso.

Mbuso: "Maybe I should get you something."

He's still outside the door and I'm getting frustrated. I decide not to respond, he will go away if I ignore him. My stomach is in knots, I am sweltering and half naked on the toilet seat. What did Brenda put in that food? God, I pray my baby doesn't die. These sudden period pains have killed me, I shouldn't be feeling them.

Me: "Aaahh!!!"

I scream as I feel a sharp pain on my womb.

Mbuso: "Lelo."

He jolts in with my name surging out of his mouth, he's bug-eyed and panicking.

Me: "Jeez Mbuso, will you give me some privacy, please."

This is too much.

He's not moving. Why is he not moving?

Mbuso: "You screamed, why?"

Me: "It's painful, that's why."

Mbuso: "Lelo, we should go to the hospital so, they run some tests."

This is uncomfortable, he's watching me while standing at the door, with his hand on the door knob.

Me: "Can we talk about this later?"

Mbuso: "I'll prepare sugar and salt solution, it will stop the diarrhoea."

He's still talking.

Me: "Sure."

Mbuso: "Are you sure you're okay? You're sweating."

Me: "Mbuso please."

Mbuso: "Lelo I'm worried, you've been in here for a while now."

Me: "I'm worried too, Mbuso."

I'm more terrified.

Mbuso: "We should take you to the hospital."

That's if I can get out of this bathroom.

Me: "I am not going to wear an adult diaper."

Mbuso: "Why would you wear one?"

Me: "I'm clearly stuck here."

Mbuso: "The sugar and salt solution will stop the diarrhoea."

Me: "Go make it then."

I grunt as the pain shoots through my womb again, tears instantly fall out of my eyes. I can't be

losing my baby, I press my hand on my stomach as I bend over to clog the pain.

Mbuso: "Okay, you stay there and don't move."

What?

Me: "Really?"

Mbuso: "I meant... I won't be long."

His anxiety intensifies, he rushes out leaving the door wide open.

Me: "The door Mbuso."

I yell and hear his footsteps run back.

Mbuso: "Sorry."

He shuts it.

Who will take care of who, if we both panic?

I sigh in relief, as I hear his footsteps disappearing. I should have known when Brenda bought that meal, that witch.

A wave of heat rushes through my body as I get up, the room spins for a while forcing me to hold on to the wall. I quickly flush and drag my body to the sink to wash my hands. I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror to realise that my face is dripping with sweat.

Me: "Mbuso!!!"

I scream his name in my head and it comes out of my mouth as a whisper, my knees give up on me so, I sink to the floor and crawl to the door. It swings open before I could touch the door knob.

Mbuso: "Lelo."

Me: "It's Brenda Mbuso, she wants to kill my baby. She poisoned my food, she wants to kill my baby."

I'm crying now.

Mbuso: "It's okay, mam Zodwa is here with mom."

He scoops me up, rushes me to the bedroom and covers me with a sheet, the moment I curl on the bed.

Me: "Call mam Zodwa, quick."

I am surprised that I'm not bleeding yet, something or someone is protecting this baby. God if it is you please, don't give up on me. Continue to protect my baby.

Mbuso has ran out of the room, it's not long till they are back

Zodwa: "Sisi." (Sister.)

She looks too calm for this emergency.

Zodwa: "Don't worry my child, nothing is wrong with you."

That's not how it feels like.

Me: "I'm in pain mam Zodwa."

I cry, Mbuso sits on the bed and starts patting my back. It beats me why he's doing this, I want to shrug his hand away.

Zodwa: "Remember we did everything to cleanse you, I strengthened you as well so that, your body should reject isidliso. Your system is cleaning out the poison." (Poison.)

Me: "Does it have to hurt."

I'm speaking through gritted teeth now, this pain is terrible. The diarrhoea has halted though.

Zodwa: "It will pass. Did you vomit?"

Me: "Yes at work, right after lunch."

I answer as I push Mbuso's hand away, it's irritating me.

Zodwa: "It's a good thing you did, we'll talk some more, when you're feeling better."

Me: "Can I take something for the pain."

Mbuso's stubborn hand is back on my shoulder, I glance at him. He's more concerned than I am. I want to push it away but, this is his way of showing support.

Zodwa: "No, I will make soft porridge for you. That's the only thing you should eat for now, until the diarrhoea subsides."

Me: "What do those people want from me, mam Zodwa?"

It hurts to know that I am surrounded by enemies...

Zodwa: "People always want something Lelo, they are never satisfied with what they have."

Mbuso: "Are you sure she will be okay?"

Zodwa: "Yes, let me make that porridge. Your body is weak and you need the strength."

She leaves the room.

Mbuso: "Remember when I said we should move to Mozambique? The offer still stands, I'm tired of these people."

Me: "These people are everywhere."

We can't run from these things.

Mbuso has alternated to stroking my hip now and it's putting me to sleep, I don't know if this pain will let me.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

112\*

SETHU\*

Styles insisted that I drive back home with him while Ayize followed behind in her car, she wants me to lay charges against Khethu and I will do that first thing in the morning.

Styles drives through the building gate, the ride home was quiet and short, he was speeding. Styles doesn't speed, he must've been expressing his rage. He tried to talk to me and I failed to answer. I am angry at him for letting this happen to me.

Me: "You can go now, I'm fine. Ayize is here."

I proclaim as he parks the car, Ayize drives in and parks a few blocks away.

Styles: "Can we talk?"

Me: "No, I'm tired."

I want to talk to him, God-knows I do. My anger is not allowing me.

Styles: "I'm sorry that you had to go through that."

I have questions that need answers.

Me: "Why didn't you tell me about her?"

Styles: "I didn't think that it would come to this, I knew Khethu had a hard time with letting go. For it to reach this far, comes as a shock to me as well."

How can he not know?

Me: "I don't think I can stand this Styles, I'm not too strong for it."

Styles: "What are you saying?"

I hate what I'm about to do.

Me: "I'm saying we should spend time apart."

Styles: "No, that's not happening."

Me: "I have made up my mind Styles, I can't do this. I can't fight a crazy woman."

I fought for Ntokoza with Lebo, I am not about to fight for a man again.

Styles: "You don't have to fight anyone Sethu, I told you that I will protect you."

Me: "That's the thing, I don't want to live my life afraid that she will strike. That woman has been watching me, she knew my every move. She attacked me at work Styles, she didn't care that there were people around. If she's willing to go that far, then she's capable of anything."

I know that I'm breaking his heart still, I have to put my safety first.

Styles: "I won't let her get to you again Sethu, She will never bother us again, I will make sure of it."

Me: "Can you guarantee that? She's pregnant with your baby, that's a lifetime attachment."

It still hurts me that she is having his child.

Styles: "It's not mine."

Me: "How do you know?"

He glances at me for a while before turning on the light.

Styles: "Look at me Sethu, you know me, don't you? These months we've spent together, you must have observed the type of person I am. Would I ever lie to you?"

He's always been honest with me, I can bet on this one.

Me: "I don't know anymore, I need time."

He hates my answer, the tightness on his jaw says it.

Styles: "I know you're hurting right now."

I am more than hurting, I am demented.

Styles: "I won't lie to you, I need you. You have helped me overcome the greatest battle I have ever had to face, just by being you. How can I let this go? How can I let you go?"

I don't want to let him go either but...

Me: "This is the second time I have come close to death Styles, I had to beg for my life again."

Styles: "He tried to kill you?"

He grunts under his breath as an unknown expression takes over his face.

I can't answer that, it's still hard to open up about my past.

Me: "I have to go."

I announce as I see Ayize step out of her car. He takes my hand.

Styles: "I know you're upset and I understand but, I am not letting you go Sethu. I will fix this, go and rest. I will come and see you tomorrow."

He won't easily agree to time apart.

Me: "Goodbye Styles."

Styles: "I am not accepting that goodbye, like I said. I'll see you tomorrow."

I'm not going to argue about this, maybe he's right, I probably need to sleep it off.

RANDALL\*

I'm going crazy trying to stop myself from going after Segun, I have had it with that old man. I have to inform Styles about my plan, I think it could work. Amara will have to forgive me, there is no other way to get rid of that evil man.

Styles is not taking calls, I'm on my way to his house.

Styles: "Randall."

He finally answers.

Me: "Where are you?"

Styles: "I'm on my way to khethu's house."

He sounds sad, Styles better not be going back to that woman.

Me: "Why?"

Styles: "I'm going to kill her."

Something is definitely wrong.

Me: "What did she do now?"

Styles: "She attacked Sethu at the hospital, she tried to burn her alive. If I was a few seconds late Randall. I don't know anymore. I'm going to kill her."

Me: "That woman is insane. I'm outside your house, come and get me."

Styles: "That's fine but, you have to let me handle this."

I am not promising anything.

Me: "Hurry."

He's here in less than fifteen minutes, I jump in the car.

Me: "You look like shit."

I announce as he drives off.

Styles: "Sethu wants us to take time apart."

Me: "She blames you?"

Styles: "I know she does, I can't lose her Randall."



Me: "You won't, she just needs time."

Styles: "You didn't see her face, she hates me."

That's impossible.

Me: "Miss Sethu can never hate Mr. Styles."

He chortles.

Me: "Cheer up man, this is not you. You don't give up that easily, nothing brings you down."

Styles: "Khethu does."

Me: "Are you going to kill her for real?"

Styles: "There's this picture of me strangling her to death, it's stuck in my mind. I have that thing you always get when something pisses you off."

Me: "What's that?"

Styles: "An itch."

He laughs, it's good that he's laughing.

Me: "Fuck you Styles."

Styles: "I'm serious man, I have an itch. I want to squeeze the life out of her and watch her die."

Khethu messed up, Styles doesn't talk about killing people. Heck, he's not a murderer.

Me: "She fucked up huh?"

Styles: "You don't know how much I wanted to kill her back at the hospital, if Sethu wasn't there I would have beat her up to a pulp."

Me: "What stopped you?"

Styles: "Sethu was in an abusive relationship with that son of a bitch Ntokozo, I didn't want to awaken that fear. I didn't want her to see me as this man who beats up women."

He explains, I can only say that I'm glad he has moved on with his life. There was a time when he couldn't see Khethu in pain.

Me: "Sethu is fragile."

Styles: "She's my fragile Sethu."

He laughs, this is a different Styles and I like how Sethu is changing his life.

Styles: "I need to make things right with her, first I need to prove to her that Khethu's baby can't possibly be mine."

He shocks me with these words, Khethu cannot be pregnant.



Me: "How is it possible? I thought you had a vasectomy."

Styles: "I did and she doesn't know it. I think I know who the father is and she has the nerve to pin the pregnancy on me."

This is how far her insanity has gone.

Me: "The lawyer?"

Styles: "Yeah."

Me: "You need to tell Khethu the truth then, imagine if that baby was yours Styles. You would definitely lose Sethu."

I know that he hates the thought of it, he doesn't respond as he mulls over what I just said.

Me: "You won't believe who came to see me."

Styles: "Kenny."

He sneers.

Me: "Did he fill you in."

Styles: "Yes and I am shocked. That old man is one sick bastard."

Me: "Sick doesn't even begin to describe him, I have two options Styles. It's either I put a bullet through his head or fake my own death."

He gives me a brief look.

Styles: "What happens to my plan?"

Me: "You mean with Ruth?"

Styles: "Yes, once we get rid of Ruth. Segun won't be so desperate to get you married."

Me: "I doubt it, Segun can't see himself losing. He will want to pursue this until the end."

Styles: "I vote with killing him but, what about the Okolie curse? Won't you be cursed?"

Randall: "I'm not sure, I didn't think of that."

Styles: "Getting him out of the country failed, I think we should turn Segun and Bensen against each other."

That could work.

Me: "How do we do that?"

Styles: "We have someone in there."

Me: "Kenneth?"

Styles: "Yes, we need to come up with a solid plan."

Me: "I think we should pin Ruth's death on Segun. That will just aggravate Bensen. He will want revenge, it appears that he's obsessed over his daughter."

Styles: "Get Bensen to kill Segun and let the Okolies deal with him. I'm starting to like your ancestors."

Me: "We kill three birds with one stone."

Styles: "Done, I'm tired of that man's name. It's about time we catch a break."

Me: "So, Nkomo has to hurry up with this Styles, even if it means, he has to get her in bed tomorrow."

He laughs.

Styles: He can actually do it, you know."

Me: "Yeah, I've seen his player side."

If anyone can pull this stunt off then it's Nkomo.

Styles: "If Ruth refuses to bend and doesn't fall for him, we go for Kenneth."

Me: "I can't imagine him with a woman."

Styles: "I know right."

Me: "I'm fucking tired of Segun."

Styles: "At least Olivia is off your back."

Me: "She finally gave up and took her life."

Styles: "You gave her no choice."

I know that he was against this but, I don't care. Olivia deserves what happened to her. My child is better off without her.

NOMBULELO\*

"Lelo wake up."

Mbuso shakes me arousing me from a deep slumber.

Me: "What happened?"

Mbuso: "How are you feeling?"

Me: "Okay I guess, my throat is dry though."

Mbuso: "I'll get you some water, you need to eat this soft porridge."

I sit up and take the plate from him.

Mbuso: "Be careful it's hot and there's no sugar."

Me: "Why?"

He laughs at my facial expression.

Mbuso: "She said not to put it."

Me: "Argh, ngifelani?" (Why am I suffering?)

He sniggers and places his hand on my belly.

Mbuso: "Is Goku okay?"

Me: "I think he is, the pain has subsided."

Mbuso: "Tell me about this Brenda person. What's her story?"

I wish I knew, I didn't know her intentions towards me till today, never have I thought that she could have something against me.

Me: "I don't know, there's something though. I don't remember a time when I speak to her and she doesn't bring you up."

It makes me wonder if she knows him from somewhere.

Mbuso: "Why?"

Me: "I don't know, she could be one of your exes."

That's my first theory.

Mbuso: "If she was, I would know."

He wouldn't be the first guy to forget his ex.

Me: "Maybe it was a long time ago or..."

Mbuso: "I said, if she was I would know."

Why is he getting defensive?

Me: "If you say so, I want that woman away from me."

If I see her face again, I doubt that I'll be able to restrain myself.

Mbuso: "We'll find out what her problem is and I will make her pay Lelo, she wanted to kill our baby."

Me: "I should lay a charge against her. What's wrong with women Mbuso? Why do we hate each other so much? Imagine if the world was filled with only female leaders, there would be an unending war until we destroy each other."



I have enough experience to say this.

Mbuso: "Not all women are like that chubby cheeks, look at you. You're an angel."

He pinches my cheeks, they'll be saggy by the time I give birth.

Me: "Don't christen me with that name please. Who knows, I might change one day as well. Look at my mother, she changed overnight. That woman loved me, she would protect me with her life. Now, she only sees my father and then there's Koketso. She was walking around with a dagger in her hand, trying so hard to push it in my back. Martha is worse, I grew up in her eyes. She was my mother's friend although, they competed against each other in almost everything. Brenda was the one who welcomed me with warm arms at work, only for her to conspire against me."

The list is endless.

Mbuso: "It's time for a woman's conference then."

He has to joke in times like this.

Me: "No one will be leaving that conference alive, we would kill each other with a simple look. The lack of support we give each other as women is embarrassing and they say we are the gentle, sensitive gender. Give me a break."

I am tired of this, must I die in the hands of another woman?

Me: "What about the term 'my sister's keeper'? We should practise that Mbuso, not this hatred we dish around."

I should add his mother to the list.

Mbuso: "Maybe you should do something about it, complaining won't help."

Me: "I'm not complaining, I'm voicing out. God must be ashamed of us. Is it not enough that men are killing us? We are killing each other as well."

Mbuso: "Do something my love, you're a nurse you love working with people. You have a kind heart Lelo and I refuse that you be counted with those evil people you speak of."

I cannot accept this praise. What if this is contagious? We tend to follow a trend, good or bad, if everyone is doing it we fall in.

Me: "What do you have me do then?"

Mbuso: "Start an awareness, you can name it 'My sister's keeper.' That's where you will share your experiences, you would be surprised by the number of women who have gone through what you're going through."

This man is smart.

Me: "That's a good idea but, what will we do there? I can see it already, back biting, betrayal, gossip, jealousy. Yoh! The drama."

Mbuso: "Your pain has put you in this position, like I said not all women are like that. You will



teach about forgiveness, self-love, standing up for each other as women and you can also counsel women that have been abused. If we give a little love out there, we can change the world one step at a time.”

Me: “Maybe.”

Mbuso: “You don’t believe me?”

Me: “I do, Brenda and Martha have drained me.”

He smiles.

Mbuso: “I can imagine, think about it though.”

It could work.

KHETHU\*

I dash into the house to find my father sitting on the couch, I fail to hide the panic on my face and that forces him to jump from his seat.

Dad: “What have you done?”

He always thinks that I’m up to something.

Me: “Styles is an idiot, he’s an idiot.”

I yell as I pace around the living room.

Dad: “You went to see him?”

Me: “That man is stupid dad.”

Dad: “Kethu, what happened?”

Me: “He’s going to come for me, I just know it.”

I can’t stand still, I am so angry.

Me: “I know that look in his eyes, he’s about to explode when he’s calm like that. He’s going to kill me daddy.”

He grabs my arm, stopping me from pacing.

Dad: “What did you do Khethukuthula?”

If I tell him the truth, he’ll kill me. How do I tell my father that there’s a woman threatening my relationship and I tried to kill her?

Me: “Nothing, I did nothing.”

I lie as I yank my hand from his grip. He doesn't believe me.

Dad: "What's that smell on you Khethu?"

He comes closer to sniff my clothes.

Me: "What smell?"

I make sure to step away from him.

Dad: "It's gasoline."

This man will catch me red-handed if he puts on his commissioner cap.

Me: "I'm going to take a bath, excuse me."

Dad: "Khethu what did you do?"

His angry voice follows me as I walk to my room.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

113\*

STYLES\*

Me: "We're here."

I pull up outside Dladla's gate.

Randall: "She's not alone."

Me: "I don't care, Dladla will not stop me."

Randall: "Let's go then."

We exit the car, it's a good thing the gate is not locked.

"Who is it?"

Dladla's voice echoes from inside as we knock on the door, Randall shakes his head in annoyance. He is not a fan of this man.

The door opens and he welcomes us with a scowl on his face.

Dladla: "What do you want?"

He grunts.

Me: "I want to speak to khethu."

Dladla: "She's in the shower, come back tomorrow."

He's trying to get rid of us.

Randall: "That's alright, we'll wait."

He pushes his way in, it's too late for Dladla to push him back out. Randall is already in so I might as well. I follow, leaving Dladla tongue tied.

Randall: "Nice place Dladla, for a policeman you are living the life hey."

He says as he strolls around the living room inspecting everything he sees.

Dladla: "I'm a police commissioner."

Randall: "Yes that."

He flails his hand at him as if it's a nonfactor.

Randall: "Corruption must be paying well hey?"

He picks up a strange looking vase and makes a face as he tries to read what it is. Dladla leers at me then back at Randall.

Dladla: "What did you say?"

Randall: "Did I say corruption? I meant being a commissioner pays well hey."

He smirks at him, Dladla doesn't seem comfortable with Randall's attitude towards him.

Me: "Randy, manners. This is not home."

He puts the vase down, turns back to us and rams his hands in the pocket of his jeans.

Randall: "Angel is sure keeping us waiting Dladla, won't you check on her please?"

Dladla is never at a loss for words, I'm shocked.

Randall: "Styles, you lived with her for four years, right? It was four years yeah, she never let us forget it. Does she take this long to shower?"

I don't know what he's getting at but, he must be as angry as I am.

Me: "She took longer actually."

Randall: "Oh, my bad. We'll continue to wait then, no biggie."

Dladla: "You two better leave my house now."

Me: "Phola Dladla, we come in peace." (Relax.)

Dladla: "I don't care, get the hell out of my house."

Randall: "What is wrong with old people Styles? They like shouting and forget how weak their hearts are."

He responds with a condescending approach.

Me: "Took the question right out of my mouth. Maybe Dladla can tell us."

Randall: "Dladla, shed some light please."

Dladla: "What game are you playing at Sishi, take your friend and get out of here."

He snaps.

Me: "I don't mind leaving, but as for my brother there. He won't step foot outside this house until I see Khethu and I can't leave him here."

He turns to look at Randall who shrugs his shoulders.

Dladla: "That's it, I'm calling the police."

I have a feeling that he knows what Khethu did and is trying to protect her.

Randall: "I thought you were the police."

Dladla glares at him, he hesitates before, he continues with his phone call.

Randall: "Okay, we'll wait for them, like we're waiting for angel."

He takes a sit on the couch, crosses his leg over the other and his hands still hiding in his pouches.

Dladla releases a sigh of frustration, he gives up on the phone call.

Me: "I think I should check on her."

Dladla: "No, you stay away from my daughter. If she wants to see you she will come here."

He yells and that sets me off, knowing that he's not a loud person. Is he alarming Khethu that I'm here?

Randall: "Wow, Dladla, you're good."

He looks at me and gestures that I should go to her, I start to saunter towards Khethu's room.

Dladla: "Sishi, you're trespassing my premises. Get back here."

Randall: "Dladla come and keep me company, tell me about the corruption. I mean, tell me how it's like being a commissioner."

I hear him say, Randall is going to give that man a hard time.

AYIZE\*

Me: "I brought you coffee."

Sethu is lying on the bed crying her eyes out, she's been crying since Mr. S drove away. I haven't had the chance to ask her what happened. I know it has more to do with the conversation they were having in the car.

Sethu: "Coffee?"

She sobs as she throws herself on the pillow.

Me: "And then?"

Sethu: "Styles loves coffee."

She answers without looking at me.

Me: "So, that's a reason to cry? Come on Sethu, must you waste your tears for that?"

Sethu: "I'm going to miss him."



I'm done guessing. I place the cup down and sit on the bed.

Me: "What happened?"

She sits up as she wipes her tears.

Sethu: "I told him not to come back."

Me: "Mr. S?"

Her nodding reminds me that she's stupid.

Me: "Why would you do that?"

Sethu: "I don't want his baggage Ayize. I have my own to deal with."

Who was I giving advice to the other day? Because I remember talking to this girl before me.

Me: "Who doesn't come with baggage Sethu?"

Sethu: "But his is too much, that woman tried to kill me."

Me: "Do you hear yourself? You're judging him, wena Sethu, mam'fundisi." (You pastor)

Sethu: "I'm not judging him Ayize."

She clearly doesn't hear herself.

Me: "Then what are you doing? No one is perfect Sethu, if you think you will find a guy with no baggage, forget it."

Sethu: "So, you're saying I should stay with Styles?"

Me: "I'm saying follow your heart, I know that Mr. S is your heart. You love him, don't you?"

I have seen how her eyes sparkle when she speaks about him.

Sethu: "I do but, I'm afraid."

Me: "Tell him, speak your heart out and tell the guy how you feel. Don't shut him out. That man loves you Sethu."

We hear a knock on the door, disturbing us from our conversation.

Me: "Are you expecting someone?"

Sethu: "No."

I see fear in her eyes.

Sethu: "What if it's her?"

Me: "Then today is her day, I will show her what crazy is."

I grab an umbrella behind the door,

Sethu: "That won't work."

Me: "We don't have a gun, so this will do."

Sethu: "Get the pan or pot."

Me: "What will I do with a pot? Cook for her?"

Sethu: "No, beat her up with it."

Me: "Uyahlanya." (You're crazy.)

I potter towards the door.

Me: "Who is it?"

"It's me, ubaba." (Dad.)

Sethu: "Who is it?"

She's standing by the bedroom door, leering at me with terror. Will she get over what happened today?

Me: "Your father."

I am in no mood to see him, Sethu rushes to open the door. It's good that he's alone, I would've left the house if that woman was here.

Sethu: "Dad."

She throws herself in his arms.

Me: "What are you doing here so late at night?"

He's hurt by my question.

Dad: "I came to see you girls."

Sethu: "Come in dad."

She is too happy to see him, I lead the way to the living room.

Me: "I'm going to retire for the night."

Dad: "Ayize, wait please."

He stops me before I move."

Dad: "I came to see how you two are doing."

I'm pretty sure that my mother sent him here, they will pester Sethu until she agrees to help Lebo.

NOMBULELO\*



Mbuso helps me to the lounge, my body is a bit weak. Mam Zodwa and his mom are watching TV. His mother looks like she doesn't want to be here anymore, she sits with her arms folded across her chest. They both turn at the same time as we approach the lounge.

Me: "Ma."

Last time I was warned about this name.

Mom: "Mmmmhh."

That's the response I get. Mbuso has his arm around my waist, he's too much really. I told him that I can walk by myself.

Mbuso: "Sit here."

There's an empty space next to his mother and no I will not be sitting here. I opt to sit on a chair, right away from monster in-law.

Zodwa: "How are you feeling?"

Me: "I'm okay now."

Zodwa: "You're a strong woman, you know that?"

I smile. How do I answer that?

Mbuso: "I think you should sit on the couch Lelo, this chair is not comfortable."

Yeah but, I'm sitting, right.

Me: "I'm fine."

He grabs a chair in the kitchen and sits next to me, his mother is not happy about this.

Mom: "Mbuso are you going to sit by the door?"

Mbuso: "It's fine mom."

Mom: "There's enough space on the couch."

She wants her son next to her.

Mbuso: "Don't worry about it."

He dismisses her.

Zodwa: "Your mother gave us permission to come to her house Lelo."

Me: "Oh."

Zodwa: "Yeah, we're going tomorrow."

Me: "Am I required to be there?"





Zodwa: "Yes, I have to cleanse the whole family in order to chase away that shadow that's following you."

Mbuso: "In this weather? Lelo can't go to the river mam Zodwa."

Zodwa: "Who said we're going to the river?"

He's too forward.

Mbuso: "Isn't that how it's done?"

Zodwa: "Not everyone does it, we'll do this one in the bush."

Me: "Forgive him mam Zodwa, he watches kasi bioskop." (Local movies.)

He throws his head back as he laughs at my lie.

Mbuso: "You got me hooked on those movies and now I can't get enough."

His rejoinder has me laughing like an idiot, I'm stopped by his mother, clicking her tongue.

Zodwa: "I see a bright future for you two."

She predicts out of the blue.

Zodwa: "Your meeting was not a coincidence, it was intended by God."

I look at Mbuso's mom, she's ready to vomit a million insults. I see them packed on her chest, causing a rise and fall.

Zodwa: "However, you will go through storms. If you stand together, you will make it to the end."

She has to burst my bubble.

Me: "What storms? Will we see them coming?"

Zodwa: "Life is not perfect Lelo, everyone goes through something. It's up to you, how you fight and stay away from friends, especially that girl you work with. She doesn't have good intentions for you."

She never directly answers my questions.

Me: "What does she want from me?"

Zodwa: "What you have?"

Me: "What's that? I have nothing."

Zodwa: "But, you have a supportive man who is willing to do anything for you."

Me: "Mbuso?"

I should've seen this coming.

Mbuso: "So, she was wanted to kill my baby for that?"

He grunts, he's angry. His mother cackles at his words.

Mom: "Yimihlola." (Wonders.)

No one will pay attention to her.

Zodwa: "That's the world we live in."

Mbuso: "Lelo is not safe in that hospital."

I have predicted what he's thinking, I'm not leaving my job.

Zodwa: "Control your anger Mbuso, it will not help with anything."

What is she talking about? Mbuso doesn't have anger issues, I glance at him to see that he's still wearing that angry face.

I turn to Mbuso's mom, she has swallowed a bitter pill now as she carries a sour face. I don't care about her, I will be vigilant even when it comes to her.

STYLES\*

The door to her bedroom is locked.

Me: "Khethu open the door."

I bang on it and she doesn't respond.

Me: "Open the damn door Khethu."

Seeing that she will not open, I kick it down to find her lying on the bed. She jumps up as I march towards her, she shrieks and swooshes past me, scurrying towards the door. She doesn't make it as I grab the back of her neck and pin her against the wall.

Me: "What the fuck is your problem?"

Khethu: "You're hurting me Styles."

She muffles.

Me: "I'm hurting you?"

Khethu: "Yes."

I put pressure on the grip, she's standing with her body pressed against the wall. I'm behind her, fuming as hell.

Me: "How is this? Is it better?"

I put more pressure and she stifles a scream.

Khethu: "Styles please."

Me: "This is nothing Khethu."

I whisper in her ear and hear her moan.

Khethu: "It's okay Styles, you can hurt me if you like. As long as you're here with me."

Me: "What?"

Khethu: "Yes, I like your kind of hurt."

I release the grip on her neck, she immediately turns to face me. I stand disgusted by her words.

Me: "You're sick."

Khethu: "Why did you stop Styles? I loved the way it hurt."

She takes my hand and sends it back to her neck, I yank it away.

Me: "You're sick you know that?"

What has happened to her?

Khethu: "I'm not sick, I'm fighting for what's mine. You are mine Styles, I told you that, till death do us part. No women will take you away from me. I will burn that little girl, I swear next time she comes near you I will burn her in that little apartment she lives in."

She yells.

I grab her arm and her body wobbles.

Me: "You stay the fuck away from Sethu. Do you hear me?"

Khethu: "No."

She barks as she yanks her hand away.

Khethu: "No, she should stay away from you. What did you see in her anyway? Styles a man like you honestly, I expected better. Not, that short simple ugly girl. What was it that attracted you to her? I can't possibly see what you saw in her?"

Me: "Shut up, don't you dare talk about her."

Khethu: "You know that I'm telling the truth Styles, she doesn't fit in your world. How do you introduce her to your friends without feeling embarrassed. You need a woman by your side, you need me."

She moves closer and wraps her arms around my torso.

Khethu: "I know you still love me Styles, don't you miss this? Don't miss my lips and my caresses? Don't you miss me, making you feel like a real man?"

She lets her hands play on my torso, I am disgusted by her touch. She fuels me with her words and I need the tank to be full in order to go through with this and her last question hits the target.

I place my hand on her chest and gently slide it to her neck. She closes eyes her as a smile takes over her mouth.

Khethu: "Oh Styles, I missed..."

I clutch my hand on her neck, depriving her a chance to finish her words. Her eyes pop open, if they could fall out they would. She has a fantasy and I have mine alright, this is the picture that has been flashing in my mind. It refuses to leave me and the only way is to give in to it.

Khethu: "Sty..."

She struggles to say my name as I strangle her, I want to see her breathe her last. She grabs my wrist in an attempt to pull my hand away, I take pleasure in seeing her struggling like this.

Me: "Tell me you love the way it hurts Khethu. Do you still love it?"

She shakes her head.

Me: "You said you love the way it hurts, didn't you?"

Tears fill up in her eyes as she struggles to breathe. I can't let go, I want her to feel the pain, I want her out of my life.

Me: "How dare you challenge me, baby?"

How did I love such a woman?

Me: "Don't fight now, let go. Let go Khethu."

It's getting difficult for her to breathe, she's coughing as she tries to catch her breath.

Me: "It's okay, you'll go to a better place now."

Tears stride down her face, her knees fail her and she begins to sink down.

Me: "Good girl, that's it."

I whisper as her face falls on my chest.

"What the hell are you doing?"

Dladla shouts the moment he enters the bedroom, he grabs Khethu from me while aiming a gun at me. She falls on her knees and coughs vigorously.

Dladla: "You're going to jail for this Sishi."

I turn to the door to see Randall leaning against the door post, he has this smirk on his face and I know that I'm covered.

Randall: "Take it easy Dladla, I thought we spoke about this temper of yours."

He states calmly, Dladla grits his jaw. He's powerless now.

Dladla: "I will kill you Sishi, your days are numbered."

Me: "Okay, keep this woman away from me."

I am done with this family.

Khethu: "What about our baby Styles?"

She struggles to speak but, her stubbornness pushes the words out of her mouth.

Me: "You mean Mbongeni's baby?"

Her eyes buck.

Me: "I'm not an idiot Khethu. You wanted marriage and kids, I didn't. When I saw that you stopped taking your pills, I decided to have a vasectomy. Why do you think you never fell pregnant in the four years we were together?"

Her eyes widen in shock and horror.

Khethu: "You deceived me Styles? I thought something was wrong with me. How can you be so evil?"

Me: "You deceived me first and baby, two can play that game."

Khethu: "I hate you."

She cries.

Me: "Beautiful, I love this."

Randall: "It's your birthday bro."

He chortles at his declaration.

Dladla: "Get the fuck out of my house."

He shouts.

Randall: "Styles let's go before the old man gets a heart attack."

Khethu: "You're going to pay for this Styles."

I know she means it and I will not give her a chance.

Me: "Dladla, get your daughter treated before you lose her to insanity."

Dladla: "You will not get away with this Sishi, I promise you."

He pulls Khethu to his chest with these words as he consoles her.

Me: "Yeah, I think I have."

I follow Randall out, I can hear Khethu's cries coming from the bedroom.

Me: "I know a doctor who can treat her illness."

I announce to Randall as we stroll to the car.



Randall: "The same girl you almost strangled to death? You want to help her?"

I know what he's thinking but, that's not the case.

Randall: "What the fuck is wrong with you?"

Me: "I'm part responsible for the state she's in. I will get her help."

Randall: "Stay away from Khethu Styles."

My suggestion has angered him.

Me: "That's exactly what I'll do, I'll just recommend someone. You didn't see her in there Randall, the things she was saying to me. She is not herself, she needs help."

Randall: "I give up on you Styles."

He jumps into the passenger's seat, I know what I'm doing.

Me: "She needs to heal for her baby, that child cannot suffer. It's innocent in all of this."

Randall: "It's not your problem."

Me: "Randall, I'm only recommending a doctor that's all."

Randall: "What the hell? Where is the Styles I saw strangling Khethu in there? You were so bent on killing her, what has changed now?"

Me: "I told you Randall that, baby is innocent."

He shakes his head in disapproval. Khethu needs to get help, I know that I should stay away. All I want is to live in peace with Sethu.

To be continued....

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

114\*

### NOBAYENI\*

There are two policemen on my doorstep, so early in the morning. People have no timing.

Me: "Dladla, they are looking for you."

I move away as he ambles with a confused look on his face.

Dladla: "Can I help you?"

He should know them, they are his fellow officers.

"We're not here for you sir, we have an arrest warrant for Khethukuthula Dladla."

Khethu hears her name the moment she walks in from her room.

Me: "What have you done Bridgette?"

This child is losing her mind.

Khethu: "What's going on?"

Me: "These men are here to arrest you."

Her mouth drops open, she glares at the door with tears threatening to escape from her eyes.

Khethu: "Dad."

She snivels.

Dladla looks at her while holding a look of defeat, he knows what she did.

Me: "Will someone tell me what's going on here?"

Dladla turns back to the policemen.

Dladla: "I will bring her to the station."

"We can't do that sir, we have to take her with us."

They insist.

Dladla: "Dammit, I said I will bring her to the station. Whatever happens will be on my watch, I will take the fall."

Me: "No, Dladla let these people do their job. Khethu must account for her actions."

Khethu: "You stay out of this."

She has the audacity to shout at me in my house.

Me: "Let these people in Dladla."

Dladla: "Would you wait Nobayeni?"

He barks at me.

Khethu: "Don't let them take me, daddy please."

Dladla: "It's okay angel."

Me: "You have spoiled this child Dladla, mark my words, you will not like the end of this story."

The policemen walk away.

Me: "What did you do Bridgette?"

Dladla: "I said wait Nobayeni."

Me: "What is wrong with you? Why are you so stressed out?"

I don't understand his demeanour, he takes a deep sigh of despair.

Dladla: "This child has been through enough Nobayeni, give her a break. If you're not interested in taking care of your child let me do it then, let me take care of my child."

He takes out his phone.

Me: "Who are you calling?"

He doesn't answer, but listens on the phone.

Dladla: "Sir, commissioner Dladla speaking."

Listens>>>>

Dladla: "I know protocol sir but, she is my daughter."

This is too much, I will not be supporting this.

Khethu is anxiously waiting for him to finish the call as if she knows what it's about.

Dladla: "I understand sir."

He sighs as he hangs up

Khethu: "Dad?"

Dladla: "I'm sorry but, you will have to go with those men."

Khethu: "No, dad."

Me: "Maybe a night in jail will knock you back into your senses."



I am not sticking around for this.

NTOMBI\*

Me: "What are you doing Petunia?"

She's peeking through the window, I move closer to see what she's engrossed on. There's a car at the gate, I see Lelo jump out. She's with a woman, it must be mam Zodwa.

Me: "Petunia, move away from there. They will see you."

I command as I rush to the room to get Moses, I don't trust Jonas, he will lock my husband in the bedroom and say he can't find the key.

Me: "Moses asambe." (Let's go)

He's sitting on the bed entertaining himself as usual.

Moses: "Siyaphi?" (Where are we going?)

Me: "To the sitting room."

I pull his hand, to drag him out.

Moses: "Hayi Ntombi Hayi. Indonda ayidonswa man." (You don't drag a man.)

He complains while pulling away from me, maybe I should just leave him.

We get to the living room to find them sitting on the couch.

Zodwa: "Hai hai, mmmhhh mmmhhh." (No.)

She shakes her head while fixated on Moses, I leer at Jonas who's sitting on the couch beside Mhambi. I have a Zombie in my house and his name is Mhambi, we are still, not on speaking terms.

Lelo: "What's wrong mam Zodwa?"

Zodwa's body shudders.

Zodwa: "This man is not alone."

I knew it, I knew she will see it. Let's see if Jonas' dark magic will stand against prayer. I pull Moses to a seat.

Moses: "Nombulelo? Uphumaphi?" (Where have you been?)

He's only seeing her now."

Moses: "Kanti wena uyingane enjani engalaleli? Uphumaphi Nombulelo? Why are you not sleeping at home anymore?" (What kind of a child are you that does not listen. Where do you

come from?)

Lelo: "Baba?" (Dad.)

She knows that he's not well but holds a confused face.

Moses: "Ucabanga ukuthi usukhulile manje Nombulelo? Awulali ekhaya?" (You think that you are grown now? You don't sleep at home.)

Me: "Cha, Moses. Nombulelo doesn't live here anymore, she moved out." (No.)

Moses: "Yeyi, uyamkhulumela Ntombi?" (You're talking for her?)

He yells, as he pulls out his belt.

Lelo: "Baba?"

She holds on to the confusion.

Petunia: "Moses, you chased your daughter out of the house."

Moses: "Thula Petu, this has nothing to do with you."

He Charges at Lelo with the belt held high, Jonas stops him.

Jonas: "Moses sit down."

He demands, he must fix this.

Moses: "Jonas, move. This child has no manners, I will teach her today. Uzofunda ukulala ekhaya njengabanye abantwana." (You will learn to sleep at home like other children.)

Zodwa: "Lelo, go to the kitchen and bring a glass of water."

Lelo gets up at Zodwa's instructions.

Moses: "Iyaphi lengane, Jonas ngiyadelelwa kwami." (Where is this child going? I'm being disrespected in my house.)

Jonas does not care.

Me: "Moses awume man, we have visitors." (Stop it.)

Zodwa: "What did you do to this man? His soul is not at peace."

I leer at Jonas who clears his throat in return.

Me: "Sisi, my name is Ntombi and this is my husband Moses. My brother here." (Sister.)

I point at Jonas, he sits as if he doesn't care.

Me: "He did this to my husband."

She shakes her head.

Zodwa: "No, this is wrong. What do the dead have to do with the living?"

I haven't said anything about Nkosiyabo yet.

I pull Moses down to a seat, he's leering at the direction Lelo disappeared to.

Zodwa: "There's a spirit, that's bothering this man's soul. He has to be set free, God doesn't want this."

I agree.

Jonas: "Ngiyaxolisa sisi, kodwa this is a family matter it has nothing to do with you." (I'm sorry but...)

Me: "Bhuti Jonas?" (Brother.)

How can he be so rude?

Zodwa: "I am here because of a family matter and I cannot help you without helping this man here."

Mhambi: "Do you know what he did to this family? We can't set him free, his time has not come yet."

Zodwa: "Whatever he did, God will judge him. You have no power or authority to decide this man's fate. He is a child of God, sin or not."

Me: "I agree mam Zodwa."

I love this woman.

Lelo comes back with the glass of water, she hands it to Zodwa. She places her palm on the top and prays over it.

Zodwa: "Give it to him."

Lelo brings the glass over, I take it and hand it to Moses.

Me: "Take."

Moses: "I don't want water Ntombi."

Me: "Moses please, just drink."

He's always working hard to frustrate me.

Zodwa: "It's okay, don't rush him. He will drink."

He better drink it.

Zodwa: "Before we start, I want to know if you agree that I pray over your house."

Me: "Yes."

How can I not?

## STYLES\*

I'm on the way to Sethu's place while talking to Randall on the phone. He tells me that his mother is sending Chioma back, apparently she says she can handle her child and does not need help. I don't know why Randall's family is like this, it's a good thing he saw their toxicity and flee.

Randall: "In a way, I'm glad because Liyana is a hand full and Amara needs help."

Me: "That little girl is a diva."

Randall: "Don't let her hear you say that, she will fight you."

He Sniggers

Me: "I was thinking that I can introduce Sethu to Amara."

I don't know if he will like the idea.

Randall: "Are we playing match maker now?"

Me: "Funny, don't you think she needs a friend? No offence Randall, there are things that she can't tell you as a guy."

Randall: "I know and I was thinking, since Mkhize is busy fighting with his brothers. It's safe for her to go out and about."

My thoughts too.

Me: "You're right, besides Segun is actually after you and not her. Ruth is living her best life with Nkomo."

He Sniggers.

Randall: "So, Nkomo is in."

Me: "He's in."

Randall: "He should bring this one home."

Me: "I trust him to do so."

The security guard knows me by now so he opens the gate for me, I pull up.

Me: "I have to go, I'll talk to you later."

Randall: "How about you bring Sethu over for lunch, I'll cook."

Something is wrong with my phone.

Me: "My phone is losing signal Randy, can you repeat what you said."

Randall: "I said bring Sethu over for lunch, I'll cook."

The man cannot boil water, I doubt he knows how to open a pot.

Me: "So, I heard right."

This is the funniest thing I have ever heard.

Randall: "You'd be surprised Styles."

He protests as I struggle to control myself.

Me: "It's 2020 anyway, strange things have been happening."

He laughs.

Randall: "I will pretend you did not say that, bring that girl over."

Me: "I'll talk to her, I have to go."

I never thought I would see the day when Randall would put a meal together.

I hope Sethu will welcome me with open arms, I refuse to let khethu destroy what I'm trying to build.

I wait for her to open the door, my heart is throwing tantrums today. This is how nervous I am. My hope rises as I hear footsteps tread toward the door, the excitement to see her face grows.

It all comes crushing down as her father stands before me, I will not expect a warm welcome from him.

Dad: "What do you want?"

He grimaces at me.

Me: "Good morning sir."

He inspects his wrists watch.

Dad: "It's after 12pm."

Like I didn't know.

Me: "Good day sir."

He blankly ignores me.

Me: "May I please see Sethu?"

Dad: "No."

That's it, he's not saying anything more. I can be stubborn too.

Me: "With all due respect sir..."

Dad: "Not with me boy, you will not disrespect me."

He grunts, Randall was right about these old people and their anger issues. If only I could catch a glimpse of Sethu in the house.

Me: "Sorry."

Dad: "Who are you?"

Me: "I'm Sethu's friend sir."

Dad: "That's not what I'm asking, where are you from and where are your parents? Didn't your father teach you manners? Is this what you do in your father's house, disrespecting elders?"

His hostility towards me is understandable but, to bring my father into this.

Me: "I don't know which question to answer first, maybe you should choose."

If he wasn't Sethu's father I would put him in his place, my retort puts a frown on his face.

Dad: "You have no manners boy, you lack respect. How dare you stand tall before me? Are you trying to intimidate me?"

He growls.

"If the shoe fits dad, gqoka." (Wear it.)

I didn't expect this, Ayize pushes through the door.

Ayize: "Mr. S."

She greets with a smile, I nod. I'm not sure if talking to her would be ideal, her father is a raging lion and he's ready to attack.

Dad: "Ayize go back inside."

He commands, her posture says she's not going anywhere.

Ayize: "I'm not leaving Mr.S alone. I heard your little conversation, you were rude to him dad. Sethu is taking a bath, Mr. S, you can come in and wait for her."

This would be very inappropriate.

Me: "That's alright, I'll wait in the car."

Ayize: "Okay, I'll make sure she comes to you."

She steals a glance at her father, he clicks his tongue before dashing back inside.

Ayize: "My father is getting old, forgive him."

She justifies his rudeness.

Me: "How is Sethu?"

Ayize: "I think she's okay, I can't say. Sethu knows how to hide her pain well."

I know.

Me: "I need to see her."

Ayize: "I'll drag her to you, myself."

Her statement has me laughing.

Me: "Hey, be gently."

Ayize: "If anyone needs dragging it's her."

She laughs before taking up a serious mien.

Ayize: "Please, don't hurt my sister Mr. S. She has been through so much in her life. It's about time she lives."

Me: "I would never dream of hurting her."

She leans against the gate as she gives me a look of worry.

Ayize: "Sethu is fragile, she was never like that. Life broke her down and left her with insecurities. Please be patient with her, I'm telling you this because you care about her."

She declares and reveals. I understand her fears, and why she would want her sister safe and loved.

"Baba you can't do that."

Sethu's loud voice echoes from inside.

NKOMO\*

Ruth is at her usual spot, she's reading a book. Her eyes shoot up and instantly fall on me, she smiles.

Ruth: "Are you stalking me Sboniso?"

She keeps the smile.

Me: "You said my name?"

Ruth: "I've been practising."

She reveals.

Me: "I'm flattered, you were thinking about me."

My statement causes her to snicker.

Ruth: "I didn't say that."



Me: "You're not denying it either, if it makes any difference. I couldn't get you out of my mind."

Who said black people don't blush? This woman is flushed. If she were lighter, her cheeks would have turned pink. I think my job here is done.

Me: "May I?"

I point at a seat.

Ruth: "You're here so, you might as well."

Me: "What are you reading?"

She bashfully flips the pages.

Ruth: "Nora Roberts."

Me: "Should I know her?"

Her eyes sparkle.

Ruth: "If you love reading then you must have heard of her, she's one of New York times, bestselling author."

I see a bit of passion in her words.

Me: "I'm not really into fiction."

Ruth: "You should try it. Do you like travelling?"

Styles should see me now.

Me: "Drag me to a road trip and I will listen to your fiction stories."

She laughs like a little kid.

Ruth: "Well, reading is like travelling. Every character takes you on their personal journey and you get front row seats of the days of their lives."

She explains as if it's all she's ever known.

Me: "You're passionate about this hey?"

She nods.

Me: "Now, I know what to get you for your birthday."

Ruth: "Come on."

She's free around me now.

Me: "Unless you're the diamonds and pearls type of girl."

Ruth: "A girl's best friend."

Jackpot!!! The sooner, the better.





Me: "Good, two things to get you for your birthday. When is your birthday again?"

Ruth: "I will leave that to you to figure it out."

Fair enough.

Me: "How wild are you?"

Ruth: "Excuse me?"

She gulps.

Me: "Are you the 'heck let's do it, tomorrow will see itself' or the let me sleep it over, type?"

Ruth: "Spur of the moment."

Just what I thought.

Me: "Okay, truth or dare."

Ruth: "Are you serious?"

Dead serious.

Me: "Come on, intrigue me. Truth or dare?"

she sighs.

Ruth: "I'm going to regret this. Dare."

Me: "I dare you to come with me."

Ruth: "Where are we going?"

Me: "Hey that's not part of the game."

Ruth: "I don't know you that much to follow you."

Me: "It's understandable, you're cautious. How about you take my number plates, contact details. I'll add a selfie if you like and send it to your next of kin."

She stares for a while, she's mulling over it.

Ruth: "Spur of the moment?"

Me: "Shall we?"

I rise, extend my hand to her, she takes it as she gets up.

This journey will make or break this mission.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

115\*

NTOMBI\*

Jonas: "Ntombi, can I speak to you in private."

What does he want now? We have not begun with the prayers and already my brother is unsettled.

Me: "Bhuti, I can't. You can see that we have a visitor."

I don't want to waste anymore of Zodwa's time.

Jonas: "I'm not an idiot."

He retorts, rudely.

Zodwa: "I will wait."

I don't have time, I want to get my husband treated.

Zodwa: "You two can go ahead."

Jonas is the first to get up. He walks outside through the kitchen door, this must be important.

Me: "What's wrong?"

"You can't have Moses prayed for."

Mhambi's voice sounds from behind me, I didn't see him following us.

Me: "I can and I will."

Jonas: "There was a clause that came with this agreement, Moses can't get treated until Amara is back home."

Me: "Yes, everyone knows that."

Mhambi: "This is not witchcraft Ntombi, Jonas called upon the ancestors."

Me: "So? They are inferior to God, there's hope for Moses, Mhambi. Did you two bring me here to get me to change my mind?"

Jonas: "Ntombi, if that woman is as powerful as you think and she manages to save Moses. I hope to God that he repents because if he doesn't, he still remains unprotected and they will come back. As long as their daughter is not home yet."

Me: "What do you mean bhuti? You're not making sense." (Brother.)

Jonas: "Yes, Moses can be delivered from this curse. This doesn't mean that I can't send it back to him. I'm dead serious Ntombi, I want my child home and nothing will stop me from getting her back home."

I still can't see his point.

Mhambi: "You can have your husband prayed for but, also make sure that he repents Ntombi because when Zulu comes back, it will not be a nice scene. Do you know that scripture? When a spirit comes back and finds the house still empty it says 'I'll go back to my house, the one I left.' Dwell upon that, we all know that Moses is not a saint."

They are only trying to scare me.

Me: "I will take my chances."

Jonas: "Fine, I sure hope you won't live to regret this."

Me: "I will pray for my husband."

"Zodwa is getting restless."

Petunia states, Jonas gives me a dissatisfied glare. I don't care anymore.

I come back to find Mashoto sitting next to Moses, Jonas had sent her to the shop just so we have some privacy. Now, she's curled up next to Moses as if she's part of the family.

Me: "And then wena?" (You.)

Mashoto: "What?"

Petunia: "I hope you're not about to fight her in front of the guest Ntombi."

When will Petunia learn that her opinion does not matter in this house?

Me: "Petunia, don't bore me please."

Lelo: "Mom, who is this woman?"

Mashoto: "I'm Moses' second wife."

She replies, proudly.

Lelo: "What?"

I know, I was shocked too.

Lelo: "Mom, dad has a second wife?"

She can't process it.

Me: "Yes Nombulelo, you can see her."

Mashoto: "And I'm expecting his baby."

She hisses, I'm praying that Zodwa catches her out. I doubt that the baby belongs to Moses or if she's pregnant at all.

Lelo: "How did this happen?"

Nombulelo is too fragile, I'm shocked as well but, you don't see me crying.

Me: "We'll talk about this later, can we begin please. Mashoto, sicela usidedele." (excuse us.)

Mashoto: "I should be here as well, since I'm carrying Moses' child."

The Moses she speaks of, hasn't said a thing since he drank the water.

Zodwa: "Let her be. We shall begin now. I need every one to kneel so we can pray."

As per her behest, we go down on our knees. Zodwa prays in tongues, I open my eyes to find Jonas and Mhambi sitting on the couch. How did I miss that? I thought everyone was on their knees. Jonas shakes his head the moment our eyes meet, Zodwa stands on her feet and gestures that we do the same. This time Mhambi and Jonas cooperate.

Zodwa: "I'm going to walk around the house seven times while praying. Everyone should follow after me in agreement.

We follow Zodwa behind while she enters each room in prayer, I haven't seen Moses this calm in a while. It's almost refreshing.

Zodwa: "There's something here."

We're in Lelo's bedroom, the one Petunia and Mhambi share. Zodwa is pointing at the tiled floor in the middle of the room.

Me: "What is it?"

Zodwa: "A knife, it's cemented on the tiles with the edge of it facing up."

I don't see anything and I'm pretty sure that I'm not the only one.

Lelo: "This is my old room."

Zodwa: "Yes, you're the target remember. To destroy your mother, they went through you."

Lelo: "How do we remove it mam Zodwa."

Zodwa: "It has to be dug out."

Me: "But, we can't see it."

Zodwa: "I know, I'll do it. Can you break the tile for me, then I'll take it from here."

Her request is for Jonas, he's not keen but, he's going to do it anyway.

SETHU\*



My father cannot do this to me, not him. The one person who is meant to keep me safe, this is betrayal. This revelation leaves my knees weak and throws me on the couch as tears stream down my cheeks.

Dad: "Sethu, you were not supposed to see that, I was going to tell you myself."

He thinks that makes it better?

"Sethu?"

Ayize's voice meets me before she reaches the living room.

Ayize: "What happened?"

She's next to me in a jiffy. I look, to see Styles, he's standing at a distance. He has questions too, it's written on his face.

Me: "I can't go through this again Ayize."

Ayize: "Go through what?"

Her anger reveals itself through her eyes, Styles takes a few steps closer.

Dad: "Sethu, my child..."

Ayize: "What did you do to her?"

Dad: "I didn't do anything."

Styles: "Sethu, what happened?"

He's getting closer to me, if my father was not here, Styles would be standing right next to me.

Dad: "What are you still doing here?"

He growls at him. Styles ignores him, his eyes are on me. He won't move until he knows what the problem is.

Me: "Ntokozo is out."

It takes everything in me to get these words out, I'm gawking at Styles as his face changes at my announcement.

Ayize: "What? Who let him out?"

I shake my head, my father better start explaining.

Me: "Ask him, he's the one who has been talking to him."

Ayize: "What do you mean?"

Me: "His phone had been ringing, so I answered it. Only to hear Ntokozo's voice, saying the money has been transferred into dad's account."



Ayize: "What money?"

Dad: "This is why I came here, I wanted to tell you girls in person."

Ayize: "Tell us what dad?"

He leers at Styles.

Dad: "Leave us."

He commands, that's what he does anyway.

Styles: "Sethu?"

He's looking for assurance, I don't want him to go but, my father's word should stand.

Ayize: "He's not leaving dad, tell us why Ntokozo is calling you."

She shouts at him, I don't want them to fight again.

Me: "Ntokozo's father is going to pay for Lebo's lawyer."

Ayize: "No way."

Me: "There's more, he wants to come and apologise for what he did to me."

Ayize: "Let me guess, they agreed?"

Dad: "They want to make peace, Ntonkoko is remorseful for what he did."

Ayize: "Remorseful my foot, that man is evil."

Dad: "He has served his time..."

How can he say that?

Me: "Are you kidding me? He barely spent two years in prison."

His statement forces me to yell at him, this is the same person who wanted me to stay away from men because of what Ntokozo did to me. Now he wants to accept their apology.

Ayize: "It's not going to happen Sethu, if those people dare show their faces. I will kill them."

She's also yelling, she hates them as much.

Dad: "It's not up to you Ayize, they are coming to apologize to the family."

I can't hear this, not from him. What has happened to my parents? Why are they so overprotective of Lebo?

Me: "I won't forgive him, I will never forgive him."

My emotions swamp me, this brings back all the memories, the painful words that killed my soul. The abuse and the rape.

Styles: "Come with me."



He takes my hand, I wipe my tears as I take a step to follow him. The grip on our hands is broken by a hard force that pushes through. My father is one stubborn man, I don't know why he thinks he can do anything he wants with my life.

Dad: "You're not taking my daughter anywhere with you."

He wants to fight Styles.

Styles: "I don't remember asking for your permission."

He retorts.

Dad: "You will not talk to me like that boy, you have no say in this family. What right do you think you have over Sethu?"

Ayize: "Yoh, lobaba." (This man.)

She complains.

Styles: "I don't know what's happening in this family but, I know that I will not let that man get anywhere near Sethu."

Dad: "Is that a threat."

He will never stop.

Me: "Dad stop, must you mess everything up? I am tired of the bickering, I'm tired of you and mom always putting Lebo before me. You never consider my feelings."

Dad: "That's not true Sethu, we love you."

Me: "Then, why are you bringing that evil man back into my life, you know what he did to me. He destroyed me, dad. He took my life from me."

Ayize: "Sethu."

She tries to console me.

Me: "He put me in a coma and I woke up in a vegetative state, remember dad? Remember how long it took for me to recover? I couldn't speak, eat or walk. I contemplated suicide a number of times, waking up every morning was torture for me. I asked God to take my life every night I went to bed, and would fight with him in the morning. I hated myself, I hated the world and everything around me."

Ayize: "Sethu, that's enough. Don't do this to yourself."

She wipes my tears.

Me: "Tell him Ayize, tell him not to bring those people here."

My tears are uncontrollable now, I'm snivelling. I need my father to know that I have not healed yet, the wound is still fresh. Styles doesn't know what to do, he's standing with his hands across his chest and a furrowed brow.



Dad: "I'm sorry my child, I know how you feel."

That is a lie."

Dad: "But that does that mean, we have to turn against our family Sethu? You're a devoted Christian, you know the bible speaks about forgiveness and..."

Styles: "Hold it right there sir, you will not do that. Do not throw that in her face. You walk around proud meanwhile, you fail to keep your daughters safe."

Dad: "Who the fuck are you to question me?"

Styles: "I'm the man who will protect these women from you and your wife."

Dad: "Uzolimala mfana wami, bheka indaba zakho." (You will get hurt boy, mind your business)

Styles: "This is my business, Sethu is my business."

Dad: "She's my daughter, you have no say over her or this family."

He barks at Styles as they stand head to head.

Styles: "That's not up to you now, is it? You failed to protect your daughters. You're half a man, who lives to please other people at the expense of his children."

Dad punches him across the face.

Me: "Styles."

I sprint to stand before them. You don't insult my father, he doesn't let it go. He's used to disciplining his students.

Me: "Are you okay?"

I inspect his face but, he swooshes past me and stands before my father, I think he wants to fight back. His facial expression says so, Styles better control himself.

Dad: "You want to fight me boy, bring it on."

My father is too old for this.

Styles: "I'm not going to fight you sir but, I will fight for Sethu. I will not let you abuse her, tell that to your wife as well. It seems she's the one who wears the pants in that house."

Dad grabs the collar of his shirt and tries to push him but, Styles doesn't move. How does an old man fight someone who is half his age?

Me: "Stop it dad."

I try to break his hold on an impervious Styles, he eventually lets him go. I respect Styles for not trying to fight my father back.

Me: "What are you doing? Why are you fighting him? He didn't do anything."

I want to know why he feels defensive towards Styles, placing the dots together, has put me in



an inadequate state.

I'm standing next to Styles as he takes my hand. The anger on my father's face intensifies, I can feel the sharpness of the inscrutable glare he's giving Styles. He huffs before striding towards the exit door.

Me: "Dad wait."

I shout and charge after him while letting go of Styles' hand, he grabs it before I could get to my father.

Me: "No, please tell him not to bring those people. Ayize tell him, please."

I'm crying, I want to stop but, I can't.

Ayize: "I won't let him do it Sethu."

She assures me but, I know my father.

Styles: "Sethu, it's okay. You don't have to see them again."

He clasps his arms around me, usually this helps. It makes me feel better, right now nothing can remove this pain. What my father's doing is worse than what Ntokozo did to me.

AMARA\*

I flinch as I feel a snug encirclement on my waist from behind. I'm compelled to drop the dish in the sink, Randall is norm to sneaking up on me. Normal people announce their arrival by the sound of their footsteps, a whistle, a sniff or humming. It could be that my mind tends to wonder, pulling me along to its voyage.

Me: "What are you doing?"

He pushes his hand under my garment and begins to draw circles on my stomach while, nibbling my neck.

Randall: "I love this part right here."

He gently grabs the fat on my belly, I should be offended. Any girl would, he might as well say the word.

Me: "Don't do that."

Randall: "Why? I love it."

He continues.

Randall: "Do you think there's a baby in there, yet?"

That's it, I move away from him. He wears a long face while gazing at me.

Randall: "Did I say something wrong?"

He doesn't get it.

Me: "Besides calling me fat, no."

Randall: "When did I do that?"

He's a man after all.

Me: "I thought you were warned to stay away from the kitchen."

I remind him of Liyana's instructions.

Randall: "I will not take orders from a little person who can't reach the plates on the stove."

He has me amused with his return.

Me: "She makes an honest critique, so her opinion matters."

I go back to washing the dishes.

Randall: "Speaking of food."

He leans against the counter as he prepares to share his thoughts.

Randall: "Styles is coming over for lunch."

Me: "That's great, should I prepare something specific?"

He shakes his head.

Randall: "I'll make something."

Me: "Is this you talking or your stubbornness?"

He chortles.

Randall: "I'm learning, give a man some credit."

Me: "I don't mind you practicing your lessons on me, not the guests."

He simpers and the look on his face tells me what he's thinking.

Randall: "I know something I can practise on you."

He slides behind me, surrounds his arms on my waist, closing me in on his embrace.

Me: "Are you going to wash these dishes?"

I probe due to the kisses he's planting on my neck.

Randall: "Forget the dishes, how about we go to the bedroom and..."

He's whispering in my ear and I am tempted but...

Me: "No, I'm not in the mood."

I cut him off and he ignores me as he continues with his excursion, his hands begin to wonder under my apparel. I know where he's going with this.

Me: "Must you always think about sex?"

I'm losing my breath here.

Randall: "It's not always and it's not my fault that, I can't get enough of you."

He undertones in my ear, I wish he didn't know my weakness.

"Sir."

I jerk from his hold at the male voice behind us, I'm too embarrassed to show my face. Randall grunts and gradually turns.

Randall: "What is it?"

The tone of his voice speaks of his frustrations.

"I'm sorry, there's a man outside and he's badly injured. He says he's your brother."

The announcement impels me to swivel on my feet.

Randall: "Raven."

He gasps and takes off in a flash, I tail after him. What could've happened to Raven?

NKOMO\*

I'm following my instincts, Styles said 'do whatever you can to make her fall for you' I don't know if this will work. I can only hope.

This is an unplanned road trip, we're on the high way and Ruth has trusted me so far as she hasn't questioned where I'm taking her.

Me: "Are you still okay ndlovukazi." (Queen.)

This is one title that gets her blushing.

Ruth: "I am."

Me: "Are you not going to ask where we're going?"

Ruth: "I'll let you surprise me."

Nice.

Me: "I'm honoured that you trust me already."

She laughs.



Ruth: "Don't get it twisted, I don't trust you. The only reason I'm this calmly is because I sent your picture and contacts to everyone I know. If anything happens to me then, you are in deep shit."

Me: "Wise, I'm impressed. Beauty and brains."

I score a point with this statement as she bashfully twitters.

Ruth: "Are you always like this?"

Me: "Talkative? Not really, my family says I'm the quiet one of the bunch."

Ruth: "Not talkative, charming?"

Okay... Two points for me.

Me: "You think I'm charming?"

Another laugh puffs out of her mouth.

Ruth: "You're always putting words in my mouth Sboniso."

Me: "I only repeat what I hear nkosazana." (My lady.)

Ruth: "This tells me that you're too confident."

Me: "Would that be a bad thing?"

Ruth: "No, it's attractive actually and I don't mean that you're attractive. It's your confidence."

She rephrases with excitement in her tone.

Me: "I'll take that."

Ruth: "You have to, that's all I'm giving."

I think she's hinting something. You never know with this woman.

Me: "Me pe wo, Ruth." (I like you, Ruth.)

Silence takes the stage in this moment, this has to melt that heart of hers.

Ruth: "You speak Akan?"

Me: "I've been practising, there's a certain lady I wanted to impress. She had me up all night, learning her language."

Ruth: "You are something Sboniso."

Checkmate.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

116\*

MBUSO\*

I'm assisting at the Sebokeng hospital today, it's a busy day and I'm struggling to concentrate, Lelo is on my mind. Everything should go well today, so our lives can finally begin.

I see Brenda dash out of Namhla's office, she's crying and headed my way. She sees me and stops.

Me: "Why are you crying?"

Brenda: "Nothing doctor Xaba."

Me: "It doesn't look like nothing to me. Is it Namhla?"

Brenda: "No."

Now that she's standing in front of me.

Me: "What do you want with Lelo?"

Thunderstruck, she gasps under her breath.

Me: "Well?"

She's at a loss for words.

Brenda: "I don't understand your question doctor."

Me: "Let me make it clear for you. What did you put in Lelo's food yesterday?"

Shame takes over her face and it has her dropping her gaze.

Me: "I asked you a question Brenda."

Brenda: "No... I didn't poison Lelo's food. She's my friend."

She stumers.

Me: "Cut the crap, Lelo fell ill after eating the food you gave her."

She shakes her head, denying my allegations.

Brenda: "Doctor Xaba, I don't know what she told you but, I would never do that to her. I have been nothing but, a good friend."

Although she's denying it, I can see the truth in her pondering eyes.

Me: "I don't care, I want you to stay away from her. I mean it Brenda, keep your distance from Lelo."

Namhla steps out of her office just as I reprimand Brenda, she almost rushes back and changes her steps.

Namhla: "Mbuso?"

Brenda: "Excuse me."

She scuttles away, I leer at Namhla.

Me: "What did you do to her?"

Namhla: "What do you mean?"

Me: "She rushed out of your office in tears."

Namhla: "You know how incompetent these people can be."

She brushes it off.

Namhla: "I haven't seen much of you today. How are you?"

I glance at her hand that lightly brushes down my arm.

Namhla: "When last did I see you in this white coat?"

If I'm not wrong, Namhla is acting weird. Her hands are all over me and she's standing too close for comfort.

Me: "I have to."

I rustle past her.

RANDALL\*

The guard assists in bringing Raven into the house, he's badly injured. Someone beat him to a pulp.

Me: "Let's put him on the couch."

He groans as he lies down on his back, Amara is trying hard not to stare at his face but her eyes keep diverting to it. His eyes are swollen over, he can't possibly see a thing from them and it will take a while for them to recover. Scarlet blood drips from a cut on his forehead. Bloody spit drools from his floppy jaws. His clothes are a blood-spattered mess, groans of pain escape from his mouth occasionally.

Raven: "Ran..."

He tries to speak, his split lips fail at the first syllable.



Me: "Who did this to you?"

He winces in pain, wraps his arms around his guts like they are about to fall out.

Amara: "We should call an ambulance."

I shake my head to her suggestion, this could be a criminal case.

Raven: "I'm... sorry..."

His bloodied mouth fights with his words, I give him a chance to speak. I have to know who did this to my brother.

Amara: "Randall..."

Me: "Wait Amara."

Raven: "I was... trapped."

Me: "By who?"

Raven: "Father."

The word sluggishly slips out, it crashes everything I ever shared with that man.

Me: "Are you sure?"

His nod affirms it.

Me: "How did you get here Raven?"

He couldn't have driven in such a state.

Raven: "Taxi..."

Segun is capable of anything, if he could sacrifice his daughter. What more could he possibly do to his stepson. I need to ask mother about the Okolie curse, I have to take matters into my own hands.

NOMBULELO\*

Looking at my mother, I now realize that there is something different about her. The way she watches my father's movements, is as if he's a toddler who's taking his first steps and she's afraid that he might fall and break a tooth.

She looks at him like he's the only one in the room, I can't grasp if it's the fear of losing him or she loves him this much.

I don't know her to be this way though, when I lived here, they were your ordinary couple. I remember the day she smashed a bottle of beer on his head, she was only worried about herself. Now, he's all that she sees.



"Lelo."

I switch back to the living area at my uncle's gentle voice.

Me: "Uncle Jonas?"

Jonas: "Zodwa says it's time to go to the bush, I will drive you there. Mhambi and Petunia will stay behind with Mashoto. The cleansing is only for the three of you."

Moses: "Uzulu uthi angihambi." (Zulu says that I shouldn't go.)

My father declares, he sounds terrified.

Me: "Who is Zulu?"

No one looks at me, maybe it's irrelevant.

Moses: "NTOMBI!!!"

He screams.

Moses: "Uthi, angihambi uZulu." (Zulu says that I shouldn't go.)

Ntombi: "Moses, stop."

She chastises him like a child.

Me: "Who is Zulu mom? Why is my father screaming?"

I leer at Zodwa, she shakes her head. This is not her place and I know that she will not say a word.

Moses: "Kulungile, kulungile. Angeke ngihambe." (It's fine, I will not go.)

He's crying.

Why is my father crying? No one wants to tell me what's wrong with him.

Me: "Mom."

There is a secret lurking in the corners of this house, each and every face in this room knows what it is. My father buries his face in his hands and sobs like a child, I can't stand this. I get up the same time as Zodwa, she places her hand on his head and prays softly. I can't hear the exact words, the name Jesus is audible though.

I sit beside my father, wrap my arms around him.

Me: "It's okay dad, you will be okay."

Zodwa: "The soul that's following Moses, is angry. He says he will not depart from him until he brings back what he took from him."

Gathering her words together, I grasp that my father is haunted.

Jonas: "Kunjalo." (It is so.)

Mhambi: "And we would appreciate it if you leave things the way they are. Fix what you came here to fix and leave Moses alone."

Why would he say that? This is my father.

Me: "Malume, don't say that please. If there's a spirit tormenting my father, then he needs deliverance." (Uncle.)

Jonas: "Lelo, you're a child. You wouldn't understand."

Me: "Understand what?"

Ntombi: "Lelo, I also want your father to heal. Kodwa kee, this is not the time to talk about this." (But.)

Me: "Something is wrong with my father and I want to know now."

Moses: "UZulu uyangihlukumeza Lelo." (Zulu is giving me a hard time.)

Me: "Who is Zulu?"

Unless they are talking about my uncle Vusamazulu.

Me: "Dad, is it Amara's father? Is he the one haunting you?"

Moses: "Ukuphi u Amara, Nombulelo. Tell her to come and take her father, Zulu must go. I don't want him in my house anymore."

His desperate pleas are heart breaking.

Me: "Why is he haunting my father malume?" (Uncle.)

I leer at my uncle Jonas.

Mhambi: "Tell her Jonas. What is the point of hiding the truth from her? She is bound to find out. Lelo must know what her father did."

Ntombi: "No, no one will tell her anything."

Jonas: "It's not up to you, Ntombi."

Ntombi: "She's my child, I will tell her when the time is right."

Me: "What is going on?"

Mhambi: "Your father sold your cousin."

Ntombi: "Mhambi thula." (Keep quiet.)

She yells, no one pays attention to her.

Me: "What do you mean?"

Jonas: "Exactly that, Amara was sold by your father."



In one shattered moment, my heart stops. I gradually claim my arms back from him, his head is dropped, I can't see his face.

My mom places her hands on her head, her eyes have that wide look.

Me: "Mom, is it true?"

Tears parade down her cheeks.

Me: "Is it true mom?"

My voice gets louder, I can't control it. I want to scream and I want to cry at the same time.

Ntombi: "I'm sorry Lelo."

The room falls into silence and I hold my breath, to grasp everything I have just heard. I feel like I'm losing my mind, my father is not capable of this. Why is he not looking up at me? I need him to tell me that it's all a lie.

Me: "AMARA!!!!"

I scream her name as I sink down. My knees drop on the hard tiled floor.

Me: "Amara, you sold amara."

I'm screaming at the top of the roof.

Petunia: "Oh Nkosi yami." (Oh Lord.)

Her arms go around but I push them away, I don't need comforting. I want answers.

Me: "Dad why, why did you do it."

I'm kneeling before him, yelling at him and not once has he acknowledge me.

Jonas: "He's evil, that's why."

Ntombi: "Bhuti no, don't do that."

Jonas: "Face it Ntombi, the truth is out. It's better that Lelo knows the type of a man her father is."

Ntombi: "What is wrong with you people? Did you come here to destroy my family? We were fine without you."

Me: "Mom you knew, all this time you knew that dad sold Amara and you didn't say anything."

Ntombi: "Can we talk about this when we come back from the bushes."

That's all she cares about.

Me: "Does it matter to you at all that Amara is gone?"

She goes silent on me.



Me: "Dad, tell me where she is please."

I take his hands into mine, this time he looks up at me.

Me: "Where is Amara dad? Where is my sister?"

He shakes his head and this does not say anything.

Me: "What does that mean? Where is Amara dad? Please tell me where she is."

I beg as I whimper in sobs, he continues to shake his head. This compels me to shake him, I want him to say something. Anything, his silence is driving me crazy.

Ntombi: "Lelo."

She pushes me back, I fall on my butt and Petunia helps me up.

Petunia: "Are you crazy Ntombi? She's pregnant."

She yells at her. I watch my mother as she rubs my father's back. She doesn't see me, it's all him.

Mhambi: "He's not going to tell you anything, we tried Lelo. This is why your uncle had to do this. A curse was placed on your father to force him to confess. He is not apologetic at all."

Me: "So, Uncle Zulu is tormenting my father?"

Jonas: "Yes, Zulu demands that his daughter be brought back home."

Me: "Why did you let this happen mom? Why didn't you protect our family?"

These are not my parents, they can't be. I don't know these heartless people.

SETHU\*

Styles and Ayize have tried to calm me down, the pain in my heart refuses to give solace to my persistent tears. I'm curled up on the bed, enveloped in his arms, my head resting on his chest.

Styles: "That's enough now Sethu, you'll get a headache from all this crying."

I'm inconsolable, this pain is suffocating. I lean in to his face, he takes up a soft scowl as I cup his cheeks and rest my forehead on his.

Feeling an urge to comfort myself, I press my lips against his. We fall into a slow and uncertain kiss. I feel his body loosen, his arms gradually caress my back. I stifle a sob beneath the salty tears and he draws back, the frown has left him, he now carries a look of worry.

Styles: "Sethu..."

I claim his lips again, clogging his words from escaping his mouth. It grows into a rhythmic kiss, a small deep moan answers back. He dominates over me as the kiss grows into a passionate

dance.

Styles: "Hmm"

He moans again, his hands finding a place on my waist. We breathe heavily as he pulls back.

Me: "Styles, make love to me."

Confusion builds up on his face.

Styles: "You don't mean that."

Me: "I do, I want you."

I need comforting, I lean in to kiss him again, he only allows a peck.

Me: "What's wrong?"

Styles: "I am not going to take advantage of your vulnerability."

Me: "You're not, I want you."

Styles: "Don't you want to talk about it, rather?"

Me: "You don't want me?"

Styles: "I do, you don't know how bad I want you. You're fragile right now and this is not what you want. "

I see genuineness in his eyes.

Styles: "What are you doing?"

He tries to stop me as I alternate to removing my shirt. I watch his expression, I want to see his reaction. His eyes scan my body, every inch of it. There's an expression but, I can't tell what it is.

Styles: "Sethu."

I don't know if Styles will look at me the same after seeing this.

Styles: "Did he do this to you?"

I nod.

Me: "These are not scars Styles, it's the insults, the battering, the rape."

He clamps his eyes.

Me: "I know, it's disgusting."

He looks at me.

Me: "This is what I am Styles, this is what he has turned me into."

He presses his hand on my lips to silence my words.

Styles: "Stop, don't talk like that. Sethu you are not defined by these scars."

That's what Ayize says, I have no answer to that. This is how I see myself.

Me: "He would burn me with cigarettes, each time he beat me up."

My body is tattooed with cigarette scars.

Me: "This happened a week after I found him in bed with Lelo. He wanted me to take him back."

I point at the hideous scar across my chest.

FLASH BACK>>>

I jolt up from the couch at the sound of my door being kicked open.

"SETHU!!!"

He howls, his voice carrying so much rage. I know that tone, he would use it before beating me up. Ntokozo is unpleasable, his anger runs deep.

He stops on the pathway between the living room and the corridor, his hands are plastered on either side of the door post.

His eyes carry a kind of rage, I have never seen before. He's emotionless and by this time my body is shuddering out of fear.

Me: "Nto... Nt..."

I can't get his name out, fear has me paralyzed. My heart jumps to my throat as he trails towards me, his cold eyes stabbing me with each step. I have been terrified of Ntokozo but, it has never reached this level.

I stagger back scurrying away from him, he clutches his hand on my arm and leans his face in. He reeks of alcohol, the stench from his mouth is nauseating.

Ntokozo: "Where are you hiding him?"

He grunts through his teeth.

Me: "Who?"

My voice quavers in fear.

Ntokozo: "I know you're dumb but, this is not the time. Tell me, where your fucking boyfriend is. Where are you hiding him?"

He demands. I don't know what he's talking about, there is no boyfriend.

Me: "There's no one Ntokozo."

My tears give him power, I know this fact pretty well. He feeds on them.

Ntokozo: "How dare you break up with me? Who the hell do you think you are Sfebe?" (Bitch.)

He tightens the grip on my arm as he screams on my face.

Me: "Ntokozo please."

His slap sends me crashing against the wall. I'm lying on the floor, afraid to get up, he won't let me go until he's satisfied. He charges at me and I scream not knowing what his plans are. They are evil plans though, he's not a stranger to violence. He grabs my hair, it almost feels like my scalp will peel off.

Me: "Ntokozo please, I'm sorry please."

He's heard these screams of agony before and they never touched his heart, he's inhumane right now.

Ntokozo: "You will be sorry today, you don't dump me Sethu. I do the dumping."

He grunts as he pulls my hair tighter, I grab his arm, maybe he will see that he's hurting me.

Me: "I'm sorry, don't hurt me please."

He punches me, I'm sent back on the floor. I can never get used to his punches, today they feel ten times worse.

Ntokozo: "Who are you fucking now sfebe?" (Bitch.)

This question comes with multiple kicks on my stomach, while I'm curled up and defenceless on the floor.

Ntokozo: "Who is the fool that you're sleeping with? Answer me, answer me."

He's kicking me repeatedly as he screams these word at me. Somewhere in his subconscious mind, he is convinced that I left him because of another man. He doesn't see his mistakes.

He grabs my hair and drags me towards the balcony. He pulls me up and my head spins, I have hung down this balcony before. He's threatened to push me down here. I scream with everything inside me, I don't want to die.

Me: "No. no. no Ntokozo I'm begging you, please."

I hook my arms around his neck as I frantically cling to him.

Ntokozo: "Tell me who has replaced me Sethu. Who is the fool that's in your heart now?"

He yells.

Me: "No one, no one, I swear. It's you, it's always been you."

If lying will save my life then, I will do it.

He violently drops me back on the floor.





Ntokozo: "Look what you're making me do, Sethu, I love you. You know that, right?"

I don't answer, the only thing I can do is wail.

Ntokozo: "I said I love you."

He crouches down, he wants me to say it back. I hate him, I hate everything that has to do with him.

Ntokozo: "Tell me, you love me sthandwa sami, say that I'm the only one for you." (My love.)

He grasps my chin.

Ntokozo: "Say it, say it."

He barks on my face.

Me: "I love you."

I cry.

Ntokozo: "I love you too, even though you're stupid."

He pushes me back.

Ntokozo: "To secure this love, I have to scar you Sethu. I will make sure that no man ever looks at you. You are mine and nothing will keep us apart."

I lose my mind trying to figure out what he will do to me. I get on my knees and grab his leg.

Me: "Let me go, please."

Ntokozo: "Not so soon, we are just getting started."

He lugs me back in the living room.

Ntokozo: "Let me have fun first, when was the last time I tasted you?"

His declaration paints a picture of his evil thoughts, he unbuckles the belt of his jeans. Wide-eyed I move away from him. I don't know where I get the strength but, I'm on my feet trudging towards the exit. The feeling of escape abandons me as I feel a painful thud on my back almost cracking my spine. My face collides against the wall and I feel my head spinning. Ntokozo is back to kicking me all over my body.

I have lost the strength to scream. Why is no one coming for my rescue?

Ntokozo: "You will pay for trying to escape me."

He threatens as he drops his jeans, I can only cry, my body is numb and every joint hurts.

I'm on the floor, while he rapes me, I can't fight, I can't scream. This man I once loved is treating me like I am not human.

Ntokozo: "Awusanyakazi nakancane, this is why I cheated on you. You're stiff Sethu, you're stiff" (You didn't even move.)

His words keep echoing in my ear

Ntokozo: "I need to pee and the toilet is far so I will do it on this trash."

I'm lying on the cold floor, my pants pulled down and I have no strength to move an inch while he releases his waste on me. My eyes follow his movement as he treads to the kitchen. I can hear him whistling, he comes back with a knife. My world crushes at the realization that he's going to kill me. If I could run I would. God, I'm stuck here.

Ntokozo: "Don't worry, I'm just going to do a little operation. Let's play doctor, doctor. I've always wanted to be one. You know the formalities right? I will open your chest and see if that useless heart of yours still beats for me."

My will to fight comes back.

Me: "Please..."

I can only utter such.

He rips open my t-shirt, slashes my bra in half with the knife and begins to trail it down my chest. He cuts me with every move.

Ntokozo: "Where is the heart located? I think it's here, under your left breast. This will hurt a little."

Me: "Ntokozo... please... don't... kill... me."

Ntokozo: "If you're weak like I know you to be, then you will die. I just want to see if your heart still beats for me."

Me: "No, no. Please... spare... my... life."

He ignores my cries and slowly pushes the knife in, the pain is excruciating, that I feel myself drifting away...

End of flashback>>>

Me: "I woke up in the hospital, they said I was in a coma for four months. Someone had come to my rescue, if they didn't, I would've died. He ran only to give himself in a few days later, he plead not guilty by reason of insanity. It was proven that he was in his right mind, he came to my house with the intent to kill me."

Styles is on his feet now, he's gazing out the window. I can only see his back.

Me: "Styles."

I need to see his face, I need to see that he's not disgusted by me.

Me: "Styles look at me, please."

He sends his hand to his face, he's rubbing it. I hear a sniff. Is he crying?

I want to get off this bed and go to him, I don't know though what he thinks about all this. If he sees me differently now. He slowly turns, his eyes instantly avoid me. I keep my gaze on him as he potters to me, he sits on the bed and enfolds me in his arms.

Styles: "I'm sorry that you had to go through all that."

Being in this warm embrace, evokes the pain once again, I break into sobs. The more I cry, the tighter he holds me and the more his body stiffens.

Styles: "I've got you now kitten, I'm here now. I'm here."

He assures me, Lord knows I want to believe him. My father's actions have put me in a train of doubt and it's moving faster than it should. If I can't trust my own father. Who can I trust? This man right here has proven to me that he'll do anything to keep me safe. I have to trust him, right? I have to trust this embrace and his words of promise.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

117\*

NKOMO\*

Ruth: "When you said to come with you, I didn't think that you were taking me so far."

Ruth expresses as I open the car door for her, we have just arrived in a Game Reserve in KZN.

Me: "You should see your face right now."

Ruth: "I just didn't think that we would go this far. What are we doing here?"

She inspects the place.

Me: "I want to show you my home town, maybe one day I will get to see yours."

Ruth: "Are you trying to tell me something Sbo?"

Me: "Maybe."

I take her hand to lead her to the reception. My mind tells me that, she will protest but, she lets me. I steal a glance at her to find a distant smile on her face, I will have her wrapped around my finger in no time.

We're approached by a manager who fuses over us, it must be Ruth's appearance. She dresses as if she's already married to royalty.

Me: "We would like to book a room."

Ruth: "No, we're not staying the night."

Me: "Yes, we're spending the weekend."

She frowns.

Ruth: "I don't remember agreeing to this."

She folds her arms across her chest.

Me: "That's because I didn't ask. Spur of the moment, remember? You only live once so, why not make the best of it?"

Ruth: "Do you always take control like this?"

Me: "I don't know about always but, yes."

Ruth: "Patriarchy? How shallow."

Me: "I beg to differ, there's a huge difference between patriarchy and wanting to take care of your lady. I believe in equality, in a relationship. My woman can work, do her own craft, hell she can be the CEO. But, at the end of the day, I should bring home the bacon and take care of my woman. Her money is hers to spend, she can invest it or whatever, as long as she knows that in the bedroom, I take charge."

I like the inquisitive look, she's giving me.

Ruth: "So, woman on top is off the table?"

I dive into a gush of laughter.

Me: "Not really, if she's got tricks up her sleeve. Then baby, intrigue me. Sex is a sacred art, it's a holy communion, a powerful force that connects two souls together. You can't be selfish with that. In that beautiful moment, she's all that matters. It's about her and pleasing her, every experience has to feel like the first. My goal is to take her to that destination and make sure that she gets there. That experience should leave her wanting more and should dwell with her every second until fate brings us together again. That for me is dominance, if she doesn't reach her happy place then, I have failed as her man."

I know that look and this is where I was headed, she's glancing at me, jaw dropped and eyes narrowed.

Me: "Ruth?"

She blinks a few times before brushing her hair with her hand, she's trying to calm herself down.

Ruth: "I need water."

Me: "Are you okay."

She holds on to the counter.

Ruth: "Yeah, this place is hot."

I turn to the receptionist who is dumbfounded.

Me: "Can we get some water please."

She doesn't respond but continues to glare, I should be uncomfortable right about now.

Me: "Excuse me, lady."

I snap my fingers and she blinks.

Me: "Water, please."

She nods and scurries to some door.

Ruth's phone rings. She wears a long face after seeing the caller Id.

Ruth: "Yes."

She turns her back with this salute.

Listens>>>

Ruth: "I'm not a kid, I can go anywhere I want."

Listens>>>

Ruth: "Tell my father whatever you want, I don't care. Must I sit in that hotel and wait for him like an obedient wife."

She tilts her head back to me at this saying, she clears her throat and feigns a smile as she finds me staring.

Ruth: "Look, I have to go."

Her mood has dropped just like that phone call.

Me: "Are you okay?"

Ruth: "Yeah, let's go."

Me: "Wait, there's something on your eye."

Ruth: "What is it?"

Me: "Let me get it."

I gently push her weave from her face, I let my hand brush her cheek as I do this. My eyes are engrossed on hers, I have her mesmerised as she can't look anywhere else but, in my eyes. I lean in as if preparing to kiss her, her eyes flip shut as her mouth forms an O, giving me consent. The closer I get, the louder I hear her heart thud against her chest. Gently and leisurely I blow on her eye lid.

Me: "Got it."

My proclamation has her opening her eyes, they widen the moment they meet mine.

Ruth: "What?"

Me: "I got it. Whatever was on your face, I got it."

She bashfully drops her gaze while clearing her throat.

Ruth: "Right."

Me: "Let's go."

I take her hand, this is going to be a long weekend.

RANDALL\*

Raven has been sedated, Mbuso never fails when I need him.



Mbuso: "I need an increase, these house calls are costing me."

He proclaims as I walk him down the foyer.

Me: "You have two extra mouths to feed now, I hear you're going to be a father."

A smile answers me before his words do the honours.

Mbuso: "Who told you?"

Me: "You're my friend, it's my job to know what's happening in your life."

His smile turns into a laugh.

Mbuso: "We're friends now? Wow! Here I was, thinking I was sailing the boat alone."

He's right, I've been a jerk.

Me: "That was nothing personal, I was protecting my own."

He takes up a soft frown.

Mbuso: "Then you should know that I would also do anything to protect my own."

Me: "You're growing Xaba, being a father becomes you."

He laughs.

Mbuso: "I have two people who depend on me now."

I get his drift.

Me: "I was shocked when I found out about Liya, it was strange for me but, I grew into it and being her father is the best thing that's ever happened to me. I wouldn't trade it for anything."

Mbuso: "I can imagine, I can't wait for Goku to come."

Did he just say...?

Me: "Don't tell me that you still watch that shit."

He pinches his nose as he snickers at my statement.

Mbuso: "Yes, I still watch it."

He laughs with these words.

Me: "I take my words back, you're still a child."

We stop before the exit door.

Me: "How is Raven?"

I cannot stress this enough, I'm worried about him.

Mbuso: "He's got a fractured rib, either than that, it's minor bruises."



He smiles as he spots Amara potter from the kitchen.

Amara: "Doctor."

She returns the smile.

Mbuso: "You look different each time I see you."

Amara: "Should I take that as a compliment?"

Mbuso: "It is a compliment, you look happy."

She glances at me and makes a face, if her happiness is radiating from the inside out then, I am a happy man.

Amara: "Looks can be deceiving you know."

She sniggers.

Me: "Hey. What's that supposed to mean?"

I enwrap my arms around her, she giggles as I plant a kiss on her neck.

Amara: "Randall, you're making Mbuso uncomfortable."

She drones.

Mbuso: "That's alright, I knew that he wanted to get rid of me."

I get a call from Styles, he should be here by now.

Me: "Excuse me."

I move away from them to answer the phone.

Me: "Where are you?"

Styles: "At Sethu's apartment, we can't make it for lunch, something came up."

The sadness in his tone grasp my attention.

Me: "What's wrong? You don't sound yourself."

I wait for him to respond, he's not saying anything.

Me: "Styles?"

Styles: "I'm not okay Randy, I'm not okay."

He declares softly. What could've happened that has sent him crushing down like this.

Me: "Speak to me man."

His silence reminds me of how private he is, when it comes to his personal life.

Me: "Is it Sethu?"



Styles: "Yeah."

That's all I'm getting from him.

Me: "I'll be here when you want to talk."

There is no reaction as he drops the call.

Me: "Has Mbuso left?"

I probe an Amara who's shutting the front door.

Amara: "Yes."

Liyana: "Papa, papa."

She skittles to me, a twitter resounds from her mouth while I take her up in my arms.

Me: "Hey, princess. I thought you were napping."

Liyana: "I was and I was scared when I woke up because Mara wasn't with me."

Since when is she sacred of being alone.

Amara: "Why were you afraid? A big girl like you and it's not night yet."

Liyana: "It's the old man."

She plays with my ear.

Me: "What old man princess?"

Liyana: "In my dream, I don't know him."

Amara: "Did he say or do anything?"

Liyana: "He wanted me to open my eyes. He said 'your agya is sleeping go wake him up.'  
(Father.)

That's a strange dream, I don't sleep during the day.

Me: "Did he say agya?" (Father.)

She nods.

Me: "Can you describe him?"

She shakes her head negatively.

Liyana: "I don't remember his face. Can I go and play now?"

Her impatience causes her to jiggle out of my arms, we watch her as she dashes off.

SETHU\*



"Wake up Sethu."

Ayize's voice brings me out from my slumber, my heart jumps as my mind flashes the painful memories. I'm reminded of my current situation, this fear will not leave me anytime soon.

Me: "Ayize, did dad call you?"

Ayize: "No."

Me: "He's really going ahead with this?"

I need to convince him otherwise.

Ayize: "It doesn't matter, no one will force you to see him."

Me: "I don't want to be estranged from dad, he's my father. If he brings that man to his house, I will have no choice but to disown him."

I love my parents, even though they are not perfect.

Ayize: "You won't be alone Sethu, you have me and Mr. S is here too."

Styles... I remember crying myself to sleep with him next to me.

Me: "Where is he?"

Ayize: "He's been sitting in the balcony for a while now, I think something is wrong with him. He hardly responds when I say something to him, all he does is glare at the cars passing by. I brought him food thirty minutes ago, he didn't touch it."

It's not like Styles to zone out.

Me: "Let me check on him."

She takes my hand.

Ayize: "Did you tell him?"

Dreadfully, I nod.

Ayize: "You think that's why he's out there?"

Me: "I'm not sure."

I scramble off the bed.

Ayize: "I have to go to the mall, can I get you anything?"

Me: "I'm okay."

Ayize: "Sure."

I let my feet lead me out to the balcony, Styles is seated on a plastic chair and like Ayize said,



his eyes are fixated on the busy streets.

Me: "Styles."

He twists his head at the sound of my voice.

Me: "Are you okay?"

He reaches it out to me, I take it and he pulls me to sit on his lap.

Styles: "Are you okay?"

Me: "I am, I'm worried about you. Ayize says you've been sitting here for a while."

Styles: "I'm okay."

His arms enwrap my waist, he buries his face on the curve of my neck.

Styles: "You are an amazing woman Sethu."

He states as he kisses my shoulder.

Me: "I don't know about that."

Honestly though.

Styles: "Can I recommend someone for you?"

Me: "A shrink?"

Styles: "Yes, his name is Doctor Lawson."

I think it's time I speak out.

Me: "I don't see why not."

Styles: "You can take your sister along, he managed to squeeze you in tomorrow."

I didn't think it would be so soon.

Me: "I have work tomorrow Styles."

Styles: "You're going back there?"

What does he mean now?

Me: "I work there."

Styles: "I thought you might need time off after what happened."

Me: "I do. I need to keep myself busy though, I will go crazy if I sit around idle."

I'm an over thinker.

Me: "Besides, she's in jail."

Styles: "I still think it's not safe, you're not safe out there Sethu. I don't want you alone, anything



can happen.”

I love it when he’s overprotective, not like this though.

Me: “I’m not going on lockdown, I can’t live like a prisoner.”

I refuse to let people control my life.

Styles: “How about I become your personal body guard?”

Another kiss is planted on my shoulder.

Me: “I don’t want you to put your life on hold because of me.”

It wouldn’t be fair of me.

Styles: “What if I said that you’re my life.”

These little hints he sends out always leave me hoping for the future.

Me: “Still, you can’t follow me around. Is there more to this, than I think? Khethu is in jail, she can’t get to me.”

The apprehensive look on his face puts me in a fretful state.

Me: “Is there something you want to tell me Styles?”

I move from him, pull a chair to settle down before him.

Styles: “I don’t think Khethu was behind the late night phone calls.”

He introduces his thoughts.

Me: “Who else could it have been? She was stalking me, she came to my place of work to harass me.”

Styles: “I know, I think it was someone else though.”

My mind is blank, I can’t think of anyone else.

Styles: “I’m not certain about it, from what you told me Sethu. I figured that Ntokozo was obsessed with you. It’s possible that the phone calls were from him.”

That makes sense but...

Me: “Why would he do that? According to my father, he wants forgiveness.”

Styles: “I don’t buy that at all, there is a reason why he wants forgiveness and it’s not about the money.”

I’m starting to place the pieces together, Ntokozo hates losing.

Me: “I can’t think of a reason, I want him to stay away from me.”

Styles: “And he will, I want you to be vigilant Sethu. He’s dangerous.”



I know that.

Me: "Why would they let him out of prison? I have been cracking my head trying to find a reason."

Styles: "Money can buy you the world and his father has it. He obviously made some plans, I personally think that he got a slap on the wrist. His inmates probably miss him, the world can be a dangerous place for people like him."

His tone changes, there's a way he says this. I can't really grasp the meaning behind it.

Me: "Can we not talk about him?"

He cradles my cheeks in his hands.

Styles: "Don't let him get to you Sethu, I want you to continue with your life as you were. I will take care of the rest."

This is where my safety lies, in the palms of these hands and the look in his eyes.

Me: "I will try."

Styles: "Don't try, just do it. You are my fragile Sethu but, you're also my strong Sethu. You don't break easily, I know you've got this."

If only he could transfer this confidence over to me, heaven knows I need it.

NOMBULELO\*

We just got home from the bushes, I must say the water was freezing. Zodwa says the change will not happen overnight, it's a process. She still has to do somethings so that no one will be able to enter the house. If they dare try, they will be trapped.

My father looks normal, that's what it seems. He refuses to meet my gaze, my mother on the other hand. She looks happy, her husband is getting help. Sure she'd be over the moon.

Me: "Uncle, please take me home."

We're assembled in the living room and I don't want to be here anymore.

Petunia: "Lelo, I cooked. Stay for lunch."

I was welcomed by the aroma of her food the second we entered the house. I am starving nonetheless, I refuse to dine with these two people I call my parents.

Me: "I'm fine aunty, I need to get home."

Petunia: "Where do you live?"

My mother has never cared to ask me this, at this moment she is stuck to my father's waist. They are quietly sitting there as if they did nothing wrong.



Me: "Randburg."

Petunia: "That's far from home."

Mhambi: "I think that you should come back home, it's about time. You've been gone for too long."

I'm not returning to this house.

Me: "I can't live with these people uncle, I would rather live on the streets, where my father put me."

I retort, my father looks up at me. The child-like look in his eyes has left him, he's going back to his senses.

Ntombi: "Grudges do not suit you Lelo, my child."

The audacity.

Me: "I'm not holding a grudge, am I wrong for being upset that you two sold my sister?"

I bet that they do not have answers for me.

Ntombi: "Idrama engaka Nombulelo?" (So much drama?)

Me: "I have drama mom?"

Ntombi: "Yeah, you're becoming a nuisance."

That's my cue.

Me: "Uncle please drop us off."

I must be in the wrong house, I don't know that selfish couple. I will leave their punishment to God, I need to raise an awareness to find Amara and I think Mbuso can help me.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

118\*

MBUSO\*

Lelo walks in, drenched in exhaustion and dread. She shuts the door, and leans against it. Her lips quiver, tears fill up in her eyes before they streak down her face. This time I'm on my feet, rushing to her side.

Me: "Hey, what's wrong?"

I nuzzle her cheeks in my hands as I wipe her tears away, Lelo is a strong woman. She doesn't cry so easily.

Lelo: "He sold her, Mbuso. He sold her."

She reveals through her tears.

Me: "Who?"

Tears mock her as they flood out of her eyes, cascading her plump cheeks.

Lelo: "Amara, my father sold Amara."

No, this cannot be true. Not Randall, I know he's into shady dealings but, human trafficking? He cannot be that cruel.

Me: "Are you sure Lelo? You must've heard wrong."

Abruptly, she swipes her head to and fro.

Lelo: "My uncles told me this and dad didn't deny it, he sold my sister, Mbuso."

She sobs.

Me: "Come here."

I take her into a tight hold.

Lelo: "How can they be so heartless? Mom knew about it and she didn't say anything. What did Amara do to deserve this?"

It's hard to believe that Randall would do this.

Me: "Come sit."

I lead her to the couch.



Her body trembles due to this earth shattering news.

Me: "Tell me what happened."

Lelo: "They didn't give much detail, only that my father sold Amara to some men."

I'm going to kill Randall.

Me: "Did they give a reason as to why he did that?"

Lelo: "No, I have a feeling that, they are hiding something from me. Mom didn't want the truth to be revealed. Something is wrong with my mother Mbuso, she is not the woman I used to know. She has turned into this selfish, heartless person. She has no regard for anyone's feelings. She cared so little about Amara being trafficked."

Me: "Do you think, maybe your father forced her to keep quiet about it?"

Lelo: "No, that woman has always stood her ground when it came to my father. They always fought about that, she never allowed him to bully her into something she was against. Although, he was adamant on having the last word. I can't envision what led my father to take such drastic measures. His own niece, Mbuso."

Lelo needs to know that Amara is safe, I can't watch her cry like this while knowing the truth.

Lelo: "I need to find her, I don't know where to start. Social media is of no help, the last post I uploaded had a few shares. What if she was sold into sex slavery? Oh God, the thought of it. She must be terrified to death."

Me: "Lelo, don't do this to yourself. She could be safe."

The look she gives me makes me feel like a crazy person.

Lelo: "This is human trafficking Mbuso, they exploit girls to dreadful things."

Me: "I know, it could be that she wasn't sold into sex trafficking. We will find her Lelo, I promise."

Randall will have no choice but, to bring Amara to Lelo.

Lelo: "I don't know if I can face my parents again, they are so evil."

I understand her anger, I would lose my mind too.

Me: "Listen, I have to be somewhere. Will you be okay alone?"

Lelo: "Where are you going?"

Me: "Just work, I won't be long."

She shrugs as she wipes her tears away.

Me: "Lelo, we will find Amara."

I cradle her cheeks at this revelation.

Lelo: "I hope so."



She snuffles.

Me: "I'll be back."

I peck her lips.

Mbuso: "I love you, chubby cheeks."

She accepts a soft frown.

Lelo: "You need to do away with that name, it's bad enough that, I'm putting on weight."

Me: "Where?"

Lelo: "Don't start."

Me: "I'm serious and even if you did put on weight, I'm still crazy over this body of yours. Your plump cheeks are my favourite."

She frowns as I squeeze her cheeks.

Lelo: "Go Mbuso before you give a stupid remark that will make me mad."

I want to laugh at her retort but, it will miff her some more.

Mbuso: "I'm not walking out that door until you tell me that you love me too."

Her cheeks flush.

Lelo: "Hai, how many times a day must I confess my love to you?"

Me: "As many times as possible, I have to get tired of hearing it. Otherwise, you haven't said it enough."

Lelo: "No, I will get tired of saying it. Don't you feel sorry for me?"

She pouts.

Me: "Not really hey."

Lelo: "Will you go?"

Me: "Fine, I'm not loved here so, I might as well."

Lelo: "Fine, fine. I love you."

I stop at the sound of her voice and turn to find her smiling at me.

Me: "How easy was that? One down and ninety nine to go."

Lelo: "Ninety nine? Yoh, never and the day is almost over."

Me: "We've got the whole night?"

Lelo: "Shame, I refuse. You will not disturb my sleep Mbuso Xaba."

She points a finger at me.

Me: "We'll see about that."

I state as I stride out, I have to go and confront Randall. I drive to his house, I hope he has a good explanation for this.

Chioma opens the door, I thought that she was in Ghana.

Me: "Chioma, you're back?"

Chioma: "Yes, I'm more needed here."

Me: "Of course, Liya."

She nods with a smile.

Me: "Is Randall in?"

Chioma: "Come in, he's in the lounge."

I potter in, he's with Amara. They don't see me approaching as they are enthralled on each other. Amara should know what happened, this can't be right. Randall is a selfish son of a bitch.

Me: "You bastard, you bought her."

They glance at me, I can see that they are confused by my sudden visit or is it the accusation I just tossed at him.

Randall: "What?"

He gets up as he sneers at me.

Me: "You bought Amara."

I push him, he staggers back. This act forces Amara to jump to her feet.

Amara: "What are you doing Mbuso?"

Me: "Do you know what this bastard did, Amara?"

Randall: "What is your problem Mbuso?"

He snaps.

Me: "This whole time, I have been helping you Randall. Little did I know that, you bought Amara from her uncle. What kind of a man are you?"

I yell.

Randall: "You don't know what you're talking."

Me: "I know everything, you're trafficking girls now Randall?"

My question angers him greatly.



Randall: "You piece of shit, don't you say that to me."

Me: "The truth hurts doesn't it? How do you sleep at night knowing that you took a child from her family?"

He takes a few steps closer to me while grimacing.

Randall: "Did you get your facts straight before coming to my house to tell me shit?"

Me: "I know what I was told."

Randall: "I don't appreciate your tone Mbuso."

Me: "I don't care, I'm taking Amara back home."

He pushes me against the wall and presses his arm on my throat.

Amara: "Randall stop."

Randall: "Don't piss me off boy."

He growls.

Me: "How did I get so entangled with you Randall? You're a selfish bastard."

Randall: "I would be careful of what I say if I were you, you don't know what you're talking about."

Amara: "Will you stop?"

She yells as she pulls an undeterred Randall from me.

Me: "Did he tell you what he did Amara?"

Amara: "I know, he told me everything."

She replies quietly.

Me: "And, you're okay with this?"

Amara: "My uncle had sold me to some old man and the only way Randall could save me from him was to offer him money."

Lelo didn't mention anything about an old man, she did say that her parents are keeping a secret from her.

Me: "What?"

Amara: "Yes, what Randall did was to save me from my uncle."

Is she gullible or what?

Me: "Buying someone is not justifiable at all. How can you be okay with this Amara?"

Amara: "You don't know the whole truth Mbuso."

Me: "I know that your cousin is in my house and she hasn't stopped crying because she just

found out what your uncle did.”

Her eyes bug out.

Randall: “Mbuso?”

He’s trying to chastise me, I will not bend.

Me: “No Randall. Just as much as you can’t see Amara in tears, I can’t see Lelo cry.”

Amara: “Lelo is with you?”

Me: “Yes.”

Amara: “How is she there? What about my uncle? He never wanted her to move out of the house.”

She would be shocked if she were to find out what Lelo has been through.

Me: “Lelo needs you, Amara.”

Randall: “What are you getting at Mbuso?”

He grunts, he knows exactly what’s on my mind.

Me: “I think it’s about time these two sisters reunite.”

My introduction puts a scowl on his face.

Randall: “That is not your decision to make.”

Me: “It’s not yours either.”

I retort, Randall should put his feelings aside and think of someone else for a change.

Amara: “I agree with Mbuso.”

She turns to him.

Amara: “I want to see her, Randall.”

Randall: “Amara, you know that...”

Amara: “I know, I also know that nothing will happen to me as long as you’re with me.”

She cups his cheeks as he clings to the grimace on his face. He grabs her waist, pulls her close to him, shutting whatever space that is between them. He presses his forehead against hers and sighs deeply.

This is a different side to Randall, I have never seen. It’s as if he’s afraid of losing her. Randall Okolie is not daunted by anything, this sensitiveness is new to me.

Randall: “I just want to keep you safe Amara.”

He mummurs under his breath, she puts her arms around his torso as if claiming what already

belongs to her. She has the same fear, I can't apprehend what it is that has them terrified like this. I don't know much about Randall's life, I try to keep out of it.

Amara: "I am safe Randall, I need you to trust me with this please. I won't do anything stupid."

Another hefty sigh erupts from him. What could he be so afraid of? I look away just as he presses his lips on hers. Randall has a weakness. I'd be damned.

Me: "I'm still in the room."

It takes a minute for them to pull away, Randall keeps his arm around her waist.

Randall: "Fine, I think it would be best that your lady comes here rather."

Me: "As long as she knows the truth."

Amara: "How is she? How is Lelo?"

Me: "She's amazing."

She laughs.

Amara: "She's always been amazing. When can I see her?"

Randall: "Mbuso has to tell her first."

Amara: "Okay, I don't think I can hold the excitement anymore."

Me: "I should go, I need to tell her. I hope she won't resent me for lying to her."

Amara means everything to Lelo and finding out that I knew of her whereabouts will cause a strain in our relationship.

STYLES\*

There's a car outside my garage, this is Neo's car. He didn't tell me that he was coming. I hurry in the house to find him in my kitchen his head dipped inside my fridge.

Me: "Neo."

He peeks, before diving back in the fridge

Neo: "Stylos, u ne u ntse u le kae?" (Where have you been?)

Really? And what is he doing in my fridge?

Me: "When did you get here?"

Neo: "Yesterday."

He continues to fiddle in.



Me: "Why didn't you tell me?"

Neo: "You were not taking my calls, this is how it is vele. It's fine Stylos, kea tseba nou hore this friendship is one sided." (I know now that.)

He complains, he finally shuts the fridge and turns with groceries packed in his arms.

Me: "Are we having people over?"

He gives me a tangled stare.

Neo: "I know I'm not, I don't know about you."

Okay.

Me: "Why so much food?"

Neo: "It's for me, I'm hungry. Hospital food is poison Stylos and my mother forced me to eat it, she said it's the only way I will heal. Nahana, that's when I saw that this woman wants to kill me. I was only allowed to eat porridge, greens and more porridge. Kea u joetsa hore mosali eo o batla ho mpolaea ntwana." (I'm telling you, that woman wants to kill me.)

He breaks a block of cheese in half with his hands and bites a big chunk. I'm standing in my kitchen like I'm the visitor.

Neo: "Wena u tsoa kae? You're sleeping out now Stylos, ke mo jolo? Ho monate neh?" (Where do you come from? You're having fun with this relationship hey.)

Me: "You talk too much, Tshidi should've burnt that big mouth."

He laughs before taking a serious look.

Neo: "What did you do to Tshidi?"

He knows?

Me: "What do you mean?"

I pretend not to know what he's talking about, just in case we're not on the same path.

Neo: "I got a call from her this morning, she was crying and apologizing. Apparently she's at the hospital, she said her hands and feet were torched."

He continues to make a sandwich, his demeanour tells me that he is not really bothered about Tshidi.

Me: "What else did she say?"

Neo: "That it was you."

I figured she would snitch.

Me: "I told her not to say a word."

Neo: "So, she did wrong by telling me?"

Me: "No, I was going to tell you. I'm surprised that she had the courage to call you after I told her to stay away."

He shrugs.

Neo: "That's Tshidi for you, that woman is stubborn."

Me: "Tell me about it. Listen, I need your help with something."

He frowns at me, takes his food and strolls to the living room. I must follow him, I guess.

Neo: "I just came back from the hospital, give me a break Stylos."

He sits, puts his feet on my table and goes channel searching, while he nibbles on the sandwich.

Me: "Firstly, get your feet off my table."

He snickers and pulls them off.

Me: "I need you to get information on someone."

Neo: "Who?"

He speaks with his mouth full.

Me: "Kgabu Bophela."

Neo: "Who is that idiot?"

Me: "I don't know much about him but, I am going to make his son wish he was never born."

Neo: "Again with violence Stylos."

He complains.

Me: "Just get me the information, I need to know who I'm dealing with."

Neo: "Sho, sho bozza. Right after I finish my food."

Me: "Swallow before you speak man."

Neo: "Stop talking to me then and let me eat in peace hau."

This man will give me grey hair.

SETHU\*

I went back to the bedroom when Styles left, I want to hide away from the world. Ayize won't leave my side, she says that she will annoy me until I'm back to myself. She's lying next to me, talking the day away.

My phone beeps, I have a message from styles.

Ayize: "Only one person can make you smile like that."

She states, protesting to the beam on my face.

Me: "He sent me a song."

That's odd, Styles is not into music. He's too much of a geek.

Ayize: "Let me guess, jazz?"

She simpers as she sits up.

Sethu: "I don't know, let me play it."

I've heard this song before.

<<< Wamuhle we ngani >>> (She is beautiful.)

<<< Ng'amthatha abe nami >>> (I took her to be with me.)

<<< Ng'zokushada we ngani >>> (Why not get married?)

Ayize: "Anatii? Mr. S listens to such?"

I'm just as surprised, it's a beautiful song though.

Me: "He's trying to cheer me up."

Ayize: "Woo girl, vula amehlo. This man is trying to be romantic, if he wanted to cheer you up, he would take you to a comedy show." (Open your eyes.)

That does not make any sense to me.

Me: "Does this not count?"

Ayize: "Listen to the lyrics, unless Mr. S doesn't understand what the song means. The man wants to marry you."

This is the funniest thing I have heard today.

Me: "No, he doesn't."

I protest.

Ayize: "How do you know?"

Me: "I just know, he would have hinted something."

He might be mysterious but, he speaks his mind.

Ayize: "This is a hint. You're worth it, you know that and any man would be lucky to have you as his wife."





I don't want to cry, this sister of mine tends to be deep sometimes.

Me: "To think I was chasing him away the other day."

It was crazy of me to do that.

Ayize: "You were hurting, it's understandable. But, don't do it again or you will hear from me."

She threatens, it's good to know that she is fond of Styles. Having someone on my side feels good.

Ayize: "That man is going to marry you, you know that, right?"

I don't, really.

Me: "If you say so."

Ayize: "Hey, you better believe it. Whatever I speak comes to pass."

Me: "Sure it does."

She's tickled by my comeback.

Ayize: "Just so you know, all the uncles and aunts from your mother's side are not invited to the wedding."

She's insane.

Me: "Why not?"

Ayize: "Do you know them? They don't even bother with you so, why include them in your big day? We don't want people coming with witchcraft tendencies."

Ayize needs psychiatric evaluation.

Me: "That's a serious accusation. Do you have proof?"

Ayize: "Yes, your mother. It's not her fault that she's bitter and heartless, bam'loyile. That's all the proof I need." (She's bewitched.)

Me: "Okay, let's say that's the case. What makes you think it's her siblings?"

Ayize: "Who else would it be? It has to be them, they have bad blood. Who of her sisters and brothers has come over during the holidays?"

Me: "Lebo's mom."

Ayize: "Apart from her, shame she's an innocent soul. Trapped in a family of wicked people. She wears a gloomy face, there's something in her mind.

Me: "What about dad's family? He's got siblings too."

Ayize: "They don't know anything, his siblings are sweet. Speaking of dad's siblings, I need to contact Khumbulekhaya." (Local TV show)

Me: "Why?"

Ayize: "His sister Nontobeko went missing twenty six years ago."

Me: "How come I don't remember her?"

Ayize: "You were not born yet, she lived with us. I was about four then, I called her sis' Ntosh. She was the coolest aunt. I would follow her around the house, at first it annoyed her but, I grew into her. I have that power you know, people can't resist this face."

Me: "We'll let you think that."

She laughs.

Ayize: "You see why I say your mother is bewitched, she hated Ntosh. She hardly ever said a word to her, dad wasn't a saint when it came to her either. They argued almost every day, she was young and I couldn't understand why they gave her a hard time."

Me: "How old was she?"

She counts in her head.

Ayize: "Seventeen, eighteen. I'm not sure, I was too young to keep track. She was in school though, I remember helping her wash her black school tunic every Sunday morning. Ntosh was kind and gentle, she would fetch me from day care without fail. There was this man who drove us around, they were always together. She was so clingy with him that, anyone could see that those two were dating. She called him MK, I used to wonder what a young girl like her was doing with an older guy."

Me: "He was her sugar daddy."

Ayize: "Blessed sweetie, he would shower her with gifts, take her shopping and I tagged along with my adorableness."

She giggles at this saying.

Me: "You two were close, hey."

Ayize: "Very, besinga mathe no limi. She bought me clothes too but, your wicked mother would burn them. She said it was blood money." (We were inseparable.)

Her face changes each time she speaks of mother.

Me: "Blood money?"

Ayize: "Yeah, I didn't understand what she meant by that. Their hatred for each other grew. This one time Ntosh had an argument with dad, I remember them yelling. Each wanted to get their views heard, no one wanted to listen to the other. It was a mess, Ntosh wouldn't stop crying. I would never forget that slap, mom gave her before they threw her out of the house."

My parents can be heartless.

Me: "Why did they throw her out?"

Ayize: "I don't know."

Me: "You must have heard what the fight was about."

Ayize: "I was young babe, I might have heard it and it's probably stacked in my mind somewhere. Maybe a glass of wine will help me remember."

What I think is a joke, turns out to be a serious statement. I watch her as she jumps off the bed.

Me: "Where are you going?"

Ayize: "To get something, a memory serum."

She winks and dashes out of the bedroom, I trace after her.

Me: "Come on tell me more about Ntosh, I want to know why she was kicked out."

I find her already indulging on a glass of wine, she gulps it all down in one go and pours another one. This has to stop, it's getting out of hand. She smiles at me, shaking my head in disapproval.

Ayize: "It could be that she was rebellious, she drank like a tank."

She titters at this, it's not really funny. Alcohol addiction is a serious problem, Ayize needs to get help for that.

Ayize: "Dad hated that, you know how he can be. It's his rules or nothing."

True.

Me: "Where is Ntosh?"

Ayize: "I don't know, that night was the last time I saw her. Like I said, I should write to Khumbulekhaya. There were no pictures of her in the house, dad burnt them and she was never spoken of from that day. I was heartbroken but, your parents didn't care."

Me: "Why would dad do that? It doesn't make any sense."

Ayize: "Maybe he was trying to protect mom, the hostility they had for each other was somewhat not good for the baby."

Me: "What baby?"

Ayize: "Mom was pregnant with you, she gave birth a month later. She struggled with you, I think Ntosh's disappearance took a toll on her. She would just zone out while you cried, or when she had to feed you. Her disregard towards you made me take over from her, it hurt me to see my sister neglected like that."

It hurts to know that my mother never cared for me.

Me: "You were only four."

Ayize: "Going on five in a few months."

Me: "And that makes it better?"

Ayize: "Life will force you to grow up."

Me: "Did she ever change? Did she mother me?"

Ayize: "She did, it took a while though."

Me: "It's sad to know that my own mother neglected me."

Ayize: "I think she had postpartum depression, it's a serious illness you know."

Me: "It affects new mothers."

I can't find a reason behind my mother's inattention.

Ayize: "Ai, I don't know then, bebam'loyile." (She was bewitched.)

She phrases, finishing up the last sip of wine.

Ayize: "Let's go write that letter, sbwl to be on TV." (I crave.)

I follow after her as she trudges out of the kitchen to the living room.

Me: "Where did you get that? Stop saying it."

Ayize: "Haibo, is it a foul word mam' fundisi?" (Pastor?)

She's mocking me.

Me: "No but..."

Ayize: "Bring a paper and pen mam' fundisi and stop acting weird." (Pastor.)

She's serious about this search.

Me: "Stop calling me, mam' fundisi." (Pastor.)

I gripe while I trudge to the bedroom to get the stupid paper.

Ayize: "Okay mme moroti." (Pastor.)

I hear her loud guffaw from here.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

119\*

STYLES\*

Randall just gave me the shocking news over the phone, he's proving to be too lenient on people and that will only get him into trouble.

Me: "What did you say Randall?"

I surge into the living room with these words, Neo is sleeping on the couch. Whatever happened to his bed beats me, I grab his legs and pull them off the couch. Startled, he bounces up, looks lost a bit there as he scans his surroundings.

Randall: "I said Raven is here."

I wanted him to repeat it for clarification.

Neo: "Eish!!! What happened?"

He wipes his crusty face, I gesture that he gets up.

Me: "What do you mean Raven is in your house?"

I don't know if Randall is stupid or what?

Randall: "Like I said, he was attacked."

Me: "Randall, you can't trust him, get that bastard out of your house."

It's so unlike him to be this careless.

Randall: "You didn't see him Styles, no one can fake that injury."

Me: "Segun can."

Randall: "I know you mean well, Raven is my brother Styles. It's my job to take care of him."

Me: "Am I not your brother too?"

Randall: "Come on, of course you're my brother."

Me: "Then it's also my job to take care of you, get that idiot out of that house."

He better take note of this firm command.

Randall: "Styles."

Me: "No Randall, think of Liya and Amara. Those men are against you, have you forgotten that?"

Randall doesn't forgive so easily.

Neo: "Ke eng Stylos?" (What is it Styles?)

I gesture that he puts on his shoes, I have to go knock some sense into Randall.

Me: "I'm coming over."

Randall: "Okay although, I personally think that you should be with Sethu."

Me: "I said, I'm coming over Randall."

I hang up, I refuse to argue with him about this.

Neo: "A reng Uze?" (What did Uze say?)

He enquires as he stretches his body.

Me: "Randall is losing his mind."

Neo: "You're only seeing it now? ke e bone khale, me batho ba nahana hore ke' na ea hlanyang."  
(I saw it long ago and people thought, I was the crazy one.)

I don't know if I should laugh, his serious face clouds me.

Me: "Let's go."

Neo: "Rea kae?" (Where are we going?)

Me: "To Randall's house."

He shakes his head, he's not coming with me.

Neo: "Kea tsoa Stylos." (I'm going out.)

He grabs his car keys and begins to tread towards the door.

Me: "Are you going to see Tshidi?"

I don't trust him.

Neo: "What do you take me for, mara bozza? I'm staying away from mosali ole. Ke tsaba Tshidi, entlek any woman who can boil water must stay away from me." (I'm scared of Tshidi.)

Me: "Then you should stay single forever, there's no woman that can't put a kettle on."

The look on his face cracks me up, he is definitely disagreeing with me.

Neo: "Eng?" (What?)

Me: "Yes, you can finally become a bishop."

Neo: "Never, letsoai le lengata le ka u bolaea. It doesn't help that I'm single at the moment. Ke hore, I am struggling as we speak." (Too much salt can kill you.)

Me: "Okay, okay. I've heard enough."

Neo: "Yeah, this will teach you. oa phapha." (You're too forward.)

Me: "You started the conversation."

Neo: "And, I'm finishing it. Nahana, a re stay single. Just because you have women falling at your feet." (Imagine.) (He says)

He mumbles.

Me: "I can hear you."

That stupid smile that, only Neo can pull off, takes over his mouth.

Neo: "Let me go, hurry back home. Do you want me to get you anything?"

He walks out, he doesn't give me a chance to answer back.

NKOMO\*

Styles sent me a text a while back, he wanted to know how things are going. I decide to video call him.

Styles: "My favourite cow."

He laughs uproariously at his own jest.

Me: "You're happy today. What's up?"

He's in the car.

Styles: "There's nothing to be happy about, trust me."

Me: "Where are you?"

Styles: "At home, I was on my way out. How are things there?"

Me: "Great, I think."

He's not satisfied with my answer.

Styles: "That's not good enough, we don't have much time Nkomo."

Me: "Putting pressure on me, really?"

Styles: "I wouldn't be doing it if Segun wasn't at work. I swear that old man doesn't sleep, he stays up all night plotting against Randall."

That happy face he had when he answered the call has rejected him.

Me: "What did he do now?"

Styles: "Raven was supposedly beaten up, according to Randy, he's badly injured. Just yesterday,

he was crying daddy, today he's back in his brother's house. I have a bad feeling about this."

Me: "You should speak to Randy, family means a lot to him. You know how he protects the people that are closest to his heart. If Raven is playing victim and Randall believes him then, he's in deep shit."

There's a possibility that our plans could backfire.

Styles: "I know, I want to drag that man out of that house."

Me: "Randall won't be happy about that."

Styles: "I don't care, I will protect my brother by all means. He'll thank me later."

This brotherly love that they share is enviable, they are kindred spirits. I know from experience and the years spent with them that nothing will ever separate them. Styles lives for Randall and Randall is his shadow, if they were to be separated it would kill them both.

Styles: "Nkomo?"

The sternness of his voice gushes me out of the secrets of my thoughts."

Me: "What was that?"

Styles: "I said, any plans of gifting Ruth with the earrings?"

Me: "Not yet, the girl is materialistic but, she has pride."

Styles: "Don't take too long man, if you spend too much time with her, you will end up falling for her."

That is not happening.

Me: "You know me Styles, I don't just fall for a girl."

What I said must be funny, he's laughing.

Styles: "Unless she uses Voodoo on you."

Me: "Don't scare me like that man, I would be trapped in her web forever."

He still finds it funny, I'm done with his guffaws.

Styles: "Don't worry, her eyes are set on Randall. The woman wants to be a queen. It's sad that the only crown she'll get to wear is a crown of death."

I will not be laughing along with him.

Me: "I don't want to know the details, my job is to gift her with the jewel. Whatever happens after that, please don't bother sharing."

Styles: "Are you sure that you're Mkhize's son? You're too soft Nkomo, this is the real world man, kill or be killed."

That's the rule he and Randall live by, while I refuse to be like my father. If Randall and Styles call



me to war then, I oblige because I know that they will do the same for me.

Me: "Let's leave the killing to you."

Styles: "I have to go, make me proud Mkhize. Bring the cup home."

This is a game for Styles, the hilarity in his tone proves him guilty.

Me: "Speaking of Mkhize. Have you spoken to Neo yet about finding my mother's family?"

Styles: "He's on it."

Me: "Great because I am done with you calling me Mkhize."

I'm a joke to him.

Styles: "Keep me posted Mkhize."

Me: "Go to hell Styles."

He drops the call with a chortle, now I have to go and work.

AYIZE\*

I hate how malls are always full, one of the reasons why I hate shopping.

I have to hurry back home because I left Sethu alone and dusk is approaching.

Sethu is flooding my phone with phone calls and messages, she's terrified of being alone since Ntokozo suddenly surfaced.

Me: "Sis wami, I'm almost done. What seems to be the problem?" (My sister.)

I don't want to scare her, I'm trying to get her to relax, her anxiety will only spiral.

Sethu: "You said that thirty minutes ago."

Me: "I lied, I was actually on my way there. But, I promise that I'm done. I'm standing in the cue as we speak."

I lie.

Sethu: "Where are you Ayize? South gate is just here."

She knows me.

Me: "Okay, I needed the drive. So, I soared to the north."

Sethu: "Says the girl who drank three glasses of wine. Are you kidding me, Ayize? You're not sobered up, you shouldn't be driving. God, I knew that I shouldn't have let you go like that."

And so, the complaints launch.



Me: "I know how to handle my alcohol thank you. If I made it here alive then, I'll make it back home."

I hear her release an incredulous sigh.

Sethu: "Why must you do this to me Ayize? What will I do if something happens to you?"

Wow, I don't need this right now.

Me: "Babe, you know how careful I am. I promise that I'll come home to you. This is what happens when you're not married, you should be bugging your husband, not me."

She huffs.

Sethu: "Not funny."

Me: "Right? Let me go, this place is crowded. I'm actually getting frustrated."

I plod to the toiletry section.

Me: "Hey, how many toilet papers do you think we need?"

Sethu: "I don't know."

Me: "Fine, I'll get ten."

Sethu: "Hurry back please."

Me: "Yes mom."

I end the phone call before she could chide me, any further. I've got everything I need, this item is the last one.

Someone grabs the tissue paper from my hands, I gawp up at the idiot. He's frowning at me and I couldn't care less, I'm not letting go.

"Sorry ousie." (Sister.)

Me: "Sorry ousie my foot. Let go." (Sister.)

I demand.

"I took them first, you should let go."

Me: "You grabbed them while they were in my hands."

I gripe, he's annoying me.

"No, I got here first. You were busy talking on the phone."

Me: "So, that doesn't mean anything. Let go of the tissues s'didi." (Idiot.)

"S'dididi ke mang girly? Kyk heso..." (Who's an idiot? Look here?)

I sense an insult coming and I will not allow it.



Me: "Uthi girly kubani wena? Ek is nie jou meisie nie." (Who are you calling girly? I'm not your girl.)

He laughs...

Stupid idiot.

I pull the package. By the way he's got his grip on it, I know that he is not about to give up.

"Na ua bona hore s'dididi ke uena mona? I didn't say my girly." (Do you see that the idiot here is you?)

Me: "Yey! What kind of a man are you? Fighting a woman for tissues. Have we come this far in this country?"

"I don't care, say whatever you want. You think having a smart mouth will get you these toilet papers?"

This is what it has come to, I am being taunted by some idiot at a grocery store. It's even more embarrassing that people are watching.

Me: "You can't fight for something you cannot name."

I'm getting angry.

"What are you talking about?"

Me: "Yela! S'dididi, it's tissue paper not toilet paper." (Idiot.)

He chortles at my rectification.

"Yoh! I knew hore basali ba bang ba dom mara uena, ai shame ousie, you take the cup. It's called a toilet paper." (I knew that some women are dumb but, you sister.)

Me: "Dumb, I will show you dumb."

Our voices are the loudest in this store as we play tug of war with this last batch of tissues.

"Show me after you let go of the toilet paper."

The insolence of this man, he continues to pull it from me.

Me: "This is the last one, I probably need it more than you do."

"You must ask nicely then."

Today is not for me.

Me: "Uyanya yoh, ngeke bhuti." (You're crazy, never.)

I decline his idiotic proposition.

"What are you looking at?"

We chorus as we yell at the people staring at us.

A female shopkeeper approaches us, she carries a marked look on her face.

Her: "What's going on here? You're causing chaos and disturbing the customers."

Me: "If you haven't noticed sisi, I'm also a customer here and this man is fighting me over my toilet paper."

He throws his head back as he laughs like the idiot he is.

Me: "And then? Did I crack a joke?"

He nods, still entertaining himself.

"You said toilet paper and this just proves me right, I told you hore u dom girly." (That you're dumb, girl.)

Me: "Sisi, khuza tuu. I don't want to go crazy on people." (Chastise him.)

She clicks her tongue at us before she heatedly dashes away.

"Look, Oprah Winfrey."

He points behind me, I swivel as my heart jumps up in excitement. This fool played me, I watch him as he strides away with my tissues.

Me: "Uyis'lima." (You're an idiot.)

I shout, he waves his hand without looking back at me. I can't go to a different store, I'll have to leave that for another day. Sethu is anxiously waiting for me.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

120\*

MBUSO\*

Lelo must be in the bedroom. How will I break this news to her? She will definitely want to know why I kept it from her.

Me: "Lelo."

I call out to her.

Lelo: "I'm in the room."

My heart stops at the sound of her voice. This is it.

I decide to mosey to the bedroom to give myself time to gather my thoughts and prepare to give her the news.

The door is half open, I gander through the crack. She's standing in front of the big mirror with a towel wrapped around her.

I watch her as she unhurriedly lotions her body, the fear of losing her builds up. My love for Lelo intensifies every day, I never thought that I could love someone so much.

She must feel a gaze on her and this compels her to turn. A smile flashes on her face.

Lelo: "Why are you standing there?"

She continues with her doings as I drag my feet towards her. I keep thinking of ways to tell her.

Lelo: "How did it go?"

She glances at me through the mirror reflection, seeing her in this towel stirs me up. A few more steps bring me closer to her, I plant a kiss on her bare shoulder. She smirks and titters as I alternate to paint her skin with more kisses. I take my arms around her waist while I nuzzle her neck, placing wet kisses on every inch of it. I want nothing else at this point but, to be inside her. I want to fill her up with my love.

Lelo: "Mbuso."

Her quick breaths tell me that she wants this just as much. I find the hem of the towel, unloose it and she gasps as it falls to the floor, leaving her starkers. My hands find her breast, they feel so amazing in them.

Me: "I love you."

I mutter in her ear before I nibble her earlobe and her body shudders in reaction to it.

Lelo: "I love you."

This is something I know very well, I turn her around to face me. This is my woman, there's no one I would rather be with.

Mildly, I smash my lips on hers. My tight but, gently grip flows to her hips to pull her into me. I kick off my shoes, trying to stay in this blissful moment. Her warm hands slide under my t-shirt and they rise up with it. I lift my hands assisting in removing this garment. Her hands are all over me, I'm so excited I feel like I could explode. The kiss escalates into a peckish movement, I feel her hands on the waist of my jeans. She pops the button open and pulls the zip down.

Me: "Mmmh"

I moan as her lubra lips feel incredible against mine. We sink on the carpeted floor after I throw my jeans off. I worship every inch of her body with trails of wet kisses.

Lelo: "Mbuso."

The sound of my name delicately, departing from her mouth makes me feel like I'm the only guy she thinks about.

We're in a missionary position as I slide into her. Everything in my life falls away, I'm only here in this present moment. She hugs her legs around my hips as I begin to thrust, her arms are tightly around me and it makes me feel desired.

Her heavy breathing and warm breath on my ear drive me right off the roof. My frame is filled with need and desire for her. It's amazing, it makes me want to cry. I'm astounded by this amazing woman, the way she opens up to me and accepts a part of me inside of her. I catch a glimpse of her eyes, her warm gaze affirms that she's also lost in this glorious moment. Her gentle touch gives me so much peace. I pick up my pace plunging in and out of her. Her grip around me tightens with each thrust and her moans get louder as they occasionally escape in pleasurable screams.

Lelo: "Keep going Mbuso, don't stop."

She fuels me with these words along with her sexy moans. I bring her hand above her head and intertwine our fingers. I add an insatiable kiss and feel her mouth stretch, she's smiling. I know I have stimulated her just right and hit the g-spot as she yelps out my name, her legs and arms clasp around me. I steal kisses every now and then, I want to breathe her in. It keeps me alive.

In a while her body shudders and she clings on to me like there's nothing else she'd rather be holding. My deep strokes titillate her erotic screams.

Thrusting on, I feel a shivering sensation that increases with every stroke. It's birthed from my groin and spreads to my spine, my arms and legs go numb. My mind goes completely blank, I capture her lips into mine as my sensual journey comes to an end.

In a few seconds a wave of relaxation whelms me and nothing compares to it. We collapse sweaty and tired, Lelo falls into a pool of giggles. She rests her head on my chest as I flip us over and pull her into my arms.

Me: "You know I love you, right?"

I need to prepare myself for this.

Lelo: "If this is your way of saying you love me, then you have said it more than a hundred times."

She tattoos my chest with soft kisses.

Me: "You are everything to me Lelo and I can't imagine loving anyone else but, you."

Gradually, I brush my fingers on her bare back.

Me: "There's so many ways to say I love you. It's not just directly saying it or the staggering love making. It's not only that spark in my eyes when I see you or in the way I hold your hand. It's also, how protective I am of you, I would never do anything to hurt you."

She places her chin on my chest and our eyes meet, this is the moment of truth.

Lelo: "You sound different. What's wrong?"

She holds my cheek with her warm hand, an exhalation of despair pours out of me.

Me: "I know where Amara is."

There's no expression on her face, her mind hasn't grasped the news yet.

Me: "Lelo."

She's looking into my eyes and I can't figure her thoughts out.

Me: "My love, say something."

Lelo: "You know where Amara is?"

I nod, her hand releases my cheek.

Lelo: "How did you find her?"

I watch her facial features as I narrate the story to her, her eyes are wet by the time I finish.

Me: "Won't you say something?"

Lelo: "You lied."

The tone of her voice tells me that she is shocked by this fact.

Me: "It wasn't a lie as such."

Lelo: "You lied Mbuso, you saw how I stressed over her disappearance and you didn't bother to tell me the truth."

Me: "Lelo..."

Lelo: "Is this how you love me?"

Her words break me, I was afraid of this.

Me: "Please understand Lelo, I was cornered and blackmailed into keeping the truth from you. It was for her protection."

She moves away from my embrace, grabs the towel from the floor and wraps it around her.

Lelo: "You think that I would've failed to keep her safe Mbuso."

She throws my jeans at me as she shouts.

Me: "I didn't say that."

I jump back into my pants while desperately trying to justify my actions.

Lelo: "She's my sister Mbuso, you had no right to her from me."

Me: "I'm sorry, I know that I shouldn't have kept the truth from you. Lelo there's an old man out there who is after Amara. Your father sold her to him and this man who has her now, took her to protect her."

Lelo: "Bullshit. What about us who loved Amara? If this man cared about her so much, he wouldn't have kept her from us. There are so many ways this could've been handled, kidnapping is a serious crime Mbuso and I will report it."

I didn't expect this from her.

Me: "You can't do that."

Lelo: "I can and I will."

Me: "Lelo, you don't know those people. They can make anything go away, talking to the police will be a waste of time. No one will pay heed to you and your actions will only break Amara's heart."

She frowns at my proclamation.

Lelo: "What do you mean?"

Me: "She has fallen in love with him, she will never leave him and trying to hurt that man will create a rift between you too."

Lelo: "What if she was brain washed? If those people are as powerful as you say, it's possible that they drilled these thoughts in her head."

I know she's upset but, this is ludicrous.

Me: "Come on Lelo, think about it. Does it make sense?"

Lelo: "I don't know Mbuso, nothing makes sense anymore. You don't make sense, everything I



have ever known is a lie. From my parents, to you.”

She’s crying.

We’re standing in the middle of the bedroom, exchanging loud words and it hurts.

Me: “I understand where you’re coming from but, I am real. My love for you is real Lelo.”

Lelo: “How do I believe that?”

I nestle her cheeks with the palms of my hands.

Me: “Just trust me, trust this look in my eyes. That beautiful moment we just shared. Nothing can be more real than that.”

She shakes her head, by the looks of things, it will take a while to convince her.

Lelo: “I want to see her.”

She pulls away from me.

Me: “We’ll go tomorrow.”

We fall into a profound silence, I don’t like the look that she’s giving me. I wish I could read her mind, I yearn to know if we’re okay. I need us to be okay.

Me: “Lelo, I’m sorry.”

I break the silence.

Me: “Talk to me please.”

She sighs.

Lelo: “I have nothing else to say to you.”

I observe her movements as she plods to the bed, she gets under the blanket with the towel still wrapped around her. I hear her sniff as she turns the other way. I can’t let her sleep oblivious of what the future holds for us.

Me: “Lelo?”

I place my hand on her shoulder, she shrugs it away. I can’t see her face, only her back is visible to me.

Me: “Let me hold you please.”

She doesn’t respond so, I take my chances. I need to comfort her, I can’t lose this woman. She snivels the moment my arms clasp around her, I opt not to say a word lest it aggravates her.

AMARA\*



Liyana likes playing hide and seek with me, especially when it's time for her to have a bath. Chioma gave up searching, she is easily frustrated.

"Why are you here?"

That's her voice coming from the patio.

"What do you mean princess?"

She's with Raven, I doubt that it's a good idea for her to be alone with him. There's something dodgy about him, Raven woke up a few hours ago. He's been shambling around the house since, he claims that he needs to stretch his body.

Liyana: "You're not supposed to be here, go."

Why is she rude to him? I pick up my pace to get to her.

Raven: "Don't you want me here princess?"

Liyana: "Dabbi." (No.)

I sprint into the patio, just as she yells at him.

Me: "Liyana."

She turns at my firm voice. It's not like her to yell at elders. What is it that has her upset like this? Raven is slouching on a chair and Liyana is standing before him, she crosses her arms across her chest and she appears to be irritated.

Me: "What's wrong baby? Why are you talking to your uncle like that?"

She turns away from me.

Raven: "It's okay Amara, she's only a child."

Amara: "Yes but, that's no excuse for her behaviour."

Me: "Liyana?"

She carries a certain attitude I have never seen in her before.

Me: "Will you tell me what the problem is or should I call papa?"

Liyana: "He said I must tell him to leave, he doesn't belong here."

Me: "Who said that?"

She shrugs her shoulders, anger is visible on her face and it baffles me why she's upset about Raven's visit.

Me: "Was it papa?"

Liyana: "No."

Me: "Then, who?"

I'm talking to myself, her gaze is immersed on her uncle.

Me: "I won't know if you don't tell me anything."

I take her hand, she hauls it from me and runs out.

Me: "Liya."

I yell as I start to chase after her.

Raven: "Let her be, she'll be okay. She's fierce like her father."

He chortles. I'm not happy about this.

Raven: "How are you?"

He's smiling, last time I was in the same room with him, he could only dish out insults at me. If I remember correctly, he called me a peasant.

Me: "I should be asking you this, you don't look okay. You should be in bed sleeping."

Raven: "I have to tough it up if I want a speedy recovery."

I don't have a response for him, I think I should walk away.

Me: "Let me go find Liyana, she needs to take her bath."

I introduce my escape.

Raven: "I want to apologize for the way I treated you that day, I was a jerk."

Me: "It's alright."

Raven: "You're a good woman Amara and my brother is lucky to have you."

He suddenly sees me differently.

Okay...

Me: "Thanks."

I truly do not know what else to say to him.

Raven: "How is Randy? Is he happy?"

So, the conversation continues.

Me: "I would like to believe that he is."

I don't know why he forces a smile when his lip is swollen and cut like that.

Raven: "You deserve each other."

This is the same man who was pushing Ruth on Randall the other day.

Me: "Thank you."

I can't send out that same energetic dialog, standing here before him feels a tad bit strange. I can't get over the fact that he was against his brother, he broke his heart by choosing their father.

Raven: "I'm sorry, I don't mean to keep you. You can go ahead."

I feign a smile and turn to walk, somehow I feel a heavy stare piercing me from behind. I turn to find him glaring at me, he sends another smile. I struggle to return it instead, I rush out of there.

NTOMBI\*

Moses seems to be able to communicate without going crazy on me, he says he doesn't see Nkosiyabo anymore. He should be happy about his recovery but, he's aloof. Something is definitely on his mind, he wanted to be alone in the bedroom and I gave him space. Jonas and Mhambi are not happy people at the moment, they have been brought to shame.

It won't be too long till they are thrown out of this house. Petunia must enjoy being in my kitchen, her days in this house are numbered.

I'm leaning against the kitchen cabinet while watching her cook.

Me: "You're a good cook Petunia."

She ignores me.

Me: "It's a shame that we won't have anyone to cook for us anymore."

This should get her attention.

Petunia: "What do you mean?"

She's predictable.

Me: "Moses is himself again. Do you think that he will let you people stay here after what you did to him?"

She glares at me, her stares don't faze me.

Petunia: "Asihambi Ntombi and there's nothing Moses can do about it." (We are not going anywhere.)

Me: "Don't bet on it, take my advice. Enjoy standing behind that stove, you'll miss it once you're gone."

Petunia: "You're stupid sisi. Do you really think that Jonas will let Moses do that?" (Sister.)

Me: "This is not his house, he has no say."

She cackles.

Me: "We'll see who will have the last laugh."

She clicks her tongue, she'll be doing a lot of that on her way to Pongola.

"Moses, wenzani?" (What are you doing?)

Jonas yells from the living room, Petunia and I glance at each other before, scurrying out of the kitchen. The scene before me makes my heart jump with excitement. Moses is throwing suitcases out of the door and Jonas is trying to stop him. I knew that this day was coming, I didn't think it would be this soon.

Moses: "Get out of my house, all of you."

He yells as he points a finger at them.

Mhambi seems too calm for someone who is being thrown out of the house.

Petunia: "Are you crazy wena Moses?"

Wrong move Petunia.

Moses: "Petunia, don't make me mad. I want all of you to get out of my house."

He yells as he tosses the last suitcase out.

Jonas: "No one is leaving this house."

Me: "Bhuti don't be stubborn." (Brother.)

Petunia: "Shut up Ntombi. What is your problem vele?" (Actually.)

Moses: "Mhambi usahlaleleni? Ngithe phumani emzini wami." (Why are still sitting down Mhambi? I said get out of my house.)

Moses is livid.

My dear brother glares at him, shakes his head and continues to watch TV. What is wrong with Mhambi, has he lost his mind as well? Any normal person would be running out of that door with no hesitation at all.

Moses: "Hehehe!!! Niyangijwayela nina, Ntombi buka abafowenu. What did I say when they came to my house? Did I not tell you that these people are into dark magic? Did you see what they did to me, Ntombi? Mina lo, umyeni wakho." (You people are getting forward with me.) (Look at your brothers Ntombi.) (Your husband.)

Me: "I know Moses, I told them to reverse the curse but, they refused."

Mashoto: "Yoh hai shame, I think Ntombi should follow her brothers."

This witch.

Me: "Uthini wena s'febe?" (What did you say bitch?)

I charge at her, Moses pulls me back.



Moses: "Awume nawe man. I'm trying to fix this mess." (Stop it.)

Me: "Let me go Moses, I want to hit this home wrecker."

Moses: "Ntombi awulaleli yini? Angizwani nodoti." (Why don't you listen? I don't like nonsense.)

Why is he yelling at me? He should be yelling at her.

Me: "Yeyi Moses, ungazongihlanyisa. This woman invaded my house and I have tolerated her long enough, I want her out of my house." (Don't make me mad.)

I push him, he wobbles back with a few steps.

Moses: "You will never change Ntombi, you're the same as your brothers. I will not tolerate your bullshit."

He barks, if Moses thinks that I will let him mistreat me, I have grown into a bull in the last weeks.

Me: "Ungalinge Moses, ungalinge ukhulume nami kanjena." (Don't you dare speak to me like that?)

Mashoto: "Did you hear that sthandwa sami? This woman is nothing but disrespectful, you can't keep her around. She must go with her brothers." (My love.)

I am ready to kill her. I charge at her but, Moses pulls me back before I could grab that scruffy thing on her head.

Me: "Ngiyeke Moses." (Let me go.)

I shout as I fight to get loose.

Moses: "Ntombi wait, stop acting like a hooligan."

Me: "Mina, a hooligan? What about this ugly thing? Why did you bring her into our lives? Why would you do this to me? I have stood by you through everything Moses, I don't deserve this." (Me?)

Moses: "Ntombi can we talk about this later?"

I want to talk about it now.

I haven't stopped hearing Petunia's cackles, she's having a thrill.

Mashoto: "I say she must go, you don't love her anymore. Remember you told me this Moses?"

Moses: "Yeyi, Mashoto. Ungazong'hlanyisa wena, you will leave this house along with them if you don't keep your mouth shut." Don't make me crazy.)

He howls at her.

Mashoto: "But..."

Moses: "Thula." (Shut up.)

She huffs as she throws herself on the couch beside a calm Mhambi.

Me: "Moses, you told her that you don't love me?"

I am hurt by these words.

Moses: "Ntombi, mkami. You know a man would say anything when he's between a woman's legs." (My wife.)

Petunia: "Oh Jesu, uMoses akalungile." (Moses is sick.)

She is shocked by his confession. Jonas is standing with his jaw clamped, he's angered by something.

I know it's no secret that Moses slept with Moshoto but, I deserve respect as his wife.

Me: "How dare you say this to me, Moses?"

He grips my arms as I punch him on his chest.

Moses: "I'm sorry Ntombi, I was trying to explain to you that Moshoto means nothing to me."

Mashoto: "What?"

She jolts up.

Mashoto: "What is that supposed to mean? You payed lobola, you promised my father that you will marry me. What are you saying now?"

She should stay where she is, at this point anything is possible. I want to hurt someone, she should stay away lest she falls victim of my wrath.

Moses: "I don't know what came over me Mashoto, I guess you were good in bed and that drove me crazy."

Me: "Uyinja wena Moses." (You bastard.)

He refuses to let go of my hand.

Me: "Ngiyeke." (Leave me.)

(I want to punch the living daylight out of him.)

Moses: "Ntombi, I'm trying to explain here."

Jonas: "Explain what? Ntombi doesn't deserve this, you are an evil man Moses. I should kill you for this."

Jonas' love for me will never waiver.

Moses: "Haibo! Usase la Jonas? I said get out of my house." (You're still here?)

Mhambi: "No one is leaving this house."

He is so sure.

Moses: "Don't test me, Mhambi."

Mhambi huffs, I am mystified by this new confidence.

I can't be bothered about him right now, I want this man to let go of my hand.

Me: "Moses, ngiyeke." (Let me go.)

I command.

Moses: "Okay, relax Ntombi. Let me take care of your brothers first then we will talk about this issue."

Mhambi: "Jonas, tell your brother in-law that no one is leaving this house. I am not going anywhere until I see Amara's face."

He speaks with so much calm in his voice.

Moses is suddenly tongue-tied. Did he forget about her?

Mhambi: "If you and your wife want to spend the night in jail, go ahead. Continue with your nonsense."

Me: "You can't do that Mhambi."

Jonas: "This is serious Ntombi, don't test us. Amara's case will be on the news first thing in the morning, you and your husband will be known as child molesters. Your image will be tarnished, we'll see how you get yourselves out of that mess."

Me: "Bhuti?" (Brother.)

I gasp. He can't do this to me.

Jonas: "Put your husband on a leash mtase, I repeat, this is not a joke." (My sister.)

Moses is quiet, he's lost his confidence. I am married to a useless excuse of a man. He shoots daggers at them, before rushing to the bedroom.

Mashoto: "Moses wait for me."

I grab her hand as she tries to tread after him.

Me: "Uzofa wena mashoto, voetsek." (You will die. Piss off.)

I push her and she stumbles back. I will not be controlled in my house, I have to speak to that useless man. He thinks hiding in the bedroom will solve our problems.

To be continued...BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*



121\*

AYIZE\*

It's not a hidden secret that life has not been kind to me. Having dropped out of school due to stress and depression, I found myself working at a retail store. My first job was at PEP, the pay was terrible. I struggled to pay my rent and going back home was not an option. I would rather live on the streets than with that woman who gave me life. She is my mother but, that means absolutely nothing to me. It's better that, we're apart because we would end up killing each and I mean literally.

To afford rent and food, I jumped from one meaningless relationship to another. I went for older men, they had money and could afford to sustain my life. I can testify that I do not know what love feels like, I have never tasted it. I push people away, afraid they might hurt me.

This is the life I live, giving myself to men who care less about me and only want what's between my legs.

To say that I'm tired of this life would be an understatement.

I have done things in my life that I am not proud of, one of them is being in an entanglement with Lethabo. We met a year ago in PE, he's a BEE. Lethabo was good to me at first, although older. He respected me and I appreciated him for that.

Things took a terrible turn when I found out that he's married, I confronted him and he went ballistic. He refused that we break up and the most catastrophic thing happened. He revealed footages of us having sex, he threatened to post them on social media.

The whole time I was with him, I didn't know that he was recording everything and the worst thing about it is that, his face doesn't show on the videos. Meaning, if they were to be leaked, I would be the only one exposed.

I long for the day when I will finally be rid of that old man, I can't stand him. The sight of him makes me want to gag. Being sexually assaulted by my uncle led me in the arms of older men. Lethabo is 58, making him the oldest man I have been with. He's the reason I'm in the north, I lied to Sethu.

A car bumps into mine as I pull out of the parking lot, people don't know how to drive anymore.

Me: "Hey."

I jump out to check the damage on my car and deal with the idiot.

Me: "No, no, no. How am I going to pay for this?"

The dent is big.

"Women should not be allowed to drive, look what you did to my car. Entlek, basali should ride bicycles instead." (Women.)

Dammit, that voice. I spin and my mood changes immediately.

Me: "Yoh, yoh!!! Kazi ngigeze ngani namhlanje? Ibhadi elingaka jesu?" (What did I bath with today to have such bad luck.)

"Ibhadi ousie, really? Look what you just did to my car." (Bad luck sister?)

Me: "You hit my car, you were supposed to wait for me to reverse. I pulled out first."

He laughs mockingly.

"I see, so this is a 'me first' game? I have a life ousie, if you want my attention just tell me and I will gladly entertain you." (Sister.)

The smug.

Me: "Why would I want your attention? Awukahle tu?" (Relax.)

"Ke 'nete or else we wouldn't be in this situation." (It's true.)

Me: "Let me guess, your name is Thato, neh? You look like a Thato."

He gives me an annoyed look.

This man is seriously stupid.

How does he hit my car and blame me for it because I'm a woman?

"Oh! So you thought I was Thato, that's why you hit my car. Thato eo u buang ka eena ke mang? I feel sorry for him." (Who is this Thato that you're talking about?)

Me: "I don't blame you, I blame that big head of yours. Ligcwele amanzi." (It's full of water.)

"Shame, ua tseba ke eng? You will pay for the damage you did on my car." (You know what?)

Me: "I'm not paying for anything? If you want money bhuti, tell me and I will give it to you." (Brother.)

He huffs.

He's walking around my car, and typing something on his phone.

Wait a minute, he's taking down my number plates.

Me: "Hey, stop that."

I snatch his phone.

"Bring my phone, don't you know you shouldn't touch a man's phone?"

I knew he was imprudent, this just proves it.



Me: "Whoever gave you that, theory lied."

I turn and hunch as he stretches his hand to seize the phone from me, he's behind me while I push him off with my hip. Here we go again, wrestling but, this time the item belongs to him. The goal is to delete the number.

Oh no! Lethabo's here, he said we would meet me at Mandela square.

How is he here?

He slowly drives past us, I know that look on his face. He hates it when I talk to other men, whether a patrol attendant, a cashier, a bank teller or whoever. He would make remarks that I was flirting with them.

Me: "John Cena, thatha usgedlembe wakho." (Take your old scrappy phone.)

This man better go, I'm already in trouble with that baboon Lethabo.

"Sgedlembe is that car you're driving" (Old and scrappy.)

Me: "Ngicela uhambe tuu." (Please go.)

Lethabo is parked a few blocks away.

"When is your birthday?"

He's wiping the screen with his t-shirt.

Me: "Why?"

"I want to buy a bicycle for you because your struggle with a car is real.

Me: "Nxa!! Doti." (Rubbish.)

He's not going away, I should get in the car. This will send him off.

"I'm still buying the bike, you know."

He yells after me, I will not answer him.

I'm in trouble.

Good, he's leaving.

AMARA\*

It's strange how I haven't seen much of Randall today, he disappeared on me since Mbuso left the house. I think he's worried about me seeing Lelo again, I'm not exactly sure if he's worried or afraid.

There he is, in the bedroom changing into clean clothes.

Me: "Why do I feel like you're avoiding me today Mr. Okolie?"

I'm already standing behind him, my arms wrapped around his torso.

Randall: "How can I when you're all I think about?"

Me: "I'm worried about you."

I hate it when he shuts down.

Randall: "I'm fine, I promise."

Me: "I know you're worried about me meeting up with Lelo."

Randall: "I just want to keep you safe."

He turns to face me, my assumptions were correct, there's a glint of worry in his eyes.

Randall: "On the real though. What if she convinces you to go with her?"

He speaks of his fears.

Me: "Why would I go and leave you?"

Randall: "We're not married Amara."

Me: "But, this is where I want to be. I don't see myself anywhere else."

I also fear losing him.

Randall: "Why won't you agree to marry me, then?"

I shut my eyes at the feel of his warm hands on my cheeks.

Me: "We spoke about this."

Randall: "I won't stop you from living your dream, Amara I will stand with you till the end."

I know he will, this is the one person I know will never leave my side.

Randall: "Won't you take my hand and let me lead you?"

Me: "Something happened with Liya."

This is how I escape this intense moment. He sighs.

Randall: "What is it?"

His hands leave my cheeks.

Me: "She told Raven to leave the house, she was so upset."

Randall: "What? Where is she?"

I grip his arm as he moves to waddle out the door.

Me: "Wait."

Randall: "Don't tell me that you're taking her side."

He frowns.

Me: "No, Liya said something that got me thinking."

He gestures with his brows that I continue.

Me: "She said someone told her that Raven doesn't belong here."

He frowns.

Randall: "Who?"

Me: "I don't know, she wouldn't tell me. Something is going on, I think a message is being relayed to her. She's a child and innocent, it's easier for her to be approached..."

The pucker grows.

Randall: "Are you talking about ancestors?"

He's ignorant to these things.

Me: "Yes, first it was the dream she had, now this."

Randall: "Where is she?"

Me: "In her room with Chioma."

"Raven. Where is my son? I want my son."

Randall's face changes instantly upon hearing Segun's loud voice. He furiously races out of the room, this is not good. I bump into Chioma in the corridor.

Me: "Keep Liya with you. Don't let her leave the room."

Chioma: "What's going on?"

Me: "Please go."

I plead urgently.

She nods and scampers back into the bedroom.

Randall is fast, I catch up to find them in the foyer.

Randall: "Answer me Segun. What the fuck are you doing here?"

He booms.

Segun: "Uze..."

He appears to be dazed by Randall's tone.

Randall: "Who let you in?"

He growls as he takes steps towards him.

Segun: "I want my son."

Segun carries a smug look. If pride was a person then it would definitely have his face.

Randall: "You don't have a son, you bastard."

Raven hobbles into the lounge from the patio. Segun tries to walk up to him and Randall blocks his way.

Segun: "Uzoma, tell me what happened to you, my boy. Who did this to you?"

Raven: "This is so typical of you father, you send your goons to attack me and pretend that you don't know anything about it."

Segun: "I promise you, Uzoma. I would never do that to you."

Randall: "Get out of my house."

He demands.

Segun: "I'm not leaving without my son, he's all I have now. You turned your back on me Uze, you chose that thing over your father..."

He points at me as he fires a disgusted look.

Randall: "HEY!!!"

He howls in wrath and pins him against the wall.

Me: "Randall."

I cry out, he doesn't turn to me.

Randall: "I will kill you Segun. Do you hear me?"

He grumbles, his hand clutched on Segun's neck. Segun is unflinching, he holds a type of assurance that, nothing will befall him.

Segun: "You don't have the guts to kill your own father, do you? You might hate me but, you know that the guilt will haunt you forever."

He hisses on his face, his riposte seems to aggravate Randall some more.

Randall: "Your death will mean nothing to me."

Segun: "If this makes you feel better then, take it boy. We both know that you are destined for Royalty Uze and that woman will not rule alongside you. It's only a matter of time till you realize that, you can't take a pauper and put it in a nice dress. It will talk, walk and look like a pauper."

That is directed to me, I won't lie and say it doesn't hurt. Randall chortles, it's a dead one. He draws back from Segun who starts chuckling as well. I'm thrown into a wave of confusion as I stand here watching this father and son sniggering.

My eyes fall out as Randall draws out a gun and shoots Segun without, thinking twice about it. It happened so fast, no one could've seen it coming.

Me: "Randall?"

I scream, he turns to glance at me. I know that look. I'm no stranger to it, this is the look he had the day I contemplated suicide. It's a monstrous look, it confirms that his emotions have shut down. He turns back to Segun who is sitting on the floor, his hand pressed on his bloodied shoulder, there's so much blood oozing from it.

Segun: "You bastard, you shot me."

Raven: "Kill him Randy."

He rumbles, his voice is laced with anger.

Me: "No."

I holler.

Randall might hate Segun but, killing him will haunt him. I can't see him like that, it might seem okay right now as, his anger has taken over.

Randall: "How dare you Segun? How dare you challenge me?"

He barks.

Segun: "What do you know? You're just a prodigal son with no good upbringing, you chose to grow up on the streets of Johannesburg. What good could come out of that? Of course you would attract such women."

Segun could have a death wish, I can't put it together as to why he continues to fuel Randall's anger. Randall loads the gun, points it at his temple. He's going to kill him.

Me: "Randall stop, please."

I push myself in front of him, shielding Segun. He immediately withdraws the gun as he grimaces at me.

Randall: "Get out of the way Amara."

He demands firmly.

Me: "Please, don't."

I plead, there is no getting through that impassive face.

Randall: "I don't want to hurt you Amara, move."

He roars, I'm swimming with crocodiles here. There's no hope, he's shut down and he's going to kill his father. I choose to stand my ground, I have no clue of the outcome of my stubbornness. I know though that Randall would do anything to put a bullet through his father's head.

We stand in this warzone, glaring at each other with no words said, I'm trying to get through to

him as my eyes plead for him. I'm not pleading for Segun's life, I'm pleading for the life of this man that I love beyond anything I have ever known.

He indolently moves closer to me, he's changed his mind. That's what I think, only for him to roughly grab my arm and push me aside. The gun is aimed at Segun in a second.

Randall: "Go to hell Segun Okolie."

I scream, clench my eyes and cover my ears as the loud sound of the gun shot occupies the room. This is the scariest thing and I'm afraid to open my eyes. What if he killed him? Randall will never be the same again. How will I reach him?

AYIZE\*

My door swings open, I screech as a tight grip clasps around my upper arm. When did he get here?

He lugs me out of the car and slaps me across the face, I send my hand to rub the pain away. He scans the parking lot to see if anyone saw him.

Lethabo: "I was waiting for you like an idiot while you were busy entertaining men. Do you want to be a prostitute now Ayize? I can make it happen, you know."

I'm used to the insults and the abuse.

Me: "I was on my way to you, Lethabo when that man crashed into my car."

He doesn't believe me but, I explain anyway.

Lethabo: "You think I'm stupid? I know what I saw, you were all over him."

Me: "No Lethabo, I wasn't."

He clutches my hand again and lugs me away from my car.

Me: "Where are you taking me?"

He's dragging me, he has never been gentle with me since, he showed me the footage. His words are as rough as the sex, it leaves me feeling dirty and dressed in shame.

Me: "Lethabo wait, you're hurting me."

I want out of this, God-knows I want out but, there is no way for me. I have become this man's sex slave, he has me whenever he wants or else he will go ahead with his threats.

I once tried stealing the footage, he had copies. There's a special place in hell reserved for this bastard and I would love to take the front seat as I watch him burn.

Lethabo: "You haven't seen nothing yet, I am going to tie you down today. You like prostituting yourself, right? Today I will treat you like the bitch you are."





He grunts through his teeth.

His words form a familiar image in my mind.

He ties me on the bed and does despicable things to me, Lethabo is one of the reasons why I hate men.

Me: Not today please, I'm not feeling okay."

He never listens to me.

I stiffen my body and press my feet on the ground, I am not going anywhere with this man.

The look on his face is terrifying.

Lethabo: "You're defying me Ayize?"

Me: "I don't want to go with you Lethabo. Are you deaf or what?"

I shout and this makes him angrier.

Lethabo: "Now you have the courage to yell at me?"

Me: "You're not listening to me, I said I'm not going anywhere with you."

I put my foot down.

I can't be exposed to such terrible things again.

A scornful laugh sweeps out of his mouth.

Lethabo: "Where is this confidence coming from Ayize?"

Me: "I'm not stupid, I refuse to let you have your way with me. You're nothing but, a bully mkhulu ndini." (Old man.)

His back hand slap comes as fast as lightning, I don't feel it hit against my cheek, only the throbbing heat. I'm not going to cry, I have learnt how to control my tears. Tears give him satisfaction just like every monster out there.

Lethabo: "Repeat what you said."

I glare at him.

If given a chance, a time and a gun, I would kill this bastard.

This thing of grabbing my arm is frustrating now. It hurts but, this dog does not give a damn.

Me: "Ouch, Lethabo."

I yelp in pain.

"Yeyi! U etsang ntate-moholo." (What are you doing old man?)

Oh Lord! He's back.

Lethabo glares at me then back at the guy. I know he's about to say something stupid.

Lethabo: "Your boyfriend is back."

He sneers at me.

"Is this how women are treated?"

Why is he budding in?

Lethabo lets go of my hand and takes a few steps towards this guy. Lethabo is so used to beating up women, he thinks he can go against a young man. I hope he gets it today.

Lethabo: "Who are you and what business do you have with my woman?"

He's getting too close, I don't know this stranger but, the look on his face says he means business.

Please beat this old man for me.

"Your woman? Ke ngoana motho enoa. Awuswabi?" (She's a child, are you not ashamed?)

I'm not a child.

I definitely need a burger.

Lethabo: "Stay out of my way little boy."

Why hasn't he punched him yet?

Me: "Come on s'didi, put those arms into use." (Stupid.)

I mummer, Lethabo turns his head to leer at me.

Lethabo: "What did you say?"

I shake my head, his ears are failing him.

"You're abusing a woman in public, this has everything to do with me."

Because Lethabo is dull and stupid or old age is not treating him well, he punches the man. I hope this guy is as strong as he looks, those muscles better not be for show. I'm tired of Lethabo and his shit.

He clamps his fist, grins at Lethabo and returns the punch. I didn't think the old man would faint.

Me: "Yes."

The guy glances at me as I jump in excitement, a slight frown taking over his face.

Me: "Hey, Spiderman. I don't need a hero, I can take care of myself."

"That's not how it looked like, Cinderella. I had to come to your rescue. "

He retorts.

Did he just call me...

Me: "Oh, shake it off. I'm not a damsel in distress."

He laughs.

"Oh! Ka 'nete, uena Super girl?" (Really?)

Me: "Yes, I'm not weak."

"I didn't say you were, I hate violence and I will not turn a blind eye when a man abuses a woman."

Me: "This is none of your business?"

"You better press charges against him"

Is he really commanding me to do this?

Me: "You can't tell me what to do."

"What are you doing with this idiot anyway?"

He likes things.

Me: "Read my lips, it's not your business."

I kick Lethabo, jump over him and let my feet lead me to my car.

"What should I do with him?"

He yells.

Me: "Do you have dogs?"

He frowns.

"No."

Me: "Feed him to the crocodiles, then."

That would be a dream come true.

"Basali." (Women.)

He laughs, shakes his head and strolls to his car. Lethabo will see himself, I will deal with him some other day. He needs me, I know this pretty well and that footage is only a hold on me.

Sethu is probably peeking out the window, anxiously waiting for me.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

122\*

AMARA\*

"His death will not be on your hands."

That's Styles' voice.

I open my eyes to see him holding Randall back and he has the gun in his hand. When did he get here?

I ogle at Segun, he's still seated on the floor. His hand pressed on his shoulder, Randall missed the target, thanks to Styles.

Randall: "Why did you do that?"

He's hasn't let go of his anger.

Styles: "You know why Randall. There are other ways we can solve this. Have you forgotten?"

Randall: "Dammit Styles, give me the gun. I want to kill this bastard."

Styles: "No, your child is in this house. She knows this man as her grandfather. Do you think Liya hasn't heard the gun shot? She's probably terrified right now."

Randall groans in anger.

I want to get to him and assure him that it's okay, I don't want to be caught in the middle of this trench, though.

Raven: "I don't understand why you stopped him Styles, this bastard deserves to die."

Raven adds his inconsequential opinion.

Why is he desperate for Randall to kill their father.

Styles: "You shut up."

He points at him with his forefinger, Raven grits his teeth.

There's a dumbfounded woman standing afar off from this dreadful scene, her wide eyes are fixated on Styles.

She's terrified of what she's beholding.

There are also two guards standing a few feet away.



Segun: "You're an animal Uze, your mother will be ashamed of you. Wait till she hears of this."

For someone whose life just flashed before him, Segun sure is audacious.

Randall: "Don't talk about my mother, you piece of shit."

Raven: "I think someone should finish this man off."

I hate him.

Styles: "Why are you people here? What do you want from Randall?"

Raven holds a certain rage against Styles, that look in his eyes cannot lie.

Segun: "Do you know who you're dealing with?"

Styles: "I know what I'm dealing with and I'm not intimidated. The question is. Do you know who you're dealing with?"

Segun: "Who the fuck are you?"

Styles: "You don't want to know, trust me."

Randall: "Styles give me that gun, let me finish him off."

His eyes are kept on Segun, he wants his blood.

Me: "Randall, come with me please."

I take his hand, he doesn't look at me.

Styles: "I've got this Randall."

Randall: "Dammit Styles, give me the damn gun."

He grumbles.

Styles: "I said I've got this Randall, get out of here."

Styles seems to be wasting his time.

Randall marches to one of the guards.

Randall: "Give me your gun."

The guard is dubious about this request, he's not sure what to do.

Randall: "I said give me your gun dammit."

He yells.

Styles: "Don't give it to him."

What is wrong with Randall?

Randall: "Do you know what he said to me Styles? I will kill him."



Styles: "I know you're angry right now but, this is not the place."

Styles potters to Randall, he glances at the terrified woman who's been quietly watching everything.

Styles: "Wait for me in the car."

He says to the lady.

"What's going on?"

Her voice shudders with each letter.

Styles: "Wait for me in the car Sethu, you'll be safe there."

"Safe from what?"

Styles: "Trust me, go."

She nods and bustles away, he turns to Randall who is seething, if his eyes released bullets Segun would be dead. I don't see him being pacified anytime soon.

Styles: "Randy, look at me."

He cups his jaw line, forcing Randall to ogle at him.

Styles: "I need you to calm down. Have I ever failed you, Randy?"

Jaw clamped, Randall shakes his head.

Styles: "Then trust me on this. I can't let his blood be on your hands."

Randall: "I want him dead."

He commands softly.

Styles: "I know, I know."

He moves his hand behind Randall's neck and presses his forehead against his.

Styles: "I've got you bro, let me handle this."

Randall places his hand on Styles' shoulder, he sighs and pulls back.

Styles: "Trust me."

Randall nods, he gives Segun a black look.

Randall: "Your days are numbered father, start counting."

And with that, he dashes out of the house.

Me: "Randall."

Styles stops me.



Styles: "Let him be, he's not himself right now."

He states.

Me: "Will he be okay?"

He nods.

Segun: "This is farfetched, my Uze, the future king of Ashanti takes orders from a commoner."

He declares in a scornful manner.

Styles: "Get these fuckers out of here."

He commands the guards.

Raven: "I'm not going anywhere."

His riposte puts a grin on Styles' mouth.

Styles: "Killing you would be so easy Raven, I won't have to worry about anything. Your blood is worthless."

I don't know what he means by this but, Segun is infuriated by it.

Segun: "Shut up you fool."

Styles sniggers.

Styles: "Relax Segun, I will leave this to you. Let's hope when it's done, your shadow will be able to take it. He is so weak, I can smell it."

Raven: "What is he talking about father?"

Segun: "I don't know, come and help me up."

He bays. I thought Raven hated Segun.

Why is he assisting him?

Styles: "Get out of here Segun and don't forget your dog."

There is something dark about Styles, I have a feeling that Segun and Raven can sense it hence, the willingness to leave at his command.

He follows behind the guards as they lead them outside.

Me: "Styles."

He stops.

Me: "What about Randall?"

Styles: "He's fine Amara. You need to trust him."

Me: "Where did he go?"

Styles: "To cool off I guess, he doesn't want to expose you to his anger."

I don't know what this means.

I want Randall.

Styles: "Let me see those fools out."

He stomps out the door.

How do I not worry about Randall?

KHETHU\*

This is the second time this man has come through for me.

Me: "Thank you for bailing me out."

Mbongeni: "I couldn't let you stay in there, not when you're carrying my baby."

I don't want to be reminded of that.

I'm at his house, I called him and he dropped everything for me.

Mbongeni: "You need to stay out of trouble Kethu."

He gives out an order.

Me: "What time did my father say he'll get here?"

I don't want a lecture.

Mbongeni: "He should be here by now. You still haven't told me what happened to your neck."

He traces his fingers on my neck, I scoot away from him.

Me: "I'm fine Mbongeni. I told you that I don't want to talk about it."

Mbongeni: "How is it that you're so stubborn? Let me help you. You can get this person arrested you know."

Why would I want to put Styles behind bars?

Me: "This is why I want to be alone. You people are hoarding me, I can't deal with this. I'm a big girl, I can take care of myself."

Mbongeni: "Even big girls need someone to take care of them."

Me: "Not me. Can't you be a friend and listen? That's all I want from you Mbo, I know that my life is a mess and I have to fix it."

Mbongeni: "That's the first step, I'm glad that you're not in denial anymore."



Me: "Who died and made you a psychologist?"

He smiles.

Mbongeni: "I can be anything you want me to be."

He allows his fingers to play with mine.

Me: "I'm hungry. I thought you were cooking."

He laughs.

Mbongeni: "You know I live on microwave meals."

He can actually cook, he's lazy.

Me: "Maybe I can fix us something."

He follows me as I plod to the kitchen.

Mbongeni: "You, in my kitchen, behind the stove. Isn't that a dream come true?"

Mbongeni flirts with me at every chance he gets.

Me: "Don't reach for the stars, you'll come crashing down."

He laughs and takes my hand.

Mbongeni: "I love you Khethu and one day, you will be mine."

Mbongeni is a man of candour, he wears his heart on his sleeve.

Me: "Mbo stop."

I carry on to the kitchen. I can't give him hope, not when I don't know where I'm headed.

SETHU\*

Styles should be out by now, I saw Randall rush out of the house. He ignored me when I called him, it was more like he couldn't hear or see me. He sped out in his car, something big is happening in this house.

Ayize's phone call reminds me that I forgot to tell her that, I left with Styles.

Me: "Hey."

Ayize: "Oh, good. Your voice sounds normal, it means you're okay."

She can be dramatic.

Me: "I'm sorry, Styles came to get me when he found out that I was alone."

Ayize: "And you forgot to tell me? Sethu, I was panicking. I thought something happened to you. Why were you not taking my calls?"

Me: "My phone is on silent, it was in my bag."

Ayize: "You're careless, you know that?"

Why is she upset with me? I waited hours for her to come back.

Me: "Listen, I have to go."

Ayize: "Hayi, uyabhora man Sethu." (You're boring.)

Me: "I love you too."

Ayize: "I'm not laughing with you. Don't ever do that to me."

I had no idea, she was this frightened.

Me: "I'm sorry, forgive me."

She sighs.

Ayize: "That apology should come with a bottle of wine. Mr. S must have one there."

I wouldn't do that.

Me: "We're at his friend's house."

Ayize: "Oh! I'm bored. What should I do with myself?"

Only she would ask that at this time of the night.

Me: "Go to bed. What else is there to do?"

Ayize: "It's still early. Aren't you coming back?"

Me: "I doubt, let me hear what Styles says."

Ayize: "Okay, let me know and don't forget. Don't be like your mother, think of other people. I almost had a heart attack."

Me: "I promise. Bye."

I bid her goodbye as I see the door open, two men accompanied by the guards walk out first. Styles follows behind, he watches them until they drive off. He's walking up to me, I exit the car to meet him half way.

Me: "What happened in there?"

He takes my hand.

Styles: "Family feud, it's nothing to worry about."

Me: "That other guy was shot."

Styles: "He'll be fine."

Me: "Do you guys play with guns like that?"

Styles: "This is not a game Sethu, let's go inside."

This is his way of dismissing me.

Me: "What about Randall? He left."

He goggles towards the gate.

Styles: "He'll be fine. Is it okay if we spend the night here? I don't want to leave him alone."

Me: "I don't mind."

His dejected look saddens my heart.

Me: "Styles."

Styles: "Yes."

He raises his brows as he intently looks down at me.

Me: "I think I'm in love with you."

He stares, mouth agape with disbelief.

Styles: "You are?"

The words break free in a whisper.

Me: "Yes I am. I don't want to hide behind excuses anymore. Is it strange that my pain lessens when I'm with you?"

He tilts my chin up with his hand.

Styles: "It's not strange at all. I feel it too, remember when I said you give me so much peace?"

I remember that day, clearly.

Me: "You were lying in a hospital bed."

He smiles.

Styles: "Yes, that's when I realised that you were my peace. I'm in love with you kitten and you don't know how long I have waited to hear you say this."

He gives me a peck on my lips.

Styles: "I promise to take care of your heart."

He expresses with sincerity in his voice.

Me: "I know you will and I trust you."

I swaddle my arms around his waist, lean my chin on his lower chest and glance up at him.

Me: "Thank you for standing by me."

I made him wait for too long now. I have learnt in the past days that life is too short, like Ayize said. So I will jump and trust that he will catch me when I fall.

Styles: "Let's go inside, I want you to meet someone."

His hand on mine feels different today, it's the reciprocated love that has me feeling all giddy.

NOBAYENI\*

I hear Dladla's car pull up, I know it's him.

Me: "Wait, stop."

He frowns as he draws back from me.

"What's wrong?"

I don't know if he's deaf or what?

I have worked closely with Tim for about 10 years now, he's a funny guy. He makes me laugh, he makes me feel good and he makes me forget my problems. This little fling that we have has been going on for three years now, I don't know how I found myself in another man's arms. I guess I was bored.

We have done a lot of things in this house, unbeknownst to Dladla. I love my husband but, he doesn't do it for me anymore. He does not want to embrace change, he's the 'beans and toast every morning' type of a person.

Me: "Dladla is here."

I state, alarmed by the fact.

Tim: "But you said he's going to see Bridgette."

Me: "That's what I thought. You have to go hurry up."

I pull him from the couch, he hates this.

Tim: "Bayeni, we can't live like this anymore. When are you leaving him?"

He wants me to divorce my husband.

Me: "I told you Tim that, I can't leave him."

Tim: "I think it's time that you did."

He fixes his garments while spewing out this nonsense from his mouth.

Me: "Will you just go Timothy? We'll talk about this later."

Tim: "Fine."

He annoyingly grunts.

I drag him to the kitchen, Dladla never uses this entrance.

Tim: "How will I get home? I came here with your car remember?"

Me: "Request a ride or something, you're a grown man. You'll see what you do."

A head shake is accompanied by a chortle.

Tim: "Kiss me."

He's daring.

Me: "Just go."

He gives me a quick kiss, smirks and hurries out. I run back to the living room, to see if he didn't leave anything behind. The door swings open while I'm busy with my endeavours.

Dladla: "Hey."

I smile as I cross my arms on my chest.

Dladla: "I forgot my wallet on the kitchen counter."

He gives a reason for his early return while he marches to the kitchen. My eyes fall on the two glasses of wine on the table, I swiftly take one and hide it behind a cushion.

Dladla: "Are you okay?"

He probes, the look he's giving me makes me feel uneasy. He's a commissioner after all but, before that he was a detective. I hope he doesn't see my flushed face.

Me: "I'm good."

I sit back on the couch.

Dladla: "I see."

I exhale deeply the moment he shuts the door closed. I need to be careful with this.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

123\*

RANDALL\*

"Mara wake up."

I wake up to Liyana's pained brittle voice. She's sloping on Amara's bedside.

Me: "Princess?"

In a reflex, I climb off the bed to get to her. It's hard to make out her facial features in this dark room so, I reach for the bedside lamp. The time on the alarm clock reads 2am.

Liyana: "Papa."

Her face is glistening with sweat, her eyes sunk and her skin is ashy. I shoot my hand to her forehead to check the temperature. The reading sends my heart racing.

Me: "You're burning up. Are you in pain princess?"

She nods, her eyes turn wide and wild as milky bile dispenses from her mouth and spews on my clothes. Amara is woken up by the sound of Liyana retching, she clings her minuscule hand on her stomach as the supper she had empties out of her belly until what's left is clear liquid.

Amara doesn't ask anything but rushes to the bathroom.

Me: "Don't move Princess. It's okay."

I hold her back, as she moves to me, stepping on the mess she just made. Tears fill her eyes, her lip quivers and my heart breaks as a flood of tears stream down her face.

Liyana: "Papa."

She cries.

Me: "I know, you're afraid baba, I'm here."

Amara rushes back with a bucket and towel.

Amara: "What's wrong with her?"

She searches, dipping a towel in the steamy bucket of water. She wipes the vomit that has stained Liyana's mouth.

Me: "I don't know, I have to call Mbuso."

Liyana: "Mara."

My baby is terrified.

Amara: "Let me remove these clothes baby. Randall get cleaned up as well."

She helps Liyana out of the tainted clothes.

Amara: "Show me where it hurts baby."

Liyana points at her stomach and her head, her eye lids are weighed and she moves them sluggishly. I dial Mbuso's number while changing into a clean t-shirt.

"Hello."

Me: "Mbuso."

I greet at the sound of his sleepy voice.

Mbuso: "I think a contract should be drawn for that increase. This is ridiculous."

Me: "Liyana is sick, she has a high fever and she's throwing up."

Mbuso: "I'm on my way."

I gaze at my baby, who seems to be deteriorating every second. I rush to her side, brush her back as she lurches and retches a few times. Nothing comes out, this forces more tears out of her eyes.

Amara: "We should take her to the hospital."

Her face glints with worry as she gives out this suggestion.

Me: "Mbuso is on his way."

I grab a throw from the bed to cover Liyana's trembling body.

Liyana: "Papa."

She whispers.

Her eyes roll up showing the white of the eye and her head tilts back.

Amara: "Randall."

Amara gives a warning I already know of, I catch Liyana in my arms as she falls back. I place her on the bed to cover her with the blanket. Tears have dried up, only her eye lids remain wet from the stream that forced out of her eyes.

Amara: "I think there's paracetamol in the bathroom cabinet."

Me: "Please get cold water and a clean cloth as well, we need to cool the fever down."

She runs back to the bathroom.

I have never graced the insides of a church or opened a bible but, God keep my baby safe.

From a healthy bubbly child to curled up, shaking and pale kid. This does not add up.

Amara: "How is she?"

She's back in a flash.

Me: "I don't know Amara."

Amara: "Let me give her the medicine, help her up please."

I do as per her request.

Let this work, I can't bear to see my baby sick.

MBUSO\*

Lelo is fast asleep, I can't leave without telling her.

Me: "Lelo."

I nudge her, she tosses a few times before she continues with her light snores.

Me: "Lelo wake up."

Her eyes slothfully open, she frowns instantly. It must be the clothes I'm wearing.

Lelo: "Where are you going?"

Me: "I have a house call."

Lelo: "At this time Mbuso? It's so late."

Me: "I'm a doctor, my working hours should be crazy."

She sits up.

Lelo: "I know but, it's in the early hours of the morning."

Me: "They have a sick child, I have to attend to them."

I should tell her where I am headed to.

Me: "I don't know if they will approve of this but, you can come with me."

Lelo: "Why would I do that? I want to sleep."

Me: "Amara is there."

I hope Randall will not crucify me for this, I am done lying to Lelo.

Lelo: "Let me change."

Her demeanour changes back to gloomy, she's still upset that I lied to her. I watch her as she





climbs out of bed, she's still wrapped in a towel.

Me: "I'll be in the lounge, don't be long."

I cannot stand, to see her upset with me. Not getting an answer from her, I potter out of the room. It's going to be a long ride.

STYLES\*

There's a slight knock on the bedroom door. Who could it be at this time of the night? I look at Sethu who's sleeping beside me to see if she's been woken by this late night disturbance, from what I have gathered she is a deep sleeper.

"Styles."

Randall's voice whispers through the door, something must be wrong. I skittle to open the door and meet an apprehensive look on his face.

Me: "Hey, are you okay?"

Randall: "Liyana is sick. Sethu is a nurse, right? We need her."

He speaks with a grouchy voice.

Me: "What happened to Liya?"

He shrugs his shoulders.

Randall: "Please hurry."

Me: "Sure."

He hurtles away, I turn to see Sethu awake.

Sethu: "I heard everything, let's go."

She rushes before me.

We get to Randall and Amara's bedroom to find Liyana curled up in a ball, her body shuddering as if she were caught in a terrible storm. Randall and Amara are sitting on each side of the bed, a damp cloth has been placed on Liyana's forehead.

Sethu: "What happend to her."

Randall: "She said her stomach hurts, that was before she started throwing up."

He explains without looking at Sethu, his eyes are on his daughter.

Sethu: "Okay, I need to check on her."

He shuffles a bit, he refuses to leave Liyana's side.

Me: "Randy."

His sad eyes embrace me.

Me: "Give her space so she can check on Liya."

He moves without a word, Amara wears the same concerned look.

Amara: "She emptied out her stomach, and has been shivering since. I think she's hallucinating, she's been mumbling words we can't make out."

She explains the situation to Sethu while I take Randall to the side.

Randall: "I don't know what's wrong with my baby Styles. She was fine when we went to bed."

He answers my question before I could ask.

Me: "It must be something she ate."

Randall: "I hope so. Somehow I feel that there's an attack on her."

Me: "Spiritual?"

He nods as he glares back at Liyana.

Me: "You think Segun has something to do with it?"

Randall: "That crossed my mind."

Me: "It's probably something else man."

"Do you have paracetamol?"

We turn to Sethu's question, she's talking to Amara.

Amara: "I gave her a teaspoon but, she threw it all up."

Randall: "I spoke to Mbuso, he's a doctor. He said not to give her anything until he gets here. Maybe there's something else you can do while we wait."

Amara: "This cold cloth should help reduce the fever, right? Why is it not working?"

Sethu: "At this point we don't know if she's not feeling well because of the fever or the underlying illness. I would suggest that we give her paracetamol again, if it doesn't work, we can try the cooling treatment."

Amara desperately looks at Randall, she wants him to give consent.

Randall: "Go ahead."

Liyana: "Papa."

Liyana suddenly cries out in a low scratchy tone, Randall is by her side within a blink of an eye. Sethu has stepped aside while Amara looks more terrified now.

Randall: "I'm here princess."

Liyana: "Burn it."

A whisper leaves her pale dry lips and her eyes remain shut.

Randall: "Burn what Liya?"

Liyana: "Burn it papa."

She repeats her words.

Me: "What could she be talking about?"

Sethu: "It's possible that a feverish child can start seeing things. There's probably nothing more to it."

This should put them at ease.

Amara: "The paracetamol should be working by now, right?"

Sethu: "She should start feeling better in about thirty minutes, hopefully the doctor will be here by then."

Amara sighs as she keeps her gaze on Liyana. There's a sudden knock on the door, before it flies open. Mbuso walks in with a lady.

Wait a minute....

That's Amara's cousin, I turn my eyes to see if Randall can see what I see. Daggers are shot at Mbuso from that deep stare.

Mbuso: "Sorry I'm late."

He should be apologizing for bringing that woman at this time of the night, Amara is worried about Liyana and now she has to entertain her long lost cousin.

Me: "It sure is a full house here."

Mbuso glares at me.

Lelo: "Amara."

She spots her from across the room, Amara who was only engrossed on Liyana raises her head and her mouth drops open.

Amara: "Lelo."

Tears instantly fill her eyes. She wants to get to Lelo but, it seems hard to leave Liyana's side.

Me: "Mbuso get to work."

I don't know why he's standing idle watching this mini family reunion.

Randall is not happy and Mbuso is not disturbed about it. Putting two and two together. He'

trying to make peace with his woman. Amara finally frees herself from the bedside to meet her cousin, this time Randall is briefing Mbuso on Liyana's condition with a pucker between his eye brows.

This room is in chaos.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

124\*

AMARA\*

A beacon of sunlight shines through the window, showcasing that it is forenoon. This rising golden ball marks the journey of a new day, a day with unknown expectations.

The events of last night have brought my life to a standstill. Watching my little baby struggling as if the burdens of an adult were laid upon her miniature shoulders, killed something inside me. No child should go through any of that and that helpless feeling as a parent destroys you.

I turn around to behold my world before me, Randall and Liyana lie asleep in each other's arms. Her tussle halted around 4am and out of exhaustion she fell into a deep sleep. I mooch to the bed to get to this man who just opened his eyes, his morning face almost forcing a smile on my face.

He rubs his eyes as they fall on Liyana and as if a light bulb went on in his head he briskly sends his hand to Liyana's forehead to feel her temperature.

Me: "She's fine, I've checked about a hundred times."

I'm exaggerating really.

I lay awake early this morning carefully observing if her body was sweltering.

A soft sigh of relief pushes out of his nostrils at the realization that his better half is well.

Randall: "How long have you been awake?"

He checks the time on the clock, as he brings his noticeable tired body to a sitting position.

Me: "Not long, I made soft porridge for her. She'll be hungry when she wakes up."

He takes my hand as I stand before him and pulls me down to sit on the bed.

Randall: "Thank you."

He smoothly runs his fingers over my cheek with these words of gratitude.

Me: "Don't thank me, Liya is my baby too. I may not have given birth to her but, she's mine and she lives in my heart."

Randall: "You're amazing, you know that?"

Me: "I do now."

I jest with a smile, he fails to return it. Instead, keeps the permanent wrinkle on his forehead.

Me: "You need to shower, get rid of that stench."

He refused to leave Liyana's side last night that, he didn't clean up after she emptied her stomach's contents on him.

Randall: "I'll do that just now. Is Mbuso still here?"

Me: "Mbuso went to the hospital to run some tests, Lelo is sleeping in the guest room."

I insisted that they stay just in case we might need Mbuso.

Randall: "How do you feel after seeing her?"

Me: "If it were a different time, my heart would've rejoiced. I haven't given myself time to grasp her presence, I have a stone sitting on my heart. Liya is all I can think of right now."

His gaze falls on my hand as I place it on his lap, he takes it into his, interlocking our fingers together. A smile takes over my mouth as he places a soft kiss on my hand. He sighs with that and raises his eyes to glance at me.

Randall: "Our baby will be okay."

He assures me.

Me: "I know."

I huddle the edges of his jaw with my fingers.

Me: "What about you?"

I should get something to smooth that furrowed brow.

Randall: "What about me?"

Me: "Are you okay after everything? You shot your father."

The pucker deepens, he understands my question. He doesn't want to answer it hence, this intense expression. He claims his hand back from me and shuffles on the bed.

Me: "Randall, don't shut me out."

Randall: "What do you want from me?"

He moves from the bed.

Me: "Speak to me, tell me your thoughts and your fears."

He stops to look at me.

Randall: "I fear losing you and Liyana."

His sad words lure me to him, I enfold my arms around him.

Me: "That's not going to happen."

Randall: "As long as Segun is alive, I can't guarantee that. I don't have proof that he sent Raven here on a mission, I know what I saw when my brother was yelping in pain. Unless he is one hell of a good actor, I'm convinced that he was genuine. You want to know my thoughts Amara? Here it goes."

Why am I afraid of the revelation that's about to unfold?

Randall: "I want to kill Segun, I want him to die a slow painful death. He took so much from me and by the looks of it, he's not done."

I lead my hand to his chest, his heart thuds slowly under it.

Me: "You're holding so much in there Randall, you're a good man but, you hide that goodness through the anger that you hold."

Randall: "Anger is not the word Amara, I am demented. I can't get my sister back, I'm estranged from my family because of him. I can't let that go."

Me: "But, Ife is still on your side Randall."

Her anger has diminished, they speak on the phone occasionally. Randall opens his mouth to give a response, his words are sent back by a knock on the door.

"Randy."

The familiar voice tells us that Styles is behind that door.

Randall ambles to open.

Styles' eyes run in the room first and meet Liyana who is still soundly asleep.

Styles: "How is she?"

Randall makes way for him, he gestures a salutation as he glances at me. I welcome him with a warm smile. I like how he protects Randall, he knows him like no one ever will and Randall... Well, let's just say he's more at peace when Styles is around.

Randall: "She's better, her temperature has dropped."

Styles: "She gave us quiet a scare."

Me: "She did, she's strong like her father."

Randall twist his head back to me, he forces a distant simper.

Styles: "She is an Okolie after all, I'm yet to meet a more stubborn clan."

He throws in a joke and sniggers at it.

Me: "I agree, their stubbornness is real."

Styles laughs, it's probably too soon for Randall to entertain us with the sound of his laughter. It's something we don't hear more often, so we are used to it.

Randall: "Amara says Mbuso went to run some tests."

Styles: "I saw him before he left, the doc is hard at work hey."

Randall: "He's reliable."

Styles: "I guess it's time we appreciate him, if only he descends from the judge's seat. That cape doesn't suit him, he makes a better doctor than a judge."

He laughs, I suppose that's another joke.

Me: "Where is Sethu?"

I didn't see much of her last night, after the scene with Segun, I was worried about Randall.

Styles: "She's in the kitchen with your cousin. If you're not a fan of a strong smell of fish, do not enter there."

Me: "Okay."

I don't know what he means by that but, I laugh anyway.

Randall: "Fish, at this time?"

Styles shrugs his shoulders.

Me: "It's pregnancy cravings."

I was shocked to find out that Lelo is pregnant, she didn't give out much as my mind was muddled. I couldn't give her all of my attention, Liyana was my priority.

Me: "Let me go and check on her."

Randall pulls me into him as I walk past, I crash on his chest.

Randall: "Don't forget about me when you're there."

I know what he means, he thinks Lelo will convince me to go back with her.

Me: "I won't."

I pucker up and give him a big smooch.

He leans down to rest his cheek on mine.

Randall: "And, don't forget that, I love you."

I haven't been able to return these words of affection to him, they are there at the tip of my tongue. The only people who ever uttered these words to me, were my parents. As for my aunt... How would she? When her daughter has never heard them from her as well.

Me: "I know."

I escape his embrace with these and gush out of the bedroom.



NOMBULELO\*

This baby will honestly embarrass me, Goku has me eating this fish for breakfast. He wants nothing else. Sethu laughed until she couldn't, she says my cravings are beyond weird. I agree with her.

Me: "I should be craving something hot or ice cream with mayonnaise and bacon."

Strangely, this thought is mouth-watering. Suddenly I don't want the fish. This little person just relayed a message to me.

Sethu: "What happened?"

She sees my disgusted face as I leer at the plate before me.

I have been packed on the bar stool stuffing my face with this dish, it was the first thing that occupied my mind when I opened my eyes.

Me: "Is there ice cream and mayonnaise in the fridge?"

Her eyes fall out.

Sethu: "You want to try it."

She's sitting opposite me with a cup of coffee hugged around her hands.

Me: "I don't want to try it, I want to have it."

This child is pushing me.

Sethu: "Check, I guess."

She makes a face.

I dispose of what's left of the fish and dig in the fridge, my combination is completed. A jar of pickles catch my eye, this will be the cherry on top.

Sethu: "Don't you want to cook that bacon, at least?"

Me: "It's fine."

Sethu: "It's unsafe to eat raw bacon, you should know that as a nurse."

I ignore her and plunge the spoon into my mouth and it tastes amazing.

Me: "Mmmhhh."

I shut my eyes and do a little happy dance.

"What's in that? Can I try it?"

Amara's voice brings me back to the kitchen, she's standing next to me while looking at the bowl of my new found addiction.

Sethu: "I wouldn't if I were you. There's mayonnaise in there, prickles and uncooked bacon."

Amara snatches the bowl from me as I dig for another scoop.

Me: "Hey."

Amara: "You will get food poisoning from this, don't you know that? You should've have cooked the bacon."

She frowns.

Sethu: "I told her."

Me: "It's just this one time, let me feast please."

Amara: "No, I won't let you feed my niece that garbage."

She throws the bowl into the sink, grabs a banana from the counter.

Me: "Here, feast on this."

She shoves it into my hand.

Me: "Who says it's a girl? Mbuso thinks it's a boy, he's dubbed him with a name of a cartoon character."

They laugh.

Amara: "How old is Mbuso?"

Me: "Old enough."

They are still laughing.

Sethu: "It's sweet though."

Me: "Not to me, my child will be a clown."

Since we are on this topic...

Me: "How is Liyana?"

Amara: "She's still asleep, we'll find out when she wakes up. Her temperature has dropped though."

Me: "You're a mother now?"

She nods with a soft smile on her face.

It's hard to grasp how fast her life has spiralled.

Me: "How did all this happen Amara? How did you end up falling for a man who..."

She gestures with her eyes that I keep quiet.

I'm thinking Sethu has no clue of what's happening here. I met Styles this morning, they have a thing. I found them locking lips in the foyer, I can tell it's a new love by the way she blushes when he looks at her.

As for Randall, I spotted him from a distance, he wouldn't leave his daughter's side. I don't think he's a nice person, the frown on his face was enough to convince me otherwise. His eyes would run to Amara and I, then back to his daughter. He looked at me like I came to snatch away his favourite thing in the world. The conversation between Amara and I lasted for about a few minutes. She was terrified to death due to the child's illness.

Me: "I never thought that you would fall in love so soon."

I rephrase my statement and this one doesn't make sense.

Amara: "Randall made it easy for me."

That twinkle in her eyes when she mentions his name tells me that she is far gone, the girl is in deep.

Me: "He made it easy?"

He looks like an angry man to me.

Amara: "Yes."

She catches my judgemental question hence, the defensive tone.

Amara: "You should meet him, you two haven't been formally introduced."

Me: "I guess."

Amara: "And, you guys seem to be acquainted with each other."

She looks at Sethu.

Sethu: "It's amazing how two people can get to know each other over a cup of coffee and dried fish."

She laughs.

Me: "We had enough time, Sethu here is also a nurse."

Sethu: "Speaking of work, I have to go home and prepare."

Amara: "Won't you stay for breakfast?"

Sethu: "I'll be late if I do. I'm going to find Styles."

She gets up and plods out of the kitchen.

Me: "I'm definitely staying for breakfast, I have so many unanswered questions. I still can't believe that you're here before me Amara."

It's an overwhelming feeling honestly.

Amara: "It's been a dream till now, Lelo I have yearned to see you again."

She holds my hand.

Me: "Me too, I have so much to tell you."

She laughs.

Amara: "I need to feed Liyana first, then I'll give you all my attention."

Me: "Like you should, I didn't come here to be ignored, you know."

This is meant to be a joke.

Amara: "I'm happy that you're here."

Me: "Me too."

I wish I had someone to share this amazing news with but, Mbuso says I can't inform my uncles about it.

NTOMBI\*

Mashoto comes running back into the house, she bangs the door, leans against it and presses her hand on her chest as, she closes her eyes.

Me: "Yini manje?" (What is it?)

She looks at me, terror visible in her eyes.

Jonas: "Ntombi, kwenzakalani." (What's going on?)

Jonas is always the first to wake up, he has no choice because he sleeps in the living room. It's 7am and he has cleaned up, a cup of coffee is part of his morning routine.

Me: "Angazi, buza lona. She looks like she just saw a ghost." (I don't know, ask her.)

Mashato: "There's a woman outside."

This is the township, people wake up early to clean their yards.

Me: "Usuyahlanya wena." (Are you going crazy.)

Mashoto: "I'm serious, there's a woman standing in the yard. She's naked."

Me: "Ini?" (What?)

I sneak a peek at Jonas, he ascends from the couch to inspect through the window. There's no expression visible on his face, I can't tell if he sees what Mashoto spoke about or the woman is

catching Moses' curse.

Me: "Bhuti?"

Jonas: "It's Martha."

My heart leaps in fear.

Me: "Kanjani?" (How?)

I take his spot by the window to see Martha in a zombie position at the gate. She's facing my house.

Me: "Oh Nkosi yami." (Oh my God.)

Mashoto: "I told you."

Jonas: "We have to call Zodwa. Did she mention any of this to you Ntombi?"

Me: "No, she didn't. She only said that the person will be trapped."

How do we deal with this?

Me: "Bhuti look, people are starting to gather outside." (Brother.)

Mashoto pushes through me to peek out of the window.

Me: "You're pushing me, you stupid woman."

Her response is a tongue click.

Jonas: "I don't think we should go out, whatever those people decide to do with her. We should have nothing to do with it."

Me: "But, I want her to see that we have conquered against her."

Jonas: "You're not a child Ntombi, stop your nonsense."

Me: "I was just saying."

Must he be serious so early in the morning?

Petunia and Mhambi walk in from their room, I'm surprised she didn't wake up early to cook today. Mhambi's usual porridge and his black cup of tea.

Petunia: "Sanibonani ek'seni." (Good morning.)

She's chirpy this morning.

Mhambi: "What's going on?"

Mashoto: "That woman from next door is standing naked outside our gate."

Did she say our gate?

Me: "She's at my gate, awuna sango wena?" (You don't have a gate.)



She's getting too comfortable, the next thing she'll be saying 'our bedroom.'

Petunia: "Awukhathali Ntombi?" (Don't you get tired?)

She throws this nonsensical question at me while joining Mashoto on the window.

Petunia: "I have seen it all, kodwa lee. Hai ngiyam'vuma umuntu omnyama." (Black people defeat me.)

Mhambi doesn't bother to check. Where is his curiosity?

Mhambi: "What should be done?"

He's asking Jonas.

Me: "Bhuti says we should let her be." (Brother.)

He narrows his eyes and his brows shoot up as he gives me a quick look before swiftly, turning back to his brother. He's still upset with me. It's been too long, Mhambi must forgive and forget.

Jonas: "No one is to leave this house until Zodwa tells us what to do. Ntombi, tell Moses. He's too stubborn to listen to anyone, he'll want to walk out just to prove a point that, he can't be controlled in his house."

I should be offended but, he's right. Moses can be an idiot sometimes.

Here he comes.

Moses: "It is my house and I will not be controlled."

And, he heard everything.

Petunia: "S'felani Jesu? Ukuthi nje thina asinawo umuzi edolobheni." (Must we suffer because we don't have a house in town?)

Moses: "Awunawo vele, Petunia. Angisho Mhambi?" (You don't have one, am I right Mhambi?)

I know that he will give them a hard time until they decide to leave on their own.

Jonas: "It's too early for this Moses."

Moses: "It's never too early for iqiniso s'bali." (The truth, brother-in-law.)

Me: "Yoh hai. Moses, mana kancane. We have a more serious problem outside." (Stop it.)

Moses: "What's going on?"

This time there's a commotion.

Mashoto: "Sthandwa sami, Ntombi's friend..." (My love.)

Moses: "Mashoto uyazibona ukuthi unjani? Hamba uyogeza tuu and put on something decent." (Do you see yourself? Go freshen up.)

It's only now that I notice the skimpy night dress she's wearing. It almost shows her assets, I



don't know who she's trying to seduce.

Petunia: "Baba, asiye ekhishini. You haven't had your tea yet." (Let's go to the kitchen.)

She takes his hand and leads him to the kitchen. I don't think Mhambi noticed, he has a type and Mashoto is not it. Petunia was once his type, now I'm not sure. He's wondered around with his type before but, his love for that woman brought him home every night.

Me: "Angishongo Moses ukuthi yis'febe lomuntu?" (Did I not say that she's a prostitute?)

Jonas: "Aii, Ntombi. I'm going to get myself another cup of coffee, please call Zodwa now."

He uncomfortably marches away. Moses does not look happy and this Mashoto girl has not moved an inch. I sense that she sees nothing wrong with her attire.

Moses: "Yey wena, ngithe hamba uyogeza." (I said go bath.)

His voice sky rockets.

I agree that Mashoto should cover up and I wouldn't be so jealous if someone had told her, not Moses. It stings a bit to think that he's protecting his property. That's what he would call it.

Mashoto's stubbornness causes her to furiously rush to the bathroom.

Me: "Lomuntu uzolala ekhishini lami kuze kube nini Moses?" (For how long will that person continue to sleep in my kitchen?)

Moses: "You want her to move to our bedroom?"

Me: "What's wrong with you? Is Nkosiyo still haunting you? Udoti ophuma kulomlomo wakho, hai ngeke." (You utter nonsense lately.)

He chortles.

Moses: "Yah neh Ntombi, I have to give it to you. You know how to disrespect a man. Hai, indoda uyayidelela shame." (You're disrespectful.)

Me: "It's the truth."

He clicks his tongue.

Moses: "Suka la." (Move.)

He pushes me as he moves to the window.

Moses: "UMartha unamandla neh?" (Martha is brave hey?)

He's laughing, I don't see anything funny about that, I join him. The crowd has grown, I'm surprised no one has dared to walk past her and enter these premises. They better not call my name, not when there's a witch standing there.

Me: "Jonas says we should wait for Zodwa."

That reminds me.

I plunge my hand in my pocket to get my phone.

Moses: "Are you calling her?"

I nod.

Moses: "She should hurry, I have somewhere to be."

Me: "Where are you going Moses?"

Moses: "Since when do you ask me this?"

Me: "Since you lost your mind and I took time off work to take care of you."

He laughs derisively, shakes his head and walks back to the bedroom. Zodwa answers the call, stopping me from going after Moses.

NKOMO\*

I wiggle my nose as I feel the sun hit my face, the bright light forces me to cover my eyes. The curtains are drawn, it's too early.

"Wake up stranger."

Shit!!!

I leap up to find Ruth standing by the window.

Then it hits me, we had dinner in my room last night. I remember having one or two glasses of liquor. The memory is vague after that, it worsens as I notice that she's wearing my shirt.

Me: "Hey."

She's smiling, this could mean that something happened between us last night.

She laughs.

That means something right?

Do women laugh after a night of pleasurable sex?

Ruth: "This confused look on your face does not suit you, it brings out your ugliness."

She's amused by something. I have no words, I'm waiting for her to tell me if we slept together or not.

Ruth: "Relax, nothing happened. We both passed out on the bed."

Why is she wearing my shirt then and I'm sitting here shirtless?

Me: "I wasn't worried."



Ruth: "Could have fooled me."

I sense a bit of disappointment in her voice.

She toddles to me and sits on the bed.

Me: "Hey, I would never take advantage of a woman. We were both out of it and if something had happened, imagine the regret in the morning."

Ruth: "I wouldn't have regretted it."

She wanted this?

Damn...

Me: "So, you wanted us to..."

She nods cutting my question in half.

Ruth: "Am I too forward?"

Hell yeah...

Me: "No, you're not. I wanted to as well."

Ruth: "Then, why didn't you initiate?"

This woman.

I move closer to her, take her hand into mine and make sure to look into the windows of her dark soul.

Me: "Ndlovukazi, you're an attractive women. If I were to have you, let me rephrase that. When I finally have you, I want you fully conscious. Your mind should make you aware of your whereabouts and the person who's about to take you on a rollercoaster ride. I want you to be aware of every lingering kiss, every gently touch. Every whisper and that tingling sensation that takes over every vein in your body, I want you screaming my name, fully aware that, it is I who is taking you to cloud nine. I want you to remember that I am responsible for that toe curling and lip biting experience." (Queen.)

She gulps and flaps her eyes.

Ruth: "I think we should clean up, I'm starving."

She states while shying her eyes away from me.

Me: "For breakfast or..."

She dabs my shoulder and giggles.

Ruth: "Sbo."

Me: "I was just making sure that we're on the same page."

She smiles coyly as she drops her head, I take her chin into my fingers to bring her face back up.

Me: "Maa chi." (Good morning.)

I mummer in a soft voice, her smile broadens.

Ruth: "Maakye." (Good morning.)

How easy is this mission?

Ruth: "I'm impressed."

Me: "I live to impress you, nkosazana." (My lady.)

Me: "I can't help it, you do this to me."

Ruth: "Yeah right."

She climbs off the bed.

Ruth: "Let's get ready then."

Me: "Am I joining you in that shower?"

I probe as she toddles to the bathroom.

Ruth: "That's if you can unlock this door."

She hurries in with a giggle, I hear the crack of the key.

She locked the door.

I am winning this race.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

125\*

SETHU\*

Styles pulls up outside my building, he's not happy that I'm going to work today. I have no other choice, I can't afford to lose my job.

Me: "You can go, Ayize will drop me off at work."

Styles: "Are you chasing me away?"

Me: "Your friend needs you, you should go back to him."

I know that's where he wants to be.

Me: "When am I getting my car?"

Styles: "Today."

Me: "That's a relief, I'm tired of being driven around."

Styles: "Ouch."

Me: "Not like that silly."

He smiles.

Styles: "You need to see Lawson before you go to work."

Me: "I almost forgot about that."

Styles: "Is your sister tagging along?"

Me: "That's what we agreed on, although she doesn't seem keen."

I doubt that she's ready to open up to someone.

Styles: "Get her there, don't force her though. You might push her away."

Me: "She's in denial, I don't see her agreeing to this."

I complain.

Styles: "She has lived with the wounds for so long, she's afraid."

Me: "I'll speak to her."

Ayize can be stubborn.

Styles: "I'll walk you to the apartment."

Me: "You don't have to."

Styles: "Asambe." (Let's go.)

He treads out and I can't argue with that.

My heart stops as we step out of the elevator. My brain surges into memory lane, depriving me a chance to reject the journey. Ntokozo is here, he's standing on my door step.

He sees me and smiles.

Ntokozo: "Sethu."

I'm numb and frozen to the core. My gaze is so gripped on this monster that I don't see Styles rush to him. He punches him on the face forcing Ntokozo to stumble back. He's confused at first because he doesn't know this man who is attacking him.

Styles goes for blow after blow and this compels Ntokozo to fight back.

Me: "Styles."

I scream as he staggers due to Ntokozo's punch. I have to get help, these men will kill each other. I race into the apartment to call Ayize.

Me: "AYIZE!!!."

She peeks through the kitchen door.

Ayize: "Yini?" (What is it?)

She has food in her mouth.

Me: "Ntokozo and Styles are fighting outside hurry."

She jolts towards me as she becomes aware of my tremulous tone.

We rush out and find them still at it.

There are two women watching the fight, they are taking videos or pictures rather.

Me: "Do something, Ayize."

Ayize: "No, let them be. Mr. S has to teach him a lesson."

Me: "Ntokozo is going to hurt Styles."

Ayize: "I don't know if you're seeing it but, that bastard is getting it from Mr. S."

She's right, Ntokozo is struggling to fight back. One more punch sends him on the floor.

Ayize: "What is he doing?"

Styles is dragging him with his clothes.



Me: "He's..."

This is bad.

Ayize: "He's going to throw him down the balcony."

Ntokozo: "Stop, please."

Ntokozo pleads desperately, he knows what's about to happen. Styles is not stopping, he's livid.

Me: "Styles."

I know he will not listen to me but, it's worth a try.

He drags him up and throws him over the balcony. A scream flees from my mouth, Styles is going to go to jail. These footages will go viral.

Ntokozo: "Sethu help."

Ayize: "Look."

He's hanging off the balcony while holding on to the barriers. We rush to Styles who is watching Ntokozo with hatred in his eyes.

Me: "What are you doing?"

Styles: "Giving him a taste of his own medicine."

Me: "You'll get in trouble, these people are taking videos of you."

He doesn't care, he's glaring at Ntokozo.

Ayize: "Why is he holding on? Let go you fool."

She shouts.

Me: "Ayize."

Ntokozo: "Sethu help me, please. I don't want to die."

I hate his voice, something inside of me wants him to fall and crack his skull.

Ayize: "Yey shut up wena. It's only two stories down. You'll only break a leg." (You.)

She shouts at him.

Maybe he should let go however, I wouldn't want Styles to get into trouble with the law.

Ntokozo: "Sethu, I'm sorry, I..."

He doesn't finish his words as Styles starts to loosen his grip on the barriers.

Ntokozo: "No, no. Please, don't."

He yells in terror.

Ayize: "Makafe." (He must die.)

Ayize is encouraging this angry man to do this.

Me: "Styles stop."

He doesn't pay heed to my plea.

Me: "Siyabonga."

His gaze falls on me, he didn't expect me to call him by this name.

Maybe I shouldn't have, a loud scream from Ntokozo breaks this staring contest. Styles has dropped him while, glaring into my eyes. I gasp in shock as I hear a loud thump.

His gaze is still on me, he's the least bothered about what just happened to Ntokozo.

Why is he looking at me like this?

I know I have messed up. He told me this name in confidence, it reminds him of his past and he prefers it buried.

Ayize: "Shit, that fool is still alive."

She states in frustration.

I can't look away from this gaze that Styles has me locked in, I want to tell him that, I'm sorry.

Ayize: "He's getting away Mr. S."

Her loud warning snaps him back.

Styles: "Get in the house."

He commands as he pulls me to the door.

Me: "No, we have to fix this problem. Ntokozo will go to the police."

Styles: "I said go inside Sethu."

He snaps a reply.

Me: "Fine, I'll go."

Styles: "You have to call in sick at work, you can't go when that man is out there."

Ayize: "Don't worry Mr. S. I'll make sure that she doesn't leave this house."

This girl always has something to say.

Styles: "I'll come later, be safe."

Me: "You're going after him?"

Styles: "No."



Why do I not believe him?

Styles: "Go inside."

I'm done arguing with this man.

Ayize: "Sethu stop being stubborn and get in the house."

She pushes me in, by this time he's walking away.

I'm stunned to see Ayize standing with those women.

What is this girl up to and when did she get there?

She walks back to me.

Me: "What was that about?"

Ayize: "I asked them if they could delete the videos."

Me: "And they agreed, just like that?"

She laughs.

Ayize: "I had to pay them njalo. People love money."

She pushes me into the house and locks the door behind her. I hope Styles doesn't go after Ntokozo.

MKHIZE\*

Making a deal with these two fools was a mistake, they walk into my office looking defeated.

Raven: "Your men beat me up for nothing Mkhize, it was all in vain."

He's the first to complain, this is what they came here for.

Me: "Mr. Okolie. What happened to your arm?"

He's wearing a shoulder sling.

The great Okolie has been injured, I love this.

Segun: "Uze shot me."

I'd be damned, I should've seen this coming.

Me: "Wow, is that even possible? I know a man who shot your son once and he's six feet under as we speak."

He frowns as I laugh at their stupidity.

Segun: "He's an Okolie, he can bloody get away with anything. My stupid father protects him, he is the chosen one after all."

Me: "Dammit, so nothing will happen to him."

I don't appreciate the death stare he's giving me.

Segun: "I told you that I need Uze alive, he's the key to my future. If anything happens to him then, I am doomed. That son of a bitch Bensen will have me for breakfast."

Me: "How did the plan go and why are you here?"

Segun: "The plan didn't work, it backfired."

They settle down on the chairs without me inviting them to do so.

Me: "What do you want me to do about it?"

Raven: "That little brat Liyana saw right through me, I don't know how."

Me: "How is this my problem? We had a deal that you deliver Amara to me, she's his weakness and once I get rid of her, you can have your boy all to yourself. "

They think that I want Amara dead like they do.

Segun: "My son is not an idiot, he watches her like a hawk."

Raven: "Father is right, it was only once that I was left alone with her. And Liyana got too smart for me."

Me: "I don't understand why you people came to me. I have my own problems to deal with."

Raven: "We started this together old man and we need to come up with a solution."

Segun: "Uze has a guardian behind him, that boy protects him like he's all he's got."

He shakes his head in disgust.

Me: "Sishi? I know him too well, don't underestimate that man. He's smarter than, all of us put together."

Raven: "He's not God, we can put a bullet through his head and end him."

Stupid.

Me: "If that was possible, I would've done it long ago. He probably knows about this meeting."

Segun: "Who the hell is he?"

Me: "I have been asking myself this question and I can't really figure him out."

Segun: "Surely there's something we can use against him."

Raven: "Dig some dirt on him?"



Segun: "Who doesn't have skeletons in their closet? This Sishi boy, probably has plenty."

They are not listening to me.

Me: "If you people want to go against him, then dig your graves. That son of a bitch will kill you, he can go psycho and it's scary."

They laugh.

Segun: "You're a coward Mkhize, that's why these boys are playing you like this."

Me: "Uzonya wenja. Who are you calling a coward?" (You will shit yourself, dog.)

Segun: "Your words speak for you."

Me: "Okolie. Thank your ancestors that, they have you protected or else I would kill you right now."

If only he knew how much I hate him, he reminds me of Randall.

Raven: "Do not speak to my father like that? He is a king, respect him."

He raises his voice.

Me: "Hey, this is not Accra. You left your kingship when you boarded the plane to South Africa. You're a commoner here, no one will bow down to you."

Segun's scornful snicker proves to me that, he is arrogant like his son.

Segun: "I like you Mkhize, you're brave. You should know though, who you're dealing with."

Me: "I'm not afraid of that brotherhood you're part of. I have seen worse."

Raven: "Can we please come up with another solution? We need to get to Randall."

Segun: "The plant you left in his house will work in our favour."

Me: "What plant?"

Raven: "It's a plant that will drive Randall and Amara apart."

Me: "Really? Witchcraft?"

Segun: "I would like to think of it as art."

He's sick.

Raven: "Their love for each other is a strong force that keeps them together. This was the only way."

Me: "Don't you think they will notice?"

Raven: "They won't see it, it will be like looking for a needle in a haystack."

Segun suddenly has a creepy smirk on his face.

Me: "What's going on with you?"

He grins.

Segun: "Get your funeral suits out."

Me: "Who are we burying?"

He chortles.

Segun: "Uze."

He replies in a deadpan voice.

Raven: "What are you talking about Father?"

Segun: "That plant will not drive Uze and that girl apart, it will supposedly kill him."

I'm starting to like this man.

Raven: "Father, you said..."

Segun: "I know what I said, I had to lie to you Raven. There was no other way, you wouldn't have agreed to the plan if you knew the truth."

Raven: "The plan was that I should befriend Amara and get her to trust me."

Segun: "That could've worked but, here we are. The original plan is Uze's mysterious death, I will finally take my son back home."

He grins and it's bone chilling.

Me: "I don't know what your plan fully is but, I love it."

Raven: "You can't do that father."

He's weak.

Segun: "It's done, there's no turning back now."

He dismisses him with these words, my day has been made.

AMARA \*

I had no choice but, to send Lelo back home, Liyana needs my full attention. She's better now, though. The only difference I see in her is the quietness, something is up with this child and I have grown weary of asking her what the problem is. She refuses to speak.

She's sitting on the couch right next to me, while watching TV.

Randall walks in with Neo.

I glance at Liyana to see if she will run to him like she usually does, she takes a glimpse of him and goes back to watching TV. Randall frowns at this, he also finds it strange.

Me: "Liya baby, look who's here."

She gazes at him again and clicks a quick smile. She's probably too focused on the show.

Neo: "What did you do to the child?"

He positions himself on a chair.

Me: "She's not feeling well."

Neo: "Arg shame, nunus man. She'll be fine."

Randall moves to sit next to Liyana, he picks her up and sits her on his lap.

Randall: "How are you feeling princess?"

Liyana: "Fine."

She mummurs.

Randall: "Do you need anything?"

She shakes her head.

Me: "Chioma is making her something to eat."

Neo: "Chioma is in the kitchen?"

He sounds intrigued.

Me: "She is."

Neo: "What is she making?"

The inquisitive look on his face is funny.

Me: "Noodles."

He frowns.

Neo: "Ke lijo?" (Is that food?)

Me: "It's for Liya."

Neo: "Oh!!! Ke lapile. Stylos didn't come home last night so, I had to eat bread and butter for supper."

Randall: "Is he your chef?"

Neo laughs.

Neo: "Bozza, jy verstaan nie. Daai man can cook. Entlek, you should take lessons. I hear you made a disaster in the kitchen." (You don't understand, that man can cook.)

Randall: "Styles talks too much."

Neo finds this amusing.

This is Liyana's turn to comment, she loves making jokes about it.

Liyana: "Papa."

She utters in a low tone.

Randall: "Yes, princess."

Liyana: "You're not listening."

She states while watching the TV.

Liyana: "Papa, you're not listening."

Her voice upsurges.

Randall: "What am I not listening to princess?"

Liyana: "The message."

Me: "Liya hasn't spoken till now. Randall, I think she's trying to tell you something."

He leers at me before diverting his attention back to her.

Liyana: "You're not listening papa."

She repeats, louder this time."

Neo: "What's wrong with her Uze?"

He queries.

Randall: "Tell me Liyana. What is the message?"

Liyana: "Death."

She whispers as she lays her head on his chest. Randall looks utterly nonplussed, I'm thunderstruck as well. I knew a message was being transmitted to her and it's shocking to know what it is.

Randall: "Death?"

This could have something to do with his mysterious death.

Neo: "No Uze man. Baholo-holo ba ntse ba bua le eena. Children don't say such things for fun."  
(The ancestors are talking to her.)

Me: "It's not the first time. There was something about her behaviour when she was interrogating Raven, I have a feeling that he came here for a purpose and probably fulfilled it. It was so easy for him to leave with your father."

I try to bring everything to light.

Randall: "You think he did something?"

Me: "I don't know. The fact that an injured man was wondering around the house like a lost soul was puzzling for me. His wounds couldn't have allowed him."

Now, it makes sense.

Neo: "Ba baloi ba joalo, they don't rest. This house needs cleansing, or lithapelo. Your child speaks like an adult Uze, she has seen something." (Witches are like that.) (Prayers.)

He wears a troubled look.

Me: "I agree with Neo."

Randall: "Grandfather said a way will be shown to me, I didn't think he would use my daughter. She's just a child, this is all wrong. Why should Liyana be tangled in all of this?"

Neo: "If the adults are deaf, they go through the kids. Listen Uze, mam'Sonto o tseba lintho tseba. I'll call her, you have to fix this before someone dies in this family." (She knows these things.)

Randall: "Who is that?"

Neo laughs.

Neo: "That woman oga, ke a mo tshaba. The last time she was here, your grandfather manifested through her. She told us all your secrets." (I respect that woman, boss.)

Randall: "What?"

Neo: "I'm kidding."

He smiles, Randall does not get the joke.

Neo: "If you want to know what your old man is trying to tell you then, mam'Sonto is your woman."

He sniggers, he finds himself funny.

Liyana is slowly falling into a slumber.

Randall: "What time do you think she can get here?"

Neo: "She lives in Pretoria, someone will have to get her. It will take longer if she uses a taxi and it also depends if she's not busy."

Randall: "I'll pay if there's a problem."

Neo: "Hee Chineke." (Oh my God.)

He carries his hands on his head in a dramatic manner, Liyana is startled.

Neo: "Are you trying to upset her, mam'Sonto doesn't take payment for her work oga. Don't



mention money when she gets here and please, I beg. Try not to be rude to the poor woman biko. Kea u tseba when you're angry, everyone must feel it." (Please.) (I know you.)

He speaks the truth.

I watch Randall as he begins to rock Liyana back and forth, her half-lidded eyes gape into nothingness.

Randall: "Neo just call her, please. I'll send someone to fetch her, I need her today. Liyana hardly slept night, I don't want her to go through the same thing again."

Neo: "Awe bozza." (Boss.)

He replies as he plunges his hands into his pockets and comes out with a phone.

Everything should be revealed after this.

STYLES\*

The men I appointed to tail Ntokozo have failed, he was not to enter Sethu's building. That bastard escaped, if Sethu wasn't there I would have killed him.

I'm parked at a filling station, I have to call those people and I hope they have a good explanation for this.

"Yes, yes."

This is how he answers the call.

So unethical.

Me: "Didn't I tell you to keep an eye on that idiot?"

"Boss it's you."

He says it in a form of a statement and what angers me is that he speaks in an animated tone.

Me: "You idiot. Why are you not following that man?"

"We are boss."

Me: "If so then, who was that at Sethu's flat?"

"Boss?"

These incompetent fools.

Me: "The bastard was at the flat, she saw him. Do you know what that means?"

"What does it mean?"

Me: "What am I paying you for?"

"But he's here boss, I'm looking at him as we speak."

Me: "Let me guess, he's injured right?"

"How did you know? Are you also watching him boss?"

Me: "Fuck this. You came highly recommended by Kenneth and this is the shit I receive from you?"

"I don't understand boss."

Me: "You're fired."

I hate incompetence, I have to call Kenneth. He must sort this out.

Kenneth: "Styles."

Me: "Your boy messed up."

Kenneth: "I don't understand."

Me: "Kenneth, your boy bloody messed up. I asked him to tail Ntokozo, he failed. Sethu saw him, she saw him Kenneth. Just when everything was going okay."

Kenneth: "Give me his name, my boys never sleep on the job."

Me: "What difference will it make? The damage is done, I couldn't control myself and I thrashed him in front of her. Now, if I kill him she will know that it was me."

Kenneth: "Isn't there another way you can do this. Make him disappear or something. People go missing every day, it's not news."

That was the bloody plan.

Me: "I pushed him off the balcony, I didn't care about anything else but that. Sethu has never seen me like that man. How do I fix this?"

Kenneth: "If she loves you then, she will understand."

Me: "You don't get it do you?"

Kenneth: "I don't but, I know you got this Styles. You're smart and you will figure it out."

If only I didn't lose it in front of Sethu.

Me: "That woman is terrified of abusive men, she shouldn't have seen that."

Kenneth: "Then you will have to explain to her, that you did it for her."

It makes sense in his head.

Me: "I'll see what I'll do. I want Ntokozo dead by morning."

Kenneth: "I will deal with that idiot Ntokozo, you go make sure that all is well with Sethu."

Me: "No, his fight is with me. I will deal with him."

Kenneth: "Do what you must."

Me: "I fired your boy."

Kenneth: "I'll talk to him."

Me: "I have to go, I have a man to haunt."

He curves a brow.

Kenneth: "How is Amara?"

Me: "Who?"

Kenneth: "You heard me."

Okay.

Me: "Why are you asking about her?"

I hope he's not poking a snake in a hole.

Kenneth: "I'm just asking."

Me: "Whatever reason you have for asking, keep it to yourself Kenneth. Trust me, Randall will not appreciate it."

Kenneth: "It's only a question Styles."

Me: "Which you should keep to yourself, I have seen that man's dark side and it will force you to leave your brotherhood and turn to Jesus."

He huffs.

Kenneth: "What sin have I committed, I just want to know how the girl is after that incident."

Me: "That, exactly. You asked about her."

Kenneth: "Who is this Okolie boy? His father is a weakling and from what I know, apples don't fall far from the tree."

Me: "This one is a different breed, Randall is not his father's son. Stop thinking about Amara."

Kenneth: "I have to go."

Me: "Kenneth, Kenneth, Kenneth. How many times did I call you?"

Kenneth: "Fuck you Styles."

Me: "I'm not saving anyone when Randall losses his cool."

Kenneth: "I guess you'll be caught between two friends."



Me: "Not really, we're friends but he's my brother and I will choose him over anything."

Kenneth: "Damn, you're blunt."

Me: "I have no reason to lie to you."

Kenneth: "I have to go."

Me: "Remember my words Kenny."

He smirks and cuts the call.

I hope this is not what I think it is.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

126\*

AMARA\*

Liyana is sleeping in her room, Neo got through to mam'Sonto. Someone was sent to get her, we don't know what time she'll get here. Hopefully it will be before the end of the day.

Chioma has been of great help as far as Liyana is concerned, I'm helping her prepare lunch.

Me: "How is Ife?"

Chioma: "Stubborn."

That's all she's giving.

Me: "Is she coping? She didn't want to go back home, there must be a reason."

She stops chopping, tilts her head to leer at the door.

Chioma: "Uze doesn't know this and you're not allowed to tell him."

She's scaring me.

Me: "Is Ife okay?"

Chioma: "Ife was suspended from school, she was caught selling weed."

We can't be talking about the same girl.

Me: "Ifeanyi?"

Chioma: "That innocent face is just for show, she's a rebellious child. Her mother says she tried everything to help her but, she can't be appeased."

Me: "Did they have to suspend her, though? Couldn't they give her a warning?"

The way she looks disappointed, you'd swear that Ife is her daughter.

Chioma: "She did get a warning a couple of times and she continued to sell the weed."

Me: "Don't you think her brother should know? He might help her, I think Ife lacks a father's love."

Chioma: "She doesn't have parental guidance Amara, that woman is busy with her own things. Ife is lonely."

Me: "I'll talk to Randall."

Chioma: "Her mother said not to tell him anything."

Me: "Why?"

I can't possibly find a reason why she would want to keep this hidden, life clearly needs help.

Randall: "Where is Liya?"

Randall's disembodied voice startles me, he stands on the door way holding a scowl on his face.

Chioma: "She's sleeping in her room."

Randall: "No she's not, I was there just now. Her bed is empty."

That's impossible.

Chioma: "I tucked her in Uze, she was..."

Randall: "Chioma, I'm telling you that she is not in her room."

Panic takes over.

Randall: "Where is my child, Chioma?"

Me: "I'm sure she's around somewhere, we have to look for her."

I utter as I toddle to his side, he's not acknowledging my presence. He's searching Chioma for answers.

Randall: "Liyana better be in this house, I swear someone will answer for her disappearance."

He barks before he hurdles away.

Me: "Where could she have gone?"

She's leaning against the kitchen cabinet while giving attention to her tears.

This is odd, she hardly cries.

Me: "Chioma, this is no time to cry, we have to find Liyana."

Chioma: "I swear, she was sleeping when I left her room. I left it half-closed."

Me: "I hear you, now let's go. Check everywhere, maybe she's playing hide and seek."

My theory does not make sense at all, it is though better than the thought of her being taken.

NTOMBI\*

I can't get a hold of Zodwa, her phone rings and sends me straight to voice mail. I had to contact Lelo who confirmed that she's out of town. No one has stepped out of this house. It's been hours now and the crowd has expanded, I'm still waiting for Martha to drop dead or something. Moses looks ready to go out, it's actually funny how he doesn't have the courage to step outside.

Everyone is gathered in the living room, we have grown tired of the busy, noisy situation caused by the crowd.

“Ntombi, phuma.” (Come out Ntombi.)

Eish!!!

This is what I was afraid of, someone calling my name in front of that witch.

“Ntombi!!!”

My name booms out again from the multitude.

Jonas: “You’re not going there.”

Mashoto: “I think she should go.”

Petunia: “Me too, they probably want to know what to do with that woman since, she’s in your premises.”

Why are these witches not out there with Martha?

Me: “I’m not leaving this house.”

The noise heaps on and I’m curious to see what’s happening.

Mashoto is the first to peek through the window, we have been doing a lot of that. Each time, with hope that Martha would’ve dropped to her death. I join Mashoto as my curiosity controls me.

The crowd flows down to almost filling the streets.

Me: “I’m surprised the media is not here yet.”

Petunia: “What would the media be doing here?”

Me: “This is a big story Petunia.”

Petunia: “There’s nothing big about this story, whatever is happening out there is common.”

I don’t like Petunia’s tone.

Moses: “I’m going out there, we are going to burn that witch.”

He surges up from the couch as if someone pushed him.

Jonas: “You can’t do that Moses.”

Me: “Moses, you want to lose your mind again. You think Martha has lost her powers?”

Moses: “What powers? She’s powerless at this time of the day.”

He rushes to kitchen.

Mashoto: “What is he doing?”

I don't know who's going to answer her because it is not me.

Jonas: "Ntombi khuza lomuntu wakho, this is nonsense." (Talk to your man.)

He's on his feet treading after Moses, he's stopped by Moses' presence back in the living room. Moses is carrying a bottle of paraffin and a box of matches.

Me: "What are you going to do with those?"

He smiles.

I knew he hasn't regained his sanity.

Moses: "What is done to witches, we are going to burn her."

He declares and what scares me is the excitement and thrill in his voice.

Jonas: "You're a fool Moses, you don't know what you're doing."

Jonas reprimands him.

Moses: "I don't see anyone trying anything in this house. We are staring in each other's eyes and Martha is still in my yard."

Petunia: "Let him go, if he wants to."

Her assertion is not coming from a good place, deep down she's hoping that something terrible happens to my husband.

Me: "Moses stay."

Moses "Stay? Ithi uyadlala Ntombi, I'm not a coward njengo Mhambi. Awubuke nje, he's just sitting there watching TV. Not once has Mhambi said a word about this." (You've got to be kidding me. I'm not a coward like Mhambi.)

He criticizes.

I doubt that Mhambi heard his name being called.

Mhambi cares about Amara's safety, that's all.

Me: "It's not safe Moses."

Moses: "Don't worry Ntontos."

He laughs.

I hear the crowd cheering as he steps out, Moses can be dumb but, he can also pull this off.

NOMBULELO\*

Brenda: "Jonga sana, this has been trending since morning." (Look friend.)

I don't know how she thinks she can fly in here, while I'm with a patient, to show me nonsense. I continue with my work without acknowledging her presence.

Brenda: "Hau lelo, yintoni ngawe?" (What's wrong with you?)

Did she just ask what's wrong with me?

Brenda: "Lelo hau."

I'm going to ignore her till she goes away.

Brenda: "Lelo, come on. I didn't do anything wrong."

Me: "I'm busy Brenda, with a client as you can see."

Brenda: "I'm sure ubhuti doesn't mind. Am I right bhuti?" (Brother.)

She smiles at the patient.

"Cha sisi, you can continue. It's nice to have company for once, these..."

Brenda: "Okay, thank you bhuti." (Brother.)

She cuts the guy's words.

Me: "He might not mind, I do. Unless you want to take over."

I move to the other side of the hospital bed to check the drip. Brenda is not moving any time soon.

Brenda: "I'm trying to show you this woman who was caught in Vaal, and..."

Me: "I know, I saw it."

I saw that video of Martha and I don't care what happens to her.

Brenda: "It's okay if you're still upset with me. I hope one day you will see that I was right."

She's sounds so truthful, I can almost believe her.

"Hau sisi, why uziba umgane wakho." (Why are you ignoring your friend?)

What does he know?

Me: "I'm done here."

I storm out of the ward room.

Brenda: "Nombulelo wait."

She howls as she hurries after me.

Brenda: "Lelo, please. You're my only friend here and I hate it when we fight."

She's scurrying behind me and it's starting to get annoying.

Brenda: "Lelo, I'm talking to you. Stop being childish."

I wrench my arm away as she grips it and swivel to face her, tears threaten her eyes. This has my mind in scrabbles.

Me: "Stay away from me Brenda, I will not say this again."

I make sure to send out a firm warning, she can keep her crocodile tears. I'm tired of these fake people.

AMARA\*

"Liyana, Liyana."

We scurry around the house at the sound of Randall's voice. Where could she be? We checked everywhere, I bump into chioma in the corridor. She is still accompanied by her tears, she bangs her back against the wall.

Chioma: "This is all my fault, I shouldn't have left her alone."

Me: "We are going to find her Chioma."

Chioma: "You didn't see the look he gave me Amara, I have never failed him before especially, when it comes to that child. First it was the illness and now this."

I don't know how to comfort her, I need to find Randall. He's in the house somewhere, he went as far as the gate in search of Liyana. The guards said no one has left the house.

"Why is chioma crying?"

Mbuso's voice catches our attention, he's standing at the top of the stairs.

Me: "We can't find Liya."

Mbuso: "How is that?"

Me: "I don't know, she's nowhere in the house."

"Liyana!!!"

Randall roars from our bedroom, he storms out of the room as we start to march there.

Me: "Randall?"

I'm running behind him, I don't know where he's headed but, Liyana must be there.

Randall: "She started a fire in the garden."

He explains, aghast at the revelation. He's taking two steps at once down the staircase and I can't keep up, I'm trying my best. Hearing footsteps behind me, I slant my head back to see Chioma and Mbuso. Chioma looks more horrified.

We bustle out through the patio to the garden, Randall is right ahead of us. The first thing I see is a cloud of smoke behind the lollipop trees, we couldn't have seen her minuscule body if that's where she's been hiding. Liyana is almost the same height as these trees and this side of the house is not guarded.

Randall: "Liyana."

He screams out to her, Chioma and I stop before this fiery scene. All we can do is glare at the trees engulfed by the inferno and pray that she's okay. The smoke and the blaze have taken centre stage as the flames lick each greenery of these once perfectly trimmed trees.

Me: "Liyana."

A scream of terror is evoked from the depths of my soul, this is not happening. Chioma's cries swirl together with the sound of my snivelling. Randall disappears between the trees, he has to come out with that child alive. She has to be okay, I will never forgive myself if anything happens to her.

Mbuso swooshes past us, he aims a hose pipe at the base of the fire. I didn't think of that, my mind is caught up in getting Liyana out of there.

Me: "Randall, Liya."

A tight grip clutches my arm as I run to find them, Mbuso is holding me back.

Me: "I need to find them, Mbuso."

Mbuso: "Wait Amara, Randall will have to rescue you and Liyana if you go in there. Don't be selfish please."

He pushes me back and continues to extinguish the flames that have engulfed a quarter of this garden.

They have to come out of there, they have to.

Why is he not coming out with Liyana?

A tightness on my chest threatens my breathing, waves of negative thoughts surge into my mind and my knees wobble as horror has me immobilized. A loud cry evades from my mouth the moment my knees hit the ground, I have been suppressing it.

Mbuso: "Randall."

He shouts out to them.

Chioma: "Uze!!! Olorun gba omo mi." (God, save my son.)

Her cries twist every inch of my heart, they are the exclamations of a pained mother.



My eyes desperately scan each corner, if only I could catch a glimpse of them. I will never let Liya out of my sight again. Lord don't punish her for the sins of her elders.

We anxiously watch as the water fights the sea of red, yellow and orange that seems to be cascading from the burning bushes. Each flare starts to lose its strength. In a while the fire loses its flexibility, until all that's left is a charred figure.

Me: "Mbuso, where are they?"

I can't lose a family again.

SETHU\*

It's past midday, Ayize and I have been cooked up in this house. Styles is not answering his phone, I want to know if he's okay.

Ayize: "Stop bothering the man, girl. He said he will see you later. You need to trust that."

She proclaims and I don't know if that puts me at ease.

She's lying on the couch with her feet up while humming a song, her mind seems to be far from this place.

Me: "What if Ntokozo got to him?"

Ayize: "What will that skinny dog do? I don't understand why men like Ntokozo are released from prison."

She grumbles with her eyes closed and continues with her humming. I can't make out the song that has her tapping her feet on the arm of the couch.

Me: "His father probably paid for his freedom."

Ayize: "That fat pig, they will pay for this."

There's contempt in the tone of her voice, I hate them just as much.

Me: "What happened to your cheek?"

Her demeanour tells me that she's not bothered about my question.

Ayize: "I was in a fight."

She curls her lip and stares at the ceiling.

Me: "With who? You don't know anyone here."

Ayize: "Some woman at the store, we were fighting over toilet paper."

A quick laugh swims from her mouth.

Me: "And that's funny?"

Ayize: "I said toilet paper."

Me: "So?"

Her eyes find me.

Ayize: "You won't get it."

She's smiling.

Me: "I don't understand you Ayize. How does fighting make one happy?"

Ayize: "Go try it then come and ask me again."

Me: "I'm not doing that."

Ayize: "Oho! Then you will never know. Ungasabuzi." (Don't ask me again.)

Me: "You're weird, honestly."

She's humming again.

Me: "What's on your mind?"

Ayize: "I'm meditating, since we missed our appointment with the doctor. This helps, it keeps me sane. I'm attracting positive energy."

This gets me thinking.

Me: "I'm going to church on Sunday."

Ayize: "Okay, I'll cook Sunday kos while you're away." (Food.)

Me: "I was thinking we could go together."

Ayize: "Think again sisi, andizi." (I'm not interested.)

Me: "Please, just this once."

She glares at me.

Ayize: "God doesn't want people like me in church, his angel will freeze my feet before I stride in there."

I have heard that before.

Me: "Styles once told me the same thing and you're misjudging God. He wants you as you are..."

Ayize: "Sethu, I love you mntase kakhulu but, not now love. Don't spoil my mood." (I love you a lot my sister.)

She screws her face into a grimace.

Me: "Sorry."

Wrong time I guess, something is eating her up. The sound of my phone grips me, I can't see it.

Ayize: "Answer that, it's giving me a headache."

Me: "Where is it? I can't find it."

It's coming from where she's seated.

Me: "Move your feet."

She shifts them, revealing the mobile, it's my mother.

Gosh...

What does she want?

Me: "Mama?"

Ayize sits up, this word fills her with a suppressed urge to roll her eyes.

Mom: "Why were you not answering your phone?"

I will not be giving a reply to that.

Mom: "Something has happened to your uncle."

Me: "Which uncle?"

Mom: "Lebo's father, he's dead."

I can't say I'm shocked. I hated that man.

Ayize wants to know what the call is about, she gives me a look that says put her on speaker.

She listens closely as I place the call on speaker phone.

Me: "What happened to him?"

Mom: "Someone pushed him in front of a moving train, his body parts were squashed. There's nothing left of him."

The tone of her voice doesn't say that she's delivering tragic news.

Me: "Oh."

Mom: "You two need to come home, is your sister still there?"

Me: "She is."

Ayize frowns, she hates the idea.

Mom: "Your aunt needs support, she's alone and her child is in jail.

Ayize's eyes finally put up that show.

Me: "I'll speak to usisi and get back to you." (Sister.)

Mom: "Don't be long Sethu, this is a sad time for the family. We need to be together."

Me: "I understand mom, bye."

I disconnect the call without waiting for her send-off.

Me: "Wow!!!"

Ayize: "I know."

Her mouth starts to form a smile, before I know it she's roaring with laughter. It's transferrable and has me laughing as well, this is bad but, it feels good.

She climbs on the couch with her feet.

Ayize: "Karma is a bitch."

She yells out loud in laughter and throws herself flat on the couch, she lands on her back.

Me: "I hope the train to hell burns him before he gets there."

Ayize: "He's gliding to hell baby, he's mincemeat remember."

She laughs.

Me: "What about aunt?"

Ayize: "Shame, she'll be strong. She's better off without him anyway."

I agree, he was a terrible father and husband.

Ayize: "Girl get my outfit ready, I'm going to church on Sunday."

She exclaims loudly.

Me: "You're crazy."

Ayize: "And this crazy girl needs wine to celebrate this news."

She dances her way to the kitchen.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

127\*

AMARA\*

"Mara!!!"

My heart stops for a second and everything falls into slow motion. Her sweet voice comforts my heart, I turn and burst into a sob as I see them appear behind the house. This is how it feels to be given a second chance in life. Randall is carrying Liyana in his arms.

Me: "Liya."

I rush to them and take her in my arms.

Me: "Are you okay my baby?"

Liyana: "Yes."

Her voice is not so gloomy anymore.

Me: "Are you sure?"

I ask as I shower her with kisses.

Liyana: "I'm okay Mara."

Me: "I'm glad you're okay. You scared me, you know that?"

Liyana: "I'm sorry."

She's so innocent, she has no idea what is happening.

Randall: "We managed to escape through the back and went around the house."

Me: "I didn't know there's a way out."

Mbuso: "Who built that garden anyway?"

He complains.

Mbuso: "I think it's time that you retire Randy, that was enough scare to last us a life time."

Chioma: "We thought you were dead."

Her tears have dried up.

Chioma: "I'm glad that you're okay Uze."

He shoots her a smile.

Randall: "You two are too much really."

I don't know what he means, I'm happy that they are okay. Today has been one crazy day, I can't begin to think what I would have done if something had happened to these two.

We make it back in the lounge, Chioma takes Liyana to get her cleaned up.

My hand is wrapped around Randall's waist and I can't seem to let go.

Me: "Don't ever do that to me again."

I'm crying in his arms as tears have found a way out of my eyes.

I thought I would ever feel his embrace again.

Randall: "I'm sorry."

He clasps his arms around me, his face buried on my neck.

Me: "I thought you were..."

I can't bring myself to saying it.

Randall: "We still have twelve babies to bring into this world. I'm not going anywhere anytime soon."

If he thinks I will push twelve heads out of me then, he's insane.

He enfolds me tighter just as I attempt to move out of his arms.

Me: "I love you, Randall."

This has him pulling out of the embrace, he cups my cheeks while gazing into my eyes.

Randall: "Say it again."

His requests causes a flush on my cheeks.

Me: "I love you."

He presses his lips on mine.

Randall: "I love you too, me hemma." (My queen.)

He captures my lips, the sultry kiss pushes a soft moan from me.

"The results came back negative."

I almost forgot that he was here.

This is embarrassing and this man will not let go.

Me: "Randall."

I finally break out from his lips.

Randall: "Just a little longer, I almost died you know."

He proclaims, his forehead pressed against mine.

Mbuso: "No guys seriously, stop."

I step away from Randall, he frowns at me as he crosses his arms. I can only respond with a smile. He turns his attention to Mbuso.

Randall: "I think we know what it is now, Liyana is suddenly back to herself after that fire."

He's annoyed.

Me: "I agree, there's life in her voice again and her movements."

Mbuso: "Well, I guess I am not needed here."

Me: Thank you so much for putting out the fire."

Mbuso: "I would like to believe that Randall would do the same for me."

He smiles at Randall who nods in return.

Randall: "You're a friend Mbuso and I keep my friends close."

Mbuso: "On that note, let me rush home."

Me: "Please, greet Lelo for me."

Mbuso: "I will."

Not wasting much time, Randall enwraps his arms around me the minute Mbuso is out of sight.

Me: "I need to check on Liyana."

Randall: "She's probably not done with her bath and perhaps Chioma needs more time with her. You saw how distraught she was."

I was too.

Me: "I need her by my side as well."

Randall: "What about me?"

Me: "You're an old man."

He chortles.

Randall: "Old? Excuse me, hold that thought."

Me: "Yeah?"

Randall: "No, hold it. I'll show you what old is one day."

I don't trust his tone.

Me: "What's on your mind Okolie?"

He grins.

Randall: "You'll find out soon."

He's definitely up to something

"Yey, yey lona, there are adults here. Stop it." (Hey you two.)

If you want anyone to ruin a moment then, Neo is the one for you. He's with an elderly woman, who welcomes us with a smile.

Neo: "Oga, this is mam'Sonto the one I told you about. Mme this is the couple, from Nigeria. Uze le motho oa hae." (His woman.)

Neo is too much.

Randall: "Unjani mama." (How are you ma?)

I'm shocked by the respectful manner he just portrayed as he shakes her hand.

Neo: "Yes Uze, show us."

He hums...

Sonto: "Ngiyaphila ngane yam." (I'm fine my son.)

Me: "Sawubona ma." (Greetings ma.)

She sends back a greeting, the meeting is led in the patio. There's enough space there.

NOMBULELO\*

Finally I don't have to see that two faced snake Brenda for the next three days, I will use these off days wisely. I'm met by a mouth-watering aroma and soft music the moment I step into the house. Mbuso is a good man and seeing him in an apron, up and about in the kitchen, makes me forget why I'm upset with him. The things he does make me want to love him more.

He pauses just as I wrap my arms around him from behind, he's facing the stove and didn't hear me come in.

I lay a soft gentle kiss on his back.

Me: "I'm sorry for being an idiot."

Of all the people that have rejected me in my life, he's the only one who has been real to me.



Me: "I appreciate you, my love for your honesty."

Mbuso: "My love? I must have done something great."

Me: "You did, you gave me my sister back. I can't be ungrateful for that."

Mbuso: "You were hurt Lelo, I understand."

You see...

He makes it hard for me to stay angry with him.

Me: "Goku and I love you, Mbuso."

He turns around to face me, my arms will not leave him. He takes my cheeks in the palms of his hands and pecks my lips.

Mbuso: "I know and I love you guys just as much."

Me: "If I am ever ungrateful, please let me know and if I ever forget how much you love us, please remind me. I'm only human, I can't promise you perfection."

He narrows his eyes.

Mbuso: "What is it chubby cheeks? You're scaring me, I'm usually the sensitive, romantic one. Tables have turned today."

Me: "I realized that, you're everything to me and..."

Mbuso: "Wait, wait Lelo. What's going on? Are you okay?"

Really?

I'm pouring my heart out here.

Me: "Mbuso, I know we joke around a lot but, I'm allowed to be serious right?"

Mbuso: "Yes."

Me: "Thank you."

I have so much to say about his hugs.

Me: "I want you."

I mumble softly in his ear before taking his lips into mine.

Mbuso: "Let me finish cooking."

Me: "No, I want you now."

I run my hands on his lower torso, he smirks.

Mbuso: "Right now?"

He raises his brows.

I nod with a seductive smile.

Mbuso: "Here in the kitchen?"

Another nod as I lean up to kiss him, there is nothing wrong with exploring and there's always a first time for everything.

NTOMBI\*

So it finally happened, a witch was burnt on my street. Where Moses got the courage, beats me. The fire must have knocked Martha out of that trance. It's a good thing she didn't die outside my house. I'm worried about Moses, though. He's not back home yet, the last time he left, he came back insane.

Petunia: "I don't get you Ntombi. How long do you plan on babying Moses? He's a grown man, let him be, hau."

If Petunia could stay out of my life, I would love it.

Me: "Ukhuluma ngani wena?" (What are you talking about?)

Petunia: "You have been stuck on that door for the past twenty minutes."

Me: "So?"

Mashoto: "So, move Ntombi."

Me: "Lalela sisi, you have no right to tell me anything, especially in my house." (Listen.)

Petunia: "No one is fighting with you Ntombi, we're just telling you that it feels strange that, you're standing there. Respect your brothers and sit down."

Me: "I'm not moving from this door until Moses walks through that gate."

Jonas: "Tomorrow I have to go and see S'godi, maybe he can give me something for you to drink Ntombi. You need to remove that love portion Moses gave you, this obsession is too much."

He decides to jump in, it would be better if I ignore these people.

There's someone walking towards the gate, it's Tebogo.

Me: "Eish! What does she want?"

I proclaim loudly.

She smiles and waves while striding through the gate, maybe I should have moved away from here. It's too late to close this door, I owe this woman a cow.

Tebogo: "Chomie." (Friend.)

Yoh!

Me: "Tebogo."

I feign a smile, I don't want to talk to her.

Tebogo: "Yoh, Ntombi, I am shocked beyond. UMartha of all people, yazi I didn't think that she was capable of such things." (You know.)

She came here for gossip and not for her cow, that's a relief.

Me: "Yeah, you were on her side that day."

Tebogo: "I didn't know hau, Martha was a friend phela. Besidakwa sonke, si havi- fun sonke. Bekumnandi man Ntombi. Yah neh! RIP Martha." (We got drunk together, had fun together. It was nice. Rest In Peace.)

Did she come here to grieve that witch?

Tebogo looks drunk, I'm not entirely sure though.

Me: "Tebogo, ufunani?" (What do you want?)

Tebogo: "I thought you might need a friend after what happened to Martha."

Me: "Why? Martha meant nothing to me, I hated her."

She wears a confused look, I'm stumped as well. How is she grieving Martha?

Petunia: "Hau, Ntombi. Are you going to let your friend in or will both of you stand there and continue to disrespect us?"

She pushes the door open, I don't want Tebogo in my house.

Petunia: "Ngena sisi." (Come in.)

She invites her in.

Last time I checked I was the lady of the house.

Tebogo: "Ngiyabonga sisi." (Thank you.)

This time I was ready to dispute.

I watch as she strolls in and makes herself comfortable on the empty space beside Mashoto. She sends her greeting to everyone and they smile in return.

Is it too soon to tell all these people that they are suffocating me in my home? I need space for Pete's sake.

Me: "How can I help you Tebogo?"

Mhambi: "Ntombi, don't be rude."

Oh! He speaks?

I have to sit on the arm of the couch, the seats are occupied.

Tebogo: "As you know Ntombi, you owe me and I came here to discuss this with you. It's been too long but, the wounds are still fresh."

I knew it.

Me: "I don't have money Tebogo, I haven't been to work in a while."

Tebogo: "I don't see how that's any of my problem, you don't have to give me an actual cow. Money will do."

Me: "It will take me about five months to gather all that, I'm not rich Tebogo."

She cackles and claps once.

Tebogo: "It wasn't so long ago that your husband won the lottery. Don't tell me all that money is gone."

Tebogo can be so annoying, now all these eyes are on me. They know very well where the money came from.

Tebogo: "Right now, he's at a tavern celebrating his victory and buying all his friends drinks."

Me: "Moses is at a tavern?"

Tebogo: "Yes, after watching Martha burn to death. He and his so called friends gathered at the tavern."

Moses thinks he's clever.

I have to get him, he thinks I'm an idiot.

Jonas: "Ntombi uyaphi?" (Where are you going?) He stops my tracks with his words.

Me: "To get my husband."

Jonas: "No, sit down."

He commands with a stern voice.

Me: "No bhuti, Moses thinks..." (Brother.)

Jonas: "I said sit."

He yells.

Jonas: "I am done with you embarrassing me like this. Will you die without Moses? Stop it Ntombi and grow up man."

The firmness of his voice forces me to gather myself together.

Wait till Moses gets here, he will know me.

Tebogo: "As I was saying, imali yami chomie. Ngiyayifuna by the end of next week." (I want my

money.)

Jonas: "Can you give us more time Tebogo? We need to sort out somethings, then we'll get back to you."

She smiles.

Tebogo: "If you say so Jonas."

What?

This woman is actually blushing.

Jonas: "Thank you."

She giggles.

Tebogo: "How can I say no to you, Jonas?"

Tebogo better not be eyeing my brother and I hate the way she says his name.

Me: "Yeyi, it's bhut' Jonas to you." (Brother.)

She grimaces at me.

Petunia: "Hayi asazi." (We don't know.)

Mashoto must be seeing it too, she's laughing. I can't imagine Tebogo as my sister in-law, I'm stuck with Petunia and she's a nightmare.

RANDALL\*

Neo: "Oga, I don't think I should stay for this. Stylos asked me to do something for him. Plus the last time I was here mam'Sonto showed me flames yoh, don't run when she starts with her things. Mme ole is full of surprises." (This woman.)

Sonto: "Don't listen to him, he's crazy."

Me: "I know."

Neo: "Don't say I didn't tell you."

He gives a warning and he's serious about it.

Neo: "I have to go."

Amara: "Thank you, Neo."

He smiles, bids us good bye and leaves. We settle down, mam'Sonto is situated opposite us. Her stares are piercing, it's as if she can see right through your soul and your deepest darkest secrets.



Sonto: "How did you two meet?"

I thought she was here for something else.

I take Amara's hand into mine, it's not a blissful memory for her.

Me: "Did Neo tell you why we asked you to come here?"

She smiles.

Sonto: "Yes, he did. I see you in tears, you're carrying so much on your shoulders."

She points at Amara with her eyes.

Amara: "Tears mama?"

Sonto: "Yes, something to do with your past."

I would hate that, we bring that up.

Me: "Can we talk about the topic at hand rather?"

She titters.

Amara: "Will my past come back to haunt me, mama?"

Amara probes, her curiosity has been awakened.

Sonto: "No, your family though, is in pain because of your disappearance. There's a war going on as we speak, they want you back home. Your ancestors are not at peace."

Amara looks at me, this should not take us back to square one.

Amara: "I can't go home now."

Sonto: "I know but, it would be better if you tell them that you are safe. I see a man who is a splitting image of your father, they were inseparable. He doesn't talk much, he's a peaceful man. He grieves for you, my child. He tosses and turns all night thinking of you. He feels that he has lost a daughter, no one understands his pain."

Amara: "My uncle, Mhambi. He's the only one who looks like my father."

Sonto: "You need to let them know, he's slowly falling into depression and it won't be long till he gives up on life."

Her prediction leaves Amara in shock as she widens her eyes.

Randall: "Give up?"

Could he...

Sonto: "I see him taking his own life, the family thinks he's the strongest and he's not. He owns a gun, right?"

Amara: "I'm not sure."



Tears coat her eyes.

Amara: "Will he shoot himself?"

She nods.

Sonto: "You have to let him know that you're safe before it's too late."

Amara: "Randall."

The sadness in her eyes builds up.

Me: "We'll think of something."

Sonto: "You need to let go of your fears Uze, she's not going to leave you."

Me: "Please don't call me that."

Sonto: "That's the name your ancestors have given you, it's who you are."

Me: "It's not who I want to be."

Sonto: "You can't run away from it, it's your destiny."

Haven't I heard this a million times before?

Sonto: "The problem is that you don't trust anyone, you think everyone you hold dear will end up betraying you."

She stares deep into my eyes with these disclosures.

Me: "That's not true."

Sonto: "It is and because of this you harden your heart."

Maybe this was a bad idea.

Sonto: "Your father is the reason you're like this."

Me: "He betrayed me."

Sonto: "You shouldn't let other people pay for his deeds. Where is your daughter?"

Amara: "She's here."

Sonto: "Don't worry about her, she's protected. The sudden sickness that befell her was meant for you Uze."

She explains.

Me: "How?"

Sonto: "You're familiar with your father's plans of wanting to trap you?"

Me: "Yes."



He's going to pay for this.

Sonto: "Your grandfather says you were given something to drink?"

Me: "In a dream, yes."

Sonto: "Okay, then there's nothing to worry about. There was something planted outside by your brother, it was going to bring about death into this family. You became immune to the poisonous plant but, your child fell victim because she is your next of kin, she's lucky that her ancestors are watching over her. She would have died had they not told her to burn it."

I am baffled by these findings.

How are we surrounded by so much evil?

Me: "My father is behind all of this."

Sonto: "Don't hate him, he's still your father."

Me: "That means nothing to me."

Sonto: "Your anger is justified Uze, no evil is left unpunished. His time will come."

She utters calmly, my mind is in disarray. Raven has betrayed me once again. It's about time I forget that we are related.

Amara: "Is there a way any of this can be solved?"

Me: "I don't want my grandfather to use my child, she's been through enough. Isn't there another way he can get through to us?"

She smiles yet again.

Sonto: "It's not up to you Uze, you're more blinded by rage and revenge that you miss the signs and because of that they will use whatever way they see fit."

I refuse to accept that.

Me: "Not my child."

Sonto: "Nothing will happen to her, like I said she's protected."

Me: "I'm still not sure."

Sonto: "Don't worry, just keep your eyes open."

Me: "My eyes have been opened, I have seen enough."

Sonto: "Then you will know what to do."

Things are a bit clear to me now but, I refuse that my child be used.

To be continued...





Edit with WPS Office

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

128\*

### STYLES\*

I'm outside Ntokozo's house, as far as I know he lives alone.

The small gate is open so, I waltz in.

Thankfully, there is no security gate on this door.

If I'm not mistaken, he's in the living room. I'll use the kitchen entrance, he won't see me coming.

I twist the door knob, luck is following me today. I stroll in slowly and careful not to make any sound. I can hear the TV from here, he's watching football.

I amble to the entrance, he's on the couch lying on his back. I haven't had such luck in a while, someone up there must be looking out for me.

There's a chair right before me, I need to sit down. He should turn around any second now.

Ntokozo: "No, that's a penalty."

He grumbles as he points at the TV.

Me: "Really? I think it's a foul play."

He jolts up at the sound of my voice, stands on his feet and his eyes bulge so much that they look like tennis balls.

Me: "Hiii... We meet again."

I send my hum with a grin.

Ntokozo: "How did you get in?"

He shouts.

Me: "I'm surprised you can still shout after jumping two stories down, you're a strong man Ntokozo."

Ntokozo: "Get out of my house before I call the police."

He threatens and the finger pointed at me tells me that his threat is real.

Me: "Go ahead, I can give you privacy if you want."

He takes his phone from the table, his eyes still on me. His face changes while he has the phone

pressed on his ear.

Me: "What is it? There's no signal, right?"

Ntokozo: "What did you do?"

Me: "I would share but, I doubt your small brain will get it."

Ntokozo: "How did you get in here? Get out."

Me: "When are you people going to learn? This is South Africa, you don't leave your gate unlocked. People like us will see it as an invite to come in. Look where I am, in your house."

Ntokozo: "What do you want from me?"

Me: "You should have stayed in prison, you were safe there. Wouldn't you rather be someone's bitch than dead? Which one do you prefer?"

He grits his teeth.

Me: "Say something."

Ntokozo: "What do you want from me?"

He repeats.

Me: "Wrong answer but, since you asked. Let me tell you."

He stares with fear in his eyes, the same man that was confident a few minutes ago.

Me: "This is what we are going to do. Sit."

I aim the gun at him.

Slowly, he sits back down.

Me: "We're going to write a letter."

I shoot him a smile.

Ntokozo: "To Sethu?"

He questions with a confused expression.

Me: "Yeyi voetsek. Don't say her name." (Piss off.)

He winces as I poke his head with the gun.

Ntokozo: "Fuck you."

Me: "You're brave Ntokozo, to utter such while you have a loaded pistol aimed at you. They taught you well back in prison, hey."

He huffs in frustration.

Me: "You know I'm going to feel bad if you keep ignoring me like this?"

He glares raptly at me.

Me: "Okay, I'll do the talking and you do the writing. How about that?"

I am talking to myself.

Me: "Sorry, I forgot. I'm doing the talking."

I complement my retort with a grin, I find a pen and paper on the bookshelf near the TV stand.

Me: "Here, I hope you know how to write hey. You don't look like a smart person, though."

He's reluctant but, takes it anyway.

Me: "We're starting off good. Write everything down."

I instruct.

Ntokozo: "What am I writing?"

Me: "A note, scribble this. I want to kill myself to escape from responsibility, this world has become a nightmare for me."

I turn to find him ogling at me with shock in his eyes.

Me: "Come on man, I don't have all day. Why are you not writing?"

Ntokozo: "I'm not going to write that, you want to kill me."

Me: "I thought you figured that out when you let me in the house, come on Ntokozo."

Ntokozo: "I didn't let you in, you broke in my house."

He shouts.

Me: "I told you the gate was open, I thought you were inviting me in."

I declare while pushing the gun on his shoulder, he glares at it in terror.

Me: "Oh, sorry about that. This friend of mine likes attention, he always shows up when shitty people are around. Don't mind him, he won't hurt you."

Ntokozo: "You're crazy."

He flinches as I roll into a loud laughter.

Me: "How many men have called me crazy, so far? You're hurting my feelings you know."

Ntokozo: "How did Sethu get herself involved with you?"

He barks.

Me: "Ntokozo, dammit. Why are you not listening to me?"

I yell...

Me: "I told you, let's not mention her name. I hate talking about people behind their backs."

Ntokozo: "Look, I can give you money. My father has a lot of money, he'll pay you whatever amount you want."

What do you know? The guy is a negotiator.

Me: "I'm sorted thanks, there's bread on my table."

Ntokozo: "Please..."

I aim the gun at him.

Me: "Are you going to write or should I put a bullet through your head."

Ntokozo: "No, don't kill me please."

He implores.

Me: "Start writing, then. I might just spare your life."

Ntokozo: "Okay, okay."

He raises his hands in defence.

I narrate the first few words, he scribbles every letter down.

Me: "The purpose of this note is to make it clear that I intend to commit suicide by hanging myself without any knowledge of any other person."

Ntokozo: "Done, what now?"

He asks as he puts the pen down.

Me: "Short and simple, I like."

Ntokozo: "What are you going to do with this letter?"

I love this.

AYIZE\*

What is this man doing here?

He blinks repeatedly, I think he's trying to blink me away.

Me: "Really?"

He closes his eyes and begins a count down. He grunts as he opens them again.

"I thought I was dreaming oa tseba." (You know.)

Me: "I knew it, I knew it. You are stalking me aren't you?"

"Why would I do that?"

He huffs.

Me: "What are you doing here rabobi?" (Spiderman.)

"I think Stylos gave me the wrong address, you are not Sethu."

He frowns at me.

Me: "If you're looking for Sethu, then you're at the right place."

"Oh! Ke uena mang?" (Who are you?)

Me: "Doesn't matter, all you need to know is that you're at the right place."

He grins.

"Ousie, ha ke bue le batho boa ke sa ba tsebeng." (I don't speak to people I don't know.)

He snaps his fingers.

Me: "Hee baba, you are here. Khuluma indaba yakho." (State your business.)

"Where is Sethu?"

He scowls just as I hear her footsteps behind me.

Sethu: "Neo, come in."

She stops me from giving him a tight comeback.

Me: "Neo? Yoh hai, this name suits you shame."

Neo: "What is that supposed to mean?"

Me: "I'm just saying."

He makes a face.

Sethu: "You two know each other?"

Neo: "No."

Me: "Yes."

He grimaces at my answer.

Neo: "I brought your car, it's down stairs. I don't know if I parked it at the right place."

He hands her the car keys.

Sethu: "I'm pretty sure it's alright, thank you Neo. Please come in."

Sethu makes way for him to enter, I don't know why she's letting him in.

Of all the places to sit, he chooses to sit next to me.

Sethu: "Would you like something to drink? We have juice and wine."

Me: "Water too."

He sniggers.

Neo: "I don't drink wine."

Me: "You know what they say about men who don't drink?"

He raises his eye brows.

I see he's the type that speaks with their eye brows.

Typical.

Neo: "We're waiting."

Me: "They cheat."

He laughs.

Neo: "Ke mang ea o joetsitseng seo?" (Who told you that?)

Me: "I just know."

He falls into another laughter.

Neo: "Shame ke maka." (Lies.)

Me: "Look at you, you're so sure of yourself. How do you know it's lies?"

Neo: "How do you know it's the truth?"

Sethu: "Guys?"

Me: "I just know and I'm always right."

He puffs.

Neo: "I'm always right, O ka botsa Stylos." (You can ask Styles.)

Me: "I'm a woman and women are always right."

I dispute.

Neo: "I'm a man and men are brutally honest. So that means my right is right-er than yours."

Such lies.

Me: "No, my right is the rightest so, it beats yours."

Neo: "No..."

Sethu: "GUYS!!!"

She yells out, breaking this little debate.

Sethu: "Wow, are we back in pre-school?"

She's still standing before us.

Me: "Tell Spiderman here. He thinks he's right."

I grunt.

Neo: "Yeah."

Sethu: "I'm done with you guys. How did you meet anyway?"

Me: "Trust me, you don't want to know."

I frown as he laughs at my comment or he's laughing at me. I'm not quite sure.

Neo: "So you don't want your sister to find out that you fight strangers for toilet paper in grocery stores?"

What's funny about that?

Me: "Why am I talking to a man who calls tissue paper, toilet paper?"

Neo: "Because this man is always right, ousie." (Sister.)

He's thinks he's funny.

Sethu: "If one of you says something again, I swear I'll... I don't know what I'll do but, I'll do something."

She chides us.

Me: "Sethu, who's side are you on? I'm your sister."

Neo: "So? That means nothing. She's on my side, her future brother in-law."

He wears a smug look.

Me: "What?"

His answer tickles me.

Me: "You're not related to Mr. S."

I cover my ears at the piercing sound of Sethu's screams, she's stomping her feet while clenching her hands.

AMARA\*

I can't stop stressing about my uncle, I need his number. The walls of this bedroom are





beginning to shrink due to my deep thoughts, my butt feels numb from sitting for too long on this bed. I haven't discussed a way forward with Randall, if he disagrees then I will have to take matters into my own hands.

Lelo could have uncle's numbers.

Lelo: "Private number hello."

I can't help but laugh.

Did she just answer her phone like that?

Lelo: "Amara?"

I hear confusion in her tone.

Me: "Did you just say private number?"

She titters.

Lelo: "That's what it says on the screen."

Me: "Sorry, I should change that. Listen, I need uncle Mhambi's numbers."

Lelo: "Okay. Have you decided to go back home?"

Not when Moses is there.

Me: "No, I need to let him know that I'm okay."

Lelo: "You might as well go home and tell them in person."

Me: "I can't do that now Lelo."

Lelo: "Why not? I'll come with you."

She wouldn't understand.

Me: "I don't think I can face your father, Lelo."

Lelo: "I know that he sold you to that man Amara."

This is why I said she wouldn't understand.

Me: "His name is Randall and he saved me, I thought I explained it to you."

Lelo: "Seriously Amara? It still doesn't change the fact that you were taken against your will. It doesn't change his status."

Me: "What status?"

Lelo: "That he's a monster who took you away from us."

If it were months ago, I would agree with her but now, I am extremely offended.

Me: "I was taken by your father against my will, he brought me out of the house in the dead of



night. He threatened to kill me if I made any noise, he is the one who took me away from my family, not Randall.”

Her approval would mean a lot to me.

Lelo: “I guess he and my father are the same.”

She utters and breaks my heart while at it.

Me: “Don’t do that Lelo, don’t compare Randall to that monster.”

Lelo: “But Amara.”

Me: “You don’t know what you’re talking about. Do you know what your father did to me? Did he tell you that he molested me every day without fail? Did he tell you the revolting, disgusting things he made me do to him? He is the monster not Randall, you should be grateful because he saved me from that life.”

I didn’t want her to find out like this, she pushed me to it.

Lelo: “Amara? Why didn’t you tell me?”

Me: “What was I going to say Lelo? He threatened to kill you and aunt if I said something.”

I hate that I have to relive these terrible memories.

Lelo: “I’m sorry, you should’ve told me.”

Me: “I have to go, please text me the number.”

Lelo: “Amara, I’m sorry.”

Me: “Bye Lelo.”

I need to calm down, crying will do me no good.

I quickly wipe my tears as Randall walks in.

Randall: “Hey, I have a...”

He pauses as he glances at me.

Randall: “Are you crying?”

He takes my cheek into his hand.

Me: “No I’m fine.”

I lie.

Randall: “You’re crying Amara. Is it because of what mam’Sonto said?”

He gives me an escape, I can’t tell him what Lelo said.

Me: “Yeah, I’m worried about my uncle.”

Randall: "We'll find a way to talk to him, I promise."

Me: "I know."

Randall: "There's something I'd like you to see, come with me."

He takes my hand.

Me: "What is it?"

Randall: "Come."

I follow him. What could be so urgent?

AYIZE\*

Sethu's scream is so loud.

Me: "Yini wena. Ubanga umsindo." (What's wrong with you? You're making noise.)

I yell at her.

Neo: "Yeah eish Miss. S. Stylos oa tseba hore you scream like this, I must warn him." (Does Styles know?)

His question forces a laugh out of me, he frowns as I fall back on the couch and laugh. What's more funny is the way he said it. His frown turns into a grin and quickly transforms into a chuckle.

Sethu: "You people are crazy."

Me: "You're funny Neo."

I can't stop laughing.

Neo: "I know, right?"

He chortles.

Wait a minute.

Why am I laughing with this man?

I pull myself together and wear a serious face, I'm not his friend.

Me: "Uhlekani wena?" (What are you laughing at?)

He takes up a frown.

Neo: "O ne o tseha eng." (What were you laughing at?)

He ripostes.

Sethu: "I guess wine is off the table, you two are drunk. Neo, a cup of coffee coming right up."

She proclaims.

Me: "Sethu, you can't slave for a man. Don't you know that?"

Sethu: "Ayize, please. You two have finished me."

She mummurs as she plods away to the kitchen.

Neo: "U re Slave e etsang?" (What are you saying about Slaves?)

He does that gesture again with his eye brows, he's waiting for me to answer.

Me: "Jesu, you're that type vele?" (Jesus) (Anyway.)

Neo: "What type?"

I'm confusing him, let me make it clear.

Me: "The type that speaks with their eye brows? I've seen them abo Manqoba nabo Thobani to name a few." (Manqoba and Thobani.)

He laughs.

Neo: "I don't understand what you're trying to say."

He does it again.

Me: "The dominant type, you know, the 'awuyi lapho' type." (You're not going there.)

He laughs as I mimic a male voice with the last statement.

Neo: "You think raising of eye brows is a sign of dominance?"

I'm glad he finds this amusing...

Stupid.

Me: "I've seen things okay."

Neo: "Well I don't know about those idiots you're talking about but, it's a whole different meaning for me."

Me: "Yeah, sure it is."

Neo: "No lie, it simply means I'm interested in what you're saying."

Okay...

The world will shock you every day.

Me: "Oh!"

I'm tongue tied, for the first time in my life. I'm left speechless by this fool.

Neo: "Ke mang Manqoba le Thobani? The other day it was Thato. Where do you find those rubbernecks?" (Who's Manqoba and Thobani?)

He's got me laughing again.

Me: "I don't know them."

Neo: "Eish! I will never be able to understand women."

He shakes his head.

Me: "Just like I will never be able to understand men."

He grins.

Neo: "Yeah neh, I think it's better we don't understand each other."

Me: "Nje." (Simple.)

He chortles.

Neo: "Let me go because joale, we'll never virstaan each other." (Anyway) (Understand.)

Me: "You know what? Took the words right out of my mouth."

He glances at me for a while...

He's going to say something, he wants to say something.

Okay, I'm done convincing myself. He's not going to say anything.

Why is he staring then?

I snap my fingers on his face.

Me: "Hey, Jack Masabo. Are you trying to get romantic with me?"

He makes a face and finally blinks.

Neo: "I was trying to see if I can understand women. Maybe uena you're a different kind. You never know with this gender." (You.)

He's mocking me.

Sethu: "Are you two still at it?"

Neo stands on his feet.

Neo: "Miss. S, I have to go."

Sethu: "But, you haven't had anything to drink."

Neo: "I'm okay."

He turns to look at me.



Neo: "Your sister is something else Miss. S."

Sethu: "I know right."

She wiggles her eye brows and winks at me.

Me: "Hamba bhuti." (Go brother.)

Neo: "Ngiyahamba vele." (I'm going.)

He replies as he starts to walk out. Sethu follows behind him, men are weird.

Sethu: "Your mother keeps calling me, I'm done taking her calls."

She reveals, walking back into the living room.

Me: "We'll see them tomorrow hai."

She bounces on the couch next to me.

Me: "Ouch!"

I yelp as she pinches my thigh. That smile on her face says she wants to pry.

Sethu: "So, Neo huh?"

She wiggles her eye brows again.

Me: "What are you saying?"

Sethu: "You and Neo of course."

Nonsense.

Me: "Don't be crazy, I don't know the guy."

Sethu: "It didn't seem like that to me."

Me: "You're seeing things and get rid of that stupid smile on your face."

She giggles.

Sethu: "Tell me about him. How did you two meet? Where did you meet?"

This girl...

I didn't think she was the nosey type.

Me: "Stooooop. That guy is insane, I wouldn't survive a minute with him."

Sethu: "All I saw was chemistry and chemistry and more chemistry."

She sings.

Sethu: "Did you see how I took long in the kitchen? I wanted to give you two space."

Me: "You have lost your mind. What has Mr. S been feeding you?"



I can't get rid of her, she's following me to my room.

Sethu: "I want to hear more about Neo, come on."

I shut the door on her face and throw myself on the bed.

Sethu: "A and N sounds good, doesn't it?"

She yells outside the door.

Me: "Voetsek." (Go away.)

I hear her laugh out loud.

There is no way, it didn't even cross my mind.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

129\*

### STYLES\*

Me: "Great, the letter is done and dusted. I'm thirsty."

I announce. He leers at me with a stare that says you are crazy.

Me: "Look, I'm sorry. I wanted to scare you that's all, hence the suicide note. I won't do anything to you, I swear."

I make sure to send out a warm smile.

Ntokozo: "I don't believe you."

Me: "I don't blame you, if I wanted to kill you, you would definitely be dead by now."

I exclaim with a deadpan voice.

Me: "What do you have to drink man? I'm thirsty, give me something strong."

He curves his brows, scrutinizing me. His efforts are futile, he won't be able to read me.

Me: "I'd love to play game of stares but, I'll die of thirst before the game is over."

Ntokozo: "I think I have something."

He gets up.

Me: "Okay, I hope you don't mind me following you. You might put something in my drink."

I stride behind him.

Me: "Nice kitchen you have hey, how many parties have you had in here? You must be doing a lot of cooking with this stove."

I scan my eyes around, the cabinets are white with stainless steel kitchen appliances.

Ntokozo: "Not really."

He grunts in anger.

Me: "Why are you angry Ntokozo? I told you that I'm not going to kill you."

Ntokozo: "How do I know that when you have a gun in your hand?"

Me: "I would put it away but, I don't trust you."



He hands me a glass with quarter filled, golden liquor.

Me: "Where is yours? You can't let me drink alone."

He's throwing sighs of frustration.

Me: "A toast?"

I raise my glass up as he's done pouring a drink.

Ntokozo: "To what?"

Me: "I have a feeling that we're going to be great friends, I know our first meeting was fucked up. I was angry and I can't control my anger you know. I need to attend an anger management program, maybe you can introduce me to your class. I hear you have anger issues as well?"

Ntokozo: "I'm done with my program."

Me: "Oh."

I bring the glass to my nose and sniff it. With an inquisitive look, I inspect the layers.

Ntokozo: "What is it?"

Me: "This glass is dirty."

Ntokozo: "It's not."

He disputes.

Me: "There's a stain here."

I use my finger to circle the edge of the glass as if rubbing off dirt.

Me: "I'm not going to drink from it, you take this one."

He takes it after much hesitation.

Me: "Cheers."

A deep frown builds up as he gulps down everything, this has me smirking.

Me: "Let's sit, I want to know more about you."

I follow him back to the lounge, I'm doing most of the talking. Poor guy is nervous, he keeps shuffling on the seat trying to get himself comfortable.

His mouth begins to change colour, drips of sweat are forming on his forehead. He sends his hand to wipe out the fluid.

Me: "What's wrong?"

Ntokozo: "My throat feels dry."

He brushes a hand on his throat.

Strike one.

Me: "Drink up, quench that thirst."

Gradually, he reaches for the glass on the coffee table, it takes him a while to bring it to his mouth. He manages to take a single sip.

Ntokozo: "It's suddenly hot in here."

He struggles to remove his t-shirt, his hands have become numb.

Ntokozo: "I can't move."

He declares out of breath.

Strike two.

Me: "I think the temperature is fine."

His eyes fall as he glances at me.

Me: "You know Ntokozo, I'm not such a bad person. People piss me off and that just turns me into something I don't want to be."

Ntokozo: "Mmmhhh, mmmhh."

He winces, presses his arms around his stomach and groans in pain.

Ntokozo: "What's happening to me? My stomach hurts and I can't breathe."

He's wheezing.

Strike three.

Me: "Really? It must be the drink. What did you put in it?"

He leers at me and his mouth drops open.

Ntokozo: "You poisoned me?"

He battles with his voice.

Me: "Finally!!! I thought you would never get it. I love surprises you know and how they always work out. You should see your face right now. You're definitely surprised."

Ntokozo: "But how? I was watching your every move."

I raise my hand and wiggle my fingers, I send them to the edge of the glass and slowly circle my finger around it, I can't help but grin while doing this.

Me: "The poison was in your mouth before the drink touched your tongue."

He drops down on the floor.

Ntokozo: "You're a monster."

He groans in pain, drool drops from his mouth.

Me: "No, I'm the man with the poisonous fingers."

I thought he would laugh with me.

Oh well...

Ntokozo: "Why?"

He struggles with the word.

Me: "Why not? You chose this path for yourself my guy, I told you that you should've stayed in prison. You were much safer there, the world can be a very cruel place."

He lies on his side, his body curled up.

Ntokozo: "You bastard... my... father will... get..."

Me: "What's that? Your father will get me?"

Ntokozo: "You will... pay."

The man is struggling to breathe but, is so adamant on speaking.

Me: "I don't think so hey, daddy will be so disappointed when he finds the note."

His mouth starts forming.

Strike four, game over...

Me: "I had a great time, too bad my visit had to be cut short. I have to go now."

He's gone...

I pack the glasses we used, throw them in a bag and find my way out of the house. This is such a nice quiet community, I like.

AMARA\*

Me: "Randall? Did you cook something?"

He's holding my hand as he leads me to....

Heck, I don't know where he's taking me.

Randall: "No."

Me: "Okay, where are we going?"

Randall: "I know I'm not familiar with this relationship thing but, somehow you calling me Randall makes me feel like I did something wrong."

He declares.

Where is this coming from?

Me: "What else should I call you?"

Randall: "I don't know, those pet names they use."

By they, he means normal people because...

Well...

I doubt that he's normal.

Me: "You want a pet name?"

Randall: "Yes. Something sweet but, not too sweet, I might puke."

He smirks.

Me: "Hey..."

I dab his shoulders and he snickers.

Randall: "That's the truth."

Me: "I can't think of anything right now."

Randall: "Should I be worried?"

That's his way of cracking a joke.

Me: "Why?"

Randall: "There's so many of them, me hemma. Pumpkin, cupcake, honey." (My queen.)

He stops.

Me: "Names of food? How about baby, babe, love."

He simpers.

Randall: "Yes, those."

Me: "You have to give me a reason why you want a pet name."

Randall: "So, I don't feel like I messed up each time you call my name. You know sometimes when we make love and you say 'Oh Randall' I'm thinking shit! What have I done now?"

He imitates my voice.

I shouldn't be laughing at this lame joke but, it's funny.

Randall: "I'm serious."

His arms are around me, he pushes me against the wall and leans his face closer to mine.

Me: "I thought you were showing me something?"

Randall: "Was I?"

He bites my lower lip before taking my lips into his. I break away from the kiss as I tilt my head to the side.

Me: "We are not doing this now. Chioma is all over the house."

Randall: "Argh."

He takes my hand and we continue with our escapades.

Me: "I'm still curious you know. Don't let me guess."

We stop in the foyer, he points at the lounge.

Am I seeing things?

Me: "Randall? How?"

He's sitting on the edge of the couch holding a hat, his head is bowed. He can't see me.

It's as if I'm looking at my father.

Randall: "Go to him."

My thudding heart leads me towards my uncle, my tears show up on the way there. I can't remember the last time I saw him.

He tilts his head and sees me. His eyes widen, shock fills his face as if he's seeing a ghost.

Me: "Malume." (Uncle.)

I can't stop crying, a tear falls from his eye, and with that his knees follow after, as he drops with a thud on the floor. He buries his hands on his face and weeps. His shoulders convulsing and his head bowed, I rush to kneel before him. He refuses to let go of his face so, I wrap my arms around him.

Me: "Malume." (Uncle.)

I weep with him.

Here we are in this emotional moment and I am overwhelmed by uncle Mhambi's presence.

Mhambi: "I'm so sorry my child. Ngixolele ndodakazi, angikwazanga ukukuvikela. Ngixolele ndodakazi, ngixolele." (Forgive me my daughter, I couldn't protect you, please forgive me.)

Uncle is breaking my heart with his sobs.

Me: "No, malume. Akulona iphutha lakho." (It's not your fault uncle.)

He looks at me, I can't take these tears in his eyes.

Mhambi: "I failed you Amara, I shouldn't have let you stay with that evil man."

Me: "No, uncle. Don't blame yourself for this. You didn't know, no one knew what he was capable of."

He drops his head in snuffles as I wipe his tears.

Me: "Come sit."

I help him up. My heart has never felt at ease before.

Mhambi: "How are you?"

Me: "I'm coping malume." (Uncle.)

Mhambi: "I can see, you've gained weight."

Can someone tell men that we do not appreciate being told that, we have put on extra meat?

It doesn't matter how big I am.

Shut up...

Me: "How did he find you?"

He takes up a serious face.

He knows who I'm talking about.

Mhambi: "I received a call from someone saying they have information about you, he gave me a location where to meet him. He told me everything and why you are still here."

I hope he didn't tell him that we're a couple, uncle would definitely dismiss that.

Mhambi: "He said you live here with some woman who's helping him to look after you."

That's Chioma.

Me: "That's all he said?"

Mhambi: "Yes, is there more you want to tell me."

Me: "No uncle, I'm happy that you're here."

Mhambi: "You don't know how happy I am to see you my baby. I will take care of you now, I promise. Moses will pay for what he did, I will make sure of it."

That's what I want as well.

Me: "I don't want to go back to that house uncle."

Mhambi: "You won't, you never have to set foot in that place again."

Me: "What's going to happen after this?"

Mhambi: "I will have to inform your uncle Jonas, we will take it from there."

Can he state what he means?

Me: "I have found a home here uncle, I don't want to leave this place."

His eyes inspect mine.

Mhambi: "Amara, have you fallen for that boy?"

Yoh!!!

How do I answer this?

Me: "Why do you say that?"

Mhambi: "I can see it in your eyes, you have a reason to want to be here. I saw it with him as well, when he spoke of you. The eyes cannot hide the truth my child."

I opt not to answer.

Mhambi: "I'm not here to take you away, I know that you are not safe out there. I want you to promise me something."

Me: "What?"

Something tells me I will regret asking him this.

Mhambi: "Guard your heart, if that boy wants to be with you. He has to do things right. If it wasn't for Moses and his evil deeds I would take you with me, my child, you're still a baby Amara."

The lecture though.

Me: "What about uncle, Moses? I don't want him to know where I am."

Mhambi: "He won't know anything. I want to see him behind bars."

He assures me.

Me: "How is aunt?"

Mhambi: "She's fine, she'll be happy to see you."

Me: "I can't wait to see her too."

I rest my head on his shoulder.

Me: "I don't want you to worry about me uncle, I am fine and I'm happy here."

This is my assurance to him.

Mhambi: "I know my child."

He pats my head.

RANDALL\*



It's about time I fix my household, I am getting tired of this unending war. The first thing was to bring Amara and her uncle together, I couldn't watch her stress about him. Neo got me his numbers.

I'm on the phone with Styles, I'm worried about him lately. This killing spree he's on cannot be good for him. Styles doesn't kill people, he's more of a peace maker.

Me: "I think you should lay low for a while Styles, focus on Sethu."

Styles: "That's the plan but, I can't get comfortable not when Mkhize and Segun are still out there."

He's right, those two are our biggest threats.

Me: "It won't be long till we take them out."

Styles: "I take everything went well with Amara's uncle?"

It was a last minute decision and I had to act fast.

Me: "I wasn't sure my plan would work, I recited the story in a third person narrative."

Styles: "Mr. Story teller."

He laughs.

Me: "I had to play it safe and the man is smart, he figured out that I'm one of the men in the story."

Styles: "You did good Randy."

Me: "I want to clean out the closet, this is a start. How far is Nkomo with the task?"

Styles: "He's got it under control, Ruth is slowly giving in."

Me: "I hope he's not catching the Ruth fever."

He laughs.

Styles: "That would be deadly, he won't survive it. I trust him. He might be a lover but, he doesn't fall so easily."

Me: "For his sake, I hope you're right."

Styles: "I hope so too, I have to go. I'm driving."

Me: "Call me when you get home."

Styles: "Okay my love."

He retorts with a snigger.

Me: "You're stupid."





I deny him a chance to respond as I hang up the phone.

NOMBULELO\*

I am shocked beyond reason after Amara's confession, that man raised me, he natured me.  
How is it possible that he would do such a thing?

Mbuso: "I won't know what's wrong if you don't tell me."

He's trying to console me.

How do I tell him that my father molested my cousin?

Mbuso: "Lelo, you've been lying on this couch, crying and it's getting exhausting now. Tell me what's wrong."

Me: "My father Mbuso."

I bring myself up to sit.

Mbuso: "What did he do?"

Uncle Mhambi is calling me, this is a first. I usually receive calls from uncle, Jonas.

Mbuso: "Take it, I'll be in the kitchen."

He moseys away, giving me space.

Me: "Malume." (Uncle.)

Mhambi: "Unjani Nombulelo?" (How are you?)

Me: "Ngiyaphila malume." (I'm fine.)

Mhambi: "I just saw your sister Amara."

He states, happily.

Me: "When? Did she come home?"

Mhambi: "No, I went to see her."

Me: "You went to that man's house malume?" (Uncle.)

How is this possible?

Mhambi: "Yes, he came to get me. He told me how Amara came to be in that house."

knowing my uncle, he should have a problem with this.

Me: "Are you still with her?"



Mhambi: "No, I'm on my way home. I'll be seeing her tomorrow with your uncle Jonus."

These people.

Me: "So, you're okay with her living in that house malume?" (Uncle.)

Mhambi: "I have no say, she is of age. She's allowed to make her own choices."

Me: "Kodwa malume, that man bought Amara. He paid for her, you can't think that he's a good man." (But, uncle.)

I can't see Randall as a good person, if he was able to force Amara to live with him against her will.

Mhambi: "Oh my child, it's not like that. He paid for her freedom, your sister would be married to an old man as we speak. I know Mr. Okolie's approach was wrong, my child went through so much."

Me: "Mr. Okolie? Ngempela malume?" (Really uncle?)

Mhambi: "What is it Nombulelo? Why so much hostility towards him?"

Me: "I can't forgive him for what he did, he took Amara from us. Couldn't he approach us and tell us the problem?"

Yes, I'm complaining. I have the right to complain.

Mhambi: "Speak to your sister, she will explain things to you. I have to go."

Me: "Bye."

I thought he would be able to understand my views.

Mbuso: "Whatever you do, keep your opinions to yourself. Amara will not appreciate your honesty."

I raise my head to find him leaning on the kitchen counter.

Me: "Must I force myself to like him, Mbuso? I have a bad feeling about Randall, I don't think he loves Amara like you people say he does."

Mbuso: "What's your problem? This is not you Lelo, you don't judge people. Is it because Amara has someone to love?"

Me: "Really?"

I join him in the kitchen.

Mbuso: "What other explanation is there for this? I don't understand you."

He utters as he frowns at me.

Me: "Randall needs to apologise for what he did."

Mbuso: "He's long apologized to Amara, that's why they are at peace."

Me: "What about us, her family? We were left with the scars and the trauma."

Mbuso: "That man owes you nothing Nombulelo, his business is with Amara and not you. Whatever they do with their lives has nothing to do with you. Stop this bitterness, you don't even know him that much to judge him."

He appears to be piqued.

Me: "You wouldn't understand how I feel Mbuso, until you put yourself in my shoes."

Mbuso: "I understand perfectly, if Amara could let go of the past and forgive Randall. Why can't you do the same?"

He's not making sense.

Me: "Amara thinks she's in love because he supposedly saved her..."

Mbuso: "He did save her and she loves him, I have seen them together. That is something you cannot fake. The people who need to apologize here are your parents, they wronged Amara. They failed to protect her, go seek forgiveness from them and not Randall."

When does he address me in this manner?

Me: "Mbuso, you're yelling at me?"

He sneers.

Mbuso: "I'm not yelling and I'm done talking to you. Honestly, I didn't expect this from you, Lelo. You need to think everything through, you will lose Amara if you continue with this attitude of yours."

My eyes follow his movement as he walks away from me.

I have to speak to Amara.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

130\*

### NOMBULELO\*

Mbuso is calling me, I left the house after he walked away.

I'm outside Randall's house right now.

Mbuso: "Where are you?"

He asks without greeting.

Me: "I went to see Amara."

Mbuso: "It's late Lelo. Why didn't you ask me to drive you?"

Me: "So, you can judge me on the way?"

Mbuso: "I wasn't judging you, I was stating the truth. May I ask what you're doing there?"

Me: "I'm allowed to visit my cousin, right?"

The door swings open and Randall stands before me. I'm expected to believe that this angry man is a good person that, frown on his face tells me a different story.

Mbuso: "As long as you're not there to judge her."

Me: "She's my cousin, I want what's best for her."

I make sure to look at Randall with this declaration, his unyielding gaze on me intensifies.

Mbuso: "If you say so. Let me know when you're done so, I can come get you."

Me: "I will, bye."

Randall: "This is a surprise."

He makes way for me, I step in and stand before him.

Me: "How did you know I was outside?"

Randall: "I was on my way out."

Me: "Is Amara around?"

Randall: "In the lounge."

I think he senses my negative energy towards him.

Me: "What do you want with Amara?"

He stares for a while to a point that it gets uncomfortable, he crosses his arms across his chest and smirks.

Randall: "What do you think?"

I don't like his demeanour and his dark aura.

Me: "Are you trying to tell me something?"

Randall: "I'm not quite sure I follow."

He curves a brow.

Me: "Surely rescuing Amara wasn't your original plan, you had an agenda."

Randall: "And the agenda is?"

Me: "Cut the crap, tell me what you want with my sister."

Randall: "Does it matter what I say? You have made up your mind about me."

He's arrogant to top it off.

Me: "Amara is convinced that you love her. Ever since I came here she hasn't given me much of her time. All she does is talk about you, there's nothing normal about it."

Randall: "I don't know you, girl and I will not discuss my life with you."

He wears a smug look.

Me: "Everyone might think you're a good man but, I see right through you. I will make sure that Amara sees it too."

He huffs.

Randall: "Care to share what it is that you see?"

Me: "You purchased my cousin as if she were a piece of furniture and now you have her wrapped around your finger. I know Amara, she is not so naïve."

He slants his head to the side as he puckers his brows.

Randall: "What is it? Is Mbuso not fucking you right? You seem bitter."

He sneers.

Me: "How dare you speak to me like that?"

Randall: "You don't want to challenge me little girl, you better play far away from me. Do not bring havoc into my family, I hate playing games and when I do, I don't play nice."

He utters with an intimidating tone.

Me: "Are you threatening me?"

He snickers and shakes his head. This is proof that he's not as good as people think.

Randall: "Your cousin is in the lounge, try not to upset her with your bullshit."

He states with an impassive face.

Me: "One day Amara will see you for who you are and she will leave you."

Randall: "We'll see about that."

His attitude pisses me off.

Me: "Yes, we'll see about that. I will take her away from here, you don't deserve her. You're nothing but, a human trafficker dressed in a nice suit."

"Lelo!!!"

I spin around at Amara's loud voice, she's standing with Liyana who's holding on to her hip.

Me: "Amara..."

Amara: "Why would you say that?"

She's wearing a long face.

Me: "I didn't mean it like that."

Amara: "If you didn't then, you wouldn't have said it."

Liyana: "Papa."

She flies past me as she runs to her father, he takes her in his arms.

Liyana: "This lady wants to take Mara away, don't let her."

She cries.

Randall: "Your Mara will never leave you princess."

His piercing gaze falls on me.

Amara: "Papa is right Liya baby, I'm not going to leave you."

Liyana: "But this lady said she will take you away."

She whines.

I am made to look like the bad guy.

Amara: "It was a joke, right aunty Lelo?"

She raises her eye brows while staring at me.

Me: "Yes."

Wat can I say really?

Randall: "I'm running late me hemma, I'll see you two later." (My queen.)

Liyana giggles as he showers her with kisses.

Liyana: "Papa."

She laughs.

Randall: "Papa loves you princess."

Okay...

Liyana: "Liya loves you papa."

She kisses his cheek.

Amara: "What about me?"

Randall: "I love you, me hemma." (My queen.)

He declares in a soft voice.

Why am I standing around watching this?

Amara: "I love you more and I love you, Liya baby."

Liyana giggles.

Liyana: "I love you Mara."

Randall places Liyana down, he kisses Amara and leaves without glancing at me.

He's rude.

Me: "What does me hemma mean?" (My queen.)

Liyana: "It's Akan for queen, I can teach you maame." (Aunt.)

She's smiling at me.

Me: "Maame?" (Aunt?)

Liyana: "Yes, it means aunt. You can take notes, I'm a great teacher. Right Mara?"

She giggles.

Amara: "Yes, my baby. You're the best."

I look at Amara who has her hand on Liyana's shoulder.

Amara: "You can learn a lot from her."

Me: "I see. Can we talk?"

She's hesitant.

Amara: "Liya, go find Chioma."

She bounces away.

Me: "You have gained a whole family overnight."

Amara: "I wouldn't change it for anything."

Me: "What's going on Amara? I can't seem to understand anything."

Amara: "What is there to understand Lelo?"

She walks to the lounge.

Me: "I can't understand how your life changed overnight, I feel like I have missed so much. It's like I went to bed and woke up with you married with a family."

Amara: "Is it a bad thing Lelo?"

Me: "No, it's hard to get used to it."

Amara: "You know how life can be, we don't decide our destiny. Maybe this is how I was meant to meet my soul mate."

I see a glow in her eyes as she speaks of him.

Me: "You think he's your soul mate?"

I just don't see it.

Amara: "I know he is Lelo, you don't understand. I can't see my life without him or that little girl. She is the sweetest thing ever, I could eat her up. I never knew anyone could be so refreshing."

She smiles broadly.

Me: "Where is her mother?"

Amara: "I don't know."

Me: "What if she comes back for her and her man? Are you willing to face baby mama drama?"

She narrows her eyes with a frown building up on her face.

Amara: "Her man?"

Me: "You know how these baby mamas claim these men as their own."

Amara: "No Lelo, I don't. Randall belongs to me and only me. I'm at my happiest in my life. Can I please keep it, you're my sister and I don't want us to fight about this."

Me: "I'm just looking out for you Amara."

Amara: "And I appreciate it, you don't have to, really. I would also appreciate it, if you stop judging Randall. I don't like the tone you used with him, Lelo and what you said to him. I would never speak to Mbuso like that because I respect him as the man you love. I love you and I want



you to be on my side. Won't you do that?"

I am on her side, I'm always on her side. That's why I want to protect her.

Me: "I don't want you to be hurt again, I don't see this lasting long Amara and..."

Amara: "That's it..."

She stands.

Amara: "I can't do this with you anymore, Please go."

She demands.

Me: "You're throwing me out?"

Amara: "I'm asking you to leave me in peace Lelo, I have so much going on right now and you of all people should be supportive."

Me: "I do support you."

Amara: "By judging my family?"

Me: "I am your family Amara, not them. You just met them."

Amara: "Shut up Lelo, just shut up. You don't know what you're saying. How do I deal with you hating my family like this? Your words are so vile. Am I not allowed to be happy?"

Me: "You're allowed babe and I want it for you but, it can't be with him. He's a trafficker Amara, I only spent a few minutes with him and not once was I convinced that he's a good man. He's arrogant and condescending..."

Amara: "Show yourself out and don't come back here until you change your attitude towards Randall and Liyana. I don't like this new you, I hate it actually."

Me: "Amara, you have been through so much already and I am trying to protect you, please understand."

Amara: "Protect me by breaking my heart? This conversation is over, you know where the door is. Excuse me."

She turns to walk away.

Why can't she see what I see?

SETHU\*

My mother literally came to my place, the first thing she did when she got here was to complain and I have had it. Ayize has not said a word yet, apparently we are meant to be at home with the whole family. Looking at Ayize, I think she's ready to explode. This living room has suddenly

become small.

Mom: "You can't go to the house dressed like that."

She looks at me up and down while pointing a forefinger at me.

Ayize: "Woza nazo." (Let's hear.)

Mom: "The family has gathered there. What will your uncles say when they see you under dressed like this?"

Ayize cackles.

Me: "I'm not going home with you mom, I'm going out."

Mom: "Out?"

Me: "Yes, I have a date."

Ayize: "Yes girl."

She declares out loud.

Mom: "You're going to party when your uncle just died. What is wrong with you?"

Her constant complaining never ends.

Me: "It's not a party mom, it's a date."

Mom: "Date? What is that?"

She's confused.

Ayize: "It's where a guy and a girl go out to spend quality time together without any parents disturbing them."

Okay, she makes it sound wrong.

Me: "Something like that I guess."

Mom: "Who is this boy Sethu? What about Kwena?"

This is my mother ladies and gentlemen, the control freak.

Ayize: "Usho ubhut' mfundisi? I know you think little of us mama kodwa no, come on." (But) (The pastor.)

Mom: "What do you mean wena?" (You.)

Ayize: "Exactly that, my sister will not date that arrogant pastor wanna be."

I love how she fights my battles.

Me: "My heart is set on someone else mom."

She gives me that nasty look again.

Mom: "Your heart is set on a boy who's got you wearing tight jeans? Can you breathe in that?"

She's judging me.

Me: "It's not that tight mom."

Mom: "No, I can't let you leave Sethu, we have to go home. Who is going to cook for the family?"

She proclaims.

Ayize: "I'm not going, I will not slave for those people."

Mom: "Those people are your family."

Ayize: "I don't care, I'm not going. Sethu is also not going."

Mom: "Why are you like this Ayize?"

She's starting.

Me: "Mom, I think you should go. I can't let you do this to my sister."

I know she will end up saying hurtful things to her.

Ayize: "No let her speak her mind Sethu, this is what she came here for."

Mom: "You don't have any respect Ayize, your uncle died and..."

I shouldn't have opened for her.

Ayize: "He wasn't my uncle and I am glad that he's dead, I hope he's burning in hell."

Mom: "You..."

Me: "No, I will not allow it. Not in my house, I want you to go mom."

Mom: "Sethu?"

Me: "That man assaulted her."

Her eyes buck.

Mom: "Is that what she told you and you believed her?"

Me: "Yes I believe her and I can't let you attack her as if she asked for all of this."

Mom: "Asked for what? Nothing happened..."

Ayize: "I hate you."

She screams as she stands on her feet.

Ayize: "You don't know how much I hate you mom, I hate that you're my mother. I hate that your blood runs in my veins."

I was afraid of this.

Mom: "You see Sethu, I can never have a normal conversation with her."

Ayize: "Sethu, is she leaving or should I? Tshela lomama ahambe." (Tell this woman to go.)

Me: "Mom, you heard her."

Mom: "Are you choosing her over me?"

She's asking me and it doesn't make sense.

Me: "If you put me in a position to do so then I will definitely choose her."

Mom: "I don't blame you, you're just like your..."

She stops as if she remembers something.

Me: "My what?"

Mom: "I want you two in that house by tomorrow morning or you will have the whole family to deal with. I will not take nonsense from you."

Ayize: "Shame, sizobona." (We'll see.)

Me: "Thanks for stopping by mom, you can go now."

I point at the door.

She sighs before turning to walk away.

Ayize: "That woman is evil, I hate her."

She grunts as she sits back down.

Me: "Don't let her get to you, you know how she can be."

She laughs.

Ayize: "You know me, I'm okay."

This time I am not convinced, she's broken because mom still doesn't believe her.

"Hello."

That's Styles voice.

Ayize: "Your mother left the door open, that witch."

The door locks from the inside, you can't open it from the outside unless you have a key.

Styles appears into the lounge.

Styles: "Why is the door open?"

He's looking at me.

Ayize: "Your evil monster in-law left it open."



She speaks about her with resentment in her voice.

Me: "Are you okay?"

He looks drained and blue.

He bites his lower lip, he wants privacy.

Ayize: "I'm going to fix my... I'm going to fix something in my room."

I'm glad she gets it.

Me: "Are you okay Mr. Styles?"

He forces a smile.

Styles: "When last did you call me that?"

My effort to put a smile on his face is not completely successful.

Me: "Talk to me."

He drops his head as I cradle the edges of his clamped jaw with my fingers.

Me: "Styles."

I gently bring his face up.

Styles: "I want you to hold me."

He declares softly.

I enfold my arms around him and he holds on to me.

Me: "Do you want to talk about it?"

I feel his head shake, I guess this means no.

Me: "I'm here."

He's different today.

Me: "Come sit."

Styles: "We're running late, we should leave."

I thought it was cancelled.

Me: "Wouldn't you rather stay home? You're not okay."

Styles: "I'm okay when I'm with you, let's go."

He's talking to me but, his voice sounds distant.

Me: "Okay, if you insist."

Probably by the end of the night he will open up to me.

KHETHU\*

Mbongeni is doing so much to help me forget my past. He insisted that we go out.

Me: "I don't feel like people today Mbo, I think we should go home."

We're at a restaurant and it's crowded. I don't want to be here.

Mbongeni: "You can't stay cooked up in that house, you need to go out and mingle with people."

Me: "You mean mingle with you?"

He titters.

Mbongeni: "I count as people so, yeah. Also, I want to feed my baby."

He places his hand on my belly.

Me: "What are you having?"

He draws back.

Mbongeni: "I don't know. What are you having?"

Me: "I don't know."

Mbongeni: "You must be craving something."

Me: "I'm not hey and I'm not hungry, I think I'll only have something to drink."

Mbongeni: "No way, I can't eat alone."

My mind is not here.

Me: "Order anything, I'll have the same."

He shrugs, raises his hand to summon a waiter.

Mbongeni: "Have you spoken to the psychologist?"

When will he get that I hate having this conversation?

Me: "No."

Mbongeni: "I think you should."

Me: "We came here to eat right? Let's do that or else take me home."

I squelch.

Mbongeni: "I'm sorry."

The waiter finally steps to our table.



I'm tired of people thinking that I need a doctor.

The lights in this place must be playing tricks on me.

I scan my eyes to the table on my right, it's four tables away from us and I think the woman locking lips with a man is my mother.

Mbongeni: "What is it?"

Me: "I think that's Nobayeni."

I know that's my mother.

Mbongeni: "Where?"

Me: "The table there, Oh my God."

I'm not surprised really.

Me: "I'm going to confront her. How could she do this to my father?"

Mbongeni: "Are you sure that's a good idea?"

He would obviously say that.

Me: "Are you serious?"

This is amazing, I finally have something on this woman.

I toddle to their table.

Me: "What do we have here? Nobayeni Dladla, you have been busted."

She jerks up and ogles at me with her eyes widened.

To be continued...

BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

131\*

KHETHU\*

Nobayeni: "Bridgette, it's not what you think."

Yeah, that's what they all say.

Me: "Timothy Mabuza?"

He's Nobayeni's business associate, I have met him a couple of times. He's an acquaintance of my father, they have hung out before.

He's standing next to Nobayeni, slightly smiling at me. I don't see any remorse in his eye.

Tim: "This is not how we wanted you to find out Bridgette."

He also calls me Bridgette, I should've figured out that these two are doing more pleasure than business together.

Nobayeni: "Tim, let me handle this."

She raises her hand to stop him.

Me: "I knew you were shallow Nobayeni but, this?"

Nobayeni: "Please, don't tell your father."

She pleads, I haven't seen her desperate till today.

Me: "How could you do this to him? He has been a good husband."

Nobayeni: "It was a mistake Bridgette."

Lies.

Tim: "Just tell her the truth Bayeni."

Nobayeni: "Shut up."

She grits her teeth.

Me: "Yes Bayeni, tell me the truth."



She frowns.

Nobayeni: "Don't do this Bridgette."

I don't think she is sorry about this.

What am I saying?

Of course she's not sorry, she's Nobayeni Dladla. To hell with other people's feelings, Tim is proof of her selfishness.

Me: "I am going to tell dad everything."

I should tell dad, I have to tell him. He deserves better than this.

Nobayeni: "No."

Her voice rises.

Nobayeni: "You can't please, I will do anything. Please Bridgette."

Why is she holding my hand?

I snatch it back. I don't care about her or how desperate she is.

Me: "If you're so afraid of losing him, why are you doing this? Why the infidelity?"

She better have a good explanation for this.

Nobayeni: "I don't know."

Me: "You don't know? Wow."

She clings to my hand as I turn to walk away.

Nobayeni: "Bridgette, let's talk about this please."

Me: "No. Proceed with whatever it is you were doing, don't let me keep you."

I refuse to let these people make a fool out of my father.

Mbongeni: "Why did you do that?"

I'm not a coward, I had to confront that woman.

Me: "What did you want me to do Mbo?"

Mbongeni: "Wait till you two are alone, then confront her."

Me: "Are you serious?"

He must be crazy.

Mbongeni: "I am dead serious Khethu. Do you take joy in hurting other people? She is your mother. Is it so hard to respect her?"



I will pretend he did not just say this to me.

Me: "Where is our food? I'm hungry."

That look...

Me: "Are we going to eat or not?"

Mbongeni is too considerate, it gets annoying sometimes.

Gosh...

What does she want now?

Nobayeni: "Can we talk please?"

Her eyes are wet.

I'm not moved.

Me: "We're are busy and you're disturbing us."

Nobayeni: "Please."

Me: "I'm tired of hearing that word. God! Leave me alone woman."

Mbongeni: "Stop it."

He snaps.

Me: "Tell this woman to leave me alone."

Why is he reproaching me? I'm not the one caught cheating.

Mbongeni: "She is your mother Khethu, you can't talk to her like that. It doesn't matter what she did."

What?

Me: "Why are you taking her side?"

Mbongeni: "Will you stop Khethu? You're acting like a child."

Me: "Oh really?"

Mbongeni: "Yes, we're in public. Can't you respect your mother?"

Me: "Go to hell Mbongeni."

I am leaving.

Nobayeni: "Bridgette wait."

I ignore her.

Mbongeni: "Khethu."

He snatches my hand.

Mbongeni: "Where are you going?"

Me: "Home, you can stay with my mother."

Mbongeni: "Don't be ridiculous, I'll take you home. Get in the car."

Me: "No, I'll get a cab."

He pulls me back as I proceed to walk.

Me: "Don't..."

Mbongeni: "I said get in the car."

What the hell?

The glare in his eyes says he's not playing.

I drag my feet to the stupid darn car.

NTOMBI\*

<<< Fill up the tables, count the empties. >>>

<<< Hayi mina ngiyofela etshwaleni kwenzenjani. >>> (I'll die of alcohol.)

What have I done to deserve such a husband?

He's drunk and stumbling into the house singing out loud, he's carrying a bottle of beer. Everyone went to bed while I waited for him to come home.

Me: "Moses?"

He looks at me as if his vision is not clear.

Moses: "Ntombi, mkami. Woza my loving, khombisa indoda yakho ukuthi uwulahla kanjani umlenze." (Come my love and show your husband how you dance.)

He's so loud and dancing like the idiot he is.

Me: "Uphuma kuphi Moses?" (Where do you come from?)

Moses: "Hayi hayi, Ntombi. Awubuzi indoda ukuthi ibikuphi." (You don't ask a man where he was.)

Me: "Uyindoda wena Moses? You're nonsense." (Are you a man?)

Moses: "One day is one day wena Ntombi, ungasho ukuthi angikutshelanga." (Don't say I didn't tell you.)



He exclaims loudly.

Me: "Sshh, Jonas is sleeping."

He leers at Jonas who is sleeping on the floor.

Moses: "Angina ndaba, man." (I don't care.)

He burps.

Moses: "Umfowenu is crowding my space. I want him out of my house." (Your brother.)

Same story every day.

Moses: <<< Yin' le ethi nca nca nca lomshina uyakhuluma... >>> (What is that beat?)

He continues to sing and dance.

Moses: "Ntombi man, ngikhumbula ngesikhathi sami. Before I met you, bengimuhle madado." (I remember during my time, I was handsome.)

Me: "Moses stop it."

Moses: "Thatha uphuze Ntombi, you're too frustrated mkami." (Take and drink. My wife.)

"What is all that noise?"

Mashoto appears from the kitchen.

Moses: "Awu madoda, nangu omunye umfazi wami. (Here's my other woman.)

He points at Mashoto.

Moses: "A party for three, inhlanhla engaka? Shotos, my love, sondela wena my fohloza." (So much luck. Come close my love.)

He stumbles to her, he takes her hand into his.

The fool is smiling. Can't she see that this man is drunk?

Me: "Moses let go of that hand now."

I snap at him, Jonas wakes up due to this.

Moses: "No, no, no Ntombi, ma loving. Umona pansi, uShotos naye ufuna ukufudumala." (Don't be jealous, Mashoto also wants to be warm.)

He wraps his arms around her, the room erupts with her loud giggles.

Moses: "Buka s'bali. Am I blessed or what? Ngiphethe u winter ngapha, when it's cold uyangifudumeza." (Look brother in-law. She keeps me warm.)

He kisses her cheek.

Moses: "Ngiphethe u summer ngapha. She keeps me cool."

He better not be talking about me.

Moses: "Learn from me, sbali. Get yourself a big woman and a small women, the best of both. You will thank me later." (Brother, in-law.)

What the hell is he saying to my brother?

Jonas is lost for words, I know that he's extremely annoyed and he won't say anything.

Me: "Moses shut up."

You can't tell him anything when he's drunk.

Moses: "Asambe bafazi bami. Ziyawa namhlanje, omunye phezu komunye. Awu suka madoda." (Let's go my wives, it's going to be fun tonight. One on top of another.)

He laughs.

He takes my hand, I tug it back.

Moses: "Oho!!"

Why is Mashoto following my husband to my bedroom?

Me: "Uyaphi wena sfebe? (Where are you going bitch?)

I snatch the bottle of beer from Moses, I throw it in her direction. She screams as it hits her back.

Me: "Ungijwayela kabi wena." (Don't get forward with me.)

I grab her hair, pulling her back. She screams in agony.

Moses: "Ntombi, stop."

He speaks with a lazy voice.

Why does someone have to pull me back each time I attack this woman, I have to teach her a lesson.

Me: "Jonas, leave me."

I shout.

Jonas: "Ntombi, you've hurt the poor woman. She's pregnant. What is wrong with you?"

Mashoto is sitting on the floor crying.

Me: "I don't care, ngifuna sichitheke lesosisu sakhe." (I want her to have a miscarriage.)

Moses: "You want to kill my baby Ntombi?"

He sounds shocked, it's not a banger that I hate her this much. I'm fighting to get off Jonas' hold when Mhambi and Petunia walk out of their room.

Petunia: "Ngazile." (I knew it.)

Mxm!!!

Mhambi puts his hand on her shoulder, takes her back to the bedroom and closes the door. He wants nothing to do with any of this.

Mashoto: "Ouch! Moses, my baby."

She cries, holding her belly.

Me: "Oh please."

Moses: "It's okay Shotos, don't cry."

He comforts her.

Me: "Ngiyeke." (Leave me.)

I break out of Jonas' strong hold.

Moses thinks he knows me.

I take his hand, lug him to our bedroom and lock the door. Mashoto's days are numbered I swear.

SETHU\*

Me: "I thought we were going to restaurant?"

He parks the car in his garage.

Styles: "Change of plans."

Me: "Okay, I hope you won't make me cook."

He gives me half a smile.

Styles: "Neo cooked before he left."

Me: "He can cook?"

Styles: "He tries."

He steps out and runs to my side, I was about to jump out of the car. He has decided to be a door opener today.

Me: "This is new."

He takes my hand and helps me out, I haven't heard his laugh today nor seen that genuine smile. The grip of his hand on mine is tighter than usual.

I'm worried about him.

The house lights are on, he lets me in first.

This house is warm and welcoming, it smells like him.

Styles: "Do you need anything?"

Me: "I'm okay for now. What did Neo cook?"

Styles: "Pap."

He's serious?

Me: "I'm still waiting for the part where you laugh."

Styles: "No, I'm serious. That's what he made."

Me: "So I dressed up for pap and?"

Styles: "Go look."

He gives me a half smile.

Styles: "I'll be back."

He leaves me and disappears to one of the rooms, I don't know where he's headed to. I make my way to the kitchen to check if there's real food. Neo really cooked pap and there's no meat, I'm hungry. I haven't eaten anything since earlier today, I was trying to avoid a bloated stomach so, I fit in my jeans. I struggled for nothing, here I am standing in front of a pot with dry pap.

I see the kitchen window has been fixed.

I turn to see Styles walk back to the living room, he's changed his clothes. Shorts and a tank top, that's odd. There was nothing wrong with what he was wearing. Now, I feel overdressed.

Me: "You know, next time you cancel our plans let me know. Look at me all dressed up."

I approach him with these words, he's still wearing a gloomy face.

A pucker has grown between his eye brows.

Me: "Babe."

I wrap my arms around him, he looks down at me as he lets his hands massage my shoulders.

Me: "Are you okay?"

He sighs.

Styles: "I feel empty."

He mummurs.

This is definitely new, he's always full of life. I love how Styles is open, from day one, this is how

things have been.

Me: "Tell me about it."

He raises his eyes, releases another short sigh, leans in to my face, I shut my eyes as his lips brush on mine.

Styles: "I need you kitten. Won't you breathe life back into me."

He declares against my lips, I can't comprehend what he could mean by this. I am though, willing to help with whatever he needs.

Just as I'm busking in this slow moment where our lips are gently brushing, his lips claim mine. I merely had time to think, now I'm lost in this steamy kiss that has my body pulsating with heat.

The kiss is different this time, it's filled with life, it's passionate and fiery.

His hands tightly grip on my waist as he pulls me closer to him and without warning invites his tongue into my mouth. This motion lets me know what he wants and I want the same thing, I have been longing for this moment.

We're moving, my eyes are closed and my arms are around his neck.

I moan as I feel my body hit against the wall, we're hungry for each other. His hands are all over my body, he stops and looks at me. I'm pinned against the wall fighting to catch my breath with my mouth slightly open. He's towering over me, his eyes have narrowed and are filled with lust.

Styles: "I want you Sethu. I want you so bad."

He whispers ever so softly.

Me: "I am yours Styles, take me."

My heart belongs to him.

How does he know that I want to be kissed like this? No one has ever kissed me this way.

What was a greedy kiss has turned into a soft, hot and breathy soul kiss. He kisses me like he wants half of my breath. His arms are back to caressing my body, slowly this time.

I want to take off this top he's wearing, I want to feel his skin on mine. He pulls back, raises his hand and I slide it off of him. I take my time to lust after his body while letting my fingers dance on it. I take a risk by grazing my fingers close to his private parts.

He smirks, plants a kiss on my forehead, my cheek and my nose. He buries his face on my neck, my breathing quickens at the feel of his wet kisses. He traces them down to my collar bone.

He's kissing me there and I just want to take my shirt off. I need his hands on my bare skin.

Me: "Won't you take my shirt off?"

I whisper while trying to catch my breath.

He stops and gives me an inquisitive look, a naughty grin takes over his face.



I help him with the buttons. This is my attribute, my shyness runs out the window during a moment of pleasure.

He buries his face on my cleavage and takes a deep breath, before his lips have me trembling with pleasure.

Styles: "I don't have protection."

That's the last thing on my mind.

Me: "I'm clean, and I trust you."

He smiles and kisses me.

Styles: "I'm also clean."

Okay...

Let's do this then...

I push my chest up as he glides his hands on my back and unhooks my bra. It's weird for me that he just smelt it, he tosses the bra and it flies across the room.

His face finds a place between my breasts again, he's kissing and sucking and nibbling. I run my fingers through his hair, he unbuttons my jeans while sucking my nipples. I'm too excited and cannot wait to have him inside me.

He kisses his way down to my belly and my abdomen. I step out of my jeans after he pushes them down, leaving me completely naked. He gently grabs my ass and kisses me down there.

Styles: "You're not wearing underwear."

The way he says it makes my clit twitch.

Me: "I'm not."

I whisper.

I will not reveal that I hardly ever wear any.

He kisses my cookie again and adds a lick.

Styles: "This is all mine."

He's declaring and not asking.

Me: "It's all yours."

I'm giving him all of me, I'm trusting him with my life.

Styles: "I'd like to taste it."

His soft declaration has me trembling, my heart is thudding, I'm wet and my clit is pulsating.

He holds my lower back, takes my hand and pulls me down to him. I lie down facing up, he

starts off with kisses on my inner thighs. Slowly leading his way to my cookie, I impatiently wait to feel him. I bite my lower lip as he kisses me down there. He puts his hand on my lower back and plunges his tongue in me. I lose it as he starts to go in and out of me. I scream and push my hips up to his mouth, he lays a hand on my abdomen to hold me steady.

I feel like I will explode and this compels me to scream as my orgasm takes over me. My head spins and I feel an overwhelming pleasure that causes me to scream louder as I grip his hair tighter. He's crawling up to me in a while right after taking off his pants.

He smashes his lips on mine. He's packed between my legs, his warm tongue on my breasts.

It's driving me crazy.

Me: "Oh Styles."

His hand slides down on me, my body heats up again as his finger plays around down there. This foreplay has me wanting more of him.

I graze my fingers on his spine as I feel him enter me. I pull him closer and continue to caress him,

I put my hands on his hips, my legs are wrapped around his waist. I meet his jolting thrusts with mine by grinding my hips.

Styles: "Shit!!!"

He groans.

Me: "You feel so damn good Styles."

He growls in pleasure.

I lean up to kiss him and clutch his ass.

I clench legs around him in such a way that the arches of my soles are pressed against his hip, almost pulling him toward me. I reach down and stroke my clit and the base of his length while he's thrusting.

We're both moaning into each other's ears. I feel a pleasurable sensation travelling all through my body and my toes begin to twirl, it feels like I'm in fast ride down and my I'm dropping at a fast rate. It's a great fall.

I know I'm going to have an orgasm, I pull his head close to me and whisper into his ear.

Me: "Styles, I'm going to cum."

I struggle with my whispers as I can't stop myself from moaning.

He kisses me and presses his forehead against mine.

Me: "Styles mmmhhh."

I feel like crying, laughing and screaming at the same time. His deep thrusts drive me over the

edge.

Styles: "Cum for me kitten."

He whispers with amusement in his voice.

Everything around me shuts down, including my mind. I feel this great need to scream, it engulfs me as it increases with every stroke. While he's coming in and out of me, I am convinced that this is it.

It's him.

Where the hell has he been all my life?

I bite his ear and suck on his ear lobe, this drives him insane. He picks up his pace. I feel a warm fuzzy, scratchy feeling rush through my body. One last pleasurable moan as my body shudders, I feel a pulse on my clit and my cheeks feel hot. I grind on, my hands clutched on his ass, helping him push to his ending. He's groaning louder, I'm screaming louder. His hand tenses on my waist. He kisses me before his muscles tighten. He cusses a few times and collapses on me.

Me: "Wow."

Styles: "Fuck."

He raises his head to look at me, he's forever smirking.

Styles: "What the hell was that?"

I bite my lower lip, I'm trying to hide a smile but, failing.

Me: "I love you, Mr. Styles."

He smiles and a kiss comes with that.

Styles: "I love you, kitten."

He buries his face on my cleavage.

Styles: "Thank you."

He whispers as he takes up a sigh of relief, I sink my hands into his hair and slowly caress it.

AMARA\*

I hear his footsteps tread towards the bedroom, I thought he would be a bit late. I'm surprised how his presence still makes me nervous, I should be used to him by now. A distant smile clicks on his mouth.

Me: "You're home?"

He potters towards me, leans over the bed and plants a kiss on my lips.

Randall: "Missed me?"

He gives me a peck.

Me: "Nah."

Randall: "Liar."

He's eating...

I ignored that scent from his breath, only now my brain tells me.

Me: "What are you eating?"

He moves back, reveals a small packet of snacks.

Randall: "Raisins."

He throws a few into his mouth.

Randall: "I was hungry so, I got these. They are nice, try some."

He stretches his hand to offer me.

Me: "I'm okay thanks. I can make you something to eat."

Randall: "No, no. I grabbed a bite with Neo."

I thought he said he was hungry.

He kicks his shoes off and lies back on the bed, he's still eating.

Me: "Randall."

He lifts his head and frowns.

Randall: "Oh no! What did I do?"

Funny.

Randall: "When am I getting my name, me hemma?" (My queen.)

Big baby.

Me: "You haven't earned it yet."

He throws his head back on the pillow, continues to eat raisins.

Since when does he snack on raisins?

Randall; "It's fine."

Me: "Really?"

Randall: "What?"

Me: "You're sulking."

Randall: "I wouldn't if you gave me a pet name."

I'm tossed into a laughing mode.

Me: "What's wrong with you? What did Neo feed you? You're acting strange."

Randall: "Because the woman I love doesn't deem me fit to have a pet name?"

He huffs.

Me: "Sensitive much?"

Randall: "Yes."

We're talking and he just won't let go of that snack.

Me: "Okay, buddy?"

He frowns.

Randall: "What's that? I'm not a dog."

He disputes, I suppress my laughter.

Me: "Cupcake?"

Randall: "Never, I refuse."

Me: "Dear?"

Randal: "What are we, fifty?"

I am running out of ideas here, this man is picky.

Me: "Randall?"

He looks at me as if I'm crazy.

Me: "I have nothing left."

I whine.

Me: "My honey bear?"

He gives me an inquisitive look, he seems to like this one.

I'm tired... he should take it or leave it.

Randall: "Rid of honey."

Wow...

Picky and demanding.

Me: "You're my bear."

He smiles like a kid.

Randall: "What was hard about that?"

Everything.

Me: "You're not my Randall. Where did you leave him?"

Randall: "I would laugh if it was funny."

He states while stuffing his face.

Who eats lying down anyway?

I rest my head on his chest and place my arm over his torso.

Me: "I'm sorry about what Lelo said."

He goes quiet for a while, he's chewing. I can hear him.

Randall: "I'm not bothered about other people's opinions of me. What matters to me is what you think."

He puts his arms around me.

Me: "Whatever she said is a lie. I know who you are and what we have is real, no one will convince me otherwise."

Randall: "That's a relief, I thought I would come home with your bags packed."

He must be kidding, he knows I would never leave him and Liyana.

Randall: "Why are we talking about other people when we should be making hot steamy love?"

Because you've been intimate with those raisins since you got here. I straddle him, snatch the packet from his hand and throw it on the floor.

Randall: "Hey, I was still eating that?"

He glowers.

Me: "Fix your face and kiss me."

I lean in, he smirks.

His hands find my butt as he leans up. This has become a habit of his, biting my lower lip before he gets me high on his kisses. My own personal drug, I can't get enough.

NOMBULELO\*

The light is out, odd. Mbuso never goes to bed this early and without me.

I find my way to the bedroom, switch on the light. He's sleeping, I don't know if he's really

sleeping or pretending.

"Please turn the light off when you're done, I have an early morning tomorrow."

His eyes are closed, he's upset with me.

Me: "I need to change."

He doesn't respond.

Me: "Mbuso."

Silence.

I sit on the edge of the bed and place my hand on his hip.

Me: "Are you upset with me?"

He's not saying anything.

What wrong did I do?

Me: "Mbuso man."

I whine as I nudge him.

Mbuso: "What?"

He snaps, opens his eyes and sits up.

Me: "We're you not the one who said we shouldn't go to bed mad at each other?"

Mbuso: "Did you not go to bed upset with me the other day?"

Me: "So, you're settling a score?"

Mbuso: "I don't play games with my heart Lelo, you should know that."

He proclaims firmly.

Me: "I'm sorry."

Mbuso: "What did you say to Randall?"

Huh!!!

Me: "Nothing."

He's on his side anyway.

Mbuso: "That's not what he said to me."

Me: "So he ran to you? Typical."

Out of frustration, he sighs.

Mbuso: "Do you know what he said to me?"

How am I supposed to know? I wasn't there.

Mbuso: "Bamba inja yakho Mbuso." (Put a leash on your dog.)

He compresses his jaw.

Mbuso: "Do you know how that made me feel Lelo?"

I shrug and look away.

Mbuso: "I felt like an idiot, a useless man who doesn't know where his woman is in the late hours of the night. I couldn't say anything to him, I was tongue tied because you told me that you were going there to visit your cousin not to insult Randall."

It's not that big of a deal.

Me: "I didn't insult him, I told him the truth."

Mbuso: "And what is the truth?"

Me: "That he doesn't deserve Amara, he's not good enough for her."

Mbuso: "When did you come to this conclusion? Is it when you saw him for the first time or when Amara told you about him or when you saw him again, today?"

I know what he's saying.

Me: "I'm not judging him Mbuso, I'm only..."

He raises his hand, clogging me from speaking further.

Mbuso: "You need to grow up and stay out of Amara's life."

Me: "I'm not going to do that, she's my cousin."

He pinches the edge of his nose, his gaze refusing to snub me.

Mbuso: "Fine."

He grunts, hands clamped together.

Mbuso: "You can't stay away from Amara, right? Stay away from Randall then, don't bother him or his family."

Me: "What is it about him that has you trembling like this Mbuso?"

The glare in his eyes deepens.

I'm guessing I shouldn't have said that.

Mbuso: "Turn off the light once you're done."

He lies back down and covers himself with a bed sheet.

Me: "Mbuso, I'm sorry."



Mbuso: "Cisha isibani." (Turn off the light.)

He demands.

I know he won't speak to me tonight, I might as well give up and try in the morning.

NOBAYENI\*

I walk in the house to find Dladla sitting on the couch. I try to read his appearance, he seems normal.

Good.

Dladla: "Hey, what are you looking for?"

I'm browsing my eyes around the house.

Me: "Is Bridgette home?"

Dladla: "Not yet."

Me: "Dladla."

I throw myself in his arms, we don't usually do this.

We're married so it's not strange. He holds me with one hand.

Dladla: "What happened?"

The tone of his voice confirms that, he's astounded by my sudden affection.

Me: "You know that I love you, right?"

He draws back.

Dladla: "I know, although you hardly ever tell me. What happened Nobayeni?"

Me: "Nothing, I don't want to lose you that's all."

Dladla: "You know what would make me leave you."

I know damn well, he told me this a million times over the years. Dladla can forgive anything but, cheating.

I nod.

Timothy has to go, this affair is not worth my marriage.

Bridgette is toxic, I will have to speak to her. She hates me and would do anything to destroy me.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

132\*

AYIZE\*

Who could it be at this time? Visitors should not be allowed after 8pm.

Me: "Who is it?"

It's 11pm, it's not a normal time for people to be knocking. We could be sleeping for crying out loud.

"Ayize vula." (Open.)

My father's voice booms from the other side of the door. It's quiet late for a visit, his last one didn't end well.

I should've kept my mouth shut.

How am I going to explain Sethu's absence?

I meet my parent's angry faces as I open the door. That's right, they are both here.

Me: "Dad?"

I stand, holding on to the burglar gate as I leer at them.

Dad: "Open the door."

Me: "The door is open dad."

Dad: "I'm not here to play games with you, open this gate now."

He hassles.

Me: "I'm not letting you inside this house dad, until you tell me what you two are doing here at this time."

My mother is standing next to him, she carries a scowl on her face.

Dad: "Where is your sister?"

He's routed by my assertion.

Sethu is one of the reasons why I don't want to let them in. They will interrogate me about her whereabouts, dad will go crazy if he hears that she's not sleeping at home tonight. I can't lie and

say she's at work for the reason that, this woman was here when Sethu was preparing for her date.

Me: "She went out."

Dad: "Call her, tell her that we are here."

Old age does this to you.

Me: "I can't do that."

Mom: "Will you talk to us behind that bar as if we are strangers?"

Me: "I can't open for you guys, it's late and I need to sleep. I don't know why you're here, you didn't call to say that you're coming."

Dad wears his strict principal hat as he glowers at me.

Dad: "Do you hear yourself? Now, we have to announce our visit?"

Me: "Yes dad, that's what normal people do."

Mom: "Just open Ayize, we are here to get you and your sister."

She orders.

I open for them. They will not leave, that's a given fact.

Me: "we're not going anywhere dad."

Mom: "You see?"

This proves that she went and snitched on us.

Dad: "Do you realize that your uncle passed away?"

They settle down on the couch, they have made themselves comfortable

Me: "I am familiar with that?"

Dad: "Is that all you have to say?"

Me: "Yes."

Dad: "Don't be like that Ayize."

Me: "Like what?"

Mom: "Baba, how do you talk to this child while she's standing? It's disrespectful."

She enquires meekly, her reprimanding gaze is on me. My father could be the only person that my mother respects, the rest of the world can go to hell.

For peace's sake, I settle on the arm of the couch next to my father. I don't want to get comfortable, I want these people gone before the clock strikes 12.

Me: "Sethu and I will come home tomorrow dad."

Mom: "That is a lie."

Nailed it right off the park.

Me: "Why would I lie?"

To answer my question...

I despised that man my aunt called a husband, his death means nothing to me.

Mom: "What did you say to me when I was here earlier?"

Me: "Oh well."

I can't fight against these people, my struggles always prove to be futile.

Dad: "The funeral is this Saturday, you two will have to be there."

My father gives demands and expects results.

Mom: "Where is my baby? It's late, she should be home by now."

She says Sethu is her baby. When it comes to Kwena and Lebo, she suddenly becomes a woman.

Me: "I'm going to call her."

I have to have an excuse to catch a breather.

My parents came here late at night to tell me that I have to attend the funeral of a man who raped me. These two have taught me how to be strong, I have no tears to waste.

SETHU\*

"Sethu."

Styles nudges me, I'm jolted out of a deep sleep. I feel exhausted.

Me: "Yes."

Styles: "Your phone is ringing."

He announces.

My phone can take message.

Me: "Let it ring Styles, I'm tired."

I riposte.



Styles: "It's your sister, speak to her. Maybe something is wrong."

He hands me the phone, I follow his actions as he jumps out of bed. He's wearing nothing but boxers, he turns to find me drooling over him and smirks.

Styles: "Your sister is waiting."

At his words, I realize that I still have the phone on my hand.

Styles: "I'm going to get some water. Do you need anything?"

I shake my head, he turns to walk out.

Me: "Hello?"

Ayize: "Stop having sex, your parents are here."

She proclaims in a panic.

Me: "At this time?"

Ayize: "Your mother went to get her husband, he's here to slaughter. He says he's not leaving without us."

My parents are dictators, they lose it if things do not go the way they want. To have come to my residence at this time is insane, hence Ayize is browned-off.

Me: "I'm not coming back Ayize and it's late."

I say narked by the thought of going to my father's house.

A naughty giggle resounds from the receiving end.

Me: "What's funny?"

Ayize: "I'm not coming Ayize."

She imitates my voice.

Ayize: "Yey, wenzani lapho?" (What are you doing there?)

It takes a special person like her to sneer at something like this.

Me: "Shut up."

She laughs at my riposte.

Ayize: "I had to lie you know. I told them that you're not back from your date. I know they will wait for you."

Me: "Please do something to get rid of them, dad will have a fit if he realizes that I'm sleeping out."

If anyone could do it, it's her.

Ayize: "I'll see what I can do. Tomorrow though, we have to go to the house otherwise, they will never stop."

A pained sound coats her voice.

Mom and dad are very discourteous. How are such people given a chance to bare children?

Me: "I know this must be hard for you sis' I wish we can avoid going there."

Ayize: "I have been through worse, this is nothing. It will pass just like everything else."

She expresses half of her heart, I doubt though that it will pass. When a whirlwind passes it leaves excessive damage behind.

Me: "Will you be okay?"

It troubles me that she's facing them all alone.

Ayize: "I've got this, don't worry about me. Don't be in a hurry to come back, live your life."

Me: "Thank you, I love you."

Ayize: "Yoh, haibo."

She whinges.

Me: "What? I said I love you."

There's a time for everything with her, you don't just surprise her with such words. It's funny how she responds to it.

Ayize: "Yeah, yeah. I heard you Juliet. Bye."

I titter at her comeback.

Me: "Bye."

You know that nettling feeling where you want to throw something at someone or break things, that itching feeling. That's the one my parents evoke in you.

Styles walks back in, he brought me a glass of water.

Styles: "Is she okay?"

He sits on the bed after handing me the glass.

Me: "Thank you. My parents are in my apartment."

Styles: "Is everything okay?"

Me: "Lebo's father died today, he was hit by a train."

I convey the not so bad news.

Styles: "Oh."

Me: "My parents want us to go and grieve with the family, apparently everyone is there except Ayize and I."

He looks at me.

Styles: "You should go."

He states looking rather disgruntled.

Why is he advising it though?

Me: "I don't want to put my sister through that."

Styles: "The man is dead, she won't really see him. This is to get your parents off your backs, it sounds like they will not let this go."

Not in a million years.

Me: "They can be very adamant."

I retort feeling miffed about it.

Styles: "I think it's better that you get it over with."

He's right, it's the only way we can get them off our backs.

NKOMO\*

HERE LIES RUTH ADAEZE BELOVED DAUGHTER AND FRIEND.

I can almost see the engraving on her tomb stone.

It finally happened last night and she lies next to me soundly asleep, Randall and Styles have told me about a callous Ruth. I saw a woman who is full of life and passion, I'm yet to see her evil side or she doesn't have one. Nevertheless I have to focus on the game, Styles trusted me with this and I have to deliver.

I'm leaning against the headboard as she turns.

Me: "I thought you would never wake up."

Her eyes fall on me the minute she opens them, she smiles.

Ruth: "What time is it?"

She queries with a scratchy throat.

Me: "Something past 8am, it's still early."

She sits up and leans back.



Ruth: "Why are you awake so early?"

Me: "Are we not going back home today?"

Ruth: "Argh, don't remind me."

She says sounding riled, there must be a reason why the thought of going back home miffs her.

Me: "Life is not a holiday sweetheart."

Ruth: "I wish it was, trust me, I am drained Sbo."

She throws her hands on her sides and slouches.

Me: "Care to share?"

She flings her eyes at me.

Ruth: "Let's just say, my life is not going the way I want it to. I'm the only daughter of my father, my mother left when I was a little girl. She got tired of us, fell in love with a young wealthy man and they set off together into the sunset. We haven't heard from her since. My father grew bitter after that, he changed with time. He was not so gentle and kind anymore, he went from a farmer to a suit wearing tyrant. We were very poor, sometimes we would fill our stomachs with sugar water and retire for the night. I always thought that's the reason my mother left us, she hated being poor. The only thing my father could afford to put on the table were crops from his farm, which were meant to be sold at the market the following day. My mother's departure must have forced him to pick up his socks. My life changed overnight, I suddenly had everything I wanted at the snap of a finger. We grew apart my father and I, he seemed to love whatever he was doing more. He replaced his presence in my life with gifts and money, I was given a nanny to raise me. One day he comes to me and says I have been married off to some man who is set to be King. I almost died that day, that's when he told me how he attained so much wealth and that in order for mom to come back we have to do this. I needed my mother back in my life, nothing else mattered at that time."

Me: "You agreed?"

She nods.

Ruth: "You can imagine how I felt when my mother left, I blamed him for it. I still do, I hate that man Sbo. Sometimes I lie awake at night thinking of ways to kill him."

I know how it feels to lose a mother.

Ruth: "He looks like my father but, I'm not familiar with the man in there. He's filled with hate, greed and hunger for power. That's all he lives for now and he can be very manipulative."

She speaks with so much resentment for him.

Me: "What is it that he does?"

I ask a question I know the answer to.

She glances at me, frowns as she bites the seam of her lower lip.

Ruth: "I would have to kill you if I tell you."

She exposes impassively.

Ruth: "I'm playing with you, I can't tell you though. It's not something I am proud of."

What do I do with this information?

Me: "You say your father is a greedy man and manipulative. What if he lied about your mother coming back? What if there's another reason why he wants you to be with this man?"

She mulls upon my words.

Ruth: "I doubt it, he was convincing. He showed me letters that she wrote to us."

Me: "So you think your mother will come back only if you marry a king?"

Ruth: "That's the ultimatum she gave us."

It strikes me that Ruth can be this stupid, it doesn't make sense. Even a toddler can sense that this is all a lie.

Me: "Do you want him?"

She shrugs.

Ruth: "I've met him once, I feel nothing for him and he is definitely not my type. Apparently he has someone in his life and wants nothing to do with me, I don't blame him. The man doesn't know me, if there was any other way I would go for it. His father though, wants this more than anything else, if I didn't know better I would think he and my father were separated at birth."

Me: "There could be a way out, find out the truth. I doubt that your mother gave him this proposition, it doesn't add up. You might find out that he's lying to you."

She throws her head back and sighs in frustration.

Ruth: "My father is capable of anything."

It's getting to her.

Me: "Find out the truth before you commit yourself to something terrible, you could wake up to find that he lied about everything."

She stretches her body before turning to me.

Ruth: "Let's stop talking about my father and enjoy our last day here."

She straddles me with these words, leans over and kisses me. I don't know why I'm advising her, her days in this world are numbered.

KHETHU\*

When I got home last night, that witch Nobayeni was sleeping in my father's arms. She probably convinced my father to go to bed early, I will expose her even if it's the last thing I do.

She's bustling in the kitchen as if she has ever cooked for him, my father has done all the cooking in their years of marriage. She claimed that she was a busy woman, her hands were made to seal deals and sign contracts. Today she has suddenly turned into a house wife, I hope my father sees through her scheming ways.

Can she even cook?

Forget cooking. Who cooks in formal clothing? This woman needs a serious make over, she needs to do away with those crease line trousers. And those pointed 1 inch heels are the ugliest thing I have ever seen.

My father and I are seated at the breakfast table waiting for madam to finish, the number of stares she has given me should've killed me by now. She will not leave us alone, she knows I will spill the second she's out of sight. I can tell as I watch her that, she has a comeback ready for me.

Me: "Daddy."

Let's see how fast Mrs. Dladla can jump.

Dad: "My angel."

Me: "There's this friend of mine, her mom is cheating on her father."

Yeah, she's a kangaroo alright. She just dropped a plate of food, she stands goggle-eyed.

Dad: "Are you okay?"

Why is he jumping to help her?

He's squatting before her, picking up the broken pieces while she shoots darts at me.

I wink causing her to frown in disgust.

Me: "Leave it dad, I'm sure Nobayeni can handle it. If she can't handle the fire, she should stay out of the kitchen."

Dad: "She might cut herself, Khethu."

Me: "She's a grown woman, she should be able to clean out her mess."

Dad: "What's wrong with you?"

He's leering at me.

Me: "Nothing, I'm just voicing out my opinions."

Dad: "It's not necessary."



Nobayeni: "I agree, Bridgette. What happens between your parents has got nothing to do with you."

She retorts.

Dad: "Your mother is right."

He adds as he sweeps the floor.

As to why he's slaving for her today, puzzles me.

Me: "You're my father, I would hate it if people took advantage of you."

His brow cambers as he takes up an addled expression.

Dad: "Are you trying to tell me something?"

He takes his seat beside me.

Nobayeni's stern gaze hasn't left me.

Me: "Just that, you should be careful, we walk around with wolfs in sheep's clothing."

Nobayeni: "Dladla, your food is ready."

She strides to him with a plate of warm breakfast and a cup of coffee.

Me: "Where's mine?"

I ask as she takes a sit with her food.

Nobayeni: "You have hands, you can make your own."

I'd be damned.

Dad: "You didn't make enough?"

He questions her.

Nobayeni: "No honey."

Honey?

When did he upgrade from Dladla to honey?

Dad: "You can share mine."

Nobayeni: "No, she can have mine. I will share with you."

She slides her plate across the table to me.

Dad looks at me and gestures that I should eat, Nobayeni is shameless. She's eating from my father's plate, stupid woman. I will expose her, I can't see my father hurt. This news will definitely hurt him, he's been a good husband to this witch.

AMARA\*

Randall is snoring this day away, I thought I was the deep sleeper. I bathed, made porridge for Liyana, helped Chioma with the washing and he is still sleeping. I hope he's not sick, let me wake him up.

Me: "Randall."

I shove him, he doesn't move.

Me: "Randall."

Second try, it takes a minute for him to open one eye.

Randall: "Mmmhhh."

He groans, a frown instantly heaps on his face.

Me: "You're drooling."

He sends his hand to his mouth and swipes over it, he looks really tired. This little act has me snickering in amusement.

Randall: "Amara, if you don't want to sleep. Let me be please. Where are you going so early?"

He carps, closing the only eye that was strong enough to open.

Me: "It's 10am Randall, you usually wake up earlier than this."

Randall: "It can't be 10, there's something wrong with your clock."

He turns to face the other way.

Me: "Hey, life will go on while you're sleeping yours away."

Randall: "Let it go on."

He's not bothered.

Me: "Randall."

Randall: "What? Let me sleep."

He's serious.

Me: "No you have to wake up, remember you have that meeting."

Randall: "Styles will take care of it."

He growls, pulling the blanket up to his face. This is like seeking attention from your best friend and all they want to do is nap, it's frustrating.

Me: "Fine, you sleep and I'll move on with my life. Maybe I'll find someone else, get married and..."

He jerks up a scowl already visible on his face.

Randall: "Hey, take that back."

He rubs his eyes with that.

Me: "What's wrong with you? Are you catching something?"

His temperature is normal.

Randall: "I'm tired that's all."

He smashes his head back against the headboard.

Me: "You should eat something, maybe you'll feel better after. I'll get you some porridge."

He takes my hand as I attempt to get up, I fall back on the bed.

Randall: "Don't bring that thing to me."

He whines.

Me: "It's food."

Randall: "Yeah, let Liya deal with it and leave me out of it."

I laugh.

Me: "What do you want to eat then?"

He puts his arms around me and pulls me to him.

Randall: "You."

His eyes scan my lips as he leans in, I place my hand on his mouth. He raises his brows and motions a question.

Me: "You were drooling just now, I'm not kissing those lips."

I try to break out of his embrace, he won't let go.

Randall: "I don't drool."

Me: "How do you know?"

Randall: "I just know, I can't say the same about you though."

Me: "Hey, stop lying."

He sniggers.

Randall: "Have you seen your pillow?"

Me: "That's not drool, it's grease from my hair."

I protest.

Randall: "I don't believe you, you will have to do something to convince me."

Me: "What?"

Randall: "Fe m`ano." (Kiss me.)

He says softly, I have heard this before...

Me: "No."

He's leaning in, his hands are roaming under my t-shirt, there's no escaping this embrace.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

133\*

### STYLES\*

I love how Sethu fits into my world.

Who would've thought that I would love her like this? Just a few months back my life didn't make sense, everything was falling apart.

She makes life worth living.

I'm receiving a video call from Nkomo, this man is still on holiday. He should be home by now.

It's a good thing Sethu is in the bathroom, we can talk freely.

Me: "That doesn't look like your house. How is it that you're still there?"

Nkomo is dragging this.

Nkomo: "We're going home today."

He seems different.

Me: "We? You banged her didn't you?"

He smirks as he shakes his head.

Nkomo: "You said do anything."

Me: "Anything but, fall for her. Nkomo no one can save Ruth from this not even you, if you fall for her, I would have to put a bullet through her head right in front of you."

He frowns.

Nkomo: "Why do you have to be violent?"

His query raises questions in my head.

Me: "Explain?"

I'm not going to play games with him, not when Ruth is involved.

He recites a story told by Ruth. I'm not really thrown.

Me: "That means nothing Nkomo, she's in cahoots with Segun."

Nkomo: "I thought you should know."





He utters and I can't shake the feeling that he somewhat feels sorry for her.

Me: "Yeah well, life is shitty and there's nothing we can do about it. Her destiny has been decided, there's no turning back now. The mission has to be successful."

He appears to be offish.

Nkomo: "Yeah sure."

Me: "Dammit Nkomo, don't piece me off."

I snap.

Nkomo: "What?"

Me: "Fix your face and get your head back in the game, I told you that I want gold and I expect gold. Don't you dare show your face here if the mission is not complete."

He sneers.

Nkomo: "Relax. Why do you have to be sensitive? I've got this and no, I'm not catching feelings."

That's what I'd like to hear.

Nkomo: "There's nothing wrong with being human."

what kind of nonsense is this?

Me: "Switch your humanity off if you have to, I'm not about to gain another Mkhize enemy."

Nkomo: "I said I've got this Styles, relax."

He's suddenly frustrated.

Me: "I'll relax once you're done with this mission."

Nkomo: "You'll get your gold."

Love it.

Me: "Neo was trying to get a hold of you, call him."

Nkomo: "Has he found anything?"

Me: "I'm not sure."

Sethu walks in from the bathroom wrapped in a towel, she smiles as she sees me watching her.

Nkomo: "What happened?"

My attention has diverted to that amazing woman across the room.

Me: "Nothing, we'll talk later. I want results cow, don't disappoint me."

He grunts.

My eyes are stuck on Sethu, she's moisturising her body and it's a sight for sore eyes. It's amazing how a woman can capture the heart of a man and have him mesmerized.

Nkomo: "I'm not a cow."

He protests.

Me: "I'll slaughter you like one if you mess this up."

I whisper to him.

Nkomo: "Go to hell."

He chortles before he hangs up.

Sethu: "Who are we slaughtering?"

She heard that?

Me: "What time are you going to your father's house?"

I amble to her.

Sethu: "I'm not sure, I have a lot of missed calls from my mother."

She sounds frustrated.

Me: "She's desperate for you two to be there."

Sethu: "Tell me about it."

Me: "If it were up to me, you would spend another night with me."

She giggles as I wrap my arms around her waist.

Sethu: "I can come tomorrow."

I lean over to press my cheek against hers, her arms are wrapped around me.

Me: "Or you can move in."

She pulls away from the hug.

Sethu: "Vat n sit? I don't think so." (Cohabiting.)

Me: "Fair enough, it's not a bad idea though."

Sethu: "For you it's not."

She retorts.

Me: "Everyone is doing it."

Sethu: "I'm not everyone babe."

This is going to be tough, I haven't thought of marriage. It's always been the last thing on my

mind, it goes against everything I believe in. For this woman, something's got to give.

Me: "I know and I will not pressure you into something you don't want to do."

She smiles.

Sethu: "Thank you babe."

Me: "Call me babe again, my heart just danced there."

She giggles, I have her back into my arms.

AYIZE\*

I'm in the queue at clicks, waiting to pay for my groceries as I see Neo potter in. I hide my face hoping he didn't see me.

"Must we always meet like this?"

Oh great! He did.

Me: "Not really, if you would stop stalking me."

He throws his head back and laughs.

Neo: "You're holding on to that?"

Me: "The truth? Yes, I am."

I move with the queue.

Neo: "I happen to think fate keeps bringing us together."

He's following me.

Me: "Fate? I didn't strike you as the type that watches boma daily telenovela. Let me guess, wena no gogo wakho, glued to the couch from 6:30 indulging on soapy TV shows?" (You and your granny.)

He titters.

Neo: "Oa bua neh?" (You can talk hey.)

Me: "I'm trying to get rid of you."

"Next please."

The cashier calls, he takes my basket and marches before me.

Didn't he come in here for his own shopping?

Me: "Hey, wenzani?" (What are you doing?)

I hurry after him, I try to grab the basket and he immediately places it on the counter.

Me: "Did you have to do that?"

Neo: "Ousie was calling you, hau. Must she scream next' the whole day. Le uena o ne o tla khathala." (This lady.) (You would also get tired of it.)

Me: "I heard her, I was about to move when you snatched my basket."

Idiot.

Neo: "O leshano, you were busy looking into my eyes. Ha oa utloa letho, ha ke re ousie?" (You're lying. You didn't hear anything. Am I right lady?)

The cashier nods with a smile, I think she also wants to laugh at his stupidity.

Me: "Ungazihlazi bhuti, people will laugh at you. Why would I be staring into those tiny eyes? Can you even see anything through that? You need glasses, you're definitely seeing things." (Don't embarrass yourself brother.)

Neo: "Hey, se ke oa rohaka mahlo a ka. You're just upset because I caught you eyeing me." (Don't insult my eyes.)

Wow.

I cackle at his saying

Me: "Maybe it's time I go back to P.E. Abafana base goli hai ngiyabavuma shame." (Men from Joburg defeat me.)

"Cash or card sir?"

She asks, staring at him.

The smile on her face though.

Me: "Sir yani sisi? These are my items and it's cash." (Why are you asking him?)

She raises her eye brows.

"Okay."

She responds rudely.

Me: "Let me guess, she's also interested in what I have to say?"

I ask him remembering his words the last time we spoke.

Neo: "No, ua mo koatisa." (You're annoying her.)

His response.

The lady glares at me.

Me: "What was wrong with my question? I told her the truth moes."

Neo: "It's not what you said, it's how you said it."

I don't care.

"Are you paying or not sisi." (lady)

I fiddle for my wallet in my bag.

Oh shit!

I look up at her, she feigns a smile.

Me: "I forgot my wallet in the car."

She tilts her head to the side and sighs.

Me: "Ngcicela ulinde kancane, I'll be back now." (Please wait a bit.)

"Authorization!!!"

She shouts to whoever.

Neo: "It's fine, I'll get it ousie." (Sister)

He tells the cashier.

Me: "No, my wallet is in the car. I won't take long."

I persist.

"Sisi, can you see the cue? Siyasebenza lana." (We're working here.)

Neo: "Seriously Zee, think about it. What you're saying doesn't make sense."

He proclaims as he hands the lady money.

Me: "It's Ayize to you bhuti and I will pay you back ama cent wakho." (Brother.) (Your money.)

He laughs.

Neo: "Ayize might seem short but, it feels long when you say it so, Zee will do."

This man is arrogant.

Me: "Whatever."

He grabs my grocery bags as the cashier places it on the counter.

Me: "What is it with you and grabbing my things?"

I'm following behind as we walk out of the store.

Neo: "I was raised by a woman who taught me that a woman should be treated like a queen, it doesn't matter if she talks too much."

I'm being mocked.

His answer though, is sweet.

Me: "My car is parked that way."

Neo: "We're going to get something to eat."

I'm done.

I can't turn back, he's got my groceries and he's walking fast.

Me: "I'm not hungry and even if I was, I wouldn't want to eat with you."

Neo: "Well, I'm hungry and my mother taught me that women should be fed even if they are not hungry."

Me: "Gosh!! Wena no mama wakho." (You and your mother.)

Neo: "I know, you should meet her."

He's smiling.

Why would I want to meet his mother?

Me: "Neo uyabhora, yazi?" (You're boring, you know?)

He's leading us to an eatery.

This is not me, I don't follow men around.

Lord tell me, I'm not sitting at a diner with him and ordering food.

Neo: "Just so you know, I'm not sharing my food with you."

He speaks randomly.

Me: "I didn't say that I want your food."

Neo: "Whatever that thing you ordered will not fill you up."

He means a salad, it's lighter and it will save me the trouble of having to run to the toilet to throw up. Binging has become a habit, I can't stop it even if I want to. Sethu thinks I eat less, what she doesn't know is that I over eat and vomit.

Me: "It's fine with me."

With a scowl on his face, he scans my body. I don't know if I'm seeing things or there's a glint of concern in his eyes.

I hope he will not comment on my weight that will set me off.

Neo: "Zee, I better not see your hand flying to my plate. I will bite it, you'll see."

He's actually funny, I can't stop laughing. He's chuckling as I try to block this laugh box.

Neo: "I'm serious, that's how hungry I am."



Me: "Uyahlanya." (You're crazy.)

The food arrives, now I have to force myself to eat. A few bites wouldn't give me away. He receives a call, maybe I can use this as a chance to flee.

Neo: "Excuse me."

He answers the call.

Neo: "Khomo, u reng twana." (How are you, cow?)

He listens.

Neo: "I hear that you're hanging out with witches now, your type."

He laughs.

Neo: "I'm still on it, you'd swear that your mother dropped from the sky. I think it's time we approach the big dogs. Your father might know something about her family."

I think I should go.

He notices my restlessness.

Neo: "I have to go Khomo, you're coming back today, right?" (Cow.)

He's staring at me with a frown on his face.

Neo: "Sho, sho ntwana." (Bye boy.)

He cuts off the call.

Me: "You're staring."

He must be seeing something.

Neo: "There's a place I'd like to show you. Come with me."

No way.

Me: "I don't know you that well."

I protest.

Neo: "Of course you know me, I'm Stylos' friend."

Me: "That's all, you could be some psycho for all I know."

Neo: "Look at this face, does it look like a face of a psycho to you."

Not really.

Me: "Yes."

My answer causes him to smile.

Neo: "Come on, you trust Stylos, am I right?"

Me: "Yeah."

Neo: "Then you should know if anything happens to you, he will kill me."

I hear his declaration.

Me: "Fine."

I hunch, push my chair back as I prepare to stand.

Neo: "Wait, I'm not leaving this food nahana. A re jeng pele." (Imagine. Let's eat first.)

Great!

Now I must force this down my throat.

AMARA\*

"Mara, papa said to come get you."

Liyana springs into the bedroom, it's amazing how kids her age are always eager to please. They always want to lend a helping hand, sometimes I sit and wonder if she will be the same as teenager.

Me: "What is it?"

Liyana: "There are people here for you."

It must be uncle Mhambi.

Me: "Let's go baby."

She takes my hand and begins to lead me out.

Me: "Why are we happy today?"

It's good to see her high-spirited.

Liyana: "I'm going to visit uncle Styles tomorrow, papa said I can."

Me: "Okay, are you going with Chioma?"

Liyana: "No, Chioma can't come."

Me: "Why not?"

Liyana: "I don't want her to come, it's my time with uncle."

She's territorial.





"Me hemma, come." (My queen.)

He's seated with my family in the lounge. This man though.

Is this allowed?

Jonas: "Amara?"

He's here, with aunt Petunia who engulfs me into a hug.

Liyana has long flittered to Randall.

Petunia: "Oh, ma ibongwe iNkosi." (Praise the Lord.)

She looks at me.

Petunia: "Unjani sisi?" (How are you?)

Me: "Ngiyaphila mama." (I'm fine.)

Jonas: "Amara, is it really you standing before me?"

He's in tears.

Me: "Yebo malume." (Yes, uncle.)

He gives me a quick hug.

Jonas: "How are you my child? Are you well?"

Me: "I'm fine malume." (Uncle.)

I'm flabbergasted, words fail me.

Me: "Malume, Mhambi." (Uncle, Mhambi.)

He hugs me.

Mhambi: "Ndodakazi." (My daughter.)

I look at Randall who is carrying Liyana on his lap and gesture a thank you.

There's enough space next to uncle Mhambi, I settle there. I am still overwhelmed by his presence, it's like having my father close to me. I didn't see much of him growing up, Lelo's father restricted our visits.

I don't know if I should introduce those two there. What will I say?

Mhambi: "Jonas, this is the man I told you about."

They should've done the introduction when Liyana came to get me.

Jonas: "Mmhh, I see."

That tone...

Petunia: "Hayi, siyabonga ndodana." (Thank you son.)

How should he respond to this?

Randall: "Akudingeki ungibonge ma" (You don't have to thank me.)

Mhambi: "You saved our child, although I wish things were done differently."

Jonas: "Things should've been done differently. I totally disagree with your approach."

Me: "There was no other way malume." (Uncle.)

Jonas: "There's always a way my child."

This is the take no nonsense uncle, I don't want him to give Randall a hard time about this.

Mhambi: "Jonas, we are not here for that. We came to see our Amara."

Petunia: "Yes, I am a happy woman today."

She cups my cheek with a smile embracing her face.

Me: "I'm happy too, mama."

Jonas: "The family has to be informed back home. They have to know that our daughter has been found."

Mhambi: "I agree, the problem is that we will have to do a ceremony for her."

He utters softly. They exchange glances and it tells me that something is up with them.

Randall: "Princess, you can go play."

Liyana: "But I want to sit with Mara."

She sulks.

Me: "I'll join you later Liya, we have guests."

Liyana: "Are they here to take you away?"

Her voice is glazed with worry.

Me: "No, I'm not going anywhere."

I don't know where she got that from.

Liyana: "Promise?"

Randall: "Your Mara won't leave you, I promise."

This is rather awkward with my uncles here.

Me: "It's a promise."

Liyana: "Okay."

She drags the word out before trudging away.

Petunia: "She is a sweetheart. Is she yours?"

She smiles at Randall.

Randall: "Yes, thank you."

I have a feeling that uncle Mhambi told them about Randall and I.

Jonas: "So, my daughter has become a mother over night? You're only a child Amara."

I refuse to think that this was a bad idea.

Me: "I'm a responsible woman, if this is the life God has chosen for me then, who am I to argue. I love her and I wouldn't trade her for anything."

Mhambi: "We know ndodakazi, your uncle is only having a hard time accepting this. He will understand in due time." (Daughter.)

I hope so, I would hate to fight with them.

Randall: "Sir, I assure you that your daughter is in good hands."

Jonas: "Why are we talking to you? Shouldn't your elders be here as well?"

What is he on about? It's not lobola negotiations. (Bride price.)

Jonas: "As per tradition we are not supposed to be speaking to you at all but, your elders. It would be different if you were not involved with our daughter."

He adds.

My uncle wants to ruin things for me.

Randall: "I don't think it's necessary that my elders should get involved in this sir."

Again, there's Randall who won't bend.

Jonas: "You have no say in this, I think we should take Amara with us until you set a proper meeting."

I'm certain that, this was a bad idea, I should've asked uncle Mhambi not to reveal anything to them. That man sitting across me is angry, he sits with his jawbone clamped.

Randall: "That's not a good idea sir."

He states coldly, not even caring that he's talking to my uncle.

Jonas: "It's not your decision to make, I will take her with me to Mpumalanga. She will be safe there no one will find her."

Randall is on his feet by the time my uncle finishes his statement.

Randall: "That's not going to happen."



He grunts slowly, Randall can't curb his temper. He acts when he feels threatened.

Uncle Jonas didn't come here for peace.

Me: "Uncle don't do this please."

Mhambi: "I think we should all calm down."

Jonas: "Mhambi, this boy is..."

Mhambi: "Jonas don't make me regret bringing you here, I am not going to lose my daughter again."

If they make me choose, I am choosing Randall and Liyana. I won't even think twice about it.

Me: "Randall."

He's glaring at my uncle like a bull that's ready to attack.

Me: "Randall."

He shifts his angry eyes to me.

Me: "Please."

I plead.

He pinches the tip of his earlobe, sighs and leisurely sits back down.

Jonas: "Fine Mhambi but, you know that we have to get her to Pongola. The ancestors have to be informed that she's home, Vusamazulu will only be at peace then. How will that work out?"

Petunia: "The ceremony doesn't have to be done there, we can perform it here."

Jonas: "That's not appropriate, we are not familiar with these premises. We don't know these people."

Randall huffs, my uncle is only adding up to his frustrations.

Mhambi: "You will not be difficult about this Jonas, we will find a way. Can't my child be at peace for once? Don't do this, ngiyakucela mfowethu. Amara told me that she doesn't want to leave, it won't be fair if we take her away from the home she has built for herself." (I'm begging you my brother.)

He replies back.

Uncle Jonas is shaking his head, he is not going to let go of this. I glance at Randall, he's holding on to his anger. I know that he regrets calling them here.

NKOMO\*



We're in the car back home, Ruth hasn't said much since we left. She's not keen about going back.

Me: "Maybe I should've taken a flight back home and let you drive alone?"

She's turns her head to look at me.

Ruth: "Why?"

Me: "Well, I would have had better company sitting next to a stranger. Where are you lost?"

Ruth: "I'm sorry, I have so much on my mind."

Me: "Like?"

Ruth: "Going home means that I have to carry on with this task, I'm tired Sbo."

She sighs.

Me: "Speak to your father and tell him how you feel, he might surprise you and understand."

Ruth: "Not Bensen Adaeze that man has a heart of stone."

Me: "Search for your mother, only she can tell you the truth."

This has suddenly become difficult.

Ruth: "He knows where she is and refuses to tell me, searching won't be of help. He says I can only meet her once I'm with that man."

He's a bastard.

Me: "I know something that can make you feel better."

This is the moment.

Ruth: "What?"

Me: "Open thee glove compartment"

She smiles curiously.

Ruth: "Okay."

She opens it to reveal a black velvet jewellery box, she takes it.

Ruth: "What's this?"

Me: "Open it."

Her jaw drops as she pops it open.

Ruth: "Wow, this is beautiful."

Me: "Not more than you, ndlovukazi." (Queen.)



Ruth: "Are they for me?"

She enquires.

Me: "Yes."

Ruth: "You're sneaky. When did you do this?"

Me: "A man can never reveal his secrets."

If only she knew.

I grab her wrist as she reaches to touch the earrings.

Me: "Try them on when you get home."

This will be like putting a bullet through her head myself.

Ruth: "I can't accept this Sbo, it's too much."

I knew she would say this.

Me: "Hey, you can't say no to a gift. I won't take it back."

I briefly glance at her to find her smiling at them, she loves them.

Ruth: "Thank you, I guess."

Shit!!!

Ruth: "What does this mean for us?"

I have no answer for that.

Me: "Let's go with the wind and see where it takes us."

She will never hear from me again.

Ruth: "That sounds good."

There's hope in her voice.

Look what you've made me do Styles.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

134\*

AYIZE\*

We arrive at a woman's health shelter, I am puzzled by this visit. Why would he bring me to this place?

Neo: "Come with me, Zee."

I should have brought my car, I have a feeling that I am not going to like this.

Me: "Why did you bring me here?"

Neo: "I want you to meet some people."

Me: "Do I look like a people's person to you?"

I am in no mood.

Neo: "Please Zee, follow me."

He climbs out of the car.

Is it weird that I wish to read his mind?

Me: "What's this place?"

I catch up with him, he's forever leaving me behind. The board outside reads ASANDA WOMEN'S SHELTER.

Neo: "This is Stylos' baby, he opened it in memory of his late sister, Asanda."

He replies.

Neo: "It's open for anyone who needs help, rape victims..."

My heart skips. Could he know that I was assaulted?

Neo: "Victims of abuse, drug addicts and people suffering with eating disorder."

Neo seems to know so much about me.

Me: "Why am I here?"

Neo: "Would you relax?"

Me: "Kanjani? When I don't know my reason for being here." (How?)

“Neo.”

A woman approaches us with a smile.

Neo: “Lerato, hi.”

Lerato: “We don’t see much of you here anymore.”

Neo: “I’ve been busy, this is my friend, Zee.”

He introduces.

Lerato: “Hi.”

She greets with a smile, I wave back.

Neo: “We’ll be okay Lerato thank you.”

He dismisses her before he takes me to one of the rooms, there is a group of women seated in a circle. Something catches my attention, the ladies are thin. Some of them are thinner than others.

Me: “What is this?”

I don’t appreciate this.

Neo: “These women here have eating disorder.”

I have figured that one out.

Me: “I want to know why you have brought me here.”

I feel a need to be defensive.

Neo: “Do you see that girl there?”

He points at a thin girl standing in the middle of the group. She’s not just thin, she’s scary thin. Her clothes are loose on her as if hung on a hanger, the bump of each rib is visible underneath her neatly ironed t-shirt. I clench my teeth at her withered figure. Her face is sunken in, the outline of her skull is detectable under her skin. Her legs are thin as twigs, the space between her thighs is so wide they can’t possibly knock together when she walks.

I suddenly feel uneasy, my heart breaks for these ladies. Is that where I am headed?

Neo: “Do you know what anorexia is?”

I’ve heard of it.

Me: “Eating disorder?”

If I’m not mistaken.

Neo: “Yes. People with anorexia eat so little that they become riskily thin. They think they are overweight even when they are underweight or skinny. It’s a serious health problem and it can increase the risk of early death.”



He explains.

I was clueless.

Neo: "Let's get closer so you can hear their stories."

I doubt I'm ready for this.

I move with him anyway, I can't seem to get my eyes off of this girl. She could be about 18 years old but, her thinness makes her look more like a child. As we get closer I notice that her scrawny face is wet, she's crying.

"I had a relapse last night, I thought I was doing okay. Till I heard a voice telling me that I shouldn't eat and that if I eat I will gain weight."

She stifles a laugh between her snuffles.

"Funny thing is that it was my sister's voice, the same words she used to tell me when I was twelve. Your arms are flabby, you're getting chubby. Slow down pig, you are what you eat. She didn't know that she was changing me into someone I will never escape from. She went on and got married and lives her life in peace while I'm left to fight a losing battle."

"Katlego, you do know that voice is not real?"

An elderly coloured woman speaks, she's the one in charge.

Katlego pulls a face.

Katlego: "It sounds real to me, I haven't had anything to eat for the past 10 hours and I don't feel hungry at all. This emptiness in my stomach is the only thing that comforts me, it's like a drug that gets me going. I feel good when my stomach feels empty."

"We will tackle that, you would have to stay in the rehab centre so, we can keep a close eye on you. We're fighting this battle together."

The elderly woman replies.

I find comfort in her words.

"Jabulile, it's your turn. Would you like to speak?"

If I had a mother with such a warm voice, I would hide in her arms and not seek solace in men. I feel a hand on my shoulder as I wipe a tear that leaped out of my eye. Neo is gazing down at me.

Neo: "Are you okay?"

I give him a nod.

Jabulile is thin too, her brown skin is pale. She has dark circles under her eyes that have sunken in and her hair seems to be falling off. Her pose shows her lack of confidence as she stands with her arms across her chest, her skeletal body refusing to stand still.

She scans everybody, looking at them like they are judging her.

Jabulile: "I have been here for a week."

She begins after clearing her throat.

Jabulile: "I hated my mother for bringing me here. I have been hospitalized three times and all those times I came to the brink of death. I saw nothing wrong with my body, even when my family told me that I had lost so much weight. That's not what I saw when I looked in the mirror, I saw a plump girl who was gang raped by her boyfriend and his friends."

She pauses for a while, trying to catch a breather.

Jabulile: "I used to be a happy plus size teenager, I loved how I looked. Till I met Lindani, he used to praise me you know."

A forced smile appears on her frail face.

Jabulile: "He was my confidence booster, until his friends started making remarks about my body, they would ask him in my presence, how a girl like me was in bed. Some would say they wanted a taste of me and he laughed with them, instead of defending me. I thought maybe that's what boys do, it made me feel dirty though and exposed but, I was a teen and in love. I covered his flaws with my heart. I didn't know that I was nursing a monster, he called me to his house this one time with the pretext that, he's throwing a party in his parents' absence. I got there to find him and his friends, they didn't hide their perverted stares the minute I walked in the living room."

This is hitting home.

Jabulile: "He told his friends that I was a freak in bed and made a bet with them, he gave them permission to my body as if it were his. He said that if they thought the same then, he would lose the bet. I was surrounded, there was no way out for me. He was the first to assault me. He said he was paving a way for them because I belonged to him."

I can't grasp how she must have felt, her tears only paint half of her pain. I guess the rest is written on her emaciated body.

Jabulile: "They took turns while he sat and watched, I screamed till I couldn't. I fought till I had no strength to fight, they went on all night like animals. I recall collapsing and waking up with one of them on top of me. I woke up in the hospital, I guess it was the following day. I had locked myself into my world, a place where I wanted to feel safe. Lindani and his friends denied everything, police dockets went missing along with the evidence. They walked the streets freely, they would mock me whenever they saw me. Everything around me collapsed, I couldn't look at myself in the mirror without feeling disgusted by the person staring back. It was my fault, my body attracted them and I had to do something about it. I couldn't let the same thing happen again, that's when I started starving myself."

Me: "I can't do this."

I scurry out of the building in tears, I am not prepared for this.

"Ayize wait."

Neo calls after me, I should be upset with him for this ensnarement.

Me: "Take me back home."

I say without turning back to look at him.

Neo: "It helps to talk about it you know?"

Me: "I can't."

I answer softly, I don't want to cry.

Why am I crying?

Neo: "Zee listen to me."

Me: "Neo just take me home, take me home now."

I scream cry.

This will never go away, I don't see it going away. How is Jabulile able to live after what she went through?

I feel a pair of large arms surround me from behind.

Neo: "I'm sorry."

He utters.

Stop crying Ayize, you're a big girl. Big girls don't cry.

Dammit, these tears.

I have never had anyone else comfort me like this.

Why do I find comfort in other people and not my parents? God knows how much I need them to believe me. Maybe I need them to accept that I was sexually assaulted, maybe then I will finally accept that I need help.

Neo: "It's okay, I've got you."

Ayize: "You shouldn't have brought me here Neo. Why did you bring me here?"

I'm on my knees crying in the arms of this stranger, I feel so embarrassed and ashamed. He doesn't know my story but, I feel exposed through Jabulile's story.

Neo: "I'm sorry."

He doesn't know what else to say, I wouldn't know what to say. There's a woman crying in public and you don't know the reason behind her tears.

I fight to move away from his arms.

Me: "Let me go."

I utter softly ready to be the strong woman I had forced myself to be.

Neo gradually loose his arms from me, helps me up and I dash back to the car without catching a glimpse of him.

This will teach me never to follow strangers.

STYLES\*

For a moment there, I thought Nkomo would disappoint. He actually pulled it off, although it was too early for Ruth to accept the gift. The man knows his stuff.

I have never seen him so gloomy. He looks like shit and it's confirmed that Nkomo feels something for Ruth.

We're at Randall's house, Chioma said he's sleeping. She went to get him.

Nkomo: "Don't you think it's weird that Randall is sleeping at this time of the day?"

We're in the lounge and Randall is taking time.

Me: "What I think is weird is that you're falling for Ruth."

I rejoinder, he makes a sour face.

Nkomo: "I told you that I feel nothing but pity for her."

He fights back with an intimidating tone.

Me: "That pity will brew into something, you need to watch out Nkomo."

I chide him. He needs to know what he's getting into, I doubt that Bensen will let his daughter be with anyone else but Randall.

Nkomo: "You're an idiot, you know that?"

Me: "An idiot that looks out for his friends, Ruth will die soon."

He needs to be reminded of the girl's none existent future.

Nkomo: "Would you get off my case? I feel bad enough already, I don't want to think about her."

I didn't see this one coming, Nkomo is falling.

Me: "What about that other girl?"

He rubs his chin.

Nkomo: "She's with someone."

Me: "That has never stopped you before."



Nkomo: "I've suddenly lost the will to go after her."

Me: "Darn it, I don't like this side of you. What did Ruth do to you?"

"Ruth Adaeze?"

We both twist to the sound of Kenneth's voice, I asked him to meet me here.

Kenneth: "What do you have to do with her?"

Me: "She's Nkomo's love interest."

His face cracks into a grin as he plods to bring himself to a seat.

Kenneth: "You're brave boy."

Me: "Maybe you can knock some sense into him, tell him how vile that woman is."

Kenneth: "I don't know much about her, her father though is one ruthless bastard."

Nkomo: "Is that supposed to make me feel something?"

Me: "Hey Nkomo, forget about Ruth."

I give him a warning.

Nkomo: "What is this Styles? Should I read between the lines? Are you trying to get rid of me?"

Kenneth sniggers.

Me: "I'd be damned, Ruth has outdone herself. She turned a player into a lover."

He snorts.

Nkomo: "I'm done with you."

Me: "I'm playing with you cow, relax."

Kenneth suddenly jolts up to his feet, his eyes fixated on something. Nkomo is as confused as I am.

Me: "Kenneth?"

I call out to him, my voice doesn't seem to have reached his ears. I turn to see Amara, she's in the foyer toddling this way. She has seen him staring at her, hence the uncomfortable deportment. Randall strides behind her, catches her in his arms and buries his face on her neck. This brings Kenneth back to his senses, he blinks once and gradually pushes himself back down.

What the hell just happened?

Nkomo noticed as well, he wiggles his eye brows with a sly grin.

Me: "Mkhize?"

I say to Kenneth, his relaxed disposition has abruptly turned disconsolate. That leer he's giving

me is intimidating.

Me: "If you want to leave this place alive, keep your eyes to yourself."

I notify him.

Kenneth: "Have you grown tired of insulting Nkomo? You're attacking me now?"

Me: "This is a heads up, be warned."

I'm not kidding.

Randall catches up without Amara, thank God she didn't come here. I doubt Kenneth would've been able to compose himself.

Randall: "Are we having a party?"

He didn't know Kenneth would be here.

Kenneth: "Okolie?"

He replies coldly.

Randall: "Mkhize."

That's his deadpan response.

Nkomo: "What's that you're eating?"

He's carrying a sachet of appetisers.

Me: "Are those raisins?"

He positions his body on the couch and nods while indulging on them.

Me: "You don't eat raisins, you don't have a sweet tooth."

This man hates all things sweet.

Randall: "I do now."

Strange comeback.

Nkomo: "You're like a kid indulging on their favourite snack."

Randall: "It has suddenly become my favourite snack actually, I enjoy it."

Me: "You don't snack Randall."

I dispute.

Randall: "Give me a break Styles."

Okay...

That tone...

Kenneth: "People are allowed to snack."

He adds his opinion.

Randall: "Mkhize is right."

They are agreeing on something.

Me: "With that being said, Kenneth here is throwing a party."

Randall: "Okay."

Nkomo: "What are we celebrating?"

Kenneth: "My achievements."

He states with a sneer on his face.

Me: "Nkomo, you should love this, Mkhize has lost half of his taxis. All thanks to Kenny."

Randall: "How?"

Kenneth: "There has been a dispute between Mkhize and his brothers."

Me: "The best part about this is that they have all turned against him."

Kenneth: "Yeah, I took this as an opportunity to approach one of them. The weakest of the Mkhize bunch, he's all about saving his family. His wife and kids are his number one priority and after we made them believe that Mkhize is stealing from them, he decided to save his own skin by selling his share of the taxis."

Me: "That's one monkey down, Mkhize will be left with nothing by the time we're done with him."

Nkomo: "Yeah but, Mkhize has other investments."

He reminds me.

Me: "That's not a problem, I've got it under control."

Randall: "Let's remember that he has kids and they shouldn't be left out in the cold."

I think I should hit him on his face with those raisins.

Me: "Since when do you care about that bastard?"

Will he stop eating that?

Randall: "I don't give a shit about him, it's the kids I'm worried about."

Nkomo's search on Randall shows that he's also confused by his behaviour.

Nkomo: "You're worried about my siblings?"

Randall: "Don't get too excited Nkomo, I'm only looking out for them."

Me: "That's it. Who the hell are you?"

He grimaces.

Randall: "I'm not such a bad person styles."

I'm getting frustrated.

Me: "Stop eating that shit Randall."

I snap.

He's not focussed.

Randall: "No."

He growls, I snatch them away from him.

Randall: "Give that back."

He commands.

Me: "No, you're getting on my nerves, you know that?"

Randall: "Styles, I am not playing with you. Give it back."

Nkomo: "Come on Randy, it's just a packet of snacks."

Kenneth: "Maybe we should come back another time?"

He suggests.

Me: "No one is leaving this house until we are done with this meeting."

Randall: "Fine, there's more where that came from."

He tells.

He is not normal.

Randall: "Chioma!!!"

He calls out to her.

Who is this man?

Chioma comes rushing to the lounge.

Me: "Chioma, go back."

I demand.

She leers at Randall who has lost the battle then back at me.

Chioma: "Uze?"

Me: "Chioma go."

I'm trying to control a situation here. Randall huffs as Chioma walks away.





Me: "If you must know Uze, Nkomo has delivered. He got us the girl."

Randall: "Impressive."

Nkomo: "There's nothing impressive about taking someone's life."

He complains.

Me: "This is serious Nkomo, it's either her or Randall."

Nkomo: "Don't I know that?"

Randall: "Don't tell me, you're falling for her?"

He sees it too.

Nkomo: "I'm not. If I was, I wouldn't have gifted her the earrings."

Randall: "Good, your next step is to make sure that she wears them."

Nkomo: "I still have to see her again?"

Me: "It doesn't matter how you do it NKomo, make sure that girl wears those earrings."

He sighs at my command.

Kenneth: "What's in the earrings?"

Randall: "Don't worry about that Mkhize."

There are things that Kenneth can't know about. He works close with Segun and might slip up one day and say something he shouldn't.

Me: "I agree with Randall, you should focus on getting those taxis from Mkhize."

Kenneth: "You know that won't be a problem."

Me: "I like it when I hear good news."

Randall: "Yeah! Segun you bastard, you're going down."

He sounds.

If everything goes according to plan, then our lives will be at peace in no time.

SETHU\*

Ayize and I had no choice but to finally go home, the house is full. Basically my aunt's house is packed, my uncle's family is there and they are giving her a hard time. That woman is fragile, I doubt she will be able to handle stress from the in-laws.

Me: "Your mother says one of us should go stay with aunt."

I introduce to Ayize, the living room is full so we're hiding in the kitchen. If I received money every time the aunts and uncles asked for tea, I would be on the same level as Bill Gates.

I'm tired...

Ayize: "Why doesn't she go?"

She's sitting with her head bowed and her hand pressed on it.

Me: "My thoughts exactly."

Ayize: "That woman is driving me crazy."

Ayize has been aloof since she came back from the store.

Me: "Are you okay?"

She shakes her head.

Ayize: "I need a drink."

Me: "What happened to you, Ayize?"

I notice that she's not herself.

A little boy runs into the kitchen from outside, he hands Ayize a green metal cup.

"Umalume uthe ngikuphe." (Uncle said I must give this to you.)

She smiles.

Ayize: "Dankie boy." (Thank you.)

The boy is staring at her, I don't know what he wants.

Ayize: "Hamba." (Go.)

"Uthe wena uzongipha imali." (You said that you will give me money.)

He says.

Ayize: "Where will I get that money? Uyayazi impilo boy?" (Do you know anything about Life?)

He shakes his head.

Ayize: "Nami angiyazi, hamba tuu." (Neither do I, go.)

She shoos him away.

Me: "Shame, don't do that to the child."

Ayize: "He wants money from me. Where will I get it?"

Her reply comes with a sip of whatever is in that cup.

Me: "What did this uncle give you?"

Ayize: "You don't want to know."

I shouldn't push.

Dad: "Ntokozo is dead."

My father walks into the kitchen with this news, his wife is right next to him.

Ayize: "UJesu umkhulu." (Jesu is great.)

She raises her hands in praise.

Mom: "Yey wena, usuyahlanya." (Are you crazy?)

She snaps.

Ayize: "If rejoicing means crazy, then yebo mama, I have lost it." (Yes mom.)

My sister is not drunk yet but, the way she's talking to my mother, you would think that she is.

Mom: "Awunanqodo wengane." (You're crazy.)

Her angry voice fills the kitchen.

Ayize: "Ok'salayo this week is a happy one for me. It's good news after good news."

Dad: "I don't know what we should do with you anymore."

Me: "Dad there's something I don't understand. Why are you people like this? Is it because we're girls? Maybe you'd be more supportive if we were boys."

Mom: "What are you talking about?"

Me: "Two men who violated your daughters have died and you two want to grieve them, I don't understand the logic."

Dad: "Sethu, you know that we have supported you since Ntokozo was arrested. We did everything in our power to protect you so that, you don't fall into the hands of another monster."

Me: "Maybe you did, I don't know. You were more controlling than supportive, I couldn't live my life in peace. I still can't dad, I live alone and yet I have to report everything I do to you."

I proclaim.

Mom: "That's not true."

They will never accept the truth.

Me: "Really mom? What do you call coming to my apartment late at night?"

Dad: "Is it so wrong for us to worry about you?"

Mom: "Not at all but, your worry is different. It's not normal at all, you want everything to go your way. Dad, you're not as supportive as you think you are. Look at my sister, she looks dead. She might be talkative and disrespectful sometimes and you guys know why. You abandoned her

dad, you and mom. You turned your backs on her when she needed you the most. How do you expect her to respect you after what you did?"

I wipe the tears that have creeped up on me, Ayize has her face hidden. I know that she's trying to stop herself from shedding tears.

Mom: "You don't know what you're talking about."

Of course mom would deny the truth.

Dad: "Where is this coming from Sethu?"

His question causes me to huff.

Me: "Look at her dad, look at your eldest daughter. Not once has any of you asked her why she is under weight. Does she look healthy to you?"

Mom: "She looks fine."

She retorts coldly.

Me: "Ginger weighs bigger than Ayize, you can't tell me that she looks fine. What kind of a mother are you?"

Dad: "Sethu not now, we have visitors."

Me: "That's all you care about, people. You two have been people pleasers for as long as I can remember. You don't care about us."

Mom: "Will you stop Sethu? That's enough."

She yells through gritted teeth.

Me: "It's not enough mom, I have so much to tell you. I have so many questions for you people. You don't deserve to have kids. You're evil, you destroyed my sister and I want you to fix her. She doesn't eat, all she does is pump her stomach with alcohol just to numb the pain. You better fix my sister dad."

I scream at them, I'm unable to control my tears.

Mom: "What have we done to deserve such kids? You two are a disgrace."

I hear Ayize laugh.

Me: "A disgrace is what you two did, you covered up for a rapist. Uncle raped my sister and you protected him."

I'm screaming at the top of the roof. My mother rushes to me and slaps me across the face, I stumble back only to fall into the arms of someone. I turn to find my father's elder sister. Her hands are on my shoulders while she glares at my mother with anger in her eyes.

Me: "Aunty."

I lay my head on her big chest as she holds me.



Aunty: "Kwanele sisi, ungabusakhala." (It's okay, don't cry anymore.)

Her words of comfort arouse more tears.

Me: "Aunty, Ayize is... she..."

I can't speak due to my tears.

Aunty: "Ngiyazi Sethu, ngizwe yonke into. Sizoyilungisa le ndaba." (I know, I heard everything. We will fix this matter.)

I can only hope so.

Ayize is smiling while sipping on that metal cup, I know she's trying to be strong for herself and it's only a matter of time till she cracks. I'm tired of being strong, it's time to fight these people.

Mom: "Sisi, it's not what you think. Banamanga Labantwana, ayikho lento." (These kids are lying, there's no such thing.)

She denies what she knows to be the truth, Ayize cracks up in laughter.

Aunty: "Thula Beauty!!!"

She snaps at her.

Aunty: "I have always known that my brother chose the wrong woman. I knew you were heartless Beauty, I saw it the first time he brought you home."

Dad: "Sisi, ngumkami lowo okhuluma naye." (That's my wife, you're talking to.)

He fights his wife's battles and leaves nothing for his kids.

Aunty: "Alfred. Is this what has been happening in this house? This is how you raise your children? Ungafihla isidumbu wena, ngiyakusaba mfowethu omncane." (You would hide a dead body, I'm scared of you, little brother.)

Dad: "Sisi, let me explain."

Aunty: "We'll talk after the funeral, now is not the right time."

Mom: "Kodwa sisi..." (But sister.)

Aunty: "Doti." (Nonsense.)

She snorts.

Aunty: "Asihambe zingane zami." (Let's go my kids.)

She takes our hands and leads us outside, Ayize has zoned out. It's like she has frozen in time.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

135\*

AMARA\*

I have so many missed calls from Lelo, I have nothing to say to her at this point. I know she will be negative the moment I answer the phone.

Randall: "Amara?"

Me: "Yes?"

I know the sound of his voice when he's about to complain, he's lying beside me with his head resting on my shoulder.

Randall: "Do you think I'm getting fat?"

What?

He zooms his face in on the phone reflection and pinches his cheeks. Since when does he worry about his features?

Me: "No."

My sceptical answer.

I am confused as to what he's talking about.

Randall: "Are you sure?"

Me: "Yes. Why?"

Randall: "My cheeks kind of look chubby. And this t- shirt doesn't fit me anymore."

He stretches it.

Me: "When last did you wear that?"

Randall: "Last week, it was okay."

Me: "I don't see anything wrong hey, it looks fine to me."

I jump from the bed to have him grab my arm.

Randall: "Where are you going?"

Me: "The bathroom, I need to pee."

Randall: "You just came from there five minutes ago."

Me: "I need to go again."

Randall: "Hurry back."

Randall is sure acting strange, he's clingy and sensitive. Something is definitely up with him. I walk back to the bedroom to find him standing in front of the mirror inspecting his facial features.

I'm not going to ask.

I need to get ready for bed, I'm tired.

Randall: "Turn around."

I lift my head to see him scowling at me, I'm unclothed as I prepare to change into a night gown.

Me: "Why?"

I hold the gown against my chest hiding my starkness from his stern gaze.

Randall: "I saw you naked this morning, you are seriously not shying away from me."

Well, it's not like I'm bloody Naomi Campbell.

Randall: "I want to see something."

Me: "What?"

I give him an inquisitive look.

Randall: "Amara, I'm a very observant man and I know every inch of your body."

I drop my gaze bashfully.

Randall: "I have seen how insecure you get sometimes, how you don't let me admire your body. You shy away from my gaze. Don't you know how beautiful you are? To be beautiful means to be yourself, God doesn't make mistakes Amara. Stop criticising his work. Do you know that the world sees you as you see yourself? You need to be proud of what you have. I for one love every part of you."

He caresses the side of my face with his hand and slightly draws the edge of my skin with a soft barely-there touch using his fingers, trailing them from my collarbone down to my arm. I feel a tingle in my stomach, which births chills on my skin.

His face is so close to mine that our lips are a few inches from each other.

Randall: "I love your bronze skin tone."

He pecks my lips and goes down on his knees, he draws his hand along my hipbone to my buttocks.

Randall: "I love these stripes on your hips, they are the best part of you because they show that you are capable of change. It simply means that you have the ability to transform yourself, which is astonishing."





My mind has gone south, I'm thinking my own things now. I want him inside me.

He enfolds his arms around my lower back, places a few kisses on my stomach.

Randall: "Your tummy is a home to our unborn kids, they will mark you but, each mark will symbolise the strength your body used to create life."

He kisses me on my stomach, even after hearing his words that have put me to tears. I cannot get over the uncomfortable feeling of being naked.

He holds me tighter as he lays his head on my tummy.

I stroke his head, while looking down at him. I try to think of reasons why I deserve this kind of love and I can't come up with any.

How does one love so much?

Such things are not real.

He looks up at me.

Randall: "The reality is that our bodies are constantly changing and they will never remain the same. Should the world stop because of that?"

In tears, I shake my head.

Randall: "I don't want you to ever doubt yourself, me hemma. Promise me." (My queen.)

I doubt I'll be able to keep the promise.

Me: "I do."

He's drawing circles on my lower back and darn it, it feels good.

Randall: "I know the plans you have for your life, I want you to share them with me. I want to share my life with you Amara and I promise that I will try to be the man you deserve. I want to start my life with you, I want to give you all of me without any fear that, someone will take you away. Your uncle is a bull fighter hey."

He smiles, I'm able to let out a titter.

Randall: "Can I be that person for you, me hemma? Can I be the one to make sure that you ate, the one to call you just to find out if you arrived safely? The one to tell you sweet nothings and you know I suck at that but for you, I'll try. Can I be the one to give you big headed babies that will annoy you all your life?" (My queen.)

I fall into an elated giggle.

Randall: "Can I be the one you come home to after a long day at work? The one to tell you that I love you. Can I be your only one, me hemma?" (My queen.)

These tears are mocking me, I can't stop them.

I might have a clue where he's going with this.

Randall: "Amara?"

Me: "Randall?"

Randall: "Wobeware me?" (Will you marry me?)

Okay, I don't know what he just said.

I can only smile in confusion.

Randall: "Will you marry me?"

How can I say no after that speech?

The nervousness on his face is louder than the sound of my heart beat.

Me: "Yes."

He smiles, genuinely.

He kisses my belly before standing up, I still have the gown covering me.

He holds my face with his hands, I can't look anywhere else but, in his eyes.

He starts off with that bite on my lower lip, before caging my lips with his.

Randall: "I love you."

He utters against my lips, this is an overwhelming feeling. I'm locked in his arms again.

Randall: "Great, can we have sex now?"

He whispers in my ear.

Me: "Hey."

I push him back and the night gown drops to the floor.

Me: "What a way to spoil to a romantic moment?"

I says as I grab the gown, he snatches it first.

Randall: "Let me look at you."

He says softly, his gaze has me dropping my head. He takes my chin in his fingers to lift my head up.

Randall: "You're going to be my wife."

I smile at the thought of it.

Randall: "And we're going to be parents."

What?

Me: "You're in a hurry for that hey. I am not getting pregnant any time soon."



Randall: "That's not what your breasts are telling me."

Really?

Who says that?

Me: "Randall don't play like that."

I haven't had time to think about being someone's mother.

Randall: "You're pregnant Amara."

I don't believe it.

I sit on the bed and fold my arms hiding my nakedness from him.

He kneels before me, placing his hands on my thighs.

Me: "How do you know?"

Randall: "I told you that I'm a very observant man. When you were changing just now, I noticed how you winced as you removed your bra."

Me: "Yeah, that doesn't mean anything."

Randall: "Okay, we can do a test tomorrow."

I shrug.

Randall: "Don't be scared, I'm here. I'm not going anywhere."

He engulfs me into a hug.

I am scared honestly, I don't know how to feel.

STYLES\*

Neo: "Is this the time to come home Stylos?"

I forgot that I have a roommate who keeps tabs on me. He's lying with his feet on my couch, holding the remote while engrossed on the screen.

I shut the door, push his legs off of my couch and drop my body on the opposite seat.

Neo: "U ne u le kae Stylos?" (Where were you?)

He sits up.

Me: "I'm sorry I didn't know that I was supposed to report to you."

He grins.

Neo: "It's not funny Stylos, first you sent me away yesterday. I come home today to find you gone."

Why is he being weird?

Me: "What's wrong with you?"

Neo: "I feel abandoned that's what. Do you know how lonely I get when you're not home? Uze also doesn't have time for me, all he does is look into Amara's eyes."

Me: "When are you never complaining Neo? Maybe I should get you someone, so you get off my back."

I suggest.

Neo: "Once, then you will know how it feels to be ignored."

Me: "No one ignored you idiot."

I protest.

He sits back and sighs.

Me: "Neo it's not that big of a deal, don't act like a little girl."

Neo: "No, it's not that Stylos."

Me: "What is it?"

Neo: "Eish Stylos, ke flopile twana." (I messed up.)

Whatever it is can't be that bad.

Me: "What did you do?"

Neo: "Eish, le nna kea phapha." (I'm too forward.)

He's scaring me.

Me: "Will you tell me or beat around the bush?"

Neo: "What happened to Miss. S' sister?"

Me: "Ayize?"

He nods.

Why is he asking about her?

Me: "I'm not sure I follow Neo."

Neo: "She doesn't eat much, does she?"

Anyone can figure that out.



Me: "Yeah, she has an eating disorder."

Neo: "I noticed, I met her at the mall today. We went to have lunch and she ordered a salad, she barely touched it. At first I thought that it was her body but looking at her, I realized that no man, it can't be. She's too tiny for someone her age."

He states. I can't miss the concern in his tone.

Me: "Yeah, she's been struggling with it for years now."

Neo: "I took her to the shelter because I wanted her to see the other girls that are struggling like her. This new girl who was gang raped gave her testimony and Ayize literally ran out of there in tears only to break down outside."

Me: "I think you should've given her a warning first, she was raped by her uncle when she was a teenager. Her parents didn't believe her till today, she has been fighting this battle alone. Hearing this girl's story undoubtedly brought back painful memories."

He ponders upon my explanation.

Neo: "Do you think I should apologise to her?"

When did Neo grow a sudden liking on her?

Me: "Is there something going on between you two?"

He grimaces at my question.

Neo: "Should there be something?"

Smart.

Me: "I don't know, you tell me."

Neo: "There's nothing Stylos, I was worried that's all. No woman should go through that."

He says, staring into space.

Me: "You're right, Ayize needs a friend right now and not a lover. Her wounds are still fresh."

He sneers.

Neo: "Relax, I'm not there. However, I don't mind being her friend. That girl is carrying so much on her shoulders."

I know.

Me: "That's why I had the uncle eliminated."

Neo: "You killed him?"

I give him a nod.

Neo: "I hope it was a terrible death."

This is the first time he's commending me for taking a life.

Me: "Neo, are you thinking of pursuing this girl?"

He titters as he shakes his head.

Neo: "Stylos, I just met the woman. That thought hasn't crossed my mind and I doubt it will, there is nothing wrong with befriending the opposite sex."

True. My mind is telling me things.

Neo wouldn't lie to me though.

Me: "Just in case you think of doing it, take it easy with her. Don't put pressure on her, she's fragile although she looks strong."

He nods repeatedly, proving to me that the thought did cross his mind. You never know with Neo.

Neo: "I want to move here permanently and take my son to live with me."

He randomly introduces.

Me: "That's great, it's about time anyway. Have you thought of a specific place?"

Neo: "Right here in your house."

He says.

I'm trying to read his face, I don't know if he's serious or not.

Me: "For how long?"

Neo: "Forever, you're single, I'm single and I have a son. We can be two and a half men."

I need to sanctify my ears.

What the hell did Neo just say to me?

Me: "Tell me you're kidding."

Neo: "I'm dead serious."

Okay.

There's a way out of this.

Me: "Listen Neo, I love you... no man. That came out wrong. What I'm trying to say is that you're my brother and I don't mind you staying here for now. It can't be a permanent thing though."

Okay he's laughing, it means he's not offended, right?

Neo: "I was kidding Stylos, nahana. It would be too awkward living here with you and Miss. S." (Imagine.)

Me: "I'm glad you understand."

Neo: "I want my son with me Stylos."

Me: "Tshidi won't fight you for custody, she learnt her lesson."

Neo: "Yeah, it's a relief. I can't imagine my son being raised by a woman like her."

Me: "Me too."

Neo is hands on with that little boy, he deserves to have his son with him.

NKOMO\*

Zwelethu spends more time in my apartment than he does at his father's house, I don't know what he's escaping from. I should talk to maSibiya and take him to live with me full time.

He tends to be a problem when it comes to doing school work, Varsity is no kid's play and he will flunk if he doesn't pull up his socks.

Me: "You know those TV games will not give you a future, you need to do away with that."

He nods, his eyes engrossed on the screen. This is his daily life, it worries me.

Me: "Zwelethu, I'm talking to you."

He tilts his head for a bit, his eyes barely noticing me.

Zwelethu: "I heard you bhuti." (Brother.)

Me: "Have you spoken to your mother?"

Zwelethu: "Must you always ask me that?"

He complains.

Me: "I'm worried about you Zwe. What's with you?"

He ignores me, it's become an everyday thing.

Me: "If you keep ignoring me like this I will send you back to your father's house."

Finally, I get his attention.

I join him on the couch.

Zwelethu: "Ngubaba, he's different bhuti. He's forever barking at everyone in the house, I don't want to live there anymore." (It's dad.)

It must be because of the war Mkhize has with his brothers and he's taking his frustrations out on everyone.

Me: "You can stay here with me if you want."

Zwelethu: "You mean forever?"

He smiles.

Me: "Not forever, you're twenty one. You will have to get your own place pretty soon."

He chortles.

Zwelethu: "I know bhuti and yes I want to live here with you. I doubt uma will let me." (Brother.)  
(Mom)

Me: "Don't worry, I will speak to her."

Our conversation is cut short by the sound of my phone ringing. I dread to speak to her, Ruth hasn't stopped calling me. The plan was to keep away from her, I have to throw that in the trash now. Styles and Randall demand that I make sure she wears the jewellery.

Zwelethu: "Aren't you going to take it."

Me: "No."

I watch the phone as it rings on the table.

Zwelethu: "Trouble in paradise?"

He's nosey.

Me: "There's no paradise."

Zwelethu: "Well, whatever it is I think you should take it. You have ignored her long enough, the girl is possibly crying her eyes out."

I'm not going to take advice from a child, it's crazy.

He snatches the phone from the table, it's too late to stop him.

Zwelethu: "Hello."

I try to grab it, he pulls away.

Zwelethu: "Sboniso?"

Oh shit!!!

I take the phone from him.

That was a close call.

"Hello?"

Her voice resounds over the phone.

Me: "Hi."



I feel like shit.

Ruth: "Oh great, you exist. I thought the past weekend was a dream."

Her voice is coated with sadness.

Me: "I'm sorry, I was busy."

Ruth: "Too busy to answer my calls?"

I didn't think that Ruth would feel this way.

Me: "I was swamped Ruth, forgive me Nkosazana." (My lady.)

Ruth: "Under one condition."

Why do I feel that I will regret this?

Me: "Speak to me."

Ruth: "Have dinner with me tomorrow night."

Me: "I'm not..."

If I deny she will sense that something is up.

Me: "How can I say no to you ndlovukazi." (Queen.)

Ruth: "Great. I'll see you tomorrow?"

She's confirming.

Me: "See you tomorrow."

I reply.

Ruth: "Sbo."

She calls my name. I sense that she's about to ask for a favour.

Me: "Yes."

Ruth: "Don't ever stop talking to me, please. You're the only real person I know, I'm surrounded by heartless people and you're the only one who brings light into my dark world."

She pleads with so much candour in her voice.

Me: "I won't."

Ruth: "Okay."

She sends an answer in a modulated voice.

Ruth: "Can we please talk some more, I need a listening ear."

Me: "Sure."

I respond with no hesitation, I leave Zwelethu in the lounge as I amble to my room. There's so much I have learnt about Ruth, I thought I would meet a loud, spoiled brat.

We have painted her with the wrong brush.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

136\*

AMARA\*

Randall woke up early today. I don't know where he is in the house. I thought he would walk in while I made the bed or showered.

I'm on a video call with Ife, the call was for her brother and since he's not here. I decided to take it. I couldn't keep the news to myself, I had to share and Ife is the next available person to tell.

Ife: "Oh my God, I am happy for you Amara."

Me: "Thanks, I'm happy for me too."

Ife: "Let's see it."

Me: "What?"

She sneers before a deep frown takes over.

Ife: "Randall Uze Okolie. Why am I not surprised?"

Me: "What is it Ife?"

Ife: "There's no ring, right?"

She knows her brother, I lift my hand to show her.

Her mouth drops open.

Ife: "Amara, Amara, Amara. How many times did I call you?"

She pulls her earlobe with this.

Me: "Really?"

Ife: "No, I knew that I shouldn't have left. Look at this mess, he failed to court you and now he comes empty handed asking for marriage. You are letting that man get away with everything. He has to get you a ring, by the end of today."

Me: "He will."

I'm lying, we didn't discuss it.

Ife: "I'm not sure he knows that a proposal comes with a ring."

There's a possibility.



Me: "Don't be silly."

Ife: "I'm serious, he won't be the first clueless man to ever walk the face of the earth. Such men deserve their own planet. We don't need that kind of stress in life."

She's still talkative.

Me: "Don't let him hear you say that."

She laughs.

Ife: "Okay. Kasa Akumaa." (Listen sister in-law.)

I give her a questioning look.

Ife: "That means listen sister in-law. Don't let him get you pregnant until you say I do."

This girl is too smart for me.

Me: "I won't."

I stammer.

I haven't taken the test yet.

Ife: "Mmmhh. The next thing you'll be walking down the aisle with a huge baby bump. I know brother is cunning, he knows how to get his way."

True.

Me: "Please don't tell anyone about the proposal Ife, your father should be the last person to find out."

Ife: "My lips are sealed and I know agya will lose it if he finds out. Chai! That man is evil."  
(Father.)

"Are you bad mouthing your father again Ifeanyi?"

A piqued looking Ife twists her head to the side at the sound of the female voice that echoes from the speaker.

Ife: "Mother."

She grins.

"Who are you talking to?"

She questions, maybe I should drop the call.

I'm denied a chance as her face appears on the screen. I have seen her in pictures, the woman who birthed the man I love so dearly. I see a bit of his features on her face, middle age seems to suit her. She's not overly old but her face seems to have aged past her years. Her black hair holds a few strands of grey tresses. Her face is slightly wrinkled probably caused by years of gnawing. It also appears to be drained of happiness.

Mom: "Hello."

She says in a soft voice.

Me: "Hello ma."

What do I say to her?

Ife is trying to push her off but, her persistence is winning.

Ife: "Mother you can't do that, I'm busy."

She complains.

Mom: "I have seen pictures of you on Ife's phone, you're the woman who has taken my son's heart?"

Ife: "Mother, you went through my phone again?"

She ignores her.

Her gaze is stuck on me.

Randall walks in, I want to tell him that I'm on a video call with his mother. Her focus on me won't let me.

Randall: "Me hemma." (My queen.)

I try to relay the message with my eyes, he's not getting it. He's chewing, of course he won't notice anything.

He sits on the bed pressing his body against mine.

Mom: "Randall?"

She smiles.

Randall: "Mother?"

He's startled.

Yeah, I tried to warn you.

Mom: "Do you two live together?"

He looks at me before taking his eyes back to her.

Randall: "Yes, mother."

Mom: "Without marriage? You're a future king Randall, such things are prohibited."

Randall: "Not you too mother."

He states in annoyance.

Ife has long given up fighting her.



Randall: "I'll talk to you later, bye."

He disconnects the call.

Me: "Why did you do that?"

Randall: "It's too early to listen to her complaints."

He brushes it off and I will not dispute with him, I haven't spoken to his mother yet, so I don't know how she feels about me.

Me: "You have suddenly become a cow Randall?"

He scowls.

Me: "You're chewing again?"

He's hiding the package so I don't see it.

Me: "What are you eating?"

He hides his hand.

Me: "Randall, don't tell me you're eating that, again. You haven't had breakfast yet."

Randall: "So?"

Only now he reveals the pack.

Me: "That's all sugar."

Randall: "You eat cereal for breakfast, it has more sugar than these and you don't hear me complaining."

Where did he get that conclusion?

Me: "You're not young anymore, your teeth will fail you."

Randall: "I'll have you know that, I take serious offence in what you just said. My teeth are perfect."

Me: "Tell that to those raisins you're eating."

Randall: "You should try some, I never knew anything could taste this good."

He chews on.

Me: "That's exaggerated don't you think?"

Randall: "Nope."

He does a little dance with his shoulders as he tosses a few of them in his mouth. They can't be that good.

Me: "Give me that."

I reach for them and he moves back.

Randall: "You and Styles will kill me, let me be Amara."

He whines, he's forever whining lately.

Me: "I'm done with you."

He sneers as he carries on with the snack.

Randall: "Try it, you'll see what I'm talking about."

He offers.

Me: "I'm okay."

Randall: "Come on, try one at least. I promise you'll love them."

Let me see what the fuss is all about.

I take two, reluctantly shove them in my mouth. My heart rejects it at the first chew, it's too late to spit it out. I swallowed it.

I clamp my teeth as the queasiness claws at my throat, trying to force down the sourness. It could be that I haven't brushed my teeth.

Randall: "And?"

He's giving me an intrigued guise, he doesn't see the disgusted look on my face. An intense wave of nausea hits me and I find myself lurched forward before the toilet, my knees secured on the floor. The vomit bursts from my throat, choking me in the process. It feels like forever and I want it to be over with, hot tears roll from my eyes as my stomach empties yesterday's dinner. Just when I think I'm done my intestines heave to bring up drips of what's left in my stomach.

I turn my head to see Randall standing in the door way, carrying a look of worry on his face.

Me: "Water."

The word grazes out of my mouth that's coated with acidic fluids, I swipe the back of my hand to wipe it off.

He hurries back to the bedroom, I don't know if he's running away or going to get the water. In the meantime I push my weak knees up from the floor, shut the seat to flush away the bulk of puke so that, I rid the stench that threatens to fill the bathroom.

Randall: "Here."

He's back with the water, he kneels before me as he hands it to me.

Randall: "Are you okay?"

He rubs my knees while he worriedly looks into my eyes.

I nod.



It's a lie, I'm not okay.

Randall: "I guess we have different taste buds?"

That's a question by the way, his facial expression tells me so.

Me: "I think you're right."

Randall: "I'm always right, but they taste great to me so I don't..."

Me: "Not about that silly, the pregnancy. My periods are irregular so it didn't strike me as odd when I missed them."

Am I ready to have a baby?

Randall: "I can ask Mbuso to come over."

Me: "No, I don't want Lelo finding out about it. She'll crucify me and I am not prepared for that."

Lelo is not on my side, she will call me crazy if she were to find out.

Randall: "We can go to the hospital."

Me: "Go out?"

Randall: "Yeah, nothing will happen. I'll be with you."

The furthest I have been since my rescue is the garden.

NOMBULELO\*

This morning is different and everything is wrong.

Me: "Mbuso how long are you going to give me a cold shoulder?"

He ignores me, Mbuso refuses to speak to me. He didn't eat my food last night, he won't let me touch him and I have had it.

Me: "Mbuso speak to me please."

He's bustling in the bedroom getting ready for work. He is trying so hard to avoid me.

Me: "Mbuso Xaba."

I take his hand.

It's the first time that he's upset with me like this.

Me: "Don't do this please, talk to me."

Mbuso: "What do you want from me?"



He hunts for an answer that's written in my eyes.

Me: "Speak to me."

I mumble under my breath.

Mbuso: "I have nothing to say to you."

He returns with an icy tone.

Did I mess up this bad? Mbuso is not easily angered, his anger doesn't dwell with him for too long.

Me: "Please, your silence is killing me. I can't take it anymore."

I'm not used to the not smiling Mbuso.

Mbuso: "Do I not deserve respect as the man you love? You talk to me as if I mean nothing to you. When I ask you to do something you completely ignore me and do the opposite. How is this relationship going to work if we are not on the same page?"

Me: "We are on the same page."

Mbuso: "Stop lying, this is exactly what I'm talking about. It's so easy for you to lie."

He steps away from me.

Me: "What did I lie about?"

I'm plodding after again.

Mbuso: "You're seriously not asking me that, Lelo you have become someone I don't recognize. I don't want that person I want my Lelo, The innocent Lelo I almost ran over with my car the first time we met."

Me: "I'm here, it's me."

He disagrees by swiping his head back and forth.

Me: "Okay, tell me what to do and I'll do it, I'll do anything."

He leers at me.

Mbuso: "Stay away from Amara's relationship with Randall. You have this mentality that I am terrified fo Randall. I only want peace. I see no reason for you to hate him."

Me: "I don't hate him."

Mbuso: "Actions speak louder than words."

Me: "Okay, there's something about him that puts me off it doesn't mean that I hate him."

Mbuso: "Are you trying to convince me or yourself?"

He questions with his brows raised.

Me: "You know I'm not perfect Mbuso..."

Mbuso: "We're all not perfect Lelo, I'm not perfect but you don't see me hating on other people."

Me: "Hate is a strong word."

Mbuso: "It is and that's what I see when you complain about Randall. Why do you do this Lelo? Why do you want to destroy Amara's happiness?"

His question baffles me. I love Amara, I would never do anything to hurt her.

Me: "I promise to stop meddling in her life, I can't have you not speaking to me."

I stand before him clogging him from walking out the door.

Me: "I'm sorry."

I clasp my arms around his torso.

Me: "Love me again, please."

He emanates a yawning sigh.

Mbuso: "I never stopped and that shit scares me to death. You will always have a hold me, no matter what happens. This love I feel will constantly prove to be my weakness for you. Don't do that to me Lelo, do not take advantage of my love for you. I can only take much."

He tells.

Life without Mbuso is scary, I don't know if I would survive it.

Me: "I won't, I promise that I will love you right and I will give you the respect you deserve."

He holds a glower on his face.

I pucker up and peck his lips, he doesn't move and it stings. This is a start, it's better than nothing.

MKHIZE\*

At this point Sika is the only person I can confide in, my brothers have turned against me. My life has taken a terrible direction and I am headed for destruction.

Me: "Everything is falling apart Sika."

I can only hide in this office, I don't want my wives to see me broken down like this.

Me: "I am losing my business and my siblings."

Sika: "I think you should make a peace treaty."

Me: "How?"

Sika: "I don't know, throw a party in honour of your brothers, they might appreciate it and forgive you."

He sounds stupid.

Me: "My brothers aren't kids that you impress them with a party pack. It will take a miracle for them to forget our differences."

Sika: "The war with Okolie is bringing you bad luck."

Me: "No, I just have incompetent people behind me. That Mkhonto guy was one of them he was weak, he went and got himself killed during a mission."

Sika: "I told you that the plan wasn't going to work baba." (Boss.)

Me: "It's a shame that his mother died of a heart attack, the woman was weak she couldn't handle being kidnapped. "

Sika: "But she was old, we should've went for one of Mkhonto's kids. He loved them just as much."

Me: "It doesn't matter, what's done is done. I don't understand how my plans never work, someone is working against me."

Sika: "I think Someone is protecting that girl, her ancestors know their stuff. Why don't you stop pursuing her baba, she will bring about, your death you know."

He sheds light.

Me: "It's not about her gracing my bed anymore, I want to prove to Okolie that I am not a loser. This is my town Mkhonto, kukhala esami is'cathulo. I cannot be defeated by a little boy who thinks the world is his footstool. I want him to suffer knowing she is with me." (I make the rules.)

Sika: "I don't see that happening, that man is sly. He won't let you set an eye on her."

Me: "Moses can, I hear he has regained his sanity back. He's splashing his money all over town."

He chortles.

Sika: "You seem to be getting old baba, Moses is powerless. He failed to convince that girl to marry you when she was here, he won't be able to go against Okolie. He will squash him and you know where Sishi is involved nothing comes right."

I see his reason.

Me: "I thought I would use Segun to destroy Okolie, his plans are stupid. They always backfire."

Okolie is supposed to be sick by now and nothing has happened to him yet.

Sika: "I think we should forget about everything, focus on getting your life together. This cannot be worth losing your family. You've lost Lunga and maDlamini is at a point of no return. Talk to

your brothers, reason with them and make peace.”

He utters wisely, however...

Me: “I am Bangizwe Mkhize, I do not bow down to anyone. This is war Sika, you know what Shaka Zulu did to weaklings?”

My question causes him to frown in disarray.

Me: “He eliminated them, I don’t want weaklings Sika. I need strong men by my side and we will fight this till the end.”

Sika: “I only hope that your children will not pay for your mistakes baba.” (Boss.)

Me: “That’s enough Sika, I know what I’m doing.”

I dismiss him.

I have to think positive.

To be continued...



BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

137\*

RANDALL\*

We're at the hospital waiting for a general practitioner. Amara's hand is clenched on mine, not once have I seen her this nervous.

Me: "Penny for your thoughts?"

She gives me a soft smile.

Amara: "I have so many of them, I wouldn't know where to start."

Me: "Whichever comes to mind first?"

Amara: "The first thought is. Stop eating that."

I simper at her answer.

Me: "Not again."

I can't seem to get over these edibles.

Amara: "I'm serious."

She protests.

Me: "What's really on your mind Amara?"

She lets out a sigh of lassitude.

Amara: "This is new to me, I don't know what to expect and I'm terrified."

She expresses her fears.

Me: "I'm terrified too, I met Liya when she was four. I wasn't there during the pregnancy and when she was born. We can do this Amara, we shouldn't be afraid to try out new things."

Amara: "I know."

She places her hand on her stomach.

Amara: "Do you think there's really a baby in there?"

I position my hand on top of hers.

Me: "I know there is. A little Randall Junior."



She glowers.

Amara: "A boy?"

Me: "Why not? Liya needs a protector."

My answer puts a smile on her face.

"Amara Buthelezi."

The receptionist calls.

She shows us to the doctor's room, an Indian woman sits on a chair, scribbling something on a piece of paper. She raises her head with a smile plastered on her face. Amara is directed to the bathroom for a urine test. The level of nervousness has increased, I want this baby more than anything.

A few minutes later we're seated before the doctor who tells us the results. It's confirmed, we're going to have a baby. I'm holding her in my arms, trying to push back the tears of joy. It's an overwhelming feeling that, the woman I love is having my baby.

She snuggles my jaw with her fingers.

Amara: "We're having a baby Randall."

She states, her eyes gleaming with bliss. I nod elatedly.

Me: "We're having a baby."

I engulf her in my arms.

Me: "Thank you, me hemma." (My queen.)

This is what an overwhelming joy feels like.

STYLES\*

Sethu's uncle will be buried today, if it were up to me, I wouldn't have Sethu and Ayize go to the funeral. Apparently Ayize is not herself, she stays locked up in a room. I have to be there for them.

We're running late, Neo is taking time. It's so unlike him, he's always the first to finish.

Me: "Neo come on."

I yell from the living room, he's in his room doing God-knows what.

Neo: "I'm coming, hold your horses."

He shouts back.

I need to call Sethu and let her know that we'll be a little late.

"Babe."

She answers with that.

Me: "How is everything?"

The last time we spoke, she said there was chaos at home.

Sethu: "I can't find Ayize anywhere, she came home late last night and she was drunk."

Me: "Did you check the neighbourhood?"

Sethu: "Not yet, she could be around. Her car is parked outside. I don't know what to do Styles, my parents are not bothered."

Me: "I can help track her down, send me her contact number."

Sethu: "Thanks, that would be great."

Neo strides into the lounge, wearing a pink sweater and jeans with sneakers.

Me: "I'll see you just now kitten."

Sethu: "Okay, bye."

Neo is standing before me tying his shoe laces, he's humming.

Me: "What are you wearing?"

Okay...

It seems that I'm confusing him with my question. Let me rephrase it.

Me: "We're going to a funeral."

He's still confused.

Neo: "The pants and the shoes are black."

He sees nothing wrong with the top.

Me: "Why pink? You could have chosen a different colour."

Neo: "I'm not going to grieve that man, the reason I'm tagging along is because you said Zee needs support."

Me: "You do know that you'll be the only one in a pink t-shirt?"

He smiles.

Neo: "Just how I like it, I must stand out."

Me: "Don't walk too close to me, you'll embarrass me."

He laughs.

Neo: "Listen, I'll be handcuffed to your wrist."

Me: "Dare me."

He walks to the kitchen with a laugh.

Neo: "Have you seen my car keys?"

He shouts from there.

Me: "Check on the counter next to the breadbin."

He walks back whistling.

He does a little twirl as he gets to the lounge.

Neo: "Yes."

He sings as he does a dramatic pose.

Neo: "Oa dlala uena, ke lepato." (It's a funeral.)

And he's cheerful about it.

Me: "Why are we happy?"

Neo: "A dog will be laid to rest today."

He responds.

I will never be able to understand him.

Me: "Let's go, we need to help find Ayize. Sethu says she's nowhere to be found."

Neo: "Okay."

He's the first to walk out of the house.

SETHU\*

It's been three days since we came to the house, the funeral is today. In a few hours we will be burying that bastard. I noticed how Ayize is not herself. She is very reticent, I am worried about her. I tried to speak to her and she brushed me off. I don't know where she is at the moment.

Dad: "Sethu let's go."

He walks in the kitchen followed by my mother, the other guests have left for the church.

Me: "I'm waiting for Ayize."





Dad: "Okay. Who will you girls come with?"

There's a car.

Me: "I will drive us."

Dad: "We needed the cars to transport the guest, you and your sister should come with us."

He speaks as if what he did is a norm.

Me: "How do you give away my car dad?"

Dad: "I didn't give it away, I lent it to them."

Me: "It's the same thing. What if they crash?"

This is unacceptable.

How did he get my car keys?

Mom: "Stop being dramatic nawe, nothing will happen to your car." (You)

She snaps, I'm annoying her. I can tell by the look that she's giving me.

Dad: "Get your sister and let's go."

I am not riding with these two.

Me: "You guys go ahead, we will request a ride."

Thank God the church is not far from here, I'm broke and these taxi rides can make you pray for month end.

Mom: "I think it will be best that we all go as a family."

A miserable family.

Me: "Take Mbali and Ginger with you, we'll follow."

Can they go?

Dad: "Okay."

Mom: "There's something else."

What is it now?

Mom: "You have to go and stay with your aunt after the funeral."

Me: "Stay with aunt?"

I don't understand her command.

Mom: "For a few days until she feels better, she'll be alone with her kids. She won't be able to cope."

Me: "You want me to play maid?"

Her eyes narrow at my question.

Mom: "I want you to help family."

Me: "I have a life mom, I have a job. You can't possibly ask me to put my life on hold."

Mom: "It will only be for a few days Sethu."

Me: "It won't work, I'm not doing it."

She crosses her arms on her chest.

Mom: "If Lebo was here she would take care of her mother but, she's in jail and you refuse to help her. Now you should take up her responsibility and look after her mother."

Me: "It's not my fault that Lebo is in jail. That's the life she chose for herself, I had no part in it."

Dad: "Why do you tend to twist your mother's words Sethu?"

Dad to the rescue.

Me: "I didn't twist anything, this is exactly what she said. Mom blames me for Lebo's imprisonment."

Mom: "I don't blame you, I only feel that you should've lent a helping hand. Kwena was ready to help your cousin and you refused him."

The truth comes out.

Me: "Help? You mean marry me? I had to sacrifice myself for Lebo?"

Mom: "Not a sacrifice but a union."

She's crazy if she thinks that makes any sense.

Me: "I knew there was an agenda behind that. You're capable of selling me off to get what you want?"

Dad: "I don't know what to say anymore. What is happening to you kids?"

He questions.

Me: "I should be asking you guys this, you have changed."

Mom: "Baba, let's go. I'm not going to stand for this."

She's upset and I can't find a reason why.

Dad: "Don't be late, I want you both there."

He commands like he always does.

We can only make it if I find Ayize.

NTOMBI\*

These three are up to something, they think I can't see their gallivanting. I am on to them like a house on fire. I want to know what their daily escapades are about. Jonas and Mhambi are busking in the sun outside. Petunia is bathing, this gives me a chance to check Mhambi's phone. He left it on the charger and it's my luck that he doesn't have a password on his phone.

Okay, I can't see anything here. There are no messages, Mhambi is boring. Who doesn't have WhatsApp in this day? How does he talk to Petunia when he's not home? That app is like your own personal private investigator.

Maybe the call logs will tell me something.

Ndodakazi?

Who could that be? As far as I know their daughters are in boarding school and none of them have mobile phones.

There's another number here, it's saved as Mkhwenyane (son in-law). Mhambi doesn't have a son in-law.

I knew that they are up to something, this proves it.

"What are you doing?"

Nonsense!

Mashoto startles me with her annoying voice.

Me: "Yini ngawe?" (What's wrong with you?)

Mashoto: "That's not your phone. What are you doing Ntombi?"

Me: "It's none of your business, I can do anything I want in my house."

I hope she reads between these words that she should stay out of my way.

Mashoto: "Bhuti, Mhambi!!!" (Brother.)

She shouts to him after opening the door.

Me: "Shut up wena." (You.)

Mashoto: "Bhuti, Mhambi!!!" (Brother.)

She's so stubborn. I place the phone back on the charger.

Petunia rushes from the bathroom, her eyes are popped out.

I don't know who called her.



Petunia: "What's wrong?"

Mxm.

Me: "You are not Mhambi."

I retort with a grumpy tone.

Petunia: "He's my husband so, if his name is called with an emergency tone I will act."

Yoh! Brooke Logan.

Me: "Niyathandana wena no Mhambi neh?" (You and Mhambi love each other, hey?)

Petunia: "Mashoto. What happened? Why were you calling Mhambi?"

The stupid woman will snitch.

Mashoto: "Ntombi was going through your husband's phone."

Witch!

"What?"

Here's the husband...

Great!!!

Mhambi: "Why were you going through my phone Ntombi?"

He strides towards me and takes it off the charger.

Me: "I was checking the time."

I lie.

Petunia: "There's a clock on the wall Ntombi."

Petunia must drop dead this instant, I can't stand her.

Me: "Haibo, ngiboshiwe that, you have to interrogate me like this?" (Am I under arrest?)

Mhambi: "Kulungile." (It's okay.)

That sounds like a warning.

Me: "What does that mean Mhambi?"

He doesn't respond, he begins to walk back outside.

"Mhambi, u Ntombi ukhuluma nawe." (Ntombi is talking to you.)

That's Moses.

When did he wake up?

Mhambi doesn't acknowledge him as he goes on about his business.



Moses: "Kwenzakalani Ntombi?" (What's going on Ntombi?)

I have to tell him in private, Petunia is ogling at me, she too is looking for answers.

Me: "Is it not this witch Mashoto? She told Petunia that I was going through Mhambi's phone."

He frowns at me.

Moses: "Is this the reason Mhambi felt a need to threaten you?"

I thought I was the only one who heard that tone.

Me: "Cabanga nje Moses?" (Imagine.)

Petunia: "He didn't threaten anyone, Ntombi must stay out of people's business. Uzolimala."  
(She will get hurt.)

I don't trust that look Petunia is giving me.

Me: "Did you hear that Moses?"

Moses: "Ngizwile mkami." (I heard it my wife.)

Why is he calling me that? He probably wants something.

If he wants to go and drink again he has another thing coming.

Me: "Moses, can I see you in the bedroom?"

I walk past Petunia, this woman is too much for me. I can't handle her.

Moses: "Yini Ntombi?"

He's standing in the door way.

Me: "Vala umnyango nawe." (Close the door.)

He shuts it and potters to me as a pucker builds up between his eye brows.

Me: "Have you noticed how Jonas, Mhambi and Petunia are always going out and coming home late?"

Moses: "It happened twice Ntombi, it's not a big deal."

I knew his frail brain wouldn't understand.

Me: "It is a big deal Moses. I was checking for something suspicious on Mhambi's phone, he has numbers saved as Mkhwenyane." (Son in-law.)

Moses: "So?"

Me: "Mhambi doesn't have a son in-law, his daughters are still in school."

I clarify.

He scratches his head in confusion.

Moses: "Okay. What's your conclusion?"

Moses is so slow.

Me: "Think Moses. Who could this son-in-law be?"

He's thinking... Good.

Moses: "Lelo's boyfriend?"

Wow.

I give up.

Me: "No, think about this Moses. It's Amara, she's married and they didn't tell us."

He roars in laughter.

I'll wait for him to finish...

And, he continues...

I don't see anything funny with what I said.

Me: "Stop and listen to me."

I push him back.

Moses: "Hayi ngiyaxolisa Ntombi. Kodwa uyahlekisa mfazi, hayi cha." (I'm sorry Ntombi but, you're funny.)

He's still laughing.

Me: "Moses use your brain, it's Amara. I'm telling you, if it was Lelo they wouldn't be so secretive about it."

My current words have him laughing again. Moses is a fool.

Me: "You're so annoying."

Moses: "Lalela Ntombi, I saw the men that took Amara. Heyi mfazi, those people were not looking for marriage." (Listen.) (Woman.)

He states in an amused tone.

Me: "Why is Mhambi keeping it a secret ke?" (Then.)

Moses: "Angazi nami, ask him maybe he will tell you." (I don't know.)

My assumptions are right, I know it.

Moses: "Amara married?"

He laughs out loud.

Moses: "Hayi suka." (Get out of here.)

He declares as he laughs his way out of the room. I can't be wrong, it has to be Amara.

To be continued...

BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

138\*

SETHU\*

The fact that we have to sit here and listen to these people talk about that evil man as if he was a saint is pure torture.

Not one person has stated the truth.

Ayize is seated next to me holding my hand, Styles and Neo are two rows away from us. The church is not as full as I thought it would be.

"John was a good man, he always put other people before him."

That's one of his friends spewing nonsense from his mouth. Ayize drops her head, her shoulders are convulsing. She's laughing.

Did I mention that my sister is drunk?

She is wasted.

Me: "Are you okay?"

She brings her head up to look at me, her eyes are filled with tears. I can't grasp if they are from crying or laughing. My mother takes the podium, she didn't tell us that she would be speaking.

Mom: "The first time I met John, I didn't like him for my sister. I thought he wasn't good enough for her, he proved me wrong. I remember when he came to my father's house to ask for her hand in marriage, that's when I knew that he was a man of honour. My sister, you found a gem for yourself. Indoda emadodeni." (Men amongst men.)

Ayize tightens her hold on my hand, her head is again bowed. I place my arm around her shoulder.

Mom: "To say you were blessed with the best would be an understatement my sister. John was full of life, he loved life as much as he loved people."

Ayize stifles a laugh, she smashes her hand on her mouth to stop herself from laughing. She's failing dismally.

This is when the church erupts with the sound of her laughter.

Me: "Ayize?"

She's laughing uncontrollably, all eyes are on us. Mom has a death stare shooting at us. I turn back to look at Styles. He and Neo are carrying scowls as they stare in confusion."

Ayize: "This is bullshit, all of this is bullshit."

She pushes herself up to her feet. I take her hand trying to pull her down.

Aunt stares at her in puzzlement.

Mom: "Ayize sit down."

Mom commands, she's talking to the wrong person. Ayize will not listen to her.

Ayize: "No, no. Not today mother, you will not tell me what to do."

She pushes her way to the front, grabs the microphone from my mother.

Ayize: "It's my turn to speak, everyone has said their part."

She says in her drunk tone.

She's going to confess everything.

Ayize: "Uncle dearest deserves to hear some words from me as well. It's only fair because he also gave me memories."

Mom: "Ayize stop, give me that."

Taking the micro phone from her will not be as easy as mom thinks. Dad marches to the front, he's wearing a cloak of embarrassment.

Dad: "My baby come with me."

He takes a hand that is snatched away from him.

Ayize: "I'm your baby today? What was I that night when I told you that this man raped me?"

She blurts out.

Sounds of shock occupy the building followed by my aunt's screams of agony, she's wailing in no time.

Mom: "AYIZE!!!"

She raises her hand to slap her, Ayize manages to block it. She sends a slap back on my mother's cheek.

Dad: "Ayize?"

His is a whisper.



Ayize: "Sorry dad, it's just that your wife needed to be put in her place."

She laughs. Mom stands with her hand on her cheek and shock on her face.

I can't watch this.

I rush to the podium to take Ayize away from there.

Me: "Ayize, let's go. We'll talk about this at home."

My request doesn't seem to be getting through to her.

Ayize: "Wait, let me finish here first."

Dad: "Ayize listen..."

She cuts him off.

Ayize: "You know what was on my mind when I was sitting right over there listening to all you, liars."

She points at our sitting spot.

Ayize: "All I could see was this coffin burning."

Gasps from the crowd resound.

Ayize: "Yes, it made me feel good. You people have got to be ashamed of yourselves. How can you stand here and speak lies about this old fool."

She taps the coffin with the microphone. Dad has his arms over mom's shoulders, she has been silenced. There's a commotion in the church, people are casting evil eyes, some are whispering.

NKOMO\*

I have found myself in the arms of Ruth once again, my mind is muddled, I have no clue what I'm doing now. I came here to see if she has used the earrings, the box is packed away in a drawer. She did not give a reason as to why she hasn't worn them and I did not care to ask.

Ruth: "You have proven to me once again that you are what you say you are Sbo?"

Her head is resting on my chest with her arm around me.

Me: "How do you mean?"

Ruth: "Dominant, you know your story and I am impressed."

She sounds happy.

Have I made this woman fall for me?

Ruth: "You left me wanting for more. Why did you disappear on me, Sbo?"

What have I gotten myself into?

Me: "I had work."

I retort with a lie.

Me: "Ruth, remember what I said about us?"

I need to remind her that we are not a thing.

Ruth: "I know, you said go with the wind. Can I just enjoy this moment, please?"

She clasps her arm around me.

Me: "So? Why haven't you tried the earrings on yet?"

If words could sting then, these are the ones.

Ruth: "They are too precious to be worn without a reason."

Me: "A reason?"

Ruth: "Yeah, I can't wear them while roaming around in this lonely hotel room."

A knock on the door jams me from asking any further questions.

Ruth: "Shit!"

She exclaims as she jolts up.

Me: "Who is it?"

Ruth: "There is only one person who knocks like that."

I leer at her waiting for an answer.

Ruth: "Segun."

She grunts out the name, her voice carries a certain anger for this man.

This is the part where I hide.

Ruth: "Quick, go to the bathroom."

She jumps off the bed in a hurry, the knock is loud and demanding. The man knocks like he has a right to invade her space.

Me: "Hold on, I've got it."

She's pushing me half naked into the bathroom, while my clothes hang in her hands. She throws them in and shuts the door closed.

Ruth: "I'm coming."

I hear her reply with a chagrined tone.

It takes about a minute for that bothersome knock to stop.

“What are you doing here?”

Her voice is not welcoming.

“Why are you not taking my calls?”

He booms like he fathers her, that’s definitely Segun’s voice.

Ruth: “What do you want from me? I thought I told you to leave me alone.”

Segun: “I’m not going to do that, we have a mission to complete and you’re slacking Ruth.”

Ruth: “Do you think my life revolves around your son? I can’t be chasing a man who has no interest in me.”

She ripostes back, throwing her words out in anger.

Segun: “You were told to do anything to make him fall for you. What have you done so far?”

Ruth: “Must I force myself into his house Segun?”

Segun: “Hey, it’s chief Segun to you. You will address me with respect young lady.”

She goes quiet due to him chiding her.

Segun: “I want you to step up your game, we’re not here on holiday Ruth.”

Ruth mummurs something I can’t make out.

Segun: “What?”

Ruth: “I said I want out.”

She announces loudly.

Segun: “You must be crazy. What is it that brought you to this decision?”

Ruth: “You know that I never wanted this.”

Segun: “Tough luck Ruth, it’s not about you.”

Ruth: “It’s my life and I want out.”

She yells, not caring that Segun is royalty.

A galling horse laugh matches his voice, the son of a bitch is laughing at her.

Segun: “My dear you have no life, it doesn’t belong to you. Ask your father, he will tell you.”

Ruth: ‘I will find my way out of this mess, we’ll see who’ll be laughing in the end.’

He takes yet another scornful chortle.

Segun: "Good luck, while you're trying to find your way out. Get to work, you don't want to get me mad Ruth Adaeze."

The laugh again...

It dies down with the sound of footsteps.

It should be safe to walk out now. I find Ruth sitting on the bed, she looks extremely angry.

Me: "Who was that?"

As if I don't know.

Ruth: "The first man on my hit list."

She reveals impassively, she leers at me with her cold eyes.

Me: "What do you mean?"

Ruth: "I'm getting my life back Sbo, if it means I have to go to jail for it then I will."

Her words send chills down my spine.

I repeat...

What have I gotten myself into?

SETHU\*

I understand my sister's anger, I would do the same thing as her.

Ayize: "Where was I? Oh yes, the part where John raped me."

These people still express sounds of shock.

Ayize: "I don't know why you people are surprised, we all know that John was not a saint. Are you people not ashamed to lie in church?"

Dad: "Ayize, I am asking you, my child. Come with me."

I think this is enough.

My eyes search for Styles, he and Neo are on their feet. My aunt hasn't stopped wailing. There are women comforting her. This must come as a shock to her.

Mom: "I knew that you were a demon Ayize, I should've aborted you when I had the chance."

Dad: "Nkosikazi." (My wife.)

Ayize: "That's fine Beauty, I don't see you as my mother anyway."

She retorts with a cold tone.

Me: "Ayize let's get out of here."

I pleading with her, I know that she doesn't mean what she just said to mom. She's protecting her heart from pain.

Ayize: "I want to talk to aunt, I want to tell her what her husband did to me."

She plods to my aunt who is still in tears.

Mom: "You stay away from my sister, she pulls her back. Ayize turns and pushes my mother, she stumbles and falls flat on her butt.

Ayize: "Aunty, did your beloved sister tell you what your husband did to me? Did she tell you that he raped me?"

Aunt presses her hands on her ears as she scream cries.

Ayize: "No, you have to listen to me, you need to know the type of a man your husband was."

Ayize grabs her hands trying to pull them off from her ears.

Aunt: "No, I don't want to hear it."

She screams.

Ayize: "You need to hear it aunty, I want you to hear it."

Her voice is breaking, she will crying any minute now.

"Zee, come with me."

I turn to see Neo, he carries a scowl on his face.

Ayize: "Aunty, listen to me."

She screams at her.

Ayize: "Please."

Her tears fail her.

She wants someone to believe her and she thinks that aunt is the one.

Neo: "That's enough Zee, come with me please."

He takes her arm, Ayize snatches it away without turning to him. Her attention is engrossed on aunt.

I see my mother rush to Ayize, she's ready to attack. The look on her face says it.

Mom: "You get away from her, you demon child."

She screams, I try to push her back but, Neo beats me to it as he stands before her.

Mom: "Get out of my way."



She commands, Neo doesn't say anything in return. I don't see Styles anywhere.

Ayize: "Why are you not saying anything aunty? Why?"

Aunt is shaking her head like a child in denial, the elders are fighting to get Ayize to stop.

Aunty: "I know, I have always known the truth."

What?

She confesses in a loud voice.

Aunty: "I know what he did to you."

Ayize stumbles back and falls in my arms.

Ayize: "You knew?"

The shock in her voice is unmistakable.

Aunt: "I have always known my child, I'm sorry."

She cries.

Me: "Why didn't you say anything?"

Aunt: "I was afraid, I guess. I heard your father arguing with him one night, John didn't deny anything. They came to an agreement that nothing will be said, I don't know how or why it was decided so."

She reveals a shocking truth.

Ayize turns back to look at dad, he's sitting on a chair sopping in shame.

Aunt: "I never spoke about it after, I lacked the courage to confront John. I hated him for what he did to his daughter."

His what?

Me: "Wait aunty? What did you say?"

Mom: "Busi, this is not the time."

Me: "Did John rape Lebo as well?"

Aunt shakes her head.

Me: "What do you mean his daughter?"

Aunt: "You are his daughter, Ayize."

She drops a bomb on us.

Ayize: "Aunty no."

She steps back with these words.



I look at my mother, her face is emotionless.

Me: "Is it true mom?"

She nods with no hesitation.

Ayize: "AAAHHHHHH!!!!!"

She releases a loud scream as she stumbles back. Neo catches her from behind, his arms are around her waist and his cheek is resting on hers. He holds her up as she sinks down screaming in agony and pain. I can't take her cries, they break my heart.

Aunt: "I'm sorry my child, I'm sorry. I hate him, I hate him as much."

Me: "Why would you do this?"

I scream at my mother, she has no remorse. Her eyes are dead.

Mom: "This is not the right time to talk about this. We'll talk after the funeral."

She still wants to bury that bastard.

The church is suddenly empty, my eyes find Styles. He's clearing the building, only the family has remained. .

Ayize is still wailing in Neo arms.

AMARA\*

I'm actually two weeks pregnant, it's still the early stages.

You'd swear that Randall is the one expecting a baby, his appetite has suddenly grown. He eats more than he should and I'm worried about the raisins he's always consuming.

Here I am in the kitchen preparing a sandwich for him and he is still munching.

Randall: "Don't put the cheese, I don't want it."

He stops me before I could drop a slice on the sandwich.

Randall: "Put these instead."

Shock is plain on my face as he passes me those stupid snacks he's forever feasting on.

Me: "You can't be serious."

Randall: "Amara, I will not eat that if you don't put these raisins in there."

He grunts.

Me: "Will you go on strike because of raisins."

"You're pregnant Amara?"

Randall and I glance at each other at the sound of Chioma's voice.

Me: "How did you know?"

She shoots me her usual warm smile.

Chioma: "I noticed with Uze, all of a sudden he became sensitive. He eats more and those things he's always snacking on."

She's standing beside Randall and has this proud look on her face.

Me: "Randall is experiencing pregnancy cravings?"

He grimaces in confusion.

Chioma: "Yes."

How lucky am I?

He frowns as I wiggle my eye brows at him.

Randall: "That can't be true Chioma, I'm not the one who's expecting."

He hates the sound of that.

Chioma: "It happens, men do suffer pregnancy symptoms in sympathy with their partners. There's more to come, cramps, mood swings, morning sickness. You can also experience labour pains during labour and delivery of the baby."

She utters. Today marks the day I have seen Randall in fear, the look on his face is priceless.

Randall: "Is there a cure for that?"

He stutters.

Chioma: "No."

Randall: "There has to be a cure Chioma."

Me: "Stop being a big baby. I for one am happy that we will share the pain together. I can't suffer alone."

I declare. I love the look on his face.

Randall: "Amara, I'm a man. I can't go through any of that."

He continues with his complaints.

Me: "Why not? I'm carrying your big head, it's only fair that you carry something as well."

Chioma: "Don't worry Uze, it's not so bad. Nine months will go by fast."

Her attempt to comfort him does not seem to be working.



Me: "Let him be Chioma, he must feel it."

I can't clog my laughter.

Chioma: "I'm happy for you two, you deserve everything beautiful and more."

Me: "Thank you, Chioma."

She peeps at Randall beside her.

Chioma: "Uze my son, I bless you."

She places her hand on his shoulder.

Chioma: "May you find happiness and joy, may you grow old with the one you love. May everything you touch be blessed and everything you do prosper."

Randall: "Thank you ma."

He sends his appreciation with a ghost of a smile on his face.

Chioma: "Amara, feed him."

She laughs as she walks away.

Randall: "She could be wrong you know."

He debates.

Me: "Chioma is a wise woman, I trust her words."

He huffs.

I'm done with this sandwich, he frowns as I put the plate before him.

Me: "What happened?"

Randall: "I don't want white bread, I want brown."

He grunts.

Me: "You said to use white bread."

Randall: "I change my mind, I don't want it anymore."

Me: "If this is what I have to go through for the next nine months, then let me carry the burden."

He sneers at my retort.

Randall: "I don't mind, I'm exhausted already."

He's grouchy.

It's not like I have a choice, the man is hungry. I have to start all over.

Randall: "Do you think your uncle will agree to us getting married?"

He questions randomly.

Three days later, his question hasn't changed.

Me: "If you do things right, he won't have a problem with it."

Randall: "I have a feeling that he will give me a hard time. Jonas is difficult, I saw him the moment he laid his skinny legs here."

Me: "Really?"

A smile forms on his mouth.

Randall: "I'm joking, on the real though, I want things to go right."

Me: "Do you know what to do?"

Randall: "Pay the bride price."

I don't think he has a clue.

Randall: "In Ghana, the groom would ask for a list from the bride's family."

He proclaims.

Me: "A list containing what?"

I ask, placing his order on the table. He thanks me with a smile.

Randall: "Ornaments, clothes and cash for the bride's mother father and brothers."

Me: "Okay, it's different this side. You have to write a letter to my family to formally ask for them to meet. You should make your intentions clear and the exact date when the negotiations would begin."

Something is worrying me though.

Me: "Who will represent you?"

He sighs.

Randall: "I was thinking Styles and Nkomo. I have a maternal uncle who is willing to come here."

I'm glad as long as there's an elder.

Me: "That's good, I don't think uncle Jonas would appreciate two young men sitting before him and asking for his daughter's hand in marriage."

I mutter, thinking of how strict and unyielding my uncle is.

Randall: "If anyone has the power of persuasion, it's Styles. I think he and your uncle will get along pretty well."

Me: "What about the dangers that lie ahead?"

These negotiations would mean that I have to go away from here.

Randall: "Don't worry about that, you think about being Mrs. Randall Okolie."

I love the thought of being his wife, although I was sceptical at first. My heart cannot lie to me, this is what I want.

I also want a ring.

Me: "You know my hand feels empty."

I raise my left hand to wiggle my fingers, he gets it instantly. He smirks at my gesture.

I'm not getting any response from him, he alternates to indulging his food.

Randall: "Can I have milk please?"

Wow.

It's going to be fun watching him go through the pregnancy symptoms.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

139\*

SETHU\*

The coffin stands on the podium, the burial has been halted for now. Other family members were sent out, the whispers and stares from them were getting too much. That's what family does, we'd rather laugh at each other than offer support.

Ayize has cried her eyes out. I doubt she has any tears left in her. To hear that the man who assaulted you is your father must be terrible, I can't fathom how she must be feeling.

She's settled on a bench with Neo beside her, I'm thinking this is his way of being there for her. My sister needs all the support she can get, my parents have failed her and they continue to do so. The shocking revelation is yet to be fully unmasked.

My mother is the least bit worried, she's chosen an isolated spot. I don't see her coming forth to confess.

Aunt is drained and tired, it's an obvious fact. Her body is slouched back on the chair and her mind seems to be far.

"Woza wena." (Come.)

My father's elder sister lugs my mother's hand, she pulls her towards Ayize.

Mom: "Sisi?" (Sister.)

Aunty: "It's time that you tell this girl the truth."

Dad jumps to my mother's side.

Dad: "Sisi, don't do this. It's not right."

Aunt Busi: "I'm tired of hiding Beauty, I had to live with this secret to protect the girls from the truth."

Lebo's mother articulates as she's ready to speak. She makes her way to Ayize, kneels before her and cups her cheeks. Ayize frowns in return.

Aunt Busi: "Ayize my child, I hope you will be able to forgive us for what we have done."

I move closer, her small voice hardly reaches my ears.

Dad: "Do you think it's wise to do this Busi?"

He holds a look of fear.

Aunt Busi: "Ayize is old enough, she will be able to handle the truth. I am tired of watching her suffer and the hate you have for her."

Dad: "I don't hate my daughter. Ayize my child, baba loves you my baby." (Dad.)

He sits next to her as he takes her hand.

Dad: "I hope that whatever you hear today, you will not turn on your father. I don't want to lose you, you and Sethu are my life."

His emotional state paints a picture that, showcases the severity of this secret.

Ayize: "What is it dad?"

Tears stream down her face.

Busi: "Your mother Beauty and I fell pregnant around the same time, she gave birth in the morning while I delivered a few hours later. The babies were somehow switched. The truth came to light ten years later when Lebo fell sick and needed a blood transfusion. She had anemia and none of us were a match but, your father here. That's when we were told that his DNA matches hers by 99 percent. Tests were done only to find out you and Lebo were switched at birth. We couldn't switch the babies back. I had grown to love my baby and I couldn't lose her. Your mother on the other hand, resented you. She was against the whole idea."

Dad: "I too had grown so fond of you baby and I couldn't lose you, I had to convince your mother to keep you with us. Lebo was only a few streets away and she could see her anytime she wanted. I couldn't lose you Ayize, I taught you how to walk and say your first word. You had taken over my heart and I didn't want to lose those memories."

I'm astounded by this story, it doesn't make sense to me.

Ayize: "You're my mother?"

Aunt nods in tears.

Aunt Busi: "John didn't know, he found out years later and that's what led to his excessive drinking. He hated himself for what he did to you, he drank to forget his evil deed."

Neo: "That doesn't excuse what he did."

Neo points out the truth.

Dad: "Who are you?"

Dad is really this type of a person.

Ayize: "Beauty is not my mother?"

She declares, clogging my father from interrogating Neo.

Mom: "I'm not."

Her reply is unsympathetic.

Me: "Mom at least have some compassion."

She huffs as she crosses her arms across her chest.

Aunty: "Beauty can't be compassionate, she is an evil woman."

My father's sister adds.

Ayize: "Wow."

I sense another break down

Mom: "I'm not evil sisi. What would you have done if you were forced to raise a child that is not yours?"

Says the woman who doesn't miss a day in church.

Aunty: "She is your niece. Ukuphi umehluko phakathi kwakhe no Lebo?" (What's the difference between her and Lebo?)

Mom: "She's not my child, that's what."

Have I been blind my whole life? I have always seen this woman as a saint, this part that she portrays at the moment is new to me.

Ayize: "Why do you hate me so much?"

There's this pose Ayize does when she's ready to fight, it's what I'm looking at right now.

Mom: "I don't hate you Ayize, I just don't like you."

Me: "Why mom? It doesn't make sense."

She's talking but her words are muddled.

Ayize: "Why? What did I do to you Beauty?"

Mom: "It's always been about you Ayize. From the moment we found out the truth, your father wouldn't stop fussing over you. I wanted my daughter, I needed her with me. I was ready to send you back to your parents but, your father threatened to leave me. He chose you over me and I resented you for that."

Her confession leaves us in more confusion.

Me: "I don't understand."

Dad: "Your mother is not well Sethu, she's suffering from a mental illness."

I wish he would stand up for Ayize like this.

Must he always justify mom's actions?

Ayize: "Stop lying dad."

She shouts.



Dad: "I'm not. She was diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder, I noticed a change in her when you were a few months old. She would get upset when all the attention was given to you, the same thing happened with Sethu. Your mother became manipulative, selfish and demanding."

Ayize: "That sounds like excuses to me, you're taking her side like you always do."

Me: "Just like you take Lebo's side."

Dad: "Lebo is away from her real parents, the least we could've done was stand by her."

Me: "And not us? You say you didn't want Ayize to leave you yet, you treated her like she didn't matter."

Dad: "That's not true, I tried my best to love you girls and your mother is not a bad person Ayize."

Ayize: "She is not my mother."

She argues loudly.

Mom: "Thank you Ayize for clearing that out, I don't understand how my sweet sister gave birth to a demonic child like you. I knew you lied about the rape, you must have seduced him and he rejected you so you cried rape."

She's yelling at her.

I don't care what illness they say she has, she bloody looks fine to me. How dare she say that?

Ayize grits her teeth in anger, she clenches her fist and her eyes before a scream erupts from her mouth.

Ayize: "I hate you, I hate you."

She yells back as she dives at my mother, they tumble to the floor.

Ayize is straddling her.

Me: "Ayize!"

I call after her, she's bawling while pulling my mother's hair.

Mom: "Get off me."

She screams.

Dad tries to pull her off of her, neo is also there helping. They manage to get a weeping Ayize off.

Dad: "Forgive your mother my child, she is not well."

He comforts her with these stupid words while holding her in his arms.

Mom: "What about me baba? She attacked me?"

She seeks attention, waiting for dad to help her up.

Ayize is waggling to free herself from his hold, Neo is also there trying to help her. The look on dad's face could kill.

Ayize: "Ngiyeke." (Let me go.)

She finally wiggles out of his arms, Neo steps back. I see the attachment he has on her, he has not said much however, he hasn't left her side.

Ayize: "You're a useless man, dad."

Dad: "Ayize?"

Ayize: "Today, right now and right here. I disown you, all of you and declare myself an orphan."

Aunt Busi: "Please my child, don't do this."

Ayize: "You're not innocent in all of this aunt, you knew what that monster did to me and you kept quiet about it. You should've defended me as your daughter, I had no one on my side and you knew but, you still kept quiet."

Aunt: "I'm sorry, I hated him too. I swear it."

Ayize: "Yet you stayed with him, didn't you? You're the same as my so called parents, you chose someone over your own child. I needed someone to believe me and take my side, I needed to be chosen too."

Aunt Busi: "I know I did wrong by you, I wronged you in so many ways and I'm sorry."

Her tears will not speak for her today.

Ayize: "It doesn't matter anymore, you all can go to hell. I'm done with this family."

She turns to walk away, dad holds her hand.

Dad: "What about me my baby? Don't leave your father like this, don't leave me please."

She yanks her hand back, clicks her tongue and walks away. I have to follow my sister, I have chosen her after all.

NOMBULELO\*

Today I'm more tired than ever, I want my bed. I'm in the hospital bathroom and my heart is heavy due to the dispute I have with Amara, I've tried her phone a couple of times and she's not answering.

I can be as stubborn as her, one more try and it goes through.

"Hello."

I'm met by her cold tone.



Me: "Hi sis."

Amara: "What is it Lelo?"

She asks, keeping the icy tone.

Me: "You're not taking my calls Amara."

It saddens me.

Amara: "Liya had the phone with her."

It would be nice to speak without her mentioning her new family.

Me: "Oh!!! I miss you Amara."

She doesn't respond.

Me: "We haven't had time to speak since I found you."

Amara: "You know I've been busy, Liyana was sick."

Liyana again.

Me: "Can we meet? I'm about to take my lunch, we can go get those fat cakes you loved."

Amara: "I can't go to Vaal Lelo, actually I can't go out at the moment."

Me: "Oh yeah, I forgot. Can I come over? I need to see you."

Amara: "I don't see why not, but Randall is around and since you don't like him, I don't know how that's going to play out."

Great.

I need time alone with her.

Me: "I'll let you know if I can make it."

I utter.

I doubt that I want to see Randall.

Amara: "Okay, bye."

Me: "Wait. I'm sorry Amara for everything. It wasn't my intention to hurt you, I became defensive because I felt like I was losing you again this time to Randall and his daughter."

Amara: "Liyana is mine as much as she is his."

She protests.

Me: "Yes, I'm sorry. I need to get used to it. Please give me a chance, I want to be there for you during this trialling time."

I hear her heavy sigh.

Amara: "I guess we can start over."

The coldness in her tone has washed off, it's a relief.

Me: "Thank you Amara, I'll call you later to let you know if I'll make it."

Amara "I'll hear from you."

I spot Brenda walk towards me with my father.

What is he doing here? He smiles as he sees me.

Brenda: "Saana, this man says he's your dad." (Friend.)

She insists on calling me that.

Moses: "Unjani Lelo?" (How are you?)

Me: "What are you doing here baba?" (Dad.)

Moses: "Ngiyabonga sisi." (Thank you lady.)

He dismisses Brenda, I don't know why she's still standing here.

She smiles before walking away.

Moses: "Can we talk?"

Me: "I'm at work and how did you find me?"

Moses: "Your mother told me that you work here, I am proud of you my child."

I don't care about his declaration, maybe months ago it would've meant the world to me. I don't see him the same anymore.

Me: "I'm busy, dad."

He gives me a pleading stare.

Moses: "How is your baby? How far are you?"

I move back as he touches my baby bump.

Me: "He's fine."

Moses: "It's a boy?"

His question comes with a big smile.

Me: "We don't know, we want it to be a surprise."

Moses: "We? Do you live with him? The father of the baby?"

I don't know how it's any of his business.

Me: "I have to go."

I announce and turn the other direction. He claims my hand, turning me back around.

Me: "What are you doing? I'm at work dad, please go."

Moses: "Please Lelo, sit with me for a while. I miss you my baby."

He states.

Me: "I doubt that you do, you abandoned me, remember dad?"

Moses: "I was angry Nombulelo and disappointed, you can't blame your father for his mistakes."

Me: "Which mistakes? Abandoning me or molesting Amara and selling her off?"

My question causes a resistance in his eyes.

Me: "I know the truth, you molested my cousin for years."

Moses: "That's a lie Lelo. Who told you this?"

It's funny how he's denying yet, his eyes write the truth.

Me: "It doesn't matter dad, you're a disgusting human being."

Moses: "Don't do that Lelo, do not let people come between us. Whoever told you this, lied"

He is unbelievable, of course he would deny it.

Me: "Excuse me, I have work."

I stride past him.

I have finally been introduced to Moses Mngoma.

MKHIZE\*

Masibiya: "Baba hurry, ngu maDlamini. She wants to jump."

MaSibiya runs into my office carrying this warning, I'm on my feet in a split second.

Me: "Jump from where MaSibiya?"

MaSibiya: "In her room baba, shesha." (Hurry.)

She runs out in panic.

Me: "Sika come."

We scurry after her to find MaDlamini standing on the edge of the balcony.

Me: "MaDlamini, wenzani?" (What are you doing?)

She slowly turns her head.

MaDlamini: "Baba buka, I can fly." (My husband, look.)

She spreads her hands out as if flying.

Me: "Yehla lapho nkosikazi." (Get down from there.)

MaDlamini: "U Lunga uthi kumele ngigxume, I will fly to him. Angisho mfana wami?" (Lunga says I must jump, right my boy?)

She glances to her side before she lurches as if getting ready to jump.

MaSibiya: "MaDlamini!"

She screams.

Me: "Awume MaSibiya, you'll startle her." (Wait.)

Masibiya: "Baba, she's going to jump."

I can see that.

Me: "MaDlamini ngiyakucela, ngicela uyehle lapho." (Please get down from there.)

I should have listened when MaSibiya said maDlamini has become a danger to herself. How do I fix this?

MaDlamini: "Iyangibiza indodana yami, ngifuna ukuya ku Lunga wami baba. Ngivumele, ngivumele ngihambe." (My son is calling me, let me go to him.)

I can't see her face, her voice though is painted with sorrow.

Me: "Nkosikazi, akuyena uLunga loyo. Ngiyacela MaDlamini, ngiyacela mkami. Ngicela uyehle lapho." (It's not him my wife, please get down from there.)

Sika is moving closer to her, it's a risk because if she turns and sees him, she will be startled and fall.

MaDlamini: "Uyahamba u Lunga baba." (Lunga is leaving.)

Sika seizes her hand, pulls her back. She falls to the ground, MaSibiya dashes to her sister-wife.

MaDlamini: "Usehamba, mvimbe. Baba vimba u Lunga. Mtshela ukuthi ngiyamdinga." (Stop him, he's leaving. Tell him I need him please.)

She howls as MaSibiya holds her in her arms.

Me: "Thank you Sika."

He nods.

Sika: "You have to do something."

Me: "I know, I know Sika."

Where do I begin? She is beyond help.

STYLES\*

Neo says he needs gasoline and a lighter, he didn't tell me what he wants to do with it. I see Neo walk out of the church as I exit the car.

I meet him half way.

Neo: "Stylos."

Me: "What's going on?"

Neo: "A lot happened in your absence, they are going forward with the funeral."

He looks different.

Me: "Where is Ayize?"

He takes the plastic with the product and inspects its contents.

Neo: "She's somewhere around with Sethu."

His eyes search his surroundings as he replies.

Me: "Are they okay?"

His poker-face has me feeling uneasy.

Neo: "Zee is not okay, I don't know about Sethu."

He shrugs, Neo is livid right now. Something big happened in there and he's going to let me dig him for information.

Me: "What's up Neo?"

I troll after him as he walks back into the building, I'm getting frustrated.

Neo: "Nix." (Nothing.)

He leers at a bunch of young men standing next to the coffin. He's leading the way and I have to follow, he might do something stupid.

Neo: "Awe, awe magents." (Hi guys.)

He shakes their hands, his attitude has swivelled in the blink of an eye. Dejection has deserted him.

Neo: "I'm Neo and this is Stylos, ntjaka." (My friend.)

"Sho, sho." (Hello.)

They salute.

Me: "Sho." (Hi.)

Neo: "Eish Alpheus, gents. Ujampile vele? Why mara a re etsa so? Mazulu a na li sebeti. Motho oa bona re loana corona, he should've waited, it was going to get to him at some point. But no, Alpheus had to jump in front of a moving train." (Did he really jump? Why did he do this? Zulus are brave. He saw that we're fighting a pandemic.)

I thought his name was John.

"Eh baba, ngubani U Alpheus?" (Who is Alpheus?)

Neo: "The fool who jumped in front of a moving train."

He delivers his answer with a frown.

"His name was John, our uncle."

They are the cousins, I see.

Neo: "Argh shame, John oa batho. Did they find his remains? Or retela ntja?" (Poor John. Are we burying a dog?)

Neo inquires with a deadpan voice, he is up to something.

Me: "Take it down."

I reprimand him with a whisper.

Neo: "What's missing in here gents? A leg, an eye or the whole body."

He's brushing the coffin with his hand.

"Eish twana, some of his parts were not found." (Boy.)

One of the young men responds.

Neo: "Shame, askies." (Sorry.)

He tilts his head to side eye me, he walks to the other side of the coffin. Normally people would find his remarks strange.

Neo: "This is a nice coffin. What do you think Stylos?"

I nod, I don't know what his game plan is. This is not Neo, he raises his eye brows and I get the message. It's insane but, I have to cover up for him. I shield him, these boys are conversing, they can't see what is happening.

In a while, the smell of smoke seeks attention. I see a lot of nose wiggling, Neo has long moved from the casket.

"Umlilo, ibhokisi liyasha." (Fire, the coffin is on fire.)

One of the young men shouts.

People start screaming and running out of the building, Sethu's aunt faints on her seat. The elders stand strong, some jaw dropped and some with their hands on their heads.

If I'm not mistaken, this counts as an abomination. I hope it won't come back to bite Neo, I browse the building to see him afar, watching the fire that has surrounded the coffin.

My eyes catch a glimpse of Ayize as I amble to Neo, she's leaning against the exit door post. Arms across her chest, deep hatred on her face and her piercing gaze at the burning casket. It takes a while for her to walk away, I knew she hated John and what I just saw now is deeper than hate.

Me: "What did you do?"

Neo: "I made a wish come true."

Ayize's wish? It's unlike Neo to do something like this.

Neo: "Stylos?"

He pulls me to the side.

Me: "Yes."

Neo: "Where do people go if they want to visit a loved one who died and was never buried?"

Me: "What do you mean?"

Neo: "Well, in John's case. He was hit by a train, his remains have been burnt to ashes. Now, how will the family bury him?"

Me: "They keep the ashes in an urn."

Neo: "That's not what I want."

Me: "You want his ashes to disappear."

He grins.

Neo: "You see Stylos, you know me better than anyone."

Me: "I thought I did, you just set a casket ablaze for a girl you hardly know. What's going on with you?"

Neo: "I hate men who abuse women Stylos."

Me: "I know that, it's different this time. You want the man to be non-existent. There must be a reason behind that."

Neo: "I think you would have done the same if you were there during the revelation. Dammit, families can be evil Stylos. I'm glad it's only my mother and I."

Me: "Was it that bad?"

Neo: "You don't know."

He states as he walks away, this is typical of him. He makes a mess and leaves without cleaning it up. I am proud of my boy.

Today's events should be recorded in history books.

To be continued...

BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

140\*

AMARA\*

Liyana and her hide and seek game, I will age before my time because of her.

Me: "Liya..."

I call out to her, she's hiding somewhere around here and has an advantage because of her tiny figure so chances of me finding her sooner are slim.

Me: "Liyana come on, you need to take your bath."

I'm pretty sure she's laughing at me where ever she is.

Amazing, Chioma walks in the foyer right on time. She has a smile on her face, a scornful simper.

Me: "Chioma, help."

Her mouth falls upside down.

Chioma: "She's your daughter, I have aged and my time is up. Let her bother you now."

Me: "Chioma, you know I'm pregnant, I can't be stressing like this."

I push my lower lip out, she laughs.

Chioama: "You just found out you're pregnant, we're not there yet. Come back with the same line in... say about, eight months. I'll help you look for Liya then."

She continues to laugh as she strides away.

Me: "Chioma!!!"

I'm wasting my breath.

Me: "Liyana Okolie, come out now."





I shout, I'll be drained by the time I retire for bed.

A forceful hand lugs me, I'm trapped against the wall within a split second.

Me: "Bad timing."

I utter, my frustration will not let me enjoy this moment and I thought we were past this stage.

Maybe I was wrong about enjoying this moment. His lips moving on the crook of my neck gets me excited.

Me: "Randall."

I just remembered, there's a little brat who could be watching us right now because she enjoys seeing me suffer.

Randall: "Mmmhhh."

Me: "Not now."

Randall: "Yes now."

There goes my breathing, it won't be long till I'm heaving like tumble drier. My heart is doing the most work, it leaps at the feel of his wet lips on my bare skin.

Me: "Liyana."

I'm trying to warn him.

Randall: "She's with Chioma."

He replies with kisses on the most sensitive parts of my neck, he's trying to get me wet and darn it, it's working. His cold hand lies on my waist, I have been defeated and my arms have betrayed me and fallen on this man. He's like a beast who is never satisfied, a sex freak. A smile shows up on my mouth as his lips fall on mine. Is it out of excitement when I say, each kiss always feels like the first? I love how he kisses me, I forget everything around me and fall into this moment of bliss.

"Eeeewwww."

Somebody pinch me right now and build me a cave where I can hide my whole life.

Randall surges back, I have never seen him step away from me so fast. I am being denied right before my daughter.

Randall: "Princess?"

I hate to say I told you so but...

Me: "I told you so..."

He side eyes me with a curved brow.

Stubborn Okolie.



Liyana: "You guys are weird."

The disgusted look on her face is epic, I love it. My innocent Liya baby.

Me: "Baby, I have been looking for you."

I walk towards her and she steps back as she holds the expression in place.

Liyana: "I was hiding inside the kitchen cabinet."

She reveals innocently.

Randall: "Are you an elf that you fit in a cabinet?"

His question compels her to titter.

Liyana: "Elves don't exist, so I can't be an elf."

Me: "How do you know?"

Liyana: "Mommy told me."

It's been too long since she has mentioned her mother, Randall ogles at me, he's not fond of talking about her.

Randall: "Princess, you shouldn't hide in cabinets."

He kneels in front of her.

Liyana: "Why not papa?"

Randall: "It's not safe, you could get hurt."

Her expression is guileless, she can't apprehend how hiding in an empty cabinet could put her in harm.

Liyana: "But it's fun hiding in there."

Her protest has Randall shaking his head.

Randall: "It won't be when you're hurt."

Liyana: "But papa..."

She hums.

Randall: "Do you want me to report you to Chioma?"

He stops her dispute half way.

Liyana: "No."

She responds sensitively as she drops her head.

Me: "Your bath time is nearly over Liya, food is almost ready."

Liyana: "I'm not hungry."

She pastes her tiny hands on her chest.

Me: "Why?"

Liyana: "I don't want to eat anything Mara."

Randall: "You don't really have a choice now do you?"

She's sulking.

Liyana: "You're not fair papa."

Randall: "I know."

He wraps his large hand on her back as he pulls her into a soft hug.

Randall: "That's why I'm the best father in the world."

He kisses her cheek, Liyana is not in this scene.

Liyana: "Mara."

She complains.

Randall: "Forget it, Mara is not going to save you now."

He whisks her up in his arms and swings her around, only now does she take joy in her father's play.

Randall: "Let's see what Chioma prepared, I'm hungry."

He walks with her swinging in his arms from side to side.

Liyana: "I want raisins."

No, I will not allow my child to fall into that trap.

Me: "Randall."

My voices races with the distance between us to reach his big ears.

Randall: "I didn't do anything."

He's lying.

He sits Liyana on the kitchen counter.

Me: "You can't have a snack baby, you have to eat first."

Randall: "Hey, how come I don't get to be called baby?"

He gives me a questioning look, turning what I think to be a joke into something serious.

Liyana is tittering with her hand covering her mouth.

Me: "You're not a baby."

Randall: "I'm your baby."

His arms snake my waist and straightaway he drops his face on my neck. There's a child in here.

Me: "Mr. Okolie, control your hormones."

I push him back.

Liyana remains entertained.

Randall: "Call me baby first."

His arms cannot be disciplined, they are on my waist again.

Liyana: "Papa wants to be a baby."

She laughs openly and elatedly.

Randall: "Shh, you'll ruin things for me."

She smashes her hand on her mouth, blocking a giggle.

Randall: "I'm not letting you go until you call me baby."

Me: "I thought we agreed on bear."

He's moving his face closer with each word I utter.

Liyana: "Bear? That's funny."

This child has front row seats to a comedy show.

Randall: "You see, even Liya thinks it's a funny name."

Me: "You loved it just the other day."

Randall: "I'm allowed to change my mind, tell her Liya."

I'm being bullied.

Liyana: "Yes, Mara."

Two against one.

His lips are so close to mine that I can almost taste them.

Here it goes.

Me: "Baby, don't kiss me in front of the child."

A smile is smeared on his face before he cages my lips.

"Eewww."

Liyana again, we draw back to find her hands casing her eyes. Randall smile is transmittable,

obliging me to return it.

SETHU\*

Me: "The least you can do is tell me where you're going."

I'm rushing behind Ayize in this guest bedroom, she's getting ready to go out. We came home with Styles and Neo, Styles thought it would be better if we spent the night at his house. Ayize and I haven't spoken about what happened earlier today, she will not open up, I just know it.

Ayize: "What will you do if tell you?"

Me: "I need to know if you'll be safe where you are."

Ayize: "Sethu, I have lived on my own for years. You know what that means? I can take care of myself."

That's not what I see, I see a pained little girl who needs help.

Me: "Are you going to drink?"

Ayize: "Yes."

Me: "Let me come with you."

I have to keep an eye on her.

She cackles at my statement.

Ayize: "Mam' mfundisi at a club? I doubt it." (Pastor.)

She reveals her journey.

Me: "You're going to a club?"

Ayize: "Yep."

Her phone beeps, she walks past me as she heads to the bed where it lies.

Ayize: "My ride is here."

She tells, after opening the message.

Me: "Please don't go sis, stay and let's talk."

The look she gives me makes me feel stupid.

Ayize: "Go sit with your man and enjoy him, life is too short to be running after insignificant things."

Me: "I hate it when you speak like that, don't say such things to me. It makes me think that



you're going to take your life."

I must have jested because she's laughing.

Me: "It's not funny."

Ayize: "It is to me. Oh Sethu, it's sad that you don't know me. Suicide is the last thing on my mind."

She plods out the door with that.

Me: "What time will you be back?"

Ayize: "I don't know, don't wait up."

We get to the lounge where Styles and Neo are situated, they get up upon seeing us.

Styles: "Where are you going?"

He's asking this lady who is dressed up.

Ayize: "Out."

He brings his gaze to me, I motion that he stops her.

Styles: "Don't you think it's late to be going out?"

Me: "I agree with Styles."

Ayize: "The night is still young, people. Let me go and enjoy life."

Neo: "I can go with you, it's been long since I went out."

That's an idea.

Ayize: "No, I party alone."

Me: "Ayize please, don't be difficult, we're just looking out for you."

Ayize: "You're parenting me and I don't have parents as far as I know. Bye family."

She laughs and scampers out of the door.

Neo: "Where is she going?"

Me: "Club, she didn't tell me which one."

Neo: "Do you think she will do something stupid? Should I follow her?"

He asks as he grabs his car keys.

Me: "If it's not too much trouble, she might do something stupid."

Styles: "I think we should let her be, she probably wants to be alone."

Ayize wanting to be alone at this point could prove disastrous.

Me: "She's carrying so much pain Styles, anything is possible right now."

Neo: "Let me go."

Styles: "Make sure she doesn't see you Neo, she might retaliate if she feels that her privacy is being invaded."

Neo nods and heads out the door.

Styles ambles to me, places his hands on my shoulders as I wrap my arms around him.

Styles: "She'll be okay."

Me: "I hope so, she is so broken and I don't know how to help her."

Styles: "We'll get her help."

Me: "I don't see her wanting to talk to a stranger about her problems."

Styles: "What about you? Are you okay kitten?"

Me: "I'm fine."

Styles: "My strong Sethu."

He smiles down at me right after pecking my lips.

Styles: "Come, let me feed you."

He chortles pulling me to the kitchen.

Me: "I know other ways you can feed me."

I pull him back, circle my arms around his waist and create an oscillation on his spine.

Styles: "Really?"

He grins.

Me: "Yes."

I stand on my toes as I lean up to kiss him, he holds my face taking me into a slow kiss.

Styles: "I think I'm starting to see the picture, it's vivid though. Visuals will do."

He smirks.

Me: "Okay, let's go, so I can show you the whole picture then."

His naughty smile though.

Styles: "Oh baby!!!"

He exclaims jokingly causing me to laugh.

I take his hand, lead him to the bedroom, this will help me forget about Ayize.

MBUSO\*

Lelo is not home yet, she wasn't at work when I went to get her. This is unusual of her, I always know where she is and what she's doing. Lelo can't have me worry about her like this. This is careless of her.

I hear the crack of the key on the door, it's definitely.

Her eyes fall on me at the first step in.

Me: "Where have you been?"

She toddles in.

Lelo: "I'm sorry, I'm late.

Me: "Where have you been Lelo? You were not at the hospital when I came to get you. You should have told me that you'll find other means of transport, I waited for you like an idiot."

I follow her to the kitchen, she's pouring a glass of water and unbothered about my complaints.

Me: "Lelo, I'm talking to you."

Lelo: "I'm sorry, I should have called you. My battery was flat."

Me: "Where did you go? It's 9pm, you knocked off at 5pm."

Lelo: "I wanted to go see Amara."

Me: "Wanted to?"

Lelo: "Yes, I changed my mind on the way there."

She opens the pots on the stove and digs her nose in.

Me: "And where did you go after that?"

Lelo: "Geez Mbuso. What's with the questions?"

She exclaims with a loud voice.

Me: "Don't piss me off Lelo, I am not your friend. Do not speak to me like that. Is this the real you? Are these your true colours coming to light?"

Her eyes roll up letting me know that my words or actions put her off.

Lelo: "That's nonsense, I don't know what you're talking about."

Lelo has become extremely rude lately.

Me: "Lelo you better not be playing me."



She frowns.

Lelo: "Don't be ridiculous Mbuso, I would never play you."

She gaits back to the lounge.

Me: "Why won't you tell me where you were?"

She sighs, slowly settling down on the couch.

Lelo: "I went to a restaurant, I needed time alone."

There must be more.

Me: "Is that all?"

Lelo: "Yes, Mbuso. I have so much on my mind, I needed time to think."

Her eyes would never lie to me and looking into them, I'm persuaded that she speaks the truth.

Me: "You should communicate with me, I can't be running after you as if you're a child. I don't want to feel like I'm alone in this relationship."

I sit on the space next to her.

Lelo: "I'm sorry."

She hooks her arms around my neck as she rests her head on my shoulder.

NKOMO\*

With her arms tightly wrapped around me, she convulses. Her heavy breathing sounding so sweet in my ears, I collapse on the side of the bed fighting to get my breathing back to its normal pace. She turns her head to glance at me and smiles.

Ruth: "Wow. What are you trying to do to me?"

Knowing what she means I smirk at her question.

Me: "It's more like, what are you trying to do to me?"

Ruth: "I have to tell you, I was shocked when you knocked on my door after you left."

I found myself back here, on her door step. This was meant to be a game and it's turning out to be something I can't control. I'm confused as well, I don't know what's wrong with me. I'm climbing on a dangerous high mountain and every step I take brings me closer to my death.

She shifts closer to me, kisses me and her lips feel right against mine. Her head rests on my chest and it feels strange that I don't find anything wrong with it anymore.

Me: "I tried to stay away."



Like a fool I confess, digging my grave deeper and deeper. Who said anything about six feet under? Styles will drag me to hell kicking and screaming.

Ruth: "I'm glad you didn't, I like being around you."

It's scary that I have started to like her presence.

Me: "I can't believe I'm about to say this but, you drive me crazy."

My arms are enfolded around her, I can feel her heart beat against my chest. It's going at a fast rate.

Ruth: "Is it a bad thing?"

Me: "How can it be? You give me an adrenalin rush."

She pins her chin on my chest as she looks up at me.

Ruth: "I know it's too soon because we just met and hardly know each other but, I see something beautiful brewing from this. Tell me I'm not crazy."

I let my hands caress her plain back.

Me: "You're not crazy."

And I am in no position to be making promises I can't keep.

Ruth: "So you also want to see where this takes us."

I do.

Me: "Like I said last time..."

Ruth: "Go with the wind."

She finishes my sentence.

Me: "You're a smart woman."

She giggles before she releases a sigh that paints her weariness.

Me: "What's with that?"

Ruth: "What if the wind blows us in different directions?"

It definitely will.

Me: "We'll hold hands in the midst of it and hopefully, we'll make it out together."

She smiles.

Ruth: "I like the sound of that."

Me: "I knew you would sweetness."

She beams.

Ruth: "Sweetness?"

She gives me an approving smile.

Okay Nkomo, you can shut up now. You're starting to live up to your name.

I'm a dead man walking.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

141\*

AYIZE\*

I'm at a club in the north clubbing like it's my last night on earth. It's the way my mind avoids thinking about my problems, this is how I would rather have it. The loud music moves me like a remote control toy.

My skin is covered with sweat, dehydration has found a place in my throat.

This idiot joined me a while ago, he's rubbing against me and it's getting uncomfortable. It's bad enough that he's such a bad dancer. I keep pushing him and he's not getting the message. His hands are all over me and it's disgusting, the loud music doesn't do it for me anymore, I have had enough.

Me: "Get away from me, idiot."

I push him and trace my way back to the bar, it's a relief that he doesn't fight me.

Me: "Sorry bhuti." (Brother.)

I summon the bar tender, he slides to me.

Me: "Can I have a refill please."

The alcohol is like a drug that puts my brain into a sleep mode.

I swivel on my chair to check the atmosphere of the club, the good vibes are flowing. The dance floor is hoarded by walls of people jamming to the loud music.

"Lady, here you go."

The barman grabs my attention with his words as he slides a bottle of beer across the table.

Me: "I didn't order this."

He got it wrong.

"It's from that gentleman over there."

He points to my left.

What the hell is he doing here? Is he following me?

Me: "Take it away, I don't want it."

I deny the drink as I turn back to the barman.

“What does a guy have to do to buy a lady a drink?”

He’s here, I wish to avoid him but, I got here first so he should leave.

Me: “I don’t want anything from you, Lethabo.”

Lethabo: “That’s not the impression I got the last time I saw you.”

Me: “Leave me alone.”

I turn away only for him to follow my movement.

Me: “Gosh Lethabo, get out of my face.”

He smirks.

Lethabo: “I own you Yize, you belong to me.”

He growls as he grabs my hand.

Me: “I don’t belong to anyone.”

I can’t yank my hand from him, his grip is too strong.

Lithabo: “Don’t forget that little movie we made, it would be a shame if the whole world were to know what we do behind closed doors. Oops! I mean what you do behind closed doors.”

He sneers.

Me: “You’re a son of a bitch.”

Lethabo: “Thank you now, how about we go to the back and you give me some good loving. My wife is away and I haven’t had some for days. I am famished.”

I am disgusted by his proposal, his hand brushing against my wrist makes me want to gag.

Me: “No.”

I move my hand away.

Lethabo: “I don’t know if you’re dumb or stupid or you’re both. You are in no position to say no, now get your skinny ass up so you can give me a good fuck.”

He commands with gritted teeth as he tightens the grip on my hand.

Me: “You’re hurting me.”

I shriek.

Lethabo: “Are we going or not? Your little boyfriend is not here to save you this time.”

He lugs me up, I have no choice but to go with him. He takes me to the women’s toilets and locks the door, I should’ve ran when I had the chance. The first thing he does is to push his coarse hands under my t-shirt, they feel so dirty against my skin. He pushes me against the wall as he roughly grabs my breasts, the pain shoots right through to my heart compelling me to



stifle a scream.

Lethabo: "They shrunk but, they are still breasts so they will do."

He mocks me, the son of a bitch. I angle my head to the side as he leans in to kiss me. I'm already disgusted by his dirty hands on me, if he kisses me, I will throw up.

Lethabo: "A little kiss would be nice, you don't like foreplay anymore?"

He continues to lean in.

I refuse, no way am I letting his lips touch mine.

He pulls back with a grunt.

Lethabo: "Okay. How about you go down on me before the real party begins?"

He smirks, the perverted look in his eyes leaves me feeling cheap and dirty.

Me: "No, anything but that."

I'd rather die. He's unbuckling his belt, I clench my eyes as he pulls his pants down.

Lethabo: "You were a master at this Yize. What has happened now?"

Me: Don't make me do this Lethabo."

I retort, if it means I will fight my way out of this bathroom then I will.

Lethabo: "Fine as long as I'm going to have some fun. Now come closer and please daddy."

I hate that smug look on his face, he's kissing me all over and trying to tear my garments.

Me: "Stop doing that, you'll ruin my clothes."

He's not stopping, his lips recklessly fall on my skin. He loosens my pants and my heart jumps to my throat as he pulls them down.

Me: "Stop."

I don't want this.

What was I thinking?

Me: "Lethabo stop."

I push him away and pull my pants back up. The look on his face is scary.

Lethabo: "You have to finish what you started, you're not going to leave me hanging."

He smacks his hands on my face and steals a kiss I don't return it.

"Hey, open the door."

A woman's voice says from the outside.

Me: "Someone wants to use the toilet."

Lethabo: "They'll go away."

He pushes down my pants again, he's breathing like an animal as he assaults my chest with kisses. I grip on my jeans just so he doesn't succeeded in pushing them down.

The knock becomes demanding, there is more than one voice now and they are insisting that the door be opened.

Me: "Lethabo stop it."

Why does this feel like déjà vu?

Lethabo: "I'll be fast Yize, just a minute."

His hands are roughly grabbing me, I can't push him off of me. He's suddenly become strong.

Me: "Get off me Lethabo."

I scream, my body is trembling out of fear. It's that fear of being raped. It's like it never left me.

The knock turns into loud banging.

"Hey vula, vula." (Open.)

It's women and they are yelling while banging on the door.

Lethabo: "Shit."

He grunts as he draws back, I fix myself and rush to open. A group of angry females stand before me, there's about ten or more of them.

"Are you okay sisi?"

One of them asks, my head is hung in shame.

"Nansi lenja, I saw him drag her in here." (Here's this dog)

A female voice yells out loud through the music.

Lethabo: "No, she's my girlfriend. We came here for a little privacy."

He lies through his teeth.

"He's lying, ngiyibonile lenja. He literally dragged her in here." (I saw this dog.)

The first lady responds in anger.

Lethabo: "Baby tell them that we're dating, please."

He refused to listen to my pleas a while ago. Why should I listen to his?

"Baby yani wenja, you've been caught with your pants down." (Don't baby her, you dog.)

These women are fuming, I'm too ashamed to speak.



"Don't worry sisi, we are here for you. We'll fight these monsters together, we're tired of these men raping and killing us. It's enough man."

The lady in the front screams.

"Get him."

They yell as they charge at him.

Lethabo: "Ayize tell them baby."

He shouts in terror, he's a coward.

How does it feel to be desperate?

Bastard, I hope he suffers a heart attack while they thrash him.

I'm getting out of here, I stroll out and catch a figure with the corner of my eye. I turn to see Neo leaning against the wall, his hands rammed in his pockets and a smug on his face.

Me: "Spiderman?"

I can hear Lethabo screaming from here and the ladies shouting.

Me: "You did this?"

How did he pull it off?

Neo: "That dog will never be the same after today."

He utters with an icy tone.

Me: "How did you know?"

Neo: "I saw him, forcing you to the bathroom. It took everything in me not to kill him."

I don't know how I am so emotional right now and it's overwhelming. Neo has no idea what he has done for me, I throw myself in his arms as I enfold my arms around his neck.

Me: "Thank you Neo."

He holds me back.

Neo: "Am I not Spiderman?"

He jokes.

Me: "Let's not get ahead of ourselves hey."

He laughs.

Neo: "Let's get out of here."

Me: "Do you think they'll kill him?"

Neo: "I want them to but, they are innocent women. That man is going to jail."





I'd rather have him dead. How do I tell Neo or anyone who cares to listen that Lethabo has a sex tape of me.

SETHU\*

Styles is fast asleep beside me, I can't stop thinking about Ayize. They are not back yet, I decide to try her phone. I'll make the call in the lounge, lest I wake this man here.

I turn the light on and peek out the window, it's dark, the streets are empty.

I should have asked Styles for Neo's numbers, Ayize is not answering her phone. I can't move from this window.

"Hey. Why are you up?"

I'm startled by the sound of Styles' voice, he holds me from behind.

Me: "Has Neo called you yet?"

Styles: "No."

He nuzzles my neck, emits a deep sigh.

Styles: "Come to bed, it's late."

Me: "I'm worried about my sister, I can't sleep."

I might as well wait down here for her.

Styles: "Neo's got this, I trust him."

Me: "Why hasn't he called yet?"

Styles: "If he couldn't find her, he would've called us."

He turns me around to face him.

Styles: "Look at this beautiful face, I think I see wrinkles on it."

He states, cupping my cheeks.

Me: "What?"

I run to the kitchen to inspect my face on the microwave mirror.

Me: "Babe, I can't see any wrinkles."

He's laughing, this was a joke.

Styles: "You're cute."

Not funny.



Me: "Really Styles, you almost gave me a heart attack."

He folds his arms across his chest as he sits on the arm of the chair.

Styles: "I wanted to distract you a little, you stress too much kitten. Your sister is with Neo as we speak."

He assures me.

Me: "Do you think she will ever be okay?"

I stand between his legs as he pulls me into him, his arms go around my waist.

Styles: "If she's as strong as you, then yes, she will be okay."

Me: "She's actually stronger than I am."

My phone is ringing.

Me: "It's her."

He smiles.

Me: "Please tell me you're okay."

That's the first thing I say to her.

Ayize: "I'm still alive sis, I'm with Neo. We went out for a bite."

Bite of what? She hardly eats.

Me: "Come home soon please."

Ayize: "Yes mom."

Me: "I'm glad you're okay sis."

Ayize: "How can I not be when I have you by my side?"

She laughs.

Me: "I love you."

Ayize: "Uqalile." (You've started.)

I will tell her this till she learns to say it back.

We bid each other goodbye.

Styles is leering at me with a smirk on his face.

Me: "What is it?"

Styles: "You worry too much."

Me: "I can't help it, she's hurting and I have to make sure that she's okay."

Styles: "Let's get some coffee."

He leads me to the kitchen.

Me: "We won't be able to sleep if we drink coffee."

Styles: "Well, it's good because it will give us time to talk."

I sit on a chair while he puts the kettle on.

Styles: "Do you think Ayize will ever forgive your parents?"

That's a casual question.

Me: "I doubt it, mom showed a certain hate towards her. I doubt that Ayize would want to see them again."

Styles: "And you Kitten? If the same thing were to happen to you. Would you forgive them?"

Why is he asking me this?

Me: "Honestly, I don't know."

Styles: "How would it make you feel though?"

Me: "I would die, they might not be perfect but they are the only parents I know. I love them and I know that Ayize loves them too, she wouldn't be this hurt if she didn't."

He puts a hot cup of black coffee on the table.

Me: "Thanks."

Styles: "Yeah, that's true. Promise me something."

Me: "What?"

Styles: "That you will always remain this strong, no matter what happens."

Me: "I'll try."

He nods as he sips on his cup of coffee. There is something behind this promise he wants me to make and that concerned look on his face.

MBUSO\*

"Speak to your father Mbuso. I can't do this anymore."

Mom is complaining about my father, he comes home late from work and spends his off days away from home. She says he doesn't speak to her like he used to, I have no idea what's going on with that old man.

Me: "I'll try mom, I can't promise anything. You know how your husband can be, he demands respects and hates it when people meddle in his affairs."

That's my father.

Mom: "You're his son and he will surely listen to you, I'm too old for this Mbuso."

I hope he's not cheating on her.

It could be that he's still seeing Nomasonto.

What happened to the love they had for each other?

I envied their marriage, I wanted to be like my father, love selflessly with no limits.

I glance at Lelo, she's sleeping on her side of the bed. I wanted to give her the kind of love that my father gave my mother when I was growing up, I hope she doesn't change on me. I won't be able to take it, I love her too much to be without her.

Me: "I'm not promising anything mom, I'll try though."

Mom: "Thank you my son."

Me: "Is he home now?"

Mom: "No, I'm all alone."

She replies in a sad voice.

Me: "I'll call you tomorrow."

Mom: "You can come over tomorrow, I'll let you know if he's at home first."

Me: "Sure."

I bid her goodbye just as I hear Lelo mumbling something.

Me: "Lelo."

I shake her and she sluggishly opens her half lidden eyes.

Me: "You're crying in your sleep."

Lelo: "I was?"

She rubs her eyes.

Me: "Yeah. What were you dreaming about?"

Lelo: "I don't remember."

She sits up.

Me: "Do you need some water?"

She appears to be drained.



Lelo: "I'm okay."

Me: "Are you sure?"

Lelo: "I'm okay Mbuso."

She snaps.

Me: "What's wrong with you?"

She's jumpy.

Lelo: "Don't start."

Me: "Something is up with you Lelo, since you came home you've been acting strange."

Looking slightly miffed, she lies back down and faces the other way,

Me: "Nombulelo?"

Lelo: "Let me sleep please."

I'm not getting anything from her as she has taken an oath of silence. I need to find out what is happening with her.

NTOMBI\*

Moses is getting on my nerves, he's tossing and turning. It's been a while now, if he continues like this he might break the bed.

Me: "Moses man."

I snap at him.

Moses: "Eish!!!"

He exclaims.

Me: "What's wrong with you? You're supposed to be sleeping, it's late and you're disturbing my sleep."

Moses: "I can't stop thinking about Lelo."

Me: "Is that the reason you're losing sleep? Uyadlala yazi." (You're kidding me.)

Moses: "My child hates me Ntombi."

I don't know if I gave him the impression that I want to talk at this time.

Me: "Lelo is just angry, she will get over it in time."

Moses: "I don't think she will, you didn't see her."

Me: "Yoh hai Moses. We're you not the one who chased my child out of the house? You told me that you will have a funeral for her."

I remind him as he seems to have forgotten.

Moses: "You can't hold the past against me Ntombi, I was angry and didn't know how to react. I was all about pleasing people and I didn't care how she felt."

He's still about pleasing people, I don't see him changing any time soon.

Me: "If you're so worried about Lelo, go speak to her let me sleep in peace."

Moses: "Don't be so mean Ntombi, can't you see that I can't sleep. Who should I talk to if not you?"

I should care but, I don't.

Me: "Let's talk in the morning, I can't hear half of the things you're saying. I'm tired Moses and stop tossing you're moving with the bed and it's annoying."

He clicks his tongue and leans back on the headboard. He can sit up all night if he wants, I'm sleeping.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

142\*

AMARA\*

Me: "I don't understand you Randall, I'm the pregnant one here. I thought I'd enjoy seeing you suffer but, it seems like I'm the one suffering."

He refuses to get up from the bed.

Randall: "I don't understand you Amara. Why must you wake me up every day?"

He grimaces as he drops his mouth while bringing himself to a sitting position.

Me: "Randall, I'm serious."

I drone and for some reason I get the feeling that he's not listening to me.

Randall: "What's that?"

He points at the glass in my hand, his face has decided that he doesn't like it.

Me: "Juice, freshly squeezed orange juice. It's for you."

I stretch my hand to give it to him, he glowers at the glass as he covers his nostrils in disgust. I can't smell anything.

Randall: "Get it away from me."

He slants his head back.

Me: "Great, don't tell me the smell is nauseating."

Randall: "It's not the smell, it's the thought of tasting it."

He whines, I should be used to this by now, right?

Maybe I want the serious Randall back.

Me: "Baby."

He shows his teeth, that was not a smile.

Me: "Should I give you the baby to carry as well?"

It's a good idea, it sounds perfect. He might as well, since I get to take care of him while I'm carrying the baby.

Randall: "You're not so funny me hemma, leave that to Neo. You'll insult him by trying too hard."

(My queen.)

I snigger at his lame comment.

Me: "Please get up."

Randall: "I'm up."

Me: "Get up I want to make the bed."

Randall: "I thought we could sleep in today."

He smirks during his suggestion.

Me: "We can't sleep in, Liyana will wonder where her parents are."

Randall: "We'll lock the door and tell Chioma to tell her that we're not home."

Me: "We are not doing that."

Randall: "Why not?"

Me: "Lelo is coming over."

Randall: "When?"

He frowns, possibly at the thought of seeing her.

Me: "She's probably on her way."

Randall: "We haven't made our beds and people are knocking on our door."

Me: "She's family."

He disagrees.

Randall: "Bitter family."

Me: "She's not bad you know, she's just afraid that she might lose me."

Randall: "I'd rather not talk about her."

Me: "You know that marrying me is the same as marrying my family?"

He shakes his head.

Randall: "Don't remind me."

He jumps out and ambles to the balcony.

Me: "Randall, I was thinking you could join me and Lelo for breakfast."

I say walking behind him, he turns with a scowl on his face.

Randall: "Count me out, I'm not dining with that girl."

Me: "Please, I want my two favourite people in the world to get along."





Randall: "We don't have to get along, it would be best if we stay out of each other's way."

He answers as he settles down on a bench.

Me: "How will that work? What will happen during family gatherings?"

He didn't think that far.

Randall: "We'll avoid each other."

Me: "Please baby, do this for me."

I claim my rights on his lap and hook my hand over his shoulders.

Randall: "Amara, I can't sit and have breakfast with your cousin and play happy family. She can't control herself, it won't be long till she starts speaking her mind and I will be forced to retaliate."

Me: "You promised to control your temper."

He must remember.

Randall: "I did, if I feel defensive towards my family I will be forced to act."

Tell me something I don't know.

Me: "Lelo says she wants a second chance and I know that she will behave."

We sit soundless as I wait for him to respond, it would mean so much that he gets along with Lelo.

Me: "Baby."

I decide to break the silence, It's been too long.

Randall: "I'll do it."

Me: "Thank you Randall."

I press my lips on his cheek.

Randall: "No Amara. What is this?"

Something I said or did has made him grimace.

Me: "What is it?"

Randall: "I agree to dine with Fiona and you call me Randall."

Funny.

Me: "Her name is not Fiona and is Randall not your name?"

He has started.

Randall: "I was baby when you were pleading."

Me: "Okay, I'm sorry baby."

Randall: "That's more like it."

I can never get tired of these kisses.

Me: "When we get married, should I say I take you Randall to be my husband or I take you baby?"

I have to hear this.

Randall: "Who is baby? Are you marrying baby Okolie or Randall Okolie?"

I saw this coming.

Me: "These hormones are showing you flames."

Randall: "What's that?"

Gosh.

Me: "Forget it."

Randall: "No tell me. What do you mean they are showing me flames? Is it a code for something?"

I'm going to prepare breakfast, Lelo will be here soon.

Randall: "Me hemma tell me." (My queen.)

He saunters behind me inquisitively. I'm not saying anything.

Me: "Go ask Chioma."

She probably knows, Randall has to be from Mars. I turn back and he's no longer there, he probably went to ask Chioma.

MBUSO\*

Watching Lelo sleeping is one of my morning splendors, the peaceful look that glazes her sweet face makes life seem perfect. I wish she would know how her current actions are hurting me, this love I share with her is one I have never experienced and letting go of it would be stupid of me. Whatever is happening or what we're going through should pass, I wouldn't want my Goku to come into this world with the house cluttered.

With an urge to caress her baby bump, I lay my hand on it. Four months have gone by like lighting flash, it feels like it was just yesterday when we met and now were here. It must be my hand rubbing on her skin that causes her to briskly open her eyes.

Me: "It's just me."

She sighs lowly, as she hits her head back on the pillow.

Lelo: "Hey."

She greets me with a smile.

Me: "Awusemubi." (You're so ugly.)

I tease, she laughs lightly and this is the genuine laugh I am norm to. Can't we be like this, let things stay like this. I don't want to be my father, I cannot break the heart of a woman I love.

Lelo: "Ngifuze wena." (I get it from you.)

She joshers back.

Me: "I still love your crusty look when you wake up."

She groans with a smile as she hides her face in her hands.

Lelo: "Mbuso, I don't have a crusty face."

Me: "Let me take a picture, you'll see it too. You know how the mirror can lie to us, so it's out of the question."

I direct my phone to her face ready to capture that moment.

Lelo: "No, don't. I already feel insecure with this weight I'm gaining."

She covers her face with a pillow.

Me: "Hey, what weight?"

What do I say to a pregnant woman when she tells me that she's gaining weight? You can never say the right thing to them, whatever comes out of your mouth could upset her.

Lelo: "You don't have to lie to me."

If I tell the truth, I'll get in trouble still. So either way, I'm screwed.

Lelo: "By the time this baby is ready to come out, I'll be big enough to fit the titanic in me."

She's murmurs.

Me: "Hey, stop. You can talk about other women, not mine."

Lelo: "I'm serious Mbuso."

Me: "So am I. Do you know the miracle of carrying a human being in you? Lelo nothing is bigger than that, it's the greatest gift and you should embrace it. Love every minute of it before you know it, Goku will be off to college and the next thing he'll be getting married and moving away from us."

I was trying to comfort her, not make her cry.

Me: "Hey?"

Lelo: "I'm sorry, it's just that."

She fights to speak through her cracking voice.”

Me: “Angisakuzwa ke mina uma usukhala.” (I can’t hear a word now that you’re crying.)

She looks at me as she gleams, her lips pout and a soft giggle sweeps out of her mouth.

Lelo: “You’re my weakness Mbuso and I will do anything to protect you.”

Where is that coming from?

Me: “You stole my line.”

Lelo: “It’s the truth, you’re the father of my baby and only you have the right to him and I will forever be grateful to you for accepting us and all you do for us.”

I’m not a fan of such talks, they make me feel like things are about to come to an end. Her hand flies to my cheek, I place mine on top of it.

Lelo: “You’re my life Mbuso Xaba, don’t ever forget that.”

As she continues with these words my anxiety builds up.

Me: “Is there something you want to tell me Lelo?”

She throws herself in my arms, the embrace is tighter than usual as she holds me like it’s the last time.

Lelo: “Just that, I love you.”

Me: “Why does it sound like you’re saying goodbye.”

Lelo: “I would never leave you, Mbuso.”

Me: “Then stop saying such things, you’re scaring me.”

I can’t think of losing her, she presses her forehead against mine. A deep urge to taste her lips overcomes me. I clasp my arms on her waist, my lips pressed on hers. It’s not a while till I taste bitterness in my mouth, it’s her tears. I pull her back.

Me: “What’s wrong chubby cheeks?”

Her head falls as she wipes her tears.

Me: “Lelo you can talk to me.”

Lelo: “I know, don’t mind me. It’s the hormones.”

It can’t be that.

Lelo: “Amara invited me for breakfast, I need to get ready.”

She scampers off the bed.

Me: “Do you think that’s a good idea?”

Lelo: "Yes, we'll finally be able to talk. I've been waiting for this day."

She declares out of excitement.

I know Amara means a lot to her but, this visit is too soon.

Me: "Should I come with?"

To make sure that she doesn't say something stupid.

Lelo: "No, it will be the two of us. It'll be awkward for you if you're there."

She states while wrapping a bath towel around her.

Me: "Will Randall not be there?"

Lelo: "I doubt it."

Me: "Okay, I'll fetch you when you're done."

Lelo: "Sure."

She rushes to the bathroom, I'm not comfortable with this visit.

SETHU\*

I hear Ayize's loud voice as I make my way to the kitchen. My eyes must be deceiving me, she's sitting with a bowl and eating like it's the first meal she's had in years. Neo is sitting on the opposite chair with his own bowl.

They are talking and laughing like best friends.

"You're lying Neo, you didn't do that."

She exclaims in laughter.

Neo: "I'm telling you Zee, bekunyiwa." (It was tough.)

Ayize is having a time of her life, I'm shocked to see her laugh with so much delight.

Me: "Care to share the joke."

I hug her from behind as I wrap my arms around her shoulders.

Ayize: "You're so mushy. Since when do we hug?"

Me: "I always give you hugs."

Neo: "Miss. S. Where is Stylos?"

Me: "He's getting ready."



Neo: "Where is he going?"

Me: "To see Randall."

Neo: "I see, I'm still playing the third wheel in this bro-mance."

Did he say bro-mance.

Me: "Why do you say that?"

Neo: "Stylos didn't tell me that he's going out, I haven't bathed yet so, it means they made plans without me."

Ayize: "Are you jealous Neo?"

I'm trying to grasp why she's grinning.

Neo: "No. I'm not. I'm only saying."

Ayize: "I think it's cute though."

And this puts a smile on his face.

Neo: "You do?"

He's fascinated by the thought.

Ayize: "Yes, it shows your sensitive side."

His smile grows.

Neo: "I have many of those."

He winks at her.

Ayize: "Oh do reveal and make my day."

Is she flirting?

Me: "Do you two need some privacy?"

Ayize: "You're not funny."

Me: "No, it wasn't meant to be a joke. I'm serious as a heart attack."

Ayize purses her lips.

Ayize: "Quit playing Sethu."

I have made Neo uncomfortable with my comment, I spot Styles walking up to the kitchen. He has the car keys in his hand.

Me: "Aren't you going to eat first?"

I ask Styles.

Neo: "He's going to eat at Uze's place."

He's not happy.

Styles: "Neo's right and I'm running late."

Neo: "Did you hear that Miss. S? This is what I have to face every day."

Styles: "What's wrong with you?"

Neo: "Nothing Stylos."

He slouches as he focuses on his food.

Styles: "I thought we were going together."

I'm glad he has suggested this, Neo is sulking like a kid.

Neo: "No, go Stylos ke sharp." (I'm good.)

Ayize decides to be herself and laugh at this poor man.

Styles: "Okay, I'll see you later."

He turns and starts to walk off.

Neo: "Where are you going?"

Styles: "To see Randall."

He says turning back.

Neo: "I'm coming with you."

He jumps up from his chair, leaves the plate on the table and scurries after Styles.

Ayize: "Hey, awuhlambi?" (You didn't bath.)

She yells after him.

Neo: "Ke tla hlapa pele." (I'll bath when I get there.)

He exclaims rushing out the door and leaving Styles behind.

Ayize: "He's from Pretoria neh?"

She's laughing.

Me: "Yeah."

Ayize: "I can tell."

She rejoinders tumbling into a crazy belly laugh.

"Kitten."

I twist my head to his voice, he's standing by the door.

Styles: "Don't leave yet, I'll be back soon."

Me: "We'll be here."

Styles: "I love you."

Ayize clears her throat, dipping her head in the bowl of cereal.

Me: "Me too."

He accepts a soft frown and waves his hand before he shuts the door closed.

Me: "Uhlekani wena." (What are you laughing at?)

Ayize: "Nothing."

She says and yet continues to laugh.

Me: "We need to talk."

I wipe off the smile on her face with these dreadful words.

Ayize: "I'm okay with talking for now kitten."

She delivers a smile.

Me: "You and Neo seem to be cosy."

Ayize: "He's a nice guy, shame."

She gets up.

Me: "Where are you going? We're still talking."

Ayize: "The bathroom, I won't be long."

She disappears into the corridor. I hope she's not going to throw up the food she just ate.

NTOMBI\*

Jonas: "As you all know, Nombulelo is pregnant and will give birth very soon. I was approached by the father of the baby, he wants to pay inhlawulo (damages). He claims he didn't know that Nombulelo was pregnant, now he wants to do the right thing."

Jonas has called this meeting, we haven't had breakfast and we're already discussing serious issues that will give us nothing but headaches.

Mhambi: "Paying damages is an important aspect of our culture. It has to be done."

Me: "Who is going to go to this boy's family and report the pregnancy?"

Jonas is suddenly upset.



Jonas: "Why did you become a mother if you will not do your duties?"

Me: "You don't have to bite my head. Nombulelo wants nothing to do with me, I can't take part in this."

Mhambi: "You don't have a choice Ntombi."

Moses: "I agree with Mhambi, this is the least you can do for your child after everything that happened."

Me: "Our child Moses and you mean after everything you did to her."

Jonas: "This meeting is not about who is the better parent, it's about Nombulelo."

That's obvious, he doesn't have to remind us.

Moses: "Has she been informed."

Jonas: "I was with her and the Mhlongo boy last night, Nombulelo is against it. She says this boy denied the pregnancy and abandoned her. It doesn't matter now, he's back and wants to make things right."

Moses: "If she is against it. Why go through with it?"

Jonas: "It's part of our culture Moses, we can't ignore it."

Petunia: "I say we shouldn't force her, let's sit her down first and find out what her thoughts are. Why did this boy deny the baby and now he's suddenly back?"

Jonas: "It's not only about Nombulelo, that baby is a Mhlongo and should be known by the Mhlongo ancestors."

I don't trust Jonas, I'm sure he forced her into accepting this.

Me: "If Nombulelo doesn't want this, we can't force her bhuti. She is old enough to make her own decisions." (Brother.)

Jonas: "Nombulelo is barely twenty one, you can't tell me that she's old enough. Now, the child lives with someone we don't know. We don't know if he's planning on making an honest woman out of her. Ntombi I don't trust your judgement, you're not wise enough to vote on this. I have made up my mind, this coming weekend you will go with Nombulelo and report the pregnancy."

He rumbles.

Me: "Woo no bhuti, this is not 1960 relax. Are these things still practiced? You need to move with the times." (Brother.)

Moses: "Ntombi, try to be serious for once. This is our child we're talking about."

Me: "Yes Moses, she's our child and I'm against her being forced to accept whoever this Mhlongo guy is. Why should we force her if she doesn't want him?"

Jonas: "No one said Nombulelo must marry this boy, the child should know where he comes

from.”

Me: “What about the boy she lives with? Does he not have a say in any of this?”

Mhambi: “We don’t know him, he hasn’t come forward to let us know what his relations are with our daughter or the plans he has for her.”

Moses: “Let’s call a meeting with Nombulelo first, hayi emakhoneni Jonas without her parents there.” (Not in secret.)

Moses makes sense for once.

Me: “I also agree.”

Petunia: “What’s wrong with you two? Why are you playing the good parent card all of a sudden?”

She gives us a suspicious look.

Me: “That’s your problem Petunia, you think we hate our child. Lelo is our only child, mina no mnyeni wami love our daughter. We just don’t show it too often.” (My husband and I.)

She cackles as she claps her hands.

Moses: “Petunia don’t insult us please, you don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Petunia: “Ai ngeke, you two are up to something.” (Never.)

She would say that because she thinks she’s perfect.

Jonas: “Okay, that’s enough. We will call Nombulelo tomorrow, she better make the right decision or else we will make it for her.”

He makes a command.

These people want to control my family.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

143\*

SETHU\*

Ayize is retching in there, I can hear her. My assumptions were correct. How is she going to get better if she continues to do this?

I move away from the door as I hear the sound of the toilet flush. I opt to wait for her in the lounge. She's striding back, dragging her feet.

Me: "What were you doing in there?"

She tries to hide her teary eyes from me, it's too late.

Ayize: "Don't be weird, you can't ask me such a personal question."

Me: "Were you throwing up?"

Ayize: "Stop it Sethu. Why are you monitoring me?"

She snaps at me, this is what she does when caught red-handed she becomes defensive.

Me: "I thought you were done with that Ayize."

She marches to the kitchen.

Ayize: "Does Mr. S have wine in here."

She's opening the cabinets in search of alcohol.

Me: "It's too early for that and you can't drink you just emptied your stomach."

Ayize: "Who said I emptied my stomach? I was doing something else in there."

She refutes my proclamation.

Ayize: "Hallelujah!!! Makabongwe." (Praise him.)

She pronounces with a joyful sound as she holds up a bottle of whiskey.

Me: "Ayize no, put that away."

I request frantically.

Ayize: "Relax, I won't drink the whole bottle. I'll just have a few sips."

She finds a glass, I follow her as she walks to the lounge.



Ayize: "Come sit with me, maybe you can taste."

Me: "I don't want any."

I am very upset with her, although it's not her fault that she's like this.

I have an incoming call from Styles.

Styles: "You didn't say I love you back"

He introduces with this grumble.

Me: "I did."

Styles: "You said me too, that doesn't count."

I see.

Me: "Okay, I love you Mr. Styles."

Styles: "You know I'm going to marry you one day?"

He drops the unexpected avowal that leaves me wordless.

Styles: "Are you there kitten?"

Me: "Yes."

And I'm gobsmacked.

Styles: "Ngizokushada mama." (I will marry you, my lady.)

He says softly.

The fact that he says this with the right accent drops me on the couch as he leaves my knees feeling weak.

Me: "Styles?"

This is Siyabonga speaking.

Styles: "Yebo Sthandwa sami, ukhethwe yinhliziyoyami." (My heart has chosen you my love.)

Why is he saying these things to me? Styles better not be proposing marriage over the phone.

Me: "Is this your way of asking me to marry you?"

I'm sure he can tell that I'm smiling like a retard.

Styles: "If I was, I would do it right, otherwise your sister will kill me."

He snickers.

Me: "I know and she would kill me as well for agreeing to it."

I gawk at Ayize opposite me, she's staring back with a naughty smile on her face.

Styles: "So you would say yes if I ask?"

We're on 'if' now and not 'when'

Me: "When you ask?"

I let him know that I will not settle for less.

Styles: "Yes, when I ask."

Me: "Ask and find out."

He chortles.

Styles: "Let me go, Neo is complaining."

He sounds annoyed, I send my goodbyes.

Ayize: "Nina?" (You two.)

She points at me with her eye brows.

Me: "What?"

Ayize: "You must remember that some of us are single, spare us please."

Me: "What did we do?"

Ayize: "Nywe nywe sthandwa sami." (My love.)

I laugh as she imitates Styles' voice.

Me: "You heard that?"

Ayize: "Word for word, Mr. S is Zulu?"

I never told her this.

Me: "His mother was and he was raised by his step father who was Zulu."

Ayize: "You mentioned that before. Does he have a native name?"

Me: "Siyabonga."

Ayize: "USiya no Sethu? Bathathe girl." (Siya and Sethu, you go girl.)

She sings. The alcohol must be kicking in.

Ayize: "When you two have kids, please give them names that start with S. I have a few."

Me: "I'll keep that in mind aunty."

Agape, she ogles at me.

Ayize: "Aunty? Never, no little brat is calling me aunty. I'm sis' Zee."

Me: "Sis' Zee hey, siyabonga Neo." (Thank you Neo.)



Ayize: "Siyabonga ngempela." (Thank you indeed.)

I worry as she pours another glass of liquor.

Me: "Did you see this?"

I pass the phone to her.

Ayize: "What is it?"

Me: "It's trending on twitter, some guy named Lethabo was arrested for assaulting a woman in a club. Apparently a group of women caught him and attacked him."

She sighs with a face as long as a fiddle.

Me: "Are you okay?"

Ayize: "Am I ever not okay?"

Her riposte worries me.

Ayize: "I'm going to get some sleep."

She's taking the bottle with her.

Me: "You can leave that."

Ayize: "I need some company."

She laughs her way up the flight of steps.

RANDALL\*

I open the door for Styles and Neo.

Me: "You made it?"

Neo: "Yes, yes Uze. We made it oga." (Boss.)

Neo saunters in and heads straight to the kitchen. I leer at Styles in wonder.

Styles: "Don't look at me."

He shrugs his shoulders.

Me: "Did you bring them?"

Styles: "Yes."

He retorts with a smile as he rams his hand into the pocket of his jacket and pulls out the pack.

Me: "Hide them, I don't want her to see."

I whisper.

Styles: "Okay. Why are we whispering?"

Me: "I don't want her finding out."

Styles: "Don't tell me you're doing this secretly."

Me: "Do I have a choice, the woman has banned me from having them. Such cruelty I tell you."

If Styles knew how serious this is he would constrain that mocking laugh.

"Who is cruel?"

Dammit she heard that, I smile as she plods to us from the kitchen.

Me: "No one me hemma." (My queen.)

I hold her waist as she stands beside me.

Amara: "Where is Sethu?"

Styles smiles at the mention of Sethu's name.

Styles: "Her sister is not feeling well, she had to stay behind with her."

Amara: "What's wrong with her?"

Styles: "It's family related, maybe Sethu will tell you about it."

I forget how secretive he tends to be.

Amara: "I'll call her later today. Neo is in the kitchen inspecting every pot, you'd think he's a food critique."

She laughs.

Me: "That's Neo, he's special like that."

Styles: "Please, don't let him take over. He'll ruin the food, I came here to eat."

Me: "Let's go in then."

"Hello."

We turn back to the door, Lelo is here. I was hoping that she would cancel.

Amara: "Hey."

They share a hug.

Lelo: "I'm sorry I'm late, there was traffic on the way here."

Amara: "You're just in time."

Lelo looks at me the hate she has for me does not hide away from her gaze.



Lelo: "Randall?"

I will not respond to her cold salutation so, I nod.

Amara glares at me.

Amara: "He's Styles, a family friend."

Styles: 'More like the brother.'

He shakes her hand, she smiles.

Lelo: "Nice to meet you Styles."

Me: "Shall we?"

Amara: "Lelo and I will be in the kitchen."

She announces as they begin to toddle there.

Styles: "I sense bad blood between you and cousin. What's up?"

We settle outside in the back yard.

Me: "She hates me for some reason."

I explain, reaching my hand out to him, he knows what I want. He smashes them on my hand with an attitude.

Styles: "What does that girl want with you?"

Me: "I'm not good enough for her sister."

Styles: "When did she decide that?"

Me: "The first time she saw me. Her motive is that I bought Amara for a reason and brainwashed her to fall in love with me."

Styles: "Watch out bro, she might try to mess up what you have."

He gives me a warning and it did cross my mind. No one will break Amara and I apart, I will kill if I have to.

Me: "You know I don't play when it comes to Amara, if I have to collect dead bodies then I will do it."

Styles: "I think you have become too lenient Randy, you're even eating raisins. They are making you sweet, people like Lelo will throw parties in your territory and you won't do anything about it."

Precisely that's the case.

Me: "It's this thing you call love, I blame you Styles."

Styles: 'What did I do?'





Me: "Do you recall how you were drilling the word into my head? It was the last thing on my mind."

My testimonial causes him to sneer.

Styles: "You were going to fall in love with Amara sooner or later, weren't you the one who loved her at first glance."

The first time I saw her feels like a long time ago, I didn't love her the first time. There was a strong liking, something that drew me to her.

Me: "You know it wasn't love Styles."

He chuckles.

Styles: "Well I think you need to get back in the game, sweet Randall can't fight Mkhize and Segun. They will fuck you up."

"Hey there's a child in the house."

Amara jogs our memory while stepping towards us. She carries a tray with two glasses filled with juice, I am not going to drink that.

Me: "Where is she?"

The nosh is safely tucked away in my pocket.

Amara: "Somewhere around with Chioma."

She places the tray on the table.

Styles: "Thank you Amara."

He smiles gratefully.

Me: "Isn't there anything else I can drink?"

She narrows her eyes at me as she scrutinizes me, locking me in her stern gaze.

Amara: "What is that you're eating?"

Busted.

Me: "I'm not eating anything."

I move my head as she moves in.

Amara: "You're eating raisins again Randall?"

Great.

Me: "Ask Styles."

Amara: "I won't do that because he will vouch for you."

Styles: "I swear he's not eating anything at all."

Amara: "Let me get out of here."

Me: "What about my drink?"

I send my question to her as she lumbers away.

Amara: "Drink that juice."

She shouts back, I will not drink that.

Styles: "What's with you?"

He's scowling at me.

Me: "What?"

Styles: "You're acting like a pregnant woman."

Me: "Piss off."

Styles: "I'm serious."

Me: "Amara is pregnant and Chioma thinks I have pregnancy symptoms."

I explain with a not so friendly face, his jaw drops, he's astounded.

Styles: "Amara is pregnant? Wow this is amazing Randy."

He takes my hand for a forced hand shake.

Me: "Thank you, I can't wait to be a father again."

Styles: "I can't wait to be an uncle again."

He grins.

Me: "I need a favour."

Styles: "I'm your guy."

Me: "I need to send a letter to Amara's family."

"Who's getting married?"

Neo walks in with this, he positions himself on the space opposite me.

Styles: "You're getting married?"

Me: "How did you figure it out Neo?"

He gives me a victorious smile.

Neo: "You said you want to send a letter to Amara's family. It could mean that you want to pay the bride price."



Me: "Yes we're engaged and she's pregnant."

Neo: "Yoh Oga, what have you done oooo? This is a big wahala." (This is a big problem boss.)

Me: "What are you on about?"

Neo: "Getting a girl pregnant out of wedlock is damaging her so, you will have to pay baba." (Boy.)

Me: "Pay what?"

Styles: "Money, the uncles will tell you how much."

Me: "So I will have to pay for the bride price plus the damages."

Neo: "That's what you get for ho rata tlof tlof. That thing doesn't come cheap. So is a Zulu girl whose parents are more rural than the word itself." (For loving sex.)

Me: "And the uncle doesn't like me, I can't even think how much he'll charge me."

Neo: 'I suggest you start selling your furniture, you're going to need the money."

His suggestion is conveyed with a scornful laugh.

Styles: "Who is standing up for you?"

Me: "I thought you and Nkomo would do it, the guy is traditional and knows the customs."

Neo: "Khomo neh! You and Stylos trust people so easily oga. Have you forgotten that he's a Mkhize? Is it wise to have him represent you?" (Cow.) (Boss.)

He queries fairly, considering Nkomo's history.

Me: "If Styles says he's changed, I believe him."

Styles: "We can present you, Neo can tag along too."

Neo: "Count me out, I don't want to face greedy uncles who will demand money I can't even count."

Styles: "Coward."

He taunts.

Neo: "Call me anything you want Stylos, I am staying away from those people."

It can't be that bad.

Neo: "It's happening, Uze is getting married. Woman, you're powerful."

He clowns or is he serious?

Me: "Fuck you Neo."

He laughs.

Neo: "Oga am I allowed to swear back or is it too soon into the friendship? You never know with you and your temper, you might show me my mother." (Boss.)

He quizzes in amusement.

Neo: "If you say yes, just know that I have a list of insults for you, for all these years that..."

Styles: "Neo shut up."

Styles stops his prattle, he's laughing too.

Neo: "Okay, today is not the day."

Me: "I'm done with you Neo."

Neo: "Me too, I'm done with you. I'm allowed to say this one back, right?"

He grabs the juice on the table, sits back and indulges. He stretches his hand out to me as he sees the snack in my hand.

Neo: "Share Oga." (Boss.)

He's crazy, I won't do that.

NOMBULELO\*

Amara walks back to the kitchen with a smile splashed on her face.

Me: "Don't you have a maid? Shouldn't she be the one serving them?"

She joins me at the table, I made myself a sandwich.

Amara: "No we don't have a maid."

Me: "Who is that lady then?"

Amara: "Chioma? She's Randall's foster mother."

Me: "Foster mother? Is he an orphan?"

Amara: "No, it's a long story. Randall is lucky that he has two mothers who love him."

Her eyes glimmer as she mentions his name.

Me: "Have you met his mother?"

Amara: "Not yet, she lives in Ghana, maybe one day."

Me: "What about his father?"

A glint of sadness covers the sparkle in her eyes.



Amara: "I'd rather we not talk about his family, tell me about Mbuso. How is he? Is he treating you well? I hope he is."

She diverts from the topic.

Me: "Mbuso is amazing, I couldn't have asked for better."

My answer has her giggling.

Amara: "Mbuso is a good man."

Me: "He is, he accepted me and my baby when we had no one."

Amara: "Zuma is a fool. How can he do such a thing to you?"

I hate that man.

Me: "He won't leave me alone Amara, he wants to pay damages and I can't have him a part of my child's life."

Amara: "He can't force himself into your life."

She utters.

Me: "If he goes through Jonas Buthelezi, he will glide his way in."

She gives a quiet sigh.

Amara: "Uncle Jonas is a dream killer."

Me: "I know right, I'm so frustrated Amara. He agreed that Zuma pays the damages, he says my baby needs to know his roots. That's bull shit, Mbuso will adopt my child."

I ramble on worriedly.

Amara: "You need to tell him that Lelo. After all of this is done uncle Jonas will go back to his life and leave you with the mess. He won't be there when Zuma is troubling you."

She says wisely.

My word!!! I needed this moment, having someone listen to you is the next best thing after free hugs.

Me: "I need you to come with me when I speak to him."

Her eyes drop and the hope I have that she will be there for me begins to diminish.

She pins her back against the chair as she takes up a disapproving stare.

Amara: "You know I can't leave the house Lelo, unless Randall comes with."

About that...

Me: "For long will you stay locked up in here Amara? Is it not the same as being in prison?"



I don't like how everything is played out here. Amara cannot see that these people are controlling her life.

Amara: "I'm not locked up Lelo, we spoke about this. What do you want me to do?"

She nettles, the truth has her frowning.

Me: "We did, my doubts have not been cleared yet. There is a way that Randall looks at you, one would say that he's infatuated by you. His eyes follow your every movement as if you'll disappear if he blinks."

That cannot be a good a thing, love is not showcased in that mode.

Amara: "Is that bad Lelo? I am loved for once in my life. I have someone who is willing to protect me with his life, if you knew what we have been through together, we wouldn't be having this conversation and I thought you changed your mind about him. Randall and his friends are joining us for breakfast, I want you to get to know each other. I promise, he is the best man you'll ever know. He looks rough on the outside, to top it off he's huge. I too was terrified of him at first, but if you get to know him you will learn that he has a gentle heart. He's a good father who loves his daughter like he'll never love again."

She gives a consequential dialogue.

Me: "If you're convinced, there is nothing I can say to convince you otherwise."

There's a twitch in her eyes. She's bothered by my riposte.

Amara: "It's getting late, we should set the table."

Her modest pronouncement comes with her clomping to the kitchen counter, observing her I notice how she has done away with the dowdy look. The frumpish Amara I knew and loved has mellowed into this casual woman, one I cannot recognize.

Me: "Where do I take these plates?"

I besiege, carrying the plates in my hands.

Amara: "The patio, follow me."

I mooch beside her, our feet tracing us to the foyer. There's a colliding from my left that pushes me a few staggers back, compelling me to drop the plates. They split in pieces as they whack against the hard wood floor.

Me: "Hey, watch it."

The startle induces a yell within me that frightens the little girl who is the cause of the accident. Her eyes widen and swell up with tears in a miniature, her lower lip curls as it quavers. Her tears do not take long to cascade down tiny face, the bridge of her nose rapidly turns red.

Amara: "Lelo!!!"

She chides me for my short outburst, as Liyana flitters to hide behind Amara's hip.

Me: "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to. She bumped into me and I thought..."

Amara: "You thought what? It was a mistake, she's only a child."

She scoops Liyana up in her arms.

Me: "I know, but kids shouldn't run in the house."

Amara glances at Liyana who has her head hidden on her shoulder.

Amara: "It's okay Liya baby, aunt didn't mean to shout at you."

Liyana nods half-heartedly.

Amara: "Won't you give Mara a smile."

Liyana gives her half a smile while wiping her tears away, she is truly upset.

Me: "Liyana..."

Amara lifts her hand to stop me from blabbering any further.

Amara: "You have said enough, I think you should leave Lelo. Today is not right for you to be here, I think you need more time."

How is it that she's able to choose them over me?

Me: "I said I'm sorry Amara. I mean the child is taking it too seriously, it was a simple innocent scolding."

Amara: "It didn't sound innocent to me."

"We don't scold our child, there are so many ways you can chastise a child miss and this is not one of them."

Randall adds his opinion as he saunters in from outside, he's with Styles who takes Liyana and walks away with her.

The sound of the dishes crashing beckoned them here.

Me: "I apologized, I didn't mean to yell."

Must they gang up on me?

Amara: "Yeah you didn't, you can leave now."

She cannot be treating me this way.

Me: "Amara you're throwing me out?"

I gasp, incredulity evident in the tone of my voice.

Randall: "Yes she is."

He snaps, his teeth gritted together.

Me: "I'm the only sister you have. Will you do this to me?"

Amara: "We'll talk when you're calm Lelo, right now I think you're overworked. Let me know when you get home. I'm going to check on Liyana, excuse me."

She spits out leaving me with this man who is shooting daggers at me.

Me: "What have you done to my Amara?"

He simpers as he carries a smug look.

Randall: "She's my Amara now."

His comeback cautions that my assumptions were correct.

Randall: "Unless you're ready to be the sister that she needs you to be, I suggests that you stay away from her."

Me: "I'm not doing that, you kept her away from me for too long."

Randall: "Suit yourself miss, don't say I didn't tell you though."

He walks away with this proclamation. Like expected, I find my way out of the house. I should've brought Mbuso with, he would've stood up for me.

NEO\*

Me: "Where is she?"

Sethu: "In the bedroom, she has locked herself in there. I can't get in Neo, she's drunk. I think she has passed out."

Zee probably needs time alone.

Sethu called when we were at Randall's, saying Zee has locked herself in the bedroom. Styles stayed behind and is set to follow in a while.

Me: "Let me talk to her first?"

It took a less time to know that she needs someone to listen and not to be told what to do. Sethu can't find a way through this mess, she can only offer demands and chastises, which is something Zee doesn't want.

Sethu: "Okay, I'll be here."

I use the extra key to open the door, I close it after ambling in. There's no one in the room, I hear soft music coming from the bathroom. I knock a few times, there is no response from the inside. The music is not that loud that she wouldn't hear me.

Me: "Zee, are you in there?"



Sure she is. She has to be otherwise, where would she be?

Me: "Zee."

I pound on it this time and not so loud lest I frighten an already terrified Sethu. Seeing that she's silent, I choose to go in.

Me: "I'm coming in."

I give a warning and what I see stops my heart from beating for a mere second. She's lying fully clothed in the bathtub filled with water, an empty bottle of whiskey occupies her hand. Her head is imbalanced and her eyes tightly shut. The bathroom is misty from the hot water that, my vision is vague.

Me: "Ayize."

I say softly, Sethu will be crushed if she finds her like this.

I whisk her out of the bath tub and carry her out to the bedroom. There's a dry towel on the bed, I use it to wipe her wet hair. Thank God there's a pulse.

Me: "Zee wake up."

I slightly pat her face, it takes a few pats for her to flap her eye lids.

Ayize: "Mmmhh mmhhh."

She mummurs with a frown.

Me: "Ayize open your eyes."

Gradually they flip open, I try to help her up as she lifts her head and winces in pain.

Ayize: "Stop it."

She pushes me, finally her body regains the strength it needs to move.

Me: "What the hell is your problem? You're selfish Zee man."

I yell through clamped teeth.

Ayize: "Don't call me selfish, you're selfish."

She retorts as she moves to sit on the bed, my attempt to lend a helping hand is shrugged away with a force.

Me: "Were you trying to kill yourself?"

She guffaws.

Ayize: "Life is too much fun robobi. Why would I want to die?" (Spiderman.)

Her voice paints the level of her intoxication, she starts to strip out of the wet clothes. I swivel to face the door, a titter escapes from her mouth.

Ayize: "Have you ever had sex with a drunk woman before?"

She's giggling and I don't see anything funny.

Ayize: "How about we do it here and no one will know."

I don't like her words.

Ayize: "You can turn around now, I'm done."

I hear a thud and turn to find her butt flat on the floor, she's trying to bring her body up and failing at it. She has wrapped herself with a bathrobe.

Me: "Get up."

I seize her arm.

Ayzie: "Ouch."

She winces in pain before laughing.

Ayize: "That's okay, you men like it rough anyway. Women are just sex objects with no emotions, we are soul... less."

She speaks trying to make out the sense of the word.

Ayize: "Yes... Soulless, some would say characterless, right? No one cares what happens to us, we have been left into the hands of men. Does it matter what they do to us?"

She claps her hands in applaud.

Me: "Don't say that."

She laughs. She is wasted.

Ayize: "Truth hurts hey robobi? It's okay" (Spiderman.)

Me: "Not all men are the same Zee."

She laughs as she throws her head back, the sound of her hands clapping fills the room.

Ayize; "You're talking to a girl that has seen every beast out there, men are animals Neo."

Me: "There are men who want to protect you Zee."

Ayize: "Protect? That must be a joke. All of you have abandoned your nature and have turned into animals, you walk around with the hunger to hurt us. The first glimpse of a woman and your first thought is ATTACK!!!"

She yells the word out.

I'm speechless. How do I respond when I have been painted with the similar brush as the John's of this world?

Ayize: "To prove myself right, Sethu my sister. You know her right? Miss. S, that's what you call

her.”

She giggles.

Ayize: “That innocent girl, God bless her soul. She is naïve you know, she doesn’t know anything, only forgiveness. She was raped by her boyfriend and I was raped by my father, my father saw a woman in his child, he wanted to take what was not his and he took it by force. I had no one on my side, my father, I mean uncle. Sethu’s dad is my uncle.”

She laughs.

Ayize: “Sethu’s dad is my uncle, you know? Life will deal with you accordingly. Anyway, he was meant to protect me and he didn’t. I couldn’t run into his arms and hide, he didn’t open them for me. He also pointed an accusatory finger at me, he called me a whore, a slut, an indecent characterless girl who couldn’t hide her body, that’s why men lusted after her. He might not have said them out loud but, his silence spoke volumes. You know what I did Neo? I ran into the open arms of other men, they were not comforting as my father’s arms would be and I couldn’t find the comfort I was looking for so, I chased it. I needed to find it Neo, one of those old fools had to be the one.”

Her voice paints tears yet her eyes are dry.

Me: “Zee.”

She stands on the bed with the bottle in her hand, I watch her as she gulps down the last of it. She raises her hand in the air, her body too intoxicated to stand still.

Ayize: “This is nice Neo, I feel like I’m on top of the world.”

She shouts before erupting in laughter.

Ayize: “That look in your eyes, I’ve seen it before. It’s the same look Mr. S gives Sethu. You can’t look at me like that. My uncle. Oops...”

She covers her mouth.

Ayize: “I mean my father marked me worthless the day he raped me, it’s written all over my body. Do you want to see it?”

She strips off the gown exposing her starkness, I clench my eyes as I look away.

Ayize: “I Know I’m not as attractive as I should be, I’m a thirty year old woman with a tiny, tiny body. My bones are sticking out, it’s not cute but disgusting. It can’t be as disgusting as these words written on my body. Look.”

I can’t look.

Ayize: “Look at me dammit.”

She yells forcing me to open my eyes, she giggles.

Ayize: “You’re supposed to see the words, I do each time I look in the mirror. Here, it says

worthless.”

She points at a spot on her bust, I thought she'd have words written on her skin. She's plain clean.

Ayize: “Here it says whore, Slut, you deserved it, you asked for it.”

She continues with these words while mapping her body with her finger.

Me: “Please stop.”

I whisper.

I can't take it anymore.

Ayize: “No, you have to know what you men have done to me, look at me Neo. I'm a walking zombie, my life is not worth living but, I continue to push. I push for the one who couldn't and ended their life. I push for the one who was found in a ditch raped and murdered. I push for that new baby who was raped by her father. I push for the wife who is raped by her husband every night because he thinks he has a right over her. I push Neo for that little girl who can't tell her mother that her father creeps in her room every night and assaults her. I push for the sister who can't get away from her brother's perverted words and he has his way with her as if he were not her protector. I push for people like my sister who have been raped by their abusive boyfriends. I can't give up Neo, I have to live for them. I feel like they are looking at me and routing for me, that I can do this that, I can fight. I want to scream though, I want to scream at the top of the mountain that I am tired. I can't push anymore. I have lost my strength and I can't hold on anymore. Life has called me a failure, I have been defeated Neo. How can I win against these monster when all of them want what's between my legs?”

I find myself crying, she carries so much pain. Zee has a long way to go.

I grab the gown to cover her.

She shrugs it off.

Ayize: “No, It's too late. You can't protect me now, my father failed, my uncle failed. All men in my life failed to protect me. My honour and dignity has been taken by all those men and I'm left with nothing but, this empty stained body, I don't have a soul Neo. How is it that I'm standing here?”

Me: “Zee please.”

Ayize: “You know where it hurts Neo?”

She places her hand on her chest.

Ayize: “Inhli... Inhliziyo yami.... Neo...Inhliziyo... yami ibuhlu... ngu.” (My heart is in pain.)

She pats her chest.

Ayize: “Ngikhathale Neo... ngikhathale mina. I want out... of this game, fate has forced me to play. Whoever is in charge, please tell them that I want out. I'm tired, umphefumulo wami ubuhlungu Neo. Can't they have mercy on me?” (I'm tired. My soul is shattered.

She stifles a sob as tears streak down her face.

Ayize: "No, don't cry Ayize. You are stronger than this."

She comforts herself.

Me: "It's okay to cry Zee."

I cover her with the gown.

Ayize: "That could only mean that I'm weak, I have to be strong, they look up to me. Sethu is looking up to me, I have to stay strong for her and all those women."

Her tears blind her eyes, every wipe is futile as they stream down her cheeks.

Me: "No one expects you to be strong Zee, you need to open up and cry."

She shakes her head as she drops down on the bed.

Ayize: "You're a man."

She pinches my nose.

Ayize: "I don't trust you Neo, men cannot be trusted."

She cups my cheeks...

Ayize: "I know this believe me."

Zee is stronger than she thinks. I drop my head as she wipes my tears.

How do I fix this?

Ayize: "You stay away from me."

Me: "I want to help you overcome this, not all men are the same. There are monsters out yes but..."

She presses her hand on my lips while moving her head back and forth.

Ayize: "No, no, no. A man is a man, don't try to convince me otherwise."

Me: "Okay, we failed you Zee. Yes we were supposed to protect you and we didn't. We turned a blind eye when your father took advantage of you. We turned a blind eye to the woman chased by men on the streets, we turned a blind eye when our friends made sexual remarks on the woman passing by. We laughed when they spoke about the body of a five year old girl in lust. We turned a blind eye when our friends showed us sex tapes they made of their girlfriends, we turned a blind eye to the father who rapes his daughter every night. We turned a blind eye when a grandson raped his grandmother. We turned a blind eye to the lesbians who were gang raped and murdered. We shut our windows when the woman next door was screaming for help as her husband beat her to a pulp every day. We turned a blind eye to women and we failed you."

I'm on my knees crying with her.

Me: "Sorry will never be enough, it will never heal you but, I am truly sorry Zee. On behalf of all the men out there, forgive us. I vow to protect every female out there, from the elders to the new born babies. If you let me, I will protect you Zee."

Ayize: "What makes you different from other men Neo? I can't tell the difference, every man I see wants to hurt me."

Me: "I'm not different Zee because I'm a man and I have ignored the signs, I went on with my life because it was not my business. I'm as guilty as they are, if you give me a chance I can rectify my mistakes. Let me walk this journey with you."

She wipes her tenacious tears while shaking her head.

Ayize: "My feet have failed me, sometimes I'll fall."

Me: "Then I will pick you up, if we both can't walk anymore, we'll crawl together. As long as we get there and we finish the race."

Ayize: "I'm tired Neo."

Me: "You're tired but you're also a strong woman, you can get through this. We'll be there for you, Sethu and Stylos are also here. You're not alone."

I hear a cry from outside the door, before it flies open. Sethu potters to her sister releasing a sob with every step. Ayize clenches her jaw, trying to subdue her tears from invading her eyes.

Sethu: "I'm sorry."

Ayize weeps, Sethu engulfs her in her arms.

Ayize: "I'm sorry too. I'm sorry too."

They wail in each other's arms, I turn back to find Stylos at the door, his hands across his chest and a clenched jaw.

Styles: "Are you okay?"

I'm not but, I nod anyway.

Styles: "You did good man."

Me: "I've never been let inside the eyes of a woman and today I have to say I have never experienced such pain in my life. What have we done Stylos? What have we done? God must be ashamed of us. We were meant to protect women and we messed up Stylos. What have we done?"

I pull the sleeves of my t-shirt to wipe off my tears.

Styles: "The sad truth is that it's not the end Neo, there are monsters out there who will never stop. We might catch them one by one but another will always surface. It's the sad world we live in."

Me: "I hate this shit. I hate it."

I walk past him, I need to breathe. I feel suffocated by this whole thing.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

144\*

NKOMO\*

Me: "Who is it Zwe?"

He's opening the door for someone.

Zwe: "It's ma."

He replies, sauntering back to the lounge.

Me: "Where is she?"

The boy left his mother at the door, he snubs my questions as he picks up his phone to scroll on it.

Me: "Stupid ass..."

I grunt as I jump to check on her.

Me: "Ma."

She's fighting to close the door.

Me: "Leave that, I'll do it. This is a tricky door, you have to push it in a certain way for it to close."

She steps aside with a slight titter.

MaSibiya: "You should get it fixed my child."

Me: "I will ma."

MaSibiya: "You sound like your father when I ask him to change the light bulb, that's his favourite line."

I give her a straight look, she reads my expression. I don't want to talk about that man.

She intertwines her fingers together and drops her head.

Me: "Let's go in."

She leads the way back to the living area.

Me: "Zwe move, so ma can sit."

He holds up a frown. What is his problem?



Me: "Hey, scoot. Usuyahlanya?" (Are you crazy?)

He mumbles something I can't make out as he shifts to the other corner of the couch.

MaSibiya: "Kulungile Nkomo, ithukuthele ingane. Don't scold him." (It's okay Nkomo, the child is upset.)

Me: "Ingane ma? Indoda engaka? Buka intshebe igcwele ubuso." (He's not a child, he's a man with beard.)

She laughs.

MaSibiya: "It doesn't matter how old he gets, he'll always be my baby."

She rubs his head, Zwelethu moves back. He's upset upon seeing his mother.

Me: "What's wrong with you Zwe?"

Zwe: "Lutho." (Nothing.)

He intones.

MaSibiya: "He's upset because I told him that he can't move in with you."

Me: "Yindaba ma?" (Why?)

MaSiyiba: "Ubaba wakho udinga indodana yakhe eduze kwakhe. He can't lose another son." (Your father needs his son by his side.)

It's about that old bastard.

Me: "Mkhize has many other sons, ma."

MaSibiya: "Three of them have taken wives and moved out Nkomo, you have disowned him and Zwe is the eldest left of his younger brothers."

Me: "Zwe has grown up, he won't be in that house for too long ma. Eventually, he will also take a wife and leave."

MaSibiya: "I know, but your father can make the best out of these few years."

She utters, annoying Zwelethu even more.

Me: "Can we please think about Zwe as well ma? Since you've started talking, you've only mentioned what Mkhize wants. What about his son? He doesn't want to be in that house anymore."

I explain.

Zwelethu: "Ubaba is not the same ma, I don't want to be around him." (Dad.)

He whines.

MaSibiya: "Your father is going through something mfana wami, it will pass and you will have him back." (My boy.)

Zwe disagrees by shaking his head.

Me: "Let's forget what Mkhize wants and think about my brother ma, I can't let him stay in that house if he's not happy."

Zwelethu: "I will run away from home and you will never see me again."

He mummurs with a deep frown on his face.

MaSibiya: "Yey, shut up."

She smacks his head, he grunts in pain.

Me: "Zwelethu relax, I've got this."

He sits back on the couch and fold his arms across his chest with an attitude.

Me: "Ma, can you at least let him stay with me for a while till we figure a way forward. You don't want to lose your son because you prioritised your husband."

She sighs as she mulls over my idea, this should make her see light. A message alert sounds from my phone, it's the only person who is responsible for this idiotic smile on my face lately.

<<< Guess what I have on? >>>

The text reads.

Me: <<< Nothing. >>>

I look up to find mother comforting her son, my words are getting through to her. I hope she makes the right decision.

<<< How did you know? >>>

She responds with a bashful emoji.

Me: <<< Just a lucky guess. >>>

<<< What should I do with myself then, I can't lie naked in this bed, you need to come and service me. >>>

Her reply.

MaSibiya: "Are you okay Nkomo?"

I leer up to meet a pucker between her eye brows. I clear my suddenly clogged throat.

Me: "Yes, ma. I have to run somewhere fast."

MaSibiya: "I can't stay longer, I probably won't be here when you get back."

Another message.

<<< Are you really blue ticking a woman who is thirsty for you? >>>

Shit.

This woman.

<<< I'm on my way nkosazana. >>> (My lady.)

MaSibiya: "Nkomo?"

Me: "Sorry ma, I'll see you next time then or I'll call you."

I grab my car keys in a rush.

Me: "Zwe will prepare something for you to eat."

I sprint out the door as she utters something, I don't hear what she says. My feet are scurrying outside.

KHETHU\*

My father dragged me to the psychologist, I'd rather be home.

I'm sitting on a two seater couch, it's the only couch in this office. The doctor is settled on his own chair with his leg crossed over the other. He has a note pad and a pen in his hand. He's a white middle aged man, could be in his early 70's if not late 60's.

Doc: "Before we begin, I want you to know that what you say here is strictly confidential and will not be shared with any third person."

I think I know the formalities.

Doc: "Do you know why you're here Bridgette?"

He calls me Bridgette.

Me: "Don't call me that, I hate that name."

Doc: "Why"

Me: "My mother gave it to me, I hate her and everything that represents her."

I don't think I have ever hated anyone so much.

Doc: "Would you like to tell me the reason you hate your mother?"

He speaks with so much calmness in his voice, I think he's going to irk me. He's digging into my past.

Me: "That's how it's always been between us, we have been at daggers drawn since I was a little girl."

Doc: "The hate you have towards your mother was caused by something, you didn't wake up one



day and decided that you hate her.”

Me: “She started it.”

Doc: “Why don’t you end it?”

Me: “We’re too far gone doc, this hate has grown roots and can’t be plucked out just like that.”

Doc: “You know that you’re keeping yourself prisoner by not forgiving your mother.”

Me: “I don’t care.”

Doc: “What did your mother do to you?”

He questions.

Me: “I don’t want to talk about my mother anymore.”

The thought of her ruins my mood.

Doc: “What would you rather talk about?”

Me: “I want to go home.”

This was a bad idea.

Doc: “Okay, I hope you’ll make it to our next session next week.”

Don’t remind me.

Me: “Maybe.”

I rush out of there to meet my father waiting for me at the reception.

Dad: “That was quick.”

Me: “Let’s go home.”

I walk past him, I don’t know if I’ll make it back here.

NEO\*

Ayize is sleeping, hours have gone by. Sethu made soup for her, she said Ayize will probably keep a light meal in her stomach. I offered to give it to her.

Me: “Zee.”

I slightly tap her shoulder.

Ayize: “Mmhhh.”

She hums without moving.

Me: "Get up."

She turns her face before sitting up right, she leans against the headboard.

Me: "I brought you food."

Ayize: "how long have I been sleeping?"

She enquires.

Me: "Only a few hours, Sethu made some lentil soup."

She scowls.

Ayize: "I don't want to eat."

Me: "Please, you need to eat something."

Ayize: "What is in that? Are you trying to feed me love portion?"

She makes a sour face, she's trying to joke through her pain.

Me: "Love portion ea ka e monate try it." (My love portion is nice.)

I send the spoon to her mouth, a laugh and a tear emits from her, she quickly wipes the tear away.

Ayize: "Sorry my eyes are usually teary after waking up."

I know that she's lying.

Me: "I thought the korobela was beginning to have a negative effect on you." (Love portion.)

She titters lowly.

Ayize: "I have had enough."

She pushes the spoon away.

Me: "A few more Zee."

She manages to eat a couple more, I place the plate on the bedside table.

Ayize: "Thank you."

She sends her thankfulness with a smile.

Me: "Can I sit here with you?"

She nods.

I lie on the bed next to her, there's a comfortable silence between us. My hands fly up as she rests her head on my chest, I don't know what to do with them. I can't touch her lest my touch triggers painful memories.

Ayize: "It's okay, you can relax."

She takes my hand and places it on her waist.

Me: "I don't want to make you uncomfortable."

Ayize: "Too late for that, you achieved it the first time we met at the mall."

I laugh along with her, thinking about that crazy moment.

Me: "I almost went back to Pretoria that night, I was convinced that girls from Joburg are crazy."

Ayize: "You should have, there's more of us."

She replies as she gets up from the bed.

Me: "Where are you going?"

Ayize: "The bathroom."

She's going to throw up.

Me: "Stay with me for a while."

Ayize: "I'll be back."

Me: "We're fighting this together, remember?"

She nods hesitantly.

Me: "Come sit with me."

She sighs before taking her place again.

Me: "Tell me about your first day at school."

I introduce.

Me: "I bet you were one of those with the oversized uniform and a big forehead."

She titters.

Ayize: "I was actually. I wore my uniform till the fourth grade, that's when I started putting on weight."

I can tell that her mind is not here, her body is not settled as she keeps twiddling

Ayize: "Neo I can't hold it in anymore."

She's fidgeting out of my arms, I let her go as she dashes to the toilet and locks the door behind her. I stand outside the door, she's gagging. I can tell by the retching sounds she makes that, she's forcing a hand down her throat. The door opens and she stands before me, her eyes remain on the ground.

Ayize: "I'm sorry."

Me: "It's okay, we'll take it one step at a time."

She plods to settle down on the bed.

Me: "Come with me, I'll make you some tea."

Ayize: "I don't drink tea, I drink wine."

Me: "About that, we're going on a fast."

I sit next to her.

Ayize: "A fast? Don't tell me you have joined Sethu's church."

Her joke causes a laugh to emit from my mouth.

Me: "No, I mean we're going to stop drinking wine."

Ayize: "You and who else?"

Me: "Me and you. We're going to attend an alcoholism treatment programme together as well as therapy. I'll hold your hand all the way."

Ayize: "No Neo, I can't do any of that."

This is expected of her, Sethu told me she would react like this.

Me: "We'll take baby steps Zee, it's the only way you'll get through this. You're not alone."

My power to persuade people should be at work now.

Me: "Pretty please with ice cream on top."

She titters.

Ayize: "I hate ice cream."

She makes a face.

Me: "Me too."

She laughs at my retort.

Ayize: "Okay."

Did I hear right?

Me: "Okay?"

Ayize: "Okay."

Me: "Great. Tomorrow we have an appointment at 10am."

Ayize: "You're coming with me right?"

Me: "I won't leave you alone for a second. You know that stubborn green fly? That's me."

I jest.



Ayize: "A fly? Of all things."

Me: "Yes."

The sound of her laughter brings a smile on my face.

Me: "Let's go get that tea."

Ayize: "Okay, I want strong and black tea."

Me: "I make the best."

Ayize: "It's just hot water and tea bags, relax Mr. Chef."

She states while walking out of the room.

MBUSO\*

I find Lelo outside the gate at Randall's house. She rushes to the car as I jump out and throws herself in my arms.

Lelo: "Mbuso."

She cries.

Me: "What's wrong Lelo?"

Lelo: "I swear Mbuso, I didn't mean it. I'm not a bad person, I just want her close to me."

She's crying hysterically, I move her out of my arms.

Me: "Lelo, I need you to stop crying. You're stressing the baby."

Lelo: "I can't stop."

Me: "Okay let's go home. We'll talk when we get there."

Lelo: "Please talk to Amara for me."

Me: "What will I say?"

Lelo: "I don't know tell her that I'm sorry and I didn't mean anything I said in there."

She went and made her views known, I should've stopped her from coming here.

Me: "Do you want me to do it now?"

Lelo: "Yes please."

Why can't I say no to her?"

Me: "Get in the car."



Driving in the premises, I keep wondering what Randall's reaction will be, as he gave me a warning last time.

The door is opened by Chioma, Liyana is standing behind her wide-eyed.

Chioma: "Mbuso."

Me: "Hey. I'd like to see Randall please."

Chioma: "He's in the patio."

She retorts with a gently smile.

Me: "Hey Liya."

I kneel to reach her level, she clings on to Chioma's garment.

Me: "Won't you greet me today?"

Her eyes rush to Lelo then back to me, Lelo didn't tell me the full story but, the child is afraid of her. She waves slowly.

Me: "Won't you greet my friend as well."

She shakes her head negatively.

Me: "Why not baby?"

Liyana: "She's mean."

Lelo must have said something.

Lelo: "Liya, I'm sorry baby. I didn't mean to yell at you."

She hides behind Chioma again.

Lelo: "Won't you give me a second chance?"

Chioma: "Liyana, come out of there."

She slowly glides out and steps before me. Lelo squats down as well.

Lelo: "Do you forgive me Liya?"

Liyana shrugs.

Chioma: "What did I teach you about forgiveness Liya?"

Liyana looks up at Chioma.

Liyana: "That we shouldn't be angry for too long and should learn to forgive people."

Chioma: "Yes, now your aunt is sorry for scolding you. Won't you forgive her."

Lelo: "I am sorry Liya, cross my heart. I promise if you give me another chance, I will be the best aunty in the world."

Liyana's face is starting to loosen up.

Liyana: "Pinkie promise?"

She points out her fifth finger and with a smile Lelo joins her pinkie finger with hers.

Lelo: "Pinkie promise."

Liyana giggles.

Lelo: "Shall we hug on it?"

In a jiffy, she engulfs Lelo with a hug. I look up to find Amara in the foyer watching us.

Me: "Amara."

She appears to be emotional, Lelo pulls herself up after withdrawing from the hug.

Lelo: "I'm sorry sis, forgive me please."

She says so sincerely.

Amara: "Me too, I didn't mean to be rude. I hate it when we fight Lelo, I want us to be like we were back then. I miss that."

She takes Lelo's hands.

Lelo: "I want that too Amara and I promise I will try to be open minded."

I have to have a word with Randall, he could be against this.

Me: "Where is Randy?"

Amara: "The patio."

Me: "Thanks."

I find my way to him, he's typing something on the laptop while speaking on the phone.

Randall: "Thanks, I'll get back to you on that."

He frowns upon seeing me and drops the call.

Me: "Do you have a minute?"

He points at a chair, his facial expression states that he knows the reason for my visit.

Me: "I want to talk to you about Lelo."

His brooding gaze examines my face, his brows furrow with unease.

Me: "Lelo doesn't know how to express herself Randall."

Randall: "That's not my problem."

He answers me with a grunt.

Me: "It's not. Look, she's pregnant and all this stress will cause harm to the baby."

He shakes his head in disagreement.

Randall: "Like I said, that's not my problem."

He mumbles a few words in reply.

Me: "Don't be like this Randy, you know those two sisters love each other. They are together right now and have made up along with Liyana."

Randall: "Okay."

He takes his attention to the laptop and begins to capture something.

Me: "Your words haven't left me, you said to talk to Lelo and..."

Randall: "I said put her on a leash."

He corrects me as he cuts my sentence mid-way.

Me: "Which I didn't appreciate by the way, you called her a dog."

By the smug look on his face, I'm assured that my words mean nothing to him.

Randall: "What do you want me to do Mbuso? Why are you here?"

Me: "Let her visit Amara freely."

Randall: "I'm not stopping her, she was able to come to the house this morning. What I don't want is her drilling nonsense into Amara's head."

Me: "She won't do that, I assure you."

I know by his pursed lips that he disapproves of this.

Me: "They both need time to adjust, it's been too long since they were separated."

He shrugs.

Whatever that means.

Randall: "I hear you Mbuso, if she keeps her thoughts to herself then, we will not have a problem."

Me: "She will."

Randall: "I'll take your word for it, I don't want a snake in my house. You know what we do to snakes right?"

He puckers his brows as he expects me to give a reply to his threat.

Me: "Lelo is far from being a snake, you both need to get to know each other."

Randall: "I hope you're right."

I am right, I know I'm right. Lelo can't disappoint me with this one.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

145\*

### NOMBULELO\*

My uncle called me over to my father's house. I walk in to everyone gathered in the sitting room. The only empty space there is for me to sit is beside my father and I have no choice but to settle there.

We exchange greetings before uncle, Jonas begins the meeting.

Jonas: "Nombulelo you must know why we called you over?"

I scowl at his introduction.

Me: "You didn't tell me Malume." (Uncle.)

Jonas: "What have you decided about inhlawulo?" (Damages.)

My uncle is too much really.

Me: "I made up my mind yesterday malume, I don't want that man anywhere near me or my child." (Uncle.)

Moses: "It's decided then, inhlawulo will not take place." (Damages.)

My father surprises me with these words.

Jonas: "What did I say, yesterday Moses? Did I not say that Nombulelo should make the right decision or we will make it for her?"

What my uncle is saying makes no sense whatsoever. Why does he want to make decisions for me?

Ntombi: "Bhuti, you heard what Nombulelo said, she wants nothing to do with this boy."

Jonas: "I heard her, which is out of line, tradition says..."

Moses: "Isiko Jonas?" (Tradition.)

My father stops him from gibbering on.

Moses: "Lalela Jonas, Nombulelo is not a Buthelezi, siyezwana? She is a Mngoma." (Listen. Do you understand?)

Jonas: "So? What have you people done for her as the Mngoma family?"

Moses: "Ungangihlanyisi Jonas, ngeyami lengane, if anyone will decide what is to be done regarding this issue, it's me. On behalf of Nombulelo's uncles, the Mngoma family." (Don't make me crazy, this child is mine.)

My father growls in anger.

Me: "You don't know that man malume, he's evil. Zuma treated me like trash when I told him I was pregnant, he went on to cheat on me with my friend." (Uncle.)

Jonas: "That has nothing to do with us Lelo, we only want him to recognise his baby."

This uncle is stubborn.

Moses: "I don't want an abusive man close to my grandchild."

I don't want my father close to my son.

Me: "Malume, there is someone and he wants to take responsibility for the baby." (Uncle.)

Lord, don't let this back fire.

Mhambi: "Who is it Lelo?"

This uncle is different from the other one, he can be understanding.

Me: "His name is Mbuso Xaba, he's a son to Muzikayise Xaba and Dorothy Xaba."

Jonas: "What does this boy do?"

He's intrigued.

Me: "He's a doctor by profession and helps around the community."

Can I score my man some points?

Ntombi: "A doctor Nombulelo? You have chosen well for yourself my child."

She states in delight.

Mhambi: "When does he plan on marrying you? If it's in his future plans, he has to do it before the baby is born."

Such pressure. How do I approach Mbuso with this?

Jonas: "No this all wrong. What will the future generation do if we abandon our customs? We have to do things right."

Me: "Malume please, don't do this." (Uncle.)

Jonas: "I'm not saying stay away from the man you speak of, I'm only stating that you let Mhlongo be a part of his child's life."

I can't grasp why he is forcing this issue.

Moses: "Because Jonas is stubborn and refuses to listen to anyone, I will have to call my

brothers. We will discuss this as the Mngoma family, we don't need any outsiders."

My father's brothers could be worse than uncle Jonas.

How do I escape from this mess?

Jonas: "I don't care about your brothers Moses, Lelo will..."

Mhambi: "Mfowethu, mana kancane bhuti. Moses is right, this has nothing to do with us. Nombulelo is not ours Jonas, yehlisa umoya." (Wait brother, calm down.)

Only this man can calm a raging storm, I guess I will wait for my paternal uncles.

MBUSO\*

Usually my father's car is parked outside around this time. Where could he be after 6pm? It's too late for an old married man to be gallivanting around town. If that man is messing around with a woman old enough to be his daughter, I swear I will make him pay. My mother is too fragile for this shit.

She walks out of the house to open the gate for me, I hoot as I drive in.

Me: "Where is dad?"

I give her a short hug.

Mom: "I don't know, he doesn't tell me when he leaves. He doesn't eat at home anymore Mbuso yet I still cook for him only to dispose his food the following day."

I get her complaints. He cannot be acting a fool after so many years, if he succeeded to hide the affair before. Why is he showing it now?

Me: "Let me call him."

She stops me by grabbing hold of my hand.

Mom: "Don't waste your time, he won't take your call."

Me: "What's going on mom? Why is he doing this?"

Could he have found out about the child and has decided to be with them?

Me: "Do you have a clue why he's changed?"

Mom: "I think I'm old enough to notice that your father has a mistress."

I potter after her to the house.

A familiar aroma tickles my nose, I have always loved my mother's cooking and so did my father. How he could eat food prepared by another woman puzzles me.

Me: "Smells nice mom. What did you make?"

She smacks my hand as I pop the lid open and drop my head inside the pot of mouth-watering stew.

Mom: "People will eat that."

By people she means her and I, possibly my father as well. That's if he finds his way home.

Me: "When are you dishing up? I'm hungry."

I rub my growling stomach, I don't recall having anything to eat today. I did though drink multiple amounts of coffee just for the energy boost.

Mom: "Doesn't that girl feed you?"

Come to think of it, I can't remember a day she called Lelo by her name. I should bring some food for Lelo, I know that she will eat at her father's house. I want her to try my mother's cooking, she will love it.

Me: "Lelo mom and yes she does. She takes care of me, look how chubby I am now. My belly is complaining too, I need to hit the gym."

I'm laughing alone, she's not tickled by my lame joke.

Mom: "Chubby? Uzacile Mbuso. Oh kodwa Jesu, umfana wami. I told you not to move out, I was going to take care of you." (You're skinny, oh Jesus.)

If I had stayed in this house, I would be one unhappy man. I love my old folks but living with them is a big no.

Me: "What about my privacy? Plus I am yet to marry, I can't be living in my father's house with my wife."

Her gaze leaves me feeling like I just lost a part of my mind.

Mom: "Most people do it, it's normal. It's an easy way to monitor if that girl is taking care of my only boy."

Her dramatic reply leaves me defeated.

Me: "Hiabo, and be the cause of my first divorce. No woman can stand living with the in-laws."

Mom: "You mean no lazy woman."

I give her a plate, I might as well be eating while listening to her complaints.

Me: "I would have you know mother that Lelo is not lazy, she is one dedicated woman."

One would think she just sucked on a lemon with that facial expression.

Mom: "You speak of marriage Mbuso. Are you willing to marry a woman who is not bearing your son? Will you be able to love that child the way you would love your own?"



My father is against this too, I don't get what's wrong with these old people.

Me: "Goku is my baby mom, I love him like I would, my own kids."

Mom: "Goku? What is that? Have you named the child before it's born? Mbuso I am disappointed in you. You are a traditional man and you know we don't do that."

That's superstition and I refuse to let my mind dwell on it, you attract what you think about the most. It's a good thing Lelo is not here, she tends to overthink. She would literally ban me from calling our baby by this name till he's born.

Me: "I know mom, it's a nick name nje. It happened that I found myself calling him that and it sounds better than calling him baby."

I'm only saying this to put her at ease, it wouldn't be bad to put the name on his birth certificate. Lelo would kill me for sure but, she will get used to it with time.

Mom: "Sit down when you eat, your father's house has chairs."

I fly to a seat at her command.

Me: "Mom, you're still the best. This is amazing hey."

She leans against the counter, giving me a smile. She doesn't smile the same anymore, it's there but, it's not there. If that makes any sense, my father is slowly killing this woman. Women respond to infidelity differently, they break and smile through the pain.

Mom: "I can come and cook for you every day if you like."

Lelo would not appreciate that, she would tell me to marry my mother if I think she is the best cook.

Me: "That's okay mom, I enjoy your cooking and appreciate it but, I have a woman now. She makes amazing dishes, you should come over for supper one day."

Is this a good idea?

Her eyes did something there.

Mom: "No thanks, I wouldn't want to get food poisoning."

Her grunt is proof that she is jealous.

Me: "I'm not saying you can't cook, I..."

Mom: "Thula tuu." (Keep quite.)

Maybe I should, I'm making things worse by rambling. Another spoonful of this scrumptious meal will shut this big mouth of mine.

Mom: "Are you ready to be a father?"

Me: "More than ready, I can't stop counting the months till he comes."

Mom: "When is the wedding?"

Me: "What wedding?"

Someone is getting married?

Mom: "You are planning on marrying that girl, aren't you?"

Oh! My wedding....

Me: "Yes, in the near future."

Mom: "Near future? Do you hear yourself? You want to play father to her child and you're not thinking of marrying her soon."

I am thinking of marrying Lelo, just not now.

Mom: "You know that child can never fully belong to you unless he has your name?"

Mom speaking like this is a surprise to me, I thought she's against our relationship.

Me: "We can do something small and traditional."

I don't have the funds for a big wedding. Knowing my mother, she would invite the whole church.

Mom: "A traditional wedding?"

Me: "Not those you see on that show of yours mom, you know how I'm struggling financially right now."

Mom: "Yet you boast about being a doctor. Why did you bother studying medicine if you were going to work for a private practitioner?"

This topic always finds its way in, when having a conversation with the parents.

Me: "I love helping people, it's my passion and I want to concentrate on that right now."

Mom: "Helping people will not put food on the table."

Me: "Like you always say, God will provide. He's been providing and he continues to do so. I don't recall a time when Lelo and I went to bed on an empty stomach."

Mom: "Hayi, wena no Lelo wakho." (You and this girl.)

I'm sensing that it's Lelo she has a problem with, not the baby.

Me: "The offer still stands mom, you're welcome to have supper with us some time."

Mom: "I will pass."

She is completely not interested.

Mom: "Have you heard from Nomasonto lately?"

How did she get in the conversation?

Me: "Why are you asking me about her?"

Mom: "She's not taking my calls, we would talk on WhatsApp and call each other. She blocked me, I can't get through to her."

Me: "Don't you think that's a good thing?"

Mom: "No, we were very close."

So?

Me: "Mom, she's half your age. You can't be friends with her."

What ever happened to Zodwa?

Mom: "You two were good together, I was hoping that maybe one day you'll patch things up and pick up where you left off."

I knew this was leading somewhere.

Me: "Lelo is my future now, I need you to accept that."

The look in her eyes right now.

Mom: "Well, I think Nomasonto is the one that got away."

I don't and I'm glad she got away.

Me: "Don't do that mom."

Mom: "Am I not allowed to speak out as your mother?"

Me: "As my mother I expect you to support me and the woman I love."

Mom: "Nomasonto is a good woman Mbuso."

If only she knew.

Me: "I'm full now, thanks for the food. I have to go and pick Lelo up."

Mom: "Will you not wait for your father?"

I will not.

Me: "I'll call him."

I peck her cheek as I get ready to leave the house.

STYLES\*

I had to get Sethu out of the house for a while, she was stuck on Ayize's bedside watching her sleep. She worries a lot and it can't be good for her. A night out is just what she needs, we're at a noisy and busy restaurant in Four Ways and the night is not going the way I planned. Her mind is not here with me and I know that she left it at home right beside her sister.

If I wanted to spend time alone with just me and the sound of my teeth shattering together as I chew, I wouldn't have brought her with me.

Me: "Do you know if there's a book called 'what women think?'"

Surely she has to hear this one. Her gaze is lost on the space between the plate of food and the fork she keeps poking it with.

Me: "So I decided that I want to be a rapper and move to Limpopo."

This line should work with me.

Okay... It's not working.

Me: "I have a wife in Bloemfontein and we have three kids together."

It's got to be a hit.

Her eyes shoot up, tears and all.

Sethu: "Styles?"

She's back.

Me: "I have been sitting here all alone. Where are you lost?"

Sethu: "You're married Styles?"

She gasps as she embraces shock.

Me: "No, I said it to tap you back to the real world. Here with me, this is where you should be."

Her eyes fall back on the plate, she drops the fork and takes up a sigh. I know that sound, she is stressed.

Sethu: "Sorry babe, I'm worried about Ayize."

Guessing that is not rocket science.

Me: "I know, I brought you here so you can stop stressing."

Sethu: "I can't help it, I think I should talk to my father and have them apologize to her."

Bad idea.

Me: "Ayize would not like that."

Sethu: "She won't heal until she gets closure. Things didn't end well that day Styles, she didn't get all the answers. My mother was mean to her and I need her to explain why."

Me: "Explain to you or your sister?"

Sethu: "To us both, they owe us an explanation. I find it hard to believe that mom has a mental disorder, it's too far-fetched and dad would do anything to rescue her. If Romeo and Juliet were black, my parents would fit the description. Those two would hide a dead body together and take the secret to their graves."

That can't be love, they must be toxic for each other if what they have brings heartache to their loved ones.

Me: "When did your parents meet?"

Sethu: "Back in high school, they've been together since."

Yeah, they have probably hidden dead bodies together. Why hold on to each other like this and forsake their children?

Me: "Do they ever have any quarrels?"

Sethu: "Not much, mom respects him like he's a god. She wouldn't dare raise a voice at him, I used to think they were the perfect couple and craved for what they have. Now, I take it back. I don't think I would ever choose my husband over my kids. I would die for my children."

We're yet to bring that up in this relationship. With Khethu, having kids was the last thing I wanted hence the vasectomy. I need to let Sethu know about that as well and see how she feels about it.

Me: "How many kids do you want?"

I don't know where to start.

Sethu: "Three, a boy first, a girl in the middle and another boy. I want my daughter to be surrounded by her brothers. I want them to be her protectors."

Sweet.

Me: "Okay. Is it a now thing or you see it in the distant future?"

Her eyes narrow at my curiosity.

Sethu: "I'm not getting any younger, I would want a child before I turn thirty. Maybe two by the time I reach that age."

Doing the math in my head, we have five years and the kids will be a year apart.

Me: "Three is a lot, don't you think?"

One would do.

Sethu: "How many do you want?"

Me: "One."

A smile creeps on her face.



Sethu: "What a lonely child he will be."

Me: "He won't be lonely, there's Liyana and they are having another baby."

Sethu: "Wow, that's great. I should call Amara and congratulate her. She must be over the moon."

Me: "I think Randall is more excited than she is."

Sethu: "That's cute."

She replies with a titter.

Sethu: "So, one child hey?"

We are back here.

Me: "We can compromise on two."

I should suggest this, right? Besides I haven't thought much about being a father.

Sethu: "Sounds like a plan, don't blame me if a surprise baby comes along after those two."

Me: "There's something called contraceptives."

Sethu: "Sure, but you can never be too sure about those."

Me: "Kitten, your plans of having a baby soon will have to wait."

I should answer to that confused face she's giving me.

Me: "I had a vasectomy."

I'm trying to read her mind, her eyes say she's shocked though.

Sethu: "Oh!!!"

She gasps.

She's definitely shocked.

Sethu: "When?"

Me: "Years back, I didn't want any kids."

Sethu: "Why? Kids are beautiful."

Me: "I know."

From a distance.

Sethu: "What about now? Do you want kids now?"

She queries with a nervous expression.

I want to be a family with her, I'm not sure about having kids. The thought has only recently crossed my mind.



Me: "I would do anything to make you happy."

I take her stiff hand into mine, she's upset.

Sethu: "You don't have to do it for me, I wouldn't want you to resent our kids because you didn't want them."

She states coldly.

Me: "I can never resent the best part of you. I want to be a family with you Sethu."

Sethu: "Without kids, right?"

She is disappointed.

Me: "I need time."

Sethu: "Okay."

She shrugs.

Me: "What does that mean?"

Sethu: "It means okay, take the time that you need."

Just like that?

Sethu: "You must know though that, I'm a woman and my biological clock is ticking. Don't take too long, I want to be a mother one day?"

I lean over the table to kiss her, she's reluctant.

Me: "Come on kitten, don't leave me hanging. Awuthi mba kancane." (Kiss me, just a little.)

Her smile triumphs over her grouchiness, she leans in as I bite my lower lip.

Me: "Mmmhhh, you taste so good."

I whisper softly against her lips.

My mind is disarrayed at first as Sethu is forcefully jolted back, she's as mystified as I am. We look up to see Khethu, she wears an angry mask on her face.

Khethu: "What is this Styles? So this is you, kissing ugly ducklings in public?"

She yells.

Me: "What are you doing here?"

If she's stalking us then I swear...

Khethu: "Doesn't matter, and you..."

She points at Sethu with her forefinger.

Khethu: "You bitch, you lied to me..."

I have to calm myself for Sethu's sake, in a leisurely way. I push my chair back, get up to my feet and move closer to Khethu. She winces in pain as I clasp my hand on her wrist.

Me: "Call her a bitch again and I swear I will forget that you're a woman and beat the hell out of you."

Her teary eyes fall on my straight face, she's seen this impassive look before and she knows that I'm not playing.

Khethu: "You're hurting me, Styles."

She has done away with the yelling all of a sudden.

Sethu: "Let her go babe."

Sethu rises with this request.

Sethu: "People are staring, let's not draw any attention."

My eyes browse the restaurant and she's right people are goggle eyed and whispering.

Khethu rubs her wrist right after I release it.

Me: "Get out of here."

She frowns at my grunt.

"Last time I checked this was a free country."

It's the shit head Mbongeni.

Mbongeni: "Khethu is with me."

Me: "Okay, get her away from us."

I demand.

Mbongeni: "You don't get to tell me what to do."

Sethu: "Let's go babe."

She takes my hand into hers, it's a good thing because I was ready to attack this idiot.

This angers Khethu, she pulls Sethu's hand from me, breaking the hold.

Khethu: "What right do you have to hold his hand?"

She's back to yelling.

Me: "Mbongeni or whatever your name is, ngiyacela bhuti bamba umuntu wakho." (Restrain your woman please.)

Khethu: "Styles are you taking her side now?"

I decide not to give an answer to her question.



Me: "Sethu let's go."

I hardly see it coming as Khethu grabs a glass of wine on the table and splashes the drink on Sethu's face.

Me: "What the hell?"

Mbongeni blocks my way, stopping me from grabbing Khethu.

Me: "Get out of my way boy, uzolimala nja." (You will get hurt you dog.)

I'm astounded by the sound of a loud clap, Sethu has reacted with a slap on Khethu's face. Her head is slanted to the side, her hand pressed on her cheek and a tear falls from one eye. People are staring and whispering, it barely takes a second before Sethu sends another hard slap on the other cheek.

Me: "Sethu?"

I pull her back, afraid that Khethu might attack her, Mbongeni has his hand around Khethu in a jiffy. Kitten is angrily glaring at Khethu who is clearly still in shock.

Sethu: "That's for calling me a bitch and for pouring wine on my face."

She growls.

Khethu: "You're going to pay for this."

I see Khethu has not changed.

Sethu: "We'll see about that."

Khethu: "You can never fully have him you know, I had him first. This man will always belong to me, he will come back once he's tired of your ugly ass. Styles and I shared a bed for four years, our souls are tied together, that's a bond you can't break."

I'm not given a chance to comeback, Sethu beats me to it.

Sethu: "Whatever makes you sleep at night, you're miserable sisi. It shows and you're bitter. You failed to keep this man even after years of sharing his bed. What did you gain from those years you're gloating about? Nothing."

This is not worth it.

Me: "Let's get out of here Kitten."

Khethu: "You can run Styles but, you know you will always find comfort with me. This is a phase and it will pass like the rest of them, you love me, I know you do."

She is still delusional.

Me: "There's nothing to go back to Khethu, you need help and stay out of our lives."

Khethu: "Never, I won't do that Styles."

I know she means it.

Khethu: "This girl doesn't deserve you, she's not the one for you. It's me Styles, it will always be me."

Mbongeni: "Khethu stop."

She pulls away from him and moves towards me, Sethu swiftly pushes her back.

Sethu: "You stay the hell away from me and from Styles, yes you had him first. So what? He's moved on with me, you better keep away Khethu or else two can play that game."

Someone tell me I'm not dreaming. Khethu is left tongue tied. My little kitten is a tiger, she grabs her bag and I know it's time to go. I'm usually a leader but, I'll give this to her for today. Let me not reign on her parade.

I have this daft smile on my face, I can't wipe it off. I am so proud right now.

Sethu: "What are you smiling about?"

She questions as she buckles up.

Me: "What happened to my innocent naïve Sethu?"

She smiles with a head shake.

Sethu: "I've been hanging around Ayize for too long and taking notes."

Me: "I don't know what that means, I'm glad though. You were able to stand up for yourself."

Sethu: "For you as well, I will not let her bully me any longer. My sister taught me that you fight for what is yours and what you believe in."

Me: "I am yours alright."

She laughs.

Sethu: "And I will never forget that."

Me: "I'm sorry about her."

Sethu: "Don't be, like you said. She needs help and I hope she gets it."

This woman is full of surprises.

NKOMOM\*

Ruth is taking a shower, we're set to go out for dinner in about thirty minutes. I have the earrings in my hand and I know that she will want to wear them as we're going out. I need to come up with a plan, I have grown so fond of her that I can't see her go through this sickness. There must be a way we can get rid of Segun Okolie, I need to think of something. Styles will grow weary of

calling me, I keep avoiding his calls. It's only a matter of time till he finds out the truth.

"Hey. Why aren't you ready?"

I hide the jewellery box in my pocket and swiftly turn to face her, she has a towel wrapped around her body.

Me: "I was thinking we could get room service."

This way, she won't have to wear them.

Ruth: "That's boring."

Me: "Let me hear you say that when I show you a few tricks up my sleeve."

I shoot her a naughty smile, she returns it.

Ruth: "I'm not easily convinced Mr, just so you know."

She turns back to the mirror and this gives me a chance to slip the box in the pocket of my jacket. I sneak behind her and spoon her.

Ruth: "You don't get tired, do you?"

She whispers already out of breath, my face is hidden on the curve of her neck as I place kiss after kiss.

Me: "You have me on steroids Ruth."

I gently bite a small part on her neck, her body trembles against mine. She turns around to face me and loosens the towel leaving her starkers. I smirk as I'm about to take a joy ride.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

146\*

MBUSO\*

I receive a phone call from Lelo as I turn the corner to her house.

Me: "Chubby cheeks?"

Lelo: "Hey, where are you?"

I can barely hear her, she's speaking softly.

Me: "I'm at the corner, almost there. What's wrong?"

Why am I whispering as well?

Lelo: "My uncle wants to speak to you."

She tells, dropping me into a pool of anxiety, Jonas is intimidating as ever.

Me: "What is it Lelo? Did you tell them about us?"

She sniffs, Goku is playing with Lelo's emotions. She does not cry so easily.

Lelo: "I'll tell you when you get here."

I spot her standing outside her father's house.

Me: "I can see you, my love."

She begins to walk to the gate as she sees my car.

Me: "Why does your uncle want to see me?"

Her eyes are puffy, she's been crying.

Me: "Hey chubby cheeks, what happened?"

I pull her into a hug, she clings on to my shirt, her face hidden on my shoulder.

Me: "Lelo?"

She's snivelling and her body is trembling.

Lelo: "My uncle wants to ruin my life."

She cries the words out.

Me: "Get in the car."



Hesitantly she turns her head back to leer at the house.

Lelo: "They are expecting us, we can't leave."

Me: "We're only going for a drive, we'll be back soon."

I open the door for her, she glides in and buckles up. It's good no one has come out yet.

Me: "Tell me what happened?"

She's still in tears as I start the car.

Lelo: "The reason I was late last night is because I met up with my uncle and Zuma."

I'm shocked as she starts to explain.

Me: "Why didn't you tell me?"

I ask.

There must be a reason why she would keep this from me.

Lelo: "I didn't know how to tell you, Mbuso, the last time we saw Zuma I told him never to bother us again and I didn't want to upset you. The thing is that my uncle wants him to pay damages, he wants Goku to take Zuma's surname."

I feel a little sting in my heart, the dreams I have for Goku and I come crushing down at the sound of his mother's voice.

Me: "How is this Lelo? I don't understand?"

Lelo: "I told him that I can't have Zuma in my child's life and he was so adamant that I was forced to tell him about us. Now he wants to talk to you."

Me: "Did he say what it's about?"

I quiz, suddenly I'm nervous.

Lelo: "They want to know if you're planning on marrying me."

The same conversation I had with my mother.

Me: "I see. What about Zuma? Will they still let him pay the damages?"

I don't see myself co-parenting with him.

Lelo: "My father is against it, he says he will call his brothers to come and address the issue because uncle, Jonas wants to have his way."

Should I be relieved?

Me: "Okay, let's go back now."

I turn the car around.

Here we are seated in the lounge, Lelo is far from me, she's sitting with her mother and aunt while I'm on a single couch and have these men glaring at me like I came to kill steal and destroy. Her dad is also among these men and I think his glare is the most piercing one.

I have never done this before so I'm not informed about the ins and outs of talking to your girlfriend's family.

Jonas: "Where is home?"

His cold tone is hardly welcoming.

Nervousness has me clearing my throat.

Me: "Mpumalanga, Emalahleni."

Jonas: "Ngiyabona, Isibongo?" (I see. What's your surname?)

He should loosen up a bit, he's intimidating.

Me: "Ngingowakwa Xaba baba." (I am from the Xaba clan.)

He nods once.

"Nonkosi, mashwabada." (Calling clan names.)

This must be the other uncle, the gentle one Lelo says.

Me: "Yebo baba." (Yes sir.)

Hearing my clan names makes me feel at ease.

Jonas: "What's your plan with our child?"

Straight to the point.

Me: "Baba, I'm sure Lelo must have told you that, we..."

Jonas: "Forget what Lelo told us. We want to know what your plans are with our child."

Me: "Ngiyayithanda indodakazi yenu baba, uNombulelo. Ngifisa ukuphila impilo yami naye." (I love your daughter sir and I want to spend my life with her.)

Moses: "Okay mfana, uthi uyihlo ngubani igama?" (What is your father's name?)

He decides to let his voice be heard now.

Me: "Ngu Muzikayise Xaba." (It's Muzikayise Xaba.)

He's rubbing his chin while gazing at me.

Moses: "Ngabe ndodana, uMuzikayise uyazi ukuthi wena ufuna uthu khulisa ingane engasiyo yakwa Xaba?" (Does your father know that you want to raise a child who is not yours?)

Me: "Yebo ngamazisa ubaba." (Yes, I told him.)

Moses: "Hayi, ngiyakuzwa ndodana. Icebo lona lithini? Ngoba angeke si kuphe indodakazi yethu nje." (I hear you son. What's your plan because we can't just give you our daughter?)

Me: "Ngifisa ukumshada uNombulelo." (I wish to marry Lelo.)

Jonas: "Pho ulindeneni?" (What are you waiting for?)

His attitude towards me has not changed.

Me: "Ngizokhuluma nobadala, sizo thumela incwadi." (I will speak to the elders and we will send a letter.)

Lelo is quietly sitting with her head bowed, I wish to know what her mind is thinking right now.

Jonas: "Kanjalo nje?" (Just like that?)

Is there something else? I nod because I don't know what he's talking about.

Jonas: "That boy who is responsible for Nombulelo's child. He wants to be a part of the baby's life. How will you deal with that?"

Me: "With all due respect baba."

Lelo throws her gaze at me like I said something wrong.

Me: "We don't need that man, I can take care of my family. I will make sure that Lelo and our child lack nothing."

Moses: "I'm happy to hear that my son, iyangijabulisa lento." (This makes me happy.)

Jonas: "I don't trust his words, these boys are not serious."

Me: "I am serious about Nombulelo, she is my life."

My statement rewards me a smile from her.

Jonas: "Uma usho ke, sizozwa ngawe. I am giving you two weeks and if that letter is not here in two weeks, we will go on with inhlawulo. Now go home and do what you must." (If you say so, we will hear from you.) (Damages.)

He dismisses me, I say my goodbyes before sauntering out the door without her. I'll wait for her in the car.

AYIZE\*

Me: "Neo look at this."

I scream with excitement at the number on the scale. I gained five pounds.

Neo: "We're getting there Zee."

He replies with the same enthusiasm. We're at Styles' house, Sethu and I have been here for over two weeks now. Therapy has been going well, Neo attended each lesson with me. We went to Alcohol Anonymous together, he's been amazing and I have found a great friend in him. At times when I don't feel like waking up in the morning he would come and pull the blankets off me. When I cancel the meetings and classes, he'd literally drag me there, I would fight with him about it though at the end of the day I have no choice but to thank him for being with me.

He makes me laugh like a freak and he makes me angry sometimes more especially when he forces me to eat.

Neo: "Now that we're here, you can start eating burgers and heavy meals."

Me: "I think I want to try that now."

He carries a smile.

Neo: "I knew you'd say that, so I brought everything we need to make burgers."

He didn't...

Burgers for breakfast. Okay.

Me: "Who's going to cook them"

He can't cook to save his life.

Neo: "Us."

Me: "I think you should rather stick to your day job, cooking is not your skill Neo."

Neo: "Excuse me, I was raised by a...."

Not again.

Me: "A mother who can cook?"

The way he prattles on about his mother.

Neo: "Hey no fair, you should let me finish my own sentences."

Me: "How can I? When I know what you're going to say next. Boring."

He brought almost everything, I have no clue how to make homemade burgers. If only Sethu was here.

Neo: "You're boring Zee, you are lucky that I'm in your life otherwise you would die of boredom shame."

He pinches my nose.

Me: "Hey, your hands are cold."

I complain as I wipe away the feel of his touch.

Neo: "I was eating ice, sorry."



He shows me his teeth while reaching for my nose again.

Me: "Neo no."

I push his hand away this act gives him the drive to want to play with my nose. I duck as he sends his hand to my face.

Me: "You're childish you know that?"

Neo: "Zee my hand is itching to touch your nose. Come on just once."

I have spoiled him with this habit, I should have stopped it the first time he started. Now he won't stop.

Me: "I don't want."

He's behind me, his hand fighting to touch my face while I'm slouched pushing him back with my hip. This reminds me of the time we fought over his phone in the parking lot.

Me: "Neo don't touch my face."

Neo: "Come baba, let me pinch that big nose. You know you want to."

Apart from Zee, he has dubbed me with the name baba. It's not often that he says it, he lets it slip out in a while.

Me: "Neo I will kick you, let me go."

To think that I'm actually laughing at this, his arm is around my waist and the other fighting to touch the bridge of my nose.

Neo: "You know we can do this all day, I don't mind. I have the energy."

And it never runs out, if you don't know anyone who never gets tired. I introduce to you Neo Maake.

Me: "I will bite your hand."

Neo: "As long as it touches your nose."

I will lose this battle so I might as well. I stop fighting him, drop my hands and freeze. The pinch is not at all painful just annoying.

Neo: "And he scores."

He still has his arms around me.

Neo: "Thank you baba, my hand is healed now."

He buries his face on my collarbone and clasps his arms around me as he holds me closer. This moment hits him as well, silence takes the starring role in this kitchen. I can hear his breathing and the sound of my heart thudding. I don't know how I should feel about this.

Me: "You can let go now."



This is the first time a man has held me so lovingly, I ooze so easily into his arms that it feels like I have been here my whole life.

Neo: "Sorry."

He draws away awkwardly.

Neo: "I was measuring your waist, there's this dress I saw and I need to know your size."

He lies while unpacking the mince meat from the fridge.

Me: "You know I don't wear dresses."

Neo: "Yes, that's why I want to buy one for you."

He winks at me, it's strange for me when Neo is serious. I know him to be a clown.

Me: "We'll see who's going to wear it."

Neo: "You'll look cute in a dress you know that?"

Me: "I think we should focus on making the food, you sound like someone who's hungry."

Neo: "Come closer, I'll show you how burgers are made."

I know he's going to burn the food.

Me: "Who taught you how to make them?"

Neo: "I saw it on TV."

He smiles at me and I don't trust that smile.

Me: "Just like that? You became a pro by watching it on TV?"

Neo: "Yes, you'll see."

He sounds proud already and the dish has not been prepared yet.

AMARA\*

"Me hemma." (My queen.)

He's breathing down my neck, planting kisses. What a perfect way to wake up, with the love of my life right beside me.

Me: "Morning."

He lifts his head to look at me, a short smile journeys on his mouth.

Randall: "You look tired."

Me: "I slept late last night. Do you perhaps know why?"

He smirks.

Randall: "You couldn't get enough of me, gosh I was so tired. I didn't know how I would say no to you."

Liar.

Me: "Randall?"

Randall: "Seriously, I didn't want to hurt your feelings. I think I created a beast."

He's jesting and I will let it go, today is a good day.

Me: "You're a clown you know. You're the one who couldn't get enough of me."

His smile says I'm right.

Randall: "Shall we continue from where we left off?"

I smash my hand on his face as he leans in to kiss me.

Me: "No, get off me."

I send my hands with a gently force to push him off of me, he falls back on the bed.

Randall: "Ouch."

He growls.

Me: "Oh my God, Randall I am sorry. Are you okay baby?"

He's not okay, his head shake tells me so. I help him up, he leans back on the pillow.

Me: "Where does it hurt?"

Randall bruises easily?

Randall: "My ego."

I smile at his reply as I punch his shoulder.

I am done with this man.

Randall: "Okay, this one really hurts."

Me: "You're full of jokes this morning Okolie."

I was expecting something else, like a happy birthday or something. Yes, Randall Okolie forgot my birthday.

Me: "Where are you going?"

He's jumping off the bed leaving me here alone.

Randall: "The kitchen, I'm hungry."

He gives a reply and continues to amble.

Me: "Aren't you forgetting something?"

He stops to give me a confused look.

Randall: "What is it?"

He has no clue at all.

How is it that he forgot my birthday? I have been singing about this day for two weeks now.

Me: "Randall you can't be serious."

Randall: "You see that?"

He points at me.

Me: "What?"

Randall: "That 'Randall', tell me what I did wrong so I can fix it."

He ambles back to the bed, hikes up to kneel before me.

Randall: "Tell me."

He says softly, staring deep into my eyes. He has me feeling shy and plummeting my gaze.

Me: "I'm mad at you."

I pout my lips and stare at him angrily.

Randall: "Me hemma, I won't know if you don't tell me."

The raised eyebrow expresses confusion.

Me: "You don't know what day it is today?"

I want to smack that big head he's shaking.

Me: "Randall?"

I cross my arms and look away.

Randall: "I know there's something I did wrong because you keep grunting my name."

He declares.

Me: "My birthday Randall, you forgot my birthday."

I am whining.

Ife did warn me about this man. My ring finger is still empty and now this.

What have I gotten myself into?

Randall: "Amara, I'm sorry."

I don't accept his apology.

Me: "It still hurts."

Randall: "Can I kiss it better?"

Me: "No."

Randall: "Please, I promise the pain will ease."

Who told him to lean in?

It's too late to draw back his lips are dancing with mine and it's a slow dance. In a while I would've forgotten that I'm angry. He draws back, presses his forehead against mine and says softly.

Randall: "Happy birthday me hemma." (My queen.)

He doesn't give me a chance to reply as he smashes his lips on mine. His body is pressing against mine, pushing me to lie on my back.

I see where this road is headed to and I'm not looking back.

RUTH\*

I didn't know what fate had in store for me when I came to this country. My life was not mine to claim, I belonged to my father and his evil friend. I did everything that they commanded me to do. I even joined his stupid cult and that's something I am not proud of. I thought by agreeing to his demands I was going to get his love, the love he deprived me of when my mother left.

Sboniso has taught me to stand up for myself and fight for what I believe in.

He has changed my life in so little time and I can't lie to myself, I am falling insanelly for him. I see a future with him, there is a problem though. My father, he will never let us be. He is so obsessed with this Uze guy.

I have to find a way out of this mess I have put myself in. I rented a house during my stay here, the bill at the hotel was beginning to pile up.

Sboniso has got to be a dream come true, I watch him as he stands by the window gazing outside. I must admit, this man is amazing.

I sneak to hug him from behind.

Me: "What are you thinking about?"

He tilts his head to the side.

Sboniso: "Nothing important."

I have noticed how his mind takes these trips.

Me: "Something is wrong Sbo, you can tell me."

I push.

Sboniso: "I would tell you if there was something."

His voice tells me that there is a problem, I can't push him though.

Sboniso: "Do you like this house?"

Me: "I love it, it's small and comfortable."

He holds me in his arms as he turns around to me.

Sboniso: "Your own space."

Me: "Our won space."

I rest my head on his broad chest, I don't know how I will be able to be without him.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

147\*

NKOMO\*

Shit!

Styles is banging on my door, I have avoided him for two weeks now. A hunter desperate to catch his prey, that's how the pounding sounds like. I'm a dead man today.

Styles: "Nkomo open this door."

He rumbles from outside. Sishi does not rumble, he's soft and gentle and...

Shit....

Who am I kidding? Sishi does not reveal himself fully, he shows you what you show him. If you crap on him, then pray your ancestors are with you because the outcome will not be pleasant.

Styles: "Nkomo, you bloody coward open this door. I know you're in there."

More grumbling from the seething Styles.

Yes I'm in here and the reason I can't open is because I want to see my next birthday.

The pounding has stopped. Great he's leaving. I hope so.

Lord, get the devil away from my door step.

Zwe: "Bhuti, who is that?" (Brother.)

Sometimes I forget that I have a roommate.

Me: "Go back to sleep Zwe, lock the door to your room."

Fear takes over his face.

Zwe: "Why bhuti? What's going on?" (Brother.)

I don't know myself.

I'm waiting to hear the fade away of the car. I'm afraid to peek out the window, I might find the bastard staring back at me.

Me: "Don't worry, just go to your room and whatever happens, do not come out."

Ah! This boy...

I'm terrified enough and that look on his face is not helping.

Zwe: "Should I bring your gun?"

Me: "What gun? How do you know about the gun?"

Zwe is racing too fast with life, he will crash.

Zwe: "I saw it in your drawer bhuti." (Brother.)

The nerve he has to tell me that he's been going through my things.

Me: "Listen to me, go back to your room and no matter what you hear Zwe don't come out. Promise me."

He glares, his jaw clenched and his eyes hard. How can a small little boy hold so much anger in him? He is Mkhize's son.

Zwe: "Bhuti..." (Brother.)

The stubbornness too. I will beat it out of him, one of these days he will see a different side to his brother.

Me: "Hamba Zwelethu." (Go.)

I yell, Styles is still out there. I haven't heard his car drive off.

Zwe and I slide to the floor at the piercing sound of two gun shots. Leering at the door I see that it has been impaled with bullet holes. With a loud thud, the door flails open.

Drama!

Styles kicked my door open, that's the least of my worries though. I need to get Zwe out of this room.

Me: "Go to your room."

I command and he runs off without arguing.

Styles smirks as his eyes follow my little brother who is scampering to his room.

I have to face him like a man and own up to my mistakes.

Styles: "Hey buddy, long time no see."

His warm smile intensifies the fear in me, I know he's about to go psycho on me.

Me: "Did you have to shoot at my door? I have neighbours you know."

Keeping the smile, he shrugs his shoulders.

Styles: "You know how I love attention, I go crazy if I'm not given one."

There is something about the way he says this that sends shivers down my spine and believe me it's not the excitement type of shivers. It's the ones that give you the assurance that hell is real.



Me: "I can explain bruh."

Let me introduce.

I won't like his starter.

Styles: "Explain what?"

He puts on the confused hat, this bastard is about to play God with my life.

Me: "Why I went m.i.a." (Missing in action.)

Styles: "Oh that. I've been meaning to ask why you're not taking my calls."

He mooches to the couch, standing a few steps away from me. I can't grasp as to why he's keeping this distance between us.

Me: "The thing is that."

Nkomo why are you suddenly trembling? Get a hold of yourself.

Styles: "I'm listening."

That eyebrow raise...

I'm in deep shit.

My head spins the second Zwelethu dashes back to the living room with a gun pointed at Styles. This boy is dull-witted, I told him not to come out. He can't even hold a gun right, his hands and legs tremble as if he's stuck in a cold storm.

Styles: "Hi."

Styles is unflinching, nothing scares him.

Me: "What are you doing Zwe?"

Zwe: "Get out or I'll shoot."

His voice quavers as he struggles to get each letter out of his mouth.

Me: "Zwelethu go back to your room."

Styles: "I'd listen to my brother if I were you."

He adds coolly.

Me: "Zwe, don't be stupid get back in there."

Snapping at him is of no use, the boy is as hard headed as his father.

Zwe: "No, he's going to kill you."

The prediction evokes a cold laugh out of Styles.

Styles: "Nkomo, I didn't come here to babysit. Put your boy on time out, we wouldn't want him

hurt.”

At his command I begin to amble to Zwelethu, his gaze is engrossed on Styles.

Me: “Give me the gun.”

He clenches his jaw, his hand is tightly clutched on the pistol.

I’m busy debating with Zwelethu when Styles shoots at his feet, he screams and stumbles back to fall on his butt. Bug-eyed he ogles at Styles, he’s inundated with fear as his body trembles. The gun lies on the floor next to him.

Me: “What the hell Styles?”

He frowns at my outburst of anger.

Styles: “I have to be somewhere important, you’re wasting my time.”

Me: “Go back to your room Zwe.”

I help him up, he rushes back. Styles kicks the gun, and it slides under the table.

Me: “You didn’t have to shoot at him, he’s just a kid.”

He smirks at my reprimand.

Styles: “I hear you’ve been busy my friend.”

He ignores my exclamation.

Me: “I was going to call you Styles.”

Styles: “Okay, I need an update then. How far with the mission? According to my calculations, Ruth should be on her death bed.”

My heart jumps at the mention of her name, I can’t imagine her dead. I was an idiot to have agreed to this plan.

Me: “I know but...”

He grimaces as I mention the word but... I hate the way Styles shakes his head in disagreement, it spells death.

He rams his hand inside the left pocket of his jacket and reveals a brown envelop.

Styles: “Do you know what this is Nkomo?”

I will wait for him to tell me.

He opens the envelope and flaps through what appears to be photographs. He does a head shake as he leers through them.

Styles: “I didn’t know you were so photogenic.”

I thought I was terrified of Randy, this man has the key to hell with him and is ready to throw me

in. I ruined this friendship, it's in my blood anyway. We destroy everything we touch.

Styles chucks the photographs at me, they scatter on the floor and I'm shattered to see pictures of me and Ruth naked in bed. You can see that they are from different days. In some of them we were in a hotel and most of them in the new house she rented. Even recent ones, as in earlier this morning recent.

Styles: "Won't you pick one and look?"

He grins from ear to ear.

Me: "How did you get these Styles?"

Styles: "Don't you know me by now Nkomo? There's nothing you can't get past me. There was something in your voice when you denied your feelings for Ruth, I knew that you were falling for her."

Nothing gets past him.

Me: "You had no right to invade our privacy."

I want to punch that smug look on his face.

Styles: "That's where you're wrong, I had every right. This mission is my baby and I hate it when my plans don't go the way I want."

He booms, he's out for my blood.

Me: "I'm sorry man, I don't know how it happened. It was no strings attached and the next thing she's on my mind, I couldn't think of anything but, her."

Styles: "I didn't come here to hear your boring story, I want to know why you betrayed us."

I did betray them and no amount of apologies will ever be enough.

Me: "I'm sorry bro."

He clamps his jaw.

Styles: "That's right, I am your bro Nkomo. That's why I haven't told Randall anything. Do you know what he would do if he were to find out?"

I know he won't hesitate to kill me.

Styles: "He's been craving for your blood since day one and this will be a great excuse for him to finally put a bullet through your head."

Dammit!

Don't I know that?

Me: "Thank you Styles."

Styles: "Fuck you, piece of shit."

He growls.

Styles: "You're so stupid Nkomo. How could you fall for the enemy?"

Me: "She's a good person..."

Styles: "Shut the fuck up before I shoot that thing between your legs. You're so weak."

I'll take all the insults as long as he spares Ruth and I.

Styles: "This is what we're going to do, you are going to kill Ruth with your hands."

A shock of my life.

Me: "No, I refuse."

Styles: "You failed the mission, so you have no choice."

Me: "Styles don't let me do this man. Don't I deserve a chance at love?"

I beseech for this emergent love, Ruth and I have birthed something and it's brewing beautifully. I didn't know being wanted felt like this. How can I let it go?

Styles: "You do, we all do. The thing is that we have to choose wisely."

He refuses to understand. Styles is imperious and snobby, once his mind is made up there is no turning back.

Me: "Ruth is innocent, she's not interested in Randy. Her father and Segun are forcing her on him."

He shrugs his shoulders and sneers at me.

Styles: "Well, Ruth will just have to die for her father's sins then."

He delivers in a deadpan voice.

Me: "Styles, I'll go down on my knees if I have to, please."

My plea is frustrating him, he points the gun at me.

Styles: "What are you doing with that girl Nkomo? I didn't know that you're weak as fuck, this is bullshit Mkhize."

Me: "She's human too Styles, she deserves to live."

He sighs as he settles down a chair.

Styles: "Will you be able to kill Segun?"

He bloody well knows the answer to that dumb question.

Me: "You know that no one will dare kill him."

Styles "My point, now you know that, we have to get rid of Ruth. Her father and Segun will not

give up on their plan unless there is no Ruth.”

He’s sauntering to my direction, I take a step back as he stands too close for comfort.

Styles: “Now let’s revisit that suggestion I made. Kill Ruth.”

He speaks softly.

Me: “Don’t make me do this.”

Styles: “Bros before hoes right.”

Styles has no mercy.

Me: “Bros before hoes.”

It takes me a minute to respond and that look in his eyes forced the words out of my mouth.

Styles: “Good, you have a week.”

Me: “What?”

Styles: “We’ve wasted enough time already, Ruth has to be dead in seven days. I don’t care how you do it, kill that bitch.”

I want to punch him.

With a revolted look, he shakes his head and walks out.

I’m doomed.

SETHU\*

Amara and Randall walk in the kitchen, he’s showing her something on his face.

Amara: “I promise Randall there’s nothing there.”

She’s whining, I’d think that she is miffed by something.

Randall: “What are those eyes for if you can’t see this big thing?”

He carps bringing his face close to hers, Amara leans in with narrowed eyes to search whatever is asked of her.

Amara: “There is nothing baby.”

She mumbles.

Randall: “I’ll ask Styles.”

He is not pleased.

Ayize: "I can check it for you, my eyes are big enough."

She flaps her eye lashes at him, I think they didn't know that there were people in the kitchen.

Randall: "Sethu?"

He packs his hands in his pockets as a pucker forms between his eyebrows. I have seen this trait with Styles, he does it when he's nervous.

Me: "Hi, this is my sister Ayize. Don't mind her, she's just like Neo. She takes pills for her insanity."

Ayize: "No, please don't listen to her. She is the crazy one."

She swooshes past me and walks up to Randall.

Ayize: "Ayize."

She introduces herself.

I'm glad that I'm standing behind her, this way I won't see the embarrassing look she has on her face.

Ayize "So you are Randall, I have heard so much about you."

Randall: "Nice to meet you too Zee, Neo has told me so much about you."

She turns back to me and winks.

Randall shakes the hand that's extended out to him.

Ayize: "You're Amara?"

Amara: "Finally I get to see Sethu's sister."

Amara throws in a hug.

Amara: "I didn't know you were coming over."

Me: "We came with Styles and Neo, they in the back yard."

Randall: "Let me go and meet them."

He turns to Amara.

Randall: "Me hemma, we'll finish this later."

He states before moseying away.

Ayize "Girl your man, chaaiii. Somebody take me to Ghana now."

She utters dramatically.

Neo walks in just in time to hear Ayize's statement, they probably heard her next door. That's how loud she was, Neo could be here for that.

Neo: "What are you going to do in Ghana?"

Ayize: "Eish, konje I'm stuck here in Mzansi with Sotho men. Bophelo mara."

She mumbles. (South Africa,) (Life hey.)

Neo: "A reng? U batla ho ea Ghana because of Uze? Have you seen his old pictures uena? You will run my sister." (What did she say? You want to go to Ghana?)

Amara laughs.

Amara: "Neo is right, his head was too big for his body."

She adds to Neo's taunts.

Ayize: "We don't care, we were not there. Please let us appreciate what God has set before us."

Her comeback is always ready.

Neo: "Zee, I think we should go home."

He introduces much to Ayize's annoyance.

Ayize: "Why?"

She quizzes with a frown.

Neo: "Because you're looking at abo Uze nou. Dit is nie reg nie." (It's not right that you're looking at Uze now.)

Ayize: "Yoh nangu umuntu. Khuzani bo." (Someone chastise him.)

She grunts, places herself down on the chair.

Neo: "Okay, if I hurt Uze today. Amara don't cry."

Amara: "Why would I cry? I won't get involved in your fights, Uze is a big man. He can take care of himself."

Neo: "Okay, I have your permission then."

Neo is crazy.

Me: "What permission Neo? Leave Amara out of this, hau. This is between you, Zee and Randall."

I can't help but laugh with Amara, Neo's eyes keep rushing to his Zee who is not bothered about his presence in the kitchen.

Neo: "Okay, ho sharp. Zee, ho sharp oa utloa?" (It's fine Zee, you hear?)

A guffawing sound fills the kitchen as he walks out.

Amara: "What was that about?"

Ayize: "Don't ask me."

Me: "You two have a strange relationship."

She waves her hand dismissing the conversation.

Ayize: "So, future Mrs. Fine."

Me: "It's Okolie."

Ayize: "I know and Okolie is fine."

She simpers.

Ayize: "When are you taking that off?"

Oh my God.

Amara: "My hair?"

Ayize: "I don't know if we can still call it that sweetie. How long have you had those braids on?"

I need to slap that big mouth of hers.

Me: "Ayize?"

She frowns at me with a curved eyebrow.

Amara: "It's okay Sethu, your sister is right. It's been too long, my life has been a mess and I couldn't get time to unplait."

I would retort rudely if I were Amara, never insult a girl's hair.

Ayize: "No excuses Amara, if you have time to have sex then, you have time to do your hair."

Amara is blushing, there is seriously nothing to be bashful about. Ayize is rude.

Me: "Ayize, you're embarrassing me, I won't take you anywhere with me."

Ayize: "I know places now sis, like the Okolie house. I will find my way here."

Let's give her the benefit of the doubt, the girl is not well.

Amara: "You're always welcome here."

Ayize flashes a smile.

Amara: "So, what should I do with this?"

She tugs her braids, pulling them down.

Ayize: "Pluck it out."

Not literally, her words sound as brutal as she is.

Me: "We can go to a hair salon."

Amara wears a sour face.



Amara: "I don't know about going out."

Ayize: "Listen my friend said he'll come with us."

Me: "Neo?"

She gives me a disgusted look.

Ayize: "Where will we take that Sotho boy? I'm talking about Randy."

Me: "Oh you two are friends now?"

Ayize: "Inseparable twins."

She says.

Amara: "Let me hear what he says."

Me: "She's right he agreed. You can ask him, still."

Ayize: "Yeah and while we're there we can get you a makeover."

This is her attempt to be gentle, she's failing.

Amara: "There's nothing wrong with my outfit."

Ayize: "Oh honey, there is definitely nothing wrong with your outfit. There's also nothing wrong with dressing up once in a while."

Amara: "But, I'll just be here at home chasing Liyana around the house."

Ayize: "A woman doesn't need a reason to dress up, come on."

That's one thing I agree with her, the rest of the things she says deserve to be trashed.

NOMBULELO\*

My uncle has finished me, Mbuso is at his worst. Since that day he's not the same, he is more quiet and reserved. He is not as playful as he was.

Zuma calls me every day, I don't get why he doesn't stop. I don't take his calls and the guy refuses to give up. Uncle Jonas called me two days ago saying that, Zuma wants to see me, he said it's about the baby. I told him that if Zuma wants to discuss the baby, he should talk to my father.

Me: "Sthandwa sami." (My love.)

I mean it has to be the only way to melt a Zulu man.

Mbuso: "Yes."



His melancholy tone greets me.

Me: "Won't you eat your food?"

Mbuso: "I'm not hungry."

He states, pushing the plate across the table.

Me: "You didn't eat last night as well."

Mbuso: "I'm not hungry Lelo."

It's about time that I interrogate him, I have had enough.

Me: "What's wrong Mbuso?"

Mbuso: "Nothing."

He mumbles.

Me: "Is it my uncle's request?"

What else would it be? My uncle is capable of pushing one to suicide.

Mbuso: "I have failed Lelo, I tried everything. I'm going to sell my car."

Me: "No, that's your baby."

Mbuso loves that car, it was his first.

Mbuso: "There's nothing else to do, your uncle will have my head. Two weeks has passed and I have nothing."

I hate seeing him like this, it breaks my heart that he has to stress because of me and the baby.

Me: "I can talk to my father."

Mbuso: "No, I made a promise to your family and I have to keep it."

Me: "You're only human Mbuso, must you kill yourself because of ilobola?" (Bride price.)

Mbuso: "It's not just ilobola, it's tradition." (Bride price.)

Me: "I know, times are changing my love. We can go and sign at the magistrate, then we'll start with the process of you adopting Goku."

He looks at me like I have insulted him.

Mbuso: "That's not what your family expects of me, they will be disappointed when they find out."

Mbuso is not accepting any of my proposals.

Me: "What should we do then?"

It riles me to know that my father has done nothing yet, he was meant to call his brothers and

none of them have come forth.

Me: "How much do you have so far?"

He frowns at my question.

Mbuso: "I'm not going to tell you that."

Me: "I can help, I have some money I've been saving for these past months."

Mbuso: "What?"

He jolts up from his chair.

Me: "Yeah, you can use it Mbuso and..."

Mbuso: "Are you kidding me?"

His hands are pasted on the table, he's hunched over while intensely leering at me.

Mbuso: "Is this a joke to you."

He shoots me for trying to help.

Me: "No that's why I'm offering you the money, it's not much but, it will boost what you have."

Mbuso: "Don't ever say that to me again."

He shouts and marches away, leaving me to eat by myself. What wrong did I do? Pride aside, we have to put the baby first.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

148\*

NKOMO\*

I tower over Ruth the moment she opens the door for me, her lips feel just right. It's this perfect kiss in this grasping moment. Her arms clutch around me as she reciprocates the passionate kiss. I move with her till her back hits against the wall. My mind is jam-packed with negative thoughts, Styles' words refuse to depart from me.

How do I kill this woman?

I never thought, I would look forward to seeing someone every day. She is my first thought in the morning. I can't do anything without her in mind.

Why should I throw that away as if it means zilch to me?

I pull back, we're both breathing heavily against each other due to the ravenous kiss. Forehead against forehead, sharing the same breath as we stand close enough to taste that kiss again.

Ruth: "Wow."

There is so much effort in trying to catch her breath as she utters this word. I cup her cheeks into the palms of my hands.

Me: "Today, I don't want to have sex with you. I want to make love to your soul, I want to worship your body. I need you like I need to breathe ndlovukazi. I want to be inside you and fill you up with all the love that can feasibly emit from me." (My queen.)

Ruth: "Love?"

The shock in her voice is justifiable. We barely know much about each other, this thing that we have. Whatever it's called, came like a wave and washed us off the shore with no warning. Now, we're soaring on the wings of love and it's taking us higher by the second. I pray we will not come crushing down. Merely, love can save us now. If it is the greatest, most powerful force in the universe then, with no doubt whatsoever we will make it to the end.

Me: "Yes, love."

I confirm my words and mean every bit of it.

Me: "Will you let me, nkosazana? Will you let me make love to you?" (My lady.)

Her tears fight to be part of this scene, unhurriedly she nods. A smile taking over from the incredulous expression.

Ruth: "Sbo, I am yours. You don't have to ask."

With no time wasted, I capture her lips with mine. My heart breaks for her, it breaks for us and what we could have.

AMARA\*

It feels good to be outside, we have just arrived at a hair salon, it's not too far from where we reside. Ayize is the first to walk through the door.

Ayize: "Hi good people."

Her high-pitched voice gets her the attention of every person in the salon. It's not fully packed, so we will not be here for too long.

We hear mumbles and loud salutations, not everyone will love your persona. Ayize is not bothered, she approaches the lady at the reception. Sethu and I toddle after her.

Randall takes a sit in the midst of a bunch of ladies, it seems a bit strange that he's in a place flooded with women. Anyone who walks in could clearly spot that large man sandwiched by females. He grabs a magazine from the table and begins to page on it, I guess these people are staring because he's the only man here. He is not bothered, whatsoever.

Ayize: "Sisi, it's an emergency. This little beaut- needs to change her hair ASAP." (Beautiful.)

Ayize tells the lady behind the counter.

Lady: "Okay you can have a sit over there, we'll appoint you an assistant."

Ayize: "Siyabonga sthandwa." (Thank you love.)

There are three empty chairs, Randall is sitting across us.

Sethu: "I think he's bored."

Ayize: "Not with that lady chatting up a storm with him."

He's smiling with some lady beside him, I feel a pang of jealousy. Randall does not smile.

Sethu: "She's kind to chat with him, considering that permanent frown on his face."

Ayize laughs.

Ayize: "My naïve sister, ugirl is flirting with the guy. Uyasazi istina sisi? (They will take your man.)

Me: "I blame R.J he's making his father act like that."

I spit out the words while glaring at Randall not once has he turned his head to look at me.

Ayize: "R.J?"

Me: "The baby."

I touch my four weeks old baby bump.

Me: "That man never smiled at me before, it all began recently."

Sethu: "I remember meeting him the first time, I thought maybe the second time he would be friendly. The guy would look at you like you did something wrong."

Sethu adds her memory.

Ayize: "How is he smiling with her?"

Me: "I told you that it's R.J. He's been too lenient lately."

Ayize: "Khuza u R.J ke ngoba thina sizo khuza uyise and angeke athande." (Tell R.J to stop because we will reprimand his father and he won't like it.)

She says out loud that Randall twists his head to find all of us glaring at him. He reads the look on my face and shifts uncomfortably on his seat.

Ayize: "Sorry sisi." (Sister.)

She's calling the lady who's enthralled on Randall, and cannot hear a word from Ayize as she continues with her talks.

Ayize: "Ousie, sisi. suster, hey makhadzi." (Sister, aunt.)

Ayize claps her hands, trying to get the lady's attention.

I see what Sethu was talking about Ayize is loud and unashamed. The lady finally looks up, her smile slowly fades away at the sight of Ayize's piqued face.

Ayize: "You're next, bayakubiza." (They are calling you.)

"Oh, I didn't hear."

The lady jumps up.

Ayize: "Yeah uzozwa kanjani ubuke amadoda emehlweni." (How will you hear when you're glaring into this man's eyes?)

Her loudness has gotten her attention once again.

"Yoh, yini inkinga yakho sisi?" (What's your problem?)

The lady retorts with an attitude, Ayize finds her squelch funny. She's laughing like it is a joke.

Ayize: "Qhubeka girl, hayi nami sweetie" (Carry on, you don't want to mess with me.)

To think that Ayize is this small petite woman but, her intimidating demeanour is enough to push this lady to walk on.

Sethu: "You see why I said I don't want to take you anywhere with me?"

Sethu complains.

Ayize: "What's a hair salon without a little drama? She's lucky I didn't start pulling her hair."

She states.

Everyone can hear her and from the looks of it they are amused.

Ayize: "That other gender Jesu, I give up on them shame. Uyayibona ichappies ifuna ukumnamathisela naye uyasondela." (Jesus. He can see the lady is taking chances and still entertains her.)

I'm dead, I can't stop laughing.

Everyone in this place of business understands what she is saying, they are entertained by her craziness. I'm glad Randall is completely confused.

Sethu: "It wasn't like that."

Ayize: "Woo bafazi, nangu usis' wami. Ngicela nikhulume naye tuu. Indoda iyathathwa. You know the people that say it will end in tears? They are telling naïve girls like you Sethu, stay woke sisi." (Ladies, here is my sister. Please talk to her. Men are easily taken.)

She exclaims loud enough for everyone to hear.

I turn to Randall and find him grimacing at me, the light has become bright in his mind as he has collected the pieces of the puzzle. I don't know what he's gesturing with that head shake.

Sethu: "Everyone is staring at you, lower your voice."

Sethu is laid back, the total opposite of her sister.

Ayize: "They are staring because I'm talking to them. I don't know why they are not responding, one of them will."

She sends her rejoinder with a smile. These ladies look like they came to listen and not to comment. They are only spectators and not players. My phone is buzzing.

A text from Randall?

Randall: <<< I wasn't flirting with her I swear. >>>

Thank you R.J, the old Randall wouldn't have bothered.

Me: <<< I know. >>>

That's all I'm going to say.

I look up to find him glancing at me, he's wearing a glower on his face.

Randall: <<< When are we leaving? >>>

He's tired already, my chance to spoil his mood.

Me: <<< We still have 8 hours. >>>

He furrows a brow as he reads the text, his goggle eyes fall on me and I have to laugh at that facial expression.

Ayize: "And then nina?" (You two.)

Ayize sees everything.

Ayize: "Kumnandi neh?" (It's fun hey?)

I am defeated.

Ayize: "Umjolo bafazi, naba abantu." (Relationships, look at these two.)

She puts me on the spot light.

Ayize: "I think it's time I finally press send on that email I wrote to Date My Family. Angeke, we also want to smile at our phones." (Never.)

She continues with her prattling, I thought I had seen it all with Neo but, Ayize takes the cup.

Sethu: "I told you that we should've left her at home."

I think so.

"You can come sisi." (Sister.)

The lady standing behind a chair calls me, there are two empty spots so Ayize jumps on the other one.

Ayize: "Make me look beautiful, cut it all out don't make me bold and dye it red."

Me: "I want that too."

I exclaim excitedly.

Sethu: "No you don't. You two cannot walk around looking like twins."

She is against the idea.

Me "Why not?"

Sethu: "It won't work, look over there."

She points her eyes at Randall, he's on his feet leering at me with concern plastered on his face.

Ayize: "Singleness is life girl."

She laughs.

Ayize: "You stick to braids, okay."

Braids it is.

Ayize: "And then, usisi we straight-up?" (The lady with the straight up {Cornrows})

She points at Sethu who looks nettled by her sister's comment.



Ayize: "We know you're a nurse but, girl cornrows? No man, leave it to married women, it suits them better."

The salon erupts with laughter they must be shocked by this girl who talks like there's no tomorrow.

Sethu gives her a bored look, it vanishes in a second as she also bursts into laughter.

Me: "Sethu looks fine with that hair."

Sethu: "Thank you Amara and I did it last week. I'm not changing it unless you're paying for it."

Ayize: "Stay with your straight-up sis wami." (My sister.)

Randall looks very impatient, I wouldn't blame him if he strolls out of this place.

Ayize: "Why doesn't he walk around the mall while he waits?"

She has seen it too.

Me: "He won't go."

Ayize: "So vele, vele you are Mzansi's most wanted?" (For real?)

She queries softly.

Ayize: "Imagine living your life in fear? That's why that man watches you like a hawk, you can't sneeze in private. Hai, abantu bayaphila ngaphandle la. (People live strange lives.)

Me: "I know, I would have it otherwise. It will pass, I can't wait to live a normal life."

Ayize: "It will and once it does, I am taking you clubbing. Umam'fundisi doesn't do clubs." (Pastor.)

That's Sethu, I presume.

Me: "I'll be a balloon when the time comes."

I know it's sooner than I think.

There are a few clothes that I have begun to fight with, Randall should be the one gaining weight since the cravings have fallen on him.

SETHU\*

My beautiful, sweet, talkative sister convinced me to change my hair, I went for braids as well. If anyone could pull off the look Ayize has on, then it's her. Amara got the makeover that Ayize spoke of, she was forced into a party dress. She hated the idea but, went with it eventually. She wanted to know why she had to wear makeup and heels. So to coat this little secret we had to dress up too.

Randall pulls up outside the house, we exit the car. Amara removes her heels and hands them to him

Randall: "I don't fit in these. My feet are big, me hemma. (My queen.)"

Amara snorts, Ayize and I react with giggles.

Amara: "I'm not going to wear those to the house, my feet are killing me."

Ayize: "Ugirl ujwayele ama flip flops, shame. I also don't do heels, they have their own people."  
(She is used to flip flops.)

It puzzles me how Amara laughs at this girl's comments.

Me: "You're spoiling it."

I whisper to Ayize, she smiles in return. You can't keep a secret with this one.

Ayize: "It's true hau."

Randall: "That's okay, let's go in."

Ayize and I walk behind Randall and Amara as they lead the way to the house hand in hand. The man guarding the door opens it and....

**SURPRISE!!!!**

A rhythmic sound choruses.

Amara is tremendously staggered, she stands astounded with her hands covering her mouth. The house is decorated with an elegant party theme, we went for black and white. Lelo said those were Amara's colours, it's a small gathering with about fifteen or less people.

Amara: "Oh my God."

She can't contain her tears.

Liyana runs to her and covers her with her tiny arms.

Liyana: "Happy birthday Mara."

She squats, hugs Liyana and plants a kiss on her cheek.

Amara: "Thank you, my baby."

Liyana hands her a sunflower which puts a smile on her face. I see Amara exchange looks with Randall, there must be a story behind that. Styles and Neo approach they give her wishes followed by hugs.

Me: "Happy birthday Amara."

I wipe her tenacious tears.

Ayize: "You're ruining your makeup stop crying, we don't want you celebrating your birthday looking like the bride of chucky."

Amara falls into a soft giggle.

Amara: "You two knew about this?"

Ayize: "I came close to telling you shame, this girl can't keep secrets."

I believe her. Ayize kept giving her hints, luckily, Amara didn't read into them.

Amara: "Thank you guys so much."

We receive a double-decker hug from her.

Randall has been standing here beside her, he has not been recognized for his efforts.

Amara: "You pretended that you had forgotten my birthday this morning."

Her tears seek attention again, Randall takes her cheeks into his palms and places a soft, gentle kiss on her lips.

Randall: "Happy birthday, me hemma." (My queen.)

He says softly.

Amara: "Thank you so much, baby this is beautiful."

She sends her gratitude with a smile.

Neo can't keep away from Zee, he's right here, besides her, patting her hair and she entertains him by pushing his hand away, she is annoyed.

Me: "You know, you praise a girl if you think she looks pretty. You don't bully her."

Everyone laughs at my remark, I didn't realize I was so loud.

Styles: "Neo needs to take lessons from Randall."

His mention has everyone laughing apart from Randall who cannot find his way through the joke.

Neo: "Uze is hopeless. Me hemma, get the movie Titanic and make sure he watches it multiple times, you will thank me later." (My queen.)

Randall: "What is that?"

Who doesn't know Titanic?

Gasps and complaints erupt from this group of friends, no one understands why Randall is like this.

Amara: "Don't worry baby, you'll find out soon."

He is not keen, if he were he would be smiling.

Neo: "Zee, ke uena enoa?" (Is this you?)

He's flabbergasted.

Ayize: "Neo bua tu, u batla ho reng?" (Speak Neo. What do you want to say?)

Neo: "Hai nix." (Nothing.)

He lies, he has something on his chest.

Neo: "Red joale?" (Red hey?)

There it is.

Ayize: "Yes, I needed change."

Someone has put a smile on Neo's face.

Me: "I think it would be best that you speak now or forever hold your peace."

He's starring at her.

Ayize: "I vote for forever hold your peace."

I tried.

Randall: "Come with me, I want to show you something."

He takes Amara's hand as he's about to pull her away.

Amara: "Wait. Where is Lelo?"

Me: "She's on her way with Mbuso, she had an appointment with her gynae today."

Randall does not grant me a chance to complete my elucidation, he's scuttling away with Amara.

Neo: "Those two hayi." (No.)

Ayize: "Umjolo baba." (Relationships.)

Ayize just called Neo baby, the smile on his face is evidence that he loved it.

Me: "Are we there yet?"

Styles: "Where?"

He asks.

Styles is lost, he has not seen the chemistry between these two. Even a blind person can see it.

Ayize: "Ungaphaphi sisi." (Don't be forward.)

She can't hide from me, I'm her sister and I know what I see. Styles suddenly looks bothered, he's glaring at the door. I turn to see Nkomo walk in with some guy dressed in black, he has shoulder length dreadlocks hanging over his face.

Styles: "Kenny."

They exchange handshakes, Nkomo only gets a frown.

Neo: "Khomo, this is you? I thought Ghana has swallowed you." (Cow.)

He says in amusement.

Nkomo: "What you just said does not make sense."

Stlyes: "It does to me."

The look he's giving Nkomo makes me uncomfortable as well. These two are quarrelling, anyone can figure that out.

Me: "Babe, excuse me."

He nods as I take Ayize's hand to pull her away. Neo clutches the other hand.

Neo: "Where are you taking her?"

He's serious.

Ayize: "Rabobi maan, I'll be back." (Spiderman.)

She complains.

Me: "I'll bring her back now."

Neo is falling for Ayize, I don't see her jumping into a relationship anytime soon.

NOMBULELO\*

I know that Mbuso is going through a lot but to take it out on me is not fair. I am tired and drained, the fight commenced before we left the house. It continued all the way to the hospital. He wanted to cancel coming to Amara's party, I had to force him.

Mbuso refuses to leave that private clinic he works for.

Me: "This cannot go on Mbuso, I think you should get a job at a real hospital. You can't keep working for that Indian man, clearly he doesn't pay you enough. The place does not make enough money."

I doubt it makes any.

I can't deal with a grumpy Mbuso anymore, he is exhausting. He ignores me and climbs out of the car.

Me: "Mbuso, I'm talking to you."

I snatch his hand as he potters towards the house, the door is widely open. There is a guard standing by the door.

Mbuso: "We came here to celebrate your cousin's day, don't spoil it Lelo."

Me: "I hate it when you ignore me."

He does what I have just told him not to do, ignores me and marches into the house leaving me behind. Now I have to go in there and pretend to be happy.

To be continued...

BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

149\*

NTOMBI\*

Moses: "We are not going to do that Jonas, that boy will come to us when he is ready."

These two have been at it for some time now, Jonas is pestering my husband. He wants to call Lelo's boyfriend and ask him how far he is with the plan. Moses forbid it, I'm glad that he's able to stand up as the man of the house. Days of Jonas bullying my husband are coming to an end.

Jonas: "You people are doing things the wrong way, I told you that boy will disappoint. This clearly shows that he's not serious about Lelo."

We don't see what Jonas sees, honestly I don't know what he's talking about.

Jonas: "Your brothers have not come forth Moses, therefore as Nombulelo's uncle I will take matters into my own hands."

Moses: "No Jonas, I can't let you do that. This is my time to stand by my child, it's my chance to make things right with her and I will not let you take it away from me. I am going to do what she wants."

I didn't know that's how he felt.

Jonas: "Moses, you're telling me that you're using this as an opportunity to make amends with Lelo? At her expense? I have always known that you're selfish, everything that you do has an agenda."

Moses: "Selfish Jonas? Is it selfish to want to be a better father?"

Me: "Kodwa bhuti, you can't say that. Moses is trying here." (But brother.)

Jonas is the one who is selfish.

Jonas: "Trying what Ntombi? This man has done terrible things to those girls, things that I will

never forgive him for. Don't think that I have forgotten what you did to Amara. You can't tell me that you're a changed person, just like that. No one changes over night Moses."

Why is my brother bitter? I don't like this, I don't like it at all.

Moses: "Who are you to judge me Jonas? How many children do you have? You know nothing about parenting, you can't tell me how to raise my daughter."

Moses is growling.

Jonas: "That's the thing Moses, you don't know how to raise kids. Look what you did with Amara, you molested the poor child, you bastard."

Moses: "What is your problem Jonas? What do you want with my daughter? What is it that you want with Nombulelo? Do you want to do to her what I did to Amara? This cannot be about that boy paying lobola or the damages." (Bride price.)

Moses never saw this one coming, Jonas just punched him on his face. He's lucky his body supported him or he would have fallen.

Jonas: "Uyinja yezwa Moses." (You're a dog.)

Me: "Bhuti no, no you can't do that." (Brother.)

Jonas: "Shut up Ntombi, I am tired of your shit."

He shouts as he points a finger at me.

Me: "Kodwa bhuti you didn't have to punch him."

Jonas: "Who raised you Ntombi?"

The stern look, he's giving me forces an answer out of me.

Jonas: "Did I ever fail you Ntombi? Did I ever go wrong in raising you?"

Why are we treading this path? I don't want Moses to feel that I'm turning against him.

Me: "No."

Jonas: "So, why is your husband saying these things to me?"

Moses: "What else do you want me to think Jonas?"

Me: "Moses thula nawe." (Keep quiet.)

Jonas: "How dare you say that to me Moses? How dare you disrespect me like that? My only crime is to want the best for those kids. You have done nothing but disappoint Nombulelo, she wouldn't be in this situation if you had done your job as a father. That girl is only nineteen, she's pregnant and living with a man who hasn't claimed her yet. How can that be okay with you? You claim that you want to protect her but, you haven't considered any of these things."

Moses clicks his tongue, he marches outside in a fit of rage. It's better that he cools off before Jonas does the worst.

Me: "Bhuti ngiyaxolisa, he didn't mean to say that." (I'm sorry brother.)

My apology seems to mean nothing to him.

Jonas: "You want me to leave your house right? I will leave Ntombi and I hope that you don't live to regret having that man's back. I have said it before and I say it again. Moses will be your down fall, I regret that I know a man like him and it's sad that I can't keep Lelo away from him."

Me: "He's not that bad Bhuti." (Brother.)

He frowns.

I am pissing him off.

Jonas: "Don't say I didn't tell you."

It's his turn to click his tongue, he marches out of the house. I hope he's not going to have a fall out with Moses. Moses can be stupid sometimes. How can he say that to my brother?

MBUSO\*

Lelo and I have been exchanging glances throughout the day, I hate fighting with her. I am under pressure, it scares me that I might lose her and Goku. She wants me to quit my job, what she doesn't know is that I owe Rajesh so much. He helped me throughout medical school, yes my parents paid for my studies but, that was only for four years. I had to find my way out to complete my studies, Rajesh had the money.

While Randall and Styles went for the thug life, I went and got a loan from Rajesh. I couldn't join them, I guess I have never been that brave. Rajesh wouldn't accept cash for payback but, that I should work for him. He opened the private clinic a few years after graduation. Maybe it really is time to move on, the cents I make from there will not take me anywhere.

"Hey."

Nkomo settles next to me, there's a bar setting in the foyer and this is where I have been drowning my sorrows away for the past thirty minutes. The looks lelo keeps giving me have said a million words.

Nkomo: "What's your excuse?"

He holds a glass of whiskey in his hand, must be drinking away his sorrows too.

Me: "Women. Yours?"

He huffs, only a woman can make a man huff like this.

Nkomo: "Women."

Figured.



I can't keep my eyes off of Lelo, I know that I will hear a speech when I get home. She hates it when I drink.

Nkomo: "The beautiful lady over there. Is she the one who has you swimming in liquor?"

He laughs at his question, he's seen her staring back at me.

Me: "That's her."

Nkomo: "It can't be, such a peaceful soul."

He speaks as if he knows her.

Me: "Am I missing something?"

Nkomo "I came to your house once, looking for you. She is a feisty one I tell you."

I don't know if I like his comment.

Me: "That was you? Why didn't you call me or leave a message?"

Nkomo: "Hey, like I said, she is a feisty one. She didn't give me a chance."

That sounds like Lelo.

Me: "I think that's enough staring for the day bruh."

He brings his eyes back to his glass, takes a sip as he chortles.

Nkomo: "Look at those two."

I turn to the direction he's facing, he speaks of the two rascals Randall and Styles. They are secretly chatting at a corner in the lounge.

Me: "Those two are crazy, you should have ran when you had the chance. I ran and never looked back."

Maybe if I stayed, I wouldn't be struggling.

Nkomo: "I know. What the heck anyway? I hate how they think they can control people's lives."

There's a reason he's saying this.

Me: "What did they do to you?"

Nkomo: "Nothing I can't handle."

He gulps down his drink.

Me: "I need money."

I'm tired of keeping it in my chest.

Nkomo: "How much?"

He pulls out a wallet from his pocket.



Me: "About 200 000."

His jaw drops and quickly shoves the wallet back in his pocket.

Nkomo: "What is it for?"

I can't let him know that I'm borrowing money for my family.

Nkomo: "Hey it's okay if you don't want to tell me."

He states as he notices how uncomfortable I have become.

Nkomo: "I have known you for a while now, you're a prideful man and will never ask for help from anyone."

Me: "I'm not a pauper Nkomo, I wouldn't want people thinking that I can't hold my own."

Nkomo: "You need to let go of your pride and ask for help. Those idiots are your friends, I'm sure they won't hesitate to lend a hand."

He could be right, I should have a talk with Randall.

AMARA\*

The party is going okay, there is soft music playing in the background, Randall disappeared somewhere with Styles. I haven't seen him since, I'm in the lounge with Ayize and Lelo.

Lelo does not look happy, she has not stopped glancing at Mbuso over there. She hasn't said much either, Ayize is the centre of attention. She can speak the day away.

Me: "You know Lelo if you want to speak to Mbuso, you should go to him."

She sighs and it's a heavy one.

Lelo: "It's better we're away from each other at the moment."

Ayize: "Trouble in paradise?"

Ayize keeps taking sips of the orange juice in her hand, the sour face she makes when she swallows is epic. I have a feeling that she would rather be drinking something else.

Lelo: "Mbuso does not want to get a job."

Me: "Isn't he a doctor?"

Doctors get paid a lot, don't they?

Lelo: "He works at some clinic for a friend."

Ayize: "How long has he been a doctor?"

Lelo: "Six years or more, I'm not quite sure."

She replies with another sigh.

Ayize: "Why is he stuck at a clinic? Girl tell that man to get a job, it's 2020. Life is hard, he'll open his own practice when he's settled. Cabanga nje udokotela ongenamali." (Imagine a broke doctor.)

She pushes the glass away in disgust.

Ayize: "Why am I drinking this?"

She complains.

Me: "Talk to Mbuso, Lelo. With the baby coming you two will need the money."

Lelo: "He snaps each time I try to speak to him."

Ayize: "Are you grilling the man? Don't be nagging sisi, he will flee. That other gender has wings, you'll blink and he's gone."

That can't be true, I know Lelo has a fear of rejection. She says it began when Zuma and her parents abandoned her. It was the scariest time in her life.

Me: "Mbuso is a good man, he will understand. You two are just going through a phase, it will pass."

It does not seem like she has hope.

Ayize: "Good man or not, they flee."

She replies as she scans her eyes around, she's looking for someone.

Me: "Stop scaring her."

Ayize turns to look at a terrified Lelo.

Ayize: "Argh shame askies, you're that type kanti? I thought Sethu was the only one. I'm kidding lovey, they don't fly, they walk..." (Sorry.)

This is pointless.

Ayize: "...away."

Lord have mercy.

Lelo: "Mbuso is not going anywhere, I know he won't."

She declares with confidence.

"Amara."

That voice.

I turn to the familiar voice to find Kenneth, he's looking down at me.

Me: "Hi."

He could be looking for Randall and Styles.

Ayize: "Oh, hi."

Her mood suddenly lights up.

Ayize: "Oh girl, dark and mysterious hey."

She whispers to me, I have no comeback.

Kenneth does not reply to the greetings.

Me "This is Ayize a friend and Lelo my sister."

I feel a need to introduce them.

Kenneth nods, he stands with his hands behind his back and that makes him unapproachable.

Ayize: "Does he talk?"

She mumbles to me, it's possible that Kenneth can hear her.

Me: "Are you looking for Styles and Randall? I saw them..."

Kenneth: "No, I'm here for you."

Okay...

Me: "Do you need anything?"

He glances at Lelo and Ayize before bringing his eyes back to me.

Ayize: "Sukuma sisi, they want to talk to you." (Stand up.)

She nudges me.

I don't know what he wants but, I get up anyway.

Ayize: "<<<Amagugu alelizwe ayosal' emathuneni.>>>" (All precious treasure remains in the grave.) {Funeral song.)

She sings as she grabs the glass of juice that she had abandoned and sips on it, Lelo is laughing, she gets the joke while I'm left in the dark.

Kenneth: "You look great."

I sense a bit of nervousness in him.

Me: "Thanks."

I look back to find Lelo and Ayize staring at us, I need to ask them about those facial expressions they have on.

Kenneth: "Happy birthday."

Where do I hide now?

Where do you hide when someone wishes you a happy birthday?

Me: "Thanks Kenneth."

We're silent now and he's staring.

Me: "Were you looking for Styles or Randall?"

I know I asked him this before.

Kenneth: "I know where they are, I came to see you."

Me: "Why? If I may ask."

He reaches for his ear lobe, pulls it down a couple of times and clears his throat.

Kenneth: "I have something for you."

He reveals the other hand, a book wrapped in a royal blue ribbon sits on it.

Me: "A book?"

Kenneth: "I didn't know what to get you."

Me: "Thanks."

I reach my hand to take it and someone beats me to it, I know this hand.

Randall: "The presents are kept in that corner."

He utters as he places the book back on Kenneth's hand.

Me: "It's okay Randall, I'll..."

Randall: "Thank you, Mkhize."

That's a harsh dismissal.

The look he's giving Kenneth is not pleasant, Kenneth is glowering at him. It's clear that there's no love lost between these two.

Kenneth: "Happy birthday again Amara."

He saunters away before I send my gratitude, Mr. OKolie is livid.

Me: "Fix your face, it's my day today."

I iron his wrinkle with my fingers.

Randall: "What did he want?"

His tone has changed, it sounds deeper now.

Me: "He wanted to wish me a happy birthday."

I thought it was obvious.

Randall: "Away from everyone?"

Me: "Is there a problem Randall?"

I don't understand his anger.

Randall: "I want you to stay away from him, Amara."

He gives a command.

Me: "I don't have a reason to be around him, I actually thought that he's your friend."

Randall: "He is no friend of mine, stay clear of him."

Me: "Okay, you don't have to be angry about it."

I hold his hand to calm him down.

Randall: "Come with me, I have something for you."

Me: "No, last time you said to come with you, you locked us in a room."

The mission to put a smile on his face is a success, although it's a ghostly one. However I will take it.

Randall: "It's different this time you'll see."

I turn back to leer at Lelo as Randall pulls me away, Ayize is no longer there. Lelo's eyes are still stuck on Mbuso, I wish she would go and speak to him.

AYIZE\*

"Hello."

It's a private number, I have a few missed calls from it, my curiosity got the best of me and here I am waiting to hear who the fool on the receiving line is. I'm standing by the flight of stairs, there's less noise here.

"Hi, Zee."

This voice always makes my blood boil, I thought Lethabo was in jail.

Lethabo: "That's what he calls you right? That little boy who is enjoying my goodies now."

He sounds more perverted on the phone.

Me: "What do you want?"

The hate I have for this man is enough to send him to his grave.

Lethabo: "You think Ben ten can scare me? You seem to forget that I can turn your world upside down at the touch of a button."

I had forgotten about that, Neo made me forget my problems that, I pushed Lethabo and the footage out of my head.

Me: "You're supposed to be in jail Lethabo."

He's chortling and the sound of his laughter makes my skin crawl.

Lethabo: "There's nothing that money can't buy sweetie, now I need you to listen to me. You might need a pen and paper to jot this down because you're stupid."

He taunts, this is his daily bread.

Me: "Voetsek Lethabo." (Piss off.)

Lethabo: "Oh baby, I love it when you talk profanity, it turns me on."

The insolence of this pervert.

Lethabo: "I want you to meet me at this address, at exactly 10pm or else Zee will be famous by morning."

I am not easily terrified but right now, I can't breathe. What will Neo think of me when he sees that footage?

Lethabo: "I hope you're writing everything."

Me: "I got it."

Lethabo: "That's my good little bitch, I'll see you later sweetheart."

He cuts the call with a scornful laugh. I know what to do.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

150\*

### NOBAYENI\*

Dladla: "Hey you're home?"

This idiot.

What is he doing here? Timothy likes playing with fire. He's comfortably sitting on my couch sipping on a cup of tea.

Me: "What's going on?"

I shut the door, toddle to my husband. He's wearing an apron, I wish Timothy doesn't have to see him like this.

Me: "Hi honey."

I give Dladla a lingering kiss, I hold on as he tries to draw back. My arms are around his neck, he smiles as I bite his bottom lip.

Dladla: "What did I do to deserve that?"

Me: "You're an amazing husband and I love you."

He raises his eyebrows in disbelief.

Dladla: "Okay, I should get these every day."

Me: "You will my love."

I kiss him again, we stop at the sound of that fool clearing his throat. Why is he in my house?

Dladla: "Timothy came here to see you."

Timothy's smile is disturbing, I had told him to stay away from my husband.

Tim: "Yes, you left the office early today and there was something important we needed to discuss."

Imbecile.

Dladla: "About that. Where did you go?"

I'm being asked about my comings and goings now because of Timothy Mabuza.

Me: "I went to visit mama's grave."



Dladla: "You should've told me, I would've come with you."

Timothy: "Same here, I mean Mrs. Mdluli was like a mother to me. Besides, it's not safe for women to wander alone, this country is slowly becoming a place of hell."

That sounds like a threat.

Me: "What do you want Timothy."

My arms are wrapped around Dladla, I am marking my territory. Timothy has to know that I am not leaving my husband for him.

Timothy: "I need to discuss a few things with you and there is a file that needs signing."

He lies through his teeth.

Me: "I'll do that tomorrow at work."

Timothy: "It can't wait actually."

I see that sly look he's giving me.

Dladla: "I'll give you some privacy, I'll be in the kitchen."

He kisses my cheek, I hold on to his hand as he starts to plod away.

Me: "I love you."

I know I love him and I wouldn't want to lose him, this stupid affair was only for fun.

Dladla: "I love you."

He takes off with that declaration. I flinch at the loud sound of a hand clap, Timothy is on his feet clapping his hands. He is strange and I cannot grasp what his problem is.

Timothy: "Wow, great acting Bayeni."

He ambles to me while applauding, the sly grin turns into a deep frown.

Me: "What are..."

He clutches his hands on my jaw.

Timothy: "You can't play with me sweetheart and dump me like that. I'm not your toy boy."

He grunts through gritted teeth, the unfamiliar coldness in his eyes sends shivers through out my body.

Timothy: "These are my lips to kiss."

Roughly, he wipes my lips with his hand, I grab hold of his wrist to get him off me. He is stronger than I think. I can't speak due to my mouth clung together, I can only mummer.

Timothy: "Ahh!"

He slants his head to the side.

Timothy: "You're clean now."

He pulls back and I stagger back, send my hand to rub away the pain on my jaw.

Me: "What is your problem?"

Timothy: "I don't have a problem my love, I simply came here to see you. I am your other man, am I not?"

He sneers.

How did I miss the red flags? This is not the Timothy I know, he is not the Timothy I let in my bed.

Me: "Get out of my house."

All this while we are whispering, if Bridgette gets home and finds him here all hell will break loose.

Timothy: "Just so you know my love, I am not letting you go. You are mine Bayeni and we will be together one day. Dladla is a good man, it will be a shame if he were to accidentally shoot himself with that gun strapped on his waist."

He smirks. He is threatening my husband.

Me: "If you dare hurt him, Timothy."

He chortles.

Timothy: "Don't worry, if he behaves I won't lay a finger on him."

He winks.

Timothy: "Commissioner."

His eyes are on me as he calls out to Dladla, Timothy has something on his mind. I don't know what, however I know that I will protect my family from him if he plans on hurting them.

Dladla ambles back, he carries an empty plate on his hand.

Timothy: "Sorry I can't stay for dinner, I have to rush home. Maybe I'll get to taste your food next time, Bayeni tells me that you're a great cook."

Each word that emanates from his mouth is a lie.

Dladla: "Okay."

Dladla's response is undoubtedly guarded.

Timothy: "Bayeni, I will see you tomorrow, don't be late."

He winks and lets himself out, my eyes instantly run to Dladla, he's gazing at the door with his eyebrows raised. His facial expression holds questions, I hope he won't ask me any of them.

Dladla: "Bayeni?"

Timothy, you stupid cow.

Me: "That's what they call me at work."

Please don't ask me anymore.

Dladla: "The food is almost ready. Khethu will not be joining us, she's with Mbongeni."

He announces as he lumbers back to the kitchen. That was a close call.

AMARA\*

Everyone has gathered in the back yard, the night has fallen. There is a beautiful setting, a long wooden table is set a few yards from the pool. It is adorned with a long white linen cloth draped in the middle, white jasmine flowers are spread across the table. There are string lights cascading above with a complimentary of lantern lights, giving the scenery a romantic atmosphere. I see Sethu rush up to me and Styles tagging behind her, she carries a big smile and there's a bounce in her walk.

Sethu: "Hey."

Her smile is uncontainable.

Me: "What are you happy about?"

Sethu: "Nothing, I'm allowed to be happy, right?"

That giggle is suspicious.

Me: "Styles, is everything okay?"

With his hands tucked in his pockets, he shrugs his shoulders. Sethu has her arms over me and her titters keep tickling my ears.

I can't see Randall anywhere, I was so entranced by the scenery that I missed him walk away.

Me: "Why is Sethu so happy?"

He smiles.

Styles: "This is her, she's always happy."

Yeah right. These two can't hide anything.

Sethu: "Thank you babe, you see Amara? You're reading too much into this smile of mine."

Yeah...

She says this while she's failing to contain her giggle.

Me: "And I'm supposed to believe that?"

Styles: "I think I'm starting to see what Amara is talking about. What is it kitten? Is there something you want to tell us?"

She simpers at his statement.

"Styles, can we talk?"

Nkomo looks terrible, I think he's drunk.

Styles: "Unless you want to tell me what I want to hear, I have nothing to say to you."

He replies coldly.

Nkomo: "Just a minute man..."

He pleads.

Styles leers at him for a while, he appears not to like the state Nkomo is in.

Styles: "We'll talk later."

He says, Nkomo nods before walking away.

Sethu: "Is he okay?"

Styles: "He is."

That's it...

As I turn to my right I see Lelo with Mbuso. His arms are around her as he continues to draw circles on her belly. The sadness she held before has long gone, you would think it was an illusion.

Neo is here too, his restless eyes are searching for someone or something. He spots us and a distant worrisome smile takes over his face.

Me: "Here comes Neo."

I introduce, Styles notices the obvious sadness on his face as he's plodding this direction.

Styles: "What's wrong?"

Neo: "Have you seen Zee?"

Me: "The last time I saw her she was inside."

Sethu: "Is everything okay Neo?"

Neo: "Yeah."

He's not convinced, himself.

Sethu: "I'll go check on her."

Styles: "Let Neo do it Kitten, I'm not letting you out of my sight again."

He pulls her to him with one hand and she crushes on his chest.

Neo: "Lona, le tsoana le Uze le me hemma. Le a bora le a tseba?" (You two are like Uze and my queen. {Amara.} You're boring, you know?)

He treads off with a tongue click.

Sethu: "What's wrong with Neo babe?"

Styles: "Don't worry about him, he's probably hungry. He gets grumpy when he's hungry."

He could be serious about it but, I find a joke through it hence my quick laugh.

Sethu: "Stop lying."

She jabs his chest.

Styles: "Neo will be fine, he worries too much that's all."

Me: "About Zee?"

Sethu giggles.

"Here, Ife wants to speak to you."

Randall says.

Where did he come from?

He hands me a phone, the first thing I see is Ifeanyi's gleaming face.

Ife: "Happy birthday sister in-law."

She sings, her energy will never fade.

Me: "Thanks Ife, this is a surprise."

Ife: "I'm sorry that I couldn't be there."

She utters.

Me: "This is more than enough."

Ife has the same smile that Sethu had when she approached me. I have to ask.

Me: "Care to explain that silly smile on your face?"

It grows.

Ife: "What smile?"

It turns into a snicker and I am convinced that something is up.

Ife: "I can't talk long hey, I want to wish you all the best in your new life sis and make sure

brother does everything right. Don't let him off the hook, the man is spoiled."

I nod to her instructions.

Me: "I will and I will need your help once in a while."

Ife: "You got it. Can you do something for me?"

Me: "What is it?"

"Mara."

I look up as I hear Liyana calling out to me, she waves, a huge smile pasted on her face. I wave and turn my focus back to Ife.

Ife: "I wanted you to look up."

She says.

Ife is acting strange.

Me: "It's only Li..."

My words are pushed back by a familiar male voice singing, my mind is playing tricks with me. I take my eyes back to where Liyana is standing and my heart stops. No, that is not Randall singing there.

He has a microphone clutched on his hand while slowly striding to me.

<<< Said I done it all>>>

<<< But frankly girl I'm tired of this emptiness >>>

<<< I wanna come home to you and only you >>>

<<< 'Cause making love to just anyone ain't happening >>>

<<< I just gotta be with you >>>

<<< Do you think about us finishing something we started so long ago? >>>

<<< I wanna give you my all >>>

<<< Do you think about maybe us having some babies? >>>

<<< Come on won't you be my lady forever, yeah >>>

<<< I'm ready to commit to you >>>

<<< And I just can't wait for that night >>>

<<< 'Cause I need you here with me >>>

<<< And let's start a family >>>

<<< Meet me at the alter with your white dress >>>

<<< We ain't getting no younger, we might as well do it >>>

<<< Been feeling all the while girl I must confess >>>

<<< Girl let's just get married >>>

<<< I just wanna get married >>>

Here I am standing before him, overwhelmed and dumbfounded. It all feels like a dream, his hand in mine keeps reassuring me that I am widely awake and this man is serenading a song to me. My heart hasn't stopped pounding, it wants to pop out of my rib cage. That's how intense it is. It feels strange having all these pairs of eyes on me, moreover I have never been the centre of attention.

I have always been that girl behind you, nevertheless I care about these set of eyes that are nervously gazing into mine and all others have disappeared.

Me: "Randall?"

I fight with the syllable, I'm astounded and talking has become a mission. My body is trembling and my tears have decided to be a part of this moment.

Randall: "Amara will..."

"Get on your knee."

Styles shouts, a sound of laughter erupts from everyone. Randall drops on his knee and Liyana bounces to his side. She hands him a jewellery box, anyone can figure this out. He flips it open revealing the most beautiful ring I have ever seen. Nothing beats the speech he made the day he proposed but this is everything.

Randall: "Me, hemma." (My queen. )

He starts.

Looking into his eyes, I see the beautiful future we would spend together sprawling out before me.

Randall: "Will you take this journey of life with me and marry me?"

The words come out of his lips.

Okay, he's done this before right? So, why am I frozen?

Of course, I didn't expect this and from him of all people. I don't think there are words to convey how wonderful this feels. I can't find the answer but, it's at the tip of my tongue. Randall clears his throat as he nervously scans our surroundings, he brings his eyes back to me.

Randall: "This is the part where you say yes."

There is laughter at the sound of his reminder, I smile and the word feels ready to rush out of my

mouth.

Me: "Yes."

A smile claims his face and I see him breathe a sigh of relief, in a second he's back up on his feet, his lips covering mine.

"Gosh, Randall. You forgot the ring."

That's Mbuso's voice, it's accompanied by echoes of hilarity. Randall draws back, he is so nervous I almost feel sorry for him.

"Somebody teach this man please."

Styles yells cracking another joke which people find funny.

"And go back on your knee."

He adds.

Randall: "Hey, you're also laughing at me?"

I smash my hand on my mouth to curb the stubborn titter that's forcing its way out of my lips. On his knee again, he slips the ring on my finger and...

It's official, I am a fiancé to the most amazing man I have ever known. I'm back in his arms and he's kissing me as if we're the only ones here. I draw back, hearing Liyana giggle and applauds from the friends.

Me: "My baby."

She's in my arms twittering.

I hear a woman ululating, it's aunt Petunia. She's jubilant as she dances in circles, my uncle is with her.

I didn't know that they were here, they approach me with hugs.

Me: "Uncle?"

Mhambi: "We couldn't miss it."

It's good to see him smile.

Mhambi: "He came and asked for your hand in marriage."

He means Randall, I don't think he will ever address him by his name. I am smiling at my future husband and I cannot comprehend how lucky I am to be loved by him. How did he pull this off? I still have to investigate, someone had a hand in it and I smell life.

Me: "Randall you are full of surprises today, hey."

He winks at me.

Need I mention, he is standing a few steps away from me? If my uncle was not here, his hands



would be all over me.

Randall: "I'm glad that you could make it baba." (Sir.)

I love the respect he portrays towards my uncle.

Mhambi: "I don't know how you youngsters do things lately, what comforts me is that you're aware of our customs."

Randall: "Yebo baba and the date has been set." (Yes sir.)

Mhambi: "It's good to hear that my son."

My son?

Way to go Randall, you scored yourself some points with my uncle. Now the stubborn one remains.

Speaking of uncle Jonas.

Me: "Where is malume?" (Uncle.)

Petunia: "He couldn't make it."

Or he didn't want to come, Styles is approaching us hand in hand with Sethu. He walks with so much confidence like he knows what he's doing.

"Greetings."

He shakes my uncle's hand, like I said, he carries this poise.

Mhambi: "Yebo ndodana." (Greetings my son.)

Sethu sends her greeting to my aunt.

Randall: "This is my brother Styles, he is one of the men who will partake in the negotiations."

Randall introduces.

Styles: "I would like to have a word with you sir, if you don't mind."

What is going to be said in my absence? Sethu and I watch them as they amble into the house, aunt never leaves my uncle's side.

Randall draws his arm around me the moment my uncle steps into the house.

Me: "A song?"

He smiles.

Randall: "Ife sent it to me three days ago, I didn't have much time to rehearse."

Me: "But you did a good job, I didn't think that you had it in you."

Randall: "Things we do for love."

The complaint comes with a kiss.

Me: "Keep this up and you might get those twelve kids you want."

He grins, clasps his arms around me as he pulls me closer shutting the space between us. I'm kidding about the brats.

Sethu: "Guys you're not married yet, give us a break."

I forgot about her.

Randall: "I'm going to see if Styles is still alive."

Me: "Not funny."

He sniggers while he wanders into the house.

The party is buzzing outside now. I'm swamped by a series of congratulations from everyone.

Lelo and Mbuso have come as well.

Lelo: "Wow, look at you."

She hugs me.

Me: "Yeah."

Lelo: "Can I see it?"

She takes my hand to inspect the shiny diamond on my finger.

Sethu: "It's beautiful, isn't it?"

I think so too, I'm not sure if Lelo feels the same.

Mbuso: "Congratulations Amara, finally someone is going to tie the beast down."

I return the smile that's flashing on his face.

Me: "Thank you Mbuso."

Lelo: "Are you ready though?"

I didn't tell Lelo that Randall had proposed, I wasn't sure what her reaction would be since there was no ring. Now that there is and she witnessed the engagement, I fail to read her attitude towards everything.

Me: "I am ready, I love him."

Lelo: "I think it's too soon."

Sethu: "Are you kidding me Lelo, if anyone deserves this, it's these two."

Sethu jumps to my rescue.

Mbuso: "I agree with Sethu."



Me: "Thank you guys."

Lelo is not sure about this engagement, I decide not to let her spoil my mood.

Me: "I have a wedding to plan."

I exclaim in excitement.

Sethu: "I have a few ideas in mind."

Me: "Great. What about you Lelo? Don't you have anything in mind?"

She's too quiet and it's stressing me out.

Lelo: "There's still time. What's the rush?"

Lelo queries, simpering at me. I feel a bit of hurt that she's not rejoicing with me, I want her by my side during my happiest moment.

Sethu: "I think it's the perfect time, in a few months she'll be ready to pop. It's better to do it now."

Sethus breaks the news, we hadn't told anyone besides Styles and Neo, afraid that Lelo might slip up and tell my uncles.

Lelo: "Pop? Amara, you're pregnant?"

The hurt in her voice hits like a flood.

Me: "We were going to tell you guys."

Mbuso: "Wow, you really are keeping that man busy hey."

He gags at his own joke, Sethu finds him funny too while Lelo is straight-faced.

Me: "Lelo, won't you congratulate me for my baby? We're both going to be mothers."

She doesn't return the smile I give.

Lelo: "Everyone knew about the pregnancy except me, your sister."

Me: "Not everyone, Randall told Styles and he..."

Mbuso: "You don't have to explain Amara, there is no need for that."

Mbuso drops in. I feel that I should explain, I owe her an explanation.

Lelo: "Mbuso is right, you don't have to explain. I understand."

There is a smile on her face yet her voice sings a different tune.

Me: "Okay, I'm glad because I want you to be my maid of honour."

I see a bit of resistance in her eyes before a smile takes over.

Lelo: "Sure, I'd love to."



This calls for a hug, Sethu joins. Randall and I still have to discuss the date but, I know that it's soon.

Sethu: "Like Ayize would say 'Umshado lento.'" (It's a wedding.)

She exclaims loudly, I'm glad that Lelo is laughing along with us. I won't be able to do this without her.

AYIZE\*

Two or more glasses of wine wouldn't hurt, I need to forget. My mind is betraying me, it's showing me these visuals I don't want to see. I shouldn't have answered my phone. Lethabo is evil, I wish our paths never crossed.

It's my luck that everyone is outside, I'm able to gulp down one more glass of wine. Sethu is with Amara she won't know or suspect anything.

I reach for my fourth or is it fifth? I have lost count. A hand grips my wrist, it's that Sotho boy Maake.

Neo: "That's enough Ayize."

He chides me.

It's not enough for me, I need more.

Me: "One more glass, I promise."

I am not familiar with this angry face, I know a smiling Neo.

Neo: "How could you Zee? After making such progress, you let yourself fall."

Neo does not understand what I'm feeling.

Me: "I need to numb the pain Neo, please."

Neo: "I won't let you drink."

He grips my hand and begins to pull me towards the stairs.

Me: "Where are we going?"

Neo: "To wash off the alcohol, you need to keep sober."

Me: "I'm not drunk."

"What's going on?"

Sethu's voice brings me around, she is forever worried.

Me: "My beautiful sweet sister, please tell Neo here that I am not drunk."

I tap her shoulder and she takes my hand.

Sethu: "Ayize, you're drinking again?"

It seems that she's on his team.

Neo: "She needs a cold shower to sober up."

I hear his plan for me and no, I don't want to bath.

Me: I bathed in the morning Neo."

I'm not that drunk.

Me: "I don't want to bath."

He whisks me up like a bag of potatoes and carries me on his shoulders, my head spins as I hang upside down.

Me: 'Neo put me down."

He adheres to my command and drops me, I'm in the bathroom and before I know it, showers of cold water wash over me.

Me: "Aaahh, Neo!!!!"

I blare trying to get out, he holds me down till I give up fighting him, I numb my body and sit down on the floor.

Neo: "Don't sit there."

He closes the tap, takes my hand and pulls me out. He places a towel over me, and leads me back to the bedroom. It's warm in here, although my clothes are damp.

Neo: "Are you okay?"

I nod, my teeth fighting to constrain themselves as they are shattering.

Me: "You think I'm dirty too don't you? Like that fool Lethabo."

A wrinkle forms between his eyebrows.

Neo: "What are you saying?"

There's a single couch at the corner by the window, I find my way there and settle down. Neo doesn't move an inch, he's glaring at me waiting for an answer.

Me: "I'm his bitch, that's why he made a tape of us having sex."

I'm watching his face as it turns to rage subsequently.

Neo: "Zee, what are you saying to me? Lethabo did what?"

He squats before me and puts his hands on each side of the couch, his eyes hold a certain rage I have never seen.



Me: "It's shocking I know, I was shocked too when he showed me the video. That's his hold on me."

I cradle his jaw into my hands.

Me: "Your Zee does not belong to you Neo, I belong to Lethabo. He owns me, I jump at his every command."

Neo: "Where is this coming from? Did you talk to him?"

Me: "He called me, I have to go to him Neo. Or else your Zee will be a celebrity before breakfast tomorrow."

Neo: "You're not going."

I don't think it's up to him, he grimaces as I burst out laughing.

Me: "Do you know Lethabo? He is..."

Neo: "I don't care who he is, you're not going to meet him."

He orders, Neo does not know the seriousness of this.

Me: "Neo."

Neo: "Where are you set to meet?"

Me: "Why? Are you going to kill him?"

His eyes harden and the furrow intensifies.

Me: "I'm kidding, relax."

I say in amusement.

Me: "Although, that's what I want to do to him, I want to kill him Neo. I want to see him lying dead in a pool of blood. I want his body to be ravished by dogs."

He puts a finger on my lips to shut me up.

Neo: "Don't say that. You will not think such thoughts Zee, you're too innocent for this."

Me: "Do not use that word in the same sentence as my name. There's nothing innocent about me, if only you knew the things I have done in my life. Do you know that Lethabo is married? Yes, he is married. I have been sleeping with a married man Neo, there was no escaping him. You see, he has a high sex drive."

He draws back, gets up and all I see is his back.

Me: "Every sexual fantasy you can think of, he has experimented it on me. He went fifty shades on me. What could I have done Neo? The man has a hold on me, he claims that I belong to him."

I exclaim.

Shame is laughing in my face.

Me: "I didn't want to do it, I swear."

He's not moving.

Me: "Neo look at me."

Sluggishly he turns back around, his eyes are red and jaw clamped. His gaze is not directly fixed on me.

Me: "Am I that bad that you refuse to let your eyes embrace me Neo?"

Neo: "You're not bad Zee."

He's here in a miniature, his hand caressing my cheek.

Neo: "You're pure and innocent."

He makes me feel pure, it's something I know for sure.

Me: "I would hate it if you saw me otherwise."

Neo: "You are my sweet beautiful Zee, this is how I see you. Do not let that fool taint you with his words."

Me: "But he said..."

Neo: "Fuck what he said, I won't let you do this to yourself Zee. Don't entertain his words, push them out of your mind. You're a strong beautiful black woman who has come out of the most severe storm. You will not let anyone pull you back there."

Why does Neo have to be like this? He makes me feel like I matter.

Neo: "Where did he say to meet him?"

Me: "Will you go there?"

I question after giving him the address.

Neo: "Yes, I won't touch him. I only want the footage."

I want him to hurt him, teach him a lesson he will never forget.

Me: "He has copies Neo and..."

Neo: "Don't worry, I've got this. You should go back to the others."

My clothes are wet.

Me: "I'll wait here till I'm dry."

Neo: "I'm sorry about that again."

It's funny to him.

Neo: "I'll let Sethu know you're here so that, you're not alone."

Me: "Thanks."

My eyes follow Neo's movement as he promenades out of the room.

I think it's about time that I face my demons eye ball to eye ball.

To be continued...





## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

151\*

NEO\*

We jump out of the car and an old abandoned building that was once a shoe factory stands tall before us. This is where that bastard had called her, clearly he had an agenda. I think Zee was not going to come out of this alive.

Styles: "The fool wanted to lure her here with the intent to kill her. If it were not so, he wouldn't have chosen a remote location."

Me: "It's time we deal with him once and for all, he made her feel worthless Stylos. I want him to pay for every word he planted in her mind."

Styles: "Oh, he will pay Neo."

We are met by darkness as we enter the building through a small opening where a door once stood.

Me: "Stylos, are we going to walk in the dark?"

I take steps back out.

Styles: "Let's go man."

Me: "In the dark? No Stylos, didn't you bring a torch or something? My eyes are big but, they do not light in the dark."

Stylos cannot be that brave to walk in utter darkness.

Styles: "We'll use the phone light, come Neo. I have a woman waiting for me back home."

Me: "Oho! What's special about that? Zee is also waiting for me."

I'm frustrating him.

Stylos: "Are we doing this or not?"

Me: "Hold my hand Stylos, I know that you're afraid."

He snatches his hand as I grab it.

Me: "I'm trying to help you, Miss. S will fight with me if she finds out, I let you walk in the dark unguarded."

He grunts in frustration, I'm trying to help him.

Styles: "Neo man, will you stop?"

He goes in first and disappears into the darkness, I peek in, I can't see him. It's pitch black and I can't see a thing.

Me: "Stylos?"

I whisper and the creepiest thing happens, my voice echoes in the building.

Me: "There are ghosts in this place."

I can feel it.

Me: "Aaah! Sepoko!!!" (Ghost.)

I scream when a hand clutches my wrist and lugs me in the building, I'm pressed against the wall in a flash. I'm screaming, my heart is thudding against my chest. I'm surprised it hasn't fallen out yet, I open my eyes wider, hoping I will see something. It's not working, there is someone or a thing in front of me. I don't know what it is but, I feel it staring right at me.

The silence is killing me, the only thing I can hear is the sound of my heart beating. I am not ready to die and I will die a coward. I can already see the headlines "Sotho boy killed by a ghost."

I'll be a laughing stock, they won't care that I have died, people will discuss me while drinking at bars. Some will use me as pickup lines.

Okay relax Neo, I think it's gone. It's not attacking me, so it's gone, right?

Where is Stylos? How can he leave me here?

Dammit!

I have a phone, I need to turn on the torch light. It's the only way I can see where I'm going. I aim the light right in front, a figure is positioned against the wall causing me to scream in fright. It takes a second to notice that it's Stylos and he's laughing at me.

Me: "Stylos?"

Styles: "I didn't know you were such a coward."

He's enjoying himself, nonsense.

Me: "I almost died Stylos, don't ever do that again."

My words fuel his laughter, he leans against the wall laughing out loud.

Styles: "Wow Neo, you scream like a girl. I should have recorded this."

Nx!

Me: "I will get you for this Stylos."

Styles: "Yeah, yeah let's go."

He laughs his way forward.

Me: "Wait for me."

I rush after him.

That fool Lethabo is sick. Why would he call Zee to such a place?

SETHU\*

Amara cannot stop smiling, she is truly glowing. I haven't seen her this happy since I have come to know her. Most of the guests have gone to their respective homes, Styles left with Neo. I'm not sure where Randall is, I saw him seeing the Kenneth guy out a while back. There is something about the way Kenneth looks at Amara, any woman can see it. There's a sparkle in his eyes, he looks at her like she is the only thing he can see.

Amara does not see it, her eyes only see one man.

Me: "It might fall off if you keep staring at it."

Her face flushes as a smile shines on it.

Amara: "Randall put this ring here, Sethu."

She says in total disbelief.

Me: "Yes he did."

It's beautiful how she glows with happiness.

Amara: "You don't know how much I love that man Sethu, my heart knows and recognizes him. He's the one for me."

Me: "I see it in your eyes."

"Don't you think you're exaggerating it a bit Amara?"

Did I mention that Lelo is here as well?

Yeah. There she is across the table stuffing her face with ice cream and mayonnaise and all those things she adds inside. She has been quiet all this while, I swear the fridge has made more noise than her in the last thirty minutes.

Me: "How is she exaggerating Lelo?"

Lelo: "The kind of love she speaks of doesn't exist, no man can love a woman like that. That proposal is probably something he saw on TV."

Wow.

If bitterness had a face and a big mouth it definitely be Lelo.

Amara: "Why would you say that Lelo?"

Amara is clearly hurt by her sister's words, Ayize would skin me alive if I were to say those things to her.

Lelo: "I'm only saying that life is not a fairy tale, if it were, we would all be smiling like that. Sadly those smiles do not last the night. Randall is like any other guy, who is to say that he won't hurt you?"

She speaks as she shoves a scoop of ice cream in her mouth.

Me: "You're bitter Lelo, Amara is your sister be happy for her."

I have had enough of her nonsense.

Lelo: "You call it bitter, I call it reality."

This girl.

I think I am more upset than Amara.

Amara: "That's what you think but it's not so Lelo. Love is real and it's beautiful."

Me: "I agree with Amara one hundred percent. God is love so why wouldn't this kind of love exist? Have you heard of a crucifixion type love Lelo?"

Lelo: "No but, I'm sure you're going to tell me."

The attitude in her voice is loud enough to wake any envious vein in her body, that's all I see, a girl who is envious of her sister.

Amara: "The kind of love that heals. That's what Randall has done for me, he has healed my wounds, even the ones that were hidden deep with me. I never thought that I would ever be with a man after what my uncle did to me, the thought of a man terrified me. The death of my parents hunted me in my dreams for years, there was no way out of that. Unbeknownst to me, the dreams stopped when I fell into the arms of a stranger. Little did I know that, he will one day be the reason that I breathe. I didn't know my fate when I came into Randall's life, I had no one but, he filled that empty space."

I'm in tears and it shocks me to find Lelo yawning in boredom, the girl is bored stiff by Amara's statement.

Lelo: "Like I said, fairy tale."

She just did an eye roll there.

Amara: "I guess I'm living my fairy tale then."

Lelo: "Don't get me wrong Amara, it's..."

I know that she is about to say something that will spoil Amara's day further.

Lelo: "I used to be in the same boat with Zuma, I thought that he was the best man in the world."

Amara: "Randall is not Zuma."

She disputes.

Lelo: "He's not, Randall's got money and they tend to be worse. Wealthy men do not respect women. You will be a trophy wife while he has a mistress on the side, the one who truly satisfies him."

She did not say that.

"Lelo?"

Mbuso's voice resound causing us to flinch and turn to the door, he stands with a clearly fuming Randall.

Mbuso: "How could you say that?"

Randall: "Mbuso get this woman out of my house."

He grunts in a deep tone, I've met the frowning Randall not the angry one.

Mbuso: "Lelo let's go."

He speaks with authority, she gets up, hugs Amara and...

Lelo: "I'll call you tomorrow."

Amara nods, she is clearly upset. Lelo toddles out leaving Mbuso who follows after her without saying a word.

Randall: "Amara?"

She ogles at him standing in the path way, I think I would be in tears if such words were said to me.

Randall: "I'm not that person, I would never look at another woman. Don't mull over her words."

Amara: "I know Randall, I know you and the kind of a man you are."

Me: "Why would your sister say that to you?"

I need to understand this.

Amara: "I have no idea."

Randall: "Excuse me."

He moseys out of the kitchen.

Me: "Are you sure you're okay?"

Amara: "I have been through enough in my life to let such trivial things affect me. Lelo doesn't know anything about Randall, so her judgement doesn't count."

Me: "Is it a good idea to have her as your maid of honour?"

She has to reconsider that.

Amara: "Maybe I made a mistake Sethu, I don't know."

Amara has no clue what her sister's wishes are for her, they are clearly written in the vile words she speaks.

NEO\*

This building gets darker with each floor, my torch light is getting dim. Styles is leading the way like he knows where we are going.

Neo: "Shit Stylos, my battery just died."

Styles: "Grab my t-shirt, I wouldn't want you screaming again."

He laughs, he's actually laughing at me.

Me: "You're not funny Stylos, you would have done the same."

He's amused.

Styles: "No I wouldn't have."

Liar.

Styles: "We're here."

He declares in a whisper. I peek over him to see an old white door, it's open, barely a crack. There's a glint of light piercing through the crack.

Me: "What's the plan?"

Stylos saunters in without giving me a warning.

Me: "Shit! Stylos."

I whisper, this corridor is dark and scary. Knowing he will not come out of there, I rush after him.

There are about three lit candles in here. The fool, Lethabo is here.

Styles: "Do you have what we spoke about?"

What is he talking about?

Lethabo: "Here. Where is my money?"

Stylos scrolls on his phone, a beeping sound echoes. Lethabo pulls out his phone, he grins widely before tossing a USB stick at Styles.

Styles: "Is everything there?"

Lethabo: "Everything is there, the copies too."

When did Styles plan all of this?

Styles: "If you're lying to me, I will hunt you down."

Lethabo: "Relax, it's all there."

Styles: "Good because not only will I haunt you down, I will slice your family every one of them and make you watch."

Lethabo widens his eyes in shock, I can't think of anything else but, Zee's words before I left. This bastard killed her soul, he took away what was left of her self-worth.

Me: "This fool is not leaving this place alive Stylos."

I refuse.

Styles: "Neo, I've got this."

Lethabo: "Control your boy, is it not past your bed time?"

The nerve of this bastard.

Styles: "I would watch my mouth if I were you."

Lethabo: "What will he do? Spray me with a toy gun?"

He's amused by his stupidity.

Me: "Stylos, we have Trevor Gumbi in the house."

Stylos chortles, he gets my idea and we're about to roll play.

Styles: "Guy is funny."

Me: "He is hey."

He stops laughing as he sees us laugh.

Me: "Won't you crack another joke?"

He has suddenly lost his voice.

Me: "I want to hear another joke. What about you Stylos?"

Styles: "I'm ready. Humour us Thabos."

He's not laughing anymore, his eyes keep running from me to Stylos.

Me: "You know Lethabo, once you crack one joke I need to hear another one or else I'll go crazy."

I raise my voice.

Styles: "He takes medication for it, he was okay until you decided to be a comedian. Now he won't stop until he hears another joke."

Me: "Oh shit Stylos, it's coming."

I scream as I press my head. Stylos draws away from me.

Styles: "Thabos do something, you started this."

His voice breaks in fear.

Lethabo: "What is he going to do?"

Good! The fools is terrified.

Me: "I better hear a joke Stylos. Why am I not hearing a joke?"

Styles: "Calm down Neo, Thabos will crack another joke now. Control that anger."

He panics as he tries to calm me down.

Me: "I can't Stylos, I can't. Oh no it's here, it's here."

I scream, dramatically spinning around in circles.

Lethabo: "What is it? What is here?"

The fear in his voice as he shouts, I love it.

Stylos: "I don't know man, no one knows what it is but, it's bad."

Me: "Oh shit Stylos."

I pull out a gun and Lethabo howls.

Styles: "Neo don't do it man."

Me: "I have to do it Stylos."

I'm yelling and he's reprimanding me, Lethabo is ready to run out of the door.

Stylos: "Don't do it Neo."

Me: "Woh, I can't control it."

I point the gun at Stylos and he raises his hands in surrender, the man is good at this acting thing.

Lethabo: "What's going on?"

His voice quavers with terror.

Stylos winks at me as I smirk at him. I swivel, shoot Lethabo on his knee and he falls with a scream.

Me: "Wooohh!"

I yell.

Me: "Damn that felt good."



Stylos bursts out in laughter.

Stylos: "Shit Thabos, are you okay?"

He's laughing.

Lethabo: "He shot me."

He cries.

Me: "Stylos, you better stop me man, it's coming again."

Styles: "oh no, Thabos this is bad."

Me: "Dammit, it's here."

In the blink of an eye, I put a bullet through his other knee, he screams in agony.

Me: "Damn this is better than that joke he made."

Stylos: "It's even better when you're watching it."

He laughs.

Lethabo: "You two are crazy. Who are you?"

He throws us into a fit of laughter.

Me: "Another joke Stylos, he should keep them coming or else."

Stylos: 'No, you can't kill him."

This little drama has Lethabo terrified to his wits.

Me: "I need to hear another joke now, Stylos."

Stylos: "Come on Thabos, don't you have another one."

He smirks at the wounded guy.

Lethabo: "No, no I don't have jokes, please take me to the hospital. I'm going to bleed to death."

Me: "Stylos stop me, I don't want to kill him."

Stylos: "Don't do it Neo, don't kill him. He has a family."

Me: "A family? Wooo I like."

Lethabo: "Please, don't do this."

I want to torture him as much as I possibly can. I want to riddle his body with bullets.

Me: "I have to go again man, this thing is pushing me, it's pushing me."

My gun is aimed at a wounded trembling Lethabo. There is a loud bang that sends him to his death. Styles leers at me.

Styles: "And then? We were still having fun. Why did you end the game?"

It wasn't me. I turn to the door to meet Zee, standing there with a gun aimed at Lethabo.

This is not happening. How did she get here?

Styles: "Ayize?"

He's as shocked as I am.

Me: "No, no, no Zee. What have you done? What have you done?"

I shout, tracing my feet to her, her eyes remain glued on Lethabo's dead body.

Her impassive face worries me.

Ayize: "I killed him."

She replies in a deadpan voice.

Me: "Dammit Zee, I had it. I was taking care of it."

Ayize: "I don't see the big deal Neo, he's dead. It's what I wanted and it's done."

I don't know if I should worry about her cold tone or the fact that she has just killed a man. If I can't deal with taking a life. How will she forgive herself?

Me: "You don't get it do you? You did not just kill him, you killed yourself too. A gun doesn't only kill the victim it kills the shooter as well. This will stay with you Zee."

She furrows a brow, she doesn't understand my explanation.

Ayize: "Neo?"

The pistol slips out of her hands and crashes to the floor.

It's getting to her, wanting someone dead is different from actually taking their life.

Ayize: "I killed him, I killed him Neo."

I didn't mean to scare her.

Me: "It's okay, I'll take care of this. And I'll take care of you Zee, I promise."

I pull her to my chest, her body is trembling. She clings her arms around me.

Ayize: "When I saw all the blood on him, all I could think of was him lying dead in it and the next thing the gun went off."

She explains her reasons for shooting him.

Me: "Don't think about it now."

Styles: "Neo get her out of here."

Me: "We have to take care of him."



Styles: "Don't worry, I've got it."

Me: "You can't stay here alone, this place is haunted."

I hear Zee giggle softly.

Styles: "You're stupidity needs to take a back seat."

Me: "Okay, we'll get out of here."

Styles: "Wait for me in the car, don't leave me behind."

I knew it.

Me: "You're also afraid, aren't you?"

Styles: "No, stupid. How will I get home if you leave me?"

Ayize is laughing, I don't know anymore. This girl is strong, so much so that it leaves me baffled.

Me: "Sho, sho Stylos." (Okay.)

I take Ayize's hand into mine and begin to lead her out. I'm still not used to the darkness of this place. It's a good thing she brought a torch.

NKOMO\*

This is the moment, I'm outside Ruth's house waiting for her to open for me. The plan was to go home but, I found myself here, guilt is killing me. More than guilt, these strong feelings I have for her. She opens the door, I'm welcomed with a frown. Her eyes ask the question before her mouth does the honours.

Ruth: "Is everything okay?"

My drunken state is part responsible for the worry in her eyes.

Me: "Can I come in."

She moves aside, paving a way for me. I dawdle in, not having a clue of how I'm going to do this. I pull out my identity document and hand it to her.

Ruth: "What's this?"

It's pretty clear what it is.

Ruth: "Why are you giving me your Id?"

Me: "Open it."

Slowly, she flips the first page open and carefully I watch her face transform as she stares at it.

Ruth: "This is a picture of you."

The words escape her lips as slow as a lazy Monday.

Me: "Yes, that's me."

I don't know what the outcome of this will be.

Ruth: "It says here that your name is Nko...."

Pronunciation calls her defeated.

Me: "Nkomo Mkhize."

Her soft face accepts a glower.

Ruth: "Why did you take a fake I.d Sbo?"

Okay.

Me: "That's not a fake I.d, this is my identity Ruth. My name is not Sboniso, my name is Nkomo."

Ruth: "I don't understand."

What's there not to understand, it's clear as day light.

Here goes nothing, I have to sit down for this. Ruth is standing across the room from me, she holds a look of confusion.

Me: "I lied about my name, I had a different agenda when I approached you but, as time went by I developed these feelings for you and..."

Ruth: "So, you lied to me?"

Me: "I'm sorry."

Her eyes widen as she drops to her knees, they quickly accept a flood of tears.

Me: "Ruth."

I'm on my feet, ready to trade to her but, I doubt my feet will let me.

Ruth: "You lied to me? All of this has been a lie."

Me: "Not everything Ruth, my feelings for you are real."

She shakes her head in disagreement.

Ruth: "No, it's all a lie. I was so stupid and thought you felt something for me."

I rush to sit in front of her, there's an urge to wipe her tears away.

Me: "I do Ruth, my feelings for you are stronger than anything I have ever known."

Ruth: "Why?"



She whispers.

Me: "Because you're an amazing woman."

Ruth: "No dammit. Why did you lie to me? Why did you deceive me?"

This is something I can't reveal.

Me: "Ruth please, I need you to know that what I feel for you is real."

Ruth: "Why did you lie to me Sb..."

She pulls herself up, this compels me to get up as well.

Ruth: "You say you care about me right? Then tell me why you lied, what was your plan? Did my father send you or Segun?"

That would be a great escape but...

Me: "No and I can't say anything."

She clenches her eyes as more tears stream down her face.

Ruth: "Get out."

She yells.

Me: "Ruth please, hear me out."

Ruth: "I hate you and I want you out of my life."

Me: "I know you don't mean that."

Ruth: "I do, I don't want to see you again."

I don't know what to make of her tone. Does she really want me gone or is she just hurt.

Me: "Sweetness listen."

Ruth: "Don't call me that, don't fucking call me that."

She yells as she throws a cushion at me.

Me: "I'm sorry Ruth but, I had to do this."

Ruth: "You had to play me? Do you hear yourself? You want me to accept the fact that you lied to me, you want me to pretend that it's okay and move on with you like nothing happened."

Me: "I only need you to understand me."

Ruth: "How will I if you refuse to give a reason as to why you lied to me?"

This is something I cannot reveal to her even if I wanted to.

Me: "I'm sorry."



Ruth: "Get out, take your sorry and get the hell out of my house."

She screams.

Me: "Come on Ruth..."

I take her hand only for her to yank it away and place a slap across my face.

Me: "Ruth?"

Ruth: "If you don't leave right now I swear, I will do more than slapping you."

She threatens.

I don't want to fight with her, hence the reason I'm walking away.

Me: "Everything was real to me, the feelings, the love making and the way you made me feel. There was nothing fake about any of that."

I proclaim before shutting the door behind me, I barely make it to the car as I hear her scream. In a jiffy, her screams turn into sobs. It takes every strength in me not to go back in there.

MBUSO\*

Lelo has outdone herself today, I don't know the person she is becoming. She said she was okay with Randall, she lied.

Lelo: "You know you didn't have to order me out of that house. What will Amara and Sethu think of me now?"

This has to be a joke.

Me: "Lelo, you were instigating Amara against her husband."

We're driving home in the dead of night.

Lelo: "I wasn't doing that Mbuso, I was simply telling her the truth."

Me: "That her husband is playing her?"

Lelo: "He's not her husband yet besides, it's the truth. Rich men don't love their wives, the wife becomes part of the furniture while the man is gallivanting with other women out there."

She huffs, there is a reason behind her frustration.

Me: "Where did you hear that Lelo? Who said Randall is that kind of person?"

Lelo: "He's got the money, the house, the status and the life style. He ticks the box."

Me: "What the hell is your problem? You know one would think that you're jealous."

I give her a brief look to find her glaring at me, I don't recognize that look in her eyes. She is not my Lelo, the sweet innocent girl I fell in love with.

Lelo: "I am not jealous Mbuso."

She yells.

Lelo: "Amara is my cousin and I want what's best for her. I will protect her even from men like Randall, who think they can buy girls because they have money."

Me: "Is this about Randall's money?"

Lelo: "You know you're insulting me with every word you say?"

Me: "I'm trying to understand why you hate the guy."

Lelo: "Hate Mbuso? You think I'm capable of hate?"

I can't grasp why Lelo is shouting.

Me: "Will you stop yelling, I can hear you."

Lelo: "Maybe if you stop judging me, I'll stop yelling."

She continues to yell.

Me: "You're childish you know that? How did I not see it? You need to grow up Nombulelo, change this stinking attitude of yours before it's too late."

I can't tolerate this anymore.

Lelo: "Do you want to leave me Mbuso?"

Me: "I didn't say that."

Lelo: "Then, what is it? What the hell are you saying to me?"

I'm tired of this shouting.

Me: "Stop yelling Nombulelo, I can bloody hear you."

Lelo: "No Mbuso, I won't stop. Why is it so easy for you to judge me? Why can't you understand my point of view?"

Me: "What view? You're judging people according to their status. Is it so wrong that Amara is marrying a rich guy? Do you wish it was you in her shoes?"

Lelo: "How could you say that to me?"

She pushes me as she yells.

Me: "Stop it Lelo."

Lelo: "You're just like Zuma, all you men are the same."



Swiftly I turn to look at her, her words sting.

Me: "Wow."

I turn my head back to the road as I hear a loud honk, it's a taxi and it's coming right at us.

Lelo: "Mbuso watch out."

She screams, the car lurches as I fight to gain control of it. It's too late, the taxi collides against us. The car screeches on the road, my attempt to control it fails and we hit a tree. My body flings forward, my face hits the air bag and in a minute my head spins. I turn to my left to see if Lelo is okay. She's unconscious, there's so much blood oozing from her head.

How did she...

My heart crumbles to pieces as I notice the big dent on the car, the taxi crashed on her side.

Me: "Lelo."

The strength to scream is not there, I try to take off my seat belt to help but, I am unsuccessful and my feet are stuck. I can't move.

Me: "Lelo open your eyes, open your eyes my love."

I'm stuck here as the seat belt holds me down, my head aches along with my body.

Me: "Hold on baby, you're going to be okay. Hold on for me, my love."

I plead in hopes that she can hear me, she is losing so much blood. There's nothing I can do to help her. An intense headache hits me causing me to pass out.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

152\*

AMARA\*

Randall is very upset, he hasn't said anything since everyone left. Why would Lelo do this to me? Why would she say something like that about Randall? I had asked her to respect him and our relationship, we are supposed to be sisters. It pains me to know that she sees him through different eyes. I'm sitting on the bed while watching him sleeping, he's lying shirtless on his back, facing the other way. I doubt though that he's sleeping. I can't hear his light snores.

Me: "Randall."

I know that he's not asleep.

Me: "Baby?"

Randall: "Go to sleep Amara, it's late."

He says in a soft voice.

Me: "I can't sleep."

Swiftly, he lurches up facing me.

Randall: "Is it the baby?"

He carries a worried look on his face.

Me: "No."

He exchanges the look with a scowl.

Randall: "Why can't you sleep then?"

The way this man worries about me, though.

How can Lelo not be fond of this amazing man?

Me: "We need to talk."

Randall: "It's not good when a woman wakes you up just to talk."

This is my cue to laugh.

He sits back and sends his hands behind his neck to balance his head.

Randall: "What is it?"



His eyes are not on me as he says this.

Me: "I want to know if you're okay."

I wait for him to speak but he's not saying anything.

Randall: "I am, I'm more than okay because I am going to marry the most amazing woman. How lucky am I?"

I'm the lucky one.

Me: "You should start counting your blessings Mr. Okolie."

He gives me a genuine smile and I just love how his eyes sparkle when he looks at me.

Randall: "Thank you for agreeing to be my wife."

Me: "There is nothing I want more."

I cradle his jaw line with my fingers.

Me: "I need you to know that, I will love you right Randall, I will respect you as my lover and the father our children. I will stand by you no matter what and fight life's battles with you."

He's scowling.

I feel a need to say this, let him know that I disagree with Lelo's views.

Randall: "I know, you tell me that each time you look into my eyes."

He's in my face in a second and kissing me.

Me: "Do you think of anything else but, sex?"

I proclaim as he slips his hand under my night gown, it's treading its way to my breast.

He's packed on top of me, his one arm is around my waist. He cups my cheek as he kisses me again.

Randall: "I love you, Amara."

He says softly, his forehead pressed against mine and his lips brushing on my lips.

Me: "I love you more."

I whisper under my breath.

I have fallen in love with his habit of biting my lower lip before kissing me, it does something to me and I can't explain it. It's the best feeling though. An annoying buzzing sound draws me out of this fantasy.

Me: "Your phone is ringing."

I tell as I grab it under the pillow, it reads Styles.

Me: "Baby, it's Styles."

He pulls away from me and seizes the phone.

Randall: "He's not home yet?"

He queries while he answers the call.

Randall: "Bro."

Listens.

Randall: "What?"

His eyes fall on me as they are tainted with sadness.

Randall: "Okay, we're on our way."

He sighs and drops the phone.

Me: "Is he okay?"

The look in his eyes tell me something bad has happened.

Randall: "Mbuso and Lelo were in an accident."

I hear him but his voice sounds so far. Did he say that Lelo was in an accident?

Me: "They are okay, aren't they?"

Why is he shaking his head?

What does that mean?

Me: "Randall?"

He kneels on the bed as he scoots closer to me.

Randall: "I'm sorry Amara."

My world crumbles, everything comes to a standstill. He enfolds his arms around me, letting me cry on his chest.

SETHU\*

I'm still at the Okolie house, Styles and Neo are not back yet. Styles wouldn't tell me where he was going, Ayize left as well saying she's going to meet up with a friend. She didn't state which friend, she appeared to be distraught. I hope her destination is not a club.

I'm in the guest room and I can't sleep not knowing where my family is, Styles' phone rings unanswered. If he weren't the most careful person I know, I would be going crazy.

I decide to try his phone one more time but, an incoming call from my mother stops me.

What could she possibly want? I don't want to speak to her. I reject the call. I can't entertain my mother, I need to know if Styles is okay wherever he is.

Gosh.

She's calling again.

Me: "Yes."

Answering is the only way for her to stop.

Mom: "Sethu, I've been calling you since morning. Why haven't you been taking my calls?"

She sounds like she's been crying.

Me: "I was busy."

I reply and make it known that, I have no interest in talking to her.

Mom: "You need to come home."

And it begins.

Me: "We're not coming back there."

Mom is not serious.

Mom: "Your father needs you both, he's sick."

If this is her way of getting us to come back...

Me: "What is wrong with him?"

Mom: "Come home and we will talk when you get here."

Come home?

We don't consider that hovel a home anymore.

Me: "Can I speak to him?"

Mom: "He's sleeping. I'm telling you the truth Sethu, your father is sick and he doesn't have much time."

Her announcement forces me out of the bed as I jolt up to my feet, my heart thudding on my chest.

Me: "What are you saying mom? What's wrong with my father?"

My emotions seek attention as my tears fight to be attended to. Dad can't be dying. That's what she means, right?

Mom: "My child..."

Her voice is breaking and I am terrified by the sound of her soft snuffles.

Me: "I want to speak to him, let me talk to my father mom."

Mom: "I told you that he's sleeping Sethu. Why are you insisting?"

Why is she getting angry?

Me: "Wake him up, I want to hear his voice."

I demand, I will not step foot in that house until I hear that man's voice. My mother is frustrated by my insistence, I hear by her heavy sigh.

Mom: "Hold on."

There's shuffling in the background and soft whispers, my heart is already heavy and my hands are trembling.

"Sethu."

A surge of heat washes over me as his frail voice resounds from the receiving end, the fear of losing him has engulfed me. That's not my father's voice, his voice is strong and confident. He is a school principal after all.

Me: "Dad."

My voice quavers, I am being mocked by my tears.

Dad: "My baby. How are you?"

It takes him a while to utter each letter as he struggles to let them out of his mouth.

Me: "What's wrong dad? What happened to you?"

Dad: "I'm dying my child, I don't have much time to live. I need to see you and your sister."

A desperate plea emanates from his voice. Will Ayize agree to go there? She has disowned them.

Me: "Won't you tell me what's wrong with you?"

Dad was strong and healthy the last time I saw him.

Dad: "I have to tell this to you and your sister together."

There's a sudden knock at the door, Chioma walks in before I could invite her. She carries sadness in her eyes.

Me: "Okay dad, please stay strong. I will call you tomorrow."

He sends his farewell before disconnecting the call.

Me: "What happened Chioma?"

Chioma: "Amara said to call you, she's downstairs with Uze."

Me: "Why? Did something happen?"

Of course something happened, it's written on her face.

Chioma: "It's Amara's cousin and Mbuso. They were in a car accident."

Me: "What?"

I rush out of the room to meet Amara and Randall.

NTOMBI\*

Surprisingly Jonas is still here, I thought he said he was leaving. Trust him to be the most stubborn, he refuses to speak to Moses or I. Maybe it's about time that he leaves, it's not necessary for all of them to be here.

Mashoto is sleeping in the kitchen, she went to bed right after Petunia finished making tea for everyone.

Mhambi and Petunia came home late, they look happy. Something must have happened wherever they had gone. They keep whispering amongst themselves.

Me: "What's going on with the two of you?"

Petunia frowns upon hearing my voice.

Me: "I'm asking."

Moses: "Something big must have happened. Are you going back home tomorrow?"

Moses jumps in with his wish, he is done with my siblings.

Petunia: "Not yet, sorry to burst your bubbles Moses."

Me: "Tell us then, the reason behind those smiles, Mhambi does not smile. What happened today that has you smiling like this?"

Mhambi: "I'm going to bed."

He gets up and starts to walk off, Mhambi can be a snob. I wonder where he gets it from.

Jonas: "I think I'm ready to retire for bed as well, I'm tired."

His announcement means that we should carry our tails to our abodes. This thing of being ordered in my house must stop. Petunia has long followed her husband.

Me: "Aren't you coming Moses?"

He's seated back, his arms crossed across his chest and rested on his pot belly.

Me: "Moses?"



He's not acknowledging me, Jonas is glaring at him. He needs space. The living room has become his bedroom, he calls the shots here.

Moses: "I'm still watching TV Ntombi, hamba uyolala." (Go to bed.)

Watching TV?

Me: "Bhuti is tired, he wants to sleep."

Moses is not bothered.

Me: "Moses stop being childish and come to bed."

He sits still and I am forced to grab his hand. He snatches it back, I am dealing with a grown ass baby.

Jonas: 'It's okay Ntombi, let him be.'

I won't do that, it's late anyway.

Me: "Moses asambe man."

I snap at him, he glances at me. He's enjoying this.

Stupid.

Moses: "Now, I can't be free in my house Ntombi? Hayi, speak to your family tuu, tell them to leave my house." (No.) (Please.)

He complains while plodding to the bedroom, Jonas is not affected. He has long made peace with Moses's rudeness.

This night feels different, I can't put my finger to it but, something is off. I'm unable to sleep, Moses is snoring next to me, I nudge him. His snores are too loud, it's probably the reason why I can't sleep.

Me: "Moses."

He stops.

It's been over an hour since insomnia paid me an unwanted visit. My mind is muddled, there are so many things running through it at once. For a strange reason Nombulelo's birth is one of them. I'm not one to reminisce, I remember that day like it was yesterday. It's as clear as day light, I have this sudden urge to call her. It's late now. The time on my phone claims that it's 1:20am. She's probably sleeping but, I'll try her phone just in case.

It's ringing, for some reason my heart is acting up. The thought of her not answering scares me, this is new. Is my motherly instinct telling me something?

Me: "Moses."

I nudge him, he's snoring again. This nudge is not to stop his loud snores but, to wake him up. I need to share this feeling with him.

Me: "Moses vuka." (Wake up.)

He turns to face me. His eyes are closed, he is struggling to open them. Nonsense, he's sleeping peacefully while, I have to keep insomnia, company.

Moses: "Yini Ntombi?" (What is it?)

Me: "Nombulelo is not answering her phone."

My emotions take over, I'm crying and I can't understand why.

Moses: "Haibo, it's late Ntombi. Normal people are sleeping and as far as I know, Nombulelo is normal."

He just called me crazy, indirectly.

Me: "Moses something is wrong, I can feel it."

He sighs deeply before sitting up, he rubs his eyes in frustration.

Moses: "Ukhalelani?" (Why are you crying?)

Me: "I need to speak to Nombulelo."

He sighs again, loudly this time.

Moses: "You will speak to her in the morning Ntombi. You can't call people in the witch hour and expect them to answer their phones."

Moses does not understand, a mother's intuition is never wrong.

Me: "My child is not safe wherever she is Moses. Call that boy then, maybe he will answer."

Hopefully.

Moses: "I can't call people at this time of the night."

This is why I said he doesn't understand.

Me: "Please, I won't be able to sleep not knowing if she is okay."

Moses: 'Uyahlupha Ntombi man." (You're a nuisance.)

He complains while dialling Mbuso's number, I watch him carefully as he waits for the call to be attended to. I can hear it ring, that's how quiet this night is. The only sound outside is the sound of dogs barking.

Me: "And then?"

He shakes his head.

Moses: "He's not answering."

Me: "Try again."



I'm desperate.

If he could he would roll his eyes.

Moses: "He's not answering, he's sleeping Ntombi."

Me: "Let's go to their place then."

He looks at me like I have lost my mind, I am literally losing it.

Moses: "We will not do that."

Me: "Please, Moses. I won't be able to sleep."

Moses: "Ntombi, whatever you're feeling is not real. You're tired, sleep. You will feel better in the morning."

His prediction can't be true, I know what I'm feeling.

Me: "I'm going to bhuti Jonas." (Brother.)

Just as I scamper off the bed, a knock on the door stops my movement.

Me: "Who is it?"

"Petunia."

What does she want?

Moses: "Yoh hai, Ntombi. Your people must go."

He proclaims, he's chagrined by this disturbance.

Me: "Yini Petunia?" (What?)

I question the tears in her eyes, Jonas and Mhambi are standing in the living room. They are dressed up and ready to head somewhere.

Me: "What happened?"

I query, stepping out of the bedroom.

Petunia: "It's Nombulelo."

She cries.

My mind goes completely blank, I guess it's trying to protect me from my negative thoughts.

Me: "What happened to Nombulelo?"

I try not to panic.

Moses: "What's going on?"

He's behind me.

Petunia: "Nombulelo was in an accident and..."

She fails to continue as she bursts out in a loud cry, Petunia is scaring me. I know I have been a bad mother but, the thought of my child hurt scares me to death. She is my child, my only child.

Moses: "What's wrong with my daughter Mhambi?"

They are quiet, no one is saying anything.

Me: "Someone better tell me where my child is."

I'm screaming, I've lost it due to Petunia's wails. They tell a tragedy, that feeling I had, meant something and the truth is coming to light now.

Jonas: "Ngiyaxolisa Ntombi, ngiyaxolisa mntwana kababa." (I'm sorry my sister.)

No!

Why is he saying this to me?

Moses: "Why are you sorry Jonas? Where is my baby?"

Jonas and Mhambi are standing with their heads bowed, they fail to look into my eyes. This could only mean one thing.

Me: "NOMBULELO!!! Oh Nkosi yami." (Oh my God.)

I scream as I drop to my knees in the middle of the room, my heart shatters into a million pieces. Not my baby, not my baby.

Moses: "Hayi, hayi." (No, no.)

He carries his hands on his head.

NARRATED\*

Mbuso's parent's house

Being a house wife is all that Dorothy has ever known, her life basically revolves around Muzi her husband. Muzi brought home the bacon while Dorothy stayed home and raised their son Mbuso.

Not once in her life has Dorothy pointed an accusatory finger at her husband. To her, he was perfect in his own way. He made her feel like she was the only woman his heart will ever know and she always found comfort in that. To say Muzi is the snake who tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden would be an understatement.

The man knows how to polish his shoes well and keep them shiny for days on end hence, Dorothy failed to see his mistakes, the same love residing in her heart coated her eyes, making it impossible for her to see Muzi for who he really is. An adulterer, a smooth talker and sly bastard who knows how to get his way through anything.

Muzi knows his wife like the back of his hand, he knows what makes her tick and what pushes her off the roof.

He loves her, no doubt about that but, life with Dorothy has become boring. Wake up, eat and sleep, same routine every day.

He needed a rollercoaster ride, an adrenalin rush and Nomasonto proved to be that and more for him.

She's become a drug to him, an addiction and he doesn't want rehab. Dorothy, the only woman he has ever loved has taken a back seat in his life. Her feelings don't seem to matter to him anymore.

Muzi strolls into the bedroom he has shared with his wife their whole life at 2:30 am, as if walking into a clothing store. He gives Dorothy one short stare and she knows that he will not give an explanation for his whereabouts. It's been over four hours since she sat on that bed reading her bible. It has to have answers for her, answers as to why her beloved has suddenly become this person she fails to recognize. Why the devil has entered her house.

Dorothy: "You're home?"

It's not a given.

What else can she say to him? He has become a stranger that she struggles to have a conversation with him. Their dialogue only consists of salutations.

Muzi: "Yebo." (Yes.)

He replies, barely looking at her as he changes into a pair of sleep wear. She wants to ask him where he was, she has been wanting to ask since his time schedule changed. Although wanting her husband home with her all the time, 10pm was more suitable for her. Now that he gets home in the wee hours of the morning, it hurts more than she could admit.

How does she tell him that he's hurting her?

Her phone rings, it's an unknown number.

Dorothy: "Hello."

Muzi leers at her as her tone alarms him, wide-eyed, she glances at him and whispers.

Dorothy: "Mbuso."

MBUSO\*

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered here to lay to rest a daughter, a sister, and a friend Nombulelo Mngoma."

The pastor's proclamation pricks my heart. The sun is blazing hot and there is a bit of wind that

throws the dust of this grave yard around.

I never dreamt that I would hear those words in my life. My heart is shattered in pieces, the pain is suffocating and I can't breathe. The cries of her mother are the loudest, Petunia is comforting her while her father is trying to be strong as he fights the tears that occasionally fall from his eyes. Amara has her face hidden on Randall's chest, soft sobs emitting from her. Sethu and Ayize are with Styles and Neo. Their faces are coated with sadness.

I leer at this coffin in front of me and I can't see her in there. In my mind she's at home waiting for me not in this coffin.

I have cried a river and the tears are still flowing. My heart is gone, she is gone.

Me: "Why Lelo? Why did you do this to me? How do I live without you? We were so busy with life that you forgot to teach me how to live without you."

I drop to my knees in front of the casket, I want to open it and take her out of there.

Me: "We had so much to live for my love. How can life be so cruel?"

Someone pulls me back as I cling to the coffin.

"Mbuso, vuka." (Wake up.)

This voice sounds so far, I raise my eyes to the sky and the sun blinds me, forcing me to cover them.

"Mbuso vuka ndodana." (Wake up son.)

My father's voice calls out to me, my eyes sluggishly open to meet my father's concerned look.

Dad: "You were crying in your sleep."

He reveals.

As I scan the room with my eyes, I realize that I'm in a hospital room. The first thought that comes to mind is Lelo.

Me: "Baba. Where is Lelo?"

I lose all hope to the sound of his heavy sigh.

To be continued...

BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

UNEDITED \*

153\*

MBUSO\*

I came out of the accident with minor injuries, I am not too sure about Lelo. My father has not said anything yet, I can't help but think the worst. After that dream I had, it felt so real and I can still see the casket.

Me: "Baba, I want to see her. I want to see Lelo."

If my desperation could stand before me in a human form, it would. My heart beats for that girl and I don't know what I would do if she were to die.

Dad: "I don't know how to tell you this ndodana." (My son.)

I'm a doctor and this is not how we break news to people. He should come out and say it.

My mother walks in just as I'm about to question my father.

Mom: "My son. You're awake."

She stands on the other side of the bed.

Me: "Were you with Lelo? How is she?"

She is all I can think about and my parents don't seem to understand how desperate I am.

Me: "How is Lelo, mom?"

I push my body up to a sitting posture, dad sends his hand to help me. This is not the help I want, I need someone to tell me that the woman I love is alive.

Mom: "I'm going to call the doctor."

She completely ignores me and rushes out of the door.

Lelo is probably okay, she has to be okay.

Me: "At least tell me that she's alive, please tell me that Lelo is alive baba."

I am asking and I'm not sure I'm ready to hear the answer. My father places his hand on my shoulder.

Are they trying to drive me crazy? Because that's how it feels. I can literally feel my heart pounding against my chest, it's almost suffocating.

Dad: "She is in surgery. The doctors haven't said much yet, they wouldn't tell us anything because we are not family. But, I think it's bad son."

He says in a modest tone.

Me: "Okay, if she's in surgery then she's going to be okay."

I'm trying to convince myself, I can't afford to think negative. The look on his face is not comforting. Why the secrecy?

Dad: "Let's wait for your mother to come back with the doctor."

It's official I will not be getting anything from him, it does not take a while for my mother to come back with the doctor.

Me: "Namhla?"

She smiles, while striding in.

Namhla: "How are you feeling?"

Me: "Fine. How is Lelo?"

Namhla: "She's still in surgery. Has anyone contacted her next of kin?"

She's asking my father.

Me: "Why?"

Namhla: "Nombulelo was injured on the abdomen and due to that, the placenta erupted. This causes a great risk to both the baby and the mother."

Me: "It can't be that big of a risk, I know mothers who carried the foetus till full form."

Namhla: "Mbuso, its not a slight placental abruption, it's a complete detachment and as a doctor you should know the possible fatal consequences it has to the mother and the foetus."

I know, I also know that Lelo is strong.

Me: "What do you need her family for?"

Namhla: "She might not make it, we have to remove the baby."

She proclaims and I refuse to believe her.

Me: "No."

I grunt in anger.

Mom: "Mbuso?"

Namhla: "She will die if we don't remove the baby."

She tells me something that I am aware of and refuse to accept.



Me: "You don't know Lelo, I have seen the storm she came out of. I have seen the demons she fought and came out victorious. Unless you're talking about a different Lelo, don't tell me that you want to kill her baby."

Mom: "It's not up to you Mbuso, it's up to her family. They will decide what they do with their daughter."

She utters and her speech means nothing to me.

Me: "I don't care."

Namhla: "I'm sorry Mbuso but your mother is right, the decision is not yours to make. If her family gives us a go ahead to remove the foetus, we will have to."

I have no idea how I'm going to stop them.

Me: "You people are not listening to me, I said no one will touch Lelo. I will fight her family if I have to."

Dad: "This is not your battle to fight, her family has every right over her."

Mom: "Lelo is not your wife."

Why are they telling me things I don't want to hear?

Me: "Don't tell me that mom."

Whose side is she on?

Namhla: "You will have to be strong."

I know what she means by this.

Me: "Where are my clothes?"

I shift, ready to get out of bed.

Namhla: "You can't discharge yourself."

Me: "I'm a doctor, I can."

Mom: "Oh my son, don't do this please."

She pleads.

Me: "I can't sit here, Lelo needs me."

I have to keep a close eye on her.

Styles and Randall stroll in the room and all eyes fall on them.

Namhla: "Think about what I said Mbuso."

She gives instructions before toddling out.



Me: "Mom, baba. Please excuse us."

I follow their movements until they shut the door behind them.

STYLES\*

Me: "How are you doing man?"

He looks like hell.

Mbuso: "I'm not okay."

He scratches his head with this response.

Randall: "At least they are minor injuries, you'll live."

Randall doesn't know how to comfort a person.

Mbuso: "How, when Lelo is at death's door."

Me: "What do you mean?"

Mbuso: "There are complications with the baby and they have to remove it to save her life."

A tear falls out of his left eye, he lets it and instantly his right eye joins in on this rain.

Mbuso: "What will I tell her when she wakes up and asks about her baby?"

He sniffs.

I notice how he's trying to be strong.

Randall: "I feel your pain Mbuso, if there's anything we can do please don't hesitate."

He pats Mbuso's shoulder.

Mbuso: "I have this unfathomable love for Goku guys and I need to keep him alive. I know that Lelo's family will not understand, they haven't bonded with the baby yet and they will choose to save Lelo."

Me: "So you would rather save the baby?"

He sighs.

Mbuso: "I want to save them both, there is a possibility that the baby will survive. I need help in keeping her family away from her, I know already what their decision is. They won't spare Goku."

I understand Mbuso's view, he is a man who wants to save his family. I would do the same for Sethu.

Randall: "What do you want us to do?"





Randall is gript in wanting to help Mbuso.

Me: "Yeah, anything you need and we're here bro."

I see tears in his eyes.

Mbuso: "I know it's not going to be easy, I am willing to fight anyone who stands in my way. I want my family back and I will need help in keeping her family away from her. They will fight me and possibly take me to court."

Me: "Are you ready for that?"

Mbuso: "To save them? I am ready for anything."

Me: "Okay, I'll see what I can do. The family is here, if the doctor gets to them first. They will give consent."

Randall: "We'll just have to stop them from signing those consent forms."

Mbuso; "How do we do that?"

Mbuso raises his eyebrows as he notices the smirk on my face.

Randall: "I know that look, your light bulb just went on, didn't it?"

He of all people should know.

Me: "I have a plan."

Randall sniggers at my announcement.

Randall: "Those magical words."

Mbuso: "What is it?"

Me: "Get a marriage certificate to prove that Lelo is your wife and you have every right over her. If it's proven then there's nothing they can do about it."

Mbuso does not seem too keen on the idea. I forgot how he likes to play by the rules.

Mbuso: "How will we do that?"

He's thinking with his heart not his head, hence the question.

Me: "Leave it to me, I'll get you two married by morning."

I love this idea, I turn to Randall. He's scowling at me, he knows that I can pull this off.

Me: "I know you like my face Randy but, tell me what you think."

He snickers.

Randall: "I love it, I'm just wondering how your brain can work so fast. My mind was still buffering, trying to find a way out."

Mbuso: "I still ask. How do we do that Styles?"

Me: "And I still say, leave it to me."

Randall: "I think I get what Mbuso is saying. How will you get Lelo's signature on the marriage certificate?"

These two are underestimating me.

Me: 'Honestly people, I am highly offended. And you Randy, you still question me till today.'

He raises his hand half way up as he takes a defensive posture.

Me: "Okay, do what you must."

Mbuso: "Will this work though? I doubt that her family will believe that we are married. They will want to know why they were never told about it."

If Mbuso continues to worry like this, he will never resolve anything.

Me: "How many people get married at home affairs every day?"

Randall: "I say you don't owe them an explanation, her family is noxious. That fat pig Moses piques me, he doesn't deserve to be a father. I don't know what I will do if I see him here."

He growls.

Speaking of Moses, Amara is outside this door with Neo and the girls. Bringing her here meant exposing her to him and it's not clear how she will take it.

Mbuso: "I agree but, her uncles are strict."

Randall: "The younger one is okay. It's the one they call Jonas who is a pain in the ass."

He states.

I am yet to meet this Jonas guy.

Me: "I will handle Jonas, as for you Mbuso, you need to prepare for battle. Her family will not take this sudden marriage lightly."

He nods positively, agreeing with my declaration.

Mbuso: "Thank you, I know Lelo has not been good to you Randall. I apologize on her behalf."

Randall: "She is Amara's cousin, you and I are friends. I mean we've had our ups and downs but we look out for each other man. I've got your back, anything you need. Styles and I are here."

I'd be damned. Way to go Amara.

SETHU\*

Something happened with Ayize, she is too quiet and Neo has not left her side. He follows her like her shadow, I still have to break the news to her.

Styles and Randall have been in Mbuso's room for a while now, we haven't heard anything about Lelo. Amara has zoned out, she hasn't said a word. All she does is cry, this stress is not good for the baby. It's an early pregnancy and stressing causes a risk to the baby.

Me: "Let's get something to drink, I think Styles and Randall will be in there longer."

I say to Amara, she is sitting with her head bowed.

Me: "Amara?"

She raises her gaze.

Amara: "I don't think we should leave, I doubt that it's safe."

I forgot that she is under watch.

Neo: "Me hemma is right Miss. S." (My queen.)

He can hear us, I thought he was lost in Ayize's eyes.

Me: "I'm glad to see that you're still with us Neo."

He feigns a smile.

Neo is usually clowning, he's different right now.

Neo: "I'll get you something to drink when Stylos and Uze come out."

Me: "That's alright Neo."

He nods before turning back to Ayize. She is staring into space, her mind is completely not here.

"Amara?"

We all turn to the female voice.

It's Lelo's mother. I have seen Pictures of her in Lelo's phone. There's a big chubby man standing next to her, he holds a look of shock. Jaw dropped and eyes widened.

The old couple that was at the party is also here, they are with an older looking man.

Amara slowly gets up from the bench.

Amara: "Aunty?"

Amara sounds just as shocked, the aunt scans her body from her head to her toes.

"So this is you?"

She cackles.

"My husband and I have been suffering kanti wena are living your best life?" But you.)

She questions in disbelief.

Mhambi: "Ntombi..."

Jonas: "You have no timing Ntombi. You seem to have forgotten why we came here. Stop this nonsense."

Ntombi: "No Jonas, you will not stop me. I want to know why this child is so heartless, we thought you were kidnapped Amara. Do you know what we have been going through since you disappeared?"

She slithers close to Amara.

Amara: "What disappearance aunty? Your husband sold me, he took me out of the house in secret while you were sleeping peacefully in your bed."

She retorts as fast as she could.

Ntombi: "My husband? Since when do you talk like that?"

Mhambi: "What is your problem Ntombi? We are here for Lelo."

Ntombi turns to Mhambi as he chastises her.

Ntombi: "Why are you not shocked Mhambi? All three of you are not surprised to see her. You tortured Moses for nothing Jonas, look at her. Look at Amara, yeey man une glow lomuntu." (She's glowing.)

She is one angry woman. She scrutinizes Amara with her stern gaze.

Ntombi: "Umithi Amara?" (Are you pregnant?)

She says. This lady has issues.

Neo: "Who are these people me hemma?" (My queen.)

Neo clogs this question.

Amara: "My family."

Neo: "Oh, this is the family Uze will have to face? Eish saan."

Ntombi: "Is this him? Is this the man who has given you this life style? Noma kee you have become a prostitute? How else can you look this clean?"

Her question shocks all of us.

Ayize: "Hiabo, ngu aunty waka bani lo?" (Whose aunt is this?)

Ayize steps in.

Neo: "Rakgadi u bitter shame, slow down nkhono, high high will kill you." (The aunt is bitter.) (Grandmother.) (High blood.)

Ntombi: "You have scored yourself a team Amara? The last time I saw you, you were in my

kitchen wearing Nombulelo's second hand clothes and..."

Ayize: "Woh! Hayi uyakhuluma mfazi, ngiyamangala nje ukuthi all these men behind you are controlled by a loud mouth like you." (You have a loud mouth woman.)

Amara: "It's okay Ayize, let her speak her heart out. I don't see her gaining anything from all this chattering."

Amara declares, her gaze is stuck on this family.

Ntombi: "Yeyi, uyadelela wena doti." (You're disrespectful nonsense.)

She's pointing at Ayize with her forefinger.

Ayize can hold her own, she doesn't need any one to come to her rescue.

Neo: "The only person who is disrespectful here is you."

Ntombi takes another ride of cackles.

Moses: "How can you be so cruel Amara? Do you know what I have been through because of you?"

He finally speaks after that long stare he was engrossed in.

Out of the blue, Jonas pushes this big man against the wall, he pins his hand on his neck.

Jonas: "Don't ever speak to her again Moses or I swear, you will lose that voice of yours."

He rumbles, Moses is throttling. He fights to breathe while trying to push Jonas off of him.

Ntombi: "Bhuti stop, what are you doing?"

She grabs hold of his hand as she tries to pull Jonas away from Moses. Jonas is unflinching, he refuses to move.

Jonas: "Try me, I dare you to try me. If you crave for my brother's company again then speak to Amara, I dare you Moses."

He is so angry.

Ayize: "Yeah, show him Mkhulu bae." (Grandpa bae.)

She adds dramatically, you wouldn't say that she's the one who was drained a while ago. This girl has a strange personality.

Neo: "He's not Mkhulu bae, ke ntate-moholo fela." (He's not grandpa bae, he's grandfather.)

Then there's Neo.

Ayize: "Nna ke bona Mkhulu bae." (I see grandpa bae.)

Her rejoinder comes with a heavy scowl that has Neo frowning.

Neo: "No Zee, no. You don't go around calling old people Mkhulu bae." (Grandpa bae.)

He's jealous, their friendship is weird. Ntombi is still fighting to help Moses. Mhambi is rambling away with his wife, I don't know where they are going.

Moses coughs vigorously as Jonas lets him go, he's battling for air.

Ntombi: "Are you okay Moses?"

I'm not sure if it's love I see in her for this Moses character or an obsession.

Jonas: "Are you okay my child?"

His question is directed to Amara who nods in response.

Ayize: "Don't worry Mkhulu bae, she's in good hands."

Neo: "Yes ntate-moholo, don't worry." (Grandfather.)

He emphasises on the word grandfather while goggling at Ayize.

Jonas is oblivious to their stupidity, he is more worried about Amara.

Moses: "That's enough, I am tired of you Jonas. You have bullied me enough. How can you take Amara's side seeing what she has done? Look at her, this girl had nothing. She was only a maid in my home, she polished my stoep, washed my clothes and cooked for me. How is it possible that she looks like this now?"

He's growling in anger, he pushes Jonas aside and grabs Amara's hand. Amara stifles a scream while trying to claim her hand back.

Amara: "Let me go."

She demands fighting for her hand to be freed.

Moses: "All of this is from selling her body."

He repeats Ntombi's insults and right after we hear a piercing loud gun shot that derives screeches from Amara and I. Moses falls on the ground, he's been shot on his thigh.

"Uze?"

Neo's voice compels us to turn around only to find a wrathful Randall pointing a gun at Moses. Styles and Mbuso are right behind him.

Ntombi: "Moses."

She screams as she sees blood streaming out of his thigh, she's lying flat on the floor, her hands covering her head. Randall is lucky it's in the early hours of the morning and the place is empty.

How do they play with guns like this?

Randall is sauntering to Moses, the look in his eyes is scary even Neo and Ayize have gone quiet. Jonas doesn't care, he moves back with an impulsive look, making way for Randall.

Amara: "Randall."

She shouts as he loads the gun.

Oh my God, he's going to kill him.

Amara: "Randall no, please."

That man does not look like Randall, the gun goes off again hitting Moses on his shoulder. He tumbles back.

Okay, this time someone will come out. A doctor or something, Randall is on a mission to kill this man.

Why is Styles not doing anything? Amara has failed to stop him, it's as if he's in a trance. I must be the only one who sees something wrong here. Ntombi has not dared to look up, she is trembling on the floor.

Me: "Styles do something, he's going to kill him."

I plead for the life of this man I do not know.

Ayize: "Sethu awuthule before they shoot you too." (Keep quiet)

I know damn well that she's enjoying this.

Amara: "Please don't kill him Randall."

Amara is afraid to come any closer.

Styles: "You're wasting your time Amara, unless you're familiar with this wrathful person then there is nothing you can do."

He speaks occasionally, this is not a movie. Randall is about to kill a man in cold blood, Moses lies defenceless on the floor. His eyes are widely leering at his attacker.

Is that Jonas walking away?

This is one strange family.

Neo: "Shit Stylos, is this..."

He carries his hands on his head as an unknown realisation hits him.

Neo: "Speak to him, only you can get to him. This is a public place Stylos, he will get in trouble."

How can I be stupid? No one will come out upon hearing gun shots, they are probably hiding under hospital beds.

Amara: "Randall, baby please, please don't do this."

She touches his hand, she wants to take the gun from him. Slowly she leads his hand down, Neo is the one to snatch the pistol from Randall. Amara wraps her arms around him while he holds on to the expressionless look.

This is too much.

What have I gotten myself into?

To be continued...

BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

Unedited\*

154\*

NTOMBI\*

My life is over, I am finished. Moses is going to die, my husband is going to die. This boy will make me a widow at this age. My brothers have abandoned me, Jonas witnessed everything and still chose to run away like a coward. He should have stood up for his brother-in-law.

Me: "What have you done?"

I shout right after the gun is taken away from this big man standing with Amara. She's holding him in her arms, this could only mean that they are a couple. Why would she hold him like that?

Me: "Amara wenzeni?" (What have you done Amara?)

I blame her.

Moses is lying on the floor next to me, he doesn't know which wound to press as his hands keep going back and forth from his injured thigh to his shoulder. I want to slide my body towards him and help him. He can be too much sometimes. How can he touch Amara after everything he did to her?

Moses: "Ntombi kubuhlungu, ngizofa Ntombi, ngizofa." (It's painful Ntombi, I'm going to die.)

He cries, his eyes reject tears that usually accompany pain.

Me: "Don't worry Moses, they will fix you, these people will fix you. Siyezwana Amara? Umyeni wami ngim'funa aphelele njenga manje." (Do you hear me? I want my husband healed now.)

She glares at me with so much hate in her eyes.

"Hehehe, impilo inzima. People are asking for death." (Life must be hard)

That brat with short red hair speaks, I don't like her. She's a loud mouth.





Me: "Yeyi wena ntombazane." (Hey girl.)

"Magriza, I would keep quiet if I were you." (Granny.)

She's threatening me.

Moses: "Ntombi yibo labo, yibo labo abathenga lengane. That white boy at the back, I remember, he gave me a bag of money. I was tricked Ntombi, they tricked me." (These people are the ones who bought Amara.)

"Hey, shut up."

The white boy booms as if trying to stop Moses from speaking further.

Moses: "Angeke ngithule, you tricked me boy. I was made to believe that you are going to sell her off." (I won't shut up.)

The young man lurches forward in an attempt to attack Moses, he's stopped by Lelo's boyfriend.

"What is he talking about Styles? Why is he saying you bought Amara from him?"

The lady with braids enquires.

Styles gives her a quick glance before turning to Moses.

"Styles, I'm talking to you."

She pushes her way through with her words.

Styles: "We'll talk about this later Sethu."

He replies without looking at her.

Moses: "Ntombi ngisize, call a doctor, I'm in pain." (Help me.)

I'm also trying to save my own skin, if I get up from here I will be killed.

"For an injured man, you talk too much."

The white boy says, the state of his anger is terrifying. Moses wants to get himself Killed.

Me: "Moses thula." (Quiet.)

Moses: "What's the point? I am dead anyway, look at me Ntombi. Buka ukuthi ungenzeni uAmara." (Look what Amara has done to me.)

He doesn't finish his words as the sound of a gunshot quiets him.

Moses: "Ntombi!!!"

He cries as he ducks, the bullet misses his head by an inch.

I saw this coming when the man, standing next to Amara snatched the gun back from the boy beside him. We're back to square one, they are shooting at Moses again.

Amara: "Randall."

That's his name, even a blind man can tell that she loves this man.

Randall: "I dare you to utter her name again."

He grumbles while pointing the pistol at my husband.

Me: "Hau kodwa mkhwenyane, sesizofela igama nje?" (Are we going to die because of calling her name?)

Moses is gobsmacked, he's crying now. His big mouth is getting him into trouble again.

Moses: "I'm sorry, please."

He implores for his life.

Me: "Amara, ngiyacela ngane yami, khuluma no muntu wakho. Uzobulala umnyeni wami." (Please speak to your man, he's going to kill my husband.)

Life will humble you, today I am on the floor grovelling before this girl for the life of my husband.

She gives me a death stare.

Moses: "Lalela u aunty..." (Listen to your aunt.)

Me: "Moses wait, I'm trying to sort this out. You will get us killed."

He is such a halfwit, he has not stopped growling in pain and he's sweltering. His clothes are damp from the sweat on his body and yet he's tempting death.

Randall: "Moses, Moses."

The smirk on his face makes my blood run cold.

Randall: "Didn't you know that this day was coming?"

He says calmly.

Amara is dating a crazy man.

Moses: "I didn't do anything, please I don't want to die."

Will he stop crying? It makes him seem weak.

Amara: "Let him be Randall, he's not worth it."

She tries to lure the gun away.

Me: "Yes Randall, he's not worth it. He's a stupid man who doesn't know anything."

Moses: "Ntombi."

Idiot, I'm trying to save his life.

Amara: "Put the gun down please."

Randall: "Amara wait."

He snaps, slightly shoving her to the side.

Amara: "What will happen to you if you kill him? I am not going to raise our kids alone Randall, I swear I will not do that."

What kids?

Nothing sits well with me here. Amara has children with this man. How and when? It's barely a year since she went missing.

Randall: "Don't use that card with me, Amara."

He utters over gritted teeth.

Amara: "I am serious, look at me Randall."

He keeps his gaze on my poor Moses.

Amara: "Styles speak to him, he listens to you."

She's giving up, she can't give up on my husband.

Me: "Hayi ngiyacela mkhwenyane, please spare my husband for me." (Please son in-law.)

Randall: "Who the fuck are you?"

I scream and duck as he turns his cold eyes to me thinking he's going to shoot.

Moses: "Dokotela." (Doctor.)

He begins to shout, I don't see anyone coming to our rescue.

Me: "Moses man."

If Moses is ready to die I am not.

Me: "I am Amara's aunt, I raised her when her parents died. Look at her mkhwenyane, she is this big because of me. This is the least you can do for us." (Son in-law)

I am wasting my time, his target is Moses. He refuses to look at me.

Sethu: "Styles do something, this is a hospital. People have probably heard the gun shots."

She looks as terrified as I am.

"Sethu, you're boring yazi. Wait a little, this is better than Generations. I want to see if Randy baby will shoot aunty too, I'm telling you Indian shows have nothing on this. Kuyanyiwa la." (Shit is happening.)

As for that little devil with the red hair, God will punish her.

I should have ran with Jonas. Why did I stay behind?

Is Moses worth losing my life?

Amara: "Let's go home Randall."

She has her hand on his lower arm as she fights to save our lives.

Amara: "Liyana is waiting for us baby, please take me home."

His eyes soften in a second, he drops his hand. Amara clenches her eyes as she lets out a hefty sigh, she pulls him into her arms.

I want to ask her about the kids she speaks of.

Is she pregnant or raising this man's kids?

AMARA\*

Seeing Moses lying in his own blood gives me a kind of satisfaction I can't explain, it might not be the justice I want for me but, it will do. Never in my wildest dreams did I anticipate that Randall would go this far, I was dazed when I spun to see the peculiar guise he held. I understood what Styles meant when he spoke of being familiar with the wrathful Randall. I have seen him, I lived with him the first few months I was brought to his house.

As I hold him in my arms in this millisecond, his body stiff against mine, a question lies with me. Will he come back from this jaunt he has taken?

Me: "Baby?"

I rest the tips of my fingers on his clinched jaw, his cold eyes decline me access to his soul. I can't see anything, it's completely blank. With a wrinkle on his forehead indicating a dose of concern that comes with anger, the vein in the middle of his forehead starts to throb

Me: "Randall look at me please."

His gaze is on me but, these are not the eyes of my Randall. Laying my hand on his chest on his chest, I feel the thud of his heart beat. The rate increases with every thump, his muscles are tense.

Me: "Say something."

The rise and fall of his chest stands evidence of the level of his rage, gnashing teeth and squinting eyes, he holds my shoulders and gently pushes me to the side. His gaze instantly falls on the wounded man who's groaning in pain.

"It came from this side."

A male voice echoes from the corridor, it must be the security.

Neo: "Shit, we have to clean up fast."

He says panicking.

Randall: "Amara step back, don't move from here."

He gives a command in a dead pan voice, I look back as a duo of arms cling on my shoulders. Ayize is behind me, and her touch is comforting.

Within a minuscule Randall is lurched over Moses, he clutches his arms and begins to pull him towards a door.

Moses: "Ntombi, ngisize. Ngisize Ntombi." (Help me Ntombi.)

He howls.

He appears to be losing a battle to articulation.

Me: "Randall, what are you doing?"

Not again, I have worked so hard trying to calm him down.

The hand that just grabbed mine belongs to a man, twisting my head back, I find Styles, he shakes his head. He doesn't want me to stop Randall.

Me: "He's going to kill him."

Styles: "He's not."

He assures me and I have no choice but to trust him.

Randall sends his foot back to open the door to lug in Moses.

Ntombi: "Moses."

She cries out loud before collapsing. Is she that afraid of losing her husband?

Ayize: "Magriza has fainted." (Granny.)

She claps her hands as she expresses in excitement.

Sethu: "I think we should help her."

Ayize: "Well I think you need to go home and sleep, stop being a turn off Sethu."

Ayize finds this normal, I know Randall and Styles play with guns, like a child would a toy but, to do it in public. They will definitely get in trouble.

Styles: "Neo take care of this."

He gives Neo his instructions to clean up Moses blood as he lugs Ntombi as well, Mbuso follows after them.

Sethu: "Styles."

Ayize smashes her hand on Sethu's mouth shutting her up, Sethu slants her head back to move away from her.

Sethu: "Ayize?"

Ayize: "Don't be that girlfriend Sethu, keep your mouth shut. We'll tackle this when we get home."

Sethu: "What they are doing is wrong."

Ayize: "Would you rather those people insult Amara? You heard the nasty things they were saying to her. They deserve worse."

I agree with Ayize, my uncle is evil and I don't care what happens to him. I wouldn't want Randall to get into trouble with the law, though.

Like I had thought, two security guards appear from the corner, their walk is not assuring as they tread slowly down the corridor.

Neo: "Here comes those two idiots."

He proclaims as if he knows them.

Sethu: "What are we going to say to them?"

Sethu is terrified.

Neo: "I'll handle it, please Miss. S don't give anything away."

Ayize laughs at his request.

Sethu: "Why me?"

Ayize: "Because you're the only one who's a coward here."

The guards approach, Neo is almost done cleaning up the blood. Being the smart person he is, he should have an explanation for this.

"What's going on here?"

We leer at him while waiting for Neo to give an answer.

Ayize: "What do you mean?"

Ayize will never rid of her rudeness.

Ayize: "This is a hospital, you don't just ask people what's going on. Can you respect us? We have a friend who is fighting for her life in there and nina nizosibuza udoti. Is it because we're standing in a group?" (You're asking us shit.)

Ayize is angered by these guards.

"I'm sorry mam, we wanted to ask if you heard gunshots?"

She stifles a sob, tears run down her cheeks. I didn't think that she liked Lelo this much.

Ayize: "Usaqhubeka bhuti ngemibuzo yakho?" (You're still asking us questions?)

Neo: "Ntwana, just go. You're only upsetting her further. She will report you and I'm sure you don't want to lose your jobs." (Boy.)

Neo adds as he pushes the bloodied cloth in his back pocket.

"Eish! Sorry."

The security guard sends his apology.

Neo: "Yeah, we're also sorry. We didn't hear any gun shots, check the other hall."

He's playing this well.

The guards nod before they stride away, in all conscience I thought that Ayize was upset, seeing her laugh has left me stunned.

Ayize: "Tau."

She points at Neo while laughing her heart out.

Neo: "Karabo."

They burst out laughing.

What just happened?

Me: "I need to see if Randall is okay."

Neo: "Uze will be back me hemma." (My queen.)

Me: "What are they going to do to them?"

Neo: "Don't worry about that. You guys have seen enough for today."

Ayize: "I don't know about these two but, I still want to see more."

She declares as she marches towards the entrance where Randall and Styles disappeared to.

Neo: "Zee, stop."

She pauses with a frown on her face and treads back to her position. At first I thought I was seeing things but, Sethu has been glaring at me since Randall and Styles went into that room. It's getting uncomfortable, honestly.

Me: "What is it?"

I have to ask.

Sethu: "Is it true?"

Her soft voice is not loud enough for Neo and Ayize to hear.

Me: "What is"

I know what she's talking about.

Sethu: "Randall and Styles bought you."

If Styles didn't mention it to her then, who am I to do so?"

Me: "They didn't, they saved my life from that evil man, my uncle."

Sethu: "But, he said that Styles handed him a bag of money."

Sethu can be persistent, she will not let this go.

Me: "I think you should speak to Styles if you have any more questions. What I'm telling you is God's honest truth."

Sethu: "Are you sure?"

I will not give an answer, I have told her what I know.

STYLES\*

This hospital room has a bed and the equipment to treat Moses, that's if Randall wants him treated. His mind takes a different turn when it comes to Amara's safety. It was in a split second after we exited Mbuso's room and found Moses all over Amara, the gun went off before I could blink. You would think that Randall would be cautious and drag Moses outside or to an isolated place but no, Randall shoots a man at a hospital.

Me: "What have you done Randall?"

The self-satisfied smirk playing on his face sends cold chills down my spine.

Mbuso: "What's the plan?"

Randall and I glance at Mbuso, he's curiously standing in the door way.

Me: "Normally you would tell us to stop before running away like a little bitch."

He chortles while striding in.

Mbuso: "Lelo and Goku are my number one priority."

He knows what he's getting himself into.

Randall: "There's no plan, we're going to leave him here."

Me: "I thought you brought him here to finish him off."

Randall: "Fuck bruh, there were witnesses. I don't trust Jonas to shut his mouth."

I don't trust him either.



Mbuso: "So, we're letting him go?"

The enthusiasm he has worries me.

Me: "It seems like it."

Randall: "Killing this fucker will be so easy, I want him to suffer first. His days are numbered."

Me: "What happened to you back there?"

Randall: "I lost it when I saw his hands clutched on Amara."

He grumbles.

Me: "This man is one brave pig."

Randall: "There's a difference between bravery and stupidity."

Both Moses and his wife are stupid.

Mbuso: "What about Lelo? What will I do while I wait for the certificate?"

Lelo is his only worry.

Me: "You're a doctor, I'm sure you can think of something."

Mbuso: "What Styles?"

He panics.

Panicking won't help him.

Randall: "I'm taking Amara home. You two will be okay?"

Me: "What about that pig?"

He smirks.

Randall: "Don't worry about him, I have seen his end."

Me: "I have taught you well hey, you don't reveal your plans now."

Randall: "Moses' fight is with me, I will deal with him."

I know it's been long overdue.

Randall: "We'll see you tomorrow man, be strong."

He pats Mbuso's shoulder.

Mbuso: "Thanks."

And with this word Randall saunters out.

Me: "I can make a court document stating that the judge has given you rights over Lelo and the baby and nothing should be done to them without your consent."

It should hold them off a bit.

Mbuso: "Okay, where will you get the document at this time?"

Me: "A digital one will do."

A sense of relief washes over him.

Mbuso: "This better work Styles."

Me: "It will relax and stop being a coward. We need to deal with those two."

I say as I twirl to ogle at Moses and his wife.

Mbuso: "I can keep him sedated."

Me: "Great idea. Will you be able to do that every day? We need to keep him asleep, I think he holds a greater threat than the wife. He's desperate to make amends with his daughter after ousting her out of his house. The mother can be easily bought."

He sneers as his face holds a flood of questions.

Mbuso: "How do you know all that?"

Me: "I make it my job to find out about my enemies."

Mbuso: "Yours or Randall's enemies?"

He won't be able to understand.

Me: "Randall and I fight the same battles."

Mbuso: "Well I guess we're fighting the same enemies now. Lelo's parents."

He turns to face them.

Me: "The lady will be sorted when she wakes up, I'll send someone to have a talk with her. She won't utter a word about any of this."

Mbuso: "Okay, that's good. I'll transfer to this hospital for a week or two just until we have sorted Moses out."

Me: "Be careful Mbuso."

Lest he blows his cover.

Mbuso: "I will."

Me: "I have to go man, I have some explaining to do. Your father in-law revealed some dark secrets today."

Mbuso: "I'm sure Sethu will understand."

I can only hope so, you never know with Sethu.

Me: "Women are unpredictable."

He sniggers, Sethu sees the world differently. If she were to find out half of the things I have done in my life, she would leave me with no hesitation at all.

MKHIZE\*

"MAMA!!! MAMA!!!"

Wait!

That's Zwelethu's voice, he's wailing loudly at 6am in the morning.

Me: "MaSibiya vuka." (Wake up.)

I elbow her as I hurdle out of the bed and reach for my morning gown.

MaSibiya: "Haibo, yilizwi lika Zwe." (It's Zwe's voice.)

She proclaims in a hurry, she's out the door before me. We follow the loud cries of my son. I can see him from here, he's trying to hold some one up while scream crying. That person is hanging on the roof, taking a closer look my heart explodes. MaDlamini has hung herself.

MaSibiya: "Hayi, hayi Jehova yini kodwa." (God, why?)

She throws herself on the floor screaming.

Zwe: "Baba, umama." (Dad, it's mom.)

He wails with tears rolling down his face.

Me: "MaDlamini? Sika, Sika."

I boom as I rush to help Zwelethu.

Me: "MaDlamini wenzeni?" (What have you done?)

Sika comes running, he pushes Zwelethu to the side. We manage to pull her down and lie her body on the floor. I think she killed herself at night while everyone was sleeping.

Her skin is pale, her eyes are wide and her tongue is hanging out. She messed on herself probably a couple of times, the smell hovers around.

MaSibiya: "MaDlamini yindaba? Yindaba usenza kanje?" (Why did you do this to us?)

My body fails me, I drop down to the floor, I can't control my tears.

Me: "What have you done mkami? What have you done?" (My wife.)

Zwe: "Baba, uma usishiyile." (Mom has left us.)

Zwelethu cries like a child, I am such a failure. My son found his mother hanging on the ceiling, I should have been vigilant. I should have kept an eye on her.

The living room is crowded in no time, the other two wives and my kids are here. Lamentation becomes the order of the morning.

Zwelethu: "This is all your fault baba, you killed her. Ubulal' uma." (You killed my mother.)

He's carrying his hands on his head at this saying.

How could I have known that she would take her own life?

Me: "Sika yini le, ngenzeni engaka empilweni? Kufanele ngijeziswe izono zami, hayi umdeni wami. Not my family Sika, hayi umdeni wami." (What wrong have I done that I have to be punished like this. I should be punished for my sins not my family.)

I feel suffocated as I leer at MaDlamini's cold dead body. She was once a strong woman. Why did she fall prey to weakness?

Zwelethu: "Mama do something please, do something mama. I can't take this pain in my heart."

He cries while kneeling at MaDlamini's feet.

MaSibiya: "Oh Zwelethu mfana wami. What can I do? She's gone, your mother has left us." (My boy.)

Me: "Ngicela ningixolele, Zweli ndodana. Ubaba uyaxolisa, ngixolele." (Please forgive me my son. Dad is sorry.)

So much anger resides in his eyes as he scowls at me, while rising up.

Zwe: "Angeke ngikuxolele baba, ngiyakuzonda ngenhliziyo yami yonke." (I will never forgive you dad, I hate you with all my heart.)

He articulates in a loud voice.

MaSibiya: "Zwelethu Mkhize."

She roars at him.

Zwe: "Yiqiniso ma, ngiyam'zonda ubaba. I will never forgive him, he was busy chasing his own things. He abandoned his family, mama would be alive right now." (It's the truth, I hate dad.)

Me: "Ngiyacela Zweli, ungangilahli. Ubaba uyakudinga boy." (Don't abandon me, I need you.)

If crying these tears will help me in this case then, I will cry. I can't lose my son.

MaSibiya: "Your mother was sick Zwe, her sickness led her to this decision."

I am to blame for her death, I neglected her.

Zwe: "I don't need him, you don't deserve to be a father. You're evil Mkhize and heartless."

He wipes his tears as he pricks thousands of needles on my heart with his words. MaSibiya jolts

up, she rushes to him and one slap from her sends him to the floor.

Zwelethu leers up at her, tears run down his cheeks.

MaSibiya: "Nguyihlo lo okhuluma naye. Show respect." (That's your father you're talking to.)

She chides him with her forefinger pointed at him. Zwelethu gets up, he's holding so much anger for a child.

Zwe: "Ngiyahamba ma." (I'm leaving mom.)

He announces softly.

MaSibiya shakes her head.

Zwe: "This is why Nkomo left, ubaba failed to be a father." (Dad.)

Me: "My son listen to me."

Zwe: "You will never see me again ma, I am leaving."

MaSibiya yelps as Zwe starts to walk away.

MaSibiya: "Zwelethu unгахambi, ungishiya nobani Zwe? Ungangishiyi ndodana." (Don't go please, don't leave me.)

Me: "Zweli my son."

I call out to him while the whole family cries in agony, we can't lose two people in one day.

Me: "Sika."

I grab his arm, there's a tightening on my chest, a severe pain clutches my left side and my heart feels like it's about to pop out of my chest.

Sika: "Baba."

He stoops before me as my body sinks to the floor.

MaSibiya: "Baba."

She rushes to me along with the other wives, I think I'm having a heart attack. The pain deprives me of air, I spot Zwelethu on the path way. He's gawking at me, the wrath is still visible in his eyes. I want to tell him not to leave me but, I can't speak.

MaSibiya: "Zwelethu your father is having a heart attack."

I need him, I will be nothing without my son. The pain intensifies as he rushes out the door without a care that I could be dying.

STYLES\*

Sethu keeps stealing glances at me, I know that she has some questions for me. Moses had to open his big mouth, I'm always quick on my feet and I don't know how I slipped today. There are so many things I would rather keep hidden from her and this is one of them. We're driving home, its dawn. Neo and Ayize are following behind us in her car.

Me: "Is there something you need to get off your chest?"

It's better to talk it through now before we get home.

Sethu: "Was Amara's uncle telling the truth?"

She doesn't waste time.

Me: "About what? He said a lot of things."

Sethu: "You know what I'm talking about, you and Randall..."

Me: "Do you think that I'm capable of human trafficking Sethu?"

I'm waiting for a reply, her gaze is lost outside the window.

Me: "Well?"

I need to hear her answer.

Sethu: "I don't know."

Me: "Give me something I can work with here, 'I don't know' says nothing."

I love Sethu and I am not risking this relationship even if it means that I have to keep secrets from her.

Sethu: "The house Styles, the life style. Where does it come from? You can't possibly be making so much from the logistics company."

She is right but....

Me: "Why now?"

I take my eyes off the road for a while, her eyes are glued to me.

Sethu: "What do you mean?"

Me: "Why are you asking me about my lifestyle now? Why not when we first started out?"

I like quick answers, they let me know that the person didn't think hard about the response.

Sethu: "I don't know."

She retorts softly.

Me: "That's not an answer Sethu."

Sethu: "What do you want me to say? It suddenly came up, I guess."

Me: "When we first met, I had a gun in my hand. A bullet hole on my abdomen and snakes scattered all over the hospital. You know the kind of life I live Sethu, you knew when we started out. I want to know why you're asking about it now."

Sethu: "I don't know Styles okay. What Amara's uncle said, got to me. The fact that, you're capable of purchasing a human being."

Me: "I'm capable of murderer and you know that too well. What's different about this?"

She lets out a sigh.

Sethu: "Don't say that to me, Styles."

The words evade from her lips and all I hear is doubt.

Me: "Tell me what's on your mind kitten, I want to know what you're thinking."

Another sigh claims her breath.

Me: "I'm not losing you, Sethu."

I let her know, her silence is scaring me.

Me: "Did you hear what I said?"

I repeat due to her gnawing quietness.

Sethu: "I heard you."

Me: "And?"

Sethu: "I'm not going anywhere."

That's what I like to hear.

Me: "To answer your question, we paid for Amara's freedom and no I'm not into human trafficking. You should know me by now, I have been open with you from day one and I have no reason to lie to you."

Sethu: "Why didn't you tell me about Amara?"

Me: "It's not my place to tell."

If Amara felt a need to tell her then she would have.

Sethu: "Promise me that, you won't hide anything from me again."

I can't make such a promise, however...

Me: "I won't."

There are things that I can't share with her.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

155\*

SETHU\*

I can hear Neo and Ayize laughing in the kitchen, she's the loudest and sounds very happy. Telling her about dad will only ruin her mood, I have to, though. Dad is sick and we have to see him, it sounded urgent.

I clench my eyes at the feel of Styles' arms around me, he burrows his face on my neck and places a wet kiss that has my heart racing and leaves a tingling feeling on my stomach. I just finished taking a bath and getting ready for the day, I decided to skip work today so I can go see the parents.

Me: "What are you doing?"

My breath has run out of the park.

Styles: "Kissing the woman I love."

He replies with more kisses.

Me: "I need to speak to Ayize."

Styles: "About what?"

He slides his hands up to my breast and seizes them now, I can't think of anything else. My mind is beginning to betray me.

Me: "My father is sick."

I say.

This ought to get him off of me, I'm still upset with him for...

Why am I upset with him again?

I can't recall because these kisses are just....

Gosh!

Styles: "What's wrong with him?"

Okay, you can back off now, we're talking about my father while your face is buried on my neck and your hands rubbing on my breast.

Does he expect me to have a normal conversation with him like this?



Me: "Styles."

I don't understand his question, his name is the only thing that manages to derive out of me and a whisper at that.

Styles: "What's wrong with your father?"

And we're still talking about my father.

This is getting awkward.

Oh!!! I'm being turned around now.

My cheeks fall quarry to the palms of his hands.

Me: "I don't know what's wrong with him, he wants to see us."

He is drawing in as he says this.

Styles: "Do you think she will go?"

He is literally an inch away from my lips that, are ready to taste his. There is no space in my mind for his question, I don't have an answer for him. I know it but, it's not there.

Why is he not kissing me?

My lips are parted, sending him that SOS message.

He's teasing me or taking his time. Whichever one, I'm getting annoyed.

I open my eyes to find him staring at me with a smirk on his face, this complacent attitude of his....

Nx!

Me: "What happened?"

I'm not really confused, let's make him think I am.

Styles: "I'm waiting kitten."

He speaks softly.

Im also waiting, for you to kiss me.

You can't arouse these feelings in me and make me wait.

Torture.

Me: "Shouldn't we be doing something else?"

Talking about my father is not it.

He grins.

He enjoys seeing me suffer. If anyone knows a way in how to torture a man, hit me up. I am

being tormented here.

Styles: "Go speak to your sister."

Say what now?

He steps away from me.

No you didn't.

My blood pressure is up, my heart is sky diving, blood is surging through my veins and I'm on fire as my body is pulsating with heat.

I lean back against a dressing table, my knees have gone south. I'd fall if I don't think wise.

Me: "You want me to go and speak to Ayize?"

Just to confirm.

I'm not stupid, let's get this out of the way.

Styles: "Yes, you said you want to speak to your sister."

I also said I'm wet and I want you.

I didn't... But, I am and I do want him.

Me: "You want me to go now?"

Okay...

Maybe I am stupid... He gives me a nod as he settles down on the edge of the bed.

It's been proven, signed, sealed and delivered. Styles Sishi likes seeing me suffer.

Should I beg for it now? He started the game.

Styles: "Are you okay Kitten?"

The look on his face right now...

He's good at this acting thing. Let's give him that.

Me: "Yeah."

Dammit, this clog on my throat. I'm obliged to make that grunting sound, I must clear it out.

Me: "I'm okay."

Truthfully, I am not.

Styles: "Okay, I'll nap for a while. I have to go back to the hospital later, Mbuso is alone."

He lies back on the bed, his legs dangling on the floor.

Nap?

He wants to nap?

What do I do with myself?

Me: "Fine, you nap and I'll go and see Ayize."

I'm frustrated.

Sexually?

Hell yeah.

Did this man just chortle?

He chortled.

The impertinence.

Relax Sethu, you're a woman in control, you can get what you want.

Darn it....

Let me get out of here lest he thinks I'm a sex addict.

With my tail between my legs, I begin to toddle towards the door. I am getting out of this room, it's hot anyway and its his fault.

Me: "Stupid."

I drone.

Styles: "What was that?"

If you didn't hear, it means I wasn't talking to you.

I swivel as fast as the word I just muffled.

Me: "Nothing babe, I love you."

This smile is as fake as the word itself.

Styles: "Mmmhhh."

And then?

That look?

Styles: "I love you too."

I'm only getting a smile, I guess.

See my life.

Now I need to convince Ayize, which is by far the most impossible thing at the moment. Girl distastes that old couple.



Now that I have mentioned our parents, my aunt calls every day with no fail. She wants to build a relationship with her daughter, it's good that she's trying. My heart goes out to her, she's a fragile woman and I'm pretty sure that she cries herself to sleep every night. She has kids to raise and I hope she hasn't abandoned them.

All three are under the age of sixteen and still in school, they need a parent. I should check on her some time, it could cause conflict with Ayize.

Is it worth it though?

NKOMO\*

This is not how I would like to be woken up, the pounding on the door is aggravating the shit out of me. I don't usually get visitors, worse so early in the morning. It's barely 8am and my house is being invaded.

Me: "I'm coming."

I yell as the pounding escalates.

Unless it's the police, they better have a good explanation as to why they are here.

Me: "Zwelethu?"

He is crying and looks like he swam here, his clothes are damp from sweating, dribs of sweat occasionally from his forehead.

Me: "What's going on? Why are you crying?"

He buries himself on me, a painful sob flares up from him. He's scaring me.

What could have happened that has him whimpering like this?

Me: "Zwelethu?"

I push him back, he drops his head as he buries his face in his hands.

Zwelethu: "She's dead bhuti, she's dead."

She?

Me: "Who?"

Zwe: "MaDlamini, she hung herself."

Oh God!

Me: "It's okay."

I lead him to the lounge.

I haven't been to see maDlamini since she fell ill. I can't believe she's gone, just like that. For how long will my family be surrounded by loss?

Mkhize is going to finish all of us.

Zwe: "I left home, I'm not going back there."

He's old enough to make this choice.

Me: "And ma?"

His mother will die without him.

Zwe: "I told her that I'm leaving and I won't be going back. Mkhize had a heart attack."

Oh please tell me he's dead.

My mother's death will finally be avenged, the devil has been waiting for that man for years now.

Me: "Oh!"

I can't express the elation I feel, he loves his father.

Zwe: "I don't know how he is, I left the house right after. I told him so many hurtful things bhuti, I voiced out the hate I have for him. I know I was wrong to address him in that manner. Why do I feel so much regret?"

Me: "He's your father that's why and you love him."

Zwe: "I told him that I hate him."

Me: "Did you mean it?"

Zwe: "I was angry."

Me: "Don't beat yourself up.."

I hate talking about Mkhize and I'm compelled to do so. This young man needs a brother and I can't turn my back on him.

AYIZE\*

Eating has become easy for me, food is life as Neo would say. It's amazing how close we have become, you would think that we have known each other forever. The kitchen is my favourite place to be, strange I know. I spot Sethu plodding to the kitchen, she's walking funny and her gaze is dropped.

Me: "And then wena?" (You.)

She scowls, twists her head back as if looking for someone.



Me: "Sethu yini?" (What's wrong?)

She shrugs right after grimacing at me. Can it be that she had a fight with Mr. S about the whole Amara thing? Sethu is too innocent for this world.

Sethu: "Nothing."

She clears her throat before her reply.

Now I see, of course the funny walk...

Me: "Argh shame. What did you do to Mr. S?"

I have to laugh at this, it's funny.

Sethu: "Uhlekeni?" (What are you laughing at?)

It's funnier that she's asking me this.

Me: "I will not involve myself in your bedroom affairs."

She sits on a chair opposite me.

Sethu: "What are you eating?"

I show her the plate. I'm not a fan of oat meal but, Maake says I should eat it before anything else. I see his plan, he wants to fatten me up.

Sethu: "Is there something else?"

Cooked by who?

Me: "Madam, the last time I checked your hands work well."

She exhales and I just know there is something sitting on her chest.

Me: "Do you want me to scratch that first before you tell me what the problem?"

She can't hide anything from me.

Sethu: "I spoke to mom and dad last night."

She introduces.

There goes my day.

Definitely not something I'd like to get into early in the morning.

Sethu: "Dad is sick."

Me: "They told you this?"

Sethu: "Yes."

Those people are masters at manipulating and Sethu is a great target.

Sethu: "They want us home, dad wouldn't tell me what the problem is. He says he wants to see us."

Like I said, she's easy prey.

Me: "Okay, you'll let me know what the problem is."

This is my way of saying, I'm not going.

Sethu: "Don't you want to see him? What will you do if he doesn't wake up the following morning?"

Me: "He won't be the first. People die every day."

Her eyes are judging me, I don't care. I am not changing my mind.

Sethu: "I really think he's dying."

Me: "Hau Sethu. What do you want me to do? If he's dying, he's dying."

I'm not about to feel sorry for the man who protected a rapist.

Sethu: "I know that I shouldn't be forcing this on you sis but, dad will be broken. He sounded so desperate on the phone."

Is Sethu the one pleading on behalf of that man?

Me: "Do you know what you're saying to me? I have been broken my whole life and he didn't care. I was desperate for his protection and he gave me none. Now you want me to feel sorry for him because he might be dying. Ungazodlala ngami wena." (Don't be ridiculous.)

I should dismiss this.

Sethu: "I'm sorry sis, I know what you've been through and it's not fair to ask you to go back to the house like nothing happened."

A house I swore never to return to.

Me: "Yeah."

We're done talking about this.

Me: "When are you going back to work? You've been off for too long."

She sits back and slouches on the chair.

Sethu: "I don't know, maybe tomorrow. The passion is not there anymore."

Me: "Since when?"

Sethu: "It's been a while."

Her voice testifies of this sudden lost passion.

Me: "Is it Mr. S? He fucked that stupid drive you had?"



There's an answer behind that bashful smile.

Sethu: "You're insane."

Me: "Girl, you love being a nurse."

It's what she knows.

Sethu: "No I don't. Dad pushed me to it. I wanted to be a chef. You know how controlling your parents can be."

My parents? It feels so unreal that I have disowned them .

Me: "It's time that you follow your dream, there's no other way."

Sethu: "I want to do that."

Me: "What's stopping you?"

Sethu: "Money."

Argh shame, the girl is blind.

Me: "Imali iyenzi sisi?" (What about money?)

Sethu: "I don't have it, there's this school IHS. I'll need about 80k for a one year course."

Can someone slap reality back into this girl?

Me: "Sisi. ulala nemali every night. You satisfy it and cook for it. Inkinga ikuphi pho?" (You sleep with money. What's the problem?)

Sethu needs a wake up call.

Sethu: "What are you talking about?"

Lord take the wheel, I'm done with this girl.

Me: "Vuka girl, vuka sisi. Life will leave you behind." (Wake up.)

She's fighting the urge to snap at me.

Sethu: "Can you speak like a normal person for once? Geez, you're making my head spin."

Me: "Yoh hai, you're slow mtase." (Sis.)

She grunts as she pushes herself up. She's bustling in the kitchen, trying to put a meal together.

Me: "What are you doing?"

Sethu: "Making breakfast for Money, he's hungry."

She gets it.

Why was she acting a fool.



Me: "Not so innocent after all hey?"

I wiggle my eyebrows as she turns her head to look at me.

Sethu: "You know it's too early for your hints. You're frustrating my frustration."

Yes.

That's what the walk was....

Me: "Sexually frustrated ekuseni sis wami?" (In the morning my sister.)

I'll annoy her as much as possible, I know she hates it and it's funny in my head.

Sethu: "Men are weird creatures, don't you think?"

She stops, leans against the counter as she stares at me.

Me: "That's it, men are creatures. We'll never understand them."

Sethu: "Styles is weird all in all, he's too mysterious."

Me: "He's your man, it's your job to unravel that mystery."

Ntokozo was way different from Mr. S. He never took time to get to know Sethu and in my opinion, their relationship was rushed.

Me: "I saw how you freaked out when Amara's uncle mentioned the exchange. I understand why you did it but, men hate it when you nag. Whatever the issue is with Styles, Randy baby and Amara, it has nothing to do with you. Wena just love the guy and don't pressure him into telling you his friend's secrets. If he feels like you have to know then, he will tell you. Focus on your relationship, don't let a third party in like you did with Lebo. Girl, they will crush you and take your man while at it. Invest your time and energy in loving that man and receive all the love he gives you."

I don't think that I can handle Sethu being hurt again.

Me: "Do you know what the most dangerous snake in the world is?"

She frowns, I know where I'm taking this.

Sethu: "How did we divert to this now?"

Me: "Just tell me."

Out of frustration, she exhales deeply.

Sethu: "A black mamba? I don't know."

Me: "Wrong. A friend, they make the greatest enemies. Don't bring them into your relationship, it doesn't matter if that friend is married or not. Never share your relationship problems with them or whatever Styles does that, makes you feel like you're the only woman in the world. Your friend will want that experience as well and with him, that's how stupid friends can be. If I'd have it, I'd put you in a bubble and protect you from people like Lebo. There are so many Lebos out there

and they don't have your best interest at heart."

Sethu is all I have in this life, she's my only family and I will protect her with my life if I have to.

Sethu: "You know I get worried when you talk like this."

Me: "Don't be, listen to your sister. Heed my advice Sethu, that man loves you. Protect your relationship. It's a good thing you're not on social media, that hash tag shit is deadly. Babukile abo Tracy like surveillance cameras and they want to see your down fall. It doesn't matter what you have in life, whether it's little or more. They don't want to see you happy."

I think it's time she lets go of her naivety.

Sethu: "You're the best you know that? I don't need anyone if I have you."

Funny...

I forget how mushy she can be.

Me: "Don't say that, you need Mr. S to keep you warm at night."

I love it when she laughs, it makes me happy.

Sethu: "You're a blessing, you know that?"

She puts her arms around my neck and pastes a kiss on my cheek.

Ayize: "Don't get too clingy now."

I push her away.

Sethu: "I love you sis."

Me: "Okay."

We're complete opposites and that's what makes up who we are.

Sethu: "Say you love me too, hau."

She'll force it out of me if I don't.

Me: "Yeah me too."

Sethu: "You too what?"

The look she's giving me.

Me: "Love you too."

Sethu: "No, I won't take that. The I is missing."

Me: "That's all you're getting."

She titters as she throws herself in my arms.

RUTH\*

It's my first time being at Nkomo's house, I don't know how he will take this visit. I had to look for him and I know it's stupid of me but, it's so hard to stay away from him. He's all I think about.

No one is opening the door, I probably should go back. My heart won't let me though, I have to see him.

The door swings open before I could knock again. His eyes widen as they meet mine. He opens his mouth to speak and nothing comes out.

Me: "Hi."

One of us has to speak.

Nkomo: "You're here?"

I knew that he would be shocked.

Me: "Do you love me?"

I'm not sure we have reached this part, or how he truly feels.

Nkomo: "Ruth I..."

He's hesitating.

Me: "I came because I need to know how you truly feel. Forget the lies, forget the betrayal. Tell me what's in your heart."

Nkomo: "Come in, we can talk inside."

Me: "No, I need to know first. Do you love me N.K?"

I'm putting him on the spot but, it has to be done.

Nkomo: "I think I do, you're all I think about and I'd rather be with you than anyone else."

This is all I need to hear, I'm satisfied.

Me: "Can I come in?"

He frowns, he's mystified by my awkwardness.

A smile clicks on his face, he takes my hand and leads me in. This is right, it has to be. Otherwise I'm doomed, my father will slaughter me.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

Unedited \*

156\*

MBUSO\*

I knew this was going to happen, I thought Moses would be the one to pose a great threat but, Jonas is a real pain in the ass. He's fighting that Lelo be operated on, he insists that the baby be removed. Lelo is in a comma and we don't know when she will wake up.

Jonas is not bothered about the so called court order, he claims that Lelo is their child and they have a right over her. Styles needs to get here with the marriage certificate, I am losing the battle.

Moses was said to be involved in a robbery, as for Ntombi...

Well... She's as quiet as a church mouse.

Money really talks, she was approached by one of Styles' men.

This waiting room has become small due to Jonas and I arguing, I have put aside the fact that he's Lelo's uncle. He wants to get his way and I will not let that happen. Ntombi is for it too, they want to kill my baby.

Me: "No one is touching Lelo, my baby will live. The court order says I have full rights over Lelo and the baby."

I know it's wrong to yell at them because they are adults but, their stubbornness evokes so much anger in me.

Jonas: "What right does it say you have over them? She is not your wife."

Jonas is too smart for me.

Ntombi: "I agree with my brother, I know Lelo, she will want us to save her life."

The Lelo I know would put her child's life first.

Me: "With all due respect baba, this is not your decision to make, I have made up mind."

Jonas: "I knew from the first time I saw you that you were trouble, I didn't like you at all."

That means nothing to me right now.

Ntombi: "Hayi kodwa bhuti nawe, ihaba jesu." (You're too much now brother.)

Jonas: "What do you mean?"



Ntombi: "Hau, bhuti. UNombulelo found a nice man for herself, he's a doctor. My child will never lack anything." (Brother.)

Jonas: "Money is making you talk like this Ntombi? This is the same boy who wants to put Lelo's life at risk. I will not allow it."

Jonas will lose because of his stubbornness.

Me: "We will see."

Jonas: "Are you challenging me, boy?"

This is what he knows and my answer would be yes... I am challenging you Jonas.

Me: "No, sir. I am fighting for my family."

I deny.

He's livid right now.

Jonas: "Nombulelo is not your family, she is not a Xaba."

Styles, you're taking time man. I have dragged this long enough, it's time to pull out the card."

Me: "Actually she is, we were going to tell you before the accident happened. We got married at home affairs on Friday."

Ntombi: "What?"

She shrieks stridently.

Ntombi: "No, never. Lelo would never do that, I know my child, I know my baby."

And so she repeats herself.

Jonas: "Where is the proof? You were at the house just the day before. Why didn't you tell us then?"

I didn't think of this.

You're a doctor Mbuso, think fast.

Me: "The plan was to reveal everything after the lobola negotiations."

I lie.

I'm learning well from Styles.

Jonas: "Oh! Lobola negotiations? The same ones you failed to pay up?"

He reminds me of my failures.

Me: "There is a reason for that sir."

Jonas: "I'm listening."

He curves a brow as he gives me an intimidating look.

I hear Jonas is not married nor does he have children. It's about time I play match maker with this man, clearly he's bored with life.

Me: "That's my business with my wife sir, I don't have to share my family secrets with you and another thing, I am a Zulu man and in my culture we speak to the father's side of the family not the mother's side."

Jonas: "Unamandla mfana." (You're brave boy.)

Lelo made me brave.

Me: "I know we did things wrong but, it's our lives. It doesn't matter if we marry without your consent. We are adults, sir and what we do with our lives should not worry you."

No, I am tired of this man.

Jonas: "I can see right through you and I know what you're up to."

What is he talking about? He can't possibly see that I am lying to him.

Me: "It seems this battle will not end, I will send my family to come and speak to yours. No one is taking my baby away from me."

Styles has to organize some uncles for me, my father cannot know what I get up to. He will surely ruin my plans.

Jonas: "You're right about this unending battle, you don't know who you're messing with."

Threats?

Nice one old man.

Ntombi: "Sizothini bhuti, bashadile and there's nothing we can do about it." (What can we say brother? They are married.)

I didn't think Ntombi of all people would understand.

Jonas: "Uyabona Ntombi, this is why I said you and Moses suck at being parents. You cannot give your daughter away just like that." (Do you see?)

I will not take part in this consequential conversation anymore.

Me: "Excuse me, my wife is waiting for me."

I proclaim ready to walk away, Jonas stops me because he thinks he can do whatever he wants.

Control people's lives that is.

Jonas: "You're not going in that room."

Yeah...

It's what he does best.



He frowns as I chortle at his command.

Me: "The one who is not going in there, is you sir."

Ntombi: "Bhuti, stop being stubborn. It will not get you anywhere."

Thank you Ntombi.

I give Jonas one long glare before striding out.

SETHU\*

My father's car is parked outside like always, the thought of going in that house makes me quail. I park my car outside the gate just in case I need to get out of there as fast as possible. My mother is a special case, you never know what she has in store for me. Anything is possible with that woman.

The kitchen door is open, I gait in to meet Ginger and Mbali washing the dishes. Ginger is the first to spot me, she hurries to me and engulfs me in a cute little hug.

Mbali: "Sisi." (Sister.)

The happiness on their faces gives me peace.

Me: "How are you guys?"

Ginger: "Okay."

She's not convincing.

Me: "What's wrong?"

Mbali: "Ginger is always fighting with mom, they just had an argument about washing the dishes."

I know Ginger hates doing the dishes.

Me: "You didn't want to do your chores again?"

She sulks.

Mbali: "She wanted me to do them alone, and I washed them this morning and cleaned the kitchen all by myself."

Ginger is the stubborn one, you can't tell her anything.

Ginger: "That's not true, she's lying sis Sethu."

I don't think she is.

This child is sly.



Me: "Ginger, you need to help your sister out, I thought you two were close."

Mbali: "We are sis Sethu, Ginger is my best friend."

Ginger's attitude lets me know that Mbali's words mean nothing to her.

Me: "What do you have to say about that Ginger?"

Her demeanour is that of Ayize. I see a tint of her in there.

Ginger: "Yeah, yeah."

She crosses her arms.

Me: "How is school?"

Mbali: "Nice."

The smile on her face is enough to make my day.

Me: "And you madam?"

Ginger: "I hate school."

Yes, she does.

Me: "You still have time you'll learn to love it."

She wants to roll her eyes, I just know it.

Me: "Are they here?"

Mbali: "Yes, mom is feeding dad in the lounge."

Me: "Thank you guys, you can go back to washing the dishes."

They grumble in annoyance.

Me: "Make sure they are sparkly."

I tell as I approach the living room.

Here goes nothing.

My father is lying on his back, on a three seater couch. He has a throw wrapped over him, my heart breaks as I realize that he's lost so much weight. He has dark circles around his eyes, his bony cheeks are the first thing you see when you walk into the room.

Dad: "Sethu my child."

He says in a feeble voice. My tears have a life of its own and they decide when to come out.

Me: "Baba?" (Dad.)

I sit on the edge of the couch next to him.



Me: "What happened to you?"

Dad: "Where is your sister?"

He passes his eyes through in search of Ayize.

Me: "She couldn't make it dad, but she sends her love.

A ghost of a smile washes over his face.

Dad: "You're a good person Sethu, I know you're only saying this to make me feel better."

He sees right through me.

Mom: "I'm grateful that she couldn't make it, that child is toxic."

I just got here, can I get a break?

Me: "What's wrong with you dad?"

He sends his trembling hand to my cheek.

When did my father get here?

Dad: "I'm sick, I was diagnosed with leukaemia six months ago."

He drops me into a muddled river.

Me: "What are you saying dad? I don't understand."

Mom: "Your father has cancer Sethu, he's dying."

I heard that and it hurts more that she's repeating it.

Me: "How? You were okay."

Dad: "I have been going through chemotherapy and I'm losing the battle to cancer my child. I don't have much time left."

Not my father, he can't be sick.

Me: "How long?"

Dad: "Any time from now, there is no guarantee that I will wake up in the morning. My time on earth is over."

I don't want to lose him.

Mom: "This is why your father called you over, he wanted to tell you in person and possibly make amends with your sister."

My sister is still livid, she will not agree to see him.

Me: "There has to be something we can do, consult another doctor. Doctor's results are never accurate."

Mom: "There is nothing we can do?"

How is she calm?

Me: "We don't know that mom, I will do some research. I'm not going to give up on you dad."

Dad: "No, I'm tired of fighting this sickness, the therapy finished me Sethu. There is something you can do for me."

Me: "What is it?"

Dad: "Your sister needs you."

I need her too.

Dad: "She wants to see in prison."

He is definitely talking about Lebo.

Me: "Is this why you called me here?"

Ayize is right, I am naïve.

Mom: "Part of it yes."

She must have put him up to this.

Me: "I am not going see Lebo dad."

I refuse.

Dad: "Please my child, it's my dying wish."

It's black mail.

Me: "What does she want from me?"

Mom: "She didn't say, she only asked to see you."

Something smells rotten, it always does when Lebo is involved. Even on his death bed, all he thinks of is Lebo. Maybe I should have stayed my ass at home.

KHETHU\*

Mbongeni is getting on my last nerve, I swear. He is more controlling than ever, I don't want this baby anymore and I have decided to get rid of it. Spending time in his house has made him think that we are a couple and I hate.

Mbongeni: "After naturing it for so long Khethu, you can't be that cruel."

He hasn't stopped yelling since I brought it up.

Me: "I'm not going to change my mind Mbo, I have made an appointment. I will get rid of this pregnancy."

I know he's grown fond of the baby but, I have my things to do and he's not the man for me.

Mbongeni: "Dare me Khethu, just do it. I will not have mercy on you if you kill my child."

Someone's angry.

Me: "It's my body and there's nothing you can do to stop me."

Mbongeni: "Don't test me Khethukuthula, I am not as soft as you think."

Me: "What are you going to do Mbongeni?"

From where I'm standing, I have the upper hand.

Mbongeni: "Why are you so cruel? Why would you do that?"

I'd say the hurt in his eyes makes me think twice about my decision but, it does nothing to me.

Me: "I'm not cruel, I'm being reasonable. I don't want to hate my child like Nobayeni hates me. This is the only way out."

Mbongeni: "It doesn't have to be Khethu, I will raise him on my own. Right after you give birth, I'll take the baby and I will never bother you again."

Sounds reasonable.

Me: "I'm sorry Mbo, my mind is made up."

Mbongeni: "Is this because of Styles? Is he the reason you want to kill my child?"

I don't know, it could be and I will never stop loving him.

Me: "I have to go."

He takes my hand as I begin to saunter towards the door.

Mbongeni: "That baby better stay in your womb and I will not repeat myself."

He growls.

The baby must mean a lot to him, Mbongeni does not do threats.

STLYES\*

I'm preparing something to eat before I head to the hospital, Sethu left for her father's house. If it were up to me, she wouldn't tread a foot there. I receive a phone call from Randall.

Neo: "Stylos phone."

He yells from the living room, He's lying on my couch watching TV.

Me: "The phone is with me Neo, I can hear it."

I yell back while I answer the call.

"It's barely two months since you moved in together and you two are fighting already."

He talking about Neo.

Me: "I think you should have him for at least a month."

I here him snicker.

Randall: "Forget it, he will drive me crazy on the first day."

He's grown fond of Neo.

Me: "Shouldn't you be sleeping? Why are you calling me?"

Randall: "I don't sleep during the day."

I know.

Randall: "That old geezer Mkhize had a heart attack."

He announces.

Me: "Which suit should I wear to his funeral?"

He sniggers.

Randall: "Relax spot, he's not dead, he's at the hospital."

Shit!!!

Me: "Dammit, that bastard has many lives."

Randall: "I know, it's fucked up."

Me: "Does Nkomo know? "

Randall: "He's the one who texted me."

Nkomo is smart, I see how he's avoiding me.

Me: "Mkhize should do himself a favour and die."

Randall: "My thoughts too."

Neo: "Stylos, there's a knock at the door."

He's literally right at the door.

Me: "Get the door Neo, you're closer."

I'm on the phone and he wants me attend to it.



Neo: "Eish Stylos, now I must get up from the couch."

Whoever is at the door really wants to come in judging by the way they are pounding on it.

Me: "What time will you be at the hospital?"

Mbuso is alone there, we need to get to him before he breaks.

Randall: "I'm not sure, I'll text you."

Me: "Okay, I'll head there in the meantime."

Neo: "Stylos, there's a white man looking for you."

Neo's voice forces me to swivel on my heel.

What the hell is he doing here?

He's in my living room, staring back at me. I have only seen this man in pictures, he's different.

Old and grey.

I drop the call without bidding Randall goodbye, I'm still trying to figure out if this man is truly here.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

157\*

AMARA\*

After the morning I had, this is where I want to be. In his arms with him between my legs, his warm breath roaming on my skin. Hearing sweet nothings swishing from his mouth into my ear. His hands delicately grazing every inch of me and tracing the hairs on my skin, every touch consumes me, making me weaker.

This steamy session started off with me getting ready to take a bath, Randall was all over me the moment I stripped naked. Now we both lie nude in each other's arms, our breathing racing against each other. He snuggles my neck with subtle kisses, so feeble they are whispers.

Randall: "I love how you tremble under my touch."

This gentle whisper fills my stomach with tingles. His lips come closer and closer to mine till they brush. Slightly he bites my lower lip and something about this gesture puts a smile on his face.

Gradually he kisses my lips, it's so soft that we're barely touching, while he smoothly tickles my skin from my pelvis to the belly button.

He kisses my face, my forehead and neck, he moves toward my mouth and brushes his lips on mine, before going back to nestling my neck and tattoos wet kisses there.

He browses his lips up to my ear, gives a few licks. I feel my body come alive, while his hands and fingers are all over my bare skin.

Randall: "I love everything about you, me hemma." (My queen.)

He proclaims as he kisses his way down to my collarbone and bust.

Randall: "I love how your skin feels on mine."

He grazes his tongue on my cleavage, I shiver due to the warm sensation. Slowly he nibbles his tongue around my nipples, traces his lips down to my tummy and legs and in the time being his palms refuse to let go of me.

Randall: "I love your thighs, and how soft they are."

He massages my abdomen while licking and kissing my inner thighs.

My heart rate increases as his lips move closer to my privates. Using both his hands, he opens



my legs as if making a way for him to move in. I feel exposed as my pussy stares back at him as he holds that naughty smirk on his face.

Randall: "Also, I love how you taste."

I shy away from his impish gaze as he declares.

He kisses my vagina quite a few times, his palms gently and gradually rubbing my thighs. He places a pillow on my lower back, slips his hands under my butt, fully cups them and slightly lifts me up.

I feel a deep arousal sensation arise from within me as his large hands gently grip my buttocks, it begins with a few kisses down there. His warm tongue replaces them as he licks me, this time my clit is insanely vibrating and I am delirious in desire.

He takes his time to nibble on me. He dives his tongue in and begins to move it in and out of me. I moan loudly gripping the bed sheets as my hips grind, I can't keep still. He pulls his tongue out and licks my clit before slowly plunging it in again, I let out a scream which is swapped by loud moans.

I'm closer to the edge, his tongue hits my G-spot and I scream out. My orgasm takes over me, there's a pulsation on my clit and a wave of heat engulfs my entire body.

Randall packs his body between my legs. I wrap them around him, waiting for him to penetrate me. We share a single lip kiss before he presses his tongue on the seam of my lips, I grant him access and he delves inside my mouth. A diminutive moan spurts out of me.

My arms reach up and tangle around his neck. It's been too long, well, that's how it feels like.

He's torturing me, I want him inside me so bad. I guide his penis between my legs.

Me: "Randall."

I whisper in his ear, he's taking his time and seems to be enjoying it.

Randall: "I want to hear you beg for it, me hemma." (My queen.)

He licks and nibbles my earlobe, his fingers gently tiptoe on my hip bone. He moves them toward my vagina, draws ticklish circles there, moving his hand up to my lower abdomen.

Me: "Please, I want you inside me. Make love to me please."

What choice do I have, he's torturing me. He lifts his head to look at me with a self-assured smug look.

Randall: "I love it when you beg."

He whispers, brushing his lips on mine barely a touch. I feel like I'm going to burst with this sensual pleasure that he has built up in me.

He holds me with one hand and his penis with the other. He taps it on my clit, rubs it around my clitoral covering, teasing me with the tip of his shaft. I'm losing my mind as he strokes the head



of his erection on me.

Me: "Baby, you're driving me crazy. Put him in, I want him inside me so bad."

If he doesn't penetrate me now, I will cry.

Randall: "Let me enjoy this moment."

You heard him, he enjoys seeing me beg for him. What has this world come to?

He kisses me, maybe I should also go on strike. One of these days, I will go to bed with nothing on and deny him a chance to touch me.

Me: "Baby, please."

I beg, lightly running my fingers up and down his spine. I know this drives him insane and he will give in any minute now. He has to because I am going crazy with erotic pleasure.

Finally he slips inside me, a soft gasp evades from me. I hold him tighter as he begins his slow thrust. He doesn't stop kissing me all over my face and lips. His lingering kisses leave me wanting more. His slow shallow thrusts have me pulling him into me.

Me: "Deeper Randall."

I mumble in his ear, he goes deeper and stays long thrusting. It feels amazing and I can't grasp the amount of love I feel for him.

In a while he increases his speed, his hand holding me while the other caresses my body.

Me: "Randall, I'm going to cum."

I scream but I want to cry as well, it's a mind blowing sensation that has me feeling like I will explode.

Me: "You feel so good Randall."

I can't stop the loudness of my voice, I'm losing my mind although it has completely shut down. My arms tighten around him, I want him deeper in me. He kisses me clogging my screams from escaping my mouth.

Randall: "I love you Amara."

He declares, increasing his thrust, he's grinding and stroking, pushing me over the edge. My mind just left me, it's me and him filling me up. I get a warm fuzzy feeling through-out my body, I clench my eyes because I feel like I'm going to cry. My bottom feet tingle and burn, I feel myself getting tighter before a sudden burst and rush goes through my body.

I tremble and let out one loud cry as all the emotions pour out on me. Randall slams against me as he releases in me, he buries my lips with his. The kiss feels amazing with all these erotic sensual emotions running all over my body. I think he has made me an addict, I still want him. I don't think I have had enough although I had more than enough.

Like he read my thoughts, he plunges two fingers inside me and strokes my G-spot. There it is,

that crazy feeling that makes me feel like I'm on cloud nine. My mind shuts down completely.

Me: "Randall, I'm going to cum."

I scream, this is how far I can go.

Randall: "I love your orgasm face, it makes me feel like I own the world."

He voices out his sensual thoughts and where would he leave that smirk?

He holds me close as he does this, my breasts are pressed on his chest. I can feel his heart beating. The kisses, the gentle strokes, his hands all over my body and his warm skin on mine. Nothing feels better than this.

I throw my head back on the pillow, my arms cling around him as I shudder under him. I glance up and find him gazing at me with of course, a smirk on his face.

God help me...

Randall: "Did you like that?"

He mummurs before kissing me. He's back to staring, I'm obliged to nod diffidently. Where did the confidence I had go to?

Me: "I love you."

I lean in to kiss him, this is my answer and I'm sure my screams spoke for me.

STYLES\*

I'm standing before this man whom I have only seen in pictures, he has this flabbergasted look on his old wrinkled face.

"You look just like me."

Thirty three years and this is the first thing he says to me.

Me: "I look nothing like you."

I retort.

The aloofness of my tone should let him know that I want nothing to do with him.

Neo: "Actually you do Stylos, look at the nose and the lips."

I leer at Neo, there's a time for everything.

Neo: "I'm going to finish cooking."

Richard Nixon, the son of bitch who denied my mother after knocking her up.

Me: "What are you doing in my house?"

Richard: "I came to see you son."

He's trying to be funny.

Me: "Don't call me that, I am not your son."

He sighs as my remark appears to disturb him.

Richard: "Can I come in."

Me: "What do you want?"

I hate this man.

Richard: "I want a chance to explain why I left."

Me: "It's too late for that."

I don't want to hear him out, I'm okay.

Me: "I want nothing to do with you."

I grunt, his presence is aggravating.

Richard: "Styles, please. Hear me out."

He's desperate, it's written on his face.

Me: "There is nothing you can say that will change what you did."

Richard: "I know, I know son and... look your uncle told me where to find you."

Me: "Get out of my house Richard."

Neo: "How many teaspoons of sugar do you take?"

Neo shouts from the kitchen.

He's making tea for this man. Richard runs his eyes to the kitchen then brings them back to me.

Me: "Your friend is kind."

He declares with a smile. What makes him think he can smile with me?

Neo: "Richy, the water is getting cold. I'm waiting."

Neo must take it down a little.

Me: "Why are you still here Nixon? Get out of my house."

He flinches as I boom in anger.

Richard: "I'm sorry son, I hope you will find it in your heart to forgive me. I'm still around, here's

my address.”

He holds out a business card, I sneer at it. I have no plans in going to see him.

Seeing that I’m not taking the card, he places it next to the flower pot by the door.

Richard: “I’m sorry again son.”

Neo: “He’s leaving?”

He shouts as he sees Richard trudge out the door. I slam it closed and turn to find Neo in my face holding an inquisitive look. I step back, scowling at him.

Neo: “What did he say?”

Is this why he ran here?

Me: “He wants to talk.”

Neo: “And?”

Why the curiosity?

Me: “There’s more?”

I didn’t know that.

Neo: “I thought he came to tell you that he’s dying and leaving you with all of his estates. That’s what they do in the movies.”

Darn it.

I know how to choose my friends.

Me: “You’re crazy.”

Neo: “I’ll be crazy when we’re rolling in money and driving those vintage cars, old men like him like collecting them.”

I should call the hospital, Neo’s condition is deteriorating.

Me: “You need to be put in a straight-jacket, besides I don’t want anything from him.”

Neo: “You can take it and pass it over to me, anger will blind you Stylos. Who says no to money?”

Not a chance in hell.

And what money?

Neo: “Maybe if we had let him in and gave him tea, it would’ve worked in our favour.”

Me: “Really? You were offering him tea?”

I’m still stunned.

Neo: “That’s what white people drink. Haven’t you seen it on TV?”



He lies back on the couch after grabbing the remote and begins to channel search.

Me: "You need to stop watching too much Television."

It's messing with his brain.

Neo: "No Stylos, ke mang ea reng television? It's a TV." (Who says television?)

I give up with Neo, I'm glad though that he's not asking me much about Richard. He respects my privacy.

KHETHU\*

Doctor: "Why do you want to get rid of the baby?"

My father has dragged me back to the psychologist, I hate that I have to share my problems with a stranger. It will take some time to get used to this. I'm tired and feeling somnolent so, doc said I can lie on my back if I want to. This baby is not treating me well.

Me: "I'm not ready to mother a child."

Doctor: "A child or the child of another man?"

He sees through me.

Me: "If I were pregnant with Styles' baby, I would be the happiest woman in the world. I would love my baby like I have never loved."

The thought of having his baby is breath taking.

Doctor: "So the problem is the man?"

Me: "Yes."

With no doubt at all.

Doctor: "And you hate your baby because it doesn't belong to Styles?"

Right on doc.

Me: "I won't be able to love it, the same thing happened with my mother. She didn't want me, I had to live under the shadow of her hate. Look at me today, I'm just as bitter as she is."

Doctor: "You are not your mother though."

Me: "I'm not but, I tend to act like her."

Doctor: "How?"

Me: "I'm selfish and inconsiderate. My feelings matter more than others."

Doctor: "Is it a bad thing to put yourself before anyone else?"

Me: "I don't know, I lived my life afraid that the people I love, will one day leave me. Like my mother, she was around, we lived in the same house but, she was an absent mother. Her negligence forced me to build a barrier around me. I was armed and thought the only way to keep my loved ones was to force them to stay with me."

Doctor: "Do you think you did the same with Styles?"

I think I did.

My biggest fear in life was losing Styles.

Me: "Maybe."

Doctor: "What does that mean?"

Me: "I don't know doc, Styles was my life. He meant the world to me, losing him is the worst thing that has ever happened to me. I doubt if I will ever get over it."

Doctor: "The way I see it, your life revolved around Styles and your mother. You needed them both and you loved one and hated the other."

Me: "Styles was there for me when my mother wasn't, he protected and accepted me."

Doctor: "How is your relationship with him at the moment?"

Null and void.

Me: "There is no relationship, he hates me."

Doctor: "Did he tell you that or you concluded it?"

Me: "I saw it in his eyes, he doesn't look at me the same way."

It hurts because I was his only eye, now his eyes crave for another woman.

Doctor: "Isn't that a sign that you should move on?"

I doubt it.

Me: "It's not that easy."

It's been a while but, he still lives in my heart. I don't see myself letting go of these feelings.

STYLES\*

I knew that I would find Mbuso in Lelo's room, he's sitting on the chair. His hand holding on to hers. She has machines attached to her, it's sad how someone so young could face such a fate. It would break Mbuso if her life were cut short. He lives for these two.

Me: "How is she?"

I ask the obvious.

He looks up at me, his eyes are red and teary.

Mbuso: "She's in a coma."

I almost don't recognize his voice, it's glazed with sadness and sorrow.

Me: "She will pull through man."

I try to comfort him, I don't know if what I'm saying is true.

Mbuso: "I don't know Styles, I'm starting to lose hope. As a doctor I don't see her and Goku surviving this but, as the man who loves her I see her fighting. I don't know which logic to go with. I'm being stubborn here."

Me: "Well, maybe your stubbornness will bring her back. You need to have faith Mbuso, she wouldn't want you to give up on her."

He sends his hands behind his neck and rubs it.

Mbuso: "Jonas wants to fight me."

That old man has serious issues.

Me: "He won't go far with that."

Mbuso: "How do you know? He is hard headed Styles, he wants to have his way with everything. I'm tired, honestly. I told them that we got married and he went ballistic. He's against the whole thing."

Me: "Even so, there's nothing he can do Mbuso. We've got this."

Mbuso: "Do we? Do we really?"

He's losing the goal, I can't let that happen.

Me: "Yes, you need to stop being negative."

If we attract negative things then that's what we'll get.

Randall walks in hand in hand with Amara, he's eating a packet of chips.

Me: "What the fuck?"

He scowls.

Randall: "What?"

Me: "You're getting fat."

Randall: "Really?"



He scans his body with a panicked look.

Amara: "Not funny Styles, he's lying baby."

Randall grimaces at me before throwing a chip in his mouth.

Me: "Yeah, continue. Don't say I didn't tell you when you look like Moses."

Ayize and Sethu laugh at my retort.

Amara: "Styles."

She whines.

I guess Randall is a sensitive topic but, there is a smile on her face as she suppresses a laugh.

Randall: "You're an idiot Sishi."

Styles: "Seriously Amara, you need to give birth soon. I don't like what R.J is doing to my friend."

She laughs.

Ayize: "I think he looks great, I mean have you ever."

Ayize is a flirter.

Randall pretends that he didn't hear the compliment from Ayize. He heard it alright, then again this is how he's always been. Only one woman has managed to touch his heart and get his full attention.

Amara: "Thank you Ayize, there's nothing wrong with my fiance."

She widely smiles at him, this man needs to learn how to return smiles.

Mbuso: "Aren't you getting married soon?"

Me: "He is, and he'll be looking like the nutty professor."

There's laughter in the room.

Randall: "If you insult me one more time, I will stuff these crisps down your throat."

He impends.

Me: "Why are you late anyway?"

Randall: "I had somethings to take care of."

Sethu: "We're here to pray for Lelo."

Ayize: "Sethu will do the praying and leave the Amen to us."

A smile dances on her face with these words.

Amara: "How is she Mbuso?"

He's been staring at Lelo.

Mbuso: "She's not doing well, she's in a coma."

Ayize: "Pregnant and in a coma? Is the baby safe?"

Mbuso: "Yes, it happens. The only problem here is the ruptured placenta, I'm forcing things here and I'm not sure if she will make it. What if I risk her life by trying to save Goku's life?"

Amara puts her hand on her belly, she exchanges glances with Randall. He puts his arm around her waist and pulls her closer to him. Lelo's situation must hit home for them as they are expecting a baby as well.

Ayize: "Goku? The cartoon character?"

She is puzzled.

Me: "Yes, that's the name of the baby."

She makes a facial expression I cannot read.

Ayize: "It's 2020, akuqali ngawe Mbuso." (You're not the first.)

Whatever she means by that.

Sethu: "Must you always have a comeback?"

Ayize: "Yes."

It seems right for her to have one, always.

Amara: "Lelo will be okay, you'll see. She is a strong woman."

Mbuso: "She is."

I hope losing Lelo won't change him, the accident has made him a person he's not.

Me: "We'll give you ladies space."

Ayize: "I'll come with you, Sethu and Amara, do your magic hey. Make sure God hears you."

Running away, are we?

Sethu: "We need you here, don't go."

Ayize: "What will I do? I don't know how to pray."

Sethu: "The bible says when two or three..."

Ayize: "Ngafa Jesu." (Such torture.)

She complains as she takes a sit on a chair by the window.

Randall is whispering something to Amara, she has her gaze dropped while slowly nodding her head. He takes her hand into his, lifts her chin with the other and mummurs something. Amara

takes up another nod, she appears to be sad suddenly.

Anyone can read the words he just mumbled before kissing her, he's comforting her.

Ayize: "Nina nobabili, yekani lento tu. I'm single and seeing a couple in love is frustrating. You can imagine how I feel right now." (You two better stop that.)

That message is for Randall and Amara.

Ayize always has something to say, Sethu did say it.

Me: "I think that's our cue."

Randall is the first to walk out.

Me: "Mbuso, are you coming?"

He nods negatively.

Me: "Are you okay Kitten?"

Sethu is a bit distant.

Sethu: "We'll talk later."

Her parents have something to do with her gloominess.

Me: "Try not to think too much okay."

Her nod is not reassuring, I frame her cheeks in the palms of my hands.

Me: "Ngiyak'thanda yezwa?" (I love you, you hear?)

Her eyes browse the room before she reticently drops them. Where is this coming from?

Me: "What happened?"

She turns to look at Ayize who is not even minding us.

Me: "You're afraid of a little PDA?"

Sethu: "There are people here."

People?

They are friends and family.

Me: "Okay, but when we get home I want you screaming out loud how much you love me."

Sethu: "Styles?"

She mumbles softly, careful not to be heard.

Me: "I'm not playing, I have to make up for this morning."

She shies away from my flirtatious gaze.



Ayize: "Okay, I'm tired of pretending that I can't hear you two. Talk about torture, Mr. S please spare me."

If you look up the word crazy in the dictionary, I am almost a hundred percent sure that you will find Ayize's name next to it, if not her picture.

Amara: "I have never met anyone like you in my life, you're a breath of fresh air."

Amara compliments her craziness.

Sethu looks up at me, I know what she's thinking. Gone are the days when I would tell her those words.

Me: "You still are you know?"

Sethu: "What?"

Me: "A breath of fresh air."

She smiles restrainedly.

Ayize: "No, don't steal my spot light. I'm the breath of nton nton, Mr S. you can go now. We have to pray, this candle I'm holding here is burning my hands." (What, what.)

Let's forget finding her name in the dictionary. Words to describe her probably haven't been discovered yet.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

158\*

## NOBAYENI\*

I don't want to be here, the bastard Timothy beckoned me. He threatened to tell Dladla about the affair. I see him standing by the testing grounds in Expo Centre Nasrec.

Why would he bring me here?

Me: "How dare you threaten me Timothy?"

I yell as I get to him.

Timothy: "It was the only way to get you here."

He leans in to kiss me, I shift back with a disgusted look. There was a time when I couldn't get enough of him and now the sight of him makes me sick.

Me: "What do you want?"

Timothy: "Look over there."

He points at a group of policemen in training, Dladla is coaching them.

I quickly hide behind Timothy, I can't let him see me here."

Timothy: "Don't worry, he can't see you."

He says in a mocking tone.

Timothy: "I take my hat off for the commissioner, he is a dedicated man. It would be a shame if the whole country were to find out what he gets up to in secret."

Timothy has nothing better to do with his life than to stalk my husband.

Me: "What are you talking about?"

He sneers at me.

Bastard.

Timothy: "Come on baby, don't tell me you don't know that hubby is into corruption. His bed sheets are as dirty as mine."

Who doesn't have skeletons in their closet? I have my own as well and I'm looking at it.



Bloody...

Nx!

Me: "So what? No one is perfect Timothy."

He chortles and I hate him right now.

What the hell was I was thinking?

Timothy: "You're right, no one is perfect but the police commissioner.

Me: "What do you want from him?"

Timothy: "You, you're my woman and I want you to leave him."

Timothy is taking chances.

Me: "I'm not leaving my husband Tim."

A scornful laugh sprints out of him.

Timothy: "I knew you were going to say no, this is why I organized a gift for you."

I should kill him he's not going to leave us alone.

He hands me a pair of binoculars.

Me: "What am I supposed to do with this?"

Timothy: "Look over there."

He points in Dladla's direction.

Timothy: "That's my second option."

I put the binoculars over my eyes, I want to see what this fool is talking about. I feel him breathing down my neck from behind and I am extremely disgusted.

Me: "I can't see anything."

Only Dladla coaching his team.

Timothy: "Drop your gaze a little sweetheart. Can you see the red dot laser on his chest?"

Oh my God, no.

Timothy: "It will be so easy to take him down and no one will see who the shooter is, they will run around like headless chickens."

No, I can't let this happen, not to my husband. I don't trust Timothy since he proved to be insane. He might shoot Dladla for the fun of it.

I drop the binoculars and off my feet I go, running to Dladla as fast as I can.

Timothy: "Bayeni, shit."



I hear him cuss and grunt, I don't care about him. I have to save Dladla. He sees me approaching him in full speed and a crinkle forms between his eyebrows.

All eyes are on me now.

I collide into his arms so harshly that he almost falls.

Dladla: "What's going on?"

Someone wants to kill you. I don't tell him that.

Me: "Hold me please."

I plead with him, his arms haven't embraced me yet. He finally holds me.

Dladla: "What's wrong?"

Me: "Just don't let go."

I'm shielding him, if I let go Timothy will shoot him

RANDALL\*

Mbuso's situation is a sad one, he yearns for Lelo to wake up. She is not my favourite person but, Mbuso deserves to have his family with him. Then there's my sweet Amara, I thought she would be broken, considering that Lelo is her cousin. Every day she's proves to me that she is not as fragile and frail as I thought. I love her strength and tenacity.

Me: "Let's not go far from the door, I'm sure they'll be done soon."

Styles snickers as he closes the door.

Styles: "Not if Sethu has anything to do with it."

Let her hear him say that.

Me: "I trust Ayize to cut it short."

Styles: "You've noticed her craziness?"

This is where he laughs and he's not doing it.

Me: "Who wouldn't, it's out there."

We settle down on the bench as he takes up a sigh that drains me as well.

Me: "What happened to you?"

The scowl on his face is reason enough for me to worry about him.

Styles: "Richard is back."



Me: "Who's that?"

His eyes give an answer to my query.

Me: "Richard Nixon?"

The only Richard I know is his father.

Styles: "The one and only, I should have put a bullet through his head."

This has always been a dream of his, to punish the man who abandoned his mother and left her heart broken.

Me: "Where did you see him?"

Styles: "He came to my house, that bastard."

He growls, I have seen the hate Styles has for Richard and because Richard was nowhere to be found Styles took it out on his uncle. He introduced him to drugs, stripped him of all his belongings including his family.

Me: "Let me guess, he wants a chance to be a father."

Styles: "It's too late for that, I don't need a father."

Me: "What are you going to do?"

Styles: "Stay away from him."

He retorts.

Me: "Don't you have questions about your mother? He could have answers. She was adopted wasn't she?"

He ruminates on my words as he leans forward and pushes his elbows on his thighs.

Me: "You don't have to build a relationship with him, this could be your chance to find your mother's family."

Styles: "I'd be damned, the son of a gun could be useful after all."

Me: "If you want him taught a lesson, I can take care of him for you."

Styles: "I'll sure to remember that."

From what I hear, Richard is from a racist family. I hope he won't cause conflict between Styles and Sethu.

Styles: "Mkhize is at this hospital, I can make things happen. What do you say? Let's get rid of him."

He introduces randomly and shares his thoughts.

"What does that mean?"



Shit!!!

Sethu is here, Ayize and Amara are with her.

How did we not hear them open the door?

Styles: "What do you think it meant?"

Sethu: "You want to kill this person you're talking about."

Me: "No one said the word kill Sethu. Your conclusions are wrong."

She holds a doubtful look.

Sethu: "I know what I heard."

Styles: "What is it that you heard Kitten?"

He leans down a bit to look into her eyes.

Sethu: "You want to kill a man Styles."

This is bad.

Styles: "You heard right, I will not hide this from you. You made me promise that we won't keep secrets right? Well, here it is."

Me: "Styles."

What is he doing?

Styles: "No Randall, she asked so she should swallow it. There's a man by the name of Mkhize and I have a bullet with his name on it."

Sethu is too fragile for this, her eyes swell up with tears.

Sethu: "Amara will you let this happen?"

Amara: "What do you want me to say? I don't care what happens to that man."

Sethu: "By being silent, you're giving them the go ahead to kill a man."

Amara: "I'm not, Sethu I have a family to think of now. A little girl at home and a baby on the way and I would kill for them, just like Randall would kill for me. I'm not justifying murder but, I can't sit back and watch while my family is in danger."

Sethu: "This is crazy."

Ayize: "What did I say to you Sethu? Don't be stupid, put your bible away and save it for Sunday. This is the real world, vuka sisi, ungangibhori." (Wake up. Don't bore me.)

Styles does not look happy.

Sethu folds her arms across her chest.

Sethu: "You guys can't do that."

Ayize: "I think we should go home now."

She has her arms around Sethu.

Styles: "I think that's a good idea, you two go."

Sethu: "Aren't you coming?"

She looks worried, she probably thinks Styles is going to kill Mkhize.

Styles: "No, Mbuso has no one. He needs a friend."

True.

Styles: "I'll see you at home."

He pecks her lips before they stride away.

Me: "Wow, you need to fix this Styles."

Styles: "Sethu will be fine, she needs to sleep it off."

I will take his word for it.

AYIZE\*

Neo is not at home, his phone is off and I'm worried about him. His phone is never off, I wonder where he could be. I haven't seen much of him today.

Sethu: "Hey, I brought you something to eat."

Sethu toddles into the bedroom with a plate of food.

Me: "Smells nice, who made it?"

Sethu: "I did."

She smiles.

Me: "Are you and Mr. S okay after what happened at the hospital?"

When will she learn to keep her mouth shut?

Sethu: "We are."

She sighs.

Sethu: "You have to understand sis, I don't want him getting into trouble. I can't grasp the thought of him behind bars."



Me: "He knows what he's doing, wena you need to trust him." (You.)

Sethu: "I do."

Me: "Good because the next time you do that, I will belt you in front of him and I'm not kidding."

If she is not careful she will ruin a good thing, it would be a cold day in hell before I let that happen.

Sethu: "I'll try."

I trust her words.

If anyone deserves happiness then it's her.

There must be a joke that was told that has her laughing like an idiot.

Me: "Please don't tell me your mother's side of the family got to you."

Sethu: "No, I just thought of something."

That something is tickling her because she's not stopping.

Me: "Share."

Sethu: "Heaven and earth."

She falls back on the bed and laughs out loud, I find it stupid honestly.

Me: "Doti." (Nonsense.)

Sethu: "Sorry sis."

Her apology comes with more laughter.

Me: "Okay stop."

I'm laughing at myself as well.

Sethu: "Who is that guy who promised you heaven and earth?"

It was such a long time ago.

Me: "I don't remember his name, stupid pig."

I don't remember his face as well.

Me: "Don't you think it's time we go back home?"

Sethu: "I'm ready, I was waiting for you to say the word. Neo has helped you a lot and I thought you might still need him."

I will always need Neo, he is my crutch.

Me: "He'll always be here, I don't want you to play vat 'n sit with that man. Yeyi sifuna umshado, you're worth it." (We want a wedding.)

Sethu: "Thank you sis. Styles knows how I feel about cohabiting."

She puts my worries at ease.

Me: "How did the visit go?"

Sethu: "Dad has cancer, he's dying."

Me: "Oh!"

She glances at me, my retort came unexpected.

Sethu: "Our father is dying Ayize, you should have seen him. He looks terrible, he wants to make amends with you."

And she expects me to believe that?

Me: "We're not going to have this conversation again Sethu, you know how I feel about this."

I will not go back on my word.

Sethu: "Lebo wants to see me."

We are forever surrounded by bad news

Me: "Uyanya." (She's full of shit.)

She glances at me and instantly, I know what's on her mind."

Me: "You're thinking of going to see her?"

She's considering it.

Sethu: "I want to hear what she has to say."

Me: "Sethu ufuna ukuyobona ibantinti ejele? That girl is crazy, she will deal with you and the next thing uzoza kimi ukhala. Nywe nywe Lebo said this, I swear I will smack you back to jail so she 'unsays' what she said to you." (You want to go and see a prisoner. You'll come to me crying.) (Rephrase.)

Days of Lebo bullying her are over.

Sethu: "That's not a word."

Me: "English is not ours and I'm not going to claim it.

Sethu: "I won't let Lebo get to me, that will not happen."

I hate how Sethu can be so ignorant.

Me: "Uma usho girl, yenza okubonayo. It's your life, noma usukhala. I will go with you. I want to see something." (If you say so, do what you see fit.) (Even when you're crying.)

I want to know what is so important that Lebo has to say, she will not play with my sister anymore.

MBUSO\*

Watching Lelo lying defenceless in this bed has broken me, I know for a fact that I will never be able to let go of this image. This is my love, the only woman who gets me. She laughs at my lame jokes, she knows what I want before I could tell her and she makes me feel like I am the only man in the world. How do I begin to start afresh without her?

"You're still here?"

My mother's voices forces me to turn to her after I wipe my tears.

Mom: "Oh my son, look at you. What have you done to yourself? How can you love a woman like this? Mbuso don't you know that love can kill you?"

She plods to me with these words and I can't help but cry even more. She is right, I love Lelo so much that it suffocates me sometimes.

Me: "I'm not weak mom, I'm only human. Is it so wrong for a man to cry for the one he loves? The world expects us to be strong and act like it is well, while we are breaking inside."

She comforts me by taping my shoulder.

Mom: "I know my son, some people would laugh at you and call you names. Only a real man is not ashamed to love a woman."

Me: "I can't lose her. What will I do if she doesn't pull out of this mom?"

Mom: "Mbuso, don't think about it too much. You need to go home and rest, her family is here."

I shake my head because I don't agree with her proposition.

Me: "I can't go into that house, she is not there. Her scent is hovering around the house. I think I will lose my mind, I won't be able to take not finding her there."

Mom: "Come to the house with me, I'll cook for you."

Mom does not understand that I can't leave Lelo alone.

Me: "I'm okay, I'll stay here."

Mom: "Your father is worried about you, he is not taking this well."

Me: "Where is he?"

Mom: "He left, I don't know where he went."

I might have a clue.

There's a slight knock on the door before Styles strides in.

Styles: "Hey."

He wants to talk.

Mom: "I'm going home, I'll check up on you later."

I nod and watch her stroll out, Styles saunters to stand beside me.

Styles: "Here is your certificate."

Oh wow, I looks legit. Even Lelo's signature looks real. I don't know if it's the pain in my heart or I'm happy to have someone behind me but, I am so emotional right now.

Me: "Thank you man, you don't know how much this means to me."

Like my mom, he pats my shoulder.

Styles: "Anything you need, I'll be here and stop crying Mbuso. You will only upset the baby."

He cracks a joke, god-knows I need a good laugh or I will explode.

Me: "I think you're mistaking me for Randall."

My retort has him sniggering.

"What did Randall do?"

Randall inquires as he ambles in with Amara beside him, these two are always glued to each other.

Styles: "How did it go?"

The question is directed to Randall.

He holds me a white envelope.

Me: "What is it?"

I ask while opening it.

Randall: "You doctor Xaba are officially free from debt."

Shocking.

I'm holding a contract in my hand that states that I am an official employee at Bara hospital.

Me: "How did you do this?"

I never had time to look for a permanent job, I only helped out in certain hospitals while fully employed at Rajesh's.

Randall: "Styles knows someone that knows someone that knows the big boss."

Okay, I'm not sure if that makes sense. I am grateful.

Me: "Thank you Styles."

But...

Randall: "You don't owe that man anymore Mbuso, it's been taken care of. You need to live your dream and make money for your family. You can't keep living under the shadow of someone."

Me: "Thank you guys."

Styles: "Friends don't say thank you."

Me: "Yeah, now I need Lelo to wake up."

Amara is sitting on her bedside while holding her hand, she carries a worried look.

Amara: "Can she hear us when we speak?"

She keeps her gaze on Lelo.

Me: "She can."

Amara: "Lelo, it's me Amara. We're here, Mbuso is here too. Randall and Styles, please come back to us. If you can hear me sis, squeeze my hand."

Why didn't I think of that?

We watch with anticipation, my heart beat has stopped for this second. The hope comes crushing down when she doesn't move.

Styles: "There's hope as long as there's breath in her."

Amara: "You need to pull through Lelo, we're going to be parents. Remember when we said our kids will grow up together? They will be best friends. How will that happen if you don't wake up. Fight for us, fight for Mbuso and Goku. He needs your strength to pull out of this."

I can't do this.

I jump from my seat and lurch to the window, I can't let them see me cry.

I'm unable to control my tears.

Styles: "Mbuso."

He's behind with his hand resting on my shoulder. If I turn around, they will see my weakness. These tears are having their way with me.

Styles: "Be strong Mbuso."

I nod, this is all I got.

Randall: "Can we ask for a second opinion? Get a different doctor to check up on her."

Styles: "We can do that, I know someone in Cape Town. He's good, he's always busy so we will have to get Lelo there."

Anything is okay with me as long as my family comes back to me.

"Neo, finally you're here."



Styles announces.

Neo: "Yes Stylos, I brought masonto."

I'm able to face them now as I have packed my tears away.

I didn't think of getting someone to pray for her.

Amara: "I hope it's okay?"

She's asking for my approval.

Me: "Anything to help Lelo and Goku."

We exchange greetings with her.

Masonto: "Nombulelo right?"

I nod.

Masonto: "This girl is strong, I see the battles she has fought in her life."

Didn't I say that Lelo is a strong woman?

Neo: "Yeah, hona le moloji enoa ea neng a batla ho mo bolaea and she fought her Masonto, nahana." (There's this witch who wanted to kill her, imagine.)

He's writing his own drama.

Masonto is staring at Lelo, her attention has been diverted from Neo.

Masonto: "Her father is the reason behind her suffering."

What does she mean suffering?

We did everything with mam' Zodwa.

Me: "I don't understand ma."

Masonto: "He did something months ago, he gave away someone that does not belong to him."

Amara?

She has been found.

Masonto looks at Amara.

Me: "kodwa ma, the person was found. That's her."

I point at the person she's looking at.

Masonto: "Yes but her ancestors have not been appeased yet. They are still angry. Nombulelo's mother and uncle went to see a witch doctor who told them that this child will never be at peace because of what her father did."

What have we been doing with mam'Zodwa?



Me: "There's a woman who prayed for her ma, she delivered her from the bondage she was in."

She smiles warmly.

Masonto: "Yes, she is a powerful woman. Our gifts are different, some are able to dictate everything and others miss some few minor things. That's the case here. Where are her parents?"

Me: "I don't know."

Masonto: "Amara my child, you need to forgive your uncle. The grudge in your heart will only keep you in bondage."

Amara: "I can't forgive him."

Masonto: "It's not easy yes. You need to find it in your heart to forgive him."

Randall moves closer to Amara.

Me: "What about the baby Masonto? Is he going to be okay?"

I'm curious.

Masonto: "Tell her family to do the cleansing for both these girls and everything will be okay after that."

How on earth will I approach the Buthelezis after what I said to Jonas?

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

159\*

NKOMO\*

I rush to the living room upon my hearing my phone ringing. I'm supposed to be meeting up with Ruth later today, maybe she's calling to cancel. I have three days left to execute Styles' plan or else I'm in deep trouble, my head has been spinning for the past few days.

Ruth: "N.K"

Her first words as I answer the call.

Me: "What's wrong?"

Ruth: "I need help, please come over."

Her voice does not alarm me that something is wrong.

Me: "I'm on my way."

Ruth's house is not too far from me, fifteen minutes drive and I'm there. There's a car parked outside, she has a visitor.

The door swings open as I reach to knock like she was waiting for me right at the door. She looks different, her eyes have lost that spark they usually have.

Me: "What happened?"

Her response is a dreadful sigh.

Me: "Ruth talk to me."

She turns to walk to the living room, I'm led there by curiosity. There seems to have been a struggle here. At first my mind is muddled as to what I'm looking at, then I see it behind the couch. It's a man's feet, the shoes give it away.

Me: "Who is that?"

It's not rocket science that she has killed someone.

Ruth: "I killed him."

Her deadpan voice is bone chilling, my sweet Ruth has killed a man.

Who could it be?

Why am I terrified of the findings?

Ruth: "He found out about us and threatened to tell my father."

No, it can't be.

Confounded, I leer at her.

How did I not see this? Her shirt is plastered in blood and she holds a knife dripping in blood.

Me: "Who did you kill?"

Silence.

Her impassive eyes are glaring into mine. There's only one way to find out, although my mind knows the answer. Taking slow steps, I make it behind the couch and...

Me: "No, no, no."

It's exactly what I thought.

Ruth: "The son of a bitch is dead, he will never bother us again."

Me: "What have you done Ruth? What have you done?"

I boom while charging at her, she flinches as she moves back.

Ruth: "I killed him, I did it for us."

She proudly states as if it's the best thing she has ever done.

Me: "Stop saying that."

I grab her upper arms, shouting at her.

Ruth: "What is it?"

Me: "You have signed your death warrant."

Her eyes fall out.

Ruth: "What?"

Me: "This is suicide."

Ruth: "What do you mean? You're not making sense."

Now, she decides to panic.

Me: "You killed Segun Okolie, you don't spill the blood of the Okolies. You'll be cursed Ruth, you and your future generation. You will die a painful death."

She smashes her hand on my mouth to stop the flow of my words.

Ruth: "No, that's not true... it can't be true... Who told you this? How do you know?"

Me: "It doesn't matter, you're doomed. You've ruined us Ruth, you've ruined us."

Ruth drops the knife on the floor, her hands begin to tremble.

Ruth: "How do we fix this? There has to be a way out."

She's begins to slowly pace the room.

Me: "Ruth."

Ruth: "I didn't know N.K, I'm sorry I didn't know."

She pulls her weave out and tosses it on the floor.

Me: "Listen to me."

I grab her upper shoulders to keep her still.

Me: "I'll fix it, I promise."

Ruth: "How?"

Me: "You trust me, right?"

She nods, the impassiveness has subsided. She has accepted fear in her eyes.

Me: "First, we have to dispose of him."

Ruth: "Okay. What should I do?"

Me: "Ditch him in a swamp or the river."

Ruth: "Okay."

Her reply comes with a nod.

Me: "We're going to be okay, I promise."

I cup her cheeks before drawing her into my arms.

How do I keep this promise? All I know is that I don't want to lose her.

SETHU\*

Me: "Ayize hurry up."

Visiting hours will be over before we get there, we're preparing to visit Lebo and my sister is taking her time. I have a feeling that she's dragging so we get there when it's too late.

We came back home three days ago, I missed my apartment I won't lie. Styles doesn't give me a chance to miss him, he is always here. Ayize spends most of her time out with Neo, she's happy.



Me: "Ayize."

I shout, she's in her room doing I don't know what and I am growing impatient.

Ayize: "Relax, I'm almost done."

She hollers back.

Almost?

She's supposed to be done. My phone is ringing, it's already packed away in my bag and I'm ready to plod out the door. I fiddle in the bag to find it.

A call from mom?

I hope she's not calling to ask about Lebo.

Me: "Mom."

I answer.

I hear sniffing, she's crying.

Me: "Mom?"

My heart jumps to my throat. Something has happened to dad.

Mom: "Your father is leaving us, he's in his final moments."

My head spins and the hair at the back of my neck stands.

Me: "Mom?"

I have lost my speech.

Mom: "You need to come before it's too late, he wants to say goodbye. Bring your sister with you, he won't die in peace if he doesn't see her. If she ever loved him she will come."

She cuts the connection, I feel a heavy presence behind me and turn to Ayize dewy-eyed.

Ayize: "Is it him?"

Me: "It's time, he wants to see us."

My father is leaving us.

RANDALL\*

Styles: "I'm going to kill Nkomo."

Styles introduces out of the blue. He came over a few hours ago, we're in the lounge discussing business as he drops this bomb on me.



Me: "What did he do now?"

He must have messed up for Styles to want to kill him.

Styles: "He's sleeping with Ruth."

Me: "Okay, that was part of the plan."

Styles: "Falling for her was not."

I knew this was going to happen.

Me: "He aborted the mission?"

Styles: "Not only that, he took the earrings from her and disposed of them."

Me: "That fucking bastard, I'm going to kill him."

He stops me as I begin to lurch towards the door.

Me: "Let me go Styles."

I growl at him, I have this desire to kill that son of a bitch.

Styles: "Calm down and lower your voice, Liyana is in the house."

Me: "Nkomo is dead, I will not tolerate his nonsense any longer. I told you Styles, I told you that man was bad news. I should have killed when I had the chance."

This is war, Nkomo will not let us kill Ruth.

Styles: "He's human Randy, it was bound to happen."

Is he justifying Nkomo's betrayal?

Me: "That's bullshit Styles, he knew the bloody plan when he went in."

Styles: "Yes, I'm not saying what he did is right. Nkomo betrayed us in the worst possible way, I hate it when a plan doesn't come together. I gave him seven days to kill that bitch, five days later he hasn't gotten back to me."

Me: "Dammit, he's probably going to elope with her. How can he be so stupid and fall for the enemy?"

I never trusted that man.

Me: "Once a Mkhize, always a Mkhize."

I pull out my gun and load it.

Styles: "What are you doing?"

Me: "Change of plans, I'm going to kill them both."

I can hear his footsteps treading behind me as I charge towards the door.

Styles: "Randall wait, I said I've got it. I will do it, you have a family to think of now. You can't go around shooting people."

He pulls me and pins me against the wall.

Me: "Get the fuck off of me."

I rumble, no one will stop me from killing that son of a bitch.

Styles: "Calm down Randall."

Me: "Don't tell me to calm down, I have to kill Mkhize and that bitch."

I push him off, he staggers back and manages to gain his balance.

This is getting annoying, he pulls me back again and this time his arm is pressed on my chest as he pins me on the wall.

Me: 'Styles, I don't want to hurt you.'

Styles: "I know you won't, you need to control your anger."

Me: "I'm not controlling shit."

I smash my hands on his chest pushing him back with force.

Me: "This is the second time Styles, the bloody second time that cow has betrayed me. I let it go the first time for you, not again. Nkomo is going to pay."

Styles: "Okay, he will pay but, not like this Randall. I have a plan, let me take care of this."

I can't trust that as well.

Me: "I'm going to kill him. Are you coming or am I doing this alone."

I am not going to play with my family's lives.

Styles: "Randall please."

Me: "You stay here then."

Styles: "I can't let you leave this house."

Me: "You can't stop me either."

Styles: "His blood shouldn't be on your hands, let me handle Nkomo."

This is a debt I owe to myself.

Me: "I'm doing this for my family. Do you think I like that Amara is locked up in this house? She can't go out without me guarding her. She is not okay Styles, she might act like it. You had everything under control, right?"

Styles: "I still do."



Me: "Not from where I'm standing, it's my fault. I got too comfortable not anymore."

I lurch to the door.

Styles: "Randall."

He shouts.

Me: "Don't stop me Styles."

I pull the door open and what do you know? The devil brought him right to my door step.

SETHU\*

My hands start shaking as we drive through the gate. Yes, we. Ayize came with.

There are people outside, it's my uncles, my father's brothers. They are sitting under a tree, grief keeps them company.

We send our salutations and toddle to the house, we meet my aunt at the door who gives us dad's current location.

I stop outside the bedroom door, my heart is pounding so fast it's making me light-headed.

Ayize: "I'm scared too."

She sees the fear in my eyes.

I push the door open, my mother is sitting on the bed next to him. They are having a light conversation. Dad's eyes fall on Ayize and a weak smile takes over his face.

Dad: "My baby."

He stretches his hand out to her.

She hesitates before striding over to the bed and takes his hand. The tears she has been holding gust out of her, as she goes down on her knees and rests her head on his arm.

Dad: "It's okay my baby, I'm at peace now that I have seen you."

Each word slowly slides out of his mouth.

Me: "How are you dad?"

It's pretty clear.

Dad: "My time has come my child, how I wish all my kids were here in my last moments."

He means Lebo as well.

Dad: "Come closer Sethu."



My feet lead me to him, I position myself on the bed.

Dad: "Mama, give me that diary in there."

It takes him a minute to point at the drawer on mom's side.

Mom: "Baba, I think..."

She tries to dispute.

Dad: "We spoke about this."

The diary is given to dad who hands it to me.

Dad: "My child, I want you to know that I love you. Everything was done to protect you Sethu."

What is he on about now?"

Ayize draws back a little, she's sensing something.

Mom: "I'm going to prepare supper."

She's trying to escape.

Dad: "No stay, this involves you too."

My gaze is on this diary in my hands. What could it contain?

Dad: "Open it."

At his instruction I flip it open to find an old picture of a young girl about the age of eighteen.

Ayize: "Oh my God, Ntosh?"

She says as she moves next to me.

Ayize: "I thought we didn't have pictures of her."

Dad: "I'm sorry that we hid them from you, I guess we couldn't stand our sin."

He struggles to speak and it's heart breaking.

Me: "What's going on dad?"

Dad: "That's your mother Sethu."

He spits the words out and shatters my world, this can't be true.

Dad: "She's your mother."

He repeats.

Ayize staggers back until she hits her back on the wall, astonishment and disbelief take over her face. I have lost my way to my words.

Dad: "I wanted to take this secret to my grave then I realised that, you deserve to know the truth

about your mother. She was a stubborn, wild child. I wanted to throw her out of the house when we found out that she was pregnant. She was six months into her pregnancy when the truth came out. There were complications when she was giving birth, we tried to save her Sethu but, she didn't make it."

Ayize: "What do you mean you tried to save her? Did she not give birth at the hospital?"

Dad: "No."

Mom is in tears, what is being said serves to be a painful memory for her.

Dad: "She gave birth here at home, she had a fight with your mother that night. Things got physical, she fell and that sent her to an early labour. We had no choice but to help her with the delivery, she didn't get a chance to hold you or look at you. She died right after she heard you crying."

Ayize: "So if she hadn't fought with mom, this wouldn't have happened, she would still be alive."

She's crying.

Dad: "It was a mistake, your mother didn't mean to push her."

Ayize huffs.

Ayize: "You people told me that she disappeared."

Dad: "We were trying to cover up our sins."

Ayize: "What sin?"

Mom: "Baba please that's enough."

Mom doesn't want her sins to be revealed.

Dad: "Find it in your hearts to forgive us, Nontobeko had serious bruises from the fight, your mother was going to be jailed. So we didn't report her death, we buried her in the back yard."

Ayize tears up and I am numb, I can't move neither can I speak. Everything around me has slowed down.

Who are these people?

Mom: "I'm sorry Sethu, I'm sorry my child."

I am not touched by her tears, I'm emotionless right now.

Ayize: "Your own sister? You buried her like a dog. How could you be so evil?"

She's yelling at him.

Dad: "I wanted to save your mother, I did it for you two as well. You girls were so young and needed a mother. How was I going to raise you by myself?"

He justifies his evil acts.

Ayize: "We played in that back yard. What were your thoughts when you saw us there? That's evil dad. How could you?"

Dad: "There is nothing I can say or do to justify my actions, till this day I regret all I have done. I couldn't protect my sister."

Me: "And my father? Who is my father?"

I gain the strength to question him.

Dad: "There's a picture on the last page, he was young then. That's all we have of him."

He doesn't look that young, probably thirty, there's no date or name on the picture.

Dad: "That's the only picture Nontobeko had of him."

Me: "Did he know about me?"

Dad: "No, she didn't want to tell him. Her plan was to raise you by herself."

I truly do not know how to feel about this.

Dad: "I can die in peace now, I have done my duty. I want you to give my sister a proper burial, she deserves that. I know I will have to answer to my ancestors when I get there."

I don't know how to feel about his death as well, my heart has been frozen by the truth. Mom has her head dropped, she can't look at me.

Dad: "Forgive me Sethu, forgive me please."

I will never forgive him, nor will I forgive this woman next to him.

Ayize: "Makafe kee, so we can go." (He should die already.)

She expresses in anger, I would chide her but I don't care anymore. These people have been selfish, they lived for each other and shoved the rest of us in shelves.

Dad: "I understand your anger Ayize and I hope that one day you will forgive me, you too Sethu. I'm not perfect, neither is your mother. Forgive her as well, don't report this to the authorities. Your mother has no one now, Ginger and Mbali need her."

He continues to fight her battles, I have no comeback for this.

Ayize: "My siblings deserve better."

Dad sighs as he clenches his eyes.

Dad: "Mama, call Ginger and Mbali in. I want to see all my children before I go."

He instructs, I should be crying and screaming for him not leave us. My heart feels nothing.

Mom comes back with the girls, they know what's going on. Mbali is in tears while Ginger is standing strong behind her, she's angry though.

Dad: 'My babies, I want you to know that I will always be with you. Take care of your mother and

live life to the fullest.”

He stretches his hand out to them. Mbali is the first to take it, Ginger follows.

Dad: “I bless you my children, may everything you do prosper. Be happy always.”

He looks at me.

Dad: “Sethu, maybe finding your father will give you closure. He will tell you everything you need to know about your mother. I see the anger you hold in your heart, you’re protecting yourself from pain. Take heart and heal my baby.”

I’m not touched by his saying.

Dad: “Ayize, I love you. I hope you two will find it in your hearts to forgive me.”

Ayize looks ready to go.

Dad: “Mama, ungasakhala. You will be okay, you’re blessed with four beautiful daughters.”  
(Don’t cry.)

She shakes her head weeping and this provokes Mbali and Ginger to weep.

Mom: “You have been a good husband and I couldn’t have asked for a better partner.”

Dad: “My wife, tell Lebo that I love her.”

The words sluggishly move out of his mouth, he’s giving up.

Dad: “I’m going now.”

He slowly declares, the girls are sitting on the bed crying their hearts out. With coldness in my heart, I watch my father take his last breath. Mom screams as she throws herself on the floor. I want to comfort the girls but, I don’t know how to, my heart is cold. Ayize is the first to rush out of the room, she is enraged. Is this a start for me?

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

160\*

RANDALL\*

Nkomo has the nerve to come to my house after what he did, I press the gun on his temple and he raises his hands in submission. He staggers back outside, I follow his slow movements with the gun pointed at him.

Nkomo: "What's going on Randy?"

Me: "You're about to meet your maker, you piece of shit."

He grimaces as he continues to move back.

Styles: "Randall stop."

He's behind me.

Me: "Remember how you stopped me at the hospital the day I went to finish him off? I shouldn't have listened to you."

Nkomo: "Styles talk to him please."

Nkomo trips on his heel and falls down, I straddle him and press the gun on his forehead.

"Randall, what's going on?"

Amara?

Me: "Go back in the house Amara."

Amara: "Randall don't do this."

She wasn't supposed to see this.

Me: "Amara, I said go back in the house."

She is never moved by my stern voice, Amara is stubborn.

Amara: "I don't care what's going on here, what I will not tolerate is you killing someone while your daughter is in the house. You're a father Randall and you have a child to protect."

Hell! This is why I'm doing this.

Me: "Give me one good reason why I shouldn't kill you."

I whisper softly, enough for only Nkomo to hear.

Nkomo: "Segun is dead."

He announces.

Me: "What?"

Styles: "You finally killed him? I'd be damned."

He chortles, today is a happy day. I move away from him, Amara is frowning at me.

Me: "Go in, I'll be with you now."

If she could roll her eyes, she would. She paces back to the house, I have some explaining to do.

Me: "How did you do it?"

Nkomo gets up on his feet.

Nkomo: "Ruth killed him, she stabbed him to death."

Me: "I don't believe you."

He might say anything to save his own skin.

Nkomo: "I saw him myself, he's dead. Ruth killed him."

Me: "Is this your way of trying to escape a bullet? It's not going to work cow, you fucked up."

Styles pushes me back as I grab Nkomo by the collar.

Styles: "I'm tired of telling you to calm down Randall, I think he's telling the truth. He wouldn't lie, knowing what's at stake. Am I right Nkomo?"

Nkomo clenches his jaw, the look he's giving Styles right now is deadly.

Nkomo: "You're right Styles, I can take you to him if you don't believe me."

Like we should trust that.

Me: "Where is his body?"

Nkomo: "In a swamp, there was no other way."

Me: "If it weren't for my mother, I would bury him in a shallow grave. That's what he deserves, my sister can rest in peace now. Her death has been avenged."

It kind of feels like a dream.

Me: "Wow, two birds with one stone."

I nod with a grin on my face, my words seem to evoke anger in him as he sneers at me.

Me: "What's wrong Nkomo? It's a great day, you're supposed to be celebrating."

Nkomo: "There is nothing to celebrate, Ruth is going to die."

Styles: "Isn't that great?"

Styles taunts and laughs while at it.

Me: "This calls for a drink."

Nkomo: "Please do something, she can't die."

He pleads for Ruth.

Me: "What is this? I thought we all hated Ruth."

Styles: "We do, am I right Cow?"

Styles is gleaming with happiness.

Me: "This should be a happy occasion."

Nkomo: "Please Randy, spare her. Do something, don't let her die."

How could he ask me to save the life of that evil woman.

Me: "There's nothing I can do, even if there was, I wouldn't lift a finger."

Nkomo: "I would do anything, please."

Is he deaf or what?

Me: "I told you there is nothing that I can do, let her be man. Her fate has been decided."

Styles: "Nkomo, you can't seriously be begging for her life."

Nkomo: "I love her, I know I wronged you guys and I was wrong."

Styles: "Damn right you did."

Nkomo: "What should I do? How do I help Ruth?"

Damn, Nkomo is really desperate. He has fallen hard for that woman.

Me: "Find a strong traditional healer, maybe they might help her. I'm not promising though, I don't know how the Okolies can be provoked to such an extent that they kill whoever is involved in hurting their own. Their anger knows no bounds, it has no limits. Remember what happened to your little brother? They can be heartless as fuck, good luck in trying to help that witch. But listen to me Nkomo, Ruth is in a cult along with her father. I'm sure you know that. There will be no happy ending for you guys."

This advice is for old time's sake.

Styles: "I'd take heed of his words if I were you Nkomo, If I could I would save you from her but, you're in deep and no matter how much we try to pull you out, you will not bend. I can only hope that she has reformed and is not the evil woman her father turned her into."

Nkomo: "She is not, I know her. I have spent time with her, Styles I held her in my arms and I know that she is real. She has a heart and it's pure."

Stupid!

Me: "Okay let's not get carried away. Today is your lucky day Nkomo, you should thank the Mkhizes. They are definitely on your side."

Nkomo is stark raving mad, he is blinded by Ruth.

Nkomo: "I will find my own way, I will help her."

He declares and starts to walk away.

Styles: "Cow."

He stops at Styles' words.

Styles: "I don't hate you bro, just so you know. If Ruth tries anything with you, I will not hesitate to kill her. I take my friends seriously and you're one of them. I will kill her right in front of you."

This is the type of a man Styles is, being abandoned by his father and having lost his mother made him cherish the people in his life. I feel sorry for Richard, it was his loss. Turning his back on such a great man like Styles.

SETHU\*

Ayize is driving us back home, none of us could stay in that house. Who could after hearing my father's confession? My biological mother is buried in their back yard.

How do people do that?

You see such things on TV and for them to happen in real life is shocking.

Me: "Take me to Styles."

My first words since we left the house.

Ayize: "Sure."

She says.

I can feel the pain in her heart as she speaks, Ayize knew Ntosh. She had a chance to meet her and loved her while I was denied a chance by the people I thought loved me. Even a picture of her would have been better, I would have lived my life knowing that I had a mother who loved me.

Ayize: "I hate them even more now."

She exclaims erratically, I think I hate them too.

Ayize: "And I am not sorry that he's dead, Beauty will also pay, I swear to god that witch will pay."

Her words are entangled with so much anger. I feel weak because I can't express myself.



Ayize: "Our father turned out to be our uncle, wow. Life is full of surprises."

Shocking revelation.

Me: "How was she?"

She steals a quick glance. I want to know about my mother.

A glimpse into her life.

Ayize: "She was full of life, she was refreshing and beautiful. She lived life to the fullest and she wasn't as innocent as you."

She's titters.

Ayize: "She was wild and carefree and she loved life and people. I don't know how Beauty could've hated such a kind soul."

That's all mom has become, Beauty Malinga. We will never see her the same again.

Me: "She was beautiful."

I proclaim as I pull out the picture from the diary.

Ayize: "I'm sorry about everything, honestly I should've known."

Me: "It's not your fault, don't blame yourself."

A while later she pulls up outside Styles' house.

Ayize: "We're here."

Neo's car is parked outside, Styles is not here. We exit the car and head for the door. I really need to be with Styles right now. He has a way of making me feel better and at peace without even trying.

Did I mention that he gave me the key to his house? That was after I refused to move in with him when he asked again. Stubbornness has a name, Styles Sishi.

The house is empty, I thought Neo was here.

Ayize: "Where is that big head?"

Translated Neo.

Me: "Probably somewhere in the house."

Ayize: "I'm hungry, I'll see what's in the kitchen."

She proclaims as she makes her way there.

Here comes Neo, he appears from one of the rooms.

Neo: "Miss S?"



This is how he greets.

Me: "Hey, I hope you don't mind, we let ourselves in."

Neo: "We? Is Zee with you?"

He scans his eyes and immediately spots her in the kitchen.

Neo: "Don't worry Miss. S. Make yourself at home, it's our house."

He's tramping towards Ayize who has sunk her head in the fridge.

Neo: "Zee."

He's a happy chap, she pulls her head out and he surrounds her with an embrace.

Ayize: "Neo, I can't breathe."

That's my sister, she's not affectionate.

Neo: "Where have you been? You don't love me anymore?"

I join them in the kitchen, although I doubt I'll be able to stomach anything.

Ayize: "Stop being weird Neo."

Yep.

The girl needs serious lessons on how to be affectionate.

Could Neo be sailing this boat alone?

Me: "That's right Neo, rub off all your affections on her."

Ayize: "Don't be ridiculous."

She's making a sandwich after denying Neo a hug.

Neo: "I'm also hungry, make me some."

He's standing too close.

Neo: "Oh shit."

He exclaims as we hear the sound of a baby crying.

Me: "Whose baby is that?"

Neo: "Mini me."

He runs to the room he came out of.

Ayize: "That's sweet, I've always wanted to meet him."

Me: "Same here."

Ayize: "Would you like some?"

She offers me a plate of sandwich.

Me: "I don't think I can stomach anything."

She shrugs her shoulders and indulges on the snack.

Me: "Maybe I should call Styles."

I need to see him.

Ayize: "Do that."

Yeah.

His phone rings, I impatiently wait for him to pick up the call.

Styles: "Kitten."

My heart jumps.

Me: "Where are you?"

Styles: "With Randall. Are you okay?"

No.

Me: "I'm at the house."

Styles: "Okay, I'll be there in a while. You don't sound okay. Did something happen?"

Me: "My father is gone."

I say it casually.

Styles: "I'm sorry Kitten."

I'm not sorry.

Styles: "Sethu are you there."

He probes as I fall into silence.

Me: "I am."

I mutter.

Styles: "I'm on my way, you're going to be okay."

I don't see it...

My world has been turned upside down.

Me: "I'll see you later then."

Ayize is gaping at me with a sad look on her face.

Ayize: "You will be okay, we're here for you and it's okay to cry."

Me: "I don't want to cry."

I don't have tears to cry.

Ayize: "I know you do, you've been holding back your tears since dad revealed everything."

Me: "Beauty won't be able to do the funeral arrangements by herself, she is too broken."

I don't want to talk about my pain, it will only make me angry hence, the offramp.

Ayize: "So? He was her husband, let her do it."

That's what I think too but....

Me: "We have to think about Ginger and Mbali, we can't abandon them. They don't know the monster that we knew, their father was their hero."

She clicks her tongue, my statement is true though.

Ayize: "Hero my foot, I swear one day I'm going to take those girls away from that woman. They will not be raised by a heartless person like Beauty."

I agree.

Neo walks back with a fussy toddler in his arms.

Me: "Oh my word, he is so adorable."

Neo: "Just like his father."

He declares.

Ayize: "Please don't insult the poor child, he is a looker and you on the other hand are..."

Neo: "Zee, I know you secretly think that I'm handsome. Have you ever seen a face like this before?"

Ayize: "Not really and I'm glad otherwise I would be traumatised, seeing you twice. Cabanga nje."  
(Imagine.)

Great.

The war commences.

I should stop them before they go any further.

Me: "Can I hold him Neo?"

I stretch my arms towards Kagiso, he hides on his father's chest.

Neo: "ke bare, o tshaba basadi. Akere Kagiso?" (He's dump, he's afraid of woman.)

To think being a parent would change someone, not Neo.



MBUSO\*

It's been a whole gnawing five days without Lelo, the house feels different without her here. I can't sleep, eat or do anything. Ntombi has set a meeting at her house, normally I should be taking an elder with. I guess I will do this on my own. My heart is not in it, Jonas will grill me today.

"Mbuso your food is ready."

I forgot to mention that my mother insisted on moving in till I get back on my feet, I couldn't contend with her.

Me: "I'm not hungry ma."

I tell her as I tie my shoe laces. I can only see her feet standing in the kitchen, she heaves a hefty sigh.

Mom: "When will you stop starving yourself Mbuso? Have you seen how much weight you have lost?"

This is her anthem, she sings it every day.

Me: "I'm going out, I won't be back till late."

My announcement leaves her jaw dropped.

Mom: "You're going to see that girl again?"

Me: "You mean Lelo? Yes mom, I'm going to see Lelo."

She props her body on the kitchen door post and doubles her arms across her chest while holding an appalled mien.

Mom: "How long will you run after her, don't you think it's about time that you move on?"

Her anthem is divided into two, this is her second stanza.

Me: "It's hardly been a week since Lelo fell into a coma and you're talking about moving on?"

Mom: "I'm looking out for you son, she might never wake up."

Me: "I don't need your negative input."

Mom: "Mbuso that child has bad luck, her life will never go right."

It's about time she goes back home.

Me: "Is this why you came here mom?"

Mom: "I came to look after you."

Me: "I think it's time you go back home, I don't need you here anymore."

Mom: "Mbuso?"

She calls out to me as I saunter to the door.

Me: "Lelo is here to stay and if you're against our relationship, it would be better if you leave us in peace."

I shut the door behind me, my mother will drive me insane.

AMARA\*

I'm not okay after seeing Randall attack Nkomo, his anger is always right at the door. He might get hurt one day and I will not be able to take it.

I'm waiting for him in the bedroom and hoping that he will come. I hear a pair of footsteps pitter to the room, he peeps through the door with that permanent pucker on his face.

Me: "Are you okay?"

He's standing in the door way.

Me: "Randall?"

Why is he not saying anything?

There it is, a nod.

Me: "Are you going to stand there or come closer?"

I want him next to me, I woke up feeling clingy today. I want to be around him all the time and I look for him when he's out of my sight.

Don't blame me, it's the baby.

Randall plods to me, the furrow grows with each tread.

Me: "Hold me."

I lie down on the bed, he spoons me and his arms feel amazing around me. Again, it's the baby.

His face is cradled on the curve of my neck, the wet kisses forces shivers to ripple through me.

Me: "Don't get any ideas Okolie."

I smack his hand that's dancing on my bust.

Randall: "This is it? A cuddle?"

He complains as he goes on with his kisses, if he doesn't stop I might just give in.

Me: "This is more than enough."

Randall: "It will be once we have tasted each other."

Randall and his hand, I decide to let him be. It's on my bosom and he's rubbing and squeezing it."

Me: "Stop trying to get me in the mood baby."

I whine.

Randall: "But, I want to get you in the mood."

Me: "Not happening."

He'll get his way, that's how it is.

Me: "I want to do the ceremony soon."

He stops playing on my neck.

Randall: "When?"

Me: "Next weekend if possible."

Randall: "I'm behind you with whatever you decide."

I love him.

Me: "We need to set a wedding date."

It's been on my mind lately and I keep forgetting to mention it.

Randall: "Anytime with me is okay, as long as I get to make you my wife. We can even do it now."

He nibbles my earlobe, he's not doing much effort to get into my pants but I'm already too excited. My heart is palpitating and there's that vibration down there.

Me: "When will you send the letter to my uncles?"

Randall: "Styles is on it, we don't know though if it will be accepted since your cousin is hospitalized."

Uncle Jonas might have a problem with it, his brother on the other hand is different.

Me: "I don't think there will be a problem. We don't know when Lelo will wake up and I don't want to wait anymore."

His presses his cheek on mine.

Randall: "I'll get on it, my uncle will leave from Nigeria in two days. Now that Segun is gone we can continue with our lives."

Is this how I'm told that his father has passed on? There is no emotion in his voice.

Me: "What happened to him?"

Randall: "I don't know."

That's a nippy rejoinder, he's sacking my question or is it the whole topic?

Me: "You need to tell them back home."

Randall: "The time will come for that."

He whirls me a little, packs his upper body on mine, careful not to press me down. He shelters my gaze with his as, he leans in to kiss me.

Randall: "I'd rather do something else than talk about my father."

Our lips swirl leading us into a slow wolfish kiss, I tangle my arms around his neck pulling him closer. I'm excited and it's too late to back down.

To be continued...





## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

161\*

NTOMBI\*

Moses is coming home this weekend, my poor husband is injured. This is what stupidity does to a person, when you're told to shut up that's what you should do. If it were a different era, and I was well off in life, I would use every cent I have to avenge my husband.

Who the hell does Amara think she is?

My baby Nombulelo is lying in a hospital bed while Amara and that gangster boyfriend of hers are serving bullets on my husband like it's a free for all magazine. And Jonas, my dear brother. I know he loves me but, the stunt he pulled that day is imprinted on my mind. I may act like everything is okay and life is grand but I have diabolical thoughts in my mind.

Look at them sitting on my couch, life is nice. I should just cook one day and see who will be able to stomach my special ingredient.

Me: "Petunia? Is the food ready? My son in-law is on his way."

She's relaxed next to her husband, their eyes glued to the TV screen.

Petunia: "You know it is."

As if she told me.

That attitude...

Amara is giving them these proud looks they seem to have lately.

They have found their precious. Why are they still here?

They must go and book a rondavel in S'godi's house, I'm out of space.

Me: "I would like to talk to you guys."

I settle on an empty space opposite Mashoto.

Can anyone tell me why she's still here?

Moses doesn't sleep with her. Doesn't she miss being in the arms of a man? The world is one strange place.

Jonas: "What is it Ntombi?"



Shame!

Jonas looks like an uncle today, blazer and all. If only Nombulelo was here.

I will have to reform and be a mother to her, my baby has been through enough. It's time I take the wheel and see to it that she is taken care of, starting with securing this love she has found for herself.

Me: "We all know that Amara is okay. I think it's time that you all go back home. You know that space is limited here, we can't even move around without bumping into each other. If the house was bigger, I would gladly accommodate you."

Like hell I would.

Petunia: "Yes Amara is home safe but, we still have to do the ceremony."

I know that.

This woman loves my house.

Me: "I hear you Petunia, kodwa kee. Is it not you I keep bumping into in the corridor? I can't walk in my house without saying excuse me. It's too small and to make matters worse. Mashoto is here and getting bigger." (But.)

Nonsense.

Mashoto: "Ntombi you can't..."

Me: "Be careful what you say to me, Moses is not here to defend you. My son in-law is on his way, so I suggest that you leave us alone for a few hours. Go hang out at the tuck shop or something."

Mhambi: "Ntombi, you don't speak to people like that. No man is alone in this world. You will need us one day."

So I was told when they first came to my abode.

I'm still waiting for that day.

Me: "I'm not throwing you out Mhambi, I'm simply saying that we need space. Moses will be using crutches when he gets back. How will he move around the house? Bhuti Jonas sleeps here, in the living room while Mashoto sleeps in the kitchen. How is that going to work?" (Brother.)

Petunia: "Where will Moses be going at night? The house is free and empty during the day."

No it's not.

Me: "My son in-law is almost here, we will discuss this later."

Their obstinate desire to stay in my house is nerve-racking.

## STYLES\*

There she is, my beautiful Sethu. She is sleeping on the bed with a throw over her, cautiously I mosey to the bed. Her eyes slightly open due to the sound of my footfall. I scamper on before she could get up and envelop her from behind.

Sethu: "Babe."

The word escapes her mouth in a form of a whisper.

Me: "Go back to sleep."

I paste my lips on her cheek as I pull her closer in my arms.

Me: "Kitten?"

Her soft sobs prickle my ears, her body trembles. Her father's death must have gotten to her. She turns around and hides her face on my chest.

Me: "It's okay, I've got you kitten."

I clench my arms around her.

Sethu: "They lied to me Styles, I have been living a lie my whole life."

God no.

I hope it's not what I think it is. Sethu won't be able to handle the truth, it will take her a life time to get over it.

Me: "Kitten look at me."

I take her face in the palms of my hands, the tears that have chosen to invade her eyes endlessly stream down her cheeks.

Me: "What happened there?"

Her lips pucker up as she tries to let a word out, her sobs clog the syllable leaving her with nothing but the sound of pain. Her head falls, I help her pick up her crown and her teary eyes meet mine.

Me: "I need you to be strong, you're my strong Sethu. Are you not?"

The head shake she gives me, leaves me feeling helpless, it won't be easy to convince her otherwise.

What do you say to a woman who found out that her whole life has been a lie?

Sethu: "I'm not strong for this Styles, I tried and I can't do it. My heart is heavy, I can't get my father's confession out of my mind."

Her voice quavers with each word.



Me: "What did he say?"

I only knew half of the story that, she is not their biological child. There is a deep secret here that has Sethu feeling like her world is falling apart.

Sethu: "They killed her, they killed my mother."

Her hand falls on her face and puts in the effort to wipe away those tenacious tears.

Me: "Who?"

Sethu: "My parents."

She powers up as she wipes away her mulish tears. She moves out of my grip, kneels on the bed and reaches for a diary on the bedside table, with a few sniffs here and there, she pulls out a photograph.

Sethu: "This is her."

She presents, while gloomily staring at it.

Sethu: "Her remains lie in a shallow grave on my parents' back yard, the same place where Ayize and I grew up playing in. The same place where Mbali and Ginger play. My mother was buried like a dog Styles, they killed her."

The pain in her eyes is abruptly replaced by wrath, a sight I have not seen in her before. She is distracted by the sound of her phone ringing, a wrinkle grows between her eyebrows as she glares at the ringing mobile device without giving in to it.

Me: "Who is it?"

Sethu: "Beauty."

She grunts her name out.

Sethu: "She probably wants to talk about the funeral arrangements."

She predicts.

It's too late to stop her from receiving it, she swipes the answering button and puts her mother on speaker. Beauty will have to talk first because Sethu is not saying anything.

"Baby."

Her voice echoes from through the phone.

Beauty: "Are you there Sethu?"

Sethu clutches her jaw and clenches her eyes.

Sethu: "What do you want?"

Beauty: "We need to talk my baby."

Sethu: "Don't call me that, I am not your baby."



She retorts.

Beauty: "Sethu I know that you're upset and..."

Sethu falls into a laughing frenzy.

Sethu: "Upset? After what you did Beauty, you think that I'm upset?"

Her anger is on another level.

Beauty: "You have to be here Sethu, at least for your father."

She completely disregards Sethu's question.

Sethu: "Must I come there and trample on my mother's remains?"

Beauty goes quiet.

Sethu: "How do you live with yourself Beauty? What happened to your humanity?"

Beauty: "Sethu let's not do this please. Can't we bury your father in peace? He deserves a peaceful burial."

The nerve of this woman.

Sethu: "Mr. Malinga deserves nothing, you don't know the amount of hate I have towards you right now. If it weren't for my siblings, I wouldn't give you the time of day."

She spits her words out with so much anger.

Beauty: "I raised you Sethu, I nurtured you and gave you an education. I took you in as my own and treated you like one, while my own child was away from me."

I am dumbfounded by her riposte, Sethu places her hand on mine as I open my mouth to speak. This evil witch needs to hear from me.

Sethu: "I know what you did for me Beauty that, was because you killed my mother and buried her body in a shallow grave. Whatever you did for me was out of guilt and not because you wanted to. That's the person you are, selfish and inconsiderate. You are the embodiment of evil, one day your sins will catch with you, your husband is not here to protect you anymore."

Should I be worried or proud that she's finally standing up for herself, hate consumes you in such a way that it leaves you trapped.

Beauty: "You sound like that demon you call a sister, these are not your words Sethu. You're my sweet child and I know that you will never speak to me like this. Don't let her get to you my baby, don't let her destroy us."

Sethu glances at me in shock as she shakes her head in disbelief.

Sethu: "Don't do that Beauty, don't insult my sister. She is nothing like you. When will you take responsibility for your actions? Not once have you said you're sorry because you fail to recognize your mistakes."

She shouts.

Sethu: "I will take care of the funeral arrangements and I'm only doing this for my siblings not for you or your husband."

I would have it otherwise.

Beauty: "Thank you, my love."

Sethu: "You're an evil woman, your life is over and I hope you will not drag the girls down with you."

Beauty: "I would never hurt my children, I love them."

Sethu clicks her tongue before cutting the call.

Sethu: "Did you hear that?"

Word for word.

Sethu: "That evil woman knows how to make one feel like they are crazy, I wouldn't be surprised if I start to blame myself for my mother's death. That's the power Beauty has on people."

Me: "I beg to differ."

I take her hands into mine.

Me: "You're trembling."

And she's fuming.

Sethu: "She makes me angry."

She mutters.

Me: "Don't let her get to you Kitten."

Sethu: "I want to give my mother a proper burial, we have to alert the authorities so, they dig up her remains."

Me: "You know what that would mean right? Beauty will be charged with murder, the authorities will want to know how human skeletons got in your back yard."

My proclamation has her pondering, for a mere second I see a glint of worry. Beauty deserves every bad thing that's coming to her.

Sethu takes the picture of her mother and hands it to me with a detached smile.

Sethu: "Nontobeko was her name, she was known as Ntosh."

She introduces.

Me: "She looks like a younger version of you."

The resemblance is big.



Sethu: "I wish there were more pictures of her."

Me: "There could be, your aunts and uncles might have them."

Sethu: "I didn't think of that. Everyone in the family was made to believe that my mother disappeared, I don't know how my parents explained it. Who disappears and is not sought after."

Me: "This is South Africa Sethu, you'd be surprised by the number of people that have gone missing and their cases are not opened."

It's sad that her mother had to go through what she went through. She had no one behind her.

Me: "Did they tell you who your father is?"

She goes through a few pages on the diary and brings out another photograph, it's almost worn and grey.

Me: "Is this him?"

Sethu: "Yeah, the picture is not clear though. Where will I begin to find him?"

This doesn't help at all.

Me: "We'll figure a way out, you will be okay. You'll see."

Sethu: "I will be if you're with me."

Me: "I'm not going anywhere. Come here."

Her arms go over my waist as I pull her close and peck the top of her head.

AMARA\*

Apart from craving Randall's arms, I am lazy today. We just got home from visiting Lelo, it felt strange not finding Mbuso there.

Liyana toddles into the bedroom, holding a plate of muffins. She places it on the bed and with so much effort jumps on.

Liyana: "This is for you Mara."

She puts the plate on my lap.

Me: "Thank, Liya baby."

I send one to my nose to take in the aroma.

Me: "Smells nice. Did you make them?"

Liyana: "Yes, Chichi helped me."



Me: "Thank you my love."

Liyana: "Mara?"

Me: "Yes baby."

Liyana: "How did the baby get in your tummy?"

Who sent this child?

Me: "Did you ask your father?"

Liyana: "No."

Me: "Go ask him, he knows the answer."

"Ask me what?"

I look up to see Randall ambling in.

Liyana jumps off the bed and bounces to him.

Liyana: "How did the baby get into Mara's tummy? Did she swallow it?"

His eyes fall out as he raises them to glance at me.

Randall: "What did Mara say?"

He tilts his head to the side gesturing that I should answer the child, I am not doing that. To answer him, I shake my head.

Randall: "Did you ask Chioma?"

Is he...

Oh no!!!!

Liyana: "No."

Randall: "Go ask her."

Only Randall would do that.

What will poor Chioma say to the child?

There goes Liyana skipping off to traumatise the woman.

Me: "Really? Chioma?"

He shrugs his shoulders while sauntering to sit on the bed.

Randall: "What are you doing there?"

He asks as he notices how I'm engrossed on the phone.

He grabs a muffin and chunks a big bite, I'm astounded when he spits everything out on the



plate.

Randall: "What is this?"

Me: "Liyana made them."

Randall: "And I'm told to stay out of the kitchen."

The comparison is not even fair and I will not give a comment to that.

Me: "How are we sure that Liyana is completely safe?"

He frowns due to my unexpected question.

Randall: "Where is this coming from?"

Me: "I have been following the #SaveTheChildren trend on social media."

Randall: "What is it about?"

Of course he wouldn't know.

Me: "It's a campaign to bring attention to the plight of child sex trafficking. Having been molested by my uncle from a young age, this hit home. There is nothing worse than being exposed to such horrible things. There were times when I wanted to die, I was only a child but my mind was entertained with thoughts of death. Liyana is growing up, eventually she will be exposed to social media and its dangers. She'll want to go to malls with her friends, that's where girls are targeted the most."

The thought of it is fretting.

Randall: "We'll protect her Amara, nothing will happen to our baby."

Me: "That's what every parent says but, we can't always keep an eye on our kids, these sexual predators are everywhere, outside school grounds as well. Sex trafficking is very real and it happens in our own backyards. Have you seen the vast number of kids that have gone missing and are never found? I can't begin to imagine how their parents feel not knowing if your child will come home or not. I would die honestly."

Randall: "You shouldn't think about such things Amara."

The topic at hand seems to make him uncomfortable.

Me: "We can't turn a blind eye to it either, we need to act and try by all means to keep our children safe."

If it is possible we could home school Liyana but, she would hate us for keeping her away from the world.

Randall: "No one is turning a blind eye, there is only so much an individual can do."

Me: "It also starts with that one person, to make a change."

Randall: "What is your plan?"

Me: "Invest in the Save The Children organization, I can't imagine any child going through what I went through with my uncle."

Randall: "We can do that, speaking of your uncle. What have you decided?"

I don't see myself forgiving him.

Me: "Honestly I don't know what to do. My mind is disarrayed, I want nothing to do with him. It's different with my aunt, she was oblivious to the things her husband was up to. She became my mother when mine died although, we didn't have that mother daughter relationship, having her around made me feel safe like I had a parent."

Randall: "I'm sure we'll find a way, I think talking to someone about your problems will lead you to the path of forgiveness. I'm not saying he deserves your forgiveness, this is for you. Your experience was traumatic and you need to heal from it."

My mind has managed to pack those memories away.

Me: "I guess but, I don't want to relive that experience."

I was alone with no one to cry to, my father had left me and a monster found me. I was in bondage, there was no way out for me.

Me: "Do you know that right at this moment, there is a girl child in the same situation and they don't have a voice Randall. There is no one to speak for them."

Randall: "We'll get you help first and then we'll think about helping those children. Styles is aware with those things, he can help. It's one person at a time. For now, when you're ready we can get you an appointment with the doctor."

The pressure.

Me: "I'll let you know when I'm ready."

My experience was traumatic. Will I be able to talk about it, I have never shared it with anyone.

NEO\*

I'm watching Zee's bustle in the kitchen as she prepares supper, her love for food is growing. I love how she is not ashamed of eating a lot, her body is transforming. She looks healthier than she did when we first met, her cheeks are becoming fuller and her hands are getting that podginess.

She can fit into clothes now and her appearance is fleeing from that of a child. She is a beauty I must say.

She catches me staring as she turns, to say something and my gaze congest her speech. She raises her eyebrows as questions fly around her head like paper airplanes.

Me: "Ke eng?" (What is it?)

Let's pretend like we don't know what her problem is.

Ayize: "Ubukeni?" (What are you looking at?)

She plants her hands on her hips.

Me: "I'm not looking at you if that's what you think, I'm looking at that double chin."

Her nostrils flap open as she frowns at my comment.

Ayize: "Angithi ifakwe nguwe, I eat more than anyone in this house."

Funny.

Me: "Are you spending the night?"

Ayize: "I think so."

Me: "Great, then I need a partner."

Ayize: "For?"

Me: "We're binging on Criminal Minds tonight, akulalwa." (We're not sleeping.)

This will give me a chance to spend some time with her.

Ayize: "Aren't you on babysitting duty?"

Me: "All the more reasons why I shouldn't sleep. Do you know how annoying it is to be woken up by the sound of a baby crying? Those little demons were sent straight from hell."

She doesn't agree with me nor does she like my statement.

Ayize: "Hayi uKagiso, he's a sweetheart, maybe wena, you were a little demon. Tormenting your mother with your ugly cries, ngathi ngiyabona nje." (Not Kagiso. I can just see it.)

Me: "Hey, I was an angel. You can ask my mother."

Ayize: "She won't tell me the truth because you are a mama's boy."

Me: "I'm not, I'm the only boy so yes her attention has to come to me."

I retort.

Ayize: "This is proof nje that you are, yoh imagine dating a mama's boy? I doubt I'll be able to can." (I can't do that.)

Okay, this could be a joke right? It has to be.

Me: "I am not a mama's boy Zee."

I didn't mind being daubed that before but suddenly I'm offended.

Ayize: "Haibo and then? Why are you so defensive?"

She takes up a different posture as she folds her arms on her chest.

Me: "I'm not, I just don't like being called that."

Ayize: "Ohho."

She turns back to her pots with this exclamation. I need to ask her this or else it will give me sleepless nights.

Me: "So, you wouldn't date me?"

She swiftly spins to glare at me.

Ayize: "Where is that coming from?"

Me: "You said you would never date a mama's boy."

Ayize: "And you said you're not a mama's boy."

There's hope, that's good.

Me: "Ho sharp." (That's great.)

I have this smile I can't push back.

Ayize: "Asazi! Uma usumamatheka kanjena? Is there something you wish to tell me Maake?" (I don't know now that you're smiling like this.)

This is my chance but it's too soon, her wounds are still fresh.

I meander to her, my eyes glued on her. A frown builds up on her face as I get closer.

Ayize: "What is it?"

She questions softly as I get too close, close enough to smell her scent. She smells like gravy, this is what you get for loving the kitchen. She's looking up at me, her eyes wondering what my next move would be.

Me: "You have something on your nose."

I lean in and hear her gulp, it's an attempt to moisten her throat that has gone dry from nervousness.

Right at this moment as we're inches away from each other, I can take this opportunity and indulge on her lips. She shuts her eyes and I know what she's expecting.

Me: "You have a grain of rice on your nose."

Her eyes swiftly open and she accepts a glower.

Ayize: "Rice?"

She asks in wonder.

Me: "Yes."

I use my thumb to flick it off.

Ayize: "Ouch!"

She covers her nose as she whines.

Ayize: "That hurt."

Me: "It should hurt baba, that's what you get for smelling our food hau. Black people like things, you take things from TV and practise it in our kitchens. Yeyi a black man will not eat that, you'll start from scratch."

She pulls a face.

Ayize: "Who will start from scratch? Not this black woman, angidlali njalo." (I don't play like that.)

Me: "The untameable Ayize."

Ayize: "You better know it."

My idea of a perfect match, is this woman right here.

Ayize: "So tell me, where is Kagiso's mom?"

Great.

I can't run away from that woman.

Me: "Probably burning some guy."

She laughs.

Ayize: "Burning?"

Me: "She specializes in burning men."

She narrows her eyes.

Ayize: "Neo don't tell me she burnt you?"

I pout.

Me: "If luck could speak Zee, it would have my voice. I escaped by an inch, she would have burnt my perfect face."

She twitters as she cups my cheeks with her warm hands that smell like soup."

Ayize: "My poor baba. At least your face was saved, ubuzoba mubi kunalokhu." (You were going to be uglier than this.)

She pinches my nose and turns back to check on the pots.

Me: "Umona Zee? It doesn't suit you." (Jealousy.)

Ayize: "Manje mina ngithini Neo? Uma umubi, umubi." (What do you want me to say? If you're

ugly, you're ugly.)

Ayize likes taunting me, I doubt I'll be able to live without that.

Me: "Ngifana nawe kee." (I look like you.)

My retort prickles her laugh bone.

Ayize: "Siyafana kee, kodwa wena umubi worse." (Okay we're the same but, you're uglier.)

Her comeback is escorted with a simper.

Ayize: "And stop abusing my language, us Zulu's don't take it lightly. Stick to your Sotho, you sound like you're chewing when you speak Zulu."

She's lying.

Me: "I'm very familiar with all eleven languages, I speak better Zulu than you."

Ayize: "If that strokes your ego baba, then take it my love."

I love it when she calls me baba.

Me: "I think you have bullied me enough, I can't debate with a woman. You people think you know better. Inkani? Yoh hai." (The stubbornness.)

Ayize: "That's because men are stupid, they think they are at the top of the food chain. The world doesn't revolve around you, the sooner you all realise that, the better."

I disagree.

Me: "The world is nothing without men, there wouldn't be peace if it were infested with women."

She bites her lower lips as she takes my words into consideration.

Ayize: "I can't argue with you on that one. Women are definitely fighting over something. You know I was at the mall yesterday and this woman walks towards me while giving me a cold look, she clicks her tongue after that. Mind you, I have never seen her in my life."

I watch her as she lets me into her world.

Can a person ever be so refreshing?

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

162\*

MBUSO\*

Ntombi is the one to open the door for me, I'm greeted with a warm smile. I can't express the level of my nervousness, Jonas is in the house, he gives me heart palpitations.

Ntombi: "Yes, come in my son."

She smiles widely and I can't seem to grasp what her sudden kindness is about.

Me: "Thank you ma."

I take one step in and she pushes me back, the look on her face is that of shock.

Ntombi: "Kodwa mkhwenyane, amateki?" (Son in-law, why are you wearing sneakers.)

She voices her judgement, I don't see anything wrong with my shoes.

Me: "Ngiyaxolisa ma, I didn't think it would be a problem."

I didn't think about it at all.

Ntombi: "Ungakhathazeki, kulungile." (Don't worry about it, it's okay.)

She paves a way for me to walk in, my gaze instantly falls on Jonas. He's glowering at me and I can't imagine what goes on in his mind.

Me: "Greetings."

They nod at my salutations, all of a sudden I feel unwanted.

Ntombi: "Yini bhuti? Awusakhulumi namhlanje? The boy is greeting you." (You can't speak today brother?)

Ntombi chides them, they are not at all bothered.

Ntombi: "You can sit here."

She points to a one seater, Jonas hasn't stopped staring. My body is sweltering, I feel like I have been put on a hot surface. Is this what being nervous feels like?

The last I spoke to him, I said some pretty nasty things and he doesn't look like the type that forgets easily.

Ntombi: "Would you like anything to drink?"

She offers.

Me: "Water please."

I need it, after this black look from Jonas that, has me feeling like I killed someone.

Jonas: "Why did you come alone?"

I didn't get the memo that this will be lobola negotiations.

Me: "My uncle couldn't make it baba, he..."

Jonas: "You have one elder kwa Xaba?" (At the Xabas.)

Me: "Cha baba." (No sir.)

Mhambi: "I don't think there's a problem because we'll only be discussing Nombulelo's situation."

Mhambi comes to my rescue, I love this uncle.

Jonas: "You said you have something to tell us."

He goes straight to the point, I haven't had time to drink water.

Here it is and Ntombi has the glass in a tray, completely unnecessary.

I almost choke on the water due these eyes glaring at me. Drinking water in peace is out of the question.

Jonas: "You were saying."

Jesus!

Me: "A woman had come to pray for Lelo, she mentioned something about Lelo being punished for her father's sins. There is a dark cloud following her and the only way for her to be free is that a ritual should be performed to appease the ancestors."

This saying takes a lot out of me, I'm going against culture here.

Mhambi: "The Buthelezi ancestors?"

Me: "I think so baba."

It should be that.

Ntombi: "Hayi, ngiyala shame. What sin is that?" (I refuse.)

She knows very well so, I don't know why she's disputing this.

Me: "He gave away someone that does not belong to him."

Ntombi: "Hayi, I see. Amara is responsible for Nombulelo's state. What does that child want from me? Does she want to see me buried six feet under?"

I take it she's not well in the head.



Jonas; "Thula Ntombi. You're talking nonsense, Moses is responsible for that." (Shut up.)

Jonas reprimands her.

Me: "The ceremony has to be done soon, Nombulelo's life is at stake."

Mhambi: "We hear you ndodana. We will do accordingly and inform you once it's done." (Son.)

Did I say I like Mhambi?

I love him actually.

Ntombi: "Inform him? Shouldn't he be apart of the ceremony since they are married?"

I forgot about that lie.

Jonas: "We are not sure about that marriage, no one in this family was there to witness it."

Jonas spews out his comeback.

Ntombi: "No, bhuti. You will not ruin things for Nombulelo." (Brother.)

Ntombi is on my side today. I wonder if she saw me that day standing with Randall and Styles.

Jonas: "Not all that glitters is gold, Ntombi."

That's a hidden insult and it's directed to me.

Ntombi: "You have to think about other people bhuti, ngiyacela tuu." (I'm begging you please.)

Maybe she truly does want what's best for Lelo.

Petunia: "You should practise what you preach Ntombi, wena the most selfish person I know."  
(You.)

Petunia has been quietly sitting next to her husband, she decides to voice out her opinions.

Mhambi: "Hayi manje mama, we have a visitor." (Not now my wife.)

He reproaches her, Petunia sits back on the couch and falls into the silence she is thrown in. There is a sudden knock at the door, Ntombi rushes to open.

Ntombi: "What are you doing here?"

She raises her voice and that forces our eyes to run to her. I am staggered by the fool at the door, due to his presence I jolt up from the chair. He's grins as he sees me.

Jonas: "Sit down boy."

Jonas commands and I cannot argue with him, I am a visitor here.

Ntombi: "Yeyi, I asked you a question. Ufunani la?" (What are you doing here?)

She pushes him back.

Jonas: "Ntombi, I called him here. Let him in."

Jonas will be the one to kill me one day.

Ntombi: "Ngazile, ngazile bhuti ukuthi wena awufuni ingane yami ijabule. What do you call this?" (I knew that you don't want my daughter to be happy.)

Zuma pushes his way in, he's not alone. An elderly man is with him, Petunia makes space for them to sit. She plods to where Ntombi was sitting but, Ntombi beats her to it. They exchange cold looks, Ntombi clicks her tongue.

Ntombi: "Hamba ekishini, amabhodo akulindile." (Go to the kitchen and cook.)

This is Lelo's mother, unashamed and very audacious, she doesn't care about people's opinions.

Zuma holds a smug look, something was promised to him. Jonas is capable of anything.

Mhambi: "How come we have not been told about this Jonas?"

Mhambi is on my side, right?

Okay, I'm trying to comfort my heavy heart.

Ntombi "I also want to know bhuti ukuthi ufunani lomuntu kwami." (What does this man want in my house?)

I'm in the queue as well.

Jonas: "As we all know, Zuma is the father of Nombulelo's baby."

Great introduction Jonas.

Imbecile.

Jonas: "Mhlongo is aware of Nombulelo's situation and about the baby's health. There is a way we can save both Lelo and the baby."

Fate is playing tricks on me right now.

Mhambi: "Qhubeka." (Continue.)

Jonas: "Mhlongo has agreed that they will introduce the baby to the ancestors, that way the child in Nombulelo's womb will be protected. If it happens that the baby dies, he won't be lost. His soul will be accepted by the Mhlongos."

Me: "That's not going to happen."

I find myself disputing against his nonsensical plan, Jonas is one stupid man.

Jonas: "You see Ntombi? You see what you're proud of? This boy doesn't know how to keep his mouth shut when adults are talking."

He growls and I can't grip what he's upset about.

Ntombi: "Umkhwenyane has every right to complain. How can you make such a decision without consulting Lelo's husband?" (Son in-law)

She moves to the edge of the seat, she's about to fight for me.

Mhambi: "I agree with Ntombi, you saw the marriage certificate. Nombulelo is a married woman now."

Jonas: "Mhambi please, this boy does not respect us. Look at him, look at how he's dressed, he failed to bring an elder with him. He should learn from the Mhlongo boy, sibadala man we shouldn't be talking to him but his elders."

This is definitely an ambush by this uncle.

Ntombi: "You know what, I think bhuti is right. Mhlongo has shown us respect by coming with his uncle."

And just like that, she turns on me. That's Ntombi for you.

Ntombi: "Unjani baba?" (Greetings sir.)

She greets Zuma's uncle or whoever he is, he responds with the same politeness.

Ntombi: "Okay, Jonas continue with your meeting while I make tea for our visitors. Courtesy of my husband Moses."

She states as she gets up, Jonas is elated.

I might as well be asked to leave.

Jonas: "So the date has been set for this weekend."

That's three days away.

Me: "With all due respect sir, I can't allow that. Lelo is my wife and you..."

"Yey wenja, phuma kwami." (Get out of my house you dog.)

Ntombi shouts as she strides back from the kitchen, she's carrying a kettle with hot steaming water. I can still hear it boiling.

I jolt to my feet in terror, I'm ready to run out the door only to see her rush towards Zuma.

Zuma: "Haibo!"

He shrieks and jumps up along with the old man he came with.

Jonas: "What are you doing Ntombi?"

He's shouting at her in wrath, his perfect plan is being ruined.

Petunia: "This is exactly the same thing Moses did to our guest, these people are crazy man."

Petunia shouts as well.

This family is something.

Ntombi is not here to play, she means business.



Ntombi: "Angifuni udoti emzini wami, angiwufuni." (I don't want nonsense in my house.)

She screams while targeting Zuma.

Gosh I love this.

Zuma and his old man are led out the door with a kettle of hot water, I would love to see him run like that again.

Ntombi: "Don't ever come back to my house, siyezwana?" (Do you hear me?)

Zuma: "Ngizobuya, I will take my child." (I'll be back.)

I'd like to see him try.

Ntombi: "Ngizokunquma amasende wenja. (I will castrate you, dog)

She yells at him.

Ntombi: "Nibukeni nina? Amabhodo ayasha, argha nxa." (What are you looking at? The food is burning.)

She roars at her neighbours.

"Ntombi usase ne drama namanje?" (You're still dramatic.)

A female voice sounds from afar.

Ntombi: "Voestek Tebogo, hamba uyofa." (Piss off, go and die.)

I'm lucky that Lelo is not like her mother, this woman is extra.

She bangs the door shut.

Ntombi: "Kukwami la Jonas, you will not tell me what to do in my house." (This is my house.)

Jonas is also terrified of the weapon on Ntombi's hands.

Ntombi: "Hlala phansi mkhwenyane, the food will be ready soon." (Sit down son in-law.)

She gives me a warm smile with this command, I just saw two different people.

SETHU\*

Ayize helped me with the funeral arrangements, although she wasn't keen about it. I'm glad that she lent a helping hand, I would've struggled on my own. My life is muddled up, I don't know if I'm coming or going.

We saw Beauty again on Wednesday during the funeral service, we didn't plan to go but, the girls were not okay.

We have to be at church around at 9am, I'm ready, doing a few touch ups. My life will never be the same after today.

I'm going through the diary that contains my mother's picture while I wait for her majesty Ayize to finish up. We're meeting with Styles and Neo at church.

Nontobeko Jacobeth Malinga?

This was her diary and she scribbled her daily life on it.

I come across a paragraph, it looks interesting.

95/03/13

{Today I found out I'm six weeks pregnant, I'm terrified and happy at the same time. I'm carrying the child of a man I love, though I don't know how he will take the news. He is married with a child of his own. I'm contemplating if I should keep the baby or not.}

95/05/1

{I don't know how my brother can be married to such an evil woman, it hurts that he always takes her side. Today Beauty confessed something to me, all the hairs on my body stood. I am afraid for my life, it all started when I got home from school.}

<<< Flash back>>>

Today has been a long day, thank God I'm finally home. The fridge wasn't open this morning, that witch Beauty locked it.

I grab a loaf of bread and butter, this will go well with tea.

There's a heavy presence behind me, it feels like a pair of eyes are piercing through me. I spin around and get a fright of my life as I find Beauty glaring at me. Her face is inexpressive and her eyes are as cold as ice.

Me: "You scared me."

I smash my hand on my chest to stop my heart from beating fast. This is one of her traits, she always sneaks up on me.

Beauty: "When will you get a job and provide in this house? You're eating for two now and my husband will not slave for you."

Her husband is my brother.

Me: "I have school, I can't drop out."

Beauty: "It's not like you have a choice, you're pregnant. You will have to drop out at some point."

This is what she wishes for me.

Beauty: "Remember that day when you fell ill and you vomited the whole night till your face was pale? That was beautiful, I really enjoyed watching you suffer. No one knew what was wrong with you except me."

She delivers in a cold tone.

Me: "What are you talking about?"

Beauty: "Oh poor Ntosh, I poisoned you."

An eerie laugh evades her mouth, I have never heard such an evil laugh in my life.

Me: "Why would you do that to me?"

Beauty: "I wanted to kill that little devil in your womb, you sinned against God. And it is appointed to me to punish sinners that disobey His commands."

She explains while her eyes pierce my soul, compelling me to look away.

Beauty: "You are carrying a demon, how else would it survive that rat poison? Oh Ntosh. When will you learn that you are not wanted in this house? I am a devoted Christian and I will not be bashed because I allowed an unruly brat into my house. I would be careful if I were you, sleep with my eyes open and that food you're about to indulge in. Who knows what it contains."

An unnatural laugh spews out of her mouth just as she walks away. This is enough proof that she wants to kill me and my brother will never believe me if I tell him.

<<< End Of Flash Black >>>

95/07/25

{My brother hates me, him and his wife. Lately I find them glaring at me, their cold stares send shivers down my spine. We had a huge argument when they found out that I was pregnant. If anything happens to me, they did it.}

Beauty Malinga, you have dug your own grave.

NKOMO\*

I'm losing my mind, Ruth's phone is off. I have tried to call her a million times, she's not in her house and what's worse is that her things are still there. Styles is behind this, I remember his threat. If he hurt her, I swear I'm going to kill him. I pull up outside his house.



The door opens after a lax knock and he stands before me with a glower on his face. I'm not here to play, the gun pointed at him is proof enough.

Styles: "What are you doing?"

The unflinching bastard is not alarmed.

Me: "I'm the man with the gun today."

I push him in the house and use my leg to shut the door.

Styles: "Nkomo, what is this?"

He growls with a deep voice, habitually I would be deterred, not today. Today I am fighting for the woman I love.

Me: "Where is she?"

I grunt between my teeth.

Styles: "Who?"

Me: "Don't act stupid Styles. Where is Ruth?"

He frowns as if confused by my question, Styles is a good actor. Heck, he'd sell you a fake dream and you'd buy it.

Styles: "How the fuck am I supposed to know? Last time

I checked, she was sleeping with you."

I have the gun aimed at him and he has the audacity to shout at me.

Me: "Don't fuck with me Styles, Ruth is missing. You threatened her just the other day, now her phone is off. She is not in her house, dammit I can't get through to her."

Styles: "How is that my problem, the bitch bailed on you. Did you think of that?"

Ruth wouldn't do that, I know her.

Styles: "Nkomo, you better put that gun away."

Demands and more demands. That's what he does.

Me: "How does it feel to be on the other side of the gun?"

I'm waiting for the part where he starts trembling.

Me: "I swear to god Styles, I will shoot you if you don't tell me what you did to Ruth."

I howl at him.

Styles is used to getting his way and I am not letting it happen this time.

Styles: "You're so dumb and you don't even know it, is this what a p\*\*\*\*y does to a man? You're



fucking weak Nkomo, shit, you are Mkhize's son."

His derisions never get to me but, today they hit a special spot.

Me: "Don't call me that, you bastard."

Styles: "Truth hurts doesn't it, listen to me Nkomo. I don't play with guns and you know that better than anyone. When I come the fun stops."

His threats are getting old.

His eyes keep moving to the left, he's searching for something or someone.

Me: "She's in this house, isn't she?"

He moves towards the kitchen.

Me: "One more step and I will forget that we're friends."

A sly grin visits his face.

Styles: "I'm giving you time to put that shit away and get the fuck out of my house."

A frustrated groan escapes my lips.

I spot a shadow from the corner of my eye, it's coming from the corridor. Judging by the structure, it's a man. Styles is trying to warn that person by gesturing with his eyes, in a second he appears on the corner. The gun flies to his direction and goes off, everything happens so fast.

"Jesus."

He jumps over the couch, to hide behind it.

Styles: "What have you done?"

Styles hollers as he rushes to check on Neo, my mind had convinced me that it was Randall.

Styles: "Neo are you okay?"

I can't see Neo, only Styles.

Styles: "Neo open your eyes man, come on. Don't do this to me."

The desperate pleas from Styles fill me with so much regret.

Me: "I'm sorry, I thought it was Randall. Honestly, I thought you two had planned to attack me."

Styles: "Oh God, Neo you have to be okay. Please be okay."

He's pleading.

What have I done? I killed him, I killed an innocent man. I stagger back till my legs hit against the couch, I hold on to the arm of the couch, trying to gain my balance. My knees are numb, my heart is pounding so fast any minute now, it will burst out of my rib cage.





Me: "Is he okay?"

Please let him be okay.

Me: "Styles, is he okay?"

I shout to get an answer from him.

Styles: "Shut up Nkomo, shut the fuck up."

He barks back with more rage.

Styles: "If anything happens to Neo, I will kill you Nkomo. I will kill you."

He declares as he has become emotional.

Styles: "Neo man, it's not funny anymore. Wake up, you're my brother. Don't do this to me."

Me: "Check his pulse, there should be a pulse."

I'm panicking, if Neo dies then, it's over for me. Styles will slice me up.

He glares at me.

Styles: "You son of a bitch."

My idea seems to have angered him, he lurches to me and throws the first punch. I wobble back as I lose my balance, the second punch throws me on the couch. The gun is in my hold, I can't use it. I just killed Neo. How do I begin to fight back?

Styles: "Get up Nkomo."

He yelps, the look in his eyes has me fearing for my life.

Me: "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to kill him. I thought it was Randall..."

He grips my shirt and pulls me up to face him, I should take this like a man.

"Ouch."

We hear a slow light groan, I'm sent back on the couch with a single push.

Styles: "Neo."

Neo appears over the couch, his hand rubbing his head and he winces in pain.

Styles: "Are you okay?"

Styles inspects his face, Neo slightly pushes him off.

Neo: "Ke eng nou, o batla ho ng kissa?" (What's wrong now? Do you want to kiss me?)

He makes a sour face while flinching in pain.

Styles: "Oh great you're still stupid. It's means that you're okay."

His remark causes Neo to cringe.

Styles: "I thought Nkomo shot you."

He helps Neo up and continues to scan him with his body.

Neo: "Eish life ke masipa saan, nahana I almost died." (Life is tough, imagine.)

Styles: "How are you feeling?"

Styles holds Neo's face and examines his eyes.

Neo: "Stylos ke straight ntwana, uskai chunna daai ding." (I'm straight, don't do that.)

I want to laugh but, I messed up.

Styles: "Voetsek Neo, I'm trying to see if you're okay." (Piss off.)

Neo: "I will live, I hit my head and fainted. Shit, I feel like ke na le babalase uit die hel." (A hangover from hell.)

He hasn't let go of his head, he could have a concussion.

Me: "I'm sorry Neo, I thought you were someone else."

I explain my panic.

Neo: "Khomo saani, you have turned your back on witchcraft? No man, you can't handle a gun rather go back to witchcraft. At least joale I am protected by masonto." (Boy.) (In that way.)

I don't know what to make of the serious look on his face.

Styles: "Get out."

It's for the best.

Me: "I'm sorry again Neo."

Neo: "U tlo nya saani, ke tseba batho nna. Die poppe sal danse." (You will shit, yourself, I know people. Trouble is coming.)

He doesn't mean it, I'm comforted by that.

I have to find Ruth, she is probably in trouble.

AYIZE\*

Who comes late to the grave yard, Styles and Neo are a special kind. They scatter to where we are standing, this place is packed. At the moment the school choir from dad's school are performing a gospel hymn, it's a lengthy one. The sun is scorching hot, I want to get out of this black dress.

I keep checking the time, it doesn't help though, it seems like we will be here much longer. Beauty is settled on a chair opposite the coffin, she hasn't stopped weeping since we got here. I hope those crocodile tears drown her.

My aunt is sitting beside her with comforting arms.

Me: "Where have you been?"

I ask Neo as he stands next to me.

Neo: "Yoh baba, you see that coffin?"

He's pointing at the casket, I push his hand down. I doubt it's allowed.

Neo: "It almost had my name written on it. I almost died today."

I know that he exaggerates a lot.

Me: "What happened?"

I'm too forward. Why am I entertaining him?

Neo: "Okay Stylos neh..."

Is he really going to narrate the story?"

Me: "We'll talk after the funeral."

The school choir finishes their song, now we can get this over with.

Styles has joined Sethu, my sister is poker-faced. She had this creepy look when we left the house this morning, it's almost like she is a different person. I tried so hard to find a twitch of emotion in her eyes, there is none.

Right at this moment, she stands with her jaw clenched and her eyes glued on the casket. The girls are here next to me, they are broken. I wish I could do something to ease their pain.

The funeral officiant recites a prayer, weeping fills the grave yard as the coffin is lowered into the ground. My uncles participate in shovelling dirt into the grave. A few more shovels later we here police sirens, everyone turns to watch what the racket is about.

A black man in formal clothes, accompanied by two uniformed officers, exit the car and they are headed this way. The uncles have stopped shovelling.

Me: "What's going on?"

Neo: "I didn't do anything, it's Nkomo who shot at me."

He's confessing something.

Me: "I'm sure they are not here for you."

Neo is forward man.

Sethu is not alarmed, the look in her eyes is ice cold as she carries a smug. I notice that she is

glaring at someone. As I follow her eyes, they are on Beauty who is sitting with her head bowed.

Me: "Oh my God."

I didn't expect this from her.

Neo: "Ke eng Zee?" (What is it?)

He whispers softly.

Me: "What have you done Sethu?"

Sethu: "The right thing."

She responds unemotionally. The coffin is not six feet down yet.

"Beauty Malinga?"

The police man is standing in front of her, like he's seen her before. Beauty looks up and confusion clouds her.

"Are you Beauty?"

He asks.

She nods reluctantly, this woman has no clue what's in store for her.

Neo: "Oh shit."

Neo has figured out what is happening.

"You are under arrest for the murder of Nontobeko Malinga."

Have you ever heard anything so sweet?

Beauty's eyes widen as big as a cartoon's, her jaw drops before it hits her that she's been found out. She leers at us with hurt in her eyes, there is a commotion as people question each other about what is going on. I should stop the ones that are taking videos, if this trends, Ginger and Mbali will not be able to take it.

Beauty: "What is this? Can't you people see that I'm burying my husband?"

She screams at them as they grab her hand.

Beauty: "No, you're mistaken. I didn't do anything, I'm innocent. Tell them Sethu, Ayize please."

I am not daunted by her pleas, and neither is Sethu. How she pulled this off, I wonder. Beauty throws herself on the ground not caring about the red soil that, has painted her black dress, her heart wrenching screams should touch a nerve.

Beauty: "Baba look what they are doing to me, look at your children baba. They have killed me today, you have to help me. I can't go to jail, I'll die, I can't go to jail."

She's screaming at the coffin in the grave, the police men have halted their arrest.

Me: "Your husband can't save you today Beauty, you can scream till you can't anymore. You will rot in prison."

She must know the truth and face it.

She shoots daggers at me, crawls to me in speed and tackles me to the ground. People scream as I almost fall in to the grave, I miss it by an inch.

Neo: "Zee."

Neo shouts, I'm wrestling with my mother. She's on top of me while I fight to get her off, people are shouting, telling her to stop.

Neo is behind her as he tries to get her off of me but, her hands hold a tight grip on my head almost covering my face.

Beauty: "You evil child, I will kill you today."

She screams while banging my head on the ground, I shriek as she scratches my face with her nails.

Me: "BEAUTY!!!"

I shout.

Neo: "Shit this woman is strong Zee, I can't get her off. Ke Big Show, o tseba wrestling." (She is Big Show, she knows wrestling.)

This is no time for jokes Neo, I will be bleeding by the time she lets go.

Beauty: "I hate you Ayize."

She yells for the whole world to hear.

Me: "Suka phezu kwami, mthakathi ndini." (Get off me you witch.)

I want to straddle her, but she has upheld her strength.

"Beauty let her go."

That's Sethu's voice.

In a jiffy, she is jolted off of me. I twist to see Randall holding her back, her clothes painted with red soil. Neo reaches out his hand and helps me up.

Nx!

That witch. I want to kill her.

Sethu: "Are you okay?"

What can I say?

Neo is dusting my clothes and my face, my eyes keep meeting his.

The policeman cuffs Beauty, we're all watching. She bursts out crying.

Beauty: "Mbali, Ginger. Look what your sisters are doing to your mother. They don't love you, they are taking your mother away from you. Please beg them for me, I don't want to go to jail."

Emotional blackmail.

Me: "Hamba uyofa, nja." (Go and die you dog.)

I yell as they lug her away.

Mbali: "Mom."

She screams while she takes a step forward. Sethu grabs her hand and pulls her back. Ginger is silently crying next to me, it's over for Beauty and I know that she will not see the light of day anytime soon.

Neo: "Hai baba, your funerals are cursed. This is some Azwindini type of shit." (TV show.)

Neo loves TV.

If it were up to me, we would go home and leave these people to bury their own. The girls need closure, we'll let them bury their father.

Neo is on my face again, dusting me.

Me: "Stop, I'll bath when I get home."

Neo: "Let me remove a little dust, you look like you just came out of that grave."

He's silly.

Me: "The elders are watching Neo."

Neo: "I'm helping you so you don't scare them away, you look like a ghost."

Me: "Doti." (Nonsense.)

"Let's continue with the burial, an abomination has happened and there is nothing we can do now."

One of the uncles says.

"Did brother know that his wife killed our sister? We were told that she disappeared."

The other uncle states.

Now everyone is talking at the same time, this is going to be a long day.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

163\*

### STYLES\*

The meeting that began at the grave yard was said to be continued at the house. Sethu's siblings are broken, they have lost both parents.

Sethu: "Babe, I don't want the girls to be there, they can't see that."

We're getting ready to move into the car and head to the Malinga premises.

Me: "I'll ask Amara if she can take them home with her."

Sethu: "That sounds like a good idea."

Here she comes with Randall.

Amara: "How are you feeling Sethu?"

They share a hug.

Sethu: "I'll be okay, there's something we need to do at home. Can you please take the girls home with you for a few hours?"

Amara: "Sure babe, if there's anything more we can do. We are here for you."

Amara takes Sethu's hand into hers. A warm friendly touch, is what my kitten needs.

Sethu: "Thank you."

Amara: "Don't mention it."

Me: "A word."

I pull Randall to an isolated corner, I can see Neo and Ayize hop into his car. They must be headed to the house, the grave yard is almost empty.

Randall: "What's up?"

Me: "I want Beauty to disappear."

Randall: "In prison?"

Me: "Yes, that woman has done her worst. Her evil deeds can't go unpunished."

Randall: "Don't you think being locked up is punishment enough?"

Me: "Not even close, that thing you did with Joseph. Make it happen with her as well."



Randall: "A sudden accidental death?"

He gives me a head shake, he has something else in mind.

Randall: "Too easy and boring, she'll meet her husband in hell. However, I can make prison seem like hell is a vacation. Beauty will relive a nightmare every day with no one to help her and watch this, she won't be given a chance to take her life. She will go to bed every night writing a love letter to death."

Randall is dramatic.

Me: "I see where you're getting at and I love this picture you just painted."

That complacent mien he gets when his mind satisfies his ego with malevolent thoughts.

Randall: "I thought Segun was bad but this, it takes the trophy."

Me: "Beauty and her husband will never know peace, it's sad that their kids will suffer for it."

"Babe, let's go."

Sethu hollers at me.

Me: "I'll see you when we come to fetch the girls, there's something I need to talk to you about."

Randall: "Yeah, sure."

We go our separate ways, I'm worried about Sethu. I don't want her becoming a person with a cold heart, it won't treat her well. Hopefully she will heal after her mother has been given a dignified funeral. She's looking out the window and her mind has taken her on holiday. I touch her hand that's resting on her lap and that brings her back to me.

Me: "What is it kitten? Why are you drifting so far away?"

A disquieting sigh forces its way out of her mouth.

Sethu: "Mbali was close to Beauty, I don't see her getting over this. She's almost a teenager, what if she finds comfort in bad friends."

Me: "We'll take care of her, both of them. They will be okay, the four of you are a family and you will need to stand together."

Sethu: "Do you think they will be okay with Amara?"

Me: "They'll be fine, Liyana is two years younger so they'll blend in well with her. Maybe she'll help them forget about today's events for a while."

She drags a long sigh of exhaustion.

Me: "We're in this together, right?"

She keeps drifting away.

Sethu: "Mmmhhh."

Her reply is not assuring, she is drowning into a dark place.

We get to the house, it's jam packed outside. The neighbours have come out to see these uniformed people that are digging. Police officials are scattered everywhere, their cars recklessly parked on the road, blocking the way for cars to pass. We can't walk past the crime scene yellow tape so, we stand with the people on the streets.

Ayize and Neo join us, there are no words exchanged between us. Sethu insisted that we call the authorities today.

There are two men digging, I have my guy in there as well. I knew we were not going to be allowed in the premises and it would take forever for the authorities to release the information.

I had to come up with a plan.

One of the guys raises his hand to show the man inspecting this dig up. He has a human bone clutched in his hand. Observing it from this distance, the thickness of the bone, appears to be a thigh bone.

Sethu smashes her hand on her mouth as she stifles a scream and sinks into my arms, Ayize doesn't shy away from hers. A long painful wail erupts from her lips, Neo is holding her steady.

The keening of these two sisters has people watching in disbelief, they seem to have figured out what is happening. Shivers ripple through me at the sight of more bones discovered in that shallow grave.

"There are two bodies in here."

My guy reveals through the ear piece.

"It's remains of an infant."

He continues and my heart beat stops for a second, Nontobeko had twins. This will break Sethu.

Could it have been a still born or they killed it?

I can't let Sethu find out.

How do I tell this guy to be discreet about this?

Too late.

The other man holds a minuscule bone.

"It's an infant's remains."

Shit.

If I was his boss, I would fire his ass.

Did he have to shout out loud?

Sethu slips out of my arms as she sinks to the floor with a piercing heart breaking cry. I enfold her back in my arms, her body trembles in my hold.

I have no words to say to her. I am at a loss for words.

She pushes herself out of my arms, with slow steps and painful wails, she toddles to her sister who is also experiencing the same pain. They fall into each other's arms. Neo steps back and carries his hands on his head.

The remains of their loved ones plastered right there for everyone to see, has evoked the kind of agony that has this crowd snivelling and gasping.

Sethu's excruciating sobs are enough to make my chest bubble with anger. If I could I would turn back time, time to when her mother was in the hands of those monsters and maybe change her destiny.

AMARA\*

Randall pulls up outside the house, he turns to me and I know he's not coming in.

Randall: "You guys go in, there's something that I need to do."

He says.

Something like what? I want to ask him but, I curb myself. Mbali and Ginger are waiting for me, I know they won't exit the car without me.

Me: "Let's go girls."

I've only met them once, they are shy at the moment and reserved.

Ginger is the first to open the door, I jump out and lead them to the house.

Me: "Chioma."

I beckon her, she appears from the kitchen.

Chioma: "You're back? How did it go?"

she enquires while staring at the two introverted girls next to me.

Me: "This is Mbali and Ginger, they are Sethu's siblings."

I'd rather we avoid talking about the funeral, Chioma greets them with a heartfelt smile.

Me: "Where is Liyana?"

Chioma: "In the lounge."

Watching TV?

Chioma gives that child too much access to the TV. I should have a talk with her about this.

Me: "Liya baby."



My voice gets her full attention and I'm met by her sweet smile, her eyes rise in surprise as they rest on the girls. They are introduced to each other before Chioma calls them to the kitchen. I take this time to lie back on the couch and take a breather.

I'm jolted out of the silent moment by tiny hands touching my face.

Liyana: "Mara, I like them. Can we keep them?"

She whispers softly, the guileless of a child can put an adult to shame sometimes.

Me: "No, Liya. They are not pets that you can keep and they have a family."

Her lower lip falls, she drops her eyes accepting a look of sadness.

Me: "What's wrong now?"

Liyana: "I don't have anyone to play with Mara."

Me: "You do now, they can visit you anytime."

Liyana: "Can't they stay with us? Pretty please."

The stubbornness of her father comes to play.

Me: "Liyana?"

I give her the look and she knows not to argue.

Liyana: "Sorry."

She mutters, she is upset by something so trivial. This worries me that one day she will want to explore the world and be as stubborn as this. Will I be able to say no to her?

Me: "Were you not eating in the kitchen?"

Liyana: "I'm not hungry anymore."

Me: "Will you let your friends eat alone?"

She slouches over, dangles her hands and factually trudges back to the kitchen. Liyana's insistence is justifiable, she gets lonely in the house.

"Mara Mara, hurry."

She's back with energy this time and it's a frantic one.

Me: "What is it?"

What has happened now?

They were eating peacefully.

Liyana: "Mbali has a knife, she wants to cut herself."

She pulls my hand to cart me to the kitchen, I thought Chioma was watching them.



Mbali is standing by the sink with a knife aimed on her wrist, I jump to snatch it from her. With tears playing on her cheeks, she looks up at me.

Me: "Are you okay?"

I inspect her wrists to find no bruises, her face holds a furrow and her lips are pulled together in an angry pout.

Me: "What were you thinking? Don't you know that you don't play with knives?"

I cradle her cheeks, instantaneously her eyes water.

Me: "Oh sweetie."

Mbali: "I wanted to remove the pain, my friend said cutting your wrist gets rid of the pain."

She explains between sobs.

Me: "No my love, it doesn't. Cutting yourself will only inflict more pain and harm to you. It's not the right way to go."

I wish Liyana wasn't exposed to this.

Mbali: "What should I do? I don't want to feel the pain anymore."

Her desperate cry for help is heart breaking.

Me: "You need to speak to us, okay? Your sisters are also here for you."

She disagrees.

Mbali: "They hate us."

Her gaze turns to Ginger, who is too quiet for my liking.

Mbali: "They sent our mother away."

How do I fix this?

Me: "No baby, they love you. Your sisters love you a lot and would do anything to protect you."

Mbali: "I want my parents, I don't want to be here."

She sobs, I have no words to comfort her but arms. Her head falls on my chest as I pull her into an embrace. Ginger runs out of the kitchen, that child is holding so much in.

Liyana: "Mara."

Liyana is in tears too, I stretch my hand out to her, she scurries to me and joins in on the hug. I can't call Sethu now, I'll have to go and find Ginger.

NTOMBI\*

Am I the only one who is ecstatic that my husband is home, my siblings fail to hide their long faces. Where is he supposed to go if not to his house?

Me: "Kodwa Jesu. Welcome home nyana for the man of the house?" (God.)

Tongue clicks resound in the living room.

Me: "Ohho, that's alright Moses. Petunia cooked, that's her way of saying welcome home."

I pronounce while helping him sit, he grunts as his body slowly settles on the couch.

Moses: "Yoh yoh, yoh. Ubuhlungu." (The pain.)

Moses is such a cry baby, he needs to man up.

Me: "Nawe ukhala kakhulu Moses, yingakho bekudubulile." (You whine too much, that's why they shot you.)

Moses: "Ntombi, you haven't offered me amanzi and already usuyakhononda." (You're complaining.)

Me: "Petu, sicela amanzi sis wami. Ngisasiza umnyeni wami." (Can we please have some water, I'm still helping my husband.)

Petunia: "Uyanya." (You're bull shitting me.)

Her famous tongue click takes the leading role.

Me: "Kulungile sthandwa, uyabona namhlanje, I am happy because my husband is home. Nothing will break my spirit, ngisho nabantu aba muncu." (I'm happy today.) (Bitter people won't bring me down.)

Jonas is not the happiest today.

Moses: "Oh mkami, kodwa uthando olungaka." (So much love my wife.)

Yoh!

Jonas: "Surely Ntombi, you can't be this happy because Moses is back home. Haibo, you're not a new bride, zibambe tu." (Control yourself)

He's just jealous.

Me: "I feel like a new a bride because Mashoto is out of our lives for good."

Moses: "Ini?" (What?)

He barks, I thought he was in pain.

Me: "Yini manje?" (What is it now?)

Just when I thought nothing could ruin my mood.



Moses: "What do you mean Mashoto is gone? Did you throw her out Ntombi?"

Moses didn't want her as well.

Why the sudden panic?

Me: "No, I woke up five days ago and there was no Mashoto in the kitchen."

It was the happiest day of my life.

Moses: "Hayi, hayi Ntombi." (No Ntombi.)

Petunia cackles.

Nx!

Moses must always embarrass me in front of my family.

Me: "Yini ngawe manje?" (What is wrong with you?)

Petunia: "UMoses ufuna isthandwa sakhe." (Moses wants his love.)

I'm about this close to slapping her across the face.

Moses: "Take me outside now."

He demands as he falls into a panic mode, he grabs his crutch and forces his body up.

Me: "Moses relax you'll hurt yourself."

Moses: "Ntombi take me outside now."

He seethes through gritted teeth.

Me: "Hayi, ungakhulumi nami kanje. Uzoxhuga uwedwa, I'm not stupid Moses." (Don't speak to me like that, you will limp by yourself.)

He hauls a dramatic sigh.

Moses: "Okay, ngiyaxolisa mkami. Please my baby, take me outside." (I'm sorry my wife.)

Hai!!!

Is he that desperate and what's outside?

Jonas: "What's going on Moses? Why the need to rush outside? Mashoto is not there, she took all her clothes and left."

Jonas loves taunting him, I don't mind when he taunts him about that home wrecker.

Moses: "Asambe Ntombi." (Let's go Ntombi.)

He rejects Jonas's remark.

Me: "Slow down Moses, you'll hurt yourself."

I had to be the one to choose a stupid man like this, the world never loved me. Petunia is right behind us, this woman likes things. She wants to see what the urgency is about.

Moses: "Take me to that tree over there."

He points at a big in the middle of the yard. All that panic, to come and sit under a tree? My husband needs help, seriously.

Moses: "Hayi, Hayi." (No.)

He cries while looking at a grain of sand on the side of the stem.

Me: "Yini Moses?" (What is it?)

He drops his crutch, falls on his knees and begins to pave through the soil. He's forgetting his injuries and it's insane.

Me: "Moses wenzani?" (What are you doing?)

Petunia: "Usure ukuthi usase right ekhanda?" (Are you sure he's still okay in the head?)

She's breathing down my neck.

Me: "Awusuke emva kwami wena." (Move.)

She shifts with a tongue click.

What if Petunia is right? What if Moses is crazy again?

I would die honestly, I can't imagine him going through that again.

Moses: "Shit, shit."

He squeals, pounding his fists in the hole he just dug.

Moses: "Aaahhh, dammit."

He just strained his injured shoulder.

I keep saying and I shall continue to say that my husband is stupid.

Me: "Moses, will you tell us what the problem is or continue to act like a lunatic."

Moses: "Imali yami Ntombi, les'febe sithathe imali yami." (My money Ntombi, that bitch took my money.)

He holws.

Petunia: "Hehehe, Jesu umkhulu." (Jesus is great.)

I don't have time for her right now.

Me: "Moses, usho yiphi imali?" (What money?)

Moses: "My money, it was here. I buried it here Ntombi. Oh kodwa baba, kodwa thixo." (God



why?)

His dusty hands fall on his bald head as he screams, he'll draw attention from these nosey neighbours. They don't miss a chance to see me hurt.

Me: "What have I gotten myself into? God what kind of a man did you give me? Look at me, look at my life."

Moses: "This is no time for drama Ntombi, we have to find that bitch."

Listen to this man.

Me: "I have always said it, Moses you are stupid. You are stupid Moses."

I'm more stupid to have fallen for a man like him.

Petunia: "He's your husband njena." (But.)

My hands are itching right at this moment and I want to punch something, I swear Petunia is the perfect target.

Me: "Why would you hide money under a tree Moses? Who does that? What happened to bank accounts?"

Moses: "Shit, Mashoto is going to pay for this. I'm going to kill her."

Sure he is, he can't even kill a cockroach.

Me: "Where will you find her? She is probably in Venda by now, uzophenya iVenda yonke ufuna uMashoto?" (Will you go around searching for her?)

Moses: "I have to find her Ntombi, that's all the money I have. How are we going to survive?"

He's asking me?

Me: "Nami angazi Moses, inkinga yakho yikuthi awucabangi. U dom yazi, I told you from the start ukuthi that woman is fake. Kodwa cha, uNtombi uyahlanya angisho? Wena ubucabanga ngalento yakho emfishane between your legs." (I also don't know, your problem is that you don't think. you're stupid. You were thinking with your short d\*\*K)

A deep frown takes over his face before his thick hand collides with my cheek, throwing me to the ground.

Jonas: "MOSES!!!"

Jonas booms from the door way, he scuttles to us and Mhambi chooses to remain standing there.

Me: "Uzonya Moses." (You will regret this.)

I exclaim loudly while Petunia helps me up.

Jonas is on his face in a second, he pushes him and Moses falls back hitting his head on the tree stalk.



Jonas: "Who do you think you are? How dare you lay your filthy hands on my sister in my presence?"

Eish!

But did he have to push him that hard?

This man is injured.

Me: "Bhuti, it's okay." (Brother.)

Jonas: "Okay kuphi Ntombi? This bastard slapped you and you're okay with it." (How is it okay?)

Moses: "This is the second time you're attacking me Jonas, I am counting."

Stupid.

Me: "Moses you're an idiot. You can't learn to keep your mouth shut. You almost lost a leg and an arm because of your big mouth."

Moses: "Uzohamba la kwami with your brothers, be careful of what you say to me." (You and your brothers will leave my house.)

We shall see who will leave this house.

Jonas: "Enough with your threats, no one lays a hand on my sister. I don't care what she did."

I'm emotional.

Jonas truly loves me.

And Moses...

His time is coming, he will pay for this slap.

RANDALL\*

I'm meeting up with Styles at a local coffee shop in Rivonia, I get there to find him already seated. The place is buzzing, noisy and hot, the sun is angry today.

Me: "Can we sit outside?"

Styles: "Why?"

He doesn't feel the heat in here?

Me: "I'm sweltering man."

He scowls at my complaint.

Styles: "Just sit down Randy, I ordered a cup of coffee for you."



Great!

Who drinks hot beverages in this scorching heat, the look he's giving me forces me to sit my ass down.

Me: "What's with you?"

He's gloomy.

Styles: "I'm worried about Sethu, she's different man."

Me: "She's mourning, she'll be okay with time."

He scratches his head, it's a peculiarity he does when bothered.

Styles: "I doubt it, I'm losing her Randy to something. I'm afraid that she will never be the same again, she is broken beyond repair. Her touch doesn't feel the same anymore, there is no emotion in her eyes."

Me: "You worry too much Styles, sit her down and find out how you can help her."

A melancholy exhalation surges out of his mouth.

Styles: "I'm such an idiot you know, here I am afraid that I might lose the only woman who has ever made me feel alive."

Me: "It's normal really, there is nothing wrong with it. If I'm certain about something it's that, she loves you, you only need to hold her hand through this."

He pulls an upside down mouth. It's so unlike Styles to let doubt get to him, he's hard headed for a reason.

Styles: "She hasn't gone to therapy since her father died, she won't let me in her mind."

Me: "What about her sister?"

Styles: "Ayize seemed to be taking this well, till today. Nontobeko had twins, the baby was buried with her."

Me: "Shit. What the hell?"

Styles: "I have never known such evil."

It's scary.

A waiter approaches and drops a cup of black coffee on the table, the smell stirs the bile in my stomach and all my insides turn. I clench my teeth trying to deny the bitterness access to surge up.

Styles: "What's wrong with you?"

My fingers are pressed on my nose as I clog the sweet smell of coffee.

Me: "Get this thing out of my sight."

I tell the waiter, he picks it up.

Waiter: "Can I get you anything else sir?"

Me: "No, I'm okay thanks."

He nods and hurries away.

Styles: "When are you giving birth? I'm tired of your whining."

He's trying to be funny.

Me: "It's not funny, I'm being tormented here."

He snickers as he enjoys my struggle.

Styles: "Look at this."

He hands me an old worn out vintage photograph of a man.

Me: "Who is this ugly fool?"

He laughs, the picture is blurry and can't be dictated.

Styles: "Sethu's father."

Me: "He's ugly damn."

He continues to laugh.

Styles: "Please, the face is not clear and don't let Sethu hear you say that."

Me: "I'll try to keep my opinion to myself when she's around."

Styles sniggers, shaking his head back and forth.

Styles: "Pregnancy is getting to you."

Fool.

Me: "Where do we start?"

There is no date or anything that could lead us to this man.

Styles: "A name or an initial would have sufficed."

Me: "We'll find a way."

It won't be easy, all we have is a blurred picture.

Styles: "You won't believe what Nkomo did, that man is losing his mind."

I narrow my eyes, his introduction doesn't sit well with me.

Me: "Do I really want to know?"

Styles: "He gets to my house with a gun demanding that, I tell him what I did to Ruth."

Me: "Did you get to her?"

I probe.

Styles would do anything to protect his loved ones.

Styles: "It would've been an honour but, I have no idea where the woman is. I think she went back to Ghana."

Me: "Do you think she was afraid for her life and ran without informing him?"

Styles: "There is that possibility, or she's dead."

Me: "Who could have killed her?"

He sneers.

Styles: "She killed an Okolie, death is bound to find her."

That's right.

Me: "Nkomo would have to move on then."

Till today, I'm failing to grasp how Nkomo could have fallen so hard and deep for a woman.

Me: "The Mkhizes are weak, his father has a swamp of women surrounding him and he keeps craving for more. I bet he has a house full of concubines somewhere. To top it off he gives birth to boys who inherit his ugliness. Nkomo was a bit lucky, if not for his mother's nose. Damn."

I'm stating the truth and Styles is entertaining himself by laughing at my observation. I pick up the picture from the table as I wait for him to come back from his laughing trip.

This person looks familiar, although the pic is blurred, the body structure and those facial features send a memory in my head.

Me: "Fuck it."

This brings Styles back.

Styles: "What is it?"

Me: "This is Nkomo, I mean he looks like him."

Styles: "What?"

He snatches the pic from my hand.

Styles: "Fuck no. Now that you mentioned it."

Me: "Mkhize?"

I gasp the dreadful name out, Styles grits his teeth.

Styles: "No, she can't be his..."

He swallows the rest of his words.

Me: "Sethu cannot be an Mkhize, she can't be."

I finish his riposte.

We fall into a silent moment, with our minds screaming out loud. I'm oblivious to the thoughts that run in his mind but, I'm thinking, hell no.

Styles: "There is only one way to find out."

He reaches for his phone on the table, dials a number and waits for a connection while holding a furrowed brow.

My heart is thumping against my chest, my palms are getting sweaty. It could be the heat in this shop or the possibility that we have found Sethu's father and he is on our hit list.

Styles: "Kitten, did they tell you what your father's name is?"

He goes straight to the point.

Don't let it be true, God please.

Styles' eyes widen in disbelief before he clenches his jaw as he accepts an angry scowl.

Styles: "M.K?"

He whispers.

Darn it. We are doomed, it's over.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

164\*

### STYLES\*

Just when I thought things were going well with Sethu, this happens. Family is everything to her and she loves hard. I wouldn't be surprised if she is fond of that man already. Randall is as shocked as I am. So it's decided...

Me: "We are taking this secret to our graves."

I trust him with my life.

Randall: "A solemn promise."

It's done.

Me: "Mkhize is a dead man."

Randall: "So dead."

Me: "I refuse to believe that Mkhize is Sethu's father."

The realization is hard, and knocked me right into reality.

Randall: "How is that possible? You know what this means right? If we kill Mkhize and she finds out about it, you two will be history."

Randall's predictions cause my heart to skip a beat.

Me: "That's why this remains between us."

First things first.

Me: "We destroy this picture."

Randall: "Burn it, also you need an explanation as to where the pic disappeared to."

Me: "Done."

This shouldn't be hard, we have kept secrets before. Secrets that could destroy us, so this should be nothing.

Randall: "Something worries me, Segun was never found and no one has reported him missing yet."

Me: "Raven did, yesterday. A post came out, there's a reward too."

I've been keeping tabs.

Randall: "That boy is still obsessed with Segun."

Randall complains.

He's not over his brother's betrayal, moreover there might be a little hope in him that one day his brother will come home.

Me: "A father can be the most important thing in a boy's life."

Randall: "Not in mine, I don't give a damn about that man."

Me: "You closed your heart and shut him out. Raven grew up craving for his attention, he wanted Segun's acceptance."

Randall sneers at my illumination.

Randall: "Either way, his body has to be found. Nkomo said he ditched it in a swamp."

Me: "Nkomo is not stupid enough to play us."

Randall: "I saw sincerity in his eyes the day he came to beg for Ruth's life. Ruth could be the master mind. I don't trust her one bit."

Me: "I'll look into it, if they had a plan, they would have acted on it. It's been a week and Segun knows that you'd never be touched by his death."

He pinches his nose and his teeth cling together. A thought has come to his mind.

Me: "What's up?"

Randall: "My mother wants to come over, she wants to help Amara with the wedding preparations."

He's worried about it.

Me: "You haven't paid the bride price yet and already the storm is coming."

He sniggers.

Randall: "Tell me about it, my mother and uncle do not get along that well. He's the irresponsible little brother she constantly has to put to order and that causes conflict between them."

Me: "If they are good to your bride, there is nothing to worry about."

He rubs his chin musing on the statement I gave.

Randall: "They should be good to her, I will not put up with any garbage. My mother will ask after her husband, I don't know how their relationship is because she hardly mentions him when we speak on the phone."

Me: "She knows there is no love between you and Segun."

Randall: "I should delay her visit, come up with an excuse or something."



Me: "Rather do that until we hear something plus, you have Amara's uncles to deal with and they postponed due to Lelo being sick."

He folds his arms as he sits back, taking up a blue expression.

Randall: "That part piques me."

He says in a miffed tone.

Me: "You need to be patient, there's no rush."

He snorts.

Personally I think Randall and Amara should wait a bit, we're in the middle of a battle and anything can happen at the wedding.

NEO\*

A little over two weeks later and things seem normal, you wouldn't say that Zee lost a parent. Therapy is going great, I can't say the same about Sethu. I think she is in denial, she walks around like a zombie and refuses to share her thoughts. Styles is drained, he looks different.

He hardly laughs like usual, he's always over at her apartment. Each time he visits there he comes back looking worse than he did before, I think they fight more than they should. I wish there was something I could do to help them.

Today I am house haunting, we're in Lyndhurst waiting for an estate agent. Zee is filling me in on how life with Sethu is lately, as we stand outside the car.

Ayize: "I don't know about that girl, she spends more time at church than she does at home. She always has a bible in her hand, ready to bash me with it. I think that she wants to be a pastor."

Me: "Some people find it easier to run to God than a doctor."

My comment has her huffing out of frustration.

Ayize: "If I were God, I would run away when I see her running to me. Her depression depresses me."

Ayize hasn't taken time to look at her sister's situation, Sethu lost so much in a space of a week.

Me: "Does she say anything about Stylos?"

I want to know if my friend is secured.

Ayize: "Not really, she hardly talks about him. Poor Mr. S. You should see him when he gets to

the apartment, he's like a little puppy that's desperate for attention. Sethu is stupid shame, she's not the first person to lose a loved one. She needs to get over the grief and move on."

Me: "Is it that bad?"

I quiz.

Styles has to do something, he will never be the same if he loses Sethu.

Ayize: "I think she wants to be a nun. Why else would she ignore that fine delicious man?"

She states as she browses her eyes around, perhaps searching for the real estate agent. The fool has kept us waiting for too long.

Me: "U re Stylos u delicious Zee?" (You're saying Styles is delicious.)

Due to my troubled tone, she turns to leer at me. The frown on her face telling me that I'm stupid.

Ayize: "Haibo Neo, I'm sure nawe uke waku charmer u Stylos." (You were once charmed by Styles.)

What?

Hell no.

Me: "You're crazy."

She twitters at my retort, I move closer to her, pushing her against the car.

My eyes are disobedient, I can't stop them from falling on her lips.

Ayize: "If you want to kiss me Neo, then do it."

She nestles my jaw in her hands and leans in, I'm usually the one in control and this feels different. Zee shuts her eyes, I smell her scent as she gets close. I clasp my hand around her waist and pull her close to me, completely shutting all spaces between us. I paste my lips on hers, it's that quick voracious kiss. Her hands are gently caressing my jawline, a soft moan leaves her mouth. I feel a pull out and move out same time as her.

She raises her eyebrows and I can't tell what her facial expression is.

Ayize: "I wondered what kissing you would be like and you're okay."

Ouch!

Me: "Just okay?"

Ayize: "Yes, just okay."

Me: "Should I be worried?"

Ayize: "Neo ufunani? You want me to sing a song so you think you're a great kisser?" (What do you want?)

Zee is too blunt, she doesn't hide from the truth but tells it like it is.

Me: "You were okay too."

She seems to be taking it worse than I am.

Ayize: "Ini? I'll have you know that I'm the greatest kisser." (What?)

She disputes with me.

Me: "Who told you that?"

Ayize: "I just know hau, I don't need anyone to tell me."

I grab hold of her hand.

Me: "Let me confirm that again, I didn't feel that one."

I say, leaning in on her.

She claims her hand back, her nose flap open and close. A habit of hers that I have come to know.

Ayize: "You just want an excuse to kiss me again."

That's the plan.

Me: "You said that you're the best so I want to confirm it. I can't let you go around claiming that you're number one at kissing, people will laugh at you."

Ayize?"

Our focus is jolted to that ugly voice.

Who is this idiot?

Ayize: "Oh my word! Bantu?"

She looks happy to see him.

I can spot a fuck boy from a distance, I hate him already. He could be the same age as her, judging by his appearance.

Me: "Ke mang ona?" (Who is this?)

She misses my question as this fool pulls her into his arms, I can't stand to see her in the arms of another man.

Bantu: "Wow, look at you."

He inspects her body in admiration.

Ayize: "What brings you here? I thought you loved P.E and wouldn't dream of leaving it."

Bantu: "When you have bills to pay, you have no choice but to get out of your comfort Zone."

I hate that smile on his face.

Ayize: "And what brings you here?"

Bantu: "I'm meeting up with a client, they are buying a house."

So he's the real estate agent.

Ayize: "I think we're the clients."

He frowns as he eventually acknowledges my presence.

Bantu: "You two are buying a house?"

Me: "Yes, we're buying a house together."

I harvest the thought of us being a couple, Ayize shakes her head after giving me a disapproving stare.

He's not the happy chirpy oak he was a few seconds ago. Zee is not disputing my lie and that puts me at ease.

Bantu: "Okay, let's get to it."

Ayize: "Baba, this is Bantu. A friend, we met on Facebook."

Not interested.

Bantu: "You commented shit on my status and we had a fall out, you were bashing me."

She laughs.

Ayize: "You started it, I had to clap back."

I must stand here and listen to them reminiscing on the past?

Nonsense.

Bantu: "That post got about 10k comments."

Ayize: "Comments like 'it's getting hot in here.'"

Bantu: "Someone grab a chair it looks like we're going to be here the whole day."

He adds with a laugh.

Ayize: "Some telling us to get a life."

They share the last laugh because I am stopping this shit.

Dude is lucky I'm not a violent person.

Me: "Okay Mr. Facebook, dankie. You came here to work not take us down memory lane."  
(Thank you.)

I interrupt their trip, Zee gives me a warning stare. I'm okay with this man, whoever he is. He should go back to wherever he came from.

Me: "Shall we?"

I take her hand as this fool leads us into the first house, Zee tries to snatch it back but, my grip stands ground.

KENNETH\*

This is insane, I know that it's absurd. One might say I have a death wish, perhaps I do. If I have to die trying then I shall. I'm at the hospital, I spotted Okolie in the canteen, probably grabbing a bite. If I'm not mistaken, I will have a minute or two with her.

Sipho: "Today is a great day, I have seen Kenneth Mkhize nervous."

Sipho is a close friend of mine, we played on the same streets as kids. Alexander was our turf, we knew it like the back of our hands. Life in squatter camps was not sugar coated candy, going to bed with sugar water and soggy pap birthed a deep desperation for change. Hell, I had dreams. Dreams of a better life for my sister, this led me to take drastic measures. A mutual friend of Sipho and I introduced us to a brotherhood, while I took the offer, Sipho declined first hand.

Me: "If you continue to mock me, Mndeni. You will not like what I do next."

He is not fazed by my threats, this is Sipho Mndeni.

Sipho: "Time is not on your side, get to it Kay."

This is it, it's now or never.

I push the door open, only now I realize that I'm nervous. Amara's eyes glint with confusion upon seeing me, she's sitting on a chair reading a book while her cousin sleeps peacefully.

Amara: "Kenneth?"

It's a good thing she's alone.

Me: "Hi."

A pucker grows between her eyebrows.

Amara: "What are you doing here?"

How do I explain my reason for being here? I am not familiar with her cousin.

Me: "How is she?"

My question should serve as an escape.

Amara: "You know Lelo?"

If I say yes, she'll ask where I know her from and if I say no, I'll have to give an explanation for

my visit.

Me: "Yeah, not personally though."

Please don't ask more.

Amara: "Oh, what a small world."

Thank you.

Me: "How is she?"

Amara: "Same."

I get a quick answer.

Me: "And you? You're glowing."

And beautiful.

A smile visits her face.

Amara: "It must be the baby."

She rejects the compliment and passes it over to the baby.

Me: "I'm sure you would still have the glow even if you weren't pregnant."

I'm glad that my declaration does not make her uncomfortable, the smile on her face is evidence.

Amara: "Oh believe me, there is no glow here. I'm as crusty as they get, Randall always teases me about it."

The mention of his name drops my mood to a zero.

Me: "I see."

I can't seem to look at anything else but her, my eyes betray me. They refuse to find something else to glance at.

Amara: "Did you see Randall outside?"

I don't want to talk about him.

Me: "No."

I lie.

Amara: "I'm sure he'll be here any second now."

I hope not.

Me: "When is the wedding?"

She accepts another big shiny smile, she raises her hand to inspect the ring.

Amara: "We decided in three months, Lelo is my maid of honour. We're waiting for her to open her eyes."

I hate the despondency on her face.

Me: "Can I see it?"

It would be better if I divert her attention from her cousin.

I take her hand and bring it close to my face, this is the ring that is standing in my way.

I raise my eyes to find Amara staring with a crumpled brow, her innocent eyes are unaware of my intentions and what's in my heart.

Me: "Sorry, I can't see from a distance. I hope you don't mind that I touch your hand."

More lies are coming out of my mouth, she clears her throat and claims her hand back. The uncomfortable pose that I was expecting comes, she timidly drops her gaze.

Me: "Are you good Amara?"

Amara: "Yeah."

Her rejoinder is a soft mummer.

Me: "You're reading the book?"

I step back a little to make her feel comfortable again, she lifts it up and wiggles it.

Amara: "I get bored here so I thought, let me read."

She explains her reason for reading the book I gifted her for her birthday.

Me: "Is it that boring?"

Sipho said it was a great gift, I'm going to kick that boy.

Amara: "No, no. I love it actually. However, you don't look like the type of man that reads books titled Fifteen Minutes of Shame."

Me: "I didn't read the summary, I saw the blue cover and the pink words and thought you'd like it."

I give a reason for my lack of taste in books, a smile on my face is brought upon by her quick laugh.

Amara: "Typical men hey."

I shrug my shoulders.

Me: "I don't know what you're talking about."

I throw the riposte out there, it so happens that she finds it funny.

Amara: "Although you didn't put much effort in buying the book, I like it a lot. I'm on chapter twenty."



It's a great feeling that she likes my gift.

Me: "What is it about?"

She smiles.

Amara: "I'm not far yet."

Me: "Okay, I want to hear about it once you're done."

I'm sliding in now.

Amara: "We'll see, maybe."

Me: "Over coffee?"

She raises an eyebrow as if she senses my desperation.

Me: "Okay that won't work, right?"

Amara: "Uhh, yeah."

She stutters.

Me: "How about you send me a long text, a whole essay on the book. I promise I'll read it and like it."

I put my hand on my heart to motion a promise.

Amara: "You mean pretend to like it? The book is cliché and I'm sure a man like you does not take time to journey in a story that, talks about a dating expert who gets dumped on national TV."

Me: "Ahh, you see. A little insight on the story and I like it already. Oh, please tell me more."

She chortles.

Amara: "Maybe I'll tell you about it one day, no promises."

She raises a hand as if dismissing the idea.

Me: "I'll be patiently waiting."

I give an answer with a slight smile, Mbuso walks in and that's my queue to scoot. He tilts his head to side, glaring at me as he tries hard to recall where he knows me from. We met once at Amara's party.

Mbuso: "Kevin?"

Wow.

And I thought I leave a great impression on people, Amara is laughing.

Me: "Kenneth."

I shove my hands in the pockets of my trousers, I'm ready to go hence, the withdrawal gesture.



Mbuso: "Sorry, I'm not good with names. You're Styles' friend right?"

Me: "As far as I know."

Mbuso: "What brings you here?"

Another lie loading.

Me: "I heard about your miss here and thought I should show my face and not be that friend you know. Otherwise, Styles would judge me."

I get a look assuring me that, my retort doesn't make sense.

Mbuso: "Oh."

He walks over to Amara and hands her a can of fizzy drink.

Amara: "Thanks. Where is Randall?"

Mbuso: "He's outside on the phone."

I should step out.

Me: "I have to go now, I hope she gets better soon."

Mbuso gives me a peculiar stare.

Mbuso: "Thanks."

Me: "Amara."

Amara: "Bye."

She waves once, I wish to spend more time with her. Nevertheless, this little time was more than enough.

STYLES\*

I knew that I would find Sethu here, this is where she spends most of her time. Her life revolves around these church walls, she hardly gives me her attention and our relationship has hit rock bottom.

There are people going in and out of the building, my eyes search for Sethu. I see her talking and laughing with some ladies by the pulpit. She spots me and her face changes as she tosses away the warmth on her face. Sethu knows quite well that I will go and lug her from there. It puzzles me as to why she's not coming.

I begin to lead my feet to her, this triggers something and she jolts over to me.

Sethu: "What are you doing here?"

I am not fond of this greeting.

Me: "Why are you avoiding me?"

Sethu: "I'm not."

Sethu has become a liar now.

Me: "What do you call not taking my calls?"

Sethu: "I have been busy?"

More lies.

Me: "With what? You're here at church entertaining these people while Ginger and Mbali need you back home."

Those girls have been abandoned by this woman who claims that she loves them.

Sethu: "Ayize is there."

She has become selfish too.

Me: "Ayize needs help Sethu, she has a life too."

Sethu: "What are you doing here Styles?"

Me: "I told you, we need to talk."

I don't remember how it feels like to spend some time with her. Those long walks and talking for hours on end.

"Sister Sethu?"

Some guy calls her from afar, her face lights up flashing a smile. She just smiled at that idiot, it's the same smile I have been craving to see for the past two weeks.

Me: "Who the fuck is that?"

I don't give a damn that were at church, she is pissing me off.

Sethu: "I'm coming Grant."

Grant?

He nods, ogles at me and walks away.

Me: "Who the fuck is that Sethu?"

The glow she had while looking at Grant is gone, the same glow that used to be mine.

Sethu: "We're in church Styles, stop swearing."

She winces as I grab her upper arm.

Me: "Don't tell me shit. Who is that fucker?"

Sethu: "You're hurting me Styles."

She yanks her arm away.

I have never laid a finger on her but, I am tempted to slap her back to reality.

Me: "Sethu, I'm not going to ask you again. I want to know who that man is."

If she hadn't given him that look, I wouldn't be acting like this.

Me: "Are you cheating on me? I swear if you are, I will kill you both."

She gives me a look that says, you're kidding.

Sethu: "Geez Styles, he's just a brother from church."

I'm not stupid.

Me: "How many church brothers fuck church sisters and hide behind the bloody brethren?"

Her jaw drops as my words hit her like a ton of bricks, tears fill her eyes. Usually I would feel a pang of guilt, not now, I'm filled with so much anger.

Sethu: "How could you say that to me?"

Me: "Is it not the truth?"

I grin at her.

Sethu: "Get out of here Styles."

Me: "I'm not leaving without you."

I pull her back as she takes the first step to leave.

Sethu: "Let go of my hand now."

She churns under her breathe.

Me: "What has happened to you, Sethu?"

Sethu: "I said let go of my hand."

She speaks as if my touch disgusts her, I can't recognize the look in her eyes. It's as if I'm staring into the eyes of a stranger. Our eyes are locked, hers hold a blank gaze while mine a look of fury.

"Sethu my child."

A deep male voice speaks compelling me to let go of her arm, it takes a minute for us to turn to the man who interrupted us. He's dressed like a bishop.

Sethu: "Yes, pastor."

She's back to smiling.

Pastor: "How are you?"

He's asking her but, his gaze follows me.

Sethu: "I am blessed pastor."

What the fuck? Since when does she speak like that?

Pastor: "That's good, and you young man?"

I can only nod, my anger won't let me speak.

Pastor: "The prayer meeting is about to start. Don't be late."

He gives a command that causes Sethu to nod with a smile. Why does she have that glow when talking to these people?

Pastor: "Will you also be joining us?"

His eyes are directed to me.

Sethu: "No, he's leaving."

Her response startles me, my kitten would invite me to the stupid prayer meeting.

Pastor: "Okay my child, we'll see you now."

He packs his bible under his armpit and does a step as he walks away, there's something familiar with that walk.

Me: "Really? That's your pastor?"

Sethu: "What?"

Me: "He's a gangster."

She narrows her eyes as my words offend her.

Sethu: "He's not a gangster."

Me: "Come on, I can recognize a gangster walk. That man is in a gang, if not the don."

Sethu: "Well, if you must know. He was in a gang a long time ago before he found God."

Me: "And he's suddenly a pastor?"

Sethu: "It's possible, if you want to change you..."

Me: "Not interested."

I cut her words, I'm not here for a preaching.

Sethu: "Excuse me, I have to go."

Me: "I'll come over to your apartment later."

Sethu: "We have a night vigil, I won't be home till morning.

Why do I find that hard to believe?

Me: "Don't fuck with me Sethu. What night vigil? What's going on here?"

Sethu: "I'm telling you the truth, why would I lie."

Me: "I don't know, you tell me."

She clenches her jaw.

Sethu: "Go home Styles."

And with this demand she walks away from me.

Me: "Sethu."

She is not turning around, I should've slapped her back to reality.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

165\*

MBUSO\*

The ceremony was performed last week, Jonas had no say. Mhambi took control, he said Jonas will ruin the kid's lives. It's strange that it was done at the Okolie residence. Moses didn't make it, I heard Ntombi say he is money sick. I don't know what that meant, half of the things she says do not make sense. The Buthelezi ancestors were appeased, they were informed that their daughter is home and safe.

Lelo is not awake yet.

She has to take bed rest when she comes back home. Goku is still in danger because of the raptured placenta.

Amara has been visiting Lelo every day.

Me: "What was Kenneth doing here?"

I was surprised to see him in here and standing close to Amara.

Amara: "To show support, you heard him, Mbuso."

Me: "Are you two friends?"

Amara: "No."

Me: "You were talking like long lost friends when I walked in here."

That man has intentions and they smell, he's lucky Randall was not the one who walked in.

Amara: "We were talking about this book he got me for my birthday."

Exactly.

Me: "Be careful Amara."

I saw the way he was looking at her.

Amara: "What are you talking about Mbuso?"

Me: "I'm only saying that, you're getting married soon and there are vultures out there."

Amara: "Kenneth is not a vulture, he's Style's friend..."

Me: "That means nothing. Did you see how he was looking at you?"



I should let her know, she's too credulous.

Amara: "No I didn't see anything besides, he wasn't here for me."

Kenneth probably knew that Amara was going to be at this hospital.

Me: "Whatever his reason for being here was, I want you to heed my words. Take what I say into consideration."

Amara: "Okay, although..."

Ntombi walks in and this stops Amara from finishing her sentence. I have learnt that they are not on good terms.

Ntombi: "Hau hau hau, kumnandi egoli. Buka nje abantu bayazenzela." (It's nice in Joburg, people do as they please.)

I'm not happy about the look she's giving Amara.

Me: "Visiting hours are almost over ma."

I want to get rid of her.

Ntombi: "Hau? Abanye basahleli nje?" (Some are still sitting.)

It looks like Amara will not be talking to Ntombi, her scrutiny is on Lelo.

Me: "We're about to leave now."

Ntombi: "I'll go with you then, I need a ride home."

Me: "Okay, no problem."

"Mbuso."

I am startled by Amara's loud voice.

Mbuso: "What is it?"

Amara: "She flipped her eye lashes.

She delivers the good news.

Ntombi: "Nombulelo."

Ntombi pushes Amara aside, Amara rushes to the other side of the bed.

Me: "Lelo."

Her eyes are opening.

Ntombi: "Nombulelo."

She holds her hand.

Me: "Lelo we are here. Open your eyes."



Randall walks in just as we are gathered around Lelo's bed, encouraging her to open her eyes.

Randall: "What going on?"

He asks while standing on the path way.

Amara: "Lelo is waking up baby."

Amara explains with excitement, there is no expression on Randall's face. He couldn't care less whether Lelo wakes up or not. The only reason he's here is because of Amara.

I have never felt so much joy as Lelo opens her eyes. With a frown she scans every eye staring at her.

Me: "Lelo can you hear me?"

She's looking at me, it's a good sign.

Lelo: "Water."

She mummurs, Ntombi reaches for the glass on her side. She helps her drink.

Amara: "How are you feeling?"

Amara hasn't stopped smiling, something is amiss though. Lelo looks confused

Ntombi: "Lelo, say something."

Lelo: "Mama."

Her calling puts a smile on Ntombi's face, she's looking at her cousin now.

Lelo "Amara."

She fights a smile.

Lelo: "What happened? You've gained weight."

I'm sure Amara would not appreciate that, she smiles anyway.

Amara: "Welcome back."

Me: "Lelo."

I'm waiting impatiently for that look that only she gives.

Me: "You scared us Lelo, don't ever do that again."

I lean over and hug her, she doesn't hold me back. It's fine, she's probably overwhelmed.

Me: "Welcome back my love."

She looks at me as if puzzled by my presence in the room, she's scaring me.

Lelo: "Mbuso?"



Oh God, for a second there I thought that she had forgotten me.

Me: "Yes my love."

Lelo: "You're okay? I thought you didn't..."

Me: "I'm here Lelo, I'm here."

Ntombi: "Your father will be happy when he finds out that you're awake."

Why would she bring him up?

Her face twists into a scowl, puzzled by something we are unaware of. Her hand runs to her belly.

Lelo: "My baby, Mbuso my baby?"

She wants me to give her assurance that the baby is fine. How do I do it knowing that, he's not?

Me: "He's fine chubby cheeks, our Goku is fine."

It takes everything in me to utter this lie.

Amara glares at me, telling Lelo the truth will cause her stress and it's harmful to the baby. I will have to keep a close eye on her for the remaining months.

RANDALL\*

Later that day\*

Styles budes into my living room, he's fuming. He pours a drink and gulps it all down in one go. He takes two more rounds. Amara gives me a worried look.

Me: "Styles?"

I call out to him, I can only see half of his face.

Amara: "I'll check on Liyana."

Amara excuses herself.

Styles is still drowning his sorrows inside the glass of whiskey.

Me: "Bro?"

He turns his head to face me while sipping on the drink, he makes a sour face as the liquor oozes down his throat.

Me: "Talk to me man."

He reacts with a low chortle.

Styles: "I'm an idiot, I'm such a damn idiot. The only woman I ever truly loved is slipping right out of my hands and there is nothing I can do about it."

A profound exhalation surges out of him. This is the thing with Styles, he doesn't share his personal affairs. He likes to keep it that way, personal.

Me: "Maybe if you tell me what's going on, I might be able to help."

I'm trying, although I know that he won't open up to me.

Styles: "Sethu doesn't want me anymore."

He reveals the cause of his drinking.

How can it be? These two are perfect for each other, if they break up where is the hope for the rest of us."

Me: "Did she tell you that?"

Styles: "No, her actions did."

Me: "You could be reading too much into things, talk to her and sort it out."

My comment is not ideal, he's laughing.

Styles: "That's the thing Randy, she doesn't want to talk to me"

Me: "Where is she?"

Styles: "Why?"

He takes a big sip.

Me: "I want to talk to her."

Styles shakes his head, he doesn't trust me with Sethu.

Styles: "No."

Me: "I'm only going to speak to her."

He does the head shake a few times.

Styles: "Not her man, she's too precious."

He's got it bad.

Me: "Look at you Styles, you're not okay."

If he continues to drink, he won't stop. He'll drink his problems away.

Me: "Please put that glass away."

He raises it, stirs the drink and sends it to his mouth.



Me: "Will you share your troubles in that bottle or will you tell me?"

Styles: "That's alright, I'll find a way out."

Me: "By drinking?"

Styles: "I can handle my alcohol, thank you."

Me: "Styles let me have a word with her, I don't like to see you like this."

Styles: "I told you that I'll handle it, relax."

He won't let me in.

Me: "Handle it then, and stop drinking."

I won't push him, he has to come around, one way or another.

NKOMO\*

I am being followed, I noticed when I was inside the mall. A tall plump woman, seemed to appear everywhere I was. She is walking behind me as I plod to the car.

What does Styles want from me now?

I'll call him to let him know that, I'm on to him, I can see the lady from the corner of my eye.

Me: "Styles."

I salute.

Styles: "What do you want?"

He sounds drunk.

Me: "Get your tail off my back."

Styles: "I have serious issues to deal with, speak or I'm dropping the call."

He grunts.

Me: "There's a woman following me."

Styles: "So?"

Me: "It's so low of you to have me followed Styles."

Styles: "If I were to have you followed, you wouldn't know about it."

Me: "Who is this woman then?"

Style: "I don't know, bye."

He drops the call.

I have to find out myself, I gather up the courage to walk up to her.

Me: "Why are you following me?"

"You're N.K?"

Ruth calls me N.K.

Me: "Who are you?"

She hands me a piece of note and dashes off.

Me: "Hey, come back."

She's gone.

The note reads:

{My life is in danger, someone wants to kill me. If this note finds you, come to the location at the bottom. Ruth.}

It could be the curse and she doesn't know it yet. I jump into my car and drive off, the yearning to see her again has multiplied.

STYLES\*

I have exhausted myself from trying to find a way to get Sethu back, my kitten, not the strange woman who has taken over her body lately.

I'm good at these things, right? There is not a time when I don't have a solution, it's what I do. So, why am I struggling with Sethu? Why can't I find a way out for us?

I need to get out of this room, overthinking will not work for me. What makes matters worse is that my room smells just like her, the pillow that my head rests on and these bed sheets.

I hear the sound of footsteps trailing towards the bedroom, Sethu's here. I recognize her footfall, I jump from the bed as the door flings open. My heart leaps at the sight of her. She stands with a grave expression, she still holds the melancholy appearance.

Me: "I thought you said you're spending the night at church."

Sethu: "I want to be here, with you."

The sound of her voice is not convincing, either way, I can't think of anything but kissing her.

I smash my lips on hers and deepen the kiss, she's not opening up to me so I bite her lower lip and find my way into her mouth. She's kissing me back and for once in two weeks my heart feels alive. I drop my hands on her waist, sliding them under her t-shirt. I can feel her warm skin

and it's the most exhilarating feeling ever. Her hands are on my back and in a millisecond she removes my top, gently we move to the bed. She's lying on her back with me on top of her, kissing her like I haven't tasted her lips in a long time.

Me: "I missed you, kitten."

I kiss her lips, letting mine linger on.

Me: "I love you, I love so much."

I whisper softly in her ears before I nuzzle the crook of her neck. Out of the blue, I feel these small hands on my chest pushing me up.

Sethu: "Styles."

She whispers.

My hands are all over her body and...

Sethu: "Stop, stop Styles."

She wants me to stop, this is what I want. I want her, I want her soul mingling with mine. I want her breath again and I want her to fill me with her love.

Sethu: "Stop please."

She's pushing me but her resistance compels me to continue.

Me: "I want you kitten, I want you so bad."

My lips explore the corners of her body and my hands map every inch of it.

Sethu: "Get off me Styles, please stop."

She pleads while crying, I raise my head to find her face streaking with tears.

Me: "Kitten?"

I don't understand.

Sethu: "Get off me please."

With force she pushes me off, I fall on the side of the bed. Sethu runs to the door crying. No, I have to stop her.

What just happened?

Me: "Sethu?"

I snatch her hand as she reaches for the door knob, she yanks it away.

Me: "Did I do something wrong?"

Sethu: "I told you to stop Styles. Why didn't you stop?"

What is happening with her?

Me: "Sethu, talk to me. I thought you wanted this, you kissed me back."

I didn't imagine that, I know I didn't.

Sethu: "I shouldn't have come here, it was a mistake."

She declares and begins to walk away, I block her way.

Me: "Don't leave like this."

She folds her arms and hits her back against the wall.

Me: "What's happening Sethu? Why are you like this? Why are you doing this to us?"

Silence.

This is what she does all the damn time, she refuses to speak to me.

How do I communicate with someone who refuses to speak?

Me: "Talk to me dammit."

She flinches at the sound of my roar, I'm losing the battle to her silence and it aggravates me.

Me: "Are we done? Is this the end for us?"

She hides her face from me as she turns away.

Me: "Okay, if this is what you want, fine. We'll go our separate ways. I am done with this."

She's glancing at me now, with tears stroking her face.

Sethu: "You're giving up on us?"

What?

Me: "What game are you playing Sethu?"

Sethu: "I'm not playing games Styles."

Me: "Then what is it? What the fuck do you want?"

I yell.

Sethu: "Don't use that language with me."

She yells back and I am bewildered by her attitude towards me.

Me: "You have been aloof for weeks now, I tried Sethu. I tried to get through to you but, you pushed me away, you don't let me anywhere near you. You flinch at the sound of my voice and wince at my touch."

Sethu: "That's not true."

Let's see if I'm the liar she is calling me out to be, I tower over her and she clenches her eyes. I lean in to kiss her, she denies me the chance as she slants her head to the side.

Me: "Do you want us Sethu?"

She's staring at me, and I can't grasp what she's thinking.

Me: "This is exactly what I'm talking about. You don't communicate with me."

I yell over her.

Sethu: "What do you want from me, Styles?"

She shouts as she moves away from me.

Me: "How about you say something? I am sick and tired of your silence."

Sethu: "I'm not going to talk to you while you're drunk. What will I possibly say to you?"

She continues to shout.

Me: "Oh great, typical Sethu. Always full of excuses, yesterday you were too tired to talk, just the other day you were not in the mood."

Sethu: "You can't force me to speak Styles."

She shouts as she steps away from me. She's headed to the window.

I hate it when she walks away from me, it shows me that she's not willing to change the course of our relationship.

I scuttle to her, seize her hand. She winces as I grip on it.

Sethu: "You're hurting me Styles."

She barks.

Me: "What is it about me that suddenly disgusts you? Where is this hate coming from?"

Sethu: "You're drunk."

She seethes.

Me: "Stop telling me that I'm drunk."

I bark on her face.

She pushes me from her, I refuse to let go of her hand.

Me: "You tell me not to go, yet you can't stand being around me. Is that not selfish? You're selfish Sethu and frankly I am tired of your bullshit. Yes you're grieving, it's understandable. But you refuse to get help. So, what the hell do you want me to do? Must life stop because you're going through something? Your parents are gone Sethu, we are all you have left. When will you realise that? When will you get this through your head? I am tired of being your punching bag."

Sethu: "If you're tired then leave."

She yells at the top.

Me: "Fine, I'll leave. We're done, it's over."

I find myself yelling back, I don't want to leave her. I don't want to be without her, I am so mad right now, I don't have the strength to beg her. Tears stream down her cheeks as she leers up at me.

Sethu: "You're a liar Styles, damn you."

She screams, I'm clueless as to what she's talking about.

Sethu: "You lied to me."

What is she talking about? Could it be that she knows about Mkhize being her father?

Sethu: "You said you won't leave me, but you're doing it right now. Like my parents did, you're also leaving me."

She scream cries, my wrath won't let me comfort her.

"Stylos can I come in?"

Neo probes from outside the door, he's in the room in a second, Ayize is with him.

Neo: "What's going on?"

Ayize: "We can hear you all the way from the lounge."

I didn't think that we were that loud, I was so caught up in letting my voice heard. In my head, yelling at her was the only way to get her to listen to me.

Me: "Ask her, she doesn't know what she wants."

Ayize: "What is it sis? Why are you fighting?"

Ayzie touches Sethu's shoulder.

Sethu: "Why don't you ask him? He wants us to break up."

She says it like I'm the one with the problem.

Me: "Fuck this shit."

Neo: "Stylos u ea kae?" (Where are you going Styles?)

He searches as I march towards the door.

Me: "I'm getting the fuck out of here."

Ayize: "What about Sethu? Mr. S, you can't leave like this."

Me: "Until your sister decides what she wants, she must stay away from me."





I will not be used again.

Ayize: "Can't you two work it out."

Sethu: "Let him go, he wants to leave and we can't force him to stay."

She won't try to put effort.

Neo gestures that I shouldn't leave, I can't stay here otherwise we'll scream at each other again.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

166\*

AYIZE\*

"Why are you following me?"

Sethu snaps, stopping me in my tracks, I'm trailing behind her as she furiously scuttles to the front door.

Me: "I'm coming with you."

I answer hastily.

Sethu: "I want to be alone."

She's lying.

Me: "You can't be alone Sethu, you're hurting."

Sethu: "I said I want to be alone."

She snaps and heads to the door, my stubbornness forces me to follow her.

Neo's is standing in the corridor watching us.

Me: "Sethu listen to me."

Sethu: "I'm not going home so, you can't come with me."

Me: "Don't tell me, you're going to church again."

Not even the pastor attends church this much.

Sethu: "At least they care about me there."

She ripostes.

They care about her there?

What have we been doing here?

We tried to give her all the love and support and she threw it back in our faces.

She flies outside slamming the door behind her.

Me: "Sethu!!!"

I shout, my plan is to stop her. She can't be so naïve and stupid to be slurped away from her

family by those congregants.

Neo: "Let her be Zee, you'll only pushing her away further."

He stops me from going after Sethu.

Me: "How much further can we push her? She's gone, we've lost her Neo. Our Sethu died that day with Beauty's husband."

I express my fears as I walk to the lounge, my head is scrambled as I try to think of ways to save my sister.

Me: "I'm glad Ginger and Mbali did not witness their fight."

Neo: "Do you want me to check on them?"

Me: "Let them play, it's a good distraction for them."

Leaving the girls in the back yard was a good idea.

Me: "Do you think it's really over between Sethu and Mr. S?"

Neo knows him well enough to know if anger compelled him to lie or if he meant every word.

He sits on the empty space next to me, his knee touches mine. If I'm not mistaken Neo has a crush on me, I see the way he looks at me. How clingy he gets and he loses his mind when we don't talk for days.

Neo: "Honestly Zee, Mr. S was livid. He doesn't shout, like never. I saw it with his former girlfriend, they had squabbles. The girl treated him like trash, she didn't give him a minute of peace and not once did I hear him shout at her while fighting. This is new, he's hurt. Miss S has pushed him to the limit and I hope he doesn't do anything stupid."

Me: "Like what? Do you think he'll hurt my sister?"

Neo: "He won't, he loves her."

He's not giving much detail.

Me: "Then what?"

Neo's hand drops on my lap, he draws small lenient circles. It's a comforting touch, he makes me feel safe. Which is something I have never felt with any man. My father included. Neo looks into my eyes as he holds a serious expression.

Neo: "Promise we will never fight like that."

He tells as if we are a couple, his request is random.

Me: "What are you?"

His eyebrows curve, I have observed Neo long enough to read his face and know when he's about to say something stupid.

Neo: "A tree."

What did I say?

He grins and the whole thing makes me laugh, my Neo is so adorable. I know I wouldn't want to lose him, he's my pillar of strength and I need him to stand.

I flit my fingers on the corners of his jawline, it's a soft gentle touch. Due to my touch, he closes his eyes for a second and in a jiffy they are staring right back at me. It's a look of promise, a protective stare. This impenetrable glare shepherds us to a sloppy kiss, he pushes his body close to me as he takes lead in the kiss that I started.

My mind was here the whole day, since that first kiss we shared. It left me wanting more, I thought he would take initiative and kiss me again. I didn't want it to be a joke or a test, this is how I wanted it to be. Real and meaningful.

We break from the kiss, both trying to catch our breaths. I have to be honest.

Me: "You kiss me like I'm the only woman whose lips you've ever tasted and I like that."

I have to let him know and to think he will show me his famous grin, his joker side decide to take a back seat. He holds my hand and presses his forehead on mine, his lips move closer to mine. I meet him half way, he pecks my lips and exhales deeply. I love the feel of his hand playing on my waist. The touch is warm.

Neo: "Please let this be real."

He whispers softly while his lips brush on mine.

Me: "You're not dreaming Neo, damn I must really be a good kisser."

He smiles.

Neo: "Zee, I want you."

He confesses and I know he does.

Neo: "When you're ready to love a man, I would like to be that man."

Me: "You want to be with me?"

Neo: "It's the only thing I think about."

Me: "You know I'm still fighting my demons Neo, and I'm not promising perfection but, we can try. If you feel like it's not working out for you or you want out, please tell me. Don't find solace in the arms of another woman while you come home to me at night. I know Jub Jub personally and I will not be kind to you and that bitch."

He smiles.

Neo: "Where have you been all my life?"

This time around his kiss is deeper and meaningful.

NKOMO\*

It's right after 6pm, the sun is setting. It will be dark in a few minutes. I'm in the outskirts of Joburg, the GPS has led me to this forest looking place. I exit the car to stand in front of a cabin, it's the only shed in the middle of the thick trees. It's dead silent that it's nearly deafening, no birds or cars are heard from here.

There is a voice in the back of my mind telling me to go back, it all started when I took a turn from the main road to drive here.

I'm not one to be stubborn but, here I am ignoring my sixth sense all in the name of love. I dawdle towards the broken fence, my blood runs cold and the hairs at the back of my neck stand as I enter the premises. There's a presence in this place, fear engulfs me and my feet freeze. I can't move, my heart feels like it wants to jump out of my chest.

What are you doing Nkomo? Go back home. Thoughts of my mother fill my mind, her face flashes before me. Why am I thinking of her at this moment?

"Nkomo."

I twist my head back as my name sounds in a whisper. There is no one behind me, I swear I felt the whisper in my ear as if the person was standing behind me.

There are two forces, one presses me to leave this place, while the other draws me toward the shed. I have a desperate desire to know if Ruth is in there, she said her life is in danger. I have to save her.

"Go back."

The voice again, it passes with the wind. Deep in my conscious, I'm certain that it's my mother's voice. I was a little boy the last time I heard it, I can forget everything, not my mother's voice.

Someone forcefully snatches my hand and lugs me towards the shed. It takes me a second to recognize her.

Me: "Ruth?"

Ruth: "Hurry, we have to hide. They are coming for me."

She utters in a haste.

Me: "What's going on?"

Ruth: "I'll explain once we're inside, I can't let them see us."

She opens the brown wooden door and pulls me inside, chills run through me as I step my foot in here. Something tells me that I will not leave this place.

The house is empty with no sign of human life, no furniture or anything to show that someone



lived here. The place is ghostly, the wooden floor is adorned with dirt and dry leaves. The windows are cracked and there is a nauseating foul smell.

There is one more door that probably leads to a bedroom.

Ruth collides into my arms the second she pushes the door closed.

Ruth: "I missed you N.K."

I pull away from the embrace.

Me: "Are you okay? What happened to you? Do you have any idea how terrified I was?"

She cots my face with her hands.

Ruth: "Someone is trying to kill me N.K. I had to run, I'm not safe."

Me: "Who is it?"

Ruth: "I don't know, they want me dead. I need to go back home."

Me: "Home?"

Ruth: "Yes, Ghana. I'll be safe there under my father's protection and I keep hearing voices N.K. When I start to walk, there's a sound. An extra pair of footsteps, it's like someone is walking behind me."

It's the curse.

She peeps out the window, Ruth is fidgety and restless. It breaks me to see her like this.

Me: "Let me help you Ruth, we can tackle whoever these people are. Then we'll deal with the curse once we get rid of them."

Ruth: "You're a good man N.K, I don't want to involve you in my problems."

Me: "Your problems are mine, we're in this together."

I oppose with her statement.

Me: "I'm going to keep you safe, I promise. First we have to get you out of this creepy place."

Ruth: "What will I do without you N.K?"

She tangles her arms around my neck and kisses me.

Abruptly, a blunt object collides against my head, everything falls into slow motion. Ruth's eyes widen in shock, horror evident in them.

Bug eyed, I send my hand on my head. My knees give up their strength throwing my body to the floor. I can't move, the pain has paralyzed me.

I don't know what happened, my head is spinning and ringing and I'm drooling. Where did these men in black come from? They are armed and look angry as hell.

Ruth: "No, N.k."

Ruth is pulled back in a bear hug by one of them, the other points a gun at me and I put my hand straight towards it, it goes off and the bullet pierces through my hand.

Ruth: "N.K!!!"

She screams as she tries to wiggle herself off this man's strong hold. The pain on my hand is excruciating. It's over, we are in the middle of nowhere, there is no help coming from the outside world, all I can think about is...

'You're going to die.'

How did they find Ruth? Did I lead them here? Desperation takes over her face, tears stroke her cheeks.

I can't speak, I feel like I have been hit by a train.

My eyes are failing me as my vision blurs, I can't keep them open. I'm jolted in and out of consciousness in a miniature. There's nothing I can do for Ruth now, whoever these men are, they are going to kill her.

STYLES\*

The sign on the board says Pietermaritzburg, I'm on the high way and it's dark out. The four lane freeway is full of cars headed to different destinations.

I don't know where I'm going. I wanted to get as far away from home as I could, everything there left me feeling suffocated. I would have done something if I had stayed.

Sethu and I have barely started and it's over, our love was short lived.

If I knew such pain existed, I would have stayed away from relationships right after Khethu. The pain I felt with Khethu is nothing compared to what I feel now.

My phone has been ringing none stop, I don't want to talk to anyone. Neo must have told Randall everything, he's calling me. I let it ring, and there's another incoming call. It says Nixon, Richard calls me every day although I don't take his calls.

Me: "Yeah."

I decide to hear what he has to say.

Richard: "Styles, thank God. I was..."

I don't have time to listen to his emotions.

Me: "What do you want Richard?"

Richard: "Can we meet for breakfast tomorrow?"

Me: "I'm not in town."

He goes quiet for a second.

Richard: "Okay, when you get back."

Me: "What do you want from me?"

Richard: "A chance, I know I screwed up and..."

Me: "You fucked up Richard and it's too late, I don't need you anymore. Maybe seven year old me, would've been over the moon."

Richard: "I know son."

Me: "Don't call me that."

Richard: "I'm sorry, your siblings are looking forward to meeting you."

I have siblings?

Richard: "Gracey won't stop bugging me, she keeps asking after you."

He chortles as he says.

Me: "Gracey?"

Richard: "Yes, she's 16 and you have two brothers. Miles is 25 and Robert is a few years older than you, he's 35."

He speaks of them with pride.

Me: "We're you married when you met my mother?"

My mother could not have been a mistress.

Richard: "I was married, yes but..."

I disconnect the phone call.

My mother was his mistress? She had an affair with a married man, he took advantage of her. This angers me greatly, Richard will pay for using my mother.

Randall won't stop calling me and he won't stop pestering me.

Me: "Why are you blowing up my phone?"

I snap.

Randall: "Where are you?"

Me: "On the road."

Randall: "Road to where?"

Why is he panicking? I can take care of myself.



Me: "What do you want?"

Randall: "Neo told me what happened, come over so we can talk."

He reveals and gives an order.

Me: "I'm not in town."

I utter.

Randall: "Where are you Styles?"

Me: "Will you stop freaking out, I'm okay."

Randall: "You don't sound it. I know you Styles, you bottle everything up."

Me: "Randall stop, I don't need this right now. This is why I didn't want to take any calls."

I bark.

Randall: "Did you just yell at me?"

He queries dubiously.

Me: "You're getting on my nerves that's why, I told you that I'm okay."

Talking about Sethu will only make me more upset.

Randall: "Okay, be safe. Call me when you get to wherever you're headed to."

He's not snubbed.

Me: "I will."

Where am I going?

RANDALL\*

Is he okay?"

Amara asks as she plods into the patio, she holds me a glass of mango juice.

Me: "I don't want this."

I drop it on the table, she gives me a jaded look and settles down opposite me.

Me: "Aren't you getting me something else?"

Amara: "Don't make me regret falling pregnant."

She snaps, this is new.

Amara: "You can't send me back to the kitchen. What will I get? You don't know what you want."

Me: "Of course I do."

Amara: "What is it?"

Me: "Something edible."

She huffs, sits back and sips on her juice.

Amara: "How is Styles?"

Changing the topic.

Okay...

Me: "He's not okay, I'm worried about him."

Styles has a certain anger that should never be provoked, he might start doing shit he will regret.

Amara: "They can't be over Randall, we have to do something."

Me: "What can we do? Styles doesn't let anyone into his private life."

Amara: "I can talk to Sethu."

Me: "If you feel that it would make a difference."

I throw my thoughts out there, I know how Styles' mind works. He doesn't follow what people say, if he feels that he needs a break from Sethu, nothing will change his mind.

Amara: "I know it will, Sethu loves Styles. This is a phase, it will pass."

Me: "I hope so. Styles is a lover and if this relationship fails as well, he won't be the same again. The old Styles was a player, shit that man slept with anything in a skirt. His target was cougars, he was a Casanova."

Amara: "What about you?"

When did we take a U-turn?"

Me: "What about me?"

Amara: "Where you not a Casanova, I'm pretty sure you were his right hand man."

I should've kept my mouth shut.

Me: "No, I was a good boy."

I need a drink.

Amara: "Now you want the juice."

Women.

I almost choke on the darn juice.

Me: "It will do."

She's sceptical about my answer.

Me: "I'm hungry, I'll go and see what Chioma is making in the kitchen."

I dash out, it's better I leave before I reveal things I shouldn't to a pregnant women.

SETHU\*

<<<Flash back to a week ago>>>

I walk into the correctional services, the guard gives me an irregular look. He looks like he doesn't want to be here anymore, he's had it with this job. He sits with his elbow on the table and his chin resting on his hand.

I don't know how I got here, I need closure. It's late now and visiting hours are over, I'm taking chances.

Me: "Good day."

He frowns at my salutation.

Me: "I need to see a prisoner."

His scowl grows.

Guard: "Do you see the time sisi?" (Sister.)

His eyes accept a chagrined look.

Me: "Yes, I'm only a few minutes late. Please it's important, my mother is in there."

My blood boils as I refer to that evil woman as my mother.

Guard: "Nami sisi, my mother is buried in Avalon and I would like to see her again but I can't."  
(Me too sister.)

Me: "Please bhuti, this is important." (Brother.)

I won't be in peace if I don't speak to her.

Guard: "You're only wasting your time sisi. I'm working here, go." (Sister.)

Dammit.

Me: "I'll do anything please."

I have a few coins in my wallet.

He takes a naughty look, his eyes receive a glint of perversion. He peruses his surroundings and



his hand falls on his member, he licks the seam of his lips as he undresses me with his eyes. I am repulsed by this perverted act of his.

Guard: "The toilet is just around there, one minute I'll be done."

He has no shame to let such thoughts leave his mouth. Men think women are sex objects, this is how rape begins. It sickens me that they don't see us in anyway but that.

Can I please speak to a man who will not make me feel like I'm in danger? Should we hide ourselves from the world because of these perverts? I can't pour petrol at a petrol station without the attendant hitting on me and making me feel like the worst thing on earth.

I have to avoid the male cashier at the counter because he keeps giving me a perverted gaze, the only reason he can't speak out is because there is a lady cashier next to him who might report him for harassing a customer. I have to change into long pants and a sweater when I go to the shop around the corner because the boys who lurk around there will undress me before I even get to them.

I have to cover up when the deliver guy knocks on my door because he will make moves on me as there is no male figure in the house to keep him in his place. I can't stay home alone with my male cousin because, well I am not his father's child, only a sex object. Heck, I can't ask the boss at work for a raise or promotion because he'll be on some "You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours".

This world is truly a man's world, they are the hunters and we are the preys. I choose to stand up for myself and everyone who was sexually harassed by these animals.

In a speed of light, I lean over the counter and slap the guard across the face. His hand flies to his cheek, he is in shock. He can't believe a woman just slapped him.

Me: "You piece of shit. How dare you?"

Guard: "You slapped me?"

He is still in shock.

Me: "Yes and I would do it again. I slapped you for every woman who works here and have been assaulted by you, you should be locked up you bastard."

I shout as I give him a piece of my mind.

Guard: "You bitch."

He growls, I move back as he attempts to tackle me.

Me: "I am not a bitch, you are."

I have gotten us attention, his colleagues have come out to watch.

Me: "That's the problem with you men, you think women are bitches. You throw these words around as if they are not offensive, you see us as loose and cheap. This is why you rape and kill women, you just told me about your mother who died. Was she also a bitch?"

I howl. The anger on his face is as clear as day light.

Guard: "You..."

Me: "What? Bitch?"

I cut his words.

Me: "I told you that I am not a bitch, I am not defined by that word. You came from a woman and have the audacity to call another woman a bitch. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"What's going on here? What is all this racket about?"

A man asks as he storms out of an office, he looks like the superior.

Me: "This man was harassing me."

Guard: "She's lying boss."

He dubs me a liar while he rubs his cheek.

Me: "We're you not the one who suggested that we go to the toilets for a quickie? What was it again? One minute right?"

I don't see anything funny in this but, the people find it laughable, I can't stop them from laughing.

Guard: "You will pay for this."

Why voice out his dirty thoughts if they will put him to shame once they are revealed to the world.

Me: "This is what we have to go through when we go to police stations, posts offices or wherever. We have to fear for our lives and brace ourselves before entering these premises because I might not come out alive. What must we do to be safe in this country?"

I'm directing the question to the superior.

"I'm sorry mam, we'll get to the bottom of this."

Me: "When?"

He's taken aback my question.

Me: "I'm not the only women who has reported a case and was told it will be resolved, only for it to be thrown out the window. This man will be back here tomorrow, harassing another woman. The next time it won't be words, he will rape a woman."

"Yeah vele." (It's true.)

Some of the women agree with me.

"I hear you mam."

I don't think he does, I want him to take action now.

"Hanyane, you're suspended with immediate effect. Take your things and go back home, you will be called for a hearing."

That's more like it, it's not justice but it's something.

Hanyane gives me a deadly stare before grabbing the only possession he had, his phone and dashes out of the building.

"Yeah maka hambe. Uyinja vele." (He must go, he's a dog.)

A lady shouts.

"Everyone back to work, the show is over."

He shouts at the employees who have turned this into a comedy, they are laughing and clapping their hands.

Me: "This was not a show sir, a woman was sexually harassed."

He drops his eyes ashamedly.

I'm being dramatic I know but, I have to speak out. Must I suffer for being a woman?

"I'm sorry again. Is there anything I can do to make it up to you?"

Me: "I came here to see someone who is locked up and that man..."

"Done, I'll appoint you a guard who will help you with the process and take you through. Please don't report us, we already have a bad reputation and we'll lose our jobs."

Nx!

Men will never change, I wouldn't be surprised if Hanyane's case is dropped and he's called back to work.

I find Beauty waiting for me in a single waiting room, she's bald and has lost weight. I can almost feel the amount of anger she holds inside.

I sit down opposite her. My mind has gone blank, everything I wanted to say to her is lost.

Beauty: "I thought you had forgotten about me."

The sound of her voice brings back every question I had like a flood.

Me: "Why did you kill my mother?"

I go with the first question my mind provides.

She doesn't have an answer for me.

Me: "Did she give birth to twins?"

Her eyes give me the answer as they enlarge in wonder.

Me: "What happened to the baby Beauty? Did you kill the baby?"



Her silence is starting to annoy me.

Me: "You're in jail, you might as well confess, there is no hope for you."

I'm hoping that she tells me, I won't leave this place until I know what happened.

Beauty: "Your mother had twins yes, he was the first to pop out."

She cracks.

Me: "He? My brother? I had a brother?"

She nods.

Beauty: "I helped Ntosh give birth. I don't know what happened but, when I turned to give your father the baby, he slipped out of my arms and hit the floor head first. I knew he was dead when his cries stopped."

Oh my God!

Beauty: "Your mother screamed the second she heard a thump, there was no time for her to mourn. You were pushing your way out and she had to continue pushing or you were going to die as well. Her agonizing screams still ring in my head, I will never forget the horrified look on her face when her first twin died right after his birth. Sethu I'm not a bad person, I swear."

Me: "What else happened that night?"

I am numb, I want to scream and cry at the same time. I want to jump off a bridge and die.

Beauty: "Your mother wouldn't let me anywhere near you, she kept you with her and wouldn't let me clean you. She wouldn't stop crying and threatening to report me for murder, I pleaded with her but, she wouldn't hear me out. So when your father left the room, I took advantage of her frail state and put a pillow over her face. She wouldn't die, it took a while for her to stop fighting me. Your mother didn't die giving birth, you were told half the truth. She died of asphyxiation. Your father walked in the room just as I removed the pillow from her face. That's when we decide to bury them in the back yard, I had Ayize and you to think about, I couldn't go to jail."

She reveals the deadly secret. Why am I emotionless? Why am I not crying?

Me: "Why didn't you kill me as well?"

She should've killed me.

Beauty: "Sethu I'm sorry."

Me: "You're not sorry Beauty, you're only sorry you got caught."

Beauty: "I'm going to go away."

She announces randomly.

Beauty: "I guess this is your destiny my child, you're destined to be alone."

What just happened?



Her face has changed, she's not the Beauty that was remorseful seconds ago.

Beauty: "You have a good heart Sethu and you have so much love to give. The problem is that the love you give causes death. You helped your brother enter the world by pushing him before you and he met his death. Your mother died too after embracing you in her arms. Everyone you love will leave you, Ayize is next, Ginger will follow, then Mbali will follow after and that man you love so much. He will leave you too, it's better that you're alone. You're a curse my child, I'm sorry."

She bursts out laughing, stands up and begins to toddle away. The guard follows behind her, I'm left in the room, unable to move. Her words replaying in my mind like a broken record.

<<< End of flash>>>

This is the only way to keep Styles alive, he's safe when he's away from me. Everyone is.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

167\*

SETHU\*

I am in pain and I don't understand it. How can a human being be subjected to so much agony?  
How can love hurt so much?

I drove to the cemetery to visit my mother's grave, I'm contemplating on whether to go or not.  
I'm getting a call from Amara.

Me: "Hey."

Like my tears sense her presence they gush out of my eyes and I'm sobbing in a jiffy.

Amara: "Oh Sethu. Where are you my love?"

Me: "I'm at the cemetery, I don't know why I'm here Amara. I don't know both these people that  
are buried here. My uncle and my mother, I needed to feel wanted."

I'm trying to speak through these sobs,

Amara: "Sethu it's not safe there, come over and we'll talk."

Me: "I don't know, it's late. I don't want to bother you and Randall."

Amara: "You're family, you won't be bothering us at all."

Me: "I don't want to intrude Amara."

Amara: "Hey stop, I told you it's not a problem."

Me: "Is Styles there?"

I wish I could turn back time and take back the words I said to him.

Amara: "He's not."

Me: "I pushed him away, it's what I wanted you know and the craziest thing is that I can't breathe.  
His absence is more painful than anything I have ever felt."

I confess what was congealed in my heart.

Amara: "I don't understand. What do you mean you wanted to push him away?"

She inquires, I can hear a spark of confusion in her voice.

Me: "People that belong to me end up leaving me, my mother and sister were the first ones.

Then my father, he was a terrible person Amara but, he was my father and I loved him. I showed him nothing but, hate in his last moments.”

Amara: “Oh sweetie, that’s not true. You’re only...”

I cut her half way.

Me: “It’s true Amara, Styles was going to leave me one way or the other. This is why I pushed him away, I don’t want him to die.”

Amara: “Where did you get that idea?”

Me: “It doesn’t matter.”

Amara: “Listen to me Sethu, come home now. We’ll talk when you get here.”

She commands, God-knows I need a shoulder to cry on.

Me: “I’m on my way.”

I’m startled by a man passing in front of my car, I didn’t see the direction he came from. He stops mid-way, looks at me and continues on his way.

Me: “That’s strange.”

My thoughts escape my mind.

Amara: “What is it?”

Me: “Is it normal for people to be lurking around at the grave yard at this time.”

Amara: “10pm? Totally not normal at all. Is there someone there?”

Me: “Yeah, some creepy guy. He was looking at me.”

Amara: “Sethu get out of there now.”

I hear the sound of breaking glass and it gets my attention as fast as the sound of a gunshot, the shards scatter all over me.

Amara: “Sethu, what was that?”

Me: “Someone threw something through my window.”

I’m panicking and trying to start the car, my hands are trembling I’m hastily trying to turn the key.

Amara: “Randall, Randall.”

I hear Amara scream over the phone.

Me: “Amara, I can’t start the car.”

Amara: “Who is there Sethu? Can you describe them?”

I scan my surroundings, it is dead silent. There is no one in sight, only the fog covering the

graves and a piercing silence that has my heart thudding hard on my chest like a drum beat during an initiation.

Me: "No, I'm alone. I'm so scared Amara."

I express and what I say is nothing compared to what I feel.

Amara: "Sethu, I need you to calm down baby, you won't be able to start the car if you're like this."

Okay, I need to breathe.

Amara: "Randall hurry."

Her shouting alarms me.

Amara: "It's Sethu, she's in trouble."

I hear her explain.

"Sethu where are you? I'm coming to get you."

Randall sounds too calm and I can't breathe from this panic, my stomach is in knots and my body is pulsating with heat.

Me: "At the cemetery, I don't know if you'll make it Randall?"

I say, my heart beating harder, if it could scream then this is it.

Randall: "Why?"

Me: "Because there's a man in front of my car and he's smiling at me."

I explain the horror that I'm observing.

Randall: "Calm down, don't put up a fight okay."

Now I'm more scared.

Me: "What does that mean Randall?"

Randall: "They are going to take you away, don't put up a fight Sethu. They won't hurt if you don't fight them."

Me: "Randall, he's walking around the car."

Randall: "I'll find you Sethu, be assured of that."

Me: "I'm scared Randall."

I'm whimpering with fear.

Randall: "I know sweetheart, I know."

My eyes follow this strange man's movement, he's glaring at me with a smug look.

Me: "Help me please."



Randall: "What does the guy look like?"

He stands at the door and knocks, his grin sends cold shivers down my spine. My first thought is to use the passenger's door and escape, I can run fast, I'll probably reach the main road before he gets to me.

Randall: "What does he look like Sethu?"

Me: "He's white, it's too dark to see his facial features."

I explain while trying to jump to the other side, I'm stopped by another man who stands on the passenger's side. My eyes widen in shock and horror, a psychotic spine chilling laugh erupts from him. I'm dead, I'm going to die.

Randall: "That's okay, remember to stay calm Sethu, I'm on my way."

The driver's door swings open with Randall's promise, a loud scream evades my mouth as the man grabs me and pulls me out.

Me: "Help, Randall."

I scream.

I cling to the mobile phone on my hand as if it's the only thing that could keep me safe. The man clenches a strong grip on my biceps, he snatches the phone from me. I'm screaming and trying to fight him off, he's tall and big compared to me.

"Shut the fuck up bitch."

He growls, it compels me to clog my screams with my hand. He's on the phone, laughing scornfully.

"Old buddy."

He says, his voice is coated with anger.

"A tooth for a tooth right?"

He chortles coldly, the second guy walks over and stops next to me.

"Fuck you too."

The man on the phone cusses.

Why is Randall arguing this man? He should be on his way.

"I'd like to see you try."

He's taunting Randall, he takes another disdainful laugh, throws the phone on the floor and tramples on it.

"Get her in the car."

He commands the second guy who gives me an evil grin, he grabs both my arms with so much

force that I scream in pain.

“Shut up bitch.”

My head rings as his large hand meets my face, he holds me like a puppet as my body begins to sink to the floor. He’s hauling me to the car, my mind is evaded with thoughts of death. Next time it’s going to be me lying six feet under, my name is going to be inscribed on a grave stone.

Me: “Styles.”

I call to no one in particular as this man throws me into a black SUV with tinted windows. I don’t know where Styles is. I don’t know if I’ll ever see him again or my family.

NOMBULELO\*

Mbuso hasn’t left my side since I came to, it’s late at night and he says that he’s spending the night. Honestly I’m lucky to be alive after coming so close to death.

Me: “Are you allowed to be here at this time?”

I ask Mbuso.

Mbuso: “I took an extra shift so yeah, I can be here.”

He’s massaging my feet, they feel numb.

Mbuso: “So much has happened since you fell into a coma, you won’t believe it.”

He nervously starts and I can’t comprehend what he could be talking about.

Me: “I’m listening.”

He clears his throat, his eyes hold a secret and they keep avoiding me.

Mbuso: “I want you to hear this from me.”

He prepares himself for a confession, I can’t think of anything but my baby.”

Me: “Is it Goku?”

My heart is dancing on my throat, I can’t imagine anything happening to him.

With his head bowed he raises his eyes, then drops them. I know this man enough to know when he’s secreting, he can’t hide anything from me.

Me: “Tell me, my baby is okay Mbuso.”

Mbuso: “Your family was fighting for rights over you, Jonas wanted to introduce our baby to the Mhlongos. I couldn’t allow it so I had to get a marriage certificate to prove that we’re married just so, I can have rights over you and the baby.”



He recites the short story.

Me: "My uncle wanted to give Zuma rights over my baby?"

Instead of answering he nods.

Me: "Why would he do that?"

To say I'm hurt would prove to be sarcasm, Jonas knows how I feel about that man. If this is his way of protecting me like he claims then I don't need it. I would rather be in danger.

Mbuso: "Lelo. Did you hear what I said? We're supposedly married."

And the thought of it makes him nervous, or is it my indefinite rejoinder.

Me: "I did Mbuso, I understand why you did it and I love the thought of being Mrs. Xaba."

He smiles brightly, it disappears as fast as it came, he moves from my feet to stand over me.

Mbuso: "You know I love you, right?"

And aren't I lucky?

Me: "Not more than I love you."

Mbuso: "I have something for you."

He goes to a cabinet on the left, fiddles in it and comes out with a baby blue gift bag, he hands it to me. I frown smile at him and this surprise.

Why is he so nervy?

Mbuso: "Open it."

He says fidgeting with his hands, he sends one behind his neck and rubs it with raised eyebrows and anticipation growing on his face.

Me: "Okay, relax Xaba."

It's baby booties, they are blue and the cutest thing I have ever seen.

Me: "They are beautiful Mbuso, but we don't know if we're going to have a boy or a girl."

He's smiling at me, he's up to something.

Me: "What happened?"

He'll start to look like an idiot if he continues like this.

Mbuso: "Won't you feel how soft they are inside, Goku will be floating on air with these."

His statement drives a nippy laugh from me. I'm familiar with this nervous look, he gets quite a few of those.

Me: "He won't be able to walk at this age."

That's how tiny they are, his assertion prompts me into wadding my hand in the booties. There's something in this one, I pull it out using my pinkie finger. My heart stops at the sight of this beautiful ring on my hand. My emotions overtake me, I gaze at him and he's on his knees.

Me: "Mbuso."

The tears in my eyes come to bear witness of this breath taking moment. He springs his hand to take the ring from me.

Mbuso: "You're the only woman for me and I want to spend my life learning how to love you right."

Mbuso: "I want you and Goku to have my surname, ngicela ubengowami maMngoma. Ngicela ungishade ntokazi?" (Will you be mine? Will you marry me?)

I am dumbfounded, I never saw this coming. He's looking up at me, unsure of what my answer would be. He furrows a brow, I'm making him wait and it's not intentional, my mind is trying to process everything.

Mbuso: "Lelo."

My name swooshes out of his mouth, he raises his hand to wipe the trickles of sweat forming on his forehead. As I wipe my tears that have blinded my vision, I give him my hand. I can't wait to have the ring on my finger.

Mbuso: "O- Okay. I don't know what this means."

He stammers.

Me: "Yes Mbuso, I will marry you."

A ghostly smile distracts him.

Mbuso: "Yes?"

He confirms.

Me: "A thousand times yes, I will marry you."

He drops his head, he's sobbing.

Me: "Mbuso."

He wipes his face before lifting his gaze.

Me: "The proposal is not complete without the ring."

He snickers at my words, slips the ring on my fingers and rises to kiss me.

Mbuso: "Thank you."

He pecks my lips.

Mbuso: "I love you chubby cheeks."

Me: "Yeah, about that. I'm not a fan of that name anymore."

Mbuso: "Why not?"

Does he not see all this fat on me?

Me: "Really?"

Mbuso: "I don't know what you're talking about and the name stays, sisi."

Me: "Sisi? Ngiyi ngonduso yakho, not your sister." (I'm your fiancé not your sister.)

He smiles.

Mbuso: "My beautiful fiancé."

Me: "Oh how I love the sound of that."

I say at the top of my voice in exultation, Mbuso sniggers.

Mbuso: "Hey we're at the hospital."

He hushes me.

Me: "I don't care, I'm the happiest woman right now."

Mbuso: "You're amazing you know, that."

Me: "Now that you said it, you can't take it back. Don't come to me one day saying nywe nywe Lelo, nywe nywe isicefe, I will remind you of this moment when you declared my awesomeness." (Saying I'm nuisance.)

He laughs.

Mbuso: "You should remind me, I forget easily."

Me: "Xaba thank you for tolerating me, I know I have been a pain in the ass and you had to tolerate my nonsense. I'm sorry for everything."

Mbuso: "You were my pain in the ass, don't worry about it my love."

This kiss still feels amazing.

RANDALL\*

Me: "Sethu, hello."

Sethu is screaming, I can't hear anything more.

Amara: "What's happening?"

Her screams are replaced by a scornful laugh from an unfamiliar voice.



"Old buddy."

A male voice sounds on the receiving end.

Me: "Who the fuck are you?"

"A tooth for a tooth right?"

He responds as he gurgles coldly.

Is that supposed to be a code or something?

Me: "I'm going to find you and I'll kill you."

Amara drops on a chair, she falls into a well of tears.

"I'd like to see you try."

The bastard hangs up.

A tooth for a tooth?

Who is that? He spoke to me as if he knows me, his arrogance was the loudest. Whoever he is I'm going to kill him

Me: "Amara?"

I squat before her.

Me: "I'm going to find her, don't worry."

I assure her as I dial Styles' number.

Amara: "They are going to kill her Randall."

She says revealing her fears.

Me: "They won't, they want something in exchange for her."

I lie, I don't know what those people want and I have no clue who they are.

Amara: "Promise me, you will find her."

Me: "Don't worry."

Styles is not answering his phone."

Me: "I have to go out, make sure the doors are locked."

Amara: "Please be careful."

Me: "Take Liya with you when you go to bed, she can sleep with you. I probably won't be back till morning."

She nods.

Amara: "Sethu has been through enough, they can't hurt her again. She won't survive this."

Me: "I know, I have to go."

I peck her cheek.

Amara: "Be careful please."

Me: "I will, I love you."

Amara: "I love you."

I'm out of the door in a flash, I call one of the guards wandering outside.

Me: "Come with me."

We are going to need back up, I have Neo's number on standby.

Neo: "Yes yes, bozza. Uze the future king, how far oga?" (What's happening?)

What is he happy about?

Me: "Sethu has been taken."

I introduce the bad news.

Neo: "I can't hear you from here, let me move."

I can hear him perfectly.

Neo: "Sorry Zee and the girls are here. I didn't want them to hear any of this."

He explains his delay.

Neo: "When did this happen?"

Me: "It's been ten minutes."

Neo: "What about Stylos? Does he know?"

Me: "He's not answering his phone."

Neo: "Stylos ke stlaela, I don't know how we are friends with him." (Styles is a fool. You know.)

He's serious.

Me: "I'm coming over, we have to trace her."

Neo: "I doubt she has her phone with her."

Me: "It's going to be hard to find her Neo."

Neo: "I know, I'll try Stylos' number."

Me: "A tooth for a tooth, that's what the guy said. Do you know what it means?"

There is a message in that

Neo: "No, we'll ask Stylos."

Me: "That's if he answers his phone."

Neo: "I think we should have Amara call him, he'll answer. Right now he thinks that we want to disturb his peace, that's why he's ignoring our calls."

How did I not think of that?

Me: "I'll ask her to call him."

Neo: "I'll see you just now."

Styles is the mastermind of the bunch, he'll know where to find Sethu.

NEO\*

Do I tell Zee what has happened to her sister? She's sitting in the lounge with her siblings.

Me: "Zee?"

She turns to me, Ginger is sitting with her head resting on Zee's shoulder, while Mbali has isolated herself on a single couch.

Neo: "Don't you think they should go to bed, it's late."

Zee: "You're right."

Ginger: "The movie is not over yet."

She whines.

Me: "You can watch it tomorrow baba."

Ginger: "Tomorrow is school and sis won't let us watch TV."

Ayize: "At least you know, now go to bed."

Ginger begins to trudge her feet towards the corridor, Mbali remains seated.

Ayize: "Mbali, you heard what I said."

She ignores Zee as she keeps her eyes on the phone in her hand. I don't understand how kids her age can have cell phones.

Ayize: "Mbali ngikhuluma nawe." (I'm talking to you.)

Mbali: "I heard you geez."

She responds rudely.

Ayize: "Girl you better watch your mouth, I'm not your friend."

Mbali mumbles something only known by her.

Ayize: "What did you say?"

Mbali: "Nothing."

She replies without looking at her, Ayize is marked by Mbali's attitude. She shakes her head as she looks at me. She marches to Mbali, snatches the phone and this causes Mbali to jump up.

Mbali: "Hey, give that back."

She raises her voice while trying to take the phone back.

Ayize: "I love you too Ulutho."

She reads a message on Mbali's phone.

Mbali: "Give it back."

Mbali shouts.

Ayize: "Who is this boy Mbali? Do you have a boyfriend?"

Mbali: "No, he's my friend. Give me back my phone."

Ayize: "I'm not going to give you this phone, you're too young Mbali. Boys will play you."

Mbali: "What do you know?"

She shouts.

Me: "Mbali?"

She folds her arms across her chest and pulls a face, this child is twelve.

Me: "That's not how you talk to an adult."

I chastise her.

Ayize: "Uyayazi impama Mbali? Talk to me sengathi uyehla es'hlahleni and I will slap you senseless." (Do you know a slap? As if you're climbing down a tree.)

Mbali: "Whatever."

Mbali's attitude is getting out of hand.

Ayize: "Qhubeka Mbali, qhubeka, yezwa?" (Continue.)

She points a forefinger at Mbali, warning her.

Me: "Zee."

Ayize: "No Neo, I will not hear from a child, she's disrespectful."

Mbali: "I want my phone."

She persistent.

Me: "Mbali go to bed, we'll talk about your phone in the morning."

Mbali: "Argh, you people are boring."

She growls as she walks away.

Ayize: "Yey wena." (Hey you.)

Ayize shouts after her.

Me: "She's just a kid Zee."

Ayize: "Angidlali nengane Neo, I will put her to order." (I don't play with kids.)

Me: "You're so sexy when you're angry."

I'm denied the smile I was expecting.

Ayize: "Are you trying to make me forget that girls' lack of manners?"

I nod reluctantly.

Ayize: "Well, it's working."

She takes up a smile, hooks her arms around my neck. I enwrap my arms around her and pull her into me, I can never get used to this. It still feels like a dream.

Me: "You're really mine Zee?"

I whisper, leaning in to her lips.

Ayize: "It's been long overdue, you sure kept me waiting."

Me: "No more, we are going to live our best lives from now on. I will protect and honour you Zee."

She smiles before our lips meet, I slide my hand across her body and rest one on her cheek.

"Really? How come you're allowed to have a boyfriend?"

Mbali is back.

Ayize: "Voetsek hamb'o lala." (Piss off and go to sleep.)

She shouts at her, Mbali rushes back to the room. Zee can be very strict.

Me: "Uze is coming to get me."

I make it known it to her.

Ayize: "Okay."

That's it? She won't ask where we are going?

Ayize: "Are you going to keep me waiting?"

She wants to know where we're headed to.

Me: "Waiting?"

Ayize: "You're going to tell me where you're going."

How do I tell her that her sister has been kidnapped?

Ayize: "Did something happen?"

I swear she sees through me.

Me: "Promise me you'll stay calm."

She stares at me as she waits for an explanation.

Me: "Zee..."

Ayize: "Say something Neo."

She plods closer to me.

Me: "Miss S has been taken."

I break the news, it hasn't sunk in yet.

Me: "She was kidnapped."

I continue.

Ayize falls back on the couch at this bombshell, I sit next to her and hold her hand.

Me: "We're going to find her."

I'm not sure if we will, Stylos is not here.

Ayize: "Who took her?"

Me: "We don't know but, we're going to find out."

Zee is not okay, she's trying to be strong.

I receive a text from Randall, he's outside.

Me: "I have to go, don't open the door for anyone okay."

Ayize: "Yeah."

She whispers, softly.

Me: "Try not to worry too much."

Ayize: "Bring her back home please."

Me: "We will baba."

Zee's strength amazes me, it leaves me astounded.

Ayize: "Be careful Neo, you better come back."

She follows me to the door as she gives a command."

Me: "Yes mam."

Ayize: "I swear Neo, if something happens to you, I won't go to your funeral."

Me: "I won't let anything happen to me."

Ayize: "Good."

She wraps her arms around my neck, and draws in for a kiss.

I don't know the mission we're going to, I don't know if any of us will come out alive. If I can fulfil this promise I made her.

I move my lips to hers, there's a hesitation in the kiss and it's unhurried. I peck her soft pursed lips a couple of times followed by an insatiable open mouth, no tongue just our lips mingling with each other. The kiss is wet, sizzling and steamy. My hands travel to her curves with light grips but with force. There's an encouragement, dominion and pleading, her soft skin against my hard muscles. The kiss is growing with anticipation.

This mind blowing kiss says see-you-soon, it's a promise of things to come although, I'm not sure if I can keep the promise. My heart feels heavy. I don't know if I'll see Zee again. How will she take it if I do not come back?

Breaking off from the kiss proves to be a mission, I'm astounded, my head feels light with giddiness, this woman just rocked my world.

She follows me to the door, her eyes telling me to come back. My heart drops at the sound of the door shut, I want to turn my head but, I know that I will be compelled to go back.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

168\*

NEO\*

Jaw clenched, hands clutched on the steering wheel, engrossed on the road ahead and in utter silence, Uze is driving in full speed. He hasn't uttered a word but, the greeting he gave when I hopped into the car. The guard at the back seat is terrified.

Me: "Oga please na, I beg. You will kill us ooo." (Boss please slowdown.)

My plea is unheard as Uze continues to drive faster.

Me: "Look I'm used to this, the adrenalin rush but, this poor man is about to have a heart attack. Have mercy on him, he has a family."

Uze is trying to get us killed, I'm too young to die.

"I'm not afraid."

The idiot says, he's ruining everything.

Me: "Shut up, I'm trying to save your life here and you're being ungrateful."

"Ye, baba I said I'm not afraid of anything. The one who is terrified here is you."

Stupid idiot.

He's right, I am scared to the core.

Me: "You see Uze, this is what a black man does. You try to help him and they throw it back at you."

I peek behind me to see this man's face.

Me: "Luister, jy sal kak vandag. This is not the same as guarding a door, jy vurstaan." (Listen, we're not going to play today. Do you understand?)

He clicks his tongue.

Me: "Uze? Where did you get this fool? He'll get us killed."

Randall: "You mean you'll get us killed. We're not there yet and you're trembling in your boots."

Me: "Hehehe, Uze o na le jokes neh." (You have jokes.)

Eish!!!



Why has he taken a U-turn to the cemetery?"

Me: "I think you took the wrong turn Oga. You can turn back there, the road will take us to the freeway." (Boss.)

I point at the off ramp.

Randall: "I didn't take the wrong turn Neo."

Me: "Do you realise that you're driving into the cemetery?"

He nods as an answer.

Me: "Uze mara le uena, I know that this is normal in your father's land, but not here ko Mzansi. We are black people Uze, we run while passing a cemetery at night, we don't even turn to look at it. Uena you drive straight inside?" (But Uze.) (You.)

The guard is laughing, I know that he's trembling on that seat.

Randall: "This is where Sethu was taken, we might get a clue."

Wait! What?

Me: "Stylos has done it again. How does he choose these women?"

Randall: "What are you talking about?"

Am I the only one who can see this?

Me: "First it was Khethu le bo hlanya ba hae. Nou dit is daai kort meisie Miss S. Who visits a grave yard at night? Maybe she wasn't kidnapped, maybe a demon took her." (Khethu and her craziness and now that short girl Sethu.)

If this guy laughs again I will not be kind.

"U dizzy saani." (You're stupid.)

The guard taunts me.

Me: "Otla nyela saani." (You will shit yourself.)

I come back.

Randall: "Your theories do not make sense."

Me: "They do in my head."

He clicks his tongue.

Uze thinks I'm lying, these things are real.

Randall: "There's nothing here Neo, relax."

He's crazy.

Me: "Nothing but ghosts, demons and devil worshippers, I wouldn't be surprised if we meet daai ugly man, Kenneth." (That.)

Randall gives me a brief look. That's okay, he will see for himself. I push my seat back and slide down as we enter the cemetery. Uze frowns at me.

Randall: "What are you doing?"

Me: "I want to rest, it's late. ke robala ka nako ena." (I sleep at this time.)

"Coward."

Why did Uze bring this man here?

Me: "Jou mau." (Cussing.)

Randall: "There's the car."

Me: "Where?"

Randall: "Right here, get up you'll see it."

Me: "No ke sharp." (I'm okay.)

He stops the car, opens the door and...

Randall: "Let's go."

What did he say?

Me: "I'm still sleeping Uze, take this fool at the back. I'll keep an eye on the car."

I'm not getting out of this car.

Randall: "Guard it while sleeping?"

Me: "Yeah, security guards sleep on duty and it works for them so, this works for me too."

He jumps out of the car.

Me: "Close the door Oga." (Boss.)

Shit, this place is scary.

Randall slams the door closed, the guard follows him.

Me: "A re get out of the car? Nahana, ha ke hlanye nna. Nxa." (Imagine, I'm not crazy.)

My door swings open, causing me to scream.

Randall: "Relax, it's me."

He shakes his head with a simper on his face.

Me: "Oga, you're not funny." (Boss.)



Randall: "Come out Neo."

He takes my hand and drags me out.

Me: "Eish."

I stand close to him, he pushes me aside as I grab the hem of his sweater.

Me: "This place is spooky man."

We're in the middle of the grave yard, the thick fog is hovering above the graves. My heart is racing faster by the beat.

Randall: 'Here is Sethu's car, we might find something.'

My mind is not here, my eyes can't stop casing our surroundings.

Me: "What if something is watching us?"

I utter in uncertainty, I am not comfortable here.

Randall: "Neo focus man."

We're at a grave site, it's dark outside and Uze is snapping at me for telling the truth.

Me: "Okay, okay."

Breathe, there is nothing here.

But...

Me: "Did you hear that?"

I take his hand, he yanks it away.

Me: "There is something here Uze."

Randall: "You can't be serious."

He getting frustrated.

Me: "I'm going back to the car."

I start to walk after my announcement.

Randall: "You're not going anywhere, we need help here."

He pulls me back.

The guard is inspecting Miss S' car so, I might as well do this, the quicker the better.

"Boss, I found something."

He holds up a broken phone, I snatch it from him.

Me: "We can't use this."

Randall: "There has to be something else around here."

There is clearly nothing, we should go home.

Me: "Uze look over there."

I point towards the graves."

Randall: "What?"

Uze turns on his heel, he thinks I have found a clue.

Me: "There's someone there."

It's too dark he won't see clearly.

Randall: "Where?"

Me: "Uze!!!"

I shout and run to the car at the weird hooting sound, I shut the door and slide on my chair.

Uze comes back with the guard, he gives me a disappointed look.

Randall: "Really?"

Me: "Please drive, I don't want to hear anything."

Randall: "It was an owl."

Me: "Exactly, birds of the night."

I retort.

The fact that there are owls at a graveyard should be enough to make us run.

AYIZE\*

Great! Now I have to be worried about Sethu and Neo, Sethu can be stupid sometimes. She better make it out of this alive or else she will have me to deal with. I'll go crazy if I stay in the house, it would be better if we go to Amara's.

She answers my phone the second it rings.

Me: "Hey love. Can we come over?"

Amara: "Sure babe. Randall told you what happened?"

Me: "It feels so unreal you know."

I reply.

I walk in the room Mbali and Ginger are using, Mbali is on a laptop while Ginger sleeps peacefully.

Me: "Where did you get that?"

She glares at me.

Me: "Amara, I'll see you later."

I send my goodbyes, Mbali will give me a headache.

Me: "Mbali, where did you get that laptop?"

Mbali: "In Styles' room."

She gives a reply with more attitude.

Me: "First of all he's not your friend, you will not address him by name and secondly put that thing back."

Mbali: "I'm still busy."

I am being tested.

Me: "I said put it away. Did he give you permission to use it?"

Mbali: "No but..."

Me: "That's all I want to hear."

I shut the laptop, she gives me a death stare.

Mbali: "I hate you."

Me: "Yeah, you'll get over it."

Mbali: "You'll never be my mother you know?"

This child.

How long is she going to put up this act?

Me: "Put on your jacket we're going out."

I give her instructions as I wake Ginger up.

Mbali: "I'm not going anywhere."

Mbali makes my heart stop, I am not prepared for this parenting thing.

Me: "Mbali will you stop and work with me, I have so much going on and I don't need to deal with your bratty behaviour."

Did she just...

Me: "Yey wena. Did you just roll your eyes at me?" (Hey you.)

She does it again.

Me: "The problem is that I have never laid a finger on you, Mbali, I am not your friend, watch it girly or else."

She gets off the bed and starts to head to the door.

Me: "Take your jersey, we're going out."

I repeat my words, Ginger is awake and putting on her shoes.

We're in the car headed to Amara's house. She's the one to open the door for us as we get there.

Amara: "Hey."

She's a hugger like Sethu, I miss those hugs right now.

Me: "They want to sleep."

Ginger has been grumpy since I woke her up.

Amara: "I'll show them where Liyana is sleeping."

Me: "Careful, this one bites."

I whisper to her as I refer to Mbali, she laughs while leading them to the rooms. Mbali worries me a lot, I doubt I'll be able to handle her. Maybe it would be best if I send them to live with my aunt. My life is barely steady, I have so much to do, get a job, study further and then maybe I will take them with me.

This is but a tough decision to make, Ginger hates it there. She wants nothing to do with them.

"Hey, I tucked them in. They are sleeping now."

Amara states as she walks into the kitchen, I'm in here because I'm hungry.

Me: "Tucked them in, abagogo labo moes." (They are old.)

She laughs.

Me: "I hope you don't mind, I'm famished."

I'm referring to the food.

Amara: "Not at all."

She positions her body on a sit.

Me: "Do you think they will find her?"

Amara: "Randall is good at this."

Me: "Oh Randy baby. How did you get entangled with these dangerous men?"

I sit opposite her with a plate of food, I can't have this conversation with Sethu and Amara

seems to be okay with the guns plastered around her.

Amara: "Long story."

She's smiling.

Me: "We have all night."

Amara: "Let me call Styles first, everyone is trying to get a hold of him. I left so many missed calls, he should've called by now."

Me: "Where could he be?"

It's strange for him to disappear like this.

Amara: "He's out of town."

She replies as she dials his number, I watch her in a bated breath.

Amara: "It's off."

She announces with a sad voice.

Me: "Is it bad that it's off?"

Amara: "I don't know, Neo and Randall are alone in this and we don't know how dangerous the people who took her are."

Me: "I don't care, I want my sister home and unharmed."

Amara: "Me too Zee."

Her retort puts a smile on my mouth upon hearing the name Neo dubbed me with.

Amara: "You're blushing."

Maybe I am, I have a reason to blush, I'm happy.

RANDALL\*

After coming empty handed at the crime scene, we went back to Styles' house. Ayize has gone to my house, so this will give us time to put a plan together and find out who those people are.

Neo is lying on the couch with an ice pack on his forehead.

Me: "How is the headache?"

I hand him a cup of black tea, he brings himself to sit up.

Neo: "Getting worse."

He takes a sip and spits it back in the cup.

Me: "Don't tell me, you can't handle hot tea."

He makes a sour face.

Neo: "No Uze man. Are you trying to kill me? What is this?"

Me: "It's tea."

Neo: "Are you sure, it tastes like you put cough medicine in it."

He's complaining.

Nice.

Me: "Did you trace Styles' phone?"

I prefer to ignore his remark.

Neo: "Yeah, he's at some motel in Pietermaritzburg. I got their number, and his room number."

Me: "Can you do that?"

Neo: "He used his credit card so tracking him was easy."

Trust Neo to do a good job.

Me: "Let me call him, time is not on our side."

He points at a piece of paper on the table, the phone is ringing, Styles is not answering, I'm going to kill him.

"Yeah."

He answers after many rings.

Me: "You're full of shit, you know that?"

I hiss.

He's sleeping peacefully while we're stressing.

Styles: "Dammit, I'm going to kill Neo."

He grunts.

He has figured out how we got this number.

Me: "You're stupid Styles. Since when do you run away from your problems?"

Styles: "Can't I get a break for once?"

Me: "Okay get your break, while Sethu is in danger."

I drop the news like a bomb.

Styles: "Sethu is in danger?"



Me: "She was taken by some fucker."

Styles: "Shit, shit. When Randall?"

He sounds like he's bustling.

Me: "It's been a while man, you have to get here. Neo and I are at your house."

Styles: "Fuck!"

He growls loudly.

Styles: "I'm going to kill someone, I swear if they touch her."

Me: "She was on the phone with Amara when they took her, she identified her kidnaper as Caucasian."

Styles: "Do you think it has to do with something we did in the past?"

It's a given.

Me: "You know it man."

Styles: "Let me transfer the call to my phone."

It takes less than a minute to get him back.

Styles: "Wait a minute, it could be that church of hers. Her pastor gave me negative vibes, I think he's in a gang."

He expresses his views before I hear a loud bang.

Me: "Are you on your way?"

Styles: "I'm in the car, I'll try to drive as fast as I could. Keep me posted, if anything comes up."

Me: "Will do."

Styles: "Check out that pastor man, he's dodgy, I don't trust him."

Me: "Sure, there's something that dick head said on the phone."

I introduce.

Me: "A tooth for a tooth. Does it ring a bell?"

Styles: "A tooth for a tooth?"

He repeats my words.

Styles: "We fucked up a lot of people in the past man."

Me: "Well, whatever it is, these people are out for revenge."

Styles: "Not my Sethu, if it's an enemy from the past then, they know what I'm capable of."

I feel sorry for them already, this man is a psycho.

Me: "Hurry Styles, time is an enemy as well and keep your phone on. They might call demanding a ransom."

Styles: "How is Ayize and the girls?"

Me: "Don't worry about them."

Styles: "Cool, go check that pastor."

He gives a demand.

Me: "I'm on it."

The phone goes dead, he hung up.

Neo: "Leoatla leo le reng?" (What did that fool say?)

He's angered by Styles' approach towards his break up with Sethu.

Me: "He's on his way."

Neo: "Banna." (Men)

Neo shakes his head as he lies back down and places the ice pack on his face.

Me: "There is no time for that, we have somewhere to be."

Neo: "Where are we going?"

Me: "Church."

Neo: "You have decided to repent oga? Chineke." (Boss. God.)

He dramatically declares.

Doesn't he have a headache?

Me: "You're a piece of work Neo."

Neo: "I don't know about that but, God is working here."

Me: "Even when we're going to kill a pastor?"

His stupid smile fades.

Neo: "We're going to kill a pastor?"

His voice quavers.

Me: "Let's do this."

I lead the way to the car.

Neo: "Oga wait, let me stay behind. I'll wait for Stylos to come back." (Boss.)

Me: "You're coming with me just in case I run out of bullets, I'll need help."

He gulps and steps back.

Neo: "I don't want to go to hell nna, my mother will look for me when she gets to heaven and she'll die if she doesn't find me there."

Me: "Stop with your stupidity. It's going to be fine."

He jumps in the car after me, the guard rides at the back. Neo is sitting back with his arms across his chest, he's terrified. I'll enjoy this for a little while.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

169\*

NEO\*

We're in Glen Vista parked outside the pastor's house, the lights are out. These people are sleeping, Uze must have an idea how to do this.

Me: "We've been casing out this place for minutes now. They are sleeping, we can go back home."

This man has a sinister look on his face and it's creeping me out.

Me: "Uze."

I snap my fingers on his face, he blinks once as he turns to face me. I gaze at him dewy-eyed, his black stare is devilish.

What does this man have in his mind?

Me: "Oga, let's go back home. I'm sure this poor man of God knows nothing, he's innocent."

Randall: "We're not going to do anything to him Neo, just talk. It would do him a lot of good if he tells us the truth."

I don't trust his words.

"Boss, I think we should have left the baby at home."

This fool is still here?

Me: "Fokof saani." (Piss off.)

Randall: "We're going in."

He moves out of the car and runs towards the gate.

Shit.

I don't have a choice but to follow him, the guard is still sitting.

Me: "And then uena?" (You?)

He folds his arms across his chest.

"I'm staying behind."

Then he calls me a coward. Uze has entered the gate.



How did he do that?

I catch up with him and the second I get to him a dog comes running.

Me: "Eyyy voetsek." (Piss off.)

I yelp, running around Uze. The dog seems to have made me the target, Uze is trying to kick it.

Me: "E tla ntoma Uze." (It will bite me.)

Randall: "Stop running, it won't come after you."

That's how black people are tricked, they tell you the dog doesn't bite until you wake up at the hospital with a dog bite up your ass.

I push Uze in front of me as I hide behind him.

Me: "Voetsek, Voetsek." (Piss off.)

I cuss at the dog, it's making enough noise to wake the neighborhood.

Randall: "Neo, you'll get us caught, keep it down."

He's worried about being caught while my life is in danger. He slightly kicks the dog, it falls on its side as a cry escapes its mouth.

Me: "Why didn't you do that when it started chasing me?"

He raises an eyebrow, he's giving me a look that says 'are you stupid?'

The light in the living room goes on, we scurry to hide at a corner.

"Jonny, are you okay?"

A man's voice says, the dog is still crying.

Me: "Eyy, uyi vuur vaayile ntja e le." (You really hurt that dog.)

Uze looks at me, he thinks the man out there is the pastor, he peeks to check and turns back to me.

Randall: "It's him."

He ratifies, draws out his gun and marches over to him without a warning or anything. I guess we won't wear a disguise.

He has the pastor against the wall.

Pastor: "Scar?"

Shit.

This is bad, he recognizes him.

Randall: "Great, I won't have to do any introductions."

Uze grins. I hide my face as the pastor looks at me.

Pastor: "What do you want from me?"

Randall: "How about we go for a drive?"

Pastor: "I'm not going anywhere with you Scar, I know I won't come back alive."

He's a wise man, I want to shout and say yes pastor don't agree. Uze will shoot me if I do that.

Randall: "Wrong choice."

He ripostes.

Pastor: "Whatever you think I did is not true, I'm a reformed man now, I live for the Lord and his word."

Randall: "Oh shut up and move."

Uze pushes him forward, the pastor stumbles but, regains his step.

Me: "Uze, I think he's telling the truth."

Randall: "We'll see."

Me: "Lightning will strike you Oga, God will punish you for touching his anointed." (Boss.)

I'm pottering next to him as we exit the gate with the pastor in front. Uze doesn't pay attention to my proclamation.

Randall: "Get in."

The pastor looks back at his house as if he's not coming back.

Pastor: "Scar this won't end well, my people will come for me."

Randall: "Yeah, yeah. Get in the car."

Uze pushes him inside.

Me: "His people? Does he mean the ushers at church?"

I ask Uze who replies with a chortle. I don't know where we are taking this man and it doesn't look good.

STYLES\*

I'm in Joburg, Randall sent me a location as to where they are. They have the pastor hostage, my puzzle is not complete at the moment. Whoever dared to step on my shoes has a death wish.

My mind is elsewhere that I fail to recognize that the GPS has led me to church grounds, Sethu's

church to be precise. I'd be damned, Randall is one sick son of a gun. He plans to torture the man at his church.

I find them in the main auditorium, Randall is sitting on the podium on the pastor's chair, while Neo plays a piano. Randall gets up as he sees me, he meets me half way and embraces me.

Randall: "Bro."

It's quiet an emotional moment.

"Do you guys want me to play a wedding song?"

Neo's narked tone of voice pulls us out of the hold.

Me: "Where is he?"

I don't see the pastor anywhere.

Randall: "On the podium."

Me: "Where?"

He looks at Neo who ambles to a big chair, and turns it around. The pastor is bound on it. He has a gag in his mouth.

Me: "Did he speak?"

Randall: "Not yet, we were waiting for you."

He follows me as I begin to mooch toward the podium. The pastor is amazed upon seeing me.

Me: "Hi."

I pull the gag out.

Pastor: "You don't know who you're dealing with."

He's threating me, I see.

Me: "Where is Sethu?"

Pastor: "What?"

He pulls a confused look.

Me: "I'm sure you know how this goes, I ask questions and you answer."

The pastor holds a certain poise, like he is so sure that nothing will happen to him.

Pastor: "I don't know why you people think I know where Sethu is."

Why is his answer not direct then?

Neo: "Yey, shumayela mfundisi re tsamae." (Preach pastor so we can leave.)

Pastor: "How is such a sweet child, like Sethu involved with you people?"

Randall: "Let's keep him here for the night, he'll crack at some point. I'm tired of his stubbornness."

Randall gives a suggestion as he moves to sit down.

Me: "I think a little torture will get him to talk. How about that pastor?"

He grins, he's not intimidated at all.

Pastor: "The first time I saw you, I knew there was something with you. If only I had known that you're associated with people like Scar, I would have warned that child to stay away from you."

I see anger in his eyes, he acts as Sethu's protector.

Randall: "Am I such an evil person Styles?"

The pastor's insult is delivered to Randall as a joke, he grimaces at the pastor, as he seeks an answer for his probing.

Pastor: "Sishi? You're Styles Sishi?"

He narrows his eyes, he's heard of me before.

Me: "Where is Sethu pastor?"

I'm losing my mind, every minute wasted puts Sethu's life in more danger.

Pastor: "I don't know what you're talking about, I'm only a pastor who lives for the Lord."

He growls.

Me: "Which one is your favorite leg here?"

I press the barrel of the gun on his knees, fear starts to visit him.

Me: "I want to save your best leg, we still need you jumping around here Sunday morning."

Pastor: "You wouldn't."

The bullet goes off piercing through his leg, he howls loudly that his voice echoes in the auditorium.

Neo: "Shit."

Neo jumps, moving away from him with great speed.

Neo: "Stylos, re mo kerekeng. How do you shoot a man of God in church?" (We're at church.)

Neo's hands are on his head as he watches this man who's crying in agony.

Me: "I hate it when people dare me, he said I wouldn't, so I proved him wrong."

Neo: "You and Uze, your beds are ready in hell, nna ha ke robale mo single bed ntwana. My mansion is in heaven, ebile I'll wait for you guys in the car. God will see that I am not involved in this."





He begins to toil away.

Neo: "The Lord is my Shepard I shall now want."

He recites as he saunters away, Randall glowers at him. We'll never get used to this.

Pastor: "What did you do?"

He yelps in pain.

Me: "Oh come on pastor, dammit."

His eyes pop open as I yell at the roof top.

Me: "Give me something man, I don't want to end up taking your other leg. Even worse, amputating them both."

I lurch over him and point the gun on his head.

Me: "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to hurt you."

I pat his shoulder to hush him.

Me: "What is it that you preach when you stand on this pulpit?"

I turn to face the congregant's seats.

Me: "Treat people the way you want them to treat you."

I shout as if giving a sermon, I turn back to the pastor, he's sweating and blood is oozing from his leg.

Me: "I'm not a bad person pastor, I swear. People push me to such an extent that I end up sinning. I don't turn the other cheek, I return the slap."

Pastor: "Your friend was right, you're going to hell."

He grunts through his teeth, he's a funny man. He flinches at the sound of my loud laughter.

Me: "You're one of those pastors with a sense of humor, I like. Shouldn't you be telling me, oh dear brethren repent for the kingdom is at hand?"

Pastor: "You're sick."

Me: "You haven't seen anything yet. I want a name now or I'm taking the other leg."

I press the gun on the other leg.

Pastor: "Fuck you."

He barks.

Me: "Oh, profanity is a sin. I guess there are three beds in hell now roomie."

Randall chortles, he's patiently waiting.



Me: "Did you hear that Randy? We have a roommate now?"

Randall: "The more the merrier."

He sneers.

Me: "I think pastor should go and hold space for us till we get there, hell can get crowded and it's a first come first serve basis."

The pastor frowns at my suggestion.

Randall: "Great idea man, plus he's exhausted his days on earth."

He adds in a deadpan voice.

Pastor: "Okay I'll talk."

He declares.

Me: "I'm listening."

Pastor: "Thato, he's been talking. Someone paid him to get information on you and Sethu."

Me: "Who is that fucker?"

Pastor: "I'm a dead man after telling you this, those people are coming for me."

"The guard is gone."

Neo comes back running as he declares.

Pastor: "That's him, the man who was in the car. "

Randall jerks up from his seat.

Randall: "Fuck! Amara?"

He starts to march towards the exit.

Neo: "Did you guys hear what I said?"

Neo hasn't grasped what's going on.

Me: "Randy wait."

I pull out my phone to call Kenneth.

"Sishi."

He's not sleeping at this hour.

Me: "I need you to go to Randall's house now, and examine all the guards. We have a snitch, I'll tell you all about it. Don't go into the house, no one should know that you're there."

Kenneth: "Done."



He hangs up.

Randall: "Who was that?"

He won't like this.

Me: "Kenneth."

Randall: "I don't want that son of a bitch anywhere near my house."

He growls.

There is no time to nurse his feelings.

Me: "Do you realize that we are at war Randall?"

Randall: "Exactly, I don't trust him."

He has become restless.

Me: "Do you think that I would let anything happen to Amara and Liyana? Kenneth knows how to be professional, he won't go anywhere near the house."

Randall: "I will kill him if he does."

His anger is quick to show itself.

Randal: "Fuck this."

He bangs the gun on a chair, growling in anger.

Me: "We're going to go home when we're done here, calm down for now."

Randall: "How do we always get the wrong guards?"

Me: "It's not about loyalty, they are hungry and would do anything to put food on the table."

Neo: "This does not look good, I think I should go back to Pretoria and spend some time with my mother until you guys find Miss S."

If anything, I would protect Neo with my life. Nothing will befall him.

Me: "If you feel that's best Neo, the battle line has been drawn. This is no child's play, people will die."

Neo: "Shit Stylos, you're scaring me now."

He expresses.

Me: "Nothing will happen to you, Randall and I got you."

Pastor: "Can I go now, please."

He groans in pain.

Me: "We're not done yet."

This is going to be a long night.

AMARA\*

I open my eyes to the sound of someone sneezing to find Ayize seated with her phone in her hand, she has this anticipating look.

I fell asleep on the couch while we were waiting for news and everyone's return.

Me: "You know it won't ring from staring at it."

She looks at me, fatigue is visible in her eyes but not more than worry.

Ayize: "Why have they not called Amara?"

She seeks answers from me and I'm blank.

Me: "They will call."

I'm not convinced by my reply.

Ayize: "What if something has happened?"

Me: "One of them would've told us."

She smiles, someone special has visited her mind.

Ayize: "Neo?"

Me: "He can't keep his mouth shut."

Ayize: "That's why I'm worried, he would've called me."

I don't know much about Ayize and Neo but, their relationship is more than that of friendship. You can see by the way they talk to each other or those stolen looks that, they care deeply for one another. If I'm not wrong, Neo would give his life for Ayize.

Me: "What time is it?"

She wiggles her phone and feigns a smile.

Ayize: "Almost 4am."

Me: "And you've been waiting since?"

I question her, she nods.

Me: "I can make us coffee."

Ayize: "No, I'll do it."

She rushes to the kitchen, I'm also worried about Randall. I don't want to show it though, I need

to stay calm for my baby. I wanted to dispute when he said that he's going after the men who took Sethu, but I had to shove my selfishness under the bed. Sethu needs all the help she can get and at this point I can only pray that, Randall comes back home to us, that they all come back.

Ayize's phone that's left abandoned on the table rings, I pick it up to see the caller Id, it says Mr. S.

Me: "Ayize your phone is ringing."

I yell to her, she comes running.

Ayize: "Hello."

She answers.

Me: "Put him on speaker."

And so she does.

Ayize: "You're on speaker Mr. S. Amara is with me."

Me: "Hi, Styles."

Styles: "Are you ladies okay?"

Ayize: "We're okay. Where is Sethu?"

Styles sighs and my heart stops for a mere second. The sound he emanated is not promising. Ayize feels the same way as I do, the look on her face marks it.

Styles: "We haven't found her yet."

Ayize clenches her eyes, she sits her body down. She seems to have lost strength.

Me: "Is Randall with you Styles?"

Ayize: "And Neo?"

She adds at a fast pace

Styles: "Yes, they are here. I called to check on you."

He utters.

Me: "I'd like to speak to Randall please."

Hearing his voice will make me feel better.

Styles: "I'll get Randall and Neo to call you once they are free."

It's surprising how Styles does not give away his sadness. He hangs up the call, leaving our minds muddled and filled with questions.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

170\*

SETHU\*

“Styles.”

He’s the first thing that comes to mind the moment I open my eyes, I wish so hard that the past few hours were only a terrible dream.

I’m disappointed when I see the very same guy who slapped me senseless standing before me. My mind tells me to scream but my head will not let me, it hurts so bad I can’t even tilt it.

I let my eyes scan the dark room, I can hardly see anything. Heat on my face and a lump on my throat, my tears are knocking and desperately need to be seen so, I let them.

The sound of a loud laugh startles me, I am so caught up in trying to figure out how I got here that, I almost forgot about this devil.

I turn to him and he has this smirk on his face.

Me: “Please let me go.”

Man: “You’re not going anywhere sweetheart.”

He sounds so believable, that I lose all hope.

Me: “What do you want from me?”

Man: “My fight is not with you, it’s with Sishi.”

Styles?

He’s the reason I’m here? No, it can’t be.

What could he have done that has these men seek after me?

Man: “Let me save you the trouble of asking what he did.”

My heart drops...

I’m terrified of the revelation that’s about to be unfolded.

Man: “Styles thinks he’s God, he’s always been like that. Arrogant, rude, and he thinks the world revolves around him. My brother on the other hand, he was a gentle soul. Only nineteen and Sishi cut his life short. He killed him.”

No, not my Styles.

Me: "There must be a mistake please, we're talking about different people."

He's amused by my request.

Man: "What I'm going to do to you will be nothing compared to what Sishi did to my brother."

There's no way Styles is capable of killing a human. He said he's capable of murder but, to actually do it? He's the man I love, sweet Styles Sishi who showed me a whole new world I never knew existed.

The man who taught my heart to love again and be free.

Man: "By the time I'm half done with you, you will be begging me to stop."

He grins at me, I cringe.

Me: "Please, Styles would never do anything like that, he would never kill anyone. You must be mistaken, please let me go."

I'm fighting for the man I love, my life as well. Convincing him otherwise and having him change his minds would save me and Styles. I am willing to stand for Styles no matter what, I don't care what this man says.

Man: "You are so naïve, that man has brainwashed you into thinking he is a saint. You don't know what you've gotten yourself into, by the time you realize it, you'll be in deep shit and it will be too late to walk away. Sishi will never let you go, you don't leave Sishi until he's done with you."

What the hell is he talking about? Clearly we know different Styles, I refuse to believe his lies.

My tears won't stop, I am tired of crying. I wish Styles would come, I miss my family.

The thought of not seeing them again, God I can't take it.

Me: "You're a monster. Who does this to a woman? You're a disgrace to the male race."

I feel another hot slap across my face, this man has anger issues.

I can't rub my cheek as my hands are tied but, it burns so bad I want to scream. He clasp his hand on my cheek and puts pressure, I tilt my head to the side as he brings in his face, he forces me to look at him.

Man: "I will make you regret that you ever met Styles, I'm going to have my way with you before I slowly cut you into pieces."

He has a small pocket knife on my cheek, this brings back terrible memories.

"I will start with your little fingers, then your toes but you know what I will enjoy the most? Gouging out your eyes with my fingers, this is going to be one heck of a party."

He paints a picture of his evil thoughts. Is this how it feels to be stuck in a nightmare?

He laughs so hard that it gives me chills.



Me: "Please you have the wrong person."

I'm so confused...

How did I get here? Just a few months back I was an ordinary girl, working as a nurse and earning a normal salary.

Maybe I shouldn't have helped Styles that day, I should have stayed away when Lebo told me to do so.

Maybe this man is right...

Meeting Styles has brought me such back luck, but no. Styles is gentle, kind and full of compassion. Maybe I'm going crazy my mind is all scrambled, but I need him right now.

STYLES\*

We are going to need extra back up, Kenneth is good for the job but, Randall hates him and it's understandable. Kenneth needs to stay within his limits. I won't be able to help him when Randall unravels. It's break of dawn, we're tired and worn out. We are parked under a bridge in Aeroton, Randall suggested that we keep the pastor locked up, he thinks there's something he's not telling us.

Me: "Let's go home and debrief."

The information the pastor gave led us to a wild goose chase, we couldn't find this Thato guy. It's as if he disappeared off the face of the earth.

Randall: "Good idea, maybe we'll get a call from the kidnappers."

He rubs his head as he yawns.

Me: Neo are you okay?"

Neo is not with us, he's been aloof for a while and it's unlike him to be so quiet.

Neo: "What will I tell Zee when I arrive without her sister? That I failed?"

He responds with a question, pouring out his qualms.

Me: "She'll understand."

Cracking would make me weak, I need to keep my head held high.

Me: "We need to keep going, put our emotions aside. For those who feel like crying, will cry when Sethu is back home."

Randall: "Who are those people Styles?"

I wish I knew.

Me: "A tooth for a tooth, it sounds familiar though. I think I have heard these words before."

Randall: "I wish they would call and give us a clue or something."

Neo: "If you wish for something really hard it will be given to you. Let's hold hands and close our eyes."

He takes our hands, Randall yanks his away.

Me: "Wish or pray?"

Neo: "Whatever, works."

He clenches his eyes.

Neo: "Ntate re tla..." (Father we come...)

I pull my hand away, my act forces him to stop.

Me: "Stop playing."

I jump into the car, Randall takes the driver's seat and Neo jumps at the back.

Neo: "This is not a joke Stylos, we need to find Miss S before it's too late. She can't go through what she went through with that idiot Ntokozo, you will never get her back if those people..."

I cut his speech.

Me: "Don't, don't say it. Do you think I never thought of that?"

I can't imagine Sethu being assaulted again. How will I bring her back from the dark hole she has fallen into?

Randall: "We need to sit this down man, Sethu has to be home by tonight."

Randall states.

Me: "We're going to find her, nothing will happen to her."

The vehicle falls into a deep silence, I can't stand the thought of her in danger.

Neo: "Eish! Miss S. Stylos remember how she would bite her pinkie finger."

He reminisces, I glance at him through the rearview mirror.

Neo: "How good she looked in the nurse's uniform and her short legs looked funny in those pumps, le kiss-kiss ea hae." (Knock-knees.)

Okay this is not the time and I shouldn't be laughing but, Neo's serious face as he gives his statement makes this funny.

Neo: "Don't laugh Stylos, ke serious. Miss S, mara o re etsang?" (What is she doing to us?)

Randall: "Neo you need help."

Randall is lost, he can't find the joke in Neo's saying.

Me: "Voetsek Neo, Sethu is not short." (Piss off.)

Neo: "She's surrounded by tall men and that makes her short."

He retorts.

Randall: "I think its best that we go back to my house, in that way we'll be able to keep an eye on the women."

Randall has zero trust on Kenneth.

Me: "Drive us there."

This is going to be a long day, we don't know where to start.

NTOMBI\*

Moses: "Ntombi! Ntombi!"

I run to the living room to find Moses wearing an angry look.

Me: "I thought something had happened. What is the emergency?"

The way he called my name, you'd think something terrible had happened.

Moses: "There's no salt in these eggs."

He's complaining, it's what he does lately. I hear more complaining than anything.

Me: "You have got to be kidding me? There's enough salt, I know because I put it there."

Moses woke me up early saying he's going to an interview, he commanded that I make him warm breakfast. He wants to slave me, usually he starts with porridge and eats a full breakfast around 11am. Jonas was forced to wake up due to Moses talking so loud, he has no respect for anyone.

Moses: "Are you saying I'm lying?"

Of course he's lying.

Me: "No. I'll bring the stupid salt."

Moses: "I want salt, not stupid salt."

What is it with this man?

Me: "I'll bring the salt."

I repeat, vexed by his attitude. Jonas is quietly observing the whole drama.

Moses: "That's more like it."

He throws a chunk of food in his mouth as he speaks, I hate the way he chews, if only he knew.

I march to the kitchen, I should have put sugar in those eggs. Let me dish up some porridge for Jonas.

I toddle back to the living room with the darn salt and a tray of food for Jonas.

Moses: "I don't want porridge, I'm full."

Can he at least swallow before he speaks?

His plate is empty, I thought he said he wanted salt. What is this?

Me: "It's not for you."

I hand Jonas the tray, he motions a thank you.

Moses: "Ntombi yini lena?" (What is this?)

Me: "What?"

Moses: "You're supposed to serve me first not your brother, you are married to me not him."

He did not just say that to me.

Jonas: "Moses."

Jonas yells. Moses sips tea, completely ignoring Jonas.

Me: "You're full now Moses neh, that's why you're talking to me like this."

Moses: "It's the truth Ntombi. I woke up early so I can go and get a job. Just to take care of you, it's my duty, isn't it?"

Me: "Since when is it your duty Moses? For years now, I have been bringing money in the house, while you would go and drink with that ugly friend of yours Jafta. Since when have you taken care of me financially? The money you got from selling Amara, not once did you spend it on me. Ngisho lona icent elimnyama Moses, You buried it, like an idiot." (Not even a single cent.)

Moses: "Don't start with me Ntombi."

His gaze is threatening.

Me: "You started it. Is it a problem if I serve my brother food? Uvuswe nguwe ubhuti njena and you expect him to sit and watch you eat. Awukahle bo." (You woke my brother up.) (Come on.)

Moses has changed since he lost his money, he is more, grumpy than happy, he complains about everything like I said.

Moses: "Okay, continue Ntombi. We shall see where this ends."

He pushes his chair back to stand up.

Me: "What does that mean?"

Moses: "Just continue."

He takes a last sip of his coffee, drops the cup on the table and begins to saunter to the door.

Me: "Hurry back Moses, we have to go and see Nombulelo today."

He waves without looking back and out the door he goes.

Jonas: "You're still young Ntombi, you deserve better than that man."

The porridge must be getting to him, he's talking nonsense now.

Me: "I'm not leaving my husband bhuti, no relationship is perfect." (Brother.)

Jonas: "I know that Ntombi, kodwa Moses is not good to you. You tolerated him when he brought a woman into the house. You nursed him when he was crazy and had to take leave from work." (But.)

Yeah, thanks to you Jonas.

Me: "You will not instigate me against my husband, Moses is mine and I will never turn my back on him."

He should know that by now.

Jonas: "Know your worth Ntombi, that man does not love you, he tolerates you."

Me: "Bhuti please, that's enough." (Brother.)

I should take that plate from him, this is what happens when a black man is full.

NKOMO\*

"N.K wake up."

I flip my eyes open upon hearing Ruth's voice, my head hurts. The first thing I see is Ruth tied up on a chair and tears streaking her bruised face.

Me: "Ruth."

I move to realize that I'm also tied up, we're still in the shed and those men are gone.

Me: "What's going on? Where are they?"

Ruth: "They left, they said they'll be back. Are you okay N.K?"

I should be asking her that.

Me: "I'm fine, are you okay? What did they do to you?"



She drops her head and I'm compelled to think the worst.

Me: "Tell me they didn't hurt you Ruth, tell me they didn't touch you."

Ruth: "They didn't, I thought they would. They beat me up N.K I was so scared, I thought I was going to die."

I'm so weak, I couldn't protect her.

Me: "I'm going to kill them."

Ruth: "There's nothing we can do at this stage, we're both tied up and they are powerful men. We'll never win against them."

Me: "I know someone who can help us, I need to get to a phone."

Ruth: "The only way out is to cut these ropes and there's nothing we can use here."

I browse the room to find nothing."

Me: "Dammit."

I cuss in frustration.

Ruth: "We're going to die, I don't want to die."

She predicts in tears, I'm not going to die so easily. My life cannot end like this, I have so much to live for.

Me: "I will fight with everything I have, I won't let them take me down just like that."

Ruth: "What are you going to do? We're tied up."

Me: "That doesn't mean we can't get out, where there's a will, there's a way."

I refuse to give up, I'm not going to be negative about this. I know my ancestors are watching over me, they will get me out of this place.

Me: "Please have faith, it's all we can do for now."

Ruth: "I don't have the strength."

Me: "Find it Ruth, we can't give up now."

Ruth: "I'm cursed anyway N.k, I might as well give in to those people."

I don't like her attitude towards this.

Me: "Don't say that, we'll find a way."

Ruth can be naïve yes, but I've learnt that she's strong.

Me: "Did they say what they want?"

Ruth: "Not yet."



Me: "You have no clue why they are after you?"

Ruth: "I would have told you if I had known, I'm sorry that you're tied up in this web. I shouldn't have called you here, I would never forgive myself if anything happens to you."

I want to wipe those tears that are mocking her cheeks.

Dammit these ropes.

Me: "I'll get us out of here, I promise."

Me and my empty promises.

How will I keep this one?

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

171\*

AYIZE\*

Amara and I didn't sleep at all, we haven't heard anything from the guys, since Styles called. I'm having my fourth cup of coffee, trying to keep myself awake. Sleeping would have made time move faster though.

Me: "Babe, I think you should get some rest. You're pregnant and you can't strain yourself. Randy baby will hate me for not taking care of you."

I say to Amara, she's lying on the couch, her feet resting on my lap.

Amara: "I'll sleep when Randall gets home, if I go to bed, I won't be able to sleep a wink."

I feel the same way, Neo will get it from me when he gets home.

Me: "Okay, at least close your eyes for a while. I'll massage your feet."

She takes a sigh and I know that my words are hitting against the wall.

Amara: "Thanks, we need to check on the girls. It is morning and they'll need something to eat."

Me: "I've got it, I'll check on them."

Amara: "I'll ask Chioma to prepare porridge, Randall and the guys might be hungry when they get home."

Porridge?

Amara: "What?"

She questions my guffawing.

Me: "Who among those grown ass men eats porridge? My Neo doesn't. Mr. S? I'm not sure but, I don't see him sitting with a bowl of porridge on his lap. The picture nje doesn't add up. Randy baby, well with that body of his, I mean girl he did not get it from eating porridge."

She throws her back laughing, it's good to see her less stressed.

Amara: "Can I please adopt you?"

She can't curb her loud laughter.

Me: "I'm sorry to disappoint you but, I belong to someone now."

The smile on my face speaks for me.



Amara: "Belong?"

Her simper is asking more.

Me: "It feels good to be chosen and wanted, Neo chose me Amara. He wants me, you don't know how happy that makes me feel. My whole life I have been searching for a sense of belonging, little did I know that, I would find it with a Sotho boy who is crazier than anything I have ever known."

Amara: "And you deserve it, you deserve all the happiness you can get. I am happy for you babe."

Me: "I'm happy for me too."

I can't express it.

This thought keeps fleeing from my mind, now that it's here...

Me: "Have you chosen a wedding dress for your wedding?"

Her cheeks flush.

Amara: "Not yet, I haven't had time. With Lelo hospitalized and the negotiations had to be postponed, now that she's okay we can carry on."

Me: "Well we need to choose a dress for you missy, unless you want to walk down the aisle looking like you swallowed humpty dumpty."

She grins like a Cheshire cat.

Amara: "Should I take offence in that?"

Her question has me simpering.

Me: "No, honey you're pregnant. Weight gain is part of the journey, embrace it and enjoy it. Do not spend the whole nine months worried about how your clothes don't fit you anymore, give your pregnancy all the attention you can give."

A happy expression crosses her face, we turn back at the sound of footsteps clomping down the staircase.

"Good morning."

Chioma is awake.

Amara: "Hey Chioma, are the girls awake?"

Chioma: "Not yet, I'm sure they'll be awake any minute now, I'm going to make some food."

Chioma looks tired, her eyes are half-lidded and she continues to stretch her neck as if it's strained.

Amara: "Is everything okay?"

Amara asks looking concerned, she can't afford to have Chioma sick. There's so much to deal

with and she's pregnant. Overworking is the last thing she should do.

Chioma: "I'm okay, it's just a headache."

It must be the TV, her eyes are forever engrossed on it. I don't live here but, when I visit, Chioma is always glued to the screen.

Amara: "You should take something for it."

Chioma: "I will. Can I get you two anything?"

Me: "I'm okay."

I'll eat when Neo gets here.

Amara: "Please make enough food, Styles and Neo will be joining us for breakfast."

Chioma nods and trudges to the kitchen.

Me: "So these are toes vele?"

I pull her toes.

I'm not joking and she's laughing out loud.

Amara: "Yes, cute aren't they?"

Me: "Girl if you reveal these toes to that fine ass man, then you need to apologise to him."

Amara: "Ayize."

She sulks.

Me: "I'm kidding relax, you can continue to wear your flip flops."

Amara: "I give up with you."

I might be smiling but, nothing is okay until they walk through the door. Trying so hard not to think about the mission and everyone's safety is proving to be an epic fail. No matter how much I try to entertain my mind with different things, it ends up taking me back to Neo.

STYLES\*

I drive into the Okolie premises followed by Randall and Neo, there are more guards in the yard. Kenneth's car is here. Randall can't control his anger when Kenneth is involved, you'd think that he senses the feelings Kenneth has for Amara. Kenneth comes out from the back as Randall parks his car.

Me: "Kenny."

He sneers.

Me: "How did it go?"

Kenneth: "I interviewed every one of them, no one knows this Thato fool. I had to show them a picture so they can identify him. He was a loner and when he talked he would ask about the family, most questions were about you."

How did we miss this? We should have learned a lesson with Mkhonto.

Me: "Did you check his work file?"

Kenneth: "Yes, it has fake information. I had one of my boys go check out his location, it's an abandoned building. Nothing on that file is real."

He played us good.

I was so caught up trying to save my relationship with Sethu. Is my weakness that obvious that, my enemies dare challenge me?

Randall and Neo step out of the car. A lion seeing its prey, is the expression he holds on his face. Kenneth rams his hands in his pouches, he glowers as he takes one step back. I can't miss the overawed guise on his face.

Randall: "What is he doing here?"

Randall snarls in anger, squared shoulders and head held up high, he draws near to Kenneth.

Kenneth: "I'm here to keep Amara safe."

Hell Kenneth!

Why would he say that? Is he trying to arouse the untameable beast?

Randall's nostril splay, to compare his anger to a burning furnace would be an understatement.

Randall: "Don't fucking test me Mkhize, Amara is nothing to you that you feel a need to keep her safe."

Once Randall crosses this limit there's no turning back, Kenneth pushed him to it. If he had said he came to keep the ladies safe, Randall would be less heated. It's definite, his intention is to provoke Randall and bloody hell it's working.

Neo: "Eish."

This one is tired and grumpy, he pushes his back on the wall and slouches.

Kenneth: "Your attitude stinks Okolie."

Kenneth growls back, his wrath is nothing compared to Randall's. What is he angry about? I had told him back then to stay away from Amara.

They stand head to head like two opponents who are ready to fight the fight of their lives.

Randall: "Not more than your agenda Mkhize, I can smell the stench from here."

Kenneth: "What is your problem?"

Is it not obvious?

Randall: "Stay away from Amara, she's taken."

Randall gives out an icy chortle.

Randall: "Who am I kidding? You're a Mkhize, nothing good could come out of you."

That's a wrap, we would be here the whole day if someone doesn't stop this or they would end up killing each other.

Me: "Curtail your anger Randall, your egocentricity should take a back seat. I am not losing this war due to your foolishness."

Randall's smile twitches

Neo: "Yeah whatever Stylos said, I'm tired Oga." (Boss.)

Neo adds, he looks gloomy.

Randall: "You call what I feel anger? I know nothing of the sort Styles, anger is not what lies in me but, deep hate and regret. Regret that I let this man lay his eyes on my wife."

Randall's chest augments under his t-shirt, his buoyancy has men trembling and intimidated. Kenneth on the other hand seems to be taking it differently, he is impervious and determined to reach his goal.

Me: "Kenneth, there are limits bro. Please respect Randall and his home. I don't want to end up choosing sides."

Kenneth: "Got it."

Lies.

Randall: "Then we shouldn't have a problem from here forth."

I'm not reliant of Kenneth's expression, he will not heed my warning. I'd be damned if I let him destroy Randall's family.

Neo: "I'm going in, Oga the key please." (Oga.)

He extends his hand out to Randall.

We slog to the house, failure sitting on our shoulders. Ayize is the first to get up from the couch, she runs to Neo and throws herself on him. Randall has Amara in his arms, their hug seems to be elongated. He lifts her up from the floor, she straddles her legs around his torso as their lips meet and there they go towards the stair case. I guess he'll brief her about Sethu.

Kenneth clenches his jaw as he slopes his head to the side, hiding his eyes from the scene that seems to be breaking his heart.

Me: "Word of advice Kenneth, forget about her. It was never going to work out, she has always

belonged to him and that man is not kind when it comes her. You won't like his retaliation."

He shrugs the comforting hand on his shoulder.

Kenneth: "Okolie doesn't scare me."

He's blankly telling me that he won't give up on Amara.

Me: "Kenneth, you will not pursue that woman. Do you hear me? Whatever it is you feel about her, shake it off. There are plenty of women out there, choose one for yourself. Amara is pregnant and engaged, you will not poke a snake in its hole."

Kenneth: "Whatever."

He mooches to the living room, I don't care what he says. If Kenneth thinks I'll sit back and watch him destroy this home, he doesn't know me.

Me: "You two?"

I break Ayize and Neo's kissing session.

Me: "You're a couple now?"

Ayize: "Did you find any leads Mr. S?"

She flouts my question as she queries about her sister.

Me: "We have something."

I can't reveal much, the lack of information will have her stressed.

Neo: "We'll find her baba."

Neo reassures her, he gives me a worried expression. I know what he said is true, Sethu will be found, even if it's the last thing I do.

Me: "Neo, a word."

We don't have time, we need to work.

He nods, I move to join Kenneth in the lounge. He's indulging on a glass of whiskey.

Me: "Is it not too early to be drinking?"

He shrugs without beholding me, his eyes are full of activity. Their terminus is the flight of stairs, his jaw is clamped and his hand clutched on the glass. His mind is not here but, with Randall and Amara.

What exactly does he plan on achieving?

Me: "Kenneth I'm not going to repeat myself."

This is my last warning.

Kenneth: "Leave me alone."



Okay.

I rest my case.

KHETHU\*

Talking to the doctor got me changing my mind about the baby, I opted to keep it. Maybe I will grow to love it. I haven't seen Mbongeni since I broke the news to him, he's a good man, that I'm certain of and he will make a great father one day.

Giving him my heart is another story, I cannot love twice. The love I had was the greatest love I had ever known, it's not something I can get past overnight. My life is going well so far, I can't say I'm happy. What is happiness?

Should it not be defined by the things and the ones you have in life?

My father and Nobayeni seem to be more in love than ever, it's sickening. I will never come to trust her after what she did to my father. She offered me a job in her company, a bribe to keep my mouth shut about her infidelity.

I declined, I don't need her money or any favours from her. She says I'm her only heir and will take over from her when she retires or expires.

Like hell I will.

NOMBULELO\*

Mbuso says I have to be bed ridden, he doesn't say for how long. I have a feeling that he's hiding something from me, his eyes are still trying to master the art of lying to me. As for my eyes, they are yet to grace his presence today. He was on call in the early hours of the morning, he'll be dead tired when he gets back. I hope that I'll be able to convince him to go home and sleep.

Mbuso's mom walks in my hospital room, I didn't know that she was coming. Her rude face greets me, she's plodding to me, I want to stop her and tell her to leave but...

Let me give her a chance.

Mom: "Ntombazane." (Lady.)

Hello to you too.

Me: "Ma."

She emits a puff, scrutinizing my body with a cold gaze.



Mom: "Do you love my son?"

That's a rhetorical question.

Me: "Mbuso is my life ma and..."

She raises her hand to clog my words from spewing out of my mouth.

Mom: "I didn't ask if he's your life or not. You don't look like the stupid type, girls from your class lack that..."

Girls from my class?

Does this old hag realise that her statement does not make sense?

Me: "Please ma, I will not take any insults from you."

That face one makes after tasting a lemon, yes, that one. It's plastered on her face as we speak.

Mom: "Uyadelela we ngane ndini." (You're disrespectful you darn child.)

Dorothy walks into my room and demands respect while she has none to give back.

Not with me.

Mom: "I want you to leave my son alone."

My son?

When is she releasing a single?

She's been singing this song for months now and she's bloody hell off tune.

Me: "Does Mbuso know that you're here?"

Or she came like a thief in the night.

Mom: "Ungangibuzi udoti, stay away from my son." (Don't ask me nonsense.)

Lord, I can't deal with this woman anymore. If she says my son one more time, I will scream.

Mom: "You and Mbuso come from different worlds, you will never be compatible. My son is out of your league. Ngempela, ngempela we ntombazane. What are you planning to gain from my son? Is your family that desperate for meat on their plates, that you target rich men and trap them with someone else's pregnancy?" (On the real, girl.)

Sometimes when you're quiet, people think you're stupid. I will show her one day who I really am.

Me: "My son, my son, my son. Are you the only woman who has a son? Haibo give me a break, let me breathe ma please. Mbuso does not only belong to you, he is his father's son. He's a nephew, a cousin and a friend, there's a lot of selfish vibes coming from you."

That's right, I'm tired of this granny.

"Lelo?"



Oh look at that, “my son” is here and confusion is written all over his face.

Mbuso: “What is this Lelo?”

He expects me to answer him?

He knows how his mother’s like.

Mom: “Mbuso buka, this girl has no respect. Did you hear how she spoke to me? She called me names and said some mean things to me.”

Today I want to see if he will defend her nonsense.

Me: “What?”

With an attitude, I cross my arms across my bust.

Mbuso: “Why would you speak to mom like that?”

Continue Mbuso, I will tell you and your mother where to get off.

Me: “What did you want me to say? She came here to insult me, and said I should leave you alone.”

How about that?

Mbuso: “Mom?”

Yeah, that’s where your anger should be directed.

Mbuso: “What did I say about giving Lelo a chance?”

Mom: “How can I? When she’s using you, Mbuso. You need to open your eyes and see this girl for who she is.”

She flounders her hand to point at me and pokes my eye.

Me: “Ouch.”

I slam my hand to wipe the pain away, Mbuso is trying to inspect it and his touch aggravates me. I want him to tell his mother to leave or I will tell them both to leave me alone.

Mbuso: “Let me look at it.”

I move his hand away.

Me: “I’m fine.”

I want to snap at him but, my reputation with this woman next to me is dropping faster than a hot air balloon with no helium.

Mbuso: “Lelo let me look.”

The stare I’m getting from monster in-law is enough to make me cringe.



Mom: "What's that on your hand?"

Oh, she's looking at my ring.

Me: "We're getting married."

I say with pride.

Mom: "Mbuso? Have you lost your damn mind? What will you do with this woman and her illegitimate child?"

Mbuso must talk to his mother, my hormones are going crazy and I'm ready to release myself.

Mbuso: "I have had it with you mom, I thought we spoke about this."

That's all?

I have a list of things to say to her.

Mom: "I will never accept her Mbuso, never. This girl will never be my daughter in-law."

Mbuso: "What will you do?"

I want to know as well.

Mbuso: "What will you do mom?"

Speak!!! Hau...

She turns to face the door with her head held high.

Mbuso: "I asked Lelo to marry me, we are going to get married."

I need a phone, so I can capture her facial expression. The way she rotated back to glare at Mbuso...

Epic...

Mbuso: "Don't look at me like that mom."

She's on the verge of tears.

Mbuso: "I think it would be best that you stay away from us, Lelo is pregnant and I'm sure that you've noticed it. If anything happens to this baby because of the stress that you're causing her, I will never forgive you."

Her fake tears are here seeking attention.

Mom: "Mbuso, I'm your mother. You can't expect me to stay away from you."

Here's a woman refusing to let go of her son, she's not just a mother but a toxic one.

Mbuso: "You need to give your attention to dad, fix your marriage and let me handle mine."

Mom: "Mbuso? This is you?"

Argh! Get out of here...

"Koko."

There goes my day...

My mother and father are here.

Ntombi: "Sanibonani." (Greetings.)

She smiles at Mbuso's mother, Ntombi is not getting a smile today.

Me: "I didn't know you were coming."

What do they want?

Mbuso's mother rushes out in tears, I want to see if he'll run after her.

He's holding my hand that, means he's not going anywhere.

But, we have a problem. My father is here and he's glaring at him. This man better not kill Mbuso with that black stare.

Ntombi: "Is that your mother mkhwe?" (Son in-law.)

Mkhwe...?

My mother always finds a way to embarrass me.

Mbuso: "Yebo ma." (Yes mom.)

Ntombi: "Yoh hai kee." (Complaint.)

Again, what are they doing here? My father walks to the bed, he pushes Mbuso aside and takes my hand.

Who gave him permission to touch me? I filch my hand back. I don't want him touching me.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

172\*

## NOMBULELO\*

Me: "What are you doing here?"

Ntombi: "We came to see you, I brought you something to eat."

She digs into her hand bag and comes out with a small lunch box.

Ntombi: "It's your favourite, pap and tripe."

I'm suddenly hungry, the baby is hungry actually.

Me: "Thanks, it's cold though."

Mbuso: "I'll warm it for you in the canteen."

He offers, is this a chance to go and speak to his mother?

Me: "Thanks."

Hurry back.

I need to get rid of these people.

Moses: "That boy is all over you."

He says as Mbuso walks out.

What does he mean by that?

Me: "That man is my husband."

Yes, I'm fast like that. I remember the fake marriage, we're sticking to the story till we walk down the aisle.

Ntombi: "He gave you a ring?"

She takes my hand.

Me: "Yes."

Ntombi: "It's beautiful."

I think so too.

Me: "Thank you."



If my vision serves me right, they are aware that I don't want them here, I haven't forgiven my father for what he did.

Moses: "My baby, you don't know how happy I am to see you well."

Unfortunately we are not sailing on the same boat.

Me: "Mom, I need to get some rest."

I have nothing to say to my father.

Ntombi: "Hau Lelo we just got here."

Me: "And you saw me, you can leave now."

Ntombi: "Hai Nombulelo, imagine the amount of money we used to get here."

Getting them to leave is going to be hard.

Moses: "Lelo, you're breaking my heart. Won't you look at your father at least once?"

I can't do that.

Me: "I'm getting some sleep, you will decide if you want to stay or go,"

I close my eyes, I'm not sleepy but hungry. How am I going to fake it?

Ntombi: "Stop being a spoiled brat nawe, vula la mehlo." (Open those eyes.)

She pulls a chair and sits.

Ntombi: "We must talk about your wedding."

Ntombi is a nuisance.

Me: "Mom, I don't want to talk."

Which part of leave me alone do they not understand?

Ntombi: "Uzokhuluma namhlanje Lelo, it's fine if you don't want to talk to your father. Nami sometimes I don't feel like talking to him, he can sit in the corner asibuke." (And watch us.)

Yoh, this woman.

Moses: "I also want to speak to my daughter Ntombi."

Ntombi: "Moses don't ruin things for me."

Lord? Did you really give me these two as parents?

I need a refund.

Me: "Are you going to force me to speak to you ma?"

Ntombi: "Force yani nawe, tell me about your plans for the wedding." (What force?)

The answer to my question is yes.

RANDALL\*

I kiss her to clog her loud sweet moans that fuel me to go deeper, her body clung to mine. My mind is all cleared of all the nonsense I had been subjected to today, the world around me ceases to exist including me. Everything goes numb except this amazing sensation, I can't feel anything else. I nuzzle her neck and throw in slow gentle kisses as her body shudders under my hold. All my tense muscles go weak and I'm stuck in this good feeling before everything goes back to normal. I fall back on the bed and we both fight to catch our breaths, Amara angles her head to glance at me, her face glistening with sweat and a smile twinkles on her mouth.

Amara: "I missed you."

Her confession has me pulling her into my arms.

Me: "You missed me or mini Okolie?"

She falls into sweet twitters that sound like a beautiful harmony in my ears.

Amara: "I missed you both."

She presses her chin on my chest before leaning up to kiss me.

Me: "I can never get used to kissing you."

I express, throwing in a few pecks on her lips.

Amara: "Am I glad or what?"

She rests her head back on my chest.

Me: "How was your night?"

Amara: "Long, I was worried about you."

Me: "You should know that nothing will ever happen to me with Styles around."

Amara: "We thank God for Styles then. Any leads on Sethu?"

Sethu has everyone worried.

Me: "Nothing yet. We don't know which route to take at this point."

Amara: "What's going to happen to her Randall?"

Me: "We'll find her, me hemma." (My queen.)

She leers up at me.

Amara: "I'm worried Randall."



"Uze."

Neo is knocking.

Me: "What does he want?"

She smiles and kisses my chest.

"Uze, Stylos wants you. I mean, he says cum... Eish man ke reng." (What am I saying?)

Neo is suffering from stupidity, Amara is thrown into a titter.

Neo: "Etila man Uze, we need you down stairs." (Come.)

Me: "Step away from my door Neo."

I give a warning.

Neo: "Askies, Oga. Continue yee, continue."

Me: "My friend get out of here."

I snap with a Nigerian accent, Amara is amused.

I hear him laugh as his footsteps fade away.

Me: "Let me go before he comes back and says something stupid again."

Amara: "He's funny and he's not even trying."

I know.

Amara sits up as I move away from her and throw my pants on.

Me: "Don't tell him that, his head will explode."

She giggles.

Amara: "Please find time to call me when you're out there."

She wears worry in her voice.

Me: "I'll try, if you promise to stop worrying."

Amara: "You know that I'll always surround myself around your existence?"

She says out of nowhere.

Me: "I know and so will I."

I peck her lips gently and slowly, letting my lips linger on.

Me: "Won't you join me for a quick shower?"

My smirk tells on me.

Amara: "Quick shower huh?"



She gives me an inquisitive look that induces a naughty smile on my face.

MKHIZE\*

My son is away from me, I lost my wife, my brothers and now my life is spiralling out of control. Bangizwe Mkhize is losing control, I used to be on top of my game. Although my house is packed with wives and children who fill it with sweet sounds of their laughter, something is missing. I can't grasp what it is.

"Baba."

Sika budes into my bedroom ringing the alarm with his voice, he stops on the door way with a shocked expression.

Me: "Yini manje?" (What happened?)

Sika: "Nkomo has been kidnapped."

He conveys the bad news that forces me to sit up from the bed, that's right, I spend most of my time sleeping.

Me: "Who took my son Sika?"

He drops his head at my loud roar.

Sika: "Angazi baba, an informant of mine told me that your son was taken and he's being held hostage by some men." (I don't know.)

Mkhize has fallen.

Me: "Is it not that boy Sishi? He's still planning revenge against me?"

Sika: "I doubt baba, Sishi has protected Nkomo like a brother."

Me: "A snake cannot be trusted Sika, Sishi cannot be trusted."

That boy is sick in the head, he can change on you overnight.

Sika: "There is something you should know baba."

He prepares.

Me: "Khuluma." (Speak.)

Sika: "Nkomo has been dating that girl from Ghana."

His eyes avoid my stern look.

Me: "Which girl Sika?"

Not Ruth please.

Sika: "The bride of Okolie."

Me: "What? How did that happen? Is she not betrothed to Okolie?"

Sika: "You know she is baba." (Boss.)

He ripostes.

Me: "What do those people want with my son? I need to see Segun, if he has anything to do with this, I will kill him."

I push the blanket aside and drop my feet on the floor, my head spins as the blood flows to my legs in a rush.

Sika: "Another thing baba." (Boss.)

More bad news?

Sika: "Segun is missing, no one knows where he is."

Me: "Why am I hearing about everything now Sika? Since when do you keep things from me? Are you not supposed to be my right hand man?"

Sika: "I am baba, your heart was not strong enough to be given bad news."

Sika, my bravest soldier thinks that I'm weak.

Me: "Was it for you to decide or me? Are you a qualified doctor now?"

Sika: "Cha baba." (No boss.)

Me: "I have to find my son, he might be estranged from me but, he's still my son and I love him."

Nkomo hated me his whole life, I pushed him away when I killed his mother. My carelessness exposed him to my rage, I failed to protect him from my life of crime.

Me: "Get me Segun's puppet, I want to have a talk with him."

Sika: "Yebo baba." (Yes boss.)

He dashes out of the bedroom, someone better explain where my son is.

NEO\*

We have settled down in the lounge to discuss the plan, nothing has come to light yet. No one has a clue as to who could've taken Sethu, like Stylos had said, the enemies are as many as the sand of the sea.

Styles: "Whoever those men are, they have done a good job hiding themselves."

Randall: "A tooth for a tooth, it's hanging at the back of my mind. My memory is not doing me



justice.”

Amara walks in to give Uze a glass of juice, he frowns at her as she holds it to him. She returns the scowl, he takes it and leaves it on the table. It’s a comical scene, Uze leers at me as I drop a laugh.

Amara: “Do you think Franco has something to do with it?”

Uze and Stylos exchange looks.

Amara: “Franco once said that to you Randall, or was it an eye for an eye? He said he was avenging his brother’s death.”

Damn, girl has cracked it.

Styles: “Fuck.”

He cusses.

Randall: “Matteo, you killed Matteo.”

Stylos drops his head, grips his hair and growls.

Styles: “Fuck.”

Me: “What is it? Ke mang Matteo?” (Who is Matteo?)

He glances at me, his gaze scrutinizing me.

Styles: “The first time Amara was kidnapped, there was a shooting in Pimville and Franco’s cousin was shot. He died on the spot.”

Me: “How do they know you did it?”

Styles: “I don’t know, the footage was deleted. They must have found a way to get it.”

Randall: “We didn’t cover our tracks well.”

Amara: “Does that mean they’ll come for me?”

The fear in her voice is palpable.

Randall takes her hand and pulls her to him, he kisses the top of her head.

Randall: “No me hemma, it’s not you they are after but, Styles.” (My queen.)

Uze pulls Amara to his lap, he circles his arms around her and hides his face on her collarbone. I turn to leer at Kenny boy beside me, he’s scowling at the couple.

Why is he giving himself heartache?

Styles: “We have to go.”

He announces erratically, he’s on his feet in a millisecond of a flash.

Me: "Where are we going?"

Styles: "I know where they are."

I thought we were all on the same page, no one knew anything.

Randall: "How?"

Styles: "I'll explain in the car. Kenneth will you stay here?"

Oh oh!!!

Randall: "Fuck no."

Uze howls.

Styles: "Should I do this alone Randy?"

When did he get angry?

Randall: "No."

Hehehe!!!

Styles: "Would you rather I take Kenneth with me? You know I can't do this without you Randall, I need you by my side. We're in this together? Ride together?"

Uze clenches his jawline, his eyes hard as a rock.

Randall: "Die together."

Me: "I don't know about dying but, I'll ride with you."

I can't be left out.

Styles: "Let's do this then, let's bring my baby home."

Randall: "Stay out of my house Mkhize."

He gives a command to an undaunted Kenneth.

Styles: "You heard him Kenneth, please."

Kenneth: "I know how to control myself."

Amara is holding on to Uze's arm for dear life, her head is resting on it. He looks down at her as she raises her head to leer at him, a kiss was brewing there and now we are holding candles. (Watching them kissing.)

Neo: "Where is my woman?"

Zee has been gone for too long.

Anger visible on his face, Kenneth furiously marches out of the house. Stylos shakes his head and scurries after him, he has to get through to Kenneth before Uze digs his grave.

Amara: "Please come home to us."

He's cradling her cheeks in the palms of his hands.

Randall: "I will always come home to you, no matter how long it takes."

He pecks her lips and...

I don't know why I'm watching this.

Me: "Zee!!!"

I run up to look for her.

"Mbali, why are you doing this to me?"

Mbali: "I didn't do anything, you're always taking Ginger's side."

Zee is fighting with Mbali.

Ayize: "What side are you talking about?"

Mbali: "You believe her over me."

I walk in to find Mbali standing with her hands stuck to her waist.

Ayize: "Yey wena, you were smoking maan." (Hey you.)

Zee shouts and grabs Mbali's arm.

Mbali: "I wasn't smoking."

She yells back.

Ayize: "Ngiyahlanya mina Mbali? Am I imagining this smell?" (Am I crazy?)

Mbali: "I don't know."

She clicks her tongue."

Ayize: "Yey wena!" (Hey you.)

I make it in time to stop Zee from slapping her, Mbali did not flinch whatsoever.

Ginger runs out of the room.

Ayize: "Neo let me go, I must teach this child a lesson."

She pulls her hand from me.

Me: "She's a child Zee."

Ayize: "An unruly child, angizwani ne hlongandlebe. Ngizom'bhaxabula." (I don't like stubborn kids. I will beat her up vehemently.)

Mbali runs to the door when Zee takes a belt from a shelf.

Ayize: "Come back here, today you will tell me where you learnt to click your tongue at an adult."

Me: "Let her go baba."

It's only now that Mbali is afraid.

Me: "Mbali go to your sister."

She runs out the door.

Ayize: "This is too much Neo. How do I discipline her?"

Me: "We'll figure it out together."

I take the belt from her.

Me: "I'm leaving baba."

Her eyes receive an indignant look.

Ayize: "You found her?"

Me: "Stylos thinks he knows where they are hiding her."

Hopefully it's not another wild goose chase.

Ayize: "Okay, don't get bitten by a dog."

She forces a smile.

Me: "I promise."

I say bringing my lips to hers, she clips her arms around me as I pull her close to me. My arms begin to wonder on her back, her hips and under her shirt. I deepen the kiss as I breathe her in, her breasts pressed on my chest and my heart rate beating faster. She pulls out from the kiss, her eyes tell me that she wants me as much as I want her.

Ayize: "You should go."

Her eyes say otherwise.

Me: "I'll be back."

Ayize: "Don't get yourself killed."

Me: "And die a virgin? Never, I'm coming home to you baba."

A rapid laugh derives from her.

Ayize: "And come back as crazy as you are, I wouldn't have you any other way."

And don't I love that?

"Neo!!!"

Uze is calling me.

Me: "Those idiots are nothing without me. Can you hear the desperation in his voice?"

Another sweet horse laugh consumes her, she holds my hand as we tread out of the room.

Me: "Baba, I know you have so much on your plate with Mbali and Ginger but, please watch over Amara as well. Kenneth will be here watching over the house and I don't trust him with her."

I pronounce while we potter down to meet the others.

Ayize: "Yeah I've seen how he looks at her, and the thousand deaths he's died seeing her with Randy baby."

Me: "He's a chance taker and he's determined, Uze will kill him."

Ayize: "Don't worry, I'll keep an eye on him."

Everyone is waiting outside, Stylos looks impatient. Randall and Amara haven't let go of each other and Kenneth is standing next to Stylos grimacing at the love birds.

Styles: "Let's go."

He jumps into the car, taking the driver's seat.

Me: "I'll see you later."

I utter to my Zee, she pecks my cheek.

Zee: "See you later."

She responds softly, walking away from her seems harder than before. Uze has bid Amara goodbye, his eyes refuse to depart from her as Stylos drives us out of the compound.

He clicks his tongue the second we exit the gate.

Me: "Don't worry Uze, Zee will keep an eye on Kenneth."

Randall: "Couldn't we get someone else to watch over them?"

He seethes.

Styles: "Kenneth knows not to try anything with Amara."

Stylos trusts Kenneth, I don't know if he should.

Randall: "How long have you known about his intentions?"

Stylos clears his throat.

Styles: "A while."

Estimated?

Me: "It doesn't matter how long he's known about this, Kenneth needs to stay away. Did you see his face?"



Styles: "Can we not talk about Kenneth? And plan how we are going to do this."

He grunts.

Randall: "We don't have a team Styles, it's the three of us."

Styles: "And Kenneth's team."

Randall: "Great, the next thing he'll be asking us for favours."

Styles: "That won't happen."

Me: "Why do you trust him so much Stylos?"

Kenneth is a dodgy man.

Styles: "He might be an idiot but, he's loyal."

Randall: "Is that why he has his eyes set on my wife?"

Styles: "I spoke to him about that, Kenneth knows what to do."

We shall see.

Randall is done with this conversation, he hands me a 23caliber gun.

Me: "What is this for?"

I don't like guns.

Randall: "We are not going to a party."

He pulls a bag from under a seat, revealing ammunition as he zips it open.

Me: "Damn Uze, so many guns?"

He grins at my retort.

Randall: "I told you that we're not going to a party."

Yeah I heard that.

Me: "Who are we going to kill with so many guns?"

Styles: "I can take you back Neo."

He offers.

Me: "No, I want to do this. I know that you'd do the same for me."

Randall: "We take care of each other Neo, nothing will happen to you."

His words are comforting. To know that I'm not alone.

Styles: "The place will be guarded, we need to come up with a strategy as to how we'll get in."

Me: "Crash their system and go in as the IT guy."

Styles: "Great plan, I'll give the men a command once we are in."

God help us.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

173\*

AMARA\*

Ayize: "Those people did not eat."

We're clearing the table, in the dining room. Chioma will have my head when she sees how her food has been wasted.

Me: "It's the stress."

Ayize: "I can relate, I haven't had anything since."

She opens a chair and sits, I settle down as well.

Ayize: "Plus, Mbali is stressing me."

Mbali is becoming rebellious.

Me: "I think she needs to talk to someone."

Ayize: "She needs a belt, Ginger is the hard headed one but, she's not being a cry baby over the loss of their parents."

Me: "Speak to her and find out what the problem is, maybe she misses her mother."

Ayize: "I want to send them away to their aunt, I'm not ready for this Amara. I'll be tired by the time I have my own brats."

She sighs.

Me: "I doubt being away from the only family they have left will do them good."

They need to keep a closer watch on Mbali, I think she'll be fine.

Ayize: "My aunt is strict, Mbali needs to be disciplined. We all lost someone, bitching about it is not the way."

Ayize is funny, she says bitching and she's talking about a twelve year old.

My heart sinks at the sound of Liyana crying, we jump to rush to her. My head spins upon seeing blood dripping from her forehead.

Liyana: "Mara."

She cries as I frantically dash to her. Mbali and Ginger are slowly toddling behind her, they look terrified and nervous at the same time.



Me: "Baby what happened?"

I inspect the injury, she has a big lump on her forehead.

Liyana: "Mbali hit me with a stone."

Ayize: "Ini?" (What?)

She shouts.

Me: "Let me look at that baby."

Liyana: "It's sore Mara, don't touch it."

She pushes my hand away as she wipes her tears. How am I going to explain this to her father? That man is too much when it comes to this child.

Ayize: "What happened Mbali?"

Silence.

Me: "Let's go clean you up."

I take her in my arms, there's a first aid kit in the kitchen.

Ayize: "You two stay here, ngiyeza. You'll tell me what you did to Randy's child." (I'm coming.)

I hear her give a command to the girls.

Ayize: "I'm sorry Amara. Is she okay?"

Liyana is still snivelling.

Me: "She'll be okay."

I can't stand her cries, they break my heart. I sit her on the counter.

Me: "Please get me the first aid kit on the top drawer there."

Ayize hurries to get it.

Me: "It's okay Liya baby, stop crying now, you'll get a headache."

Liyana: "But it hurts."

She wipes her tears as she tries to restrain them from pouring out of her eyes.

Me: "You're going to be okay."

Ayize: "What happened Liya?"

She hands me the kit.

Liyana: "Mbali put an... a... apple on... my... my head and told me... to sta... stand st.i.i.i.ll."

She drags the words out through her sobs.

Liyana: "She said if... if I move... I'll get... hurt. Then... then the stone... hit me on the head." "a.a.ad."

She narrates her short story as slow as she could, Ayize grits her jaw.

Ayize: "That brat will get it from me."

She grunts in anger.

Me: "Don't be hard on her, she's still mourning."

Ayize: "Mourning what? Please, this is no excuse to be violent. What if she hit her eye?"

She retorts agitatedly.

Liyana: "Ouch."

She whines and pushes my hand back as I clean the wound with a disinfectant.

Me: "Sorry baby."

I blow on the wound to lessen the pain.

Ayize: "Mbali, woza la wena." (Come here.)

Ayize takes her shoe off and hides it behind her. Mbali and Ginger walk in, they stop on the doorway.

Ayize: "Uyenzeni le ngane?" (What did you do to this child?)

Mbali drops her head as she fidgets her fingers.

Ayize: "Ginger, what happened?"

Ginger looks at Mbali, she doesn't want to tell on her sister.

Ayize: "Okay, no one wants to speak. I'll punish you both then. Ningama twins angisho, today you will feel how being a twin is like." (You're twins right.)

Ginger's eyes widen.

Ginger: "I didn't do anything."

She hums.

Ayize: "Khuluma kee." (Speak then.)

Ginger looks at her sister who gives her a 'don't say anything' look.

Ayize: "Okay, I'll start with you Ginger."

Ginger: "No sisi, Mbali did it. She said she wanted to see if Liyana's blood was the same colour as ours." (Sister.)

What?

I'm dumbfounded.

Ayize: "What kind of stupidity is that? Mbali? Are you stupid or what?"

Ayize yells.

Mbali: "It's not a deep wound, Liyana is a cry baby."

I have no words.

How do I keep Liyana away from her without seeming rude or offending Ayize?

Ayize: "This child? Uzungazi namhlanje Mbali, siyezwana?" (You will know me today. Do you hear me?)

Ayize charges after her, Mbali turns to run out of the kitchen.

Ayize: "Woza la wena." (Come here.)

She catches Mbali before she gets any far, holds the shoe up and thrashes her on her butt.

Mbali: "Mama, mama."

Mbali screams.

Ayize: "You're a child, you should act like a child."

She proclaims, whipping her.

Mbali: "I'm sorry sisi, I'm sorry." (Sister.)

She screams her apology.

Ayize: "You should be sorry you brat."

Ginger looks away, she hates that her sister is getting a whooping.

Liyana: "Mara, she's hurting her. Tell her to stop."

Liyana begs.

Me: "Ayize, you're scaring the kids."

She stops.

Ayize: "Apologize to Liyana now."

Mbali: "I'm sorry Liya."

A sobbing Mbali says.

Liyana: "It's okay, I'm sorry that they hit you."

She accepts and sends an apology.

Ayize: "Go to your room and think about what you did."

Mbali snivels away.



Ginger: "Are you okay Liyana?"

Liyana nods.

She's not okay, she has a big bump on her head and I foresee a headache. Ayize carries a worried look, she feels bad for thrashing her sister.

NOMBULELO\*

"Lelo wake up."

That voice...

I open my eyes to find Zuma standing by my bed side. This man does not give up or is he stupid?

Me: "What are you doing here?"

Zuma: "I've been coming to see you every day since you were hospitalized."

His confession shocks me.

Me: "Who let you in Zuma?"

I feel violated that he snuck up on me like that, if Mbuso had known about this, he would've told me and he would never allow Zuma in here.

Zuma: "It's a hospital Lelo, I can come and go as I please."

That's the problem.

Me: "Ngicela uhambe tuu." (Please leave.)

Zuma: "I came here for you Lelo, I wanted to see if you're okay."

Me: "I'm fine, as you can see."

A little too late for that.

Zuma: "How is my baby?"

He has a baby?

Me: "I don't know, I don't know who your baby is."

Zuma: "Lelo don't play like this come on, give me a chance man."

Mr. Comedian.

Me: "A chance for what Zuma?"

Why am I talking to him?

Zuma: "I'm sorry for what I did, Lelo please."

Me: "Please what? You keep saying please. Please what?"

He's getting on my nerves.

Zuma: "Do you know how much it hurts me to see you with another man? I messed up, I know and I'm sorry, baby I'm not perfect. I'm a man and we make mistakes."

Someone sent him here to make me angry.

Me: "Get out of here Zuma."

I turn away from him, I don't want to see his big head.

Zuma: "Don't chase me away please, let me stay at least for two minutes."

Me: "Ngithe hamba Zuma." (I said go.)

What is wrong with his hearing?

Zuma: "I'm not leaving, I can't go away just like that."

God, I am facing the stubbornness of a Zulu man, someone, anyone send help.

Me: "What happened in your life that made you think back?"

Let's hear it.

Zuma: "I realized that I made a mistake, I shouldn't have attacked you that day. I shouldn't have cheated on you with your best friend."

I'm getting angrier.

How dare he? How dare he treat me like trash and think he'll apologise and I'll take him back."

Me: "Voetsek." (Piss off.)

Goku pushed that one out.

Zuma: "What did you say?"

Me: "I said voetsek Zuma, voetsek out of my room now." (Piss off.)

I shout.

Zuma: "Nombulelo?"

Me: "I said get out."

I scream at him, and a sharp pain cuts through my belly.

Me: "Aaah."

I howl as I press my baby bump.

Zuma: "What is it? Is it the baby?"

He touches my hand, I shove his hand away.

Me: "Don't touch me."

I scream and the pain intensifies.

Me: "Oh God, it hurts."

I curl my body as I turn to face the other way.

Zuma: "I'll call the doctor."

I hear the sound of the door opening and...

"What the hell are you doing here?"

Mbuso is here.

Me: "Mbuso my baby, my baby."

I'm crying and my eyes are pleading for him to save my child."

Mbuso: "Get out of here."

He barks at Zuma while pushing him out.

Zuma: "Lelo."

Just as Mbuso shuts the door on his face, I scream, as another excruciating pain cuts through my belly and everything around me becomes fuzzy before a black out.

MKHIZE\*

Sika can be rough when he wants to, I told him to get me a meeting with this guy and he drags him in my house. Raven is bruised, he has blood oozing from his eyebrow and a blue eye. Sika pushes him on the floor, Raven is furious, his expression says he has no idea why he's here.

Me: "Haibo Sika."

My kids are in this house."

Sika: "It seems like the only language he understands is violence. He didn't want to come, I was nice to him and he became defensive."

He could be lying, Sika is fond of violence.

Me: "You didn't have to beat him like this."

Sika: "Ngiyaxolisa baba, but he's a dog." (I'm sorry boss.)



He clicks his tongue.

Me: "Sika, this man is an Okolie. You don't touch these dogs, you'll be cursed mfana. Have you forgotten what happened to my son and Franco?" (Boy.)

He sneers.

Sika: "Whatever witchcraft that is, it will not affect me. I'm a Zulu man baba, you don't know the things I have done and seen in life."

This one is a daredevil.

Me: "Uthatha 'ma chance Sika, this will not end well. These people know witchcraft first hand. They dine with the devil, Franco was a Zombie when died." (You're taking chances.)

Sika: "I was there baba, I witnessed his episodes. Franco was a coward and weak, he died like a coward." (Boss.)

He shouldn't say I never told him.

After so much effort, Raven picks himself and stands on his knees.

Raven: "What is the meaning of this?"

He leers up at me, blood drooling from his mouth.

Me: "Hey, you're drooling on my carpet."

He sends his hand to wipe his mouth.

Raven: "You're going to pay for this Mkhize. Do you know who my brother is?"

This is surely an empty threat.

Me: "The same brother you abandoned for that useless man, you call a father? Don't make me laugh please."

His eyes fall as shame mocks him.

Me: "How stupid can you be Okolie? Did you think you'd be protected while at Segun's side?"

Raven: "My brother will always protect me, I know he'll never forsake me."

He's delusional.

Me: "Like you deserted him?"

Sika: "He's a fool."

Sika taunts him and takes joy in it as he falls into laughter.

Raven: "What do you want from me?"

Let's get to it then.

Me: "I want my son."

Raven: "Your son?"

He frowns in confusion.

Me: "Don't act stupid Raven, your father goes missing and my son disappears as well. What are you playing at?"

Raven: "I don't know what you're talking about."

Sika: "Yey, speak you idiot or you will leave this place in a body bag"

Sika kicks him and he falls on his side.

Me: "I would believe him if I were you, he's not joking."

Raven ogles at Sika, I know that Sika means it.

Raven: "You can kill me if you want, I will not say anything."

Sika smirks.

Me: "Sika?"

Sika: "The boy has a death wish."

He pulls out a gun, loads it and aims it at Raven.

Raven flinches and clenches his eyes.

Raven: "I don't know where my father is please, he's been missing for weeks."

Me: "Looks like it's going to be a long day Sika."

He chuckles.

SETHU\*

He's back, this man is back and he looks more sinister than before. The look in his eyes makes the hairs at the back of neck stand.

"Sishi's most-priciest possession. Are we still good?"

Let me see.

Am I still good?

I'm still tied up on a chair and kept in a dark room against my will.

"I have a surprise for you."



With an evil grin he rubs his hands together, mischievously. I don't have the strength for his drama anymore, I want to go home.

"Aww! Is little miss Sishi crying?"

He mocks my tears.

"Save those tears sweetie, you are going to need them later."

He brings his wrist up to check the time on his watch.

"It's happening now. Brace yourself baby girl. Oh how I wish Styles were here, front row tickets, I can see it."

An evil laugh discharges from his mouth as he spreads his hands open.

"Come in."

He shouts.

The door swings open and I see a beam of light coming through it, followed by a tall buff black man.

He looks as scary as this one. Now I understand why parents always tell us not to go out at night, they must have met these two.

Tall man: "We need to do this now Tyson, you know how good Sishi is. He probably knows this location and is on his way."

He addresses my abductor as Tyson.

This man's words that, Styles is coming give me hope, I wish they are true and that Styles will come to my rescue.

Tyson: "Where is Dash? Call him, the party is about to start."

He looks at me with so much lust that I feel dirty, somehow I have an idea what is coming next.

They are going to gang rape me before killing me.

Don't cry Sethu, you need to be strong.

The tall man leaves and comes back with another guy just as scarier, a bit shorter and chubbier than these two. I figure he's Dash, he wears this creepy smirk on his face the moment he looks at me.

The worst part is that he doesn't have a t-shirt on and his cargo shorts are unbuttoned.

My heart jumps to my throat and immediately I feel a great need to throw up. This is it, my life is over at 25.

Dash: "I want to start, who knows, I might just be lucky and be the first to break her."

He's saying this while running his dirty hands on my breast, I try to shrug him off but, being tied

to a chair is not helping at all.

All I can do is cry out loud and scream.

Man2: "If she's a virgin, then I want to go first."

He protests making me feel dirtier than I already do.

Dash: "No, I predicted first, you were here before me but, it never crossed your mind."

Man2: "Don't be unfair Dash, you always go first. It's my turn this time."

Me: "Stop please, stop. I can't take it anymore."

I scream cry.

OMG, this isn't happening. I want to die, they are savages and their words are enough to kill me. I cry more as they start pushing each other like animals, fighting to get to me. My eyes run to Tyson and he's standing with his hands in his pockets and a smirk on his face. I can tell he's enjoying everything.

Me: "Tyson, I'm sorry please. Whatever Styles did, I'm sorry. Please don't do this, please."

I plead for my life.

They all look at each other before bursting out into laughter.

Tyson: "We haven't started yet and you're already begging me to stop."

He laughs louder.

Tyson: "Wait till Styles finds out what we did to his precious diamond, he won't be able to live with himself. This will be his down fall, finally we'll succeed in killing Styles Sishi. Only, the blood won't be in our hands, he will take his own life. My sweet little brother will be avenged."

They are having a laughing party while I can't stop shaking and sobbing from fear. I've heard about the devil's angels but, didn't think they are actually real.

How can I say I never met them when they are standing right before me?

Tyson: "Fellas, if this bitch is really a virgin then I will go first, this will kill Styles even more."

I don't know what's worse, them debating about who should rape me first or the fact that I'm going to die without seeing my family again. At least I deserve to say good bye to them and tell them I love them.

The two guys don't protest, instead they obey Tyson. He walks up to me while laughing, he rips my dress and I'm left half naked. Everything goes downhill.

I scream my lungs out as I hear the ripping sound of my dress. Not again, God not again.

Me: "Please, don't do this please."

I beg but my pleas fall on deaf ears. It dawns on me, they are not human but, demons sent from

hell by the devil.

God please, if I make it out of this I will make things right with my family. I will love Styles like I have never loved before.

With my eyes tightly shut I say a little prayer, I open them as I feel something cold and wet on my chest. It's Tyson, assaulting my breasts.

I scream and with the little strength I have, try jumping from the chair.

It isn't much help because I am tied up but, it stops him from touching me.

I feel dirty and disgusted, the urge to throw up becomes stronger and I lurch my head over and vomit right on Tyson's feet.

This repulsive act provokes him to anger that he punches me, I fall over with the chair. My ears ring so loud, I see stars as my head spins.

Tyson: "You bitch."

He kicks me on the stomach as he roars with so much anger.

I can't see the other two guys but, I hear them laugh.

Dash: "Hurry up Tyson, seeing her naked is making me horny."

I'm turned around by this Tyson guy, blood is oozing from my mouth.

He unties the rope, kicks the chair to the side and like a mannequin pulls me up to my feet. I flinch in pain.

My whole body is throbbing, every limb hurts like hell.

Tyson uses his back hand to slap me again and my body flies across the floor, hitting the ground with a loud thud. I scream in agony as my elbow dislocates from its place. This feels like déjà vu, I'm a defenceless woman and none of this matters to these monsters, nothing matters to them. My body is numb, I have no tears to cry, only pain is present at this moment as I'm curled up on the cold floor and my face buried in my arms. A hand pulls me, turns me over and I see Tyson's ugly face. I reach for my other hand to compress the pain. Tyson stands with each leg on either side of my body

I clamp my eyes as he unbuttons his pants with a perverted look in his eyes. I want this torture to be over with.

He straddles me, rips my bra string open, leaving a scratch on my chest. I'm exposed as my breasts are revealed, Tyson digs his face on my breasts before three gun shots are heard.

Tyson: "Shit."

He roars.

Dash: "Fuck, he's here."

Who's here?

The terror on their faces is evident.

Man2: "With his minions."

Tyson: "What the hell are you waiting for? Go check and kill that bastard."

He yells at them, while sitting on top of me.

Tyson gets up to his feet, runs to the small table in the middle of the room and grabs a gun.

The two guys dash out, there is more gun shots and again I curl my shuddering body. It sounds like a war has broken out. Maybe I'm going to be saved, whoever it is out there, I pray they are here for me.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

174\*

NEO\*

The plan worked, it was easy to enter the building. Everything was going okay until some idiot recognized Scar, that's when Uze pulled a gun out and started dropping bodies like fruits from a tree.

Me: "Stylos go in I'll cover you."

I shout to Stylos, I'm shielding myself with a truck that's recklessly packed in plain sight outside a three story building. Bullets are flying everywhere, my heart skips with every blast to the air. Not knowing if the next bullet will hit me is scary, I'm not certain if I will make it out of this place. I'm not as brave as Uze and Stylos who serve bullets as if it's their profession.

Stylos: "Be careful Neo."

He shouts back as he runs towards a single story factory.

"Where is Styles going?"

I turn back to see Uze behind me, his back is facing me as he shoots at men who are hiding behind the building. The gun shots sound as if they could crack a skull, flashbacks invade my thoughts as I'm taken back to the day we had gone to rescue Amara.

Will I die because of a woman, these women are always in danger.

Me: "He thinks Miss. S is in the factory."

I tell him, there's no one in sight, the bullets halt from my side.

Randall: "How many are left?"

I wasn't counting.

Who has time to count the number of people shooting at you? When will you get the time to run and hide?

Me: "I don't know Uze but, the sound of gun shots tell me that we have a lot of monkeys to kill."

I lean on the truck, shielding myself from the bullets coming from Uze's direction.

Randall: "I think I should check on Styles. He won't be safe alone in there."

Me: "And these soldiers? Who is going to kill them?"

Randall: "You seem to have it under control."

He's crazy.

Me: "They'll butcher me, Uze."

Randall: "Like that guy."

He points behind me with his eyes, I turn to see a guy running towards me with a butcher knife in his hand. The fool has run out of bullets, his gun is lying on the floor.

Me: "What is he going to do with that knife?"

Randall: "Probably stab you with it, I don't know. Let's see what he does when he gets here."

He's being sarcastic.

I have always known that Uze wants me dead.

Me "You can't let him get to me, Oga" (Boss.)

Randall: "You won't let him get to you, use your gun Neo. You need to think fast or you won't make it out alive. You'll die."

I almost forgot that I have a gun, also...

Me: "Chaii!!! I will not die, I will not die."

I need to get that out of the way, the image of my lifeless body haunts my head as Uze's words flick my ears. He frowns as he looks at me like I'm losing my mind.

Me: "I will not die Uze."

I grill.

Randall: "Yeah if you kill that fool first, you will not die."

I shoot the fool and the bullet pierces through his stomach, killing him.

Me: "Uze, he's staring at me."

He tilts back a bit.

Randall: "He's dead Neo."

I am finished, if this man died while glaring at me, he's going to haunt me. Looking at his dead body turns every knot in my stomach, I curve over and throw up.

Randall: "Are you okay?"

Me: "Eish Oga, this is not good. How will I get the image of this idiot out of my mind?"

Randall: "Don't worry, it will be out of your mind before supper."

There goes my stomach at the mention of supper, throwing up is harder this time as my gut has been emptied of its contents.

"GO, GO, GO."

We hear foreign voices shouting and multiple heavy footsteps stomping towards us.

Randall: "Neo, we have company."

He introduces in a haste.

I raise my head at the announcement to see a bunch of white men run in the premises.

They are shooting at us, our men are scattered around this place but, we don't know how many we have left.

Me: "Life does not love us."

Randall: "Styles better come out of there, now."

Me: "Let's follow him, something tells me that he'll be trapped in there. Kenneth's men will deal with these people. I'm sure there's plenty more where they came from."

I can't die, I don't want to die.

Randall: "Go in, I'll cover you."

Me: "With these bullets flying around?"

Randall: "Okay follow me."

Me: "Okay, one two, one two..."

He moves without warning, he's lurched over ducking bullets and shooting every person coming his way. I'm running behind him bowing as low as I could, my hands almost touching the ground.

Randall: "Neo use your gun."

He yells.

He has two firearms in his hands now and headed to a different direction. He's shooting left, right and centre.

Me: "Shit Uze."

I shout while I run and scan my eyes as I try to find a place of shelter.

"Get him, get him."

Someone hollers from behind.

I see a white man with black hair smirking at me and he's ready to shoot.

Me: "Shit."

I shoot at him and miss, he shoots back and I'm saved by ducking. I run behind a trailer, while dishing him with bullets.



Me: "Fuck, I was not born for this."

I peep over to see him tiptoeing closer, fool. He must be new at this, I hit him on the leg and he crushes to the floor.

Me: "Yes baby, I'm taking back our land today."

With excitement, I move from my shelter to finish him off. Keeping watch of the men bustling in this place, I knew he was weak. He has fainted.

"Neo watch out."

As I turn due to the sound of Uze's voice, something hot pierces through my leg, everything plays out in slow motion. It's that baboon Thato, he's standing a few meters away from me with a gun aimed at me.

It feels like a lifetime before I'm dropped to the floor, he's striding toward me and my mind has gone blank, all that's in it is that my time has come. My mother will die, she won't make it when she hears of my death. I never thought of how I would want to be buried, I want my body to be cremated. I don't want witches to dig my body and turn me into a zombie, I won't be able to take it. I can't live the rest of my life under some old woman's bed, that's a nightmare.

How will I escape?

My mind takes me to my beautiful Zee, she won't come to my funeral. How will I take not seeing her at my funeral? My heart will break, I will never kiss her lips again. One thing I know is that I will haunt Uze and Stylos, they will never know a moment of peace in their lives. I will make sure that they will never have sex again, they can't be having a good time while I'm trapped under some stinking bed in an old hut. This is their fault, it's all their fault.

MBUSO\*

This bastard is still here, I'm going to kill him. He's pacing the corridor, looking worried.

Me: "What the hell did you do to Lelo?"

I grab his collar.

Zuma: "Nothing, I was talking to her and she started screaming."

Me: "Who gave you permission to go into her room? You bastard. Do you have any idea what you've done?"

I bark at him.

Zuma: "Please tell me they are okay, tell me Lelo..."

His voices aggravates me.



Mbuso: "Shut up, you piece of shit. I want you to get out of here and don't ever come back."

I command.

Zuma: "I'm not leaving until I see for myself that Lelo and my baby are okay."

Zuma is stubborn and it's infuriating. I can't be worried about Lelo and this man who wants to put her life at risk.

Mbuso: "I have always known that you're selfish but this.

The security guard is brought here by the loud commotion.

Me: "Get this man out of here and make sure he leaves the premises."

I give him orders, he grabs a shouting Zuma and begins to lug him out.

Zuma: "You're going to pay for this, it's not over Xaba. You will pay."

He yells while trying to fight the security guard.

His threats don't faze me.

NEO\*

Thato takes joy in seeing me lying helpless on the floor, I want to wipe that ugly smirk on his face.

Thato: "Yeah, s'dididi." (Fool.)

He mocks me, this bloody idiot.

Me: "S'dididi, ke mau. Jou ma se." (A fool is your mother.) (Cussing.)

He chortles.

Thato: "You can't cuss at a man who has a gun pointed at you. Uzolimala njandini." (You'll get hurt you dog.)

Me: "You'll pay for shooting me mampara and for setting Miss S up, jou bliksem." (Fool.) (You bastard.)

I use my elbows to balance my body as I push myself to sit.

Thato: "If I can get away with that then I can get away with this."

"Neo shoot him, you still have the gun."

Uze shouts, it's followed by loud sounds of gun shots. Thato steps on my hand as I try to raise it. He kicks my gun to the side and laughs, he's laughing at me.

Me: "Shit, I don't want to die like this."

"Shit."

Uze cusses loudly.

I clench my eyes as Thato prepares to shoot me, a gun goes off and in a flash a heavy object falls on me. I open my eyes to see Thato on top of me with a bullet hole through his head.

Me: "Uze, get this thing off me."

I holler for help.

I need to go for cleansing seriously, the coldest water in the river will wash away this bad luck.

Uze scurries to me.

Uze: "Are you okay?"

I always knew that there was something wrong with this man.

Me: "There's a dead body on top of me Uze."

I yell.

A glower forms on his face, he kicks Thato's body and it tumbles to the ground. He reaches his hand to help me up.

Me: "This hobo got my leg Uze, I won't be able to walk."

Uze: "Take my hand Neo, we have to take cover."

Me: "Eish, nice shot Oga." (Boss.)

One day is one day, I will learn too.

He clicks his tongue, moves to stand behind me, he grabs my arms and begins to lug me away from the battle field.

Me: "Take me to the car, I'll drive myself to the hospital."

Randall: "Drive with what? You don't have a leg."

He pulls me behind a big metallic container, rips a piece of cloth from my shirt and bandages my wound to clog blood from exuding out of my leg. I grumble as the agonizing pain shoots right through my body.

Randall: "Stay here, I'll be back."

He gives instructions and scurries away before I could dispute. When will this war end? I've been hit and I can't help him. Our team is depleting, there are dead bodies scattered everywhere. Blood splattered around and the smell of death lurking in the air.

I see the pastor appear from a corner, he's slowly walking behind Uze. Where did he come from?

I thought we was locked up.

Me: "Oga behind you."

I yell out to him, he swivels in a speed of light and shoots him on the head. The pastor dies on the spot.

Wait a minute, I heard two gun shots. Oh God no, no.

Me: "UZE!!! UZE!!!"

I yelp.

He's been shot, Uze has been shot. He's lying on the ground, I don't know if he's dead or alive.

Me: "OGA!!! UZE!!!"

He's not moving, God he's not moving.

This is it, Stylos is in there and I don't know if he's still alive. Uze is down and there's nothing I can do, I'm injured myself.

There's nothing left to do now but call Zee, I have to hear her voice one last time. I don't know if Kenneth's men will help us, I push my hand into my pocket and come out with a phone.

Me: "Zee."

She answers immediately.

Ayize: 'Neo what is that? Are those gun shots?'

I take a deep breath, to control my breathing. I'm losing a lot of blood and the pain is intensifying.

Me: "Yes baba, I wanted to hear your voice for the last time."

She's quiet, I can hear her breathing.

Me: "Zee are you there?"

I ask.

Zee: "Listen to me Neo, I don't want to hear any excuses. I want you home, you hear me?"

Her stern voice fills the line.

Me: "It doesn't look good Zee, we are outnumbered. I wanted to tell you that you're the greatest woman I have ever known."

Ayize: "No, Neo don't tell me that bullshit."

She's shouting.

Me: "I want to see your face Zee."

Ayize: "No Neo, you can't do this to me."

Her voice quavers.

Me: "Please grant me this wish baba."

Ayize: "No Neo, I won't let you see my face. You won't come back to me if I let you see my face."

Me: "I'm sorry Zee."

Ayize: "Where is Mr. S and Randall? They better keep you safe or I swear to God."

She grunts.

Me: "Stylos went after Miss S and Uze is down, I don't know if he's okay or not."

She gasps.

Ayize: "What do you mean Randall is down?"

Me: "He's been shot."

Ayize: "No, it can't be."

Me: "I'm telling you this because you're strong, you can handle anything thrown at you."

Ayize: "No, I'm not strong Neo, not for this."

Me: "Please don't cry and don't tell Amara anything. I think Styles will make it out alive, he'll tell her about Uze."

Ayize: "Neo."

She yells.

Ayize: "Stop telling me that."

Me: "I'm sorry Zee, I love you."

Ayize: "No, I don't want you to love me. I want you to come back to me please."

I shouldn't have called her, I have a big mouth. Now she's stressed.

Me: "I love you Zee."

Ayize: "Neo."

I cut the call, I can't bear to hear her sobs.

AYIZE\*

"Randall?"

A whisper turns me around, Amara is standing in the foyer. Her eyes as wide as paper cups and

tears streaking down her face.

Me: "Amara."

She wasn't supposed to hear that, I get up to get to her only to see blood oozing down her thigh.

Me: "Amara you're bleeding."

She drops her head to glance at the blood then brings it back up.

Amara: "Ayize."

Her tears flow twice as much.

Me: "Hold on Amara."

What should I do? I'm thrown into a panic, I don't know what to do.

Me: "Chioma, Chioma."

I scream for Chioma, I don't know where she is in the house and she's not coming.

Amara is frozen in time, she has gone numb. The front door opens and Kenneth marches in with a gun in his hand.

Kenneth: "What's going on?"

His gaze falls on Amara, and he frowns upon seeing the blood on her leg.

Me: "We have to get her to the hospital."

He scoops a frozen Amara in his arms and starts to flee to the door.

Me: "Kenneth put her down."

I rush after him and slap his hand.

Kenneth: "Hold on sweetheart, you're going to be okay."

Hold on what?

This man...

Me: "Kenneth, put her down now."

I shout and he ignores me as he rushes to his car, he helps her in the back seat.

Kenneth: "Drive."

He throws me his car keys, I throw them back at him.

Me: "You drive, I'm sitting with Amara."

No way am I letting him anywhere near her.

I jump in and he follows.

Me: "Amara."

Kenneth: "She's in shock."

Is he talking to me?

Is it strange that I can feel a heavy presence in this car?

Me: "You didn't have to carry her, you know."

Kenneth: "What did you have me do? Drag her to the car?"

It would have been better.

Okay, I'm just upset that's why I'm talking nonsense.

Me: "Manje usweetheart yena? Where did that come from?" (Why did you call her sweetheart?)

He doesn't respond.

Me: "You do know that she's pregnant and having another man's child."

He's gone quiet on me.

Me: "Kenny."

Kenneth: "You've got a mouth, don't you?"

Me: "I only want to know why you called the poor girl sweetheart."

Kenneth: "We're almost at the hospital. How is she?"

Avoiding the topic I see.

Amara is not with us, her mind is probably with Randall. Now that I think about it, they need help.

Me: "You have to send help to Styles and Randall."

Kenneth: "Why? What happened?"

Me: "Neo said something about being out numbered. They've been hit."

I can't tell him Randall was short, the news might send him on cloud nine.

Kenneth: "Listen, I'm going to send you a location. I want you there now, it's a war. Take as many as you can."

He's talking on the phone.

Damn, he's fast.

He parks the car outside the hospital, dashes out and takes Amara the same way he did back at the house and scurries in. I'm behind him, I will not leave him alone with her.

Oh Neo, please be okay.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

175\*

NEO\*

Uze lets out a ball of air that is searing the walls of his lungs, his chest rising and falling with a desperate need breathe. I can hear his breath as he breathes as if no air would ever be enough.

Me: "Uze."

He's on his knees, his hands on the gravel. He raises his body and takes off his shirt, revealing a bullet proof vest. Dammit, I forgot that we have those on.

Me: "Oga." (Boss.)

I drag myself to him, he raises his hand to stop me from getting to him.

Me: "Are you okay?"

He raises his thumb to gesture his wellness, the man is back to shooting people and he's headed to me.

Randall: "Are you okay?"

Neo: "No man, you must warn us, warn us that you have a bullet proof vest on."

I've never been so sacred in my life.

Me: "I thought you knew, you have one on too."

Uze is insensitive.

Neo: "There are so many things to remember. So how was I supposed to remember that I have a vest on? I almost died when that pastor shot you, that piece of shit, may he burn in hell."

Randall: "I'm sorry bro."

Me: "I did something stupid Uze, I called Zee and told her that we're not making it out."

He stops shooting, twists his head to glare at me.

Randall: "Please tell me Amara doesn't know anything."

Me: "I told Zee not to reveal anything until Styles gets there."

Randall: "Shit, I'm wrapping this up and going home to my family."

He pulls out a gun from his waist and hands it to me.





Randall: "I'm going in, stay here. Use the gun Neo, don't freeze. I want to find you alive, you'll be okay."

Me: "Go get Stylos, Uze."

He gives me a final glance and scampers towards the door of the factory.

AYIZE\*

Amara has been taken in, Kenneth is pacing up and about the corridor. I'm exhausted from watching him, he's giving me a headache. My mind is filled with thoughts of Neo, Randy, Mr. S and Sethu. Is Randall really dead?

And Amara...

Lord she wasn't meant to hear that conversation, please save her baby.

Kenneth swooshes past me, he's making my head spin.

Me: "Will you stop please?"

He curves a brow, packs his hands into his pockets and leans back against the wall.

Dammit.

I decide to call Neo, I need to know if he's okay and probably inform him about Amara. I wait in anticipation, longing to hear his voice.

"Baba."

My heart sinks and a flood of relief washes over me.

Me: "Baba, you're okay?"

The joy I feel is unexplainable.

Neo: "Uze is okay too, the fool was wearing a bullet vest."

Gosh, Amara.

Me: "Neo something happened, Amara heard everything. She went into shock and started bleeding."

Being the barrier of bad news is the worst job one could have.

Neo: "Is she okay?"

Why is he calm?

Me: "I don't know, we're at the hospital waiting for the doctor."

Neo: "I'll let Uze know, he has to be there."

Me: "Why do you sound so calm Neo?"

He's scaring me.

Neo: "Zee, today I will not die from a gun shot. Uze is going to kill me."

Neo likes exaggerating.

Me: "How are things there? Kenny boy sent back up."

I opt to ignore his stupidity, Kenneth leers down at me and chortles following by a head shake.

Neo: "There's no back up here Zee."

Me: "They are probably on the way."

Neo: "They better hurry, Kenny's men are perishing. These men are dropping like dry leaves."

The exaggeration.

Neo: "I have to go."

Me: "Be careful please."

Neo: "Bye."

We are disconnected.

Neo loves it when I worry. Nx!

Kenneth looks restless, a pucker has grown on his face. Does he care about Amara that much?

Me: "What's your story with Amara?"

He sneers at me, I'm asking a simple question. It shouldn't be hard to give an answer.

Kenneth: "There's no story."

Me: "Come on Kenny."

He huffs at the mention of his name cut short.

Me: "I see how you look at her, the way you carried her in your arms. There's something there."

I probe for more.

Kenneth: "Amara is a nice person."

Me: "Yes, she's nice to me but, I don't look at her the same way you do."

He gives me one long hard look, I'm not intimidated.

Maybe a little.

Me: "You know you can't have her, right? Save your heart now Kenny because it will end in tears."

Kenneth: "Excuse me?"

I have left him mystified.

Me: "Here's the thing, Randy will never let go of that woman in there."

God let him be okay.

Me: "And the only man that exists in Amara's world is Randy, she will never feel anything for you my friend."

Kenneth: "Stay out of my business."

That's something I'm not going to do.

Me: "I will if you stay away for my friend."

Kenneth moves away from me, he is narked. The doctor is coming, his face is calm, it's good.

Me: "Doc."

I meet him half way, Kenneth rushes back.

Kenneth: "How is she doctor?"

Me: "How is the baby?"

Doctor: "Both the mother and the baby are fine."

How is that?

Me: "She bled doc. What does that mean?"

Doctor: "Bleeding during the first trimester is common, it doesn't mean a miscarriage."

Kenneth: "So the mother is perfectly fine?"

The doctor smiles.

Doctor: "Yes sir, your wife is perfectly fine."

Shame.

Me: "Dokotela akuyena umnyeni wakhe lona." (He's not her husband.)

His eyes buck at the realization of his mistake.

Doctor: "I'm sorry, I saw the ring on her finger and thought..."

Me: "He's not the only man on earth that you'd assume him to be her husband, he could be her brother."

Kenneth clears his throat, the thought of being Amara's brother puts him in an uncomfortable position.

Doctor: "We're going to keep her here for two more days, just to keep a close watch on her. Early

pregnancy is risky, any form of stress or bad news can trigger a miscarriage. You can go in and see her, I gave her something for the shock. She's sleeping now."

He saunters away after finishing his speech, Kenneth is slithering to the door. I rush after him and block his way. He goggles down at me with a scowl, his dark eyes are questioning me.

Me: "I'll go in, you guard the door."

I shut the door on his face.

KETHU\*

Today feels like Christmas, we have mail and my father has just opened it. Pictures of Nobayeni and Timothy are plastered all over the coffee table, I'm happy the woman has been caught. The problem is that my father is hurt and he hasn't removed his eyes from the pictures.

Wait till Nobayeni gets home, I'm counting down the minutes.

Me: "Dad."

He stops my words with a raised hand.

Dad: "I don't want to hear what you have to say Kethu, this has nothing to do with you."

It has everything to do with me.

Me: "Don't tell me you're going to give her a chance."

He's love struck and it's disturbing.

Dad: "I said stay out of this and I don't want you to say anything to your mother."

Argh!

You know that feeling when you think it's going to snow on Christmas morning then you wake up to find the sun out in all of its glory? Yeah! My father just burst my bubble.

My heart does a summer salt as I hear the crack of the key, she's here. Cruella is here, this is going to be fun.

Dad: "Go to your room."

Go to my...

What am I, ten? I'm not going anywhere.

He gets up on his feet, I sit back ready to watch the show unfold. Here she is, her eyes are buried on her phone.

Nobayeni: "Honey."

She hasn't done away with that word.

Me: "Welcome home mother."

I greet her with this saying, her eyes find the pictures first. Her bag and keys fall to the floor as she's standing in utter astonishment.

Nobayeni: "Dladla, I can explain."

Dad: "I'm listening."

He says softly.

Shouldn't he be throwing a tantrum and tossing her clothes out the window?

This is what I'm waiting for.

Nobayeni: "It's not what you think."

So the lies begin.

Dad: "What is it then? What do you call this?"

Why are you so calm dad? Throw this witch out.

Nobayeni: "I was stupid and lonely Dladla, It didn't mean anything."

She's visibly trembling, while clomping closer to him. Dad looks disgusted by her presence.

Dad: "It didn't mean anything? Do I look stupid to you Nobayeni?"

Yes, yell at her dad.

She quails, stepping back from him.

Nobayeni: "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I stopped, I promise. It meant nothing, I love you. I love only you."

She's touching him and he's letting her.

Dad: "I won't forgive you for this Nobayeni."

Nobayeni: "Okay it's fine Dladla, don't forgive me. I can take that but, don't leave me please honey."

Get your hands off my father you witch.

I have so much to say to her, I can't though.

Dad: "You cheat on me with Timothy of all people, you bring him into my house on the pretext of work."

Nobayeni: "I'm sorry."

That's all she can lay on the table? Dad should not be moved by those fake tears.

Dladla: "Did you sleep with him in our bed."

I move to the edge of the chair ready to hear her response, her head has fallen in shame. Dad clenches his teeth, he grunts in anger and grabs her by her upper arms.

Dad: "Did you sleep with Timothy in our bed?"

He barks in her face as he vigorously shakes her.

Nobayeni: "Yes, I'm sorry."

She confesses loudly.

He drops his head, his forehead almost touching hers. His grip still on her arms, Nobayeni is crying uncontrollably. She's desperate for him to forgive her and I don't care, she will finally be out of our lives.

Dad: "How could you do this to me, to us Nobayeni?"

His voice frequently breaks into sobs but, he's strong, he's able to curb the cries. He pushes her to fall on the couch.

Dad: "I loved you and gave you everything and this is what you do to me?"

Nobayeni: "I'm sorry Dladla, I love you."

She bring herself up to stand before him, a slap on the face is all that's left.

Dad: "I want a divorce."

He states softly, her eyes enlarge.

Nobayeni: "No, please you can't do this to me."

She falls on her knees and grabs his legs.

Nobayeni: "I won't be able to live without you Dladla, you can't leave me."

Dad is visibly upset and he's not gratified by her story.

Dladla: "I'm leaving."

No he can't leave, she should not him.

Nobayeni: "No, please."

He turns to walk away, she crawls on her knees and hands crying. I am so tempted to push her away from him.

Nobayeni: "Don't leave me Dladla please, I love you."

She cries, grabs hold of his leg and presses her head on it, dad leers down at her. I see a glint of concern in that anger of his. He feels sorry for her, I can't let him forgive her.

Nobayeni: "You're the only man for me, don't go Dladla please."

Me: "Dad, she's the one who should leave not you."

This is my father's house, Nobayeni doesn't belong here.

Nobayeni looks at me then back up at him, he kneels in front of her. Takes her cheeks into his hands. This is not happening, he can't forgive her. He's looking into her eyes and that's dangerous for him, she'll hypnotise him with her gaze.

Dad: "I loved you Nobayeni, you were the only woman for me and I couldn't look at anyone else. You have destroyed us, that boy disrespected my home, you gave him rights over my home and our bed. That is something I can never forgive."

He moves away from her, she clasps his arms and holds on to him.

Nobayeni: "Please don't, I'll die. Don't go please."

Nobayeni must stop, this is embarrassing.

Dad finally moves away and without looking back, dashes out the door. She lies down by the door weeping, I don't want to watch this. I thought I'd be able to stand it but, I can't. I drag my feet to my room, she will comfort herself...

SETHU\*

If the person who came for me is Styles, then I wonder if he's still alive. The piercing sound of bullets and screams coming from outside is deafening. I'm terrified to move, I'm afraid of what Tyson might do to me. My bust is exposed, I hide my breast with my arms. I have tried to curb my tears to no avail. My bra is lying right above my head, I stretch my arm to reach for it. It's torn but, I still hang it around me, it covers a bit.

Oh Lord he's coming over to me and he has a gun in his hand.

Tyson: "Save your tears sweetheart, you'll need them when Styles is finally dead."

He's drinking bottled liquor, he clenches his teeth as he swallows.

Tyson: "Fuck."

He leers at me with a sly grin.

Tyson: "I need this for my nerves."

He says while making his way to me, I'm thinking the worst. He's going to finally rape me, I'm all alone with this monster and I'm naked.

Tyson: "You should have some too, it will help you relax. I see how you're trembling and afraid."

He presses his fingers on my cheeks and forces my mouth open, he pushes the bottle in and pours the alcohol. I spit it out, it spills down from my chin to my bare chest. His lustful eyes

follow the flow to my breast, he smirks and I can see the diabolic thoughts hidden in his mind as he lustfully glares at them. I send my arm to cover my shame, he grabs it with force and shrugs it away. I yelp at the pain that surges through my body. He pours the alcohol on my bosom, I scoot away using my legs and hands, hurting my injured arm in the process.

Me: "Stop Please."

I beg as I continue to scoot back as fast as I could but, he's faster and stronger.

Tyson: "You don't get it do you? I want Styles to suffer the same pain I did when he killed my brother, I want his heart to break into a million pieces that, he won't know what to do with himself and the only way out would be suicide.

He tells me his sick fantasy as he grips my leg and pulls me to him, I shriek in fear and horror. He dips his head in and licks my breast while squeezing the other. There is only one way to get out of this, with great regret and disgust I put my arms around him as if giving him consent. I feel him smirk as he continues to assault my breasts. I bring his head close to my face.

Tyson: "That's more like it, it's more fun when you don't fight it."

I hate you, you bastard.

Everything feels like an outer body experience, it feels like I'm watching someone who looks like me go through this.

Tyson is close enough and relaxed, without wasting anytime I clutch his ear with my teeth and pull as hard as I can. He screams and his weakness gives me a chance to kick him on his manhood. He growls, holds his manhood and bleeding ear. I push him away and he falls back on his buttocks. I'm given an opportunity to get up and I start to run, at this point I don't care about my starkness. I need to survive.

Tyson: "You bitch, you are dead."

He yells scuttling after me, I thought I was a fast runner. Tyson pulls me by my braids, hooks his arm around my neck from behind while, pointing a gun on my temple.

Suddenly I remember the scene where Khethu had a gun pointed at me.

Is death seeking for me?

I don't care anymore, I want to die.

I have accepted my fate and whatever will be will be, I can't plead Tyson for my life anymore.

There are loud screams, shouting and more gunshots. They sound like they are outside this door. Then it goes quiet for a while, I hear Tyson panic. His breathing becomes louder and faster like he's being chased, it's so quiet I can hear his heart thudding on his chest.

Then the door bursts open, with all my heart I wish that Styles would walk through it and not Tyson's fellow demons.

Literally this moment feels like a lifetime as we both have our eyes glued to the entrance, a





shadow appears through the door and Tyson shrieks in fear.

Is he afraid of shadows?

He is a coward after all.

Tyson: "How the hell did he find me?"

He barks, his voice is coated with fear

I'm trembling, soaked in beer and naked. A nightmare is nothing compared to this.

I feel my heart on my throat as Styles appears through the entry with a gun on his hand, pointing in our direction. His eyes embrace me first, they become hard as he notices my nakedness while Tyson clings on to me...

That face...

I have never seen it before, he looks like my Styles but different.

His presence makes me feel safe though.

Immediately my emotions fail me.

Like a child, I cry but without blinking, I'm not sure how. I just don't want to lose sight of him lest I'm dreaming.

Tyson: "Look what the devil dragged in, the arrogant bastard Styles Sishi. So, they don't call you the psycho for nothing."

He tries to sound confident, I have seen his fear and it's taunting him.

Styles: "And don't you ever fucking forget that, now let her go you piece of shit."

He retorts with calmness, takes a few steps towards us.

Tyson: "You fucking killed my brother, I will avenge his death."

He presses the gun on my head...

Styles is too calm for my liking...

Styles: "Tyson, Tyson, you dumb ass shit. Next time you do this, don't make it easy for me to find you. I got bored really, I hardly lifted a finger."

Really Styles? Next time?

What if they have a shootout and Styles happens to be the one to kill me? Or even worse Tyson kills him.

Tyson: "FUCK YOU Sishi."

He barks so loud my ears hurt, Styles sniggers.

Styles: "Kitten, come to me."

He stretches out his hand towards me, I badly want to run to him. But Styles is crazy, Tyson is surely going to shoot while I run to him.

Me: "He'll kill me."

I shake my head.

Styles: "He won't I promise, come to me."

He insists, Tyson laughs as he tightens his arm on my neck.

Tyson: "Listen to your bitch Sishi, I will not hesitate to shoot."

He threatens, I see Styles' face harden and he clamps his teeth.

Styles: "Fuck this shit."

There's a loud bang...

I'm on the floor in a split second. Tyson is lying next to me with a bullet hole on his thigh, groaning in pain.

Tyson: "Fuck you Styles."

He grunts.

Styles: "You fucked up Tyson, you stepped in my turf and took what belongs to me. You of all people should know all hell breaks loose when the psycho unravels."

The psycho? What is going on?

Bang!!!

He shoots him on his manhood, all I can do is watch the man I thought I knew shoot another man without hesitating. His hands didn't even shake.

I did say he looked different...

"Styles, let's go, the police are on the way."

Randall rushes in with this warning, he stops in the door way and looks away after seeing me drenched in shame. I get up as Styles strides to my direction, probably to help me up. He glances at me, scowling before he turns to Tyson.

Styles: "Say hi to the devil for me."

He shoots him in the head and that's the end of Tyson.

Styles covers me with a coat, he wraps his arms around me.

"It's okay, I'm here now."

I cry in his arms while he assures me that I'm safe and he will not leave me. My body trembles with fear, I can't control it. He tightens the hold and slowly but surely I feel my body ease.

Randall: "Styles let's go."

Me: "What have you done Styles? You killed him."

I say as it dawns on me while pushing him away.

Styles: "He was never going to stop chasing you until you were dead."

His statement angers me more but, my anger is nothing compared to his. It's the anger he had from the moment he walked through the door.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

176\*

MBUSO\*

Lelo had to be attached back to machines, just when we were making progress. I'm impatiently waiting for her to wake up. Petunia and Mhambi are here. Boy, am I glad they didn't bring Jonas with them, the old man is avoiding me. I can't recall the last time I saw him, it's good that we stay away from each other for now. Lelo does not need any stress.

Petunia: "When can she come home?"

Petunia is sitting on a chair while holding a sleeping Lelo's hand and Mhambi has packed himself on a corner looking more worried than his wife.

Me: "She's still at risk ma, we have to keep her here until she's out of danger."

I explain.

A deep sigh discharges from Mhambi, I feel sorry for him. I am yet to see that expression from Lelo's father who claims to be a changed man. Time will tell, I guess.

Mhambi: "Why do my children have to suffer so much? They are only kids, they don't deserve to go through any of this at all.

His head is slightly hanging to the side with a disconsolate expression on his face.

Me: "Lelo will be fine baba, she is a strong woman. Don't worry so much about her."

I wouldn't want the old man to have a heart attack.

Petunia: "Yebo baba, lalala mfana. He's the doctor and he knows best." (Listen to the boy.)

I love the vote of confidence.

Mhambi: "We mfana." (Boy.)

He acquiesces with a stern voice.

Me: "Yebo baba." (Yes sir.)

Mhambi: "I want you to take care of my child and her baby, I went against my brother because I know that I can trust you. I have seen the love you have for her and I know that no one will love her like you do."

God's honest truth.

Me: "I promise baba, I will take care of Lelo. I'll protect her and our child."

Petunia: "We need to inform Ntombi and Moses about this."

I don't think that's a good idea but, if they feel that it's right.

Mhambi: "I'll call them."

He offers and saunters out with a phone in his hand.

Me: "Thank you ma for being here, Lelo will be glad to see you when she wakes up."

Petunia: "Is it possible to stay overnight? I don't want to leave her side."

Me: "Yes ma."

Petunia is a peaceful woman unlike Ntombi, if it were up to me, I would keep Ntombi and Moses away.

SETHU\*

I push Styles' hand as he touches me, there's a dead man in this room and Styles is impassive. I am stumped by his demeanor.

Me: "Don't."

He clenches his teeth as he stabs me with a piercing gaze.

Styles: "Sethu, we can argue at home, this is not the place."

He grabs my arm, I flinch in pain.

Me: "He said you killed his brother."

He goes quiet for a while, intensely gawking into my eyes, I fail to read what is going on in that mystery mind of his.

Randall: "Styles come on, they're almost here."

Randall keeps pacing up and down and peering out the window. The police sirens are heard a distance away.

Me: "We should wait for the police, I'll tell them everything. This man kidnapped me and..."

Styles clicks his tongue and scoops me up, I lose all strength to protest.

This is the safest I have felt in hours though, my arms across my bust and my head rested on his chest, I choose to trust him.

We use the back entrance to exit the premises, Randall walks behind us while checking the coast as Styles furiously marches us to the car. It's the two of us in the car, Randall jumped into a different vehicle. My mind is in a hustle and bustle, I have to contend with it as it pushes me back to that horrific involvement. I lean back on the chair and abruptly everything comes back in

a flash the moment I shut my eyes, I flinch and quickly open them to find Styles speeding. He keeps stealing glances at me.

Styles: "You're safe Kitten."

I know that I am.

My emotions again, I don't want to break down.

Styles receives a phone call, he answers without saying a word. It seems like the person on the other side is the one doing all the talking.

Styles: "Yes burn his body."

My gaze is glued to him, there is no remorse on his face, only anger. I don't want him to be this person.

What if his sins come back to haunt him one day?

"They won't hurt you again Sethu, no one will ever hurt you as long as I live. I don't care who they are."

I believe him, he would do anything to keep me safe and it scares me.

AYIZE\*

Amara has not woken up yet, I keep seeing Kenneth's dark face peeking through the door. I wish he would stop, I'm uncomfortable for Amara. Maybe I should make it known to her about his intentions, I feel that only she will put him in his place.

"Randall."

She's awake.

I stand up as I wait on her to open her eyes, she's greeted by my smile.

Me: "Hey sweetie."

She seems to be drowsy and heavily sedated.

Amara: "My baby."

Me: "The baby is okay, Randy baby too."

I put her mind at ease.

Amara: "Call him, please."

Her eyes sluggishly close, she falls back to sleep.

I have an incoming call from Neo, my patience was weighing low.

Me: "Tell me everyone is okay Neo, tell me Kenneth's men are there."

I salute with a request.

Neo: "We're fine, Miss S is with Stylos. Uze and I are driving to the hospital."

He sounds like someone who's in pain.

Me: "Okay, let me know when you get here."

Neo: "I will. Is Kenny boy still there?"

Me: "He's like a lost puppy."

He sniggers at my answer.

Neo: "Uze better not find him there, he's fuming Zee. I think he's still going to kill me."

Me: "Why do you say that?"

Neo though.

Neo: "Because he's driving full speed and looks like he's ready to kill someone, I'm his target."

Sigh!!!

We have only taken one step into the relationship and I'm having heart palpitations. I will need all the strength I could gather throughout this relationship.

"Put her on speaker."

Randy's voice speaks on the receiving end.

Neo: "I'll put you on speaker baba."

Me: "Okay."

It takes less than a minute.

Randall: "How is Amara?"

Hello to you too Randy baby.

Hao!!!

Me: "She's sleeping, the baby is fine. The doctor said the bleeding is common during an early pregnancy."

He sighs in relief.

Randall: "We're almost there, thank you Ayize."

Me: "You don't have to thank me, I'm glad to be on you, I mean, I'm glad to service you."

What on earth am I saying?

Me: "What I'm saying doesn't make sense right?"

He snickers.

Neo: "Huh ah man Zee, huh ah. O reng nou?" (What are you saying now?)

Me: "Okay I'll shut up now."

I need to keep myself intact.

Neo: "What's wrong with you?"

We are past that.

Me: "Just get here."

I'm tired and I need to see my sister.

Randall: "Keep an eye out Zee, no one should enter that hospital room."

Me: "Yeah I will."

The doctor walks in, it's a different one. He's wearing a surgical mask and latex gloves. I knew doctors were rude but, not to greet is taking it too far.

Me: "I have to go, doc is here."

The doctor checks the drip and pulls out a syringe. I thought the other doctor gave her a sedative.

Me: "Hey. Do you have to do that again?"

I ask the doctor, he nods without looking at me.

Rude.

Randall: "What's going on?"

Me: "The doctor is giving Amara another drug, maybe I'm wrong but, the other doc did that already."

I give my reply.

Randall: "Shit, get him out of there."

What?

Me: "I don't understand."

I hear a screeching car sound over the phone.

Randall: "He's there to kill her Ayize, do something. Don't make it obvious that you've caught him. He might hurt you, get him out of there."

I leer up at the doctor who is tapping the syringe with the tip of his finger.



Me: "Okay."

I whisper.

How do I do this? I browse my eyes around the room to look for something I can use to hit him with, just in case he is what Randall said he is.

Me: "Doctor what's that for?"

He slopes his head back to me, I can hardly see his face. He's ignoring me.

Me: "Hey stop, what are you doing?"

I glide close to him, I'm afraid to get any closer. He's big and tall, one slap from this bastard will send me flying across the room. If I scream Amara will wake up, she'll be startled and I doubt her pregnancy will survive another shock. If I calmly step out to call Kenneth, it will be too late by the time I get to the door.

SETHU\*

The rest of the drive is silent, till we get to Styles' house. I exit the car as he pulls up.

Styles: "Sethu wait, I'll help you."

Too late, I'm out and headed to the front door. Walking becomes a struggle, I'm still in so much pain, Styles dashes to me, puts his arm around my waist and leads me to the house. Unquestionably, there is no place like home. It might be his house but, I feel safe here.

I sit on the couch, grab a throw and wrap it around me. We have an awkward silence before Styles squats in front of me, his hands are on my thighs.

Styles: "I'm sorry."

He whispers underneath his breath, his eyes cast down.

I seize his chin, lift his head to face me.

I need the truth and his eyes would never lie to me.

Me: "Did you kill Tyson's brother?"

He casts his eyes down again.

"Look at me Styles."

My voice quavers at this request, he raises his eyes.

"Did you kill him?"

He nods, there is no remorse in his eyes whatsoever.

I am trapped in a night mare.

This cannot be happening to me... How did I end up with a murderer?

Me: "When?"

I almost don't recognize my own voice.

Styles: "It was before I met you and I would gladly do it again."

Did he just...?

Sigh!

Me: "I can't believe you are taking this lightly, you killed people Styles. Ungum'bulali." (You're a murderer.)

He gets up, crosses his arms on his chest and looks at me like I'm losing my mind.

I'm falling apart, really.

Styles: "Like I said, I will do it again."

Why is he not freaking out like I am?

Why does all of this seem normal to him?

He should be losing his mind, no normal human being takes a life and be okay.

Me: "What?"

I think I'm more worried than upset.

Styles: "How old are you Sethu?"

He sits on the arm of the couch right opposite me, his demeanour has me feeling intimidated and the look in his eyes compels me to drop my gaze.

Styles: "This is the real world, after what happened with your parents, you should be woke by now. Life is a game and if you don't know how to play it, you will be taken down. Kill or be killed, simple as that."

This guy is not serious.

Who is he really?

Styles: "I will always protect you Sethu, with my life if I have to."

Me: "Take me home now."

I stand up but fall back on the couch, he rushes to me.

Styles: "Take it easy."

He shouts like I did this to myself, he touches my cheek and I wince in pain, his face hardens

followed by a tongue click.

Styles: "Those bastards."

He clicks his tongue again while gently caressing my cheeks. I don't know how badly I'm injured but, I know I have received multiple punches and slaps.

Me: "I want to go home Siyabonga."

Do I really know what I want?

The look I dread takes over his face, this seems to be a norm, where I hurt him because I feel that he's hurting me...

He gets up leaving me alone in the sitting room.

I sit here not knowing what to do, honestly I don't want to go back home.

Styles: "I ran you a bath, you need to get cleaned up."

I didn't see him coming.

I have nothing but his jacket on and this soft throw around me.

Me: "What time is it?"

Styles: "It's quiet late. You should bath and get some rest."

Sleep?

Me: "I won't be able to sleep, each time I close my eyes, I see him on..."

My voice breaks out.

Me: "I see everything they were doing to me."

He sits beside me with his hands on my upper arms while looking into my eyes. Styles: "Did he do anything to you before I got there?"

I know what he's asking. The word rape seems to be stinging every inch of my soul. I have gone through it before and was close to it today.

Styles: "Sethu?"

He tries to hide his panic, I feel his hands clasp on my biceps.

Me: "They wanted to... they harassed me. Their dirty hands were all over me, I wanted to die Styles.... Why did you take long to find me?"

I wail, he completely surrounds me with his arms and strokes my back.

Styles: "I'm sorry, I'm sorry that he took you and I wasn't there to protect you. I'm sorry for everything they did to you."

I can sense a high level of anger in his voice and it scares me a little. I don't want him to be sorry,

I want him to erase these horrific memories. I want him to turn back time and make everything okay.

I become so angry at him that I push him off, he almost falls but is able to retain balance.

Me: "You failed me Styles, this is all on you. If you didn't kill Tyson's brother, he wouldn't have taken me. I wouldn't have gone through all of that trauma."

I scream at him, it seems like he doesn't care about my blares because he pulls me into his arms, clasping me. I don't protest, the pain lessens while in his arms.

Styles: "I'm sorry, I'm sorry Kitten."

I think that's all he can say, he doesn't know how else to console me.

I make it to the bathroom. I need to scrub my body, those men's dirty hands left prints on me. I can still feel every sick touch. I'm looking at myself in the bathroom mirror, Styles is standing by the door.

My body is bruised, it feels as bad as it looks. Pain has camped in me, physically and emotionally. However, I don't want to cry in front of Styles, I don't want to be weak anymore.

Me: "It's not as bad as it looks."

I lie, it is.

Styles: "I should take you to the hospital."

He has that look, like he feels sorry for me and I hate it.

Me: "I'm fine Styles."

I snap and push the door closed, I can't stand the look of pity in his eyes.

Sitting in this bath tub naked, I get flash backs after flash backs. I wish I was as strong as those men who attacked me.

Maybe I would have fought for myself, I would have protected myself.

I can still feel their hands all over me, I find myself scrubbing my body hoping the dirt would come off but, it's crawling under my skin. Moaning and growling, I scrub harder.

"Sethu."

His voice reaches me before he rushes in and stops at the sight of my craziness.

Styles: "What are you doing? You're going to hurt yourself."

Me: "It won't come off Styles, it won't come off."

This is a desperate need to be clean, I have to get rid of the dirt.

He snatches the bath scrub from me.

Styles: "Stop."



There is so much peace in his eyes but, not enough to heal me.

Me: "I feel so dirty, I still feel their dirty hands on me... Please... make it stop, I beg you to make it stop."

Will my cry for help be heard this time around? I want to stop crying, I want to stop hurting and I want to forget. Styles gets into the bath tub, kneels on his knees as he enfolds me around him.

Styles: "I'm here kitten, you will be okay. Stop crying please, I don't like to see you like this. I will make it all okay, I promise."

Can I dwell on this promise and hope for the best?

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

177\*

### NKOMO\*

I'm jolted out of an uncomfortable sleep with a splash of cold water over me, the first thing I do is scan my surroundings. I'm still in the shed tied up to a chair, my body is weak. I haven't had anything to eat or drink, I don't know what time it is but, it's dark out.

Ruth is slanting on her chair, her head hanging to the side. She's still alive, I can tell by the slight heaving of her chest.

There is a man glaring at me, he's sitting on a chair with the two men who attacked us standing on either side of him.

Me: "Who are you?"

I don't like the look in his eyes.

"Nkomo Mkhize huh?"

He calls my name as if he knows me or has heard of me.

Me: "Who are you?"

I repeat my question.

"Who I am is of no importance to you. I will make great use of you, my boy. You and this lady right here."

He doesn't reveal much.

Me: "Please let her go, I'll do anything."

A sly grin poses on his face.

"I don't do negotiations, besides I have no interest in working with you."

Me: "Tell me what you want from us. Why are we here?"

"All in due time boy, all in due time."

I'm hitting my head against a wall here and I'm getting a headache, he will not tell me anything. The look in his eyes is sinister, it tells me what his mind is filled with.

### AYIZE\*

I push the doctor as he aims the syringe on the drip, he staggers back and bumps into a tray with surgical equipment. The clanging metals wake Amara up as they scatter on the floor.

Amara: "Ayize."

She calls with a tired voice.

I pick up one of the scissors from the floor and point it at this man as he charges at me, he stops. I am ready to stab this bastard.

Me: "Come closer and I will show you what I'm made of."

He looks at me then runs his eyes to Amara, she's sitting up in fright and glaring at this man as if trying to recognize him.

Amara: "Raven?"

She shouts.

Me: Uyayazi lenja? (You know this dog?)

I ask with my weapon still pointed at him, he's fidgety and panicky.

Where is Kenneth?

He should have walked in here due to the noise.

Amara: "This is Raven, Randall's brother."

She confirms, this is when this Raven fool pulls the surgical mask off, he's glowering at us ready to attack.

His forceful push drops me flat on the floor.

Amara: "Ayize."

She screeches and attempts to get out of bed.

Me: "I'm fine, stay put."

She doesn't listen to me, Raven is headed to the door.

Amara: "Raven stop."

Amara yells with authority, he stops on his tracks and spins to eye at us.

Amara: "This is your chance to speak out, I know that you will never stop chasing after me. Why do you hate me so much?"

Raven: "You have to die Amara, it's the only way my father will be proud of me and I'll get my brother back."

Family affairs and I thought my family was the only one with drama.

Who needs a daily soapy when you have VIP tickets to live shows?

Me: "Mgodoyi, you want to kill an innocent woman just to make your father proud? What kind of a sick joke is this?" (Dog.)

Amara helps me up from the floor, here we are, standing before this tall man who looks ready to attack. He is so determined to kill Amara.

Amara: "Segun is dead. Randall is the only one you have left. Are you seriously going to chase a ghost?"

The bravery of this girl, firstly Raven is big enough to tackle us both.

Raven: "My father might be gone but, he'd still be proud of me wherever he is. His dream was to have his son home and once you're out of the picture, Randall will follow me back to Ghana and take up his position as King."

Oh god, this is better than telenovelas.

Amara: "I am carrying his heir, Randall's seed is in me Raven. Your nephew or niece. Shouldn't that count for something?"

She announces her pregnancy to the uncle.

Raven: "All the more reasons why you have to die, an illegitimate child of a peasant can never be welcomed into our family."

Someone pass me a note pad, I have a book to write.

Amara: "How dare you call my child illegitimate?"

Me: "This man can never be Randall's brother, I refuse."

Speaking of Randy, they should be here by now.

Amara: "It won't end well for you Raven, repent now or you won't like the consequences."

Yes girl, tell him.

Raven is filled with so much wrath, it's so visible that you can almost touch it.

Raven: "Where do you get the courage to threaten me?"

He jumps at Amara, she grabs the scissors from me. The girl is ready to stab her brother-in-law, cowardly Raven steps back.

Did I say I want to write a book? Scratch that.

Where are the directors at?

Amara: "Come any closer and I will have my hands stained with your blood."

He finds her funny.

Raven: "Please, little gullible Amara is not capable of murder."



Amara: "Don't dare me Raven, I will do anything to protect my baby."

She grunts with a grave expression pasted on her face.

Raven: "I will get you, you will never get your happy ending."

Me: "Hamba nja." (Go, you dog.)

He turns to rush out the door, I turn to Amara as she breathes a sigh of relief. Her hands are trembling.

It's not long till Raven leaves when someone tumbles into the room, we scream and cling on each other as we look at this man who's on the floor groaning in pain. It's Raven, he was kicked in here.

We raise our eyes to the door to see Randall trek in, he's breathing fire like a dragon. Amara gasps in shock as her eyes behold the man she has been longing to see.

Randall catches a glimpse of her and he's back to charging after his brother, the excitement I feel right at this moment is amazing. To see this man in action, I mean that scene when he shot Moses was something but, this is more entertaining. Brother against brother.

Raven: "Randy."

Raven's voice warbles as he appears to be dazed by his brother's actions. He doesn't bother to get up from the floor but, scoots away in fear.

Randall: "You're trying to kill Amara? How dare you, how dare you Uzoma?"

He roars that it startles us, I grab hold of Amara's hand as fear of this angry man terrifies me. Amara seems to be used to it.

Randall grabs Raven by the collar and brings him up, he pushes him against the wall with so much force.

Something must've broken there.

Randall: "What are you doing here Uzoma?"

He's growling like an angry animal while sneering at him.

Me: "I'll tell you why he came here Randy baby, this fine ass brother of yours disguised himself as a doctor. He wanted to kill me hemma, he went as far as confessing everything to us." (My queen.)

Raven: "She's lying Uze, you can't believe her over me. I'm your brother."

Randall smashes his elbow on Raven's chest, he creaks and struggles to catch his breath.

Randall: "You are nothing to me Uzoma, I have no brother. My brother died the day he decided to conspire against me."

Raven: "Is this the reason you hurt me Uze? You would rather deem me dead for the sake of this

woman?"

I don't know where he gets the strength to point at Amara after that painful blow he just received.

Raven: "She came between you and your father."

Audaciously, he continues to protest.

Amara: "Clearly you are delusional Raven. Why would..."

Raven: "Oh shut up. What makes..."

His remark is cut short by another blow on his chest.

Randall: "Don't fuck with me Raven, I will kill you right now."

Randall's threat puts Raven in an angry state, he pushes a resolute Randall from him but, his effort mocks him.

Raven: "For what Uze?"

He barks.

Raven: "All I want is for you to respect our customs. You turned your back on your people because of a woman, an ordinary girl Uze. There are so many beautiful maidens in Ghana, you could've chosen one there if you didn't want Ruth. Why would you embarrass our father and stoop so low as to choosing this wretched girl? I want to see her blood scattered all over the streets, I want people to stamp on her lifeless body."

If evil were to live in a person then Raven is the temple.

Randall: "UZOMA!!!"

His bark is louder and firmer, there is so much hatred between these brothers. One of them will end up dead, even a blind person could tell. My predictions are proven right as Randall is straddling Raven who is on the floor and throwing punches on his face. Every blow forces blood out of Raven's mouth.

Randall: "He's not your father you bastard, he's not your father."

Randall booms, Raven is shocked for a second but, continues to fight.

Amara: "Randall not here."

Not here?

Is she saying she's okay with him fighting his brother?

I'm loving this girl more and more.

"Hey stop."

A female doctor gaits in with a demand, there's a security guard with her. Randall is distracted

by the guard who is trying to pull him up and Raven straddles Randall, he returns the punches a few times while Randall is fighting to get him off. Amara grabs the tray that's on the floor and smashes Raven on the head with it. It was worth a try although Raven did not feel it.

"Call the police now."

The doctor commands the guard.

Amara: "No wait please, we don't mean any trouble."

It doesn't look like it.

The doctor screams and stumbles back as Randall pushes himself up with Raven still straddling him. His knees are bent and his body hunched showing the weight of his brother on him. He bangs him against the bed, Raven falls on it.

Randall punches him in the gut, the blow is so deep and hard that Raven struggles to gasp for air for a while, he coughs as he comes to catch his breath. He angles his head to the side and spits out blood.

Me: "Do you have your phone with you?"

I whisper to Amara, we're packed at a corner with this serious doctor who's trying to pave her way out. These men are everywhere, throwing punches at each other.

Amara: "Why?"

Me: "I want to take a video, it's not every day you see Randy baby in action."

She swipes her head side to side.

I guess I'll have to store this in my memory.

Dammit, I blinked...

I don't know what happened but, Randall is pushed off by Raven and he's out of the door in a flash with Randall scuttling after him.

Me: "Should we follow them?"

I've got my running shoes on.

Amara: "No, we won't catch up with them."

Great!

My feet are itching, I need to run after them.

"I want you to call the police right now."

The doctor gives the security an order, shame the poor man was not able to restraint the fight.

Doctor gives us ugly looks and trudges out trailed by the man.

Me: "Should I be worried babe?"

Amara: "Why?"

Me: "Your man is chasing after his brother, he's ready to kill him and you're here chilled like a Saturday morning."

Amara: "I know he's got it."

We need a doctor, there's a brain that needs checking.

Me: "Kanjalo nje?" (Just like that?)

Is supporting your man like this?

Amara: "I have gone through so much with that man Ayize, trust me life with Randall is lived on the edge. I have learnt to trust him, he knows what he's doing."

She explains with so much composure.

Me: "What if he kills his brother?"

She shrugs.

Amara: "Like I said, he knows what he's doing. Raven can't do anything to Randall."

I'm still trying to understand her calmness.

Me: "Does Randy baby have another brother who is not crazy?"

She frowns as my question has her confused.

Me: "I'm asking for a friend."

A smile and a head shake is her response.

Amara: "Can you ever be serious?"

Me: "Maybe I should go with my first plan."

Amara: "Which is?"

Me: "Move to Ghana."

She laughs.

Amara: "Let Neo hear you say that."

Me: "Konje, my passport led me to Lesotho."

She is thrown into a canal of laughter.

Amara: "Look at this face, I'm speechless."

She points at the smile on her face.

Amara: "I doubt Neo will feel the same."

Me: "He'll be strong."

Kenneth ambles in as if nothing happened, there is no expression on his face. His eyes are fixed on Amara.

The muddle in the room should raise questions, right?

Me: "Look at this one."

She twists her head to glance at him.

Kenneth: "Amara?"

He continues to saunter in.

Me: "Where have you been?"

He doesn't understand my question.

Me: "There was a man here trying to kill Amara, I thought you'd break down the door like a hero but, dololo." (Nothing.)

He puckers his brows as he stares at me like I'm speaking gibberish.

Kenneth: "Someone tried to kill you? Are you okay?"

He strides closer to her.

Me: "That's enough Kenny boy, don't go any further. You're too late, someone beat you to it. Randall is here."

His eyes harden as he glares at me.

Kenneth: "What is your problem?"

He won't like my answer.

Me: "You are my problem Kenny."

I'm standing head to head with this tall man and he's giving me a menacing look.

Amara: "Ayize? What's going on?"

It's about time I bring her to the light.

Me: "Should I tell her Kenny or will you do it?"

He grimaces as he brings his head up to ogle at Amara.

Kenneth: "Nothing."

He lies through his teeth.

Me: "There is a problem Amara, Kenny has no respect for Randy."

I move to stand next to her.



How can Amara not see how this man looks at her?

Amara: "What did he do?"

She might as well be blind.

Kenneth: "Don't listen to her Amara, she doesn't know what she's talking about."

If he wasn't as scary as he looks, I would've kicked him on his groin...

Nonsense...

Me: "You see, that right there."

I point at him, he raises his brows, mystified.

Amara: "You're confusing me."

You've been confused from day one.

Me: "Don't tell me that you haven't taken notice of the way he says your name."

She looks at me waiting for me to continue.

Me: "Amara this man has feelings for you."

There I said it...

Kenneth locks his jaw, he'll just have to forgive me.

Amara: "Kenneth?"

He drops his gaze and this proves it.

Me: "Haven't you seen how he looks at you Amara? He's trying to throw himself on you, I don't get how you don't notice the only fly in the room."

It's up to her if she will let him continue to disrespect her man.

Amara: "Is it true Kenneth?"

Silence...

We are waiting Kenneth.

Kenneth: "Excuse me, there's somewhere I have to be."

He strides out of the door, leaving us in suspense. Was I wrong by exposing him like that?

Me: "Okay, that was something."

She drops her gaze, I spot a glint of embarrassment.

Me: "Amara?"

Amara: "I didn't know, I swear. I thought he was being kind, you know like how Neo is always



flirty.”

About that... I need to have a talk with him.

Me: “Of course, I mean the guy is sly.”

Amara: “Do you think Randall noticed?”

I don’t think, I know.

Me: “Everyone did.”

She smashes her hand on her forehead.

Amara: “Oh God, I must look like a fool. Randall asked me on my birthday to stay away from him, I didn’t think that...”

Me: “Kenneth thinks he has a chance with you.”

She buries her face in her hands and nods negatively.

Amara: “No, Ayize. I didn’t mean to lead him on, okay I must have said something or did something to make him think that...”

Me: “No, this is not on you.”

Her hand flails to her mouth and she picks a finger to bite on, she’s nervous.

Me: “Don’t think like that Amara and it’s not a bad thing that someone besides our Randy finds you attractive. It means you’re a beautiful woman.”

I am worried about her sigh, she has to make things clear to Kenneth.

Amara: “Can we call Chioma and check on the girls?”

She says coyly as she eludes eye contact with me

Me: “The girls are probably asleep by now, it’s very late.”

Amara: “Yeah.”

What did I just do?

I should’ve approached her without Kenneth here, it would have made things less awkward.

KHETHU\*

I’m brought to the living room by the sound of loud music, Nobayeni is too old for this. She is lying face down on the floor, an empty bottle of liquor resides in her hand. I toddle in, to switch off the radio.

Nobayeni: "Hey, put that back on."

She sounds intoxicated.

Me: "Did you see the time? I'm trying to sleep."

Nobayeni: "This is my house, my house. If you don't like the way I do things, fuck off."

She throws her hand at me.

Me: "You're pathetic Nobayeni."

My insult has her sitting up, she stretches her legs forward and leans back on the couch before burping.

Nobayeni: "Excuse me."

She laughs.

Nobayeni: "I used to hate you Bridgette, I hated you so much. You reminded me of my father, from the moment you were born. I couldn't breast feed you because I would see his face each time. I couldn't hold you close in my arms, trust me I wanted to. I wanted to love you, you were so innocent but were caught up in the war between a father and the daughter he raped."

She laughs and it's a laugh of pain.

Nobayeni: "I decided to name you Bridgette when I was six months pregnant, it was my grandmother's name. That woman was my guardian angel and I wanted you to be that as well. I didn't think that the moment I saw your face, I would be reminded of that grisly night. My heart broke Bridgette because I knew that I will never come to love you, not when you had my father's crime pasted on your innocent face. He never apologised for what he did to me, he saw nothing wrong with it. I was forced to live in the same house with the man who raped me, my own father. He would force me to sit and eat on the same table with him as if he never wronged me. I couldn't stomach the food, just seeing him sitting there and eating as if life was all rosy."

Another scornful laugh emits from her, I bring myself to sit on the floor opposite her.

Nobayeni: "God probably has a room full of my rejected prayers asking him to let my father choke on his food and die, I prayed for his death more than I prayed for anything."

I thought her stone cold eyes would not shed a tear but here they are, and they are real.

Nobayeni: "Have I ever told you how close we were? He was everything to me, the best father I could ask for. I would boast about him to anyone who would listen. It's crazy how you really never know someone, that man was my hero. Little did I know that, he was the devil incarnate? That son of a bitch really comes in different forms, even as a father to innocent children. How God allows such things to happen, I will never know."

I know, we can't be subjected to so much pain.

Nobayeni: "Dladla came and made me see the world in a different light. He showed me that, not all men are out there to get me. I mean you can imagine what it does to a little girl when her



father, the only man who is meant to protect her assaults her. I died that day along with my innocence and him as well, I buried him in my heart.”

Me: “Why didn’t you report him?”

She laughs at my query.

Nobayeni: “Report judge Mdluli? He had the law wrapped around his little finger, one bark from him and everyone would run and hide. Moreover, I was a child, I was afraid. The world was a big place for me and my father put me in this little bird cage, I had no voice or power to stand.”

This is the first time that she opens up to me, we are never civil with each other. I’m surprised that we haven’t plucked each other’s eyes out yet.

Nobayeni: “Don’t see me clinging on to your father as if I will die without a man. I know I will live, I will pick myself up and live again but, I owe that man my life. He saved me so many times, I have a whole stack of suicide notes written to my family. After the rape happened, every day was unbearable because it felt like a repetition of that day, especially when I would hear my father’s voice. His shadow alone was enough to make me wet myself.”

She wipes her tears with one swipe as she lifts her head up like a strong woman.

Me: “He belonged in prison Nobayeni.”

She moves to sit close to me, normally I would be uncomfortable.

Nobayeni: “He did, but I was prisoned instead.”

Me: “What about gogo? Why didn’t you tell her?” (Grandmother.)

Nobayeni: “It wasn’t easy Bridgette, not everyone is strong enough to talk about their rape experience.”

She touches my cheek and smiles slightly, I don’t know this feeling. My mother’s touch is unfamiliar to me, this is the warm touch I have been longing for.

Nobayeni: “I can touch you now without seeing him and oh Bridgette, my heart is learning to love you my baby. I took my rage and anger out on you and I’m sorry, I understand why you hate me so much.”

She drops her hand to my chest.

Nobayeni: “I birthed the hate that’s in your heart and I want you to learn to love me. I want to be a mother to you Bridgette, you’re my baby and I want to protect you from the world. Would you let me do that? Let me love you, please. I know that it’s too late, you’re going to be a mother now and I want to be there for you and my grandchild.”

I have no answer for her, my heart is still cold towards her.

Me: “One step at a time.”

I can’t say more, I don’t know if I will ever warm up to her. Time will tell.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

178\*

RANDALL\*

As I chase Raven down the parking lot, I'm bugged by a loud sound of a gunshot. It sends him crushing on the ground and I directly know that he's been shot. I turn to my left, to see Styles. He has this unflinching demeanour, he smirks as our eyes meet.

Shouldn't he be at home with Sethu?

Me: "Aren't you tired of shooting people?"

He sneers, moseying up to me.

Styles: "You know once I start, I can't stop. Now I feel like going after Mkhize."

He laughs at his own dry joke.

Me: "Before you do that, lend me that gun."

He passes it to me, I am ready to kill that bastard I once called a brother. A big white van hurtles towards us, walling Raven from our sight.

Me: "Fuck."

I rumble as I run to it, Styles is scampering behind me. The van drives off in speed, Raven is gone.

Me: "Shit, shit."

I throw an air punch, cussing out loud.

Styles: "What was that?"

Why did he shoot Raven again?

Me: "I thought you knew."

Styles: "Nope, I saw you chasing him and you were losing the race so, I shot him."

His explanation must make sense to him.

Me: "Since when do you miss Styles? I would've have hit him on the head."

Styles snuffles.

Styles: "I didn't know we wanted him dead, you should've told me."

Sarcasm.

Me: "I'm going to kill him."

I should've killed him.

Styles: "What happened?"

Me: "He came here to kill Amara."

Styles: "Now I'm convinced that your brother is crazy."

Me: "I'm convinced that Segun is not dead, Raven wouldn't just want to make him proud even in his death. He is not that stupid."

Styles snickers, he seems to think otherwise.

Styles: "Raven is the epitome of stupid."

I will not dispute that.

Me: "What are you doing here?"

I hand him back the weapon as we start to make our way back into the hospital.

Styles: "I brought Sethu in."

He starts.

Styles: "Can you imagine that I had to confess to killing Matteo. She wouldn't stop grilling me, I doubt Sethu will ever forget what happened today. She knew what I'm capable of but, today she saw me actually take a life."

Me: "She will get over it, you'll help her."

Styles: "That's if I have the strength to fight, this relationship is straining me."

He appears to be drained.

Me: "It's been a long day, from the break up to the kidnapping and the killings. Who wouldn't be drained?"

Styles: "Yeah you're right, maybe I am overwhelmed by today's events."

As we approach the lift, it opens and Kenneth meanders out.

Me: "Look what the cat dragged in."

We stop and wait for him to approach, I would rather walk.

Styles: "Be nice."

He chides me.

Me: "I have no reason to be."

Styles: "He brought Amara to the hospital."



Me: "Ayize has a car, she could've done that."

His sigh tells me that he has given up on me.

Kenneth: "You two are talking about me?"

He alludes as he gets to us.

Styles: "You got us."

Kenneth huffs.

Styles: "Are you going home?"

Kenneth: "Yes."

He steals glances at me, something must have happened.

Me: "What is it Mkhize?"

Kenneth: "With what?"

He grimaces at my question, either I'm seeing things or he is up to something.

Me: "What happened back there?"

Styles: "What are you talking about Randy?"

Me: "Mkhize struggles to look at me, something happened with Amara, didn't it?"

He clears his throat and I know that I'm right.

Kenneth: "Styles, I'll see you."

He bids me farewell with a condescending sneer and mooches away.

Styles: "Will the two of you ever be friends?"

Me: "Never."

He neighs softly as we continue on our way.

Me: "I need to find Raven."

Styles: "We'll find him Randy."

Raven thinks he's clever, I know that he has some plot hatched up somewhere. His obsession of making Segun proud is getting out of hand.

AYIZE\*

I'm tired, I want to go home and sleep, Neo made a mountain out of mole hill. I'm standing on



his bedside my hands pasted on my hips, he's not waking up so I jab his shoulder. He opens his eyes and a smile claims his mouth, the plan is not to return the smile but, I'm dismally failing here.

Neo: "I thought you would never come to see me."

I have chosen him and there is nothing I can do about it.

Me: "Was I supposed to rush to you?"

Neo: "I'm injured Zee."

I remember being specific about the type of man I wanted to fall in love with, I think the man upstairs gave me someone else's wish.

God, we need to talk.

Me: "Une drama Neo, yazi une drama, uyadina man." (You're dramatic and you're a nuisance.)

And he's smiling as if it's funny.

Neo: "ke entseng?" (What did I do?)

Me: "A leg injury, all of that stress and heartache for a leg injury?"

Even the bandage on it tells me that it's not serious.

Neo: "It's a gunshot wound."

To him it's a matter of life and death, I pull a chair closer to his bed and sit.

Me: "Baba, you shouldn't do that. I know that you were afraid and thought the worst but, you need to think first Neo. I wasn't okay, I thought I was going to have to bury someone again and Amara almost lost her baby."

There it is, the serious face I have been wanting to see.

Neo: "I'm sorry Zee, I panicked, I guess."

Me: "Yeah you panicked and ended up confessing your undying love. As you would say 'nahana?'" (Imagine.)

The smile is back and it has me smiling as well.

Neo: "I meant it though."

Me: "Sure you did."

I know he did, I'm not ready to fall that far. I have given and lost so much, I can't let myself fall hard, I don't want to crash.. However, I know that Neo is in my heart, he makes it dance that's how I know. As far as love is concerned, the road is long for me.

Me: "Are you in pain?"

He will say yes, even though he's not. He gives me a nod.



He's probably not.

Neo: "Don't you want to kiss it better."

He pouts his lips and...

Me: "If I were in a movie, yes I would want to kiss it better because my script tells me to."

He laughs, it's rare for Neo to laugh at what comes out of my mouth.

Yeah hey! The power of a near death experience.

Neo: "You, my baba need to learn how to be affectionate."

Me: "I am."

Neo: "You're not, you're reserved. Love is beautiful when it's clingy and needy and you can't get enough of each other."

Here comes the drama.

Neo: "You can be free around me Zee."

The doctor must have given him an anaesthetic, he's drivelling now.

Me: "Am I not free around you Neo?"

Neo: "You're not shy and not free as well."

What does he want from me?

Me: "I'm waiting for you to explain."

The smile...

Neo: "You should be able to jump on me when you see me approaching, a piggy ride or anything. Randomly sit on my lap because you feel like it, steal a kiss or lie on my chest while we're watching TV or something. I am yours Zee, you don't have to be afraid to do any of that. You have full access to me, I have given myself to you."

I hear what Neo is saying but, I'm far from that line. Somehow I feel that my race is still on.

Me: "Maybe I'm not that person."

Neo: "I think that you're afraid of attachment."

Nailed it.

Me: "It's late you know that? We'll talk about serious things in the morning, I'm really sleepy right now."

By all means, I am averting this topic.

"Am I allowed to come in?"

Styles is standing at the door asking us this stupid question, with a silly smile on his face.

Me: "Why not Mr. S?"

Styles: "The two of you together are an atomic bomb."

He strides in with this comment.

Me: "Are you here with Sethu Mr. S?"

Styles: "Yes."

He stands on the other side of the bed.

Me: "How is she?"

Styles: "She will live."

That's not an answer, I should go see her. I have an incoming call from Chioma.

Me: "That's odd. Shouldn't Chioma be sleeping? Why is she calling me?"

Styles: "It could be important."

Me: "Chichi."

I answer.

Chioma: "Mbali is unable to sleep, she says she's having night mares."

The drama queen decides that she will wake the whole world because of a bad dream.

Me: "A nightmare?"

This child thinks she's white.

Chioma: "Yes, she says when she closes her eyes she sees someone chasing her."

Chioma sounds tired and piqued, I would be too if someone woke me from my sleep because of a bad dream.

Me: "That's probably me trying to whoop her rude disrespectful ass."

Neo does not like my comment, he is side eyeing me.

Me: "Chioma go to bed and leave her, she will sleep when she decides to. You can't stay awake because of that child."

Chioma: "She's really afraid Ayize, her body is visibly shaking."

Is this what I will have to deal with?

Me: "I can't leave everything and come home. What will I do there anyway? I can't stop the nightmares."

Styles: "Tell her to give her warm milk, it will help her sleep."



Styles recommends, she needs a warm clap not warm milk.

Me: "Please give her warm milk it should help."

If it doesn't then...

I should turn off my phone, I can't deal with Mbali's drama at this time of the night.

Styles: "Is it Mbali or Ginger?"

Me: "Mbali, that child will give me grey hair."

Styles: "Children tend to act up, she will be okay."

Me: "It's not just acting up with her."

She enjoys making my life hell.

Me: "Today she hit Liya with a stone on the head, if it was a brick that child would be lying in a hospital bed."

Styles: "What?"

The shock in his voice.

Styles: "Please tell me she didn't bleed."

Now I'm mortified.

Me: "She did actually."

I answer ruefully.

Styles: "Shit, this is not good."

He scratches his head and starts to pop his knuckles.

Neo: "Mbali le yena eish. How are we going to fix this now?" (Complaint.)

I'm lost.

Me: "What's going on? Liya is okay, it wasn't a bad injury."

Neo: "Not to the Okolies, those people don't want to smell their blood. They are probably fuming wherever they are."

I'm still lost.

Styles: "Shit, I have to speak to Randall."

He declares and dailies out.

Me: "What's going on Neo?"

The gnawing look on his face is unmistakable.



Neo: "I don't know their story but, the Okolies ke baloi Zee. If you spill the blood of their own they take revenge." (The Okolies practise witchcraft.)

No way, I refuse to believe that. Neo has his own theories about everything.

Me: "Randy and witchcraft?"

Impossible...

Neo: "No, his ancestors. A curse befalls you until they feel that you have had enough or till you meet your death."

I am done for.

Me: "No Neo, Mbali is a child."

Neo: "They don't care and worse, the whole family pays for it."

I am going to kill Mbali.

Me: "How do we fix this?"

Neo: "I don't know Zee, that's why Stylos is going to speak to Uze. Hopefully they will find a way."

There has to be a way.

STYLES\*

Randall is outside Amara's room talking to a policeman, he shakes his hand and I see him slip something there. I'd be damned, my boy is learning, the policeman nods before striding off with a satisfied mien.

Me: "Careful, you're becoming like me."

He turns to me as he pulls out his phone.

Randall: "Someone called them, complaining about the fight."

Me: "Sorted?"

Randall: "Sorted. I want to take Amara home. Apparently Liya was injured and I want to see her."

Randall worries too much about that child.

Me: "Ayize told me, it was just a minor wound."

He's focus is on his phone.

Me: "Is it worth punishing the poor child though?"

His eyes rise as he gives me his full attentiveness.

Randall: "Who am I punishing?"

He shrugs and I know that he has forgotten about his forefathers.

Me: "You won't but, your ancestors will."

His eyes resist a little as the realisation that Mbali might be in danger hits him.

Randall: "Oh shit."

My thoughts as well.

Me: "There has to be something we can do."

Randall: "What? I have no clue Styles."

We settle down on a bench.

Me: "Your dynasties can be quiet cruel? Remember what happened to Mkhize's son?"

Randall: "I know but, this has to be different right. Maybe they won't act."

Me: "They are right at work as we speak."

Randall: "What do you mean?"

He enquires as he creases a brow.

Me: "Chioma called and said Mbali can't sleep. She's having nightmares."

Randall: "Dammit."

He curses, which is no use because the child is in danger.

Me: "She's only a child Randy, they have to overlook this."

Randall: "I know Styles. What can I do? I have no knowledge of this. I don't know how to approach grandfather, that old man's silence will make you hate him."

Randall is right, the only way he was able to communicate with him was when he fell ill.

Me: "We have to do something, there has to be a way to speak to him?"

He nods as he stares into space, providing no answer for me.

Me: "What do you do in Ghana when you want to connect with your ancestors?"

Randall: "What do you mean?"

Of course he'd be insensible to my question.

Me: "You know, like burn incense or something."

Randall: "I wouldn't know, grandfather didn't practise these things when we were growing up. This is all new to me."

Me: "Do you think the worst will happen to Mbali? She's only a kid."

Randall: "I hope not Styles. Her heart is pure, I'm sure it was an accident so, she has to be pardoned."

He gives hope with his remark.

Me: "Nothing should happen to that child Randy, Sethu and Ayize have been through enough. They can't lose her as well."

I can't stress this enough.

Randall: "I'll call mother first thing in the morning, she might know something."

Me: "Hopefully, Sethu and Ayize are Mbali's cousins. So I think they are safe from the curse for now, right?"

He's up on his feet and ready to head to Amara's room.

Randall: "I think so, I don't know about Beauty though."

She can go to hell.

Randall: "I'll keep you updated."

We bid our goodbyes as we tread our separate ways.

MKHIZE\*

That stupid boy Raven proved to be useless, he gave us nothing. I don't know how many times I have lost my cool trying to locate my son. Where could he be? It's almost morning, Sika has been helping me with trying to find clues as to who would've taken my son. This lounge has turned into a little office.

Me: "I want my son found, I don't want to hear any excuses. Do your job you piece of shit."

These men are useless, I'm tired of yelling over the phone.

Me: "Why do we hire these people Sika if they don't know their work?"

Sika: "It's not going to be easy to find him."

I hate the negative reply that he just gave.

Me: "I have a bad feeling about this, my son is not safe. I can't lose him to death Sika, he is so young. Nkomo has so much to live for."

I have failed him before and I have to make up for it.

Sika: "I also have tried baba, there's no word on the streets. It's as if he disappeared."

Me: "I don't know anymore, Sika. I have one option now."

Sika: "What is it?"

Me: "Sishi."

Desperation has me stepping into the lion's den.

Sika: "Sishi wants your head."

He reminds me of what I'm aware of.

Me: "Well, I would have to sacrifice my head then."

Sika: "He hates you baba, I doubt that he'll help you with this."

Me: "He doesn't hate Nkomo. They have been friends for as long as I can remember and that boy honours his friends."

I riposte, I don't trust Sishi but, I trust his loyalty towards my son.

Me: "I think you should go to bed, tomorrow is going to be a long day."

I suggest to Sika, he is lying back on the couch with his hand covering his face.

Sika: "No baba."

He reveals his pooped eyes.

Sika: "I can't sleep, you should go to bed and I'll finish up here."

Me: "I can't sleep either Sika, I need to find my son."

Hastily, he sits up taking up a disquieting expression.

Sika: "Did you hear that?"

His eyes are bustling all over the living room.

Me: "What?"

Sika: "Can't you hear that noise baba?"

He stands.

Sika: "It's coming from that room."

He points at a guest bedroom that's close to the corridor, I draw out my gun.

Me: "Sikuphi is'bhamu Sika?" (Where is your gun?)

I'm treading behind him as he tiptoes towards the room where the noise is coming from, he slops his head back to ogle at me.

Sika: "Cha baba, we don't need a gun here. Can't you hear that sound? Someone is having sex in there."

He rumours, shocking the living day lights out of me. The last thing I need is another heart attack, I won't survive it.

Me: "Hayi Sika, not my wives." (No.)

Sika: "Kungaba njalo baba." (It could be so.)

I am going to kill someone today. Why do I always choose loose women? First it was Nkomo's mother and now whoever is in there. There is going to be another funeral at the Mkhizes.

Me: "Khipha is'bhamu, manje." (Take out your gun now.)

We have two people to kill.

He obeys the order and continues to draw towards the room. Sika is right, there are people in there having sex. I can hear them loud now. My wrath escalates as the need to kill becomes stronger than anything. I push Sika aside and kick the door open. The woman who is starkers on top of the man falls to the side of the bed, revealing my son Zwelethu. He covers himself while the lady dips her head under the bed sheets.

Me: "Zwelethu?"

I boom in anger.

There is no tint of shame on his face.

Me: "What is this Zwelethu? In my house?"

He sits back and leans on the head board, crossing his arms on his chest.

Me: "Are you bringing prostitutes into my house now?"

Zwelethu: "I thought you were sleeping."

He gives a stupid answer and with a stinking attitude. I dart to him, grab his hand and pull him off the bed. He tumbles on the floor as naked as he is.

Me: "Usuyindoda manje Zweli? Unomuzi wena?" (Are you a man now Zweli? You have a house now?)

He gets up, pushes me back and I teeter, to have Sika catch me before I fall.

Zwelethu snatches a pair of pants on the floor and throws them on.

Me: "Are you fighting me now Zweli? Are you fighting your father?"

I am astounded by his actions and the way he's glaring at me, he is ready for anything.

Zwelethu: "I'm not fighting you, I'm simply standing up for myself. You will not bully me Mkhize."

What has happened to my son? Why is he disrespecting me like this?

Zwelethu: "Yeyi, yeyi get up and go." (Hey.)

He taps the lady hard on her thigh, as she is shamefully hiding under the sheets. She shows her

fearful face.

"Where am I going to go? It's late now, there's no transport."

Zwelethu: "So? How is that my problem?"

My son has no respect for me, he brought a prostitute into my home."

Me: "Zwelethu get this woman out of here, we need to talk."

I command before I string out the door

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

179\*

NKOMO\*

Ruth: "I don't understand you N.k. You say that you want to save me but, you refuse to do what they want."

Ruth is yelling at me, she is seething. She is afraid and wants to go back home but, she knows the kind of a person that I am. I can't betray my friends. I have been on bad terms with Styles and Randall however, it does not mean that I should turn my back on them.

We're still tied up, it's been a week. That man came back with a proposal, he wants me to work with him in bringing down the Okolies, I refused and Ruth is upset with me. She says that she wants to go home, there's something I don't understand though. Why would they approach me of all people?

Me: "I am not a snitch Ruth and I am not about to betray my friend."

My words have her fuming.

Ruth: "Don't be stupid N.K. Those people don't care about you."

She knows nothing about them so she has nothing to prove her claim.

Me: "Is there something that I should know?"

She shrugs with a frown on her face.

Ruth: "Like what?"

Me: "Who are those men? Why do they want me to turn against Randall?"

Ruth: "How am I supposed to know? We're both tied up here."

I have been reciting the same poem for days now and she refuses to tell me the truth.

Me: "You're starting to piss me off. Who the hell is that man?"

I raise my voice.

Ruth: "Why are you asking me? I have told you countless times that I don't know him, I have never seen him in my life."

My question is not treating her well, her anger seems to take over every emotion in her body. Ruth is not truthful with me and I'm getting fed up with her.

Me: "Do you think that I am stupid Ruth?"



She narrows her eyes.

Ruth: "No, of course not."

Me: "Then, why are you lying to me?"

I am losing my patience with her.

Ruth: "I'm not lying to you N.K...."

Why do I keep thinking that she will reveal the truth?

Me: "Will you tell me the truth for once."

She drops her head.

Me: "Look at me Ruth, look at me."

I shout at her, she doesn't heed my request.

Me: "It's been over a week if not more that, I have been tied up here. You refuse to give an explanation why these people are after you. You say you're worried about your safety but, it seems to me that, you're more worried about me giving in to those people."

Ruth: "What are you saying to me?"

Me: "I'm saying stop lying to me..."

She cuts my entreaty short with a loud shriek.

Ruth: "I am not lying to you."

Me: "You are Ruth, you're lying to me and you better tell me the truth now."

I yell just as loud.

Ruth: "Why would I lie to you? I love you NK..."

Me: "Shut up, shut the hell up. I don't want to hear that shit, this is my life Ruth. I am bound like a fucking animal and I want to know why."

She falls into silence, she refuses to give an answer.

Me: "Love does not make me a fool or weak, I want you to listen to me Ruth. If ever you're working with those people, I will kill you. I can be merciless, don't think these ropes limit me."

Her eyebrows ruck up.

Ruth: "Are you threatening me?"

Me: "I'm making you a promise and I keep my promises. I want you to keep this in mind Ruth if that's your real name, I will escape this place and when I do I am taking you with me."

Ruth: "I know that you will never leave me..."



Me: "I'm not finish."

With a puckered brow she sneers at me.

Me: "I'm a lover and darn it I love with all my heart but, when my love turns into hate, you will wish you never laid your eyes on me. I will make sure that you die a slow painful death and not even Bensen will be able to save you."

With her eyes engrossed on mine, her mouth falls open in disbelief. I am done with her charade.

Ruth: "Who?"

Me: "You're in a cult with your father."

Ruth: "N.k..."

Me: "Don't call me that, your game is over Ruth. You're not as smart as you think, now tell those people to untie you. I'm sick and tired of your pretence."

Her eyes fall to her feet.

Ruth: "Oh Nkomo."

She says my name so perfectly and mind you this is the same woman who failed to pronounce my name. She gets up from the chair with such ease, all I feel is rage as the rope that was binding her effortlessly drops to the floor. She grins at me. I'm not surprised, although it took me a while to figure this out.

Ruth: "I was getting bored honestly, I thought you would never crack it."

Me: "Crack it huh?"

Her statement has me chortling.

Ruth: "Rid of that impervious behaviour Nkomo, you're trapped. You are not going anywhere, you have one way out take the deal."

My head falls back as I fall into a loud guffaw.

Ruth: "What's funny?"

I do away with the scornful laugh as I accept a weighty countenance.

Me: "Don't mind me sweetness, it's just my mouth is watering. The thought of your blood smeared on my hands gives me a sensational feeling."

I wiggle my eyebrows at her and send a wink, I have managed to inflict fear in her.

Me: "I swear this is better than sex, imagine when I finally kill you."

I utter as slow as possibly, so my words get into her mind, speechless, she sits back down and glares at me. She is trying to read my thoughts, I am not going to give her that chance.

SETHU\*

Weeks later\*

Grief, pain, agony, loss and betrayal. My bed had been made with these materials, and I have napped on it for quite a while now. I became numb to the strength in me, I was oblivious to my surroundings and the people that were there for me. I chose to brush away the love and support offered to me by my loved ones and this act led me to a brink of distraction.

I lost the love of my life and was swallowed up by a church that did not have my best interest at heart. It's amazing what grief can do to you, I struggled to accept my life as it had changed in the blink of an eye.

The strength I thought I had, taunted me and pulled me into the grisly hands of hell itself. The person who saved me was no stranger to hell and he's responsible for many souls that are caught into its tormenting fires.

I couldn't fathom him doing such malevolent deeds, he was an angel in my eyes and his love forced me to accept him in these two forms. An angel who would love you with that crucifixion type love and a demon who collects souls.

This is my theory of Styles Sishi and I love him more, one would tell me to run and never look back but, that surely would be suicide.

A decision has been made, I am taking back my life. I will live like it's my last day on earth. I will love like it's coming out of fashion and I will cherish every moment of my life.

"Sisi hurry." (Sister.)

Ginger runs into my room screaming, I know it's something to do with Mbali. She struggles to sleep at night, she sees things that are not there. I have tried everything I could, from prayer to a traditional healer. Her situation seems to depreciate.

She's on the floor convulsing, Ginger is helplessly in tears.

Me: "Give me that herb on the kitchen counter."

I say to Ginger, she rushes away. This is not new, it happens to her at least twice a week, it's not frequent like the dreams. Randall gave me these herbs, he said the aroma released from them should help her. Randall and Styles seem to know what's wrong with Mbali, they refuse to tell me and I gave up trying to find out. I submit myself to God in prayer, it gives me hope and keeps me going.

I help Mbali to a couch as soon as she's better, Ginger holds her a glass of water.

Me: "Are you okay?"

She nods, she hardly says much. Her eyes are always wide open as if she sees something no human should see.

Me: "Have you guys eaten?"

Ginger: "I was making food when Mbali fell."

She wipes her tears, I thought Ginger was the strong one.

Me: "Okay, go finish up. Your transport will be here in thirty minutes."

She nods and hurries to the kitchen, Mbali lies back on the couch. Her mind is not here, the poor child had to pause school. It's almost the end of the year, if she doesn't get help soon she will have to repeat the grade next year.

Me: "Do you want to sleep?"

She shakes her head. There's a knock on the door, in an instant I hear Ginger exchange a dialog with a female voice. Tracy glides into my living room, crying.

Me: "Tracy?"

Tracy: "Oh Sethu."

She throws herself in my arms.

Tracy has become one of my closest friends much to Ayize's irritation. She says that she doesn't trust her, I don't think Ayize trusts anyone. My sister went and got herself a job at some boutique, her talkativeness and energy worked in her favour. She moved out about a week ago and living with the only man who makes her angry and happy at the same time, Neo. If it were up to me I would have him marry her first but she is of age, they love each other and know what they are doing.

Me: "What's going on Tracy?"

She wants to tell me but Mbali's presence seems to halt her from doing so.

I can't leave Mbali alone.

Me: "Don't worry, she won't hear anything."

Tracy: "My life is over Sethu."

She sits as she begins her story, she appears to be distraught.

Me: "What happened?"

Tracy: "I lost my baby and Kay cancelled the wedding, he says we need to take a break from each other."

Me: "Why? He should be supporting you and not this."

Tracy: "Kay is losing everything Sethu, no one wants to hire him. Their church was shut down, his parents had to go back to Limpopo. I saw this coming, Kay is depressed."

She tells her story, Tracy is a bit secretive when it comes to Kay, I haven't met him yet.

Me: "You two should be clinging on to each other instead."

Tracy: "I know, the pregnancy kept us stronger and now that it's gone, there is nothing to hold on to."

Me: "I don't understand Tracy, I thought you loved each other."

Tracy: "I love him, I don't know how he feels honestly. Something tells me that he was tolerating me because of the pregnancy. Why break up with me after I had a miscarriage?"

Me: "I'm sorry babe."

Tracy: "Kwena has always been distant, he..."

Me: "Who?"

Tracy: "Kay."

Me: "You just said Kwena."

Could it be the same guy?

Tracy: "Yes that's his name, I call him Kay."

Oh my God.

Me: "Is he Kwena Mokoena, the pastor?"

My question puts a frown on her face.

Tracy: "Do you know him?"

Should I tell her? The girl has just lost a baby. I'm saved by the door.

Me: "I'll get the door."

I push my way out of the living room, Ginger has opened it. She's laughing and talking with Styles. He sees me and smiles.

Me: "I didn't know you were coming."

Styles: "I thought I should come and have breakfast with you before you head to work."

This is his normal routine since Neo moved out, he claims that he's lonely. I think he's trying to guilt trip me into moving in with him.

Styles: "It looks like I'm early, you're not dressed yet."

He scans my outfit, I am far from being ready.

Me: "I won't be long."

Styles: "How about we go out for breakfast?"

He offers, we haven't done that in a long time. We decided to take things slow, it's been hard for

me to be intimate with him since that experience with the kidnappers.

Me: "If you promise to take me to work early."

He enwraps his arms around me as he leans down to kiss me.

Styles: "Let's get to it then."

"I also want to go."

Ginger jolts us out of the moment.

Me: "You have school."

I dispute.

Ginger: "School starts at 8am, please sisi. You'll be taking Mbali along and its not fair."

Only because we can't leave Mbali alone, Ayize and I take turns with the girls. They spend two weeks with each of us, we will have to choose a permanent home for them. We can't keep swopping them around as if they are grocery bags. Ginger says she wants to live with Ayize because Neo doesn't let her clean and cook, while I teach her all the basics. This is what they were taught by their mother anyway.

"I want to come too."

Tracy's voice speaks from behind us.

Me: "Where?"

I hope she's not talking about the breakfast outing.

Tracy: "Wherever you guys are going."

Hell no.

She's looking at Styles. This is the first time she's seeing him.

Tracy: "This is the mystery boyfriend huh? Uyafihla girl neh?" (You know how to hide them.)

She says while plodding to him, she gives him a hand.

Tracy: "Tracy."

Styles takes the hand, shakes it before drawing back.

Styles: "Pleasure to meet you Tracy."

Pleasure?

Tracy: "I have heard a lot about you Styles."

I don't remember telling him about her.

Me: "We can do breakfast some other time."



I will have to reject her, my sister's words are imprinted in my memory. Do not trust friends.

Tracy: "Okay, if you say so."

She shrugs.

Tracy: "I'm working the night shift today, maybe I'll see you before you leave."

Me: "Sure, call me."

She sends her goodbyes and waddles out the door.

Styles: "Go and prepare, we're waiting for you."

He urges.

Me: "I won't be long."

I reply as I start to plod to the bathroom.

Styles: "No, geza sisi. Take your time, it's hot outside, we don't want people running away from us." (Bath lady.)

He's stupid.

Me: "Is your dream of becoming a comedian still on?"

He laughs as he pulls Ginger with him to the living room, I stop to see if Mbali will react to his presence. Styles Kneels before her, he slants over to catch a glimpse of her face.

Styles: "How is my flower doing today?"

He greets her with a smile and sends his hand to slightly pinch the tip of her nose. She twitches a smile, sits up and folds her arms on her bust. Her eyes are looking at him, it's a good thing. Mbali hardly maintains eye contact.

Styles: "Are you good?"

She nods giving a second round of a twitching smile.

Styles: "Okay, okay people. Who took Mbali's voice?"

He exclaims loudly as he glances up at Ginger, she giggles smashing her hand on her mouth.

Styles: "Was it you Ginger? Did you take my flower's voice?"

She shakes her head with a twitter.

Styles: "I don't trust that look on your face. Should we trust her Mbali?"

A genuine smile finally plays on Mbali's mouth.

Mbali: "I have a voice."

She speaks with a whisper.



Styles: "Aaahhh, there it is. You have found your voice."

She nods and keeps her smile, her arms go around his neck as she rests her head on his shoulder. Styles scrutinizes me with a worried look, Mbali will be okay. I have faith.

AMARA\*

What is the commotion about so early in the morning? The first thing I hear is Liyana's titters and her feet stomping the floor, she must be dancing. I jump out of bed, I'm alone in the room. I'm done looking for that man each time I wake up, it's good that he stays away from me. He hasn't been my favourite person as of late, I can't stand the sight of him and I don't know why. From the way he walks, to the way he chews, I feel every inch of me itch at his presence.

I don't know how I'm going to walk down the aisle with him waiting for me at the altar.

The wedding preparations are stressful, there is so much to do. Ayize said she knows a wedding planner, I'll be meeting her later today.

I'm clomping my tired body down the passage, there is so much noise. It sounds like a celebration of some sort, I hear unfamiliar voices. Liyana bounces to me as I take my last step down the stairway.

Liyana: "Mara come."

She takes my hand and pulls me toward the living area.

Me: "Where are we going Liya?"

I ask the course of our destination.

Liyana: "Nana is here." (Grandmother.)

Me: "Who?"

I must've heard wrong.

Liyana: "Nana." (Grandmother.)

It's too late to turn back, I'm standing in the living room. Randall's mother is here and with his uncle, I've seen a picture of him. They are settled next to each other on a three seater. Randall is on a two seater, he gazes at me.

Randall: "Me hemma, come." (My queen.)

He's sitting right across his mom who is glancing at me and I cannot tell what the expression on her face is.

If I knew that they were here, I would've changed out of this night gown. Thank God it covers my knees.



Me: "Good morning."

I acknowledge them as I trail towards Randall, I don't know where I'm going because this pregnancy does not want him.

Mom: "Morning."

I thought she wouldn't respond, the uncle greets with a nod. There's an empty space beside Randall, I pull Liyana to sit between us while I settle at the end of the couch.

Randall: "Mother this is her."

He reaches to take my hand, I want to snatch it back.

Uncle: "Our bride, we finally meet. How are you?"

Honestly I expected the likes of uncle Jonas but, he's not bad.

Me: "I'm fine uncle."

He returns the smile I give him.

Mom: "Let me get this straight, you two live together and she's pregnant?"

This, I did not expect.

Randall: "Yes mother, we're having a baby and we want to get married before she's due."

He replies confidently.

Mom: "What did I say about this Randall? What will your uncles say back home?"

She questions him with a serious tone.

Randall: "It doesn't matter, we're getting married so, I don't understand what the big deal is."

I don't understand either. This is what fate had for us and we can't change it, if it were a different time. We would've done things differently.

Mom: "Okay, as tradition would have it. The girl has to go back home until the day of the wedding, she cannot be here."

Is she here to ruin my life?

Randall: "Not happening and please do not mention tradition to me, it is the sole reason I became estranged from my family and my country."

His mother sighs at his last words, she is not a fan of what's happening here.

Uncle: "I don't see anything wrong."

The uncle adds, I like him.

Mom: "Are you an Okolie Femi? Because the last time I checked you are Femi Ihome not Okolie."

Uncle: "Does it matter sister? All the boy wants is to marry this woman. Must you make things difficult for him?"

Mom: "I'm looking out for my son and protecting our image as the queen."

She quarrels with her brother over this trivial matter.

Randall: "That's enough please, my daughter is in the room."

He has noticed how Liyana is observing these two tackle each other.

Me: "Excuse me."

I'm on my feet and ready to run out of here.

I give Randall a look and gesture that he should follow me.

Randall: "Amara?"

Me: "Why didn't you tell me that they were coming?"

I probe him as we get to the bedroom.

Randall: "I told you last night, before you fell asleep."

Me: "Was it before or after I had fallen asleep?"

He knows what I mean.

Randall: "You nodded, so I figured you heard me."

He replies, I don't recall being told that his mother was coming.

Me: "I'm going to bath."

I declare, I don't want to argue with him so it is best that, I ignore him for now until I cool down.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

180\*

MKHIZE\*

It has taken me a while to gather up the courage to approach Sishi, my pride had me thinking that I can do this on my own. Weeks have passed and I have nothing and no clues whatsoever. This is it, it's now or never.

Me: "This is the house Sika, I'm going in."

I say to Sika as he pulls up outside Sishi's house, I didn't announce my visit.

Sika: "I'm coming with you Baba." (Boss.)

I knew that he would say this.

Me: "No, you stay in the car."

Sika: "You know that I always listen to you, not today. I don't trust Sishi."

Sika presses.

Me: "Fine, let's go."

We would argue about this the whole day, the gate is not locked. Sika glances at me as we hear the crack of the door and here stands Sishi on the door way glowering at us.

Styles: "What are you doing here?"

He quizzes. I didn't expect this to be a social visit, his timid demeanour does not come as a shock.

Me: "I need a word with you."

Styles: "You could have called."

He urges.

Me: "I know, this is important."

Styles: "What could you possibly want from me Mkhize?"

He glares at Sika, he is not about to let us in the house.

Styles: "Speak."

He demands firmly. If I was not as desperate as I am, I would have pulled a gun only because he

spoke to me like this.

Me: "Nkomo has been missing for a week now."

I introduce the terrible news, it has him bucking his eyes for a bit.

Styles: "Nkomo is an adult, he is allowed to wander around."

He ripostes as if dismissing me.

Me: "Nkomo has been kidnapped Sishi, I have been trying to find him. There is no sign of him, my son is missing."

I'm desperate, Sishi is my only option.

Me: "Help me find my son, I'll do anything."

It's hard to read the look on his face, I don't know if he is keen on helping me or he wants me away from his door step.

Styles: "You have the nerve to come to my house, you're brave Mkhize."

He wants me away from his door step.

Me: "Can we put our differences aside please?"

He smirks. I might be pouring water on a duck's back.

Styles: "How the mighty have fallen."

He sneers, bastard.

Me: "This is not about me Sishi, I know that you care about Nkomo."

I pull out the emotional card.

Styles: "I will find him myself, I don't dine with the enemy lest he poisons my food."

It's not a secret that we are not best of buds.

Me: "It doesn't matter if you do it on your own or not, I want my son found."

Styles: "You know this same son that you're crying for longs to see a tomb stone with your name engraved on it?"

His words fall on the tomb of my heart.

"Styles I'm ready."

A young girl appears behind him, she opens her mouth to say more, but is stopped by our presence.

"Hello."

She greets.



My mind is buffering. I know this girl, I have seen her somewhere.

"I didn't know you had company babe. Why don't you let them in?"

She smiles at me and my heart falls to the soles of my feet.

This face and her voice?

Could it be?

No!

She would be old by now.

Me: "No, a ghost?"

I whisper to myself, I can't look anywhere else, but at her.

Styles: "These men are not my friends and they are leaving."

Sika looks at me, he must be wondering what my problem is. My hand is on my chest, my heart is pulsating, I feel light-headed and my blood pressure must be sky high.

Styles: "You may leave now Mkhize."

Sishi has taken up an uncomfortable manner.

Me: "Who is this?"

The girl is ogling at me, probably wondering why a strange old man is enquiring about her.

Styles: "That's none of your business, get out."

Gradually he pushes his hand back so to shrug her into the house. She is out of sight in an instant.

Me: "Who is this woman Sishi?"

I search.

My mind is telling me so many things, it can't be her.

Styles: "You have nothing to do with her."

He dismisses me.

I won't press more.

Me: "Help me find my son Sishi, I'll do anything."

It is better that I stick to the topic at hand.

Styles: "Why should I help you?"

Me: "Can we put our differences aside, please? I know you care for him, just get me my boy Sishi."



Styles: "I'll see what I can do and I'm not doing this for you but, for Nkomo. He is like a brother to me."

He returns, his remark gives me hope that my son will be saved.

Me: "Thank..."

He turns back into the house and shuts the door, rejecting my gratitude.

Sika: "Nx! Nja." (Dog.)

Sika cusses, he hates Sishi. I'm not fazed by Sishi's attitude, what matters to me is finding my son.

NOBAYEN\*

Life with Bridgette is going well, we have bonded in ways I never thought we would. Strange that I would say this but, my baby is so sweet. I haven't seen or spoken to Dladla since the day he left, I miss him though.

The house feels different without him, Dladla spoiled me. I got used to coming home to him, the cooked meals. The clean house and the quick kisses he stole from time to time. Bridgette seems to fill that empty space in my heart.

I took time off work to fix my relationship with my daughter, we are planning a weekend gate-away. Bridgette suggested it, she is warming up to me and I love it. I'm home alone right now, she went to run some errands. She should be back anytime soon, I took this time off to prepare a scrumptious meal for her. I am no chef in an apron, yet this meal smells good.

It should be edible too, hopefully. I'm bustling in the kitchen trying to put everything together, I've burnt one or two things, maybe more. Cooking is no child's play.

Bridgette is here, I know because of the sound of the door banging shut.

Me: "Baby, you're just in time. The food is almost ready."

I introduce with my back turned against the door way, habitually she would tell me to stay out of the kitchen.

Why is she not saying anything?

Me: "Bridgette?"

"I think we should eat out."

Everything in me goes stone cold at the sound of Timothy's voice, I swivel to find him standing a few feet away from me. He's grinning at me and it's sending certain chills down my spine, I have never seen evil in my life but, the look on his face assures me that I am standing before it.

Timothy: "We should stick to corporate love and leave the pots to men like Dladla."

He gives an unsolicited opinion.

I came to know that he is the one who sent Dladla those pictures. His behaviour had changed as well, he would come in my office with flowers. He'd declare his undying love for me during staff meetings.

It came to a point where, there were naked pictures of me circulating in the office. I fired him with immediate effect. He disappeared and this is the first time I'm seeing him since that day.

Me: "What are you doing here"

He sneers.

Timothy: "I came to see you Bayeni, my one true love. Didn't you miss me?"

He responds straightaway.

Me: "Get out of my house Timothy."

I'm trying to sound and look brave, although he's scaring me.

Timothy: "Oh Bayeni, don't be like that. I know you want me here."

My heart stops for a second as he takes a step forward, I don't want to think the worst. Something about the look in his eyes tells me that he came here with the intent to cause harm.

Me: "Bridgette will be home any minute now."

Timothy: "Oh really?"

He curves a brow as an unnerving sneer visits his face.

Timothy: "That means we have about..."

He brings his hand up to inspect the time on his wrist watch.

Timothy: "58 seconds to spare."

Me: "What do you want?"

He continues to saunter towards me, I'm pressed against the kitchen cabinet. My mind is entreating a lot of things at the same time.

Me: "You need to leave Timothy, you're not welcomed here."

I utter, trying to control the quaver in my voice. His hand flails to his chest, he slopes his head to the side.

Timothy: "Oh, baby. You're breaking my heart."

He declares in a ghostly whisper.

Me: "Timothy leave."

I don't want this person in my house, I don't trust him.

I want to move away from him, but my feet seem to be frozen. He presses himself against me, the evocative scent emanating from him takes my mind to an unpleasant time when he used to brace my bed. I have nothing, but regret for those moments.

Me: "Stop."

Sternly, I demand.

I have always had an authoritative voice that would put anyone in their place. It seems to be doing nothing to this man, he has nettled his face on the curve of my neck. Pushing against him has proved to me that I have no muscles at all, It proves, yet again that a man is physically stronger than a woman.

Timothy: "You smell like heaven Bayeni."

He declares against my neck, moves back and gives me a flirtatious smile.

Timothy: "How about you turn off the stove and we take this to the bedroom? Remember how fun it was when we would do it while Dladla was away? I'm surprised how we didn't break that bed.

He pronounces running his hands on my waist, I am not his to claim so I shove his hand away from me.

Me: "Get out of my house Timothy."

I have had enough of him, hence the loudness of my voice. I make a move to step away from him, his move is faster as he seizes my arm and with great force pushes me back against the cabinet.

Me: "Ouch."

I yelp as my back pains from the forceful hit.

Timothy: "Don't worry, I will kiss it better."

He burrows his face on the crook of my neck again, I have to stop myself from retching as the wetness of his kisses turns my insides.

Me: "Timothy stop."

I raise my voice, pushing my hands against him with great effort. My desperation seems to fuel him, his hand glides under my shirt while he pushes the other down to my privates. He is like a hungry animal that has been starved for weeks on end, I snatch both his hands and try to push them away.

This is not me, I do not whimper and I don't snivel, I am not easily deterred. Why am I terrified to my wits then?

Instantly, flashes of my father visit my mind, that terrible night that deemed me a weakling. I will



not let that happen again, I will fight if I have to. While Timothy entertains himself with assaulting me, I send my hand to the stove on a mission to grab something I can use to thrash this evil man. My hand is triumphant as it clutches a handle, it's a pan.

Gradually, I bring it up and bang it on his head, he grunts as he moves back. His hands have found work for themselves as they rub away the pain on his head.

This is my chance to run, I take off on my feet, headed to the front door.

I know I have made it when the door cracks open with the help of my hand. I'm repudiated a chance to step out as a large hand smashes against the door, clogging my chances of escape.

Timothy is caging me from behind, his body again is pressed on mine. I can feel his stiff shaft, pressing on my lower back as he pins me on the door and begins to nibble on my neck.

Me: "Tim no, stop."

My command is unheard, he continues with his escapades. He's growling like an animal devouring a meaty bone after hours without food, my heart has dropped as his doings alert my mind that he is about to take advantage of me. No, I refuse to let this happen to me again.

I can't see his face, but I know where to target. I lurch my arm backwards and elbow punch him, it lends on his forehead and sends him staggering back with a loud growl venting from his mouth.

One more try and I will be out of this house in a minuscule. I gasp as a large hand grabs my ankle and pulls me back, I fall face down hitting my nose on the wooden tiled floor. My head spins and the room becomes incoherent, I fight to get my vision cleared. Like I'm trapped in a nightmare, my body fails to move for a second and a huge somebody crawls on top of me. He's heaving and groaning with a mission to accomplish.

Me: "Lord give me strength."

I say a silent prayer, hush enough for God to have heard me.

Timothy: "Why are you fighting me Bayeni?"

He's on top of me, his lips are on my ear as he whispers this question with winded words.

Me: "GET OFF ME, TIMOTHY NO."

I blare at the top of my voice, if I scream, no one will hear me. Way to go for choosing a quiet location Nobayeni.

Timothy: "I know you want me, you couldn't get enough of me once upon a time."

His warm breath on my face evokes a great need to gag. I can't fight while face down and this pervert is on top of me. I agree that I am not perfect, my lust invited this pest into my home and destroyed my family. However this does not give him the right to rape me, my no should be heard and I will fight for it to be heard.

Timothy slides my shirt up, he begins to touch my back with his dirty hands. I'm panicking, but I



decide not to show it. I am shattered when he pulls my pants down while his other hand takes up the job of pressing my body to the floor as to keep me from moving.

Me: "NO, TIMOTHY STOP!!!"

I shriek, I know I said that I'm strong. I lied, I'm in a powerless position. I'm naked from the waist down and my heart is beating hard on my chest that, it has me shuddering in fear.

I need to stay calm, if I want to survive this. I have to survive this, I will not be a victim again. I feel his member on my butt and fear sends a pulsating heat through my body.

Me: "Okay, okay baby listen."

I utter, hastily.

Me: "Let me turn around, we'll do it like old times. It will be fun."

Lord let this work.

Timothy: "No, I prefer it like this."

He's throwing kisses on my back that have me clenching my teeth in disgust.

Me: "Timothy baby, listen to me okay."

My anxiety intensifies as I feel him try to push into me, I want to scream out loud, but I somehow have a feeling that it will power him.

Me: "We can be together love, but not like this. Not like this Timothy please."

I'm clogging my tears, I need to stay calm.

An excessive sense of relief washes over me when he stops, he turns me around and I meet his half-lidded bloodshot, perverted eyes. He's heaving and thirsty.

Timothy: "I knew that you can't get enough of me."

He leans in to kiss me and I slant my head to the side to dodge his lips, his hands are all over me. I shuffle to position myself, I'm able to bend a knee and kick him on his manhood. His eyes amplify as his hands fall down to press the pain, I push him off of me and start to crawl my way up. As soon as I'm on my feet and ready to scuttle out through the kitchen door, I'm hit on my upper back with a heavy object. My body fails me as I fall to the floor.

Timothy: "You bitch."

Timothy howls in anger, he uses his foot to turn me around. He has a sculpture on his hand, that's what he used to hit me. His face is glazed with rage.

Me: "Tim..."

I gasp as I have lost the strength to speak. He bestrides me, I want to tell him to stop. The words are at the tip of my tongue, they refuse to come out.

Timothy: "Don't worry Bayeni, I will make it less painful. You have denied me and if I can't have



you, no one can.

With speed, he forcefully blows my head with the blunt object, a loud thump resounds followed by more blows. I lose count and by this time I'm in excruciating pain, I'm paralyzed as I can't speak or move.

My eyes feel heavy and my vision is blurred, I want to sleep, but I don't want to die. In and out of consciousness, I fall. My will to live happens to be stronger than the will to die. I have to live for my baby and my grandchild, Bridgette has lost so much. I can't fail her as well, I need to keep my eyes open.

Me: "He...he...lp- me."

I mutter my cry for help with a muted voice.

Timothy: "What have I done?"

There is a fade away in his voice, I'm losing my hearing and seeing double, I feel cold and hot at the same time. Timothy puts his hands on his head as if shocked by what he just did.

Timothy: "I'm sorry my love, I'm sorry."

I'm watching his every move, while I fall in and out of a deep sleep. In a fast pace he takes his shirt off and starts to wipe the blood on my head. I don't know how deep the wound is, I feel a warm thick liquid cover my face.

Timothy: "I'm sorry."

He kisses my forehead, gets up and lurches out the door. I'm left here to die, I want to scream for him and tell him to help me. It takes me a minute to ram my hand into the pockets of my pants, I pull out my phone steadily. My brain fails to relay a message to my hand that, it should grip the phone. It falls to the side.

I must have an angel watching over me because it rings. I don't know who it is, my heart races against the ring tone. If I take my time to answer, the call will be cut.

God give me strength.

My hand makes it as it presses the answering button.

"Mom."

Bridgette speaks on the other end of the line.

Me: "Bridg..."

Lord help me speak, please help me.

Khethu: "Hello mom? Are you there?"

Panic covers her voice.

Me: "Help."

I hush desperately and hope that she heard the soft whisper.

Khethu: "Oh my God. What's wrong mom?"

I'm not given a chance to reply as I fall into a deep fade away.

AYIZE\*

Chioma is the one to open the door for us, I have an appointment with Amara and the wedding planner.

Chioma: "You can wait for her in the lounge, I'll let her know that you're here."

Why is she being formal with me? I practically live here.

Me: "What is it Chioma? You don't look okay."

Chioma: "Uze's mother is here."

It's funny how she whispers it out, you would think that she is afraid of her.

Me: "How is she? Is she a dragon lady?"

I whisper back.

Chioma: "I didn't have a good experience when I was with her, hopefully Amara won't be bullied by her."

She wouldn't dare, not when Randy is around.

Me: "Don't worry yourself Chichi, Amara is a big girl. She is Randy's me hemma, she can handle the queen bee." (My queen.)

I truly hope so.

Chioma does not believe me.

Oh well.

Here comes the bride.

Me: "Ai ai ai ai, umshado lento." (It's a wedding.)

I hum as she approaches in the foyer, her smile fills her mouth.

Amara: "You're making it sound like I'm getting married today."

Me: "It feels like it."

She smiles and acknowledges the elegant looking lady beside me.

Me: "Mrs. Okolie to be."

Amara cackles at my announcement.

Me: "This is Khanyisile Shezi, she's the wedding planner I have been telling you about."

Amara nods as I introduce.

Me: "What's your company name again?"

Khanyi: "Shezi's Little Black Dress."

She stretches her hand to shake Amara's.

Amara: "That's an interesting name. Why a black dress, though? You deal with brides, right?"

A huge smile appears on Khanyisile's face, she's stands with pride. Her formal outfit deems her professional. I have seen her work, she's good at what she does.

Khanyi: "White was already taken."

She gives a contagious giggle that has us tittering as well.

Me: "I yes you girl. Sometimes you have to be unique, don't follow the trend. Do you and see how the world will flock around you."

Khanyi: "That was the idea when I started this company, my goal is to please the bride and maybe the groom a little."

Her state has us snickering.

Khanyi: "I sleep well at night knowing the bride is happy."

Amara is contented with Khanyi's quip.

Amara: "With that being said I am in good hands."

She states, causing Kanyisile to twitter with delight.

Khanyi: "Nice to finally meet the bride, Ayize has been pressing me so much about meeting you."

Amara: "Trust me, she has been pressing me on meeting you as well."

Amara adds.

Khanyi: "Hopefully her mind can be at ease."

Ayize: "Hey, I'm still in the room."

The conspiracy.

"What about meeting the groom? There won't be a wedding without me let's face it, I am the star of the show."

Randall phrases as he trails in from the patio causing us to laugh at his comment. Amara frowns at him, he stands next to her. You don't know if he's flippant or dead serious, it's that permanent pucker.

Amara: "Excuse me? I am the star of the show, not you. Everybody will be looking at the bride, I doubt they will hardly notice you."

She larks him, his brow is quick to curve in response to her statement.

Randall: "Maybe I shouldn't show up that day and see if they will hardly notice my absence."

This man just dug his own grave.

Amara: "Don't even joke like that, it's not funny."

Duck everyone, pregnancy hormones have come out to play.

Me: "Randy baby, be careful what you say. Wifey here is pregnant."

Yeah, it just hit him.

He rubs his head and forces a smile.

Randall: "How can I not show up at my own wedding? I'll be marrying the most amazing woman in the world, baby you'll find me waiting for you at the altar."

The sarcasm in his statement.

Me: "Good, you're doing great."

I give him a thumbs up, a little smile will do. Or maybe it's that one, showing in his eyes.

You use your mouth to smile Randy, not your eyes.

Amara brushes him off.

Amara: "Khanyi, this is the man responsible for the happiest day of my life."

She clings her arm around his and rests her head on his shoulder for but a second.

Amara: "Baby, she is the wedding planner Ayize has been telling us about."

Me: "I'm a promise keeper babe, wait till you see the magic that lies within her hands."

Randall gives an approved look, I like how he has been hands on with the wedding preparations. Most men leave the women to deal with everything.

Khanyi: "Nice to meet you Mr. Okolie."

Kanyisile offers a hand shake, he shakes it with a nod.

Randall: "Please, call me Randall."

Khanyi: "Okay. Will Randall be joining us for the brief meeting?"

Amara: "Unless he wants to show up to a snow white, ball themed wedding, he has to join us."

She's kidding, I can't imagine him getting married in such.

She is kidding right?"

Me: "I have a ask?" (A question.)

I raise my hand, Amara laughs as she shakes her head.

Amara: "Speak English please."

She has our wedding planner laughing at me as well.

Me: "Question babe? You're kidding about the snow white theme?"

Let her say yes or I'm taking her back to crèche.

Amara: "Yes, I just want hubby to-be, to be present."

She turns to face him.

Amara: "It's our day baby and I want you to take part in the decision making as well. It would mean a lot to me."

She pleads with her eyes.

Me: "I thought Randy baby was already in the boat with us."

Amara: "Not fully. Just last night, I was showing him pictures of wedding cakes and he says to me whatever we choose will still taste like cake."

She complains.

Khanyisile: "That is one mistake you should avoid Randall, we don't want an angry bride, trust me."

Amara: "Please tell him."

Randy is so clingy, he has his arms around her and his face buried on her neck. Amara is fighting to push him away, not trying to give anything off.

Me: "Baby."

She whines.

Me: "Guys seriously, must we close our eyes now?"

He draws back but, keeps his arms on her.

Khanyisile: "I think we should begin."

She clears her throat at the couple that's keeping us waiting.

Me: "You two will find us in the living room."

I take Khanyisile's hand and we toddle to the lounge, leaving those two engrossed on each other.

To be continued...





Edit with WPS Office



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

181\*

NKOMO\*

Ruth is outside talking to the man who was here the other day, he has an accent and I can't grasp from which country. His one is different from that of Ruth and Raven. Something deep is being discussed there, Ruth made sure to leave the door open so I see that I'm the order of the topic.

They keep stealing glances at me.

How will I escape if they are planning on killing me? All I know is that I will die fighting.

Me: "Gcwabe, Khabazela kaMavovo, kaZihlandla. Gubhela, Mumbo omhlophe. Wena waseMbo, wena okhanya amasi esiswini, singela. Nhlama eyaphelel' etsheni, Ngunezi. Nina enadla umuntu nimyenga ngendaba. (Clan names.)

Ngiyazi ukuthi ngikude nasekhaya. Kodwa kee ningangilahli badala, ningayilahli indodana yenu. Ngisizeni, kulobunyama engikubo. Sizani indodana yenu yolahleko. Gcwabe, Khabazela KaMavovo." (I know that I'm far from home but, do not forsake me. Do not forsake your son. Help me through this dark path, help your prodigal son.) (Clan names.)

If it's one thing I trust, then it's my ancestors. I might have turned away from my father, but I kept my name and my roots. This is not the end for me but the beginning.

"Get him."

The old man instructs one of the guys, he and Ruth are gaping at me. My eyes are riveted on hers, I am looking at a different person. She is not the Ruth that I fell in love with.

How could I be so blind?

I remain calm as the man unties the bounds on my hands and legs.

"Get up."

He says, pushing me.

I follow his command.

I haven't removed my unyielding gaze from Ruth, she blinks a few times and drops her eyes in shame.

"Move."

We are headed outside, the sun is setting. I don't know what day it is, neither do I know the time.

"Get out of here."

The old man orders. I turn to Ruth, she nods.

Why are they sending me away?

Me: "Ruth?"

I search for an explanation.

Ruth: "You're free to go."

There is a bit of hesitation in her voice. I should be worried.

I have more questions, but without wasting time, I march towards the gate.

My car was here, there's nothing. I find everyone glaring at me as I turn back.

Me: "Where is my car?"

Ruth: "You're walking back Nkomo."

I knew Ruth was blonde, but she is taking it way too far.

Me: "How do you expect me to walk back home? It will take me days."

"Do you want to be free or not."

The old man asks.

Me: "I can't walk home."

Why are they suddenly letting me go?

"The only way is through the woods, they will lead you to the high way if you're lucky."

The old man...

Why is it so easy? And, what does he mean if I'm lucky?

The man who untied me pulls out a gun and aims it at me.

"Get out of here boy, this is your last chance."

The old geezer bullies, I have no choice here. They will kill me, God I don't know what their plot is, but save me from their claws.

A little wisdom will do...

I turn back to Ruth as I reach the gate.

This is a promise Ruth Adaeze. If I make it out of here, I will come for you so help me God. I thirst for revenge.

I lurch into the woods like they said, fate has something in store for me. I guess I'll find out on the way.



NTOMBI\*

Me: "Wait here while I go in."

Lelo doesn't want to see Moses, it's better that, he waits outside. We're at the hospital to see Nombulelo, I feel sorry for him. Moses is desperate to make things right with his daughter and she is not giving him a chance.

Nombulelo is her father's child, stupid and selfish. I don't know how their minds work honestly, I remember the day Moses ousted her out of the house. That was a stupid move on his behalf and he needs to make it up to her.

Moses: "I want to see my baby too Ntombi."

I think no one heard me right...

Hey people, my husband is stupid.

Me: "Moses, yini mara ngawe? Why must you act like a child?" (What's wrong with you?)

He is quick to anger lately, it's the money that Moshoto stole. He's lost weight too, Mashoto better run and not look back this man is probably planning her murder. Sometimes I find him staring into space mumbling things I can't make out, maybe he's losing his mind again.

Moses: "A child Ntombi? Is it wrong that I want to see my baby?"

Me: "She doesn't want to see you."

Moses: "And you're encouraging it, you should be taking my side Ntombi and fight to bring my child back to me."

He's not serious, I know because Moses is not capable of being serious. I can pay him a million and he'd fail drearly.

Me: "I'm always on your side and if you can't see that then you're more of an idiot than I thought."

He narrows his eyes.

Moses: "I'm counting Ntombi and ngithi qhubeka, siyezwana?" (Continue, you hear?)

Me: "Suka endleni." (Move out of the way.)

I shove him aside and he follows me into the room. Nombulelo is not happy upon seeing us, she's leaning back on the bed.

She doesn't want to be here anymore...

Aii, she will have to be strong.

Me: "My baby."

I am yet to get a smile from her, this child seems to forget who brought her into this world.

Moses: "Unjani sthandwa sami?" (How are you my love?)

You know he is sucking up to you when he uses sweet names, I have fallen victim to that.

Shame my husband, he is not that charming anymore. Life has dealt with him.

Moses: "I brought you some fruits, eyy liyabiza iplate lama fruits. It's day light robbery, this new south Africa is corrupt I tell you. Corrupt." (A plate of fruits is expensive.)

Really, politics?

Moses has decided to run for chancellor in Vaal, he thinks that he is smart enough to do that.

Me: "Haibo, wadonsa ubuso?" (Why the long face?)

Lelo: "What are you doing here?"

This child.

Me: "Nombulelo, are you sure we shouldn't transfer you to a psychiatric ward? You ask us the same question every time we come to see you. Awukhathali wentombi?" (Don't you get tired?)

Lelo: "Because I don't want you here mama. How many times should I say this?"

Nombulelo thinks that ring on her finger, gives her the right to yell at me.

Me: "Uzoqina kee sisi, ngoba mina angiyindawo. Angazi kee ngo yihlo." (Tough luck, I'm not going anywhere, I don't know about your father.)

Moses: "I'm also staying."

He takes the black plastic with fruits, takes out an orange and hands it to Nombulelo.

She exhales in a soundless snort.

Me: "Take the orange sisi."

Nombulelo has an attitude, today we will sit here and look into each other's eyes.

RANDALL\*

The day is almost over, Styles summoned me over to his house. There's an urgent thing that requires our full attention, he didn't reveal over the phone what it could be.

Neo is the one to open the door.

Me: "I thought you moved out."

He is dressed comfortably, like he lives here and is not planning on going anywhere. Shorts, a

tank top and flip flops.

He has that crusty look.

Neo: "I might have moved out, but not officially."

He replies.

Who am I to argue?

I wander in to see Sethu all over the kitchen. She smiles and waves, she looks at peace. I love what I see, my brother deserves all the happiness in the world.

Me: "I knew it was too good to be true."

I reply to Neo's riposte while I amble to a seat.

Neo: "Where is Zee? Why didn't you bring her with?"

Me: "She's still busy with Amara and the wedding planner."

He sits on the arm of the chair, grabs a remote and keeps himself busy with the channels.

Neo: "You're getting married vele? You can still change your mind you know?"

He questions and gives an opinion without turning his eyes to me. I throw a cushion at him and only now I get his attention.

Me: "You're an idiot."

Neo: "I'm not the one getting married here, so Oga shall we reverse that statement?" (Boss.)

Sethu: "Don't listen to him Randall, the only reason he says this is because my sister agreed to shack up with him."

Neo: "I know how to get my way, you people can learn a lot from me."

He boasts.

Sethu: "You do know that, she wants to get married one day, right Neo?"

He mumbles something I can't make out.

Me: "You said something?"

He shrugs.

Neo: "We haven't reached the stage where we talk about marriage or having kids."

This is not what he mumbled.

Me: "But you know that day will come?"

"What day?"

Styles questions as he strides in from outside.

Randall: "I thought you were home."

Styles: "I was in the garage."

Me: "Please tell me you have found Raven."

I jump to it, hoping that this is the reason he called me here.

Styles: "Not yet, I think the cult is hiding him along with Segun."

Uncomfortable with the topic, Sethu makes her way back to the kitchen.

Me: "They can't hide for long."

Those two are up to something.

Styles: "We'll find them."

I can only hope, Raven is dead. I will not have mercy on him this time.

Styles: "You won't believe who came to see me today."

Me: "Nixon?"

He snickers as he sits back.

Styles: "Mkhize."

Neo looks bored, he's lying on the couch wiggling his feet while watching TV and entertaining a series of yawns. He is undeniably bored, his department is catching as it has me yawning too.

Me: "Kenneth? I thought he disappeared after that day at the hospital."

Kenneth is basically nowhere to be found, no one knows where he is.

Styles: "I spoke to Kenneth today, he's around. He's heart broken and needs..."

Me: "Heartbroken from what?"

If he says Amara, God help me....

Neo: "Shame, Kenny boy has a heart. Me hemma is a heart breaker Oga?" (My queen.)

Me: "I don't want to hear that shit Neo."

Kenneth over stepped his boundaries.

What did he think would come out of that little crush?

Styles: "Can we not talk about him, Mkhize the old man was here."

He whispers the last part, his gaze runs to Sethu. I doubt she can hear anything.

Me: "Please tell me you killed him."

Neo laughs, it's quick and short and I don't know why he finds my statement facetious.

Styles: "I'm telling you temptation was laughing in my face."

Neo: "You people are always talking about killing people. Can we catch a break please?"

He has not recovered from the trauma of being shot.

Styles: "Anyway, Mkhize wants me to find Nkomo."

We haven't heard from Nkomo in a while.

Neo: "Maybe he's in Ghana with Ruth."

Styles: "He's not, it would be easy to trace him if he were. I tried to trace his credit card, it hasn't been used for weeks."

Me: "Do you think Ruth might have taken him?"

Neo splutters, he is not convinced.

Neo: "It's a Jane Doe, Ruth is not capable of that. She wouldn't be able to pull it off. It won't be easy to find out who took him."

Randall: "With the help of her father, she can pull anything off. Remember Bensen is a leader of a cult."

Styles: "So Ruth played Nkomo and now she is holding him hostage."

Styles concludes, it's as clear as the water of the ocean.

Me: "Now the question is, where?"

Styles: "Think like a cult member. Where would you hide a hostage?"

Neo: "But, why would they take Nkomo? He is of no use to them, their plan is to have Ruth married to Uze."

Neo is on to something there.

Me: "Ruth knows that we're friends with Nkomo and they want to use him to get to us."

Cracked it.

Styles: "I'd be dammed, the girl is smart after all.

Neo: "Where could they hide him though? If we were in Nigeria we were going to search the forest like they do in the movies. Am I right oga? That's what you do?" (Boss.)

What is it that Neo does not watch on TV?

Me: "I told you countless times that I am not Nigerian."

Neo: "Your mother is."

He knows too much.

Styles: "Focus please."

I don't like how Styles stresses over Nkomo?

Styles: "Neo, this is a train smash. The forest."

He has that light bulb moment.

Styles: "We got Nkomo guys, let's go."

He gets up on his feet

Me: "Like now?"

Styles: "I don't see why we should delay."

Sethu gives him a disapproving look, she is strolling to the lounge, her head spinning with questions.

Neo: "No man Stylos, I'm still recovering from a gunshot wound. I haven't had sex since my..."

Styles: "Voetsek Neo, respect Sethu at least. That's her sister you're talking about." (Fuck off.)

Neo laughs.

Neo: "Hau, Stylos hade. Miss S the food is burning in the kitchen." (I'm sorry Styles.)

He is trying to get rid of her, meanwhile Sethu is embarrassed by Neo's statement.

Styles: "You don't have to come along Neo, we'll drop you home on our way there."

Me: "I can't tag along as well Styles, Amara is expecting me."

I don't want to face her wrath.

Styles: "What is this? Should I do it alone then?"

He queries, worriedly so.

Sethu: "Babe, I think that you should plan this through. You can't just go to rescue someone without a plan and you will have to know which forest, there are so many of them."

Is this Sethu talking?

I thought she couldn't hear a thing.

Neo: "Miss S, are you okay?"

Neo has seen it too.

Neo: "Did you hit your head or something? o na le concussion?" (You have a concussion?)

Styles: "Neo stop, Randall we are going to find Nkomo tomorrow."

Okay...



That is a command.

Nkomo does not deserve Styles' loyalty.

AMARA\*

Me: "When is our next meeting?"

Khanyi: "Saturday, if you and hubby are free."

The meeting was going great until Randall received a call from Styles, apparently it was an emergency. I'm walking Ayize and Khanyisile out.

Ayize: "I'll tag along if I'm not working."

She offers.

Me: "I would love that babe."

Ayize: "Great, it's settled then."

She states gleefully.

Ayize is doing so much for me, I am grateful for her. Who would've thought that I would find a friend in her?

Khanyi: "Okay, it's a date. I have to run, I have a meeting to attend."

Me: "Thank you so much for coming over."

Ayize opens the door as they prepare to walk out, I look to see my aunt approaching from the gate. I didn't know that she was coming, it's strange to see her alone. Usually Mhambi is with her.

Me: "Call me when you get home?"

I utter to Ayize who agrees with a nod.

Ayize: "Tell Randy baby his second wife will see him on Saturday."

I laugh at her request, this is why I love her. She makes everything seem so colourful.

Khanyi: "If there's anything you need to discuss, do not hesitate to call me."

Me: "I know, thank you."

They bid me goodbye.

Me: "Mama."

Petunia smiles widely as she approaches me.

Petunia: "My baby,"

I am drawn into her loving arms, the arms of a mother. I mean my life is not perfect, however I am happy. Somehow being in this motherly warm embrace makes everything seem okay.

Me: "Please come in mama."

With a warm smile coated on her face, she leads her feet into the house.

Petunia: "I'm sorry that I came unannounced."

Me: "Not at all mama, you are always welcomed here."

We make it to the living room.

Randall's mother is not home. His uncle is having forty winks in the guest room, he is jet lagged.

Me: "I should get you something to drink."

I offer, standing up.

Petunia: "Not now, sit with me."

She pats the empty space next to her.

Me: "Are you okay?"

She has me worried, there is something up with her.

Petunia: "I'm fine. So the letter has finally arrived. You are going to be a bride my child oh, but you're so young."

Her hand gently falls on my cheek.

Me: "I'm not that young mama."

Her eyes dispute with me.

Petunia: "Are you happy?"

Me: "I am."

Petunia: "You should be. So, when were you going to tell me about the baby?"

She asks.

I would expect her to notice.

Me: "After the wedding."

This is nothing, but the truth.

Petunia: "So, we were going to ignore the baby bump while you walk down the aisle?"

Okay, I didn't think of that.



Me: "So much has been happening ma, I'm sorry that I kept this from you."

Petunia: "I have something for you."

She digs into her hand bag to reveal a photograph.

Amara: "Mama?"

I can't recall the last time I saw this picture.

Petunia: "I was packing up your old clothes and came across it."

I was three years in this picture, I'm sitting on my mother's lap and she has this warm smile on her face. Her eyes are enthralled on the side, she's looking at someone who was probably standing next to the photographer. I would like to think it's my father.

Petunia: "She would be so happy if she were here."

The tragic death of my parents haunted me for years since that night, the ghastly crime visited me every night in my dreams. I am yet to find out, as to how the dreams halted when I came into Randall's life, it has come to a point where I am beginning to forget their faces.

Me: "I wish she were here mama, I miss her so much."

Petunia: "I know my child."

Me: "Remember how I wasn't allowed to grow my hair? I had to go to school with a bald head, while other girls flaunted their hair styles."

My mother was too dramatic honestly, too rural if you ask me.

Petunia: "It's a good thing you looked like a boy, having your father's face worked in your favour."

She cackles.

I literally looked like a younger version of my father, the family would make sure to remind me of that each time they saw me. Uncle Mhambi went as far as to say I was the boy he never had.

Gosh...

I hated it and to think I wasn't tortured enough by that, I wasn't allowed to wear pants, from shorts to jump suits. So you can imagine a boy in a skirt. I was convinced that my parents had taken up a task to make my life miserable.

Me: "A boy in a skirt mama?"

I'm still not okay.

She laughs.

Me: "Why were they taken away from me? Did I not deserve to have parents to call my own?"

Petunia: "Everything happens for a reason Amara, God knows why he took them from you."

That theory should die, nothing will ever justified pain and grief.

Me: "Can God be cruel to do that?"

I hold my breath to stop my tears from pushing out, I don't want to be upset over this. Ntombi didn't give me a chance to grieve my parents, I was shipped to her house, given a kitchen full of plates and a dirty house to clean. To add to that, Moses saw a woman in a body of an eight year old.

Petunia: "You need to trust God Amara."

That's what people say when you're in a dilemma, trust God. How do I trust when I don't understand the things he does?

I clamp my teeth together, my tears have put up a fight with me. My hand trembles as it holds the picture of my mother, no one deserves to have their parents taken away from them.

Petunia: "Oh Amara, you're only going to upset the baby."

She places a comforting hand on my shoulder.

Me: "I didn't deserve any of that mama, I witnessed their death. My mother's agonizing screams and my father desperately pleading for her life."

She smashes her hand on my mouth building a wedge between my lips and the words, wanting to splash out.

Petunia: "No, please don't. I don't want you crying my child, you have cried enough in your life."

Not for their deaths.

Petunia: "Now it's time for you to embrace life and live Amara. Also think about how you and your husband will tell Jonas about the baby."

She laughs, she knows how Jonas can be.

Me: "You mean plan our funeral because he is going to kill us."

My uncle doesn't care how old you get, if he's older than you then you're young enough to be chided. He sure knows how to get under your skin.

Petunia: "I can't help you with that as well."

So much for family.

Me: "How about we tell him after the wedding?"

How clever is this?

Petunia: "You know that he will spot you from a mile, Jonas can stop the wedding with just one word."

True.

We are doomed.

I'm getting a call from Randall.

Did I mention that the man hardly ever calls me when he's out? Yes, he is still the same clueless Randall. Sometimes I wish that Ife were here to knock some sense into him.

Me: "Hi."

I answer, my aunt seems to know who I'm talking to. Her eyes are awkwardly glued to black TV screen.

Randall: "Hi?"

He's confused by how I answered the call.

Randall: "What did I do this time Amara?"

The worry in his voice....

Me: "My aunt is here."

How do I tell him that, I can't call him pet names in front of his in-law?

Randall: "So? Did she stop you from calling me baby?"

Eish Randall....

Me: "What is it?"

Aunt side eyes me...

Did I say something wrong?

Randall: "Get ready, we're going out for dinner."

Huh!!!

Me: "Hello? Randall the signal is bad, I can't hear you."

Randall: "What? The line is perfectly clear."

Me: "Not on my side. I thought you said we're going out to dinner, I think we got disconnected a little there."

He huffs at my witticism.

Randall: "Are you adopting Styles habit of cracking dry jokes?"

I crow, forgetting that my aunt is sitting next to me.

Randall: "What was that?"

With a contemptuous question, he ripostes.

Me: "Don't."

My horselaugh is not attractive, it's something he reminds me of a lot.

Randall: "Was that a laugh?"

Me: "Baby."

Aunt clears her throat, maybe I should have excused myself.

Randall: "Hey, don't scare my son by laughing like that."

I should be offended, but I decide to forgive him.

Me: "Who is cracking dry jokes now?"

He snickers.

Randall: "Get ready me hemma, we're going out. I'm almost home." (My queen.)

Me: "Really?"

This is a first, honestly.

Someone is teaching him these things, Ayize is a legend.

Randall: "Would you rather we have supper with mother, grilling us about fornication and cohabiting."

I am definitely not in the mood for that.

Me: "I'm ready, come get me."

He chortles...

Turns out I'm funny after all.

Randall: "Wait for me at the door, so you can run to the car the second I get there."

I'm not doing that.

Me: "She's not home yet."

I reply in a titter, he exhales a sign of relief.

Randall: "Let me hurry then before she gets home."

It's funny how he wants to avoid his mother.

Me: "I will see you just now."

I'll probably take forever to get ready. Honestly I don't want to see his mother, the woman looks at me like I'm planning to murder her son for insurance money.

I have a feeling that she will warm up to me one day.

Randall: "I love you."

Just like that? After telling him that, there is a rural woman sitting next to me. And the looks she has given me have made me want to hide under a rock.

Me: "Okay bye."

Randall: "No, no I'm not taking that."

He whinges.

Me: "Randall, you're wasting time, I still have to bath and find something to wear."

I take over his job of complaining.

Randall: "You know Amara..."

He sighs.

Randall: "I'll see you now."

He decides not to say much, that's alright. This phone call must end.

Me: "Me do wo." (I love you.)

I've been practising.

Randall: "Okay, okay. I'm impressed, you're ready for the Ashanti kingdom."

Not a chance, Randall can't be romantic even if he tried.

Me: "Let me go and get ready."

Randall: "Can I not find you bathing? Or I will leave you behind and you'll dine with your asew."  
(In-law.)

He wouldn't dare.

Me: "Drop the call then Randall, so I can prepare."

My voice just went up, didn't it? This aunt is giving me looks.

Randall: "Bite my head, why don't you."

R.J better calm down or I will definitely bite his head.

He won't hang up, let me take the lead.

Petunia: "Kanti amadoda asekhulunywa kanjena?" (Men are spoken to like this now?)

Not now aunt...

I want to tell her this, I'll spare her.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

183\*

NKOMO\*

"Drag him."

This old man seems to be giving so many demands. I'm lugged through the thorny trees, the rocks and mud of the forest. The only sound I have muttered is groans of pain, the pain that has me wishing for death.

I hear the sound of water before we reach a stream, Ruth is here. She's wearing a long black robe, for a second there, I see her eyes widen as she spots me.

There are more men here.

Ruth: "What the hell are you doing?"

She furiously pushes the guy that's lugging me, he falls on the ground.

Ruth: "Why are you dragging him like that?"

She yells at him and I cannot understand her actions.

"Ruth, what is your problem?"

I'm getting sick of seeing this man's face.

Ruth: "Did you have to drag him like that dad?"

Dad?

Me: "Bensen?"

He scowls at me.

Me: "Ruth, this man is your father?"

She turns away from me with a nod.

Me: "How long have you been planning this?"

Silence.

Me: "Ruth, you owe me this much."

Bensen: "She doesn't owe you anything."

He yells, I don't know why he's yelling.





Me: "I'm not talking to you demon."

The courage I have will have me killed one day, probably that one day is today.

Bensen sends his foot forward, it lands on my face. I hit the ground with a great thud, a gush of blood fills my mouth and I angle my head to spit it out.

Ruth: "Dad!!!"

She runs to me, I push her away as she lends a helping hand.

Me: "It's too late for that."

I sit up.

Bensen: "What are you doing Ruth? This is your problem, you're too kind. This is the same kindness that had your mother run away with another man."

Ruth: "You don't have to treat him like an animal dad, you said you won't hurt him. You said you'll only scare him so he agrees to the plan, but you had him, attacked by dogs."

What the hell is this? Who is this woman?

She is different from the Ruth that mocked me at the shed.

Bensen: "I will do things the way I see fit."

Me: "You can do whatever you want with me, I am not going to do your dirty work."

"I would listen to him if I were you."

Oh fuck it. Nothing surprises me anymore.

The bastard Segun is also here.

Me: "You deserve an Oscar Ruth, wow."

Her act that day was great, she nailed it. I thought Segun had really died.

Segun: "You're in deep shit and you still talk nonsense. The only thing you should be worried about is this river."

The river is flooded with crocodiles and as if they can smell my blood, they are swimming closer to the shore.

Me: "What do you want from me Segun? I have nothing to do with you."

Segun: "Just agree to hand Uze to us, we'll have him married to Ruth and you will be a free man."

I am disappointed by his futility, for Randall's father, he sure is an idiot.

Me: "Forget it, I am not you Segun. I do not turn my back on the people that count on me."

He huffs.

Segun: "It's up to you Nkomo, the way I see it, these crocodiles are hungry."

Bensen: "Get him."

Bensen commands.

Two men grab my legs, while two more seize my feet. I'm dangling in the air like a swing. I scream due to the excruciating pain on my leg.

Ruth: "No one said anything about throwing him into the river."

She panics, her eyes swell with tears.

Bensen: "This is why I don't tell you anything Ruth."

Segun: "I told you that she should stay back."

Segun adds, this man is as evil as Bensen. I wave my body to and fro, desperately fighting to be freed.

Me: "Put me down."

I command with authority, only to have them laugh at me.

Bensen: "Throw him in."

He shouts, the men move closer to the stream. I'm screaming now because I know that this is the end.

Ruth: "Dad stop, it's not funny. Stop please."

Ruth howls as she follows behind us, she is pleading for me.

Me: "Put me down, please put me down."

I shout, my voice tremors in fright.

MKHIZE\*

I have one of my taxi drivers keeping an eye on Sishi, he will alert me the moment Sishi makes a move. I want the bastard who took my son, I want to kill him myself.

Sika: "What happened to you back there?"

He walks into my office, I like how Sika has become comfortable with me. He's like a son to me.

Me: "That girl looks familiar."

Sika: "Sishi's girl?"

Me: "Yes, there was a girl I used to love back in my days. The problem is that I was married and had three kids."

Sika: "You have more than one wife baba. Why didn't you take her as your wife as well?"

Me: "She was still at school and MaSibiya was against having a sister wife, I was also secretly seeing Nkomo's mom. Nkomo was 3 years old when I met Ntokobeko. One day she was gone. I couldn't find her anywhere, I was going to marry her after she graduated."

Sika: "Graduated? How old was she?"

He asks, his eyes are filled with inquisitiveness.

Me: "She was seventeen, my heart broke when she disappeared. You know I never confessed this to anyone, even to myself. Nontobeko is the reason I have a fetish for young girls, they give me that feeling that she used to give me. It all ends once they start aging and I have to look for another."

He smiles, he's a halfwit. I'm expression my feelings here.

Sika: "You loved her baba?" (Boss.)

Me: "More than MaSibiya. She made me feel alive, she respected me and made me feel like I was important to her. Loving MaSibiya was hard, it was an arranged married."

After I had killed my mother, I ran home to my father. That's when I decided to turn away from drugs. My father introduced this beautiful maiden to me. I didn't love her, but agreed to the marriage only to please him.

Me: "Nontobeko was different, I loved that girl Sika."

He chortles, Sika needs to open his heart and find a wife for himself. He can't die alone.

Sika: "So you think that's her daughter?"

He asks.

Me: "I don't know what to think, there is so much resemblance in her."

Sika: "There is one thing left to do, find out who she is."

I like his suggestion.

Me: "We can do that, it breaks my heart to know that she was seeing someone besides me. She had a child with another man."

Sika: "Could it be that, she could be yours?"

Me: "None of my wives have given me a girl child, I doubt that's possible and she looks young. I last saw Nontobeko 25 years ago."

Could she have gone and gotten married? Is that the reason she disappeared?

KHETHU\*

I don't know who to call anymore, Styles refuses to help me. My father is not taking my calls and Mbongeni has moved on with his life. I couldn't go back to him grovelling. My mother is badly injured, the doctors say I should hope for the best. I can't lose her, she is all I have.

"Excuse me, are you okay?"

This is what you get for crying in public, I shrug my shoulders deciding not to attend to the man, standing before me. I can only see his black formal shoes, he's wearing black creased pants. His strong scent hovers in the air and it's giving me a headache.

"Are you okay lady?"

Me: "Leave me alone."

I chase him off with my demand.

"I'm sorry, I can't walk away from a woman who clearly needs helps."

Why is he being a pest?

I bring my head up to meet a black man, he looks tall from this view. He's dressed in all black and his hair is tied in a ponytail.

I was planning on telling him off, but his peaceful face does not allow me.

Me: "I'm okay."

"You don't look okay."

He disputes my response.

"May I?"

He points at the empty space next to me.

I don't answer, he sits anyway.

"You know it's not every day you bump into a beautiful lady crying."

I think he's trying to crack a joke. I will not justify his jest with a giggle.

"Won't you tell me what's wrong?"

I frown at him as I realize that he talks like Styles.

Me: "It's not every day that I share my problems with a stranger."

I mutter and he chortles

"The name is Kay."

He gives a hand shakes, I decide not to take it.

Me: "Kay what?"

Kay: "Just Kay."

He flashes a quick smile that's gone in a jiffy.

Kay: "Won't you tell me why you're crying alone in the hospital passage."

Me: "My mother is hospitals, she was beaten up by some loser. There is no hope for her."

I explain crying.

Kay: "I'm sorry, why are you alone then? Shouldn't your family be here with you?"

Me: "My father is not around."

Kay: "Maybe I can keep you company until he gets here."

Why is he nice? He doesn't know me.

Me: "The catch is?"

He snickers.

Kay: "Why should there always be a catch? Can't a man be nice to a woman without wanting anything?"

He has a point.

I guess the night will not be long.

STYLES\*

Randall and Amara must be done with their dinner, I'm waiting for him outside the restaurant. Something doesn't feel right, Nkomo is in trouble. I couldn't sleep, so I had to rush out of the house leaving Sethu fast asleep.

She will have to forgive me.

There they are, walking hand in hand as they exit the restaurant. I jump out of the car, they spot me and change their course of direction.

Randall: "Styles."

He greets with a worried look on his face.

Randall: "Are you okay?"

Me: "We have to go."



He knows what I'm talking about. He glances at Amara who hasn't abandoned the confused facial expression.

Randall: "Okay, let me drop her home."

Me: "I'll drive behind you."

He nods.

Amara: "Is everything okay?"

Me: "Nkomo is in trouble, we have to help him."

Randall: "Let's go me hemma." (My queen.)

I drive behind them like I said, I hope we get there on time.

MKHIZE\*

I receive a call from the man I asked to tail Sishi.

Me: "Speak to me."

"He's on the move."

Me: "Send me the location, when you get there."

"Yes sir."

My son has been found.

Sika: "Should I bring my guns out?"

Me: "Let's go get my son Sika."

It's time I bring out the old Mkhize.

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

184\*

NTOMBI\*

Funny how people can sense that no, it's supper or lunch time in that house. Our quiet time is disturbed by a loud knock at the door, we exchange looks. No one is willing to drop their plate and attend to the knock.

"Moses."

Jafta thinks my door was cheap, banging on it like that. All eyes are on Moses now, as we wait on him to get up.

Moses: "Yini? Ngiyadla." (What? I'm eating.)

He bites a big chunk of meat and chews without a care.

"Moses."

Jafta shouts from outside.

Me: "Moses, your friend will break down my door."

I complain.

Moses: "Eish, uJafta naye ufunani?" (What does Jafta want?)

He hands me his plate.

Me: "What must I do with it?"

Moses: "Put it in the kitchen or under the table, I am not sharing my food with Jafta."

He licks his fingers as he answers me.

Me: "Ngempela?" (Really?)

Moses: "Awumazi uJafta weNtombi, he'll be digging his hands in my plate before he even asks if he could. Please put that plate in the kitchen or else you will cook again." (You don't know Jafta.)

He has spoken, reluctantly I plod to the kitchen while he goes to answer.

Jafta: "Moses njayami, hurry. I just saw Mashoto at the tavern." (My dog.)

Moses: "What?"

He turns to me.

Moses: "Ntombi, ngiyeza."

He grabs a beret on the chair... Yes, I said beret and it's yellow.

Apparently, since he's running for chancellor, he has to look "the part". What embarrasses me is when he calls our neighbours comrade. It kills me on the spot.

Me: "I'm coming with you."

I'll need my phone for this.

Jonas: "Ntombi hlala phansi." (Sit down.)

Does Jonas know the amount of money that Mashoto stole?

I don't give him a second look, but follow Moses and Jafta. They are marching down the streets, their strides are giving off that, they are going to fight someone. Moses is honestly too old, man.

The look on his face right now is more humiliating than that, high school boy walk.

Me: "Can you slow down a bit, everyone is watching and before you know it, they will start following us."

I chastise them, they don't take notice of my words.

Me: "Moses."

He yanks his hand as I claim it.

Moses: "Go home Ntombi."

He thinks he can scare me with that tone.

We make it to the packed tavern, the music is loud. Moses stands at the door, his hands pasted on his hips.

Jafta: "There she is."

Jafta points a finger in the midst of the crowd, Mashoto is dancing with some guy. The woman looks expensive... the nerve...

Moses: "Mashoto!!!!"

He booms as he marches to her. Mashoto takes off in a hurry, she's dashing to the other direction, pushing people out of her way.

Ntombi: "Mbambe Moses, bamba lenja." (Grab that dog.)

I shout as we run after her, Moses is leading the race. I'm surprised that he can run this fast.

Moses: "Vimba, vimba." (Stop her.)

These people are too drunk to mind other people's business. Mashoto goes through a door, it's





the kitchen. The bustling staff pause from their work as they watch us swoosh past.

Moses: "Mashoto stop."

He shouts.

She should stop because Moses will pass out from fatigue. He hasn't lost that much weight to be running this much.

Moses: "Vimba sisi, vimba." (Block the way.)

He shouts to a lady that's washing the dishes by the door.

Me: "Phonsa ibhodo Moses, shaya lenja man." (Throw a pot at her, hit that dog.)

I holler while trying to pick up my pace.

Moses: "Sisi vala umnyango." (Close the door, lady.)

It's too late, Mashoto scurries out the door.

Moses: "Yingakho ugeza izitsha, u dom man." (That's why you're washing dishes, you're dumb.)

He shoves the dish washer aside as he passes, not carrying that she is a petite woman.

"Hayi suka." (Whatever.)

The lady retorts with an attitude, throwing her hand at him.

We make it out the door, Mashoto is not a fast runner. There she is scampering down the dark alley.

Moses picks up his speed, he has to catch up with her. That's money running away from us.

Moses: "Mashoto... Mana lapho... Shotos." (Stop there.)

Shotos?

Yoh!!!

She turns her head back, but doesn't stop running. Jafta appears from a corner right in front of her, she has nowhere to go now.

Moses: "Yeah, Mbambe Jafta." (Stop her.)

He's wheezing by the time we get to them.

Mashoto: "Moses sthandwa sami." (My love.)

She says, twitching a smile.

Her face is covered in sweat, her eyes widened in shock.

Moses: "Sthandwa sami? Ungijwayela kabi wena Mashoto. Ikuphi imali yami?" (My love? You're taking me for a ride. Where is my money?)

Mashoto: "What money?"

It's evident that she would deny everything. She stumbles back as a hard slap from Moses meets her cheek with force.

Mashoto: "Moses you hit me."

She rubs her cheek as a tear falls down.

Moses: "Where is my money Mashoto?"

He repeats.

Mashoto: "I don't know what you're talking about Moses, I swear I didn't take your money."

Me: "Unamanga man, you stole the money that was buried under a tree." (You're lying.)

I yell.

Mashoto: "I swear to our unborn child Moses, I don't know anything about the money."

Moses: "Unamanga man, unamanga." (You're lying.)

She screams when he snatches her upper arms and shakes her body with so much force.

Moses: "Ngizokubulala Shotos, ngizokubulala. Ikuphi imali yami?" (I will kill you Mashoto. Where is my money?)

He roars in her face, spraying his spit while at it.

Mashoto: "You're hurting me Moses."

She cries.

Me: "Hey unamandla Mashoto, hayi ngiyakuvuma shame. You're not afraid of anything neh?" (You are brave, I have to give it to you.)

I add my opinion, I can't stand here while Moses fights alone.

Me: "Moses leave her to me, I will show her what we do to thieves."

I push Moses aside, pull Mashoto by her hair. She screams and grabs my hair as well, we wrestle between these two men who are doing nothing to stop us. Mashoto pushes me, my back hits the wall. Jafta stops me from charging after her.

Me: "Move out of my way Jafta, ingijwayela kabi lengane." (This child is taking me for granted.)

Moses: "Ntombi wait, I've got this."

I stop at his demand.

Moses: "Ungizwa ngabantu wena neh?" (You don't know me hey?)

He says pointing a finger at her.

Moses: "I will take you to S'godi, he will tell us if you took the money or not and if you're really pregnant."

That's quick thinking, I like and I'm impressed.

Mashoto: "No Moses, don't take me to that man. My family doesn't believe in sangomas."  
(Traditional healers.)

Moses: "Voetsek asambe." (Piss off, let's go.)

He pulls her to the streets, crying and pleading. Today we will know if she really is pregnant.

Ayize\*

Mbali is finally sleeping, I don't know what I'll do if she wakes up screaming again. It's sad to see her like that and to think there is nothing we can do about it hurts.

I'm glad Ginger is not affected by the curse, these kids have been through enough, they deserve a break.

Neo suggested that we move her to Randall's house, maybe the ancestors won't attack her when she's close to their own. It sounds like a good idea, but we can't throw our burdens on other people's shoulders.

Moving in with Neo is the best decision I have made so far, the man makes me happy. It feels good to have someone to call my own and to have a home, yes he is a clown. Nonetheless he knows how to be serious when a situation is presented, I taught him well and he's a fast learner.

We have one problem though, our sex life is none existent. The first time we made love was, how do I put it? It was not pleasant for lack of a better word, the second time was worse. I avoided him the whole day and made sure to go to bed when he was asleep.

I don't feel anything whatsoever, it's good when we have foreplay. He knows where to touch me and how to touch me and it gets me wet in seconds that, I crave for him to be inside me.

Once the fun begins, I lose all senses. My body falls numb and I wish for it to stop, I felt so bad when Neo thought it was him. I had to assure him that, I'm the one with the problem.

Unbeknownst to Neo, I went to see a doctor who referred me to a psychiatrist. Apparently the sexual abuse I had been subjected to all my life has led me to this moment. From my father to the old men I gave myself to, the things Lethabo did to me.

He abused my privates, I don't remember feeling anything while sleeping with those men. I didn't orgasm, it was all about them anyway. I was oblivious to the lack of sexual feelings. It didn't matter to me, neither did I think that, one day I would want to enjoy sex with the man I love.

I had convinced myself that love was not for me and no man would ever look at me like that.

And now that I have fallen in love and found a man who wants to satisfy me with his love, my body refuses to conjoin with my heart.

How do I tell Neo this?

It's bad enough that I feel like a porn star who slept with every man in town. Therapy was supposed to help, it seems like my wounds run deep. I have nowhere to turn to now, I can only hope that Neo's love and patience will lead me to complete healing.

He continues to blame himself, I can't recall the last time he kissed me and meant it. I miss his lips and his touches, I miss the feeling of him wanting me and craving to be one with me.

This is where it all ends, wishes, thoughts and cravings that cannot be fed.

Good, he's in the bedroom and changing into a pair of pyjamas. Neo usually goes to bed without a shirt on, I loved it when I would turn in bed to meet his warm skin. I have been denied that as well.

Have I been so bad in my life that I deserve this kind of torture?

Why can't I be with the man I love? I just want to be normal, am I asking for too much?

My heart is hammering against my rib cage as I watch him strip naked and is left in his trunks. He has this huge tattoo on his back, of his son's face and the name Kagiso lies just beneath it.

He says he cried the day he got the tattoo, it was the most agonizing pain he had ever felt. I couldn't stop laughing the day he recited this story to me. A quick laugh escapes my mouth as my mind sends me back to the day he told me the story.

He swivels revealing his full body and my heart stops.

Hot flashes ripple through me, my mind freezes for a moment. I find myself checking him out and lusting over him, he knows this look on my face hence he quickly throws on a t-shirt and a pair of shorts.

I blink away the tears that threaten to bully me, there is a stab in my heart. I toddle in ashamedly, my gaze fixated on one place, the bed. I feel him watching me as I start to rid the bed of the many pillows adorned on it.

Me: "I was thinking about the day you got that tattoo, that's why I laughed."

I feel a need to explain my reason for falling into a cackle.

Neo: "Yeah neh."

I hate it when his voice is low like this, it tells me that he's sad and I hate it when he's sad.

Neo: "Is Mbali okay?"

He stands with his hands across his chest.

Me: "She is."

We never had muted moments like this, when we did, it was never this bad.

Neo: "Are you going to take a bath?"

Why is he asking me this? He knows I do that every night.

I nod, my eyes fall on his and we get entangled in this gaze that refuses to be broken.

Me: "I need to tell you something."

I introduce.

Maybe it's about time I tell him what the doctor said, I'm afraid though that he will think me to be a slut who has been destroyed by men. I know that Neo is understanding, also I am only human. I have my flaws and fears.

Neo: "I'm listening."

He sits on the bed.

Where do I begin?

Me: "I..."

His phone rings and I am obliged to stop as he grabs it to check the caller Id.

Neo: "Ke Stylos." (It's Styles.)

He answers.

Neo: "Yes, yes."

listens>>

Neo: "Nou?" (Now.)

What is it now?

Neo: "Okay kea tla." (I'm coming.)

This could be a sign that I shouldn't tell him now.

Neo: "Come on Stylos, I can't let you guys go to war alone."

Another war?

This life is something else hey, maybe I should put on my boots and join them. Honestly my life is boring compared to theirs.

Neo: "Kea tla, send me the location and I will meet you there." (I'm coming.)

I rush to the wardrobe to grab a coat as soon as he drops the call.

Neo: "What's going on?"

He's next to me, picking out something to wear as well.

Me: "I'm coming with you."

Neo: "Yoh, nahana Zee." (Imagine.)

He puts on a pair of black jeans and a black sweater.

Me: "We wear black during a mission? Why didn't you tell me?"

He stops to glare at me.

Neo: "Please tell me you're not serious."

Me: "As a heart attack."

He snickers... grabs his shoes.... sits on the bed and pushes them on his feet.

Neo: "Shame, it's not happening baba."

Me: "Will Randy ba..."

He raises his eyes.

Let me rephrase my question.

Me: "Will Mr. Okolie be there?"

He smiles while shaking his head.

Neo: "Yes, he will."

Me: "Then it's happening baba, I can't miss that man in action. I'm tired of watching Rambo on TV that, white man bores me now."

A laugh sashays out of his mouth.

Neo: "Have you forgotten about Mbali Zee? What will Ginger do when she starts having one of her episodes?"

Eish!

The joys of being a mother.

Me: "What if you get shot again? I need to be there to watch every bullet that flies your way, I'll be shouting "duck" because clearly you're slow."

He simpers.

Neo: "I will be careful Zee, I promise. I will come home."

He says.

Me: "Good because I am not visiting anyone at the hospital, I have seen enough of that depressing place. As for your funeral, you know the drill. I will leave this house on the day of your funeral, find a man to love and move on with my life as if you never existed. Die Neo and you will see what I'll do."

My threat causes him to sigh in distress.

Neo: "I will haunt you."

Me: "Neo I am serious."

Neo: "How can I go and get myself killed knowing that you will break my heart when I die."

Me: "Your heart stops when you die."

I correct him.

Neo: "You know what I mean baba."

He's touching me, it starts off as a gentle slow touch. His hands are now around my waist, moving up and down my spine. This act alone is enough to cause a throbbing down there. His body feels so good against mine, I close my eyes to savour the moment. My hands are all over him as he's kissing me, I hate these goodbye kisses. They scare the hell out of me, Neo better come back.

Me: "Kiss me again please."

I beg in a hush, I haven't felt this type of kiss in a while. My eyes water due to this, I am not a crier but this love thing can mess you up so bad. It can turn a stone cold heart into a heart of flesh.

He presses his forehead against mine as we break from the kiss and race to catch our breaths. His large hands pasted on my back, he pulls me closer into him that there is no space for air.

I can feel him, his heart beating hard on his chest.

Neo: "We're going to be okay Zee, I promise."

He's thinking what I'm thinking, I know he also craves for us to be a normal couple. His lips touch mine, he takes me on another kissing session.

NKOMO\*

Ruth screams like she's possessed as I am thrown into the water. The crocodiles go crazy, they are swimming towards me while I try so hard to swim away. Where will I swim to anyway? These people will throw me back in. I keep checking the coast to see how far they are, there is one that seems to be faster than the others.

I can't see clearly though due to the darkness of the night.

"BoKhabazela, if you're real then save me from the snare these people have laid for me. The claws of death seek my life, save me from its ploy."

The injury on my leg limits the rate of this race, I feel something touch the tip of my foot. The

crocodile has caught up with me.

I'm a goner... Should I give up and let it devour me?

The loudness of a gunshot resounds, it's followed by many that, I lose count. Feeling a need to turn, I stop and my tears fail me as my eyes fall on Styles.

He has killed the crocodile that was tailing me, he's standing on the shore... rage pasted on his face while shooting the others that keep swimming towards me. I fight to swim out of the water, he jumps in... swims towards me and helps me out. I collapse on the ground as a surge of relief washes over me. I have never been so glad to be alive. Styles has his hand on my shoulder, he is looking at me, his eyes painted with worry and fury.

Styles: "Are you okay?"

I can only nod.

Styles: "I'm sorry I'm late."

He clenches his teeth, tilts his head to the side and growls.

Styles: "I am going to kill them."

He grunts through gritted teeth.

Me: "Not Ruth."

He frowns at me as confusion sways on his face.

Me: "I would like to do the honours, Ruth is mine."

I am going to kill that bitch, speaking of Ruth...

I turn to the far left to see Randall pointing two pistols at the whole crew, they are quietly standing with their hands up and their eyes fixed on him.

Styles: "Stay here, I'll take care of everything."

He gives an order.

Me: "Thank you Styles."

Styles: "You're my brother, this is for life. I promised you that, I will kill them and I will."

I believe him, no one can stop him when he is thirsty for blood.

I clench my teeth trying to fight the tears that want to prove me weak, Styles tightens his hand on my shoulder. He moves closer to press his forehead on mine, the bond takes a second before he moves back.

Styles: "You're not alone Nkomo, we've all made mistakes and no one will judge you for it. We're here now."

I nod and watch him saunter to Randall.



Randall: "Is he good?"

I hear Randall ask, he looks at me... gestures a question regarding my wellbeing... I nod in return. Ruth is snivelling, her gaze is on me. I don't care anymore, apart from my ignorance, she is the reason I am here.

To be continued...

BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

185\*

NTOMBI\*

Mashoto has not stopped crying since we left the tavern, I hope Moses embarrasses her in the community. She will learn that you do not steal from the Mngomas. Who does she think she is?

I know the money was attained in the wrong way, but it didn't give her the right to steal from us.

She stops as we get to S'godi's house, she is so reluctant about going in that house.

Me "What's wrong with you?"

I ask.

Moses is trying to pull her into the premises, but Mashoto has compressed her feet on the ground.

Moses: "Asambe maan." (Let's go.)

She grabs hold of the fence, crying. This woman thinks we are joking.

Me: "Jafta go and call S'godi, since she doesn't want to go inside."

Jafta scowls at me, he doesn't believe in a woman giving him orders, hence the serious offensive look on his face that, has me clearing my throat.

Moses: "Hayi Ntombi, S'godi doesn't play. He won't come out, angeke sihlulwe ngu Mashoto. Jafta and I will drag her inside." (We will not be defeated by Mashoto.)

Me: "So Moses when you decided to date a big girl, you never saw this day coming?"

He glowers at me.

Me: "What?"



I shrug.

Me: "It was nice when you two were going behind my back and now you're struggling. How does it feel now Moses?"

Moses: "Not now Ntombi, we have serious issues to deal with."

Jafta: "Moses bra yami, you know how to choose them." (My friend.)

Says the man who spends half of his life intoxicated.

Moses: "Tell me about it Jafta."

He agrees with him, if it were up to me Moses and this loser wouldn't be friends. Jafta is a bad influence, he's probably the one who introduced Moses to this thief.

Moses: "Mashoto move man.)

He continues to pull her hand.

Mashoto: "Okay, okay I took it. I took the money."

Tired of being pulled, she confesses.

Moses: "Where is it?"

He's not playing today.

Mashoto: "I sent half of it back home to my father, so he can extend the house."

She is not even ashamed to say it.

Moses: "Ini." (What?)

He shouts.

Moses: "Call him now, fonela uyihlo Mashoto and tell him not to use my money." (Call your father.)

Mashoto: "I can't do that, they have started renovating. The money has been used Moses."

Moses throws his hands up in disbelief.

Me: "Didn't they ask where you got that amount of money? Awusebenzi wena?" (You're unemployed.)

Moshoto: "I told them that my husband gave it to me."

Wow.

Me: "Husband? You have a husband Mashoto? I know you're not talking about my husband."

Mashoto: "Moses is my husband too."

She rejoinders.

Moses: "THULA!!!"

That's right shout at her Moses.

Moses: "Where is the rest of the money?"

Mashoto: "Moses please."

She sheds tears.

Mashoto: "We are going to have a child, I need that money for the..."

Moses is serving her well today, he keeps the slaps coming.

Mashoto: "Mos..."

Moses: "Voetsek." (Piss off.)

He yells cutting her speech.

Moses: "Where is the rest?"

Mashoto: "Under the bed, at home."

Moses: "We're going to get it now."

Me: "Isisu sona?" (What about the pregnancy?)

Mashoto: "What about it?"

This woman.

Me: "Yeyi is there a baby in there?" (Hey.)

Mashoto: "I lied about the baby."

I knew it.

Me: "Siyabonga, Moses let's go get the money." (Thank you.)

He's in shock.

Me: "You will cry later man, let's go and get the money."

I push Mashoto forward.

Me: "Lead the way."

Moses has been played by this woman, this will teach him a lesson.

RANDALL\*

I knew this man was not dead, they played us well though.

Styles: "Segun you old bastard."

Styles says.

I hate how Segun stands with confidence, even after having a gun aimed at him. Three guns to be exact, he is so sure of himself it's disturbing.

Segun: "Who are you to address me, Segun Okolie? King of the Ashanti people?"

Styles: "Not here Segun, this is my land. I am king here and if I were you, I would bow down at my feet right now."

He retorts with authority.

Segun: "If you were in my Kingdom, I would have your head on a silver platter and hang it on my gate for the whole Ashanti to see."

Arrogant bastard.

"Uze, Uze, Uze."

A whisper fills my ears, I turn to see if Styles heard it. He didn't.

Styles: "Being stupid must really come cheap, unfortunately not everyone has bad taste. You're as stupid as they come Segun."

Segun groans and at this point there is nothing he can do because he is powerless.

Segun: "Uze, look what you have done for yourself. Do you know the power that you possess as an Okolie? You're a king Uze, you have royal blood running through your veins. What the hell do you call this person standing next to you? He should be guarding your door in your kingdom."

"Uze,"

The whisper again.

Me: "Shut up Seg..."

I get an instant splitting headache, my legs fall numb causing me to collapse to the ground.

Styles: "Randall."

Styles urgently says.

Having one pistol aimed at them, he squats to check on me.

"What is wrong with him Styles?"

Nkomo's voice echoes.

Me: "I can't feel my legs, my head feels like it's about to explode."

I clamp my teeth to try and numb the pain.

Styles: "What?"

He takes one glimpse at me and in an instant Segun and the whole crew scatter everywhere.

“Stylos shoot.”

That’s Neo voice, I didn’t think that he would really come. A gun fight commences, everything happens so fast that. Styles pushes me to lie flat on the ground and opens fire.

AMARA\*

I’m joggled from my sleep, my heart thrashing against my chest. I look to my left, Randall is not home yet. Something is wrong, I can feel it. He is not okay, I have to call him.

He’s not answering the phone.

Okay, I need to calm down. I’m sure it’s nothing but a bad feeling. My anxiety leads me to Chioma's room.

Me: “Chioma wake up.”

I have to wake her up, it’s getting worse.

Chioma: “What is it?”

She is startled by my sudden visit at this time of the night.

Me: “It’s Randall, something is wrong.”

Chioma: “Is he not home?”

She asks.

I have to tell her, maybe she would know what to do.

Me: “Randall and Styles went to look for Nkomo, he was kidnapped. Something is wrong Chioma, we have to do something.”

She jumps out of bed.

Chioma: “Let’s pray Amara, there is nothing else we can do.”

When last did I actually talk to God?

Liyana: “Mara, I had a bad dream.”

Liyana walks in as Chioma pulls me to my knees, she probably couldn’t find me in my room.

Me: “I’m sorry my love.”

She kneels down beside me and places her head on my shoulder.

Me: “What was the dream about?”



Liyana: "Papa was swimming in a river full of blood."

My heart jumps to my throat, Liyana's dreams are usually accurate.

Chioma: "Let's pray Amara."

Chioma states hastily.

God hear our prayers and watch over Randall.

NEO\*

I get to the river to find Stylos having a one on one with Segun. I see an old man, his gaze is gript on Uze and he's mumbling something. As soon as Uze opens his mouth to speak he falls to the ground.

Me: "Stylos shoot."

I yell as I hurry to them while shooting at the men that are scattering around the river. The old man quickly dashes into the bushes. What the hell did he do to Uze?

Styles: "Neo, what are you doing here?"

He shouts without looking at me, his focus is on hitting the target.

Me: "That creepy man Stylos, it's him. He is doing this to Uze."

I alarm him.

Styles: "What?"

I manage to get to them, Uze is groaning in pain while pressing his head.

Styles: "Where is he?"

Me: "Behind the bushes, he was chanting something. We have to get him."

I turn to the sound of a woman screaming, Nkomo is dragging Ruth by the neck kicking and screaming. He is limping to the river.

Me: "What is he doing? This is no time for rituals."

Being a Mkhize must be hard."

Styles: "Keeping to his promise."

Randall: "Styles man, my head."

Uze growls.

Me: "We have to find the old man, we have to kill him."

Styles: "That's Bensen, Ruth's father."

Me: "Shit, the devil himself?"

Maybe I should've stayed at home.

The sound of gunshots stops.

Me: "Is that all?"

Styles: "There wasn't much of them anyway."

He turns to Randall.

Styles: "Hold on man, we're going to find that bastard."

It's hard to see anything through this darkness.

"Nkomo I'm sorry, please stop."

Ruth pleads, the man is determined to kill her.

Styles: "Neo his nose is bleeding."

Styles panics.

Me: "Shit Stylos, this is witchcraft bruh. You were right I shouldn't have come here. I think I'm getting a headache too."

It could be in my conscious.

Styles: "How are you feeling Randy?"

Randall: "My... head..."

He answers in a low tone.

Me: "You go look for Bensen, I'll stay here and watch Uze."

I am not going anywhere near that man.

"Daddy."

Ruth shouts causing us to turn, Bensen has a gun aimed at Nkomo who is standing with his hands up.

Styles: "Nkomo?"

He shouts.

Me: "Shoot Stylos, shoot him."

Styles: "No, if I shoot him he will kill Nkomo."

Me: "It's his day man, it's not like he will live forever."

I retort.

Styles: "Shut up Neo, everything will be in vain."

Randall: "Styles."

Uze is trying to get up now.

Styles: "Are you okay?"

Stylos will piss me off, can't he see that Bensen is trying to kill Uze.

Randall: "It's bearable."

He answers.

"Move."

Bensen commands Nkomo, Ruth is standing beside her father.

Nkomo: "Go to hell."

Styles: "Nkomo will get himself killed."

Bensen aims the gun on the ground between Nkomo's feet and pulls the trigger, it has Nkomo jumping in fright. Segun appears behind the bushes, he is armed.

Me: "Stylos, are we going to die because of Mkhize today."

If we shoot these people now, we can go home.

Me: "I know you love Khomo, but Zee will bury me alive if I die tonight." (Cow.)

My truth has him scowling at me.

Styles: "How did we become friends again?"

He asks.

I would give an answer, but my mind is occupied right now. I can't stop thinking of Zee with another man, it's killing me.

Randall: "We can't let Nkomo die."

He's fine now, that's why he's saying this.

Me: "The risen one, death wants you Uze. I think you should go back to Ghana Oga, these people want you and they will not give up. Must we die for Ghana now?"

Styles: "Nkomo do as they say, don't be stubborn."

His gaze is on Nkomo, Stylos and that cow will be the cause of our deaths.

Me: "Do you see that Bensen is getting closer Stylos?"

He will kill us all once he gets here, that hostage situation is a trap.





Randall: "Styles, I think..."

Bensen glances at us and Uze crumbles down.

He's back to groaning in pain.

Me: "Shit, bhodisa bhare eo Stylos." (Kill that man.)

Styles: "What the fuck is going on?"

It's not as confusing as he thinks it is.

Randall: "I can't... bre...athe..."

He says, I hunker down to check on him. His nose is bleeding again, and the veins on his head have become visible as if they are about to burst

Me: "Uze ke eng." (What is it?)

He's tossing and turning on the muddy ground. I think he's going to die.

Me: "Stylos shoot daai man, Uze is dying." (Shoot that man.)

Is Nkomo worth losing a brother?

Me: "Choose Stylos, Uze or that cow."

He leers down at us, then back at them. What is confusing about this? He has to shoot Bensen, Nkomo will make a plan.

Styles: "Randall talk to me man."

His gun is aimed at Bensen, that bastard is smirking at us. He thinks he's won.

Me: "He's not okay Stylos, Uze is dying."

I yell at him.

Segun looks the least bit worried, it makes me wonder if this is their plan. To kill Uze.

Me: "I'm going to do it myself."

I point my gun at the unflinching Bensen as they tread towards us, Nkomo has his back turned... his hands up and limping to us.

Styles: "Neo no."

He pushes my hand away as I point at the target, a gunshot echoes. Bensen ducks bringing Ruth down with him, Nkomo is also on the floor his hands covering his head... And Segun... well, his face is covered in blood as he lies on the ground with a bullet hole on his head.

Styles: "Neo, what have you done?"

He shouts.

Me: "It wasn't me, I didn't pull the trigger."

I know how to handle a gun.

Randall: "What is going on?"

Uze wipes his nose using the sleeve of his shirt as he gets up. What kind of witchcraft is this? Okay, don't panic Neo. You will be fine, your mother is a prayer warrior. You're going to make it.

Styles: "Oh no, no."

Styles declares loudly, he's packing. This is the first time seeing him panic.

Me: "Ke eng Stylos, ke eng?" (What is it Styles?)

He's looking behind us, I turn along with Uze. Jehovah, this is bad.

Styles: "What have you done, you idiot?"

Nkomo: "No Mkhize, what have you done?"

Mkhize shot Segun, he's standing a few feet from us, his hands on top of his head and goggle eyed.

Randall: "Oh shit Sethu."

Uze expresses, it's over. Miss S will pay for a sin she knows nothing of.

To be continued...

Akan (Twi) is a dialect of the Akan language spoken in Southern Ghana. It's the largest of the 17th major ethnic groups in Ghana.

BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

186\*

Unedited...

NEO\*

Mkhize is shaking in his boots, I have always known that there's nothing, but water in that big head of his.

Mkhize: "I was aiming for this devil who took my son, he... he moved out of the way."

It's too late, explaining won't change anything.

Nkomo: "You have killed us, you might as well put a bullet through my head."

Nkomo shouts.

He is terrified as the word described.

Me: "And Miss S..."

I mummer, Stylos shoots daggers at me.

I tend to forget that there is a secret to be kept.

Mkhize: "Sika, how do I fix this? I can't go through this again."

His voice quavers with fear.

Mkhize drops down on his knees, crying. It's funny though seeing an old man like Mkhize cry, these are results birthed by stupidity.

I get another side eye from Stylos for my low gurgle, he's stressed I understand, but... Mkhize...I have to halt myself from laughing.

We have guns aimed at Ruth and Bensen, he scowls upon seeing the weapons that threaten to take him down.

Mkhize: "Sika take Nkomo to the hospital."

Idiot! He's wiping his tears now. I thought he was worried about the curse, suddenly his cow takes over his mind.

Sika rushes to Nkomo, the cow doesn't want his help. He shoves the helping hand Sika just offered.

Nkomo: "Don't touch me."

He makes eye contact with a terrified Ruth, she clings to her father's arm.

Mkhize: "Ndodana, ngiyacela. Go with Sika, you need medical help." (I'm begging you my son.)

He worriedly announces.

Nkomo: "I don't need your help."

The man is thirsty for revenge, he wants Ruth. If looks could kill... that's all I'll say.

Bensen: "Do you people know who you're messing with?"

That's a terrible line honestly, every coward uses it.

Me: "Stylos don't say anything, motho enoa ke moloi. Did you see what happened to Uze each time he spoke?" (This person is a witch.)

Oh God...

I smash my hand on my mouth, I shouldn't be saying anything either.

Styles: "If Neo is right, then don't say anything Randall. I'm going to teach this man a lesson."

That look on his face... Stylos is up to something.

Styles: "Ruth, you might want to move away from that man."

He shouts across the field.

None of us understand what he is on about, Stylos is always on a quest of his own.

Styles: "No?"

He confirms Ruth's insistence.

Stlyes: "Okay, you might want to ask him where your mother is."

Bensen: "Who are you?"

Bensen seems to have figured out the contents of Stylos' mind.

Styles: "Who I am is of no importance to you, what you need to know is that, I have a family to protect and no one is going to stand in my way. Not even the devil himself."

Stylos exclaims.

What would we be without this man? One man's heart that is big enough to occupy everyone in his life.

Bensen: "You don't know what you're doing boy, I suggest you go on about your way. This fight is between me and this man behind you."

He points at Uze with his eyes, I look back to check if Uze is still standing. He's good, only rage is visible on him. I know he wants Bensen's blood, he is only limited by the powers that Bensen has or else he would have done the worst.

Styles: "Like I said, I have a family to protect and this man that you seek is my brother."

Mkhize: "What are you waiting for Sishi? Kill this man, see what he did to my son."

Old man is restless, Nkomo seems to detest that Mkhize worries about him.

Stylos clicks his tongue, the hate he has for Mkhize is not a secret.

Styles: "Come on Ruth, I'm sure you want to know what happened to your mother before you die."

Her eyes widen due to Stylos' statement, she glares at Nkomo. He's breathing fire and Ruth knows that her days or hours per se are numbered.

Ruth: "What is he talking about dad?"

Bensen clenches his teeth, his chest vigorously moving under his t-shirt.

Mkhize: "What game are we playing here?"

Who invited him here?

Me: "This is not a ritual Mkhize, hold on. You have messed up already by killing..."

Stylos nudges me... I almost spilled, shit I must be tired.

Styles: "Daddy refuses to speak, so I should help you there."

Give it to us Stylos.

He definitely has something, Stylos still works alone. It's not a banger that he has dug some information on Bensen.

Styles: "Your mother did not run away with another man Ruth, your father sacrificed her for riches. What mother do you think would leave her child and not contact them?"

Mr. Bomb dropper, I did not expect this.

Ruth: "What?"

She seeks for answers as she takes a step away from Bensen.

Styles: "Give it up Bensen, it's game over for you."

Stylos declares with an unflinching attitude.

Bensen is cornered and whatever powers he has will not save him from a gunshot.

Bensen: "You're not my daughter, that's why I couldn't sacrifice you. Your mother was the closest to family. I used her."

He cracks impassively, building panic on Ruth's face.

Ruth: "What?"

She gasps.

She must feel like she's been hit by a train.

Bensen: "Your mother was pregnant when we met, I raised you as my own because I loved her. She was a great woman, but love couldn't put food on the table. I couldn't find a job, there was no way out of poverty."

He reveals his dark soul.

Every word coming from his mouth is an electric shock on Ruth as her body glitches.

Ruth: "So you killed my mother, you killed her?"

She punches him on his chest while shouting at him, Bensen grabs her arms and pushes her. Ruth staggers back to fall on her behind, she swiftly picks herself up.

Bensen: "What did you have me do Ruth? Live in poverty all my life? You are so ungrateful. I gave you everything you ever wanted, you lacked nothing Ruth. You should be thanking me."

Ruth: "You didn't have to kill her."

She takes a step to charge at him, Bensen raises his hand.

Bensen: "ENOUGH!!!"

He roars, Ruth draws back in fear.

Ruth: "Where is my mother?"

She still has the courage to yell at him after that authority he just showed.

Bensen: "She's gone."

One would think Bensen is on his death bed and about to breathe his last. Confessing your sins is that easy? Wow!!!

I would rather throw myself in that river.

Ruth: "I know that she's gone, at least you buried her right? She was your wife dammit, please tell me that you buried her."

Her voice quavers and her words break.

Bensen: "That's not how the cult works Ruth, when I brought her to that place that night, I knew that she was not going to come out."

He is doing everything to divert from the main topic.

Me: "Tell the child where her mother is."

I yell, he gives me one death stare that has my heart thumping hard. My big mouth will get me killed.

Ruth: "What did you do to my mother's body Bensen?"

Hehehe! Now he's Bensen.

Ruth will lose her voice with all that screaming. Stylos has this cold smirk on his face. What is he planning?

Bensen: "We devoured her, we drank her blood."

Me: "Chaaaaiii!!!! Jesus, see your people"

I can't help but shout, I have heard of witchcraft but this is too much. Every vein in my body itches at this revelation, God you have left us in this world. Look what the devil is doing, he is playing with your children.

Styles: "Go figure."

Stylos states holding on to the smirk, he is enjoying this. Why is he not as terrified as I am?

Uze is wide eyed, if only he could speak... Mkhize has no expression on his face, I wouldn't expect more. Considering that he is used to it.

Me: "Stylos, you knew this."

I question him

Styles: "You'd be surprised by the things I know Neo, there is so much evil out there."

Ruth appears to be numbed by the truth, jaw dropped she ogles at Bensen. I have a bad feeling about this.

Me: "I think I'll take Nkomo to the hospital, I don't want to be eaten man."

Nkomo must just let go of that rage on his face, hate has got him by its claws.

Me: "Pssst, Khomo." (Cow.)

I undertone and he angles his head to leer at me.

Me: "Ha re ee, you need a doctor." (Let's go.)

I think he can't hear me, I'm trying not to be heard by the devil over there. Why is Nkomo situated far from us?

Me: "I said let's go to the hospital."

First of all, we are a bunch of black people... in the woods at night... by the river and there are dead bodies everywhere. A cultist who eats human flesh and seems to possess a certain power.

We are not safe, I'm too young to die.

Stylos: "The fun is about to start Neo, don't leave yet."

Is he serious?

I have blocked the voices of Ruth and her father from my ears. I don't want to hear any of that evil shit, I'm too pure for that.

Me: "Do you have anything I can protect myself with?"

I'm so used to the offensive looks he gives me and I am okay... It's not a lie, I am perfectly okay.

Me: "Unless you're a prayer warrior or an exorcist, I am leaving."

Not everyone is brave and a psycho like someone I know.

Stylos: "Okay go."

Yeah, I'm leaving.

As I spin, I meet the darkness of the forest and the dead bodies that surround it. Now going back is going to be a mission.

Me: "Khome let's go man." (Cow.)

Nkomo: "Leave me alone."

This fool will lose his leg.

Sika: "Here we were thinking Sishi had a great team behind him, but he's surrounded by cowards."

I don't even know this fool. Why is he talking about me?

Me: "Mkhize mo tshware, your zombie is making noise." (Chastise him.)

Mkhize clicks his tongue right after glaring at me.

Nx!

Me: "I need to send my mother a message, Stylos give me your phone."

He ignores me, I turn to Uze. His frown forces me to turn back to Stylos.

"AAAHHHHHHH."

I'm startled by Ruth's hysterical roar and my blood runs cold. It's filled with rage and panic as if she's screaming with her whole body. Her eyes are wide with horror, fists clenched as the scream tears through her like a sharp object. I cover my ears.

Me: "No Stylos man, even their screams are evil. Give me your phone, I ran out of data. I need to text my mother on WhatsApp, she has to pray us out of here."

I urgently plead with him.



Sika: "I can carry you out of here mfana, I don't mind. Little boys should be sleeping on their mother's breast."

I'm still kept in the dark as to who this man is.

Me: "Fuseki." (Piss off.)

I retort.

Ruth: "What did you say?"

Eish!!!

Ruth is still yelling.

Styles: "Drum roll please."

He announces coldly, he is loving this. I might as well hand him a box of popcorn.

Bensen: "My powers are weighing off and I have no one to sacrifice, you're the only one I have left. The sacrifice could only be accepted if you were married to royalty, that's when I came up with this plan.

You marry the next Ashanti king, everything was set. The sacrifice was going to take place after you have consummated your marriage with the king. You would have had his blood in you, but you are stupid like your mother. You went and fell in love with a commoner.

I have always known that you are a failure Ruth, now I will have to marry you two by force. All I need is a sample of his blood and yours. You're only useful to me dead, oh dear daughter."

Bensen dishes everything out right there beside the river bank.

Styles: "You have to love family drama."

Love?

Family drama?

This is not family drama, this is a horror film.

Me: "Can we shoot him before he turns into a monkey or something."

I see it coming, Bensen has too much confidence.

Stylos laughs at my suggestion.

Me: "I'm serious Stylos, imagine four men killed by a monkey by the river. People will want to know what we were doing at the river in the middle of the night, we'll be embarrassed ntwana."  
(Boy.)

Oh no, my mind is showing me pictures. I can't deal with this, I should be home holding my baba in my arms.

Sika: "You will be dead. Where do you get this fool Sishi?"

I'm about five seconds away from shutting this man up, if he wasn't as big as he is.

Styles: "You have a death wish boy?"

Styles throws a question at him with a menacing tone that has Sika clicking his tongue.

Me: "Yeah, waphapha. Ntja." (You're too forward, dog.)

Sika gives me a cold stare.

Styles: "Okay cut..."

He hollers, startling us. Well... at least I'm disconcerted.

Styles: "Now that we're done with Ruth. Uze unfortunately, Uche happened to face the same fate as Ruth's mother."

Stylos is treading on the wrong path, Uze is not trying to hear any of that. We have to keep him as silent as possible. Uze goes from as quiet as a mouse to a wheezing beast.

The news about Uche comes as a surprise, we knew her to have had an accident and that's that.

Styles: "That day at the accident scene while you were unconscious, Segun and his buddy Bensen came and collected her body. To replace it with a shadow of her, the girl you held in your arms when you came to, was not your sister. The devil was at work that night and boy did he fool everyone."

Stylos has ignited a fire that we will not be able to extinguish.

Me: "Ke science moes eo, Mkhize is that even possible? U tseba lintho tsena moes." (That's science. Mkhize you do know these things.)

Mkhize's riposte is clogged by Uze's roar, a sound of footsteps thumping on the ground gets our attention.

No, Uze is going after Bensen. He's not protected, that man will kill him.

Me: "Uze no."

My voice reaches him, but it's not the voice of reason. Even if it were, Uze would still not heed to it. When his anger takes over, nothing can get through to him.

Ruth staggers back, her eyes jolting out of their sockets in fear and panic. While the son of a devil stands still with confidence, I would love to see him swimming in that river with crocodiles.

Styles: "Randall watch out."

Styles warns Uze of Bensen's assailants that are after him, he falls into a fist fight with one of them and Styles is attacking the other. I feel like a liability standing here while my friends fight.

I shall give myself work...

I'll keep watch on Mkhize and his gorilla, lest they decide to shoot Uze and Stylos on the back.

Nkomo: "Where did these people come from? I thought everyone was taken down."

Nkomo enquires, Bensen probably called for backup.

One of them is down by the hands of Stylos. Uze grasps his opponent's neck choking them in the process. The guy appears to have lost strength due to this, he clutches Uze's arm as he winces in pain.

Sika: "Shit, this boy proves that he's not his father's son."

Mkhize: "I hate him."

Mkhize retorts.

What he meant is that he's terrified of Uze.

Me: "Oa bona Mkhize? It should be your neck there." (You see?)

I hate this man.

I get a tongue click for my exclamation.

"BENSEN!!!"

Uze roars in rage as he goes after a defenceless Bensen. Is he really defenceless though? Ruth swivels on her heel and begins to take off, a loud bang reverberates bringing Ruth crashing on the ground with a loud thud.

Sika just killed Ruth, Nkomo is left dumbfounded as he stands victorious. He seems to take pleasure in what he sees.

Sika: "That's for Mkhize."

Mkhize's loyal dog is smiling.

Okay, let's cut this scene.

Where is the director?

So much is happening at the same time and I can't breathe.

With fear painted in his eyes, I see Bensen's mouth move.

Me: "Uze stop."

I shout an SOS, whatever Bensen is doing seems to be powerless as Uze continues to charge at him.

Bensen lifts his hand, palm up and blows. A white powder emits from that hand and plasters on Uze's face, he staggers back before falling knee down. His head collides with the ground as his body cascades into a violent movement. Bensen is swiftly drawing back.



These people are evil. What on earth was that?

Me: "Stylos!!!"

I take off to help him, Stylos is the first to get to Uze.

Nkomo: "Randall."

Cow is probably limping his way to us, I have never been a fan of the Mkhizes. Look what is happening now?

Me: "UZE, UZE!!! Twana don't do this man." (Boy.)

He's violently convulsing on the ground

Styles crouches next to me.

Styles: "Randall."

I push him off as he touches him.

Me: "Ke u joetsitse Stylos, ke u joetsitse hore bhodisa bhare eo. But, you didn't listen." (I told you to kill that idiot.)

I'm yelling at him, this makes me angry.

Styles: "Neo, I can fix this."

I have always known him to be a psycho, today he is proving me right.

Me: "No, you're not always right Stylos. You can't fix everything."

He clamps his teeth, I don't care about his anger.

Me: "Uze breathe man, breathe please."

Uze is forming in the mouth, while convulsing vigorously.

Me: "Dammit, Stylos do something. He's going to die, help him."

Nkomo: "Does anyone know of the Okolie clan names?"

Nkomo is here, next to me. I have a good mind to finish him, shoot the other leg. This is all his doing.

Me: "Are you crazy? Have you heard their surnames? Ha re dlali mona Khomo, move away from here. This is your fault." (We're not playing here cow.)

His presence miffs me.

Nkomo: "I'm only trying to help Neo."

Me: "You have done enough."

Styles: "Attacking everyone will not help Randall."

Styles chides me.

Wait, is he really...

Me: "What is wrong with you Stylos? You're taking his side now? Is Uze not your brother?"

This is what the Mkhizes do, they destroy everything they touch.

Styles: "You better curb your anger Neo, you will end up saying something you shouldn't."

I am not fazed.

Me: "Ha ke tsotelle Stylos, kill me if you want. O sethoto Stylos. If Uze dies, then what was this fight for? From day one we fought Mkhize and Segun, we pushed with Uze and you were there by his side. Now you decide that this cow is worth risking Uze's life? Is it because he's..." (I don't care. You're an idiot.)

Styles: "You better shut up Neo, don't say things you will regret."

Is it not the truth? Did he not choose Miss S' brother over his?

Me: 'O'ksalayo man." (Still.)

I throw my hand at him, he clicks his tongue as a response to it.

MKhize: "Nkomo move from there, makafe lomuntu man." (Let this man die.)

Mkhize is laughing like it's the funniest thing he has ever seen.

Nkomo: "Shut up Mkhize, you should be worried about the curse that, you have brought upon us. Nothing good comes from you."

He better tell his father because I will not be kind.

Where is that Bensen? I browse my eyes around, to see him chanting some words.

Styles: "Randy, your grandfather's name. What's his name?"

He asks Uze in a panic.

Me: "Okolie Okolie, that's his name."

What is he going to do with that?

Me: "fuck this shit."

I grab my gun... get up to my feet and start shooting at Bensen. An evil smirk flounces on his black lips, his eyes hold a cold glare that has the strands on the back of my neck stand.

Me: "Shit, boloi bona ke number one." (This witch craft is number one.)

Not one bullet has hit him or I must be missing the target, if he weren't as scary I would get closer and put a bullet through his head

Stylos: "Randall, Randall don't do this man."

Shit, he's... Uze is...

Me: "Stylos tell me he's breathing, please tell me he's breathing."

Styles: "Randall open your eyes man."

He desperately pleads.

Uze is dead, he's...

The gun slips out of my hand, I stagger back, only to fall on my buttocks.

Me: "Uze, Uze mara. U re etsang? (What are you doing to us?)

Nkomo: "He's not breathing Styles, he's gone."

He shouts at Styles as he starts to perform CPR on Randall, his body looks stiff. Impossible, it can't be.

Me: "OKOLIE!!! OKOLIE!!!"

I'm on my knees on the wet ground shouting out loud, those ancestors better hear me, they better respond to me.

Bensen: "He's gone, there is nothing you can do for him now."

He mocks us, Mkhize continues to laugh. What is wrong with these people?

Me: "U tseha eng ntja?" (What are you laughing at dog?)

Briskly, I jump on Mkhize bringing him down with me. I'm straddling him and throwing punches on his face.

Mkhize: "Sika help me."

A pair of hands snake my waist, I waggle my body as they pull me back. This bastard proves to be stronger, he tosses me to the side. I tumble into a puddle of water.

Me: "Shit."

I exclaim, jumping out of the river as I'm reminded of the crocodiles that have made a home in it.

Sika: "Uzolima wenja." (You will be injured, dog.)

I can taste the anger that is brewing inside me, I wish to kill Mkhize and his minion. Mkhize is inspecting his bruises while Sika and I stand glaring at each other.

Me: "Take your bloody son and get out of here Mkhize."

I growl to have him laugh at me.

Mkhize: "I'm not going anywhere until I see that Okolie is really dead."

Me: "You think your problems are over? Wait till your family starts dropping one at a time."

This ought to humble him.

“Come on Randall, don’t do this to me man. Breathe, Randall please.”

Styles breaks this little fight with his loud cry, if CPR doesn’t work on Uze then he’s gone.

Me: “No, no Stylos. It’s not over, it can’t end like this.”

I have lost strength to do anything, Stylos continues to give him CPR. He’s trying hard to hide the tears that seek attention as he smears his face on his shoulder.

Nkomo: “You will crash his ribs Styles, he’s gone.”

Nkomo proclaims, he’s trying to pull Stylos away from Uze.

Styles: “No, leave me.”

His voice pops as he pushes Nkomo away, he is half past to breaking down. I can’t take this, it’s too much for me.

AMARA\*

My eyes have grown tired of ogling at the phone, I can’t sleep. My mind hovers around thoughts of Randall, I can’t shake this feeling that he is not okay. No one is answering their phone, I have grown tired of calling them. Chioma went back to sleep, Liyana is with me. She’s in the bathroom, she too has been visited by insomnia. It has us by the hook.

Come to think of it, she has been in the bathroom for quite a while now.

Me: “Liya baby.”

I call out to her as I jump off the bed. The door opens, she’s clomping out of the bathroom. Each heavy step brings a question to my mind.

Me: “Baby.

I start to plod to her.

Rapidly, her miniature body hits the floor with a thud and shudders violently. So much so that, I can hear her teeth chattering, my heart thumps with fright.

Me: “Liyana.”

I yap, rushing to her side.

Me: “Chioma, Chioma.”

Not again, she can’t do this to me again.

Chioma comes running, she screams as she sees Liyana’s state. Randall’s mother follows behind.

Mom: "What's going on?"

She questions falling into a panic mode.

Me: "I don't know, she just fell."

Mom: "What did you do to her?"

What?

Me: "Nothing ma, she was walking back from the bathroom then she fell."

I explain.

It all happened so fast, I'm not sure what really happened.

Mom: "Move."

I am pushed aside.

Me: "Chioma please bring the basil leaves."

Chioma scurries out of the bedroom crying.

Me: "Liya baby."

Mom: "She can't hear you."

How does she know? I grimace at her assumption.

Mom: "I have seen this with my kids, it happened to Uze when he was a little boy. They want to speak."

Now I must ask, who is they?

Me: "Who ma?"

Mom: "The Okolies, they have something to say."

Okay.

Me: "What do we do then?"

Mom: "Let her be, she will speak eventually."

Is she insane?

I'm expected to sit here and watch my baby judder violently?

Where is Randall?

Liyana: "Okolie... Okolie..."

The name sways out of her mouth in gentle whispers. Her body seems to quiet down as she utters her father's name.



Mom: "Yema wo akwaaba Okolie." (We welcome you Okolie.)

She speaks in Akan, I'm not sure I'm comfortable with Liyana shuddering like that.

Me: "Ma, Liyana..."

She silences me with her hand.

Liyana: "Boa no." (Help him.)

Oh God, I can't hear what she's saying.

Mom: "Mente asee." (I don't understand.)

Liyana: "Boa Uze." (Help Uze.)

In a mutter Liyana utters in Akan, although I'm a stranger to the language, I know a caveat when I hear one and she's warning us of danger. Mom looks at me, her eyes widened.

Mom: "Help Uze? Where is he?"

No, God no. Something has happened to Randall.

Me: "Ma... he..."

Syllables fail me.

Mom: "Speak."

She howls.

Me: "He went to help a friend who is in trouble."

Randall, you can't do this to me.

Liyana: "Uze... Uze... Uze."

She mumbles as her body welcomes occasional twitches. It's not as bad as the seizure.

My heart has stopped, this is worse than I thought.

Mom: "Kyere me kwan no Okolie." (Please show me the way.)

I need to know what they are saying.

Me: "Can you speak English please."

My question is directed to whatever spirit has possessed my child, mom and her death stares can wait.

Liyana: "Our wife, you are carrying the heir to the throne."

Really?

I don't want to hear that, I want to know where Randall is.

Me: "Where is Randall?"

I avoid the declaration that was given.

Liyana: "Uze will perish if he doesn't wake up."

What?

Okay. I have to calm down.

Mom: "What is wrong with him?"

Her face has dived into a well of fear and panic.

Liyana: "The body of a king lies beside a river of blood. Only the water of life can snatch him back from the hands of death."

Do ancestors know what an emergency is? This is no time for parables.

She speaks of a body.

Could it be that Randall is already dead?

Liyana: "A river bank holds a cure to bring the King back to the world of the mortals."

He continues to cause confusion.

How are we to crack this parable he speaks of?

Me: "Please tell us what you mean, you say that Randall is dead?"

Liyana: "He is not, a trap has been laid for him. Dig a hole from the river bank, pure water will spew out from it. Give the water to the King to drink, for a new breath will arise in him."

She's making sense now and I know where they could be.

I rush to get my phone, I have to call Styles again. God please, let him answer this time.

To be continued....

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

187\*

### STYLES\*

Everything was at sixes and sevens as I watched my brother fall into the hands of death, I have never felt so powerless in my life. A call from Amara brought my hope back, I had act fast or we would lose him.

Following Amara's advice and with the help of Neo and Nkomo we managed to get the water from beneath the soil, but making Randall drink was a mission.

The three of us are sheilding him, just incase Bensen tries anything.

Nkomo: "What do you think his plan is?"

Nkomo whispers softly, we're all glaring at Bensen who is standing with a condescending attitude, his daughter lies dead between the figs of the trees and he is not deterred at all. If demons can escape from hell, then this man came straight from there.

Me: "I don't know, all I know is that he wants Randall's blood. We can't let Bensen get to him, no matter what. We have to keep that man away from Randall."

Nkomo agrees to my instructions with a nod.

Me: "Neo."

Neo blinks once taking his angry eyes away from Bensen, I know he is upset with me. What I did put Randall's life in danger. We have a second chance now and I need him with me, by my side.

Me: "Are you with me?"

Neo: "When are we killing that man?"

He clenches his fist in anger.

The only power Bensen has at this moment are those words he keeps mumbling between the seams of his lips. He wants Randall lifeless and I don't know if he will still use his daughter as a sacrifice.

Me: "Bensen is not leaving this place alive."

I reply.

Neo clenches his teeth and continues to look straight forward, he's not going to take his eyes off of Bensen.

Nkomo: "Why is Randall not waking up?"

Nkomo asks.

I would say if I knew, I too am growing impatient.

Sika: "Mkhize, ubaba is calling you." (Sir.)

Sika stands behind Nkomo as he brings this message forward.

Nkomo clamps his jaw, I see an outburst coming.

Nkomo: "Leave me alone."

He says calmly.

Sika: "Your father is worried about you Mkhize..."

Wrong name Sika.

Nkomo: "Yey, voetsek. Get out of my sight." (Piss off.)

Sika does not appreciate being yelled at, especially by a boy like Nkomo. He clamps his teeth, and walks off with a tongue click.

Neo: "Stylos, look."

He points at Bensen who's walking around Ruth's lifeless body and chanting in a mysterious language.

Nkomo: "The human body is too weak to stand in the presence of anything supernatural, we have to be careful Styles or we will all fall victim to his evil acts."

Me: "What is he doing?"

Nkomo: "I don't know, remember he wants both Ruth and Randy's blood."

Neo: "Re mo mzansi mona, let's burn that man down." (We're in South Africa here.)

Neo is serious about this suggestion of his.

"Mmhhhh."

There's a movement from Randall.

Me: "Randy."

He touches his head wincing in pain.

Neo: "Uze ntwana, you're awake." (Boy.)

Neo proclaims and shows his excitement with a hug.

Okay...

We expect Neo to let go any second now. Randall slightly pushes him off but he's not moving.

Nkomo runs his eyes to me as he hears a sniff.

Me: "Are you crying Neo."

Finally he pulls away, his face refusing to meet our curious eyes.

Neo: "I'm not crying."

Why is his hand swiping over his cheek bones?

Randall is up on his feet, it baffles me that he's not saying anything. We haven't heard his voice yet.

Nkomo: "Is he okay?"

I wish to know the same

Me: "Randall?"

He striding towards the river.

Neo: "Uze u ea kae?" (Where are you going?)

Neo follows behind him, he's really looking out for Randall and afraid for his life. I look back to check if Bensen has spotted Randall.

His focus is on Ruth.

What is he doing to his daughter? He thinks he's won.

Randall is bending down where Neo collected the water. He rams his hand in the hole and reveals a small dagger, a black duct tape covers the handle. He turns to leer at Bensen, his eyes as cold as ice. I see a certain strength in him, it makes me wonder if he was with his grandfather. Only he gives him this kind of strength.

Neo: "Makunyiwe once." (Let it go down.)

Neo declares as Randall begins to march to Bensen, this is going to be fun.

Mkhize: "Sika let's go, today is not a happy a day. This idiot gets to live another day."

They exit the sight with tongue clicks, it's good that they are gone.

Neo: "Stylos, what is Bensen doing?"

Me: "He's in a trance, he won't see Randall coming."

Maybe he will.

Bensen's eyes widen with shock and he lets out a short shuddering breath, he didn't think that Randall would wake up.

Bensen: "What is this? You're... supposed... to be... dead."

The trills on his voice are louder than the water slashing on the rocks.

Engulfed in fear, Bensen stumbles back. He's mumbling some words again and whatever spell he's trying to use is not working. Randall clutches the back of his neck, he lugs a slouching Bensen towards the river. We move aside as he heads to our direction.

Bensen: "Let me go Uze, you will regret this. I curse you Uze Okolie, I curse you and your family. You will never be at peace."

He shouts these words, they will probably be buried with him in that river.

Neo: "Tuffia, back to sender." (God forbid.)

Neo's comeback is always ready and the fact that he's saying this, pokerfaced.

Bensen groans as he's thrown on the ground, ogle-eyed, he scoots back. Randall straddles him, making sure that his legs do not touch Bensen. He holds the dagger up, Bensen lets out a loud roar.

Neo: "Eish saani, this is bad. Stylos I can't watch that, too much blood makes my stomach run."

He turns away from the ghastly scene.

With every blow the knife pierces into Bensen's flesh with such ease, as if it slides into a piece of cake. It makes a satisfying splosh as Randall digs it deep enough, forcing horrific screams from Bensen.

Music to my ears.

He twists the dagger while digging it deeper in his stomach, a squish resounds as he pulls the blade out of the bloodied old man. His body is riddled with multiple stab wounds.

Like a stream on a rainy day, thick blood freely oozes from Bensen's deep holes. It feels like time has slowed down as he falls on his knees first, he's wheezing from deep in his chest, fighting for another chance at life. Randall clutches his hand on Bensen's shoulder, he draws back the one glazed with this thick blood and without warning lurches the dagger all the way into Bensen's heart. The old man heaves, his erratic breathing comes to a halt, before falling into his death.

Neo: "Bensen hel toe gaan." (Go to hell.)

I told you Neo always has something to say.

Randall fixes his eyes on us, he smirks and walks away from the already dead Bensen.

Neo: "Is he coming here?"

Neo asks as he moves to stand behind me, I can't comprehend how he is always afraid.

Nkomo: "Relax, he won't do anything."

Neo: "Who put the knife in that hole anyway?"

I want to know as well.

The strong smell of blood fills my nostrils as Randall draws nearer.

Oh how I love the smell of victory.

Randall: "Let's go home, Amara is in trouble."

I try to find him in his eyes but they are empty, there is no emotion.

Me: "At least wash off that blood, you can't go home looking like this."

The weapon is still gript on his hand, beads of blood dripping from it. He sniffs and swipes the back of his hand on his forehead leaving a smudge of blood.

Neo: "Uze, that's Bensen's blood. You have to wash it off, it will bring you bad luck."

Randall: "Amara is in trouble, let's go home."

He repeats himself in a deadpan voice. What is wrong with Amara now?

Neo: "It's fine Stylos, I have clean clothes in the car and don't ask me why I keep clothes in the car."

I wasn't going to ask.

Will this life ever be normal?

Nkomo: "What about these dead bodies?"

Randall: "Throw them in the river, it will swallow them."

That's a plan, but they will float back up eventually.

Me: 'Randy...'

Randall: "The river will swallow them. We have to go, Amara is in trouble."

We have to throw the bodies into the river, Randall seems to know what he's talking about. It takes a while to clean up the place.

Segun and Bensen, I hope the devil is giving you two a very warm welcome.

Randall: "Let's go."

And with this declaration he ambles away, we have no choice but to follow him. Nkomo holds on to my shoulder, he needs the hospital pretty soon.

Neo: "This person is a Zombie Stylos. Are you sure the water helped him?"

I can only hope that it did because the man walking before us is not our Randall.

AMARA\*

5am, that's what the time on my phone says. I'm still waiting for Styles to call and tell me how it went. Liyana is sleeping in my room, she looks so peaceful. I am glad that she was not affected by whatever the ancestors were doing to her.

I hear voices as I trudge down the staircase to the foyer, it sounds like a male conversing with a female. I know mom is not sleeping.

Could it be uncle? The man loves his sleep though and it is too early for him to be awake.

No, what is he doing here?

"Sister in-law, come."

I didn't think that I would see him again since that day at the hospital.

Me: "Ma?"

Her jaw clamps as she frowns at my alarmed face.

Mom: "What?"

She shrugs her shoulders at me.

We told her, she was sitting right there where she's sitting right now and Randall explained to her word for word what Raven had been doing. He wants my life and she lets him in our house.

How can she put her grandchild's life in danger?

Why is Randall surrounded by so many enemies? His mother as well?

Raven: "I know what sister in-law wants to say."

Am I ever going to catch a break? Raven will never stop chasing after me. Will I ever be rid of him?

I'm standing in the foyer, I know that I shouldn't go anywhere near him. As for Mom, I don't know what her intentions are.

She brings Raven into Randall's house knowing that he's a danger to us.

Deciding not to argue with them, I change my direction. I am going to lock myself in my room until Randall gets here.

"Hey, hey."

I hear Raven's voice getting closer and the sound of his footfall, my heart wants to go on a quest of its own. I pick up my pace to a point where I'm running, taking two steps at a time.

The first thing I feel is his arm around my waist from behind, it lands on my belly and he clutches it. My shout at screaming is stopped by a rough hand that covers my mouth with so much might. I grab hold of Raven's hand, I want to remove it off my belly.

The grip is too tight.



"Where are you going sweetheart?"

He buries his face on the camber of my neck, adrenalin floods my system. It bumps with the need to escape through my veins. My eyes are wide with horror, I want to break from this cage and run for safety.

I want to tell him to let me go, so I bite his hand.

Raven: "Dammit, you're feisty aren't you?"

He's wiggles the pain away.

Me: "How did you get in here?"

That's what I want to know, I need to know if mom let an enemy into the house.

Mom: "I let him in, he is my son."

He's walking us to the lounge, my arm has fallen prisoner to his tight grip.

Me: "Mom? You know how Randall feels about him."

The guards know about him as well, they know he is not allowed into the premises.

Mom: "Is he not my son Amara? Randall and his brother just need to make peace that's all."

If that's what Raven told her, then she is a fool to have believed it.

Me: "He wants to kill me."

I expose him.

Mom: "He told me what happened at the hospital."

Wow...

Me: "Why is he still here then?"

Raven: "I came to apologize to my brother."

What? This is...

Me: "Randall doesn't want you here, he's...."

Mom: "Oh sit down child, I'm their mother. I know how to make Randall see reason."

Raven smirks at me, his cold eyes are stabbing me. Did he lie to mom about everything? She is his first born and the chances of her choosing him over Randall are high. What I know is that he will pay for pushing me on this couch and for grabbing me the way he did. The look on Raven's face assures me that he is up to something, he didn't come for an apology

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

188\*

KHETHU\*

"Khethu."

I'm woken up with a nudge to find Kay, he actually stayed. He's carrying two cups of what appears to be coffee.

Kay: "Here."

He holds me a cup, I sit up from the chair. I was hoping that I would wake up to my mother's eyes looking at me.

Me: "She's not going to wake up, is she?"

My tears knock on the windows of my eyes, they will force themselves out even if I clog them. My heart is broken just when we were making progress.

Kay: "I can't really say, I'm not a doctor, but I can tell you that nothing beats faith."

Faith? That has to do with church right?

I'm not sure God and I are best of pals.

Me: "She looks terrible Kay."

He pulls a seat and settles down next to me.

Kay: "Timothy Mabuza."

Swiftly my eyes fall on him. He knows Tim?

Me: "You know him."

With a downturned mouth he shakes his head.

Me: "Kay..."

Kay: "Before you ask, I did my research. Timothy is the type of man that kisses and tells, he is not as smart as he wants people to think. There was a lead and I gave it to the police, he's in police custody as we speak."

Who is this man?

Me: "Thank you."

I am not going to ask how he did that, it doesn't matter.

Me: "I want him to spend the rest of his life in prison."

Mbongeni can help with that, he's good at what he does.

Kay: "Don't worry about that, Mabuza will never see the light of day."

He delivers in a form of a promise and by god, I believe him. My mother will have justice.

Me: "Why are you helping me? You don't know me."

Kay: "It's about time we clean the country, I hate shit."

He states with a low chortle, I don't know if it's meant to be a joke or what.

Me: "Whatever your reason is, thank you again."

He nods as he looks at my mother.

Kay: "What about your father? When will he be here?"

Me: "I'm not sure, he's on his way though."

There's a sudden slight knock on the door before a man dressed in a pantsula outfit ambles in.

"Nkosazana." (Lady.)

He rubs his hands together as he greets with respect.

Strange...

Me: "Hi."

I salute with a confused face.

He could be lost, unless he's my mother's...

"Kenneth, a word."

Oh he's here for Kay... Kenneth.

Kay nods and with that the man walks off.

Me: "Kenneth huh?"

He flashes a smile that disappears as fast as a black out.

Kay: "Just Kay."

Okay.

Kay: "I'll be back."

I watch him as he walks out.

Who is that stranger and why is he helping me?

AMARA\*

I cross my leg over the other glancing at the door, if everything went okay then Randall should be home by now. It's not long since we have been sitting here and Raven is growing restless, his plan is not going the way he wants it to.

I say plan because he came here for a reason, the last time I saw him he promised to eliminate me.

His eyes have not left me since, he wants to release something and I sense that he will crack any second now.

Mom: "What is wrong with you? Will you sit down? You're making my head spin."

She complains.

Who is fooling who here?

Am I that blind that, I can't see people's intentions?

Me: "Liyana will wake any time now, I need to make food for her."

I pull myself up, this will give me a chance to escape.

Mom: "Go and make me a cup of tea."

Awesome.

Raven pushes me back on the couch as my feet hit the floor.

Raven: "Sit your ass down."

He snaps pointing a warning finger at me.

Me: "What the hell is wrong with you?"

I return the snap.

Raven: "You see mother?"

I am convinced that Raven is a mama's boy.

Raven: "Is this the type of woman you want for your son, the future king of the Ashanti?"

He's laughing and I fail to see what he finds funny here.

Raven: "Now that we're touching on that subjects. Do you know mother that your husband has gone missing?"

He starts.



I see where he wants to go with this.

Mom: "Don't be ridiculous Raven, your father is old enough to wander. He's probably with one of his girlfriends."

That's what she believes?

Now that Segun has been brought into light. Am I the only one who finds it weird that a wife has not inquired about her husband's whereabouts and why he doesn't come around?

It's not a hidden issue that Randall and Segun are not fit for the father and son of the year category. But in a normal world one of them ought to try to reach out, right?

Raven: "Oh mother, you are in the dark about a lot of things. Like how this woman is responsible for your son not giving his father a chance."

If that finger pointed at me were a gun, I would be dead by now.

Raven could have fooled me. He was so sweet when we first met.

Me: "That is a lie and you know it."

And I thought sisters in-law are supposed to be the ones giving me a hard time.

Raven: "Is it really Amara? Is it really a lie?"

Nonsense.

Raven: "Care to tell mother how her husband was ousted out of his son's house because of you and that was after Uze put a bullet through his flesh."

Yeah, his plan is starting to unravel.

Mom: "What?"

She jolts from her seat.

I don't understand, so Raven's story stands and mine will have to stay secreted.

Me: "That is a lie, I had nothing to do with it. Segun wanted..."

Mom: "Hey, watch how you address the king."

She yells.

I don't know a monster in-law facial expression, but this should be it.

She pastes her hands on her hips.

Mom: "Uze, Uze. What have you done my son? Is this what he has chosen to lead his people? I am disappointed in you Uze."

She speaks to no one in particular, Raven is satisfied with work.

Me: "But, ma he wanted Randall to marry Ruth..."

Mom: "Firstly, I am not your mother."

Ehh! So much for trying to show respect.

Mom: "Which tribe are you from young lady?"

And she's been living here for weeks now, she chooses this day to ask me this.

Me: "Zulu tribe."

She huffs while Raven welcomes a scornful guffaw.

I cringe at his blatant disrespect for his brother, the same man he claims to love and want to save him from my supposed clutches.

Mom: "Mmmh. How common is witchcraft in your tribe?"

I have put two and two together.

Me: "Randall loves me and I love him."

They must know, I am tired.

Mom: "He loves you huh? We shall see how much he loves you when he has to choose between the woman who gave him life and a peasant."

We shall see, I can say this without a doubt that, man will not leave me no matter what.

He will choose me over and over like I would him.

Raven is fidgety he can't keep still and his hand keeps peeking on his back. I don't know if he's scratching himself or...

Something tells me to get up and leave and...

Raven: "Where are you going?"

I'm on my feet.

Me: "The kitc..."

Everything around me stops as he pulls out a pistol. Lord is this a test? I can't go through another lesson. What if I fail this one?

Mom: "Raven, put that thing away."

She shouts.

Did she not see his intensions when he grabbed me from the stairs and forced me here?

Raven: "Forgive me mother, I am done pretending. This is my chance to prove to father that I am worthy of his love."

He exclaims through gritted teeth, the gun is on my face and has my heart racing to a different direction.

Mom: "What father Raven? What father?"

She yells.

Raven: "Mother please..."

He keeps his eyes on me as he grunts.

Mom: "That man has never been a father to you, he hated you and..."

Raven: "Don't you think I know that? My whole life I wondered why the first born of Segun Okolie was treated like an outcast and his precious son Uze told me that I do not Segun's blood running through my veins."

Mom: "It's true, he's not your biological father. Is this why you are so hell bent on making him proud?"

Raven: "Yes, father wanted this woman out of the way and I will do it for him. Blood or not, he's my father."

Mom: "Oh my son, I was worried about this day. That you will come to lose your mind."

I seem to think so too.

Me: "You won't get away with this Raven."

Raven: "I already have sweetheart, I can end you right here."

He presses the barrel of the gun on my head.

My adrenaline surges so fast that it leaves me light headed, I think my heart will explode, I want to run out the door and call for help but hey, there is only one thing I can do if I want to survive. Stay calm and pray he doesn't kill me.

Raven: "Say goodbye Amara, your time has come."

He delivers with a smirk on his face. My breathing quickens, my hands are curled into a fist, nails digging into my palms. My body feels hot and dribs of sweat start to form on my forehead. Fear taunts me, tossing my stomach in intense cramps.

Me: "Raven please don't."

What will Liyana do when she hears a gunshot and walks in here to find me lying in my own blood?

Mom: "Raven stop."

Why is she calm? Her son is about to shot me, she should be panicking or something. I can't hear my rapid breathing. The only sound prickling my ears is my heart thumping against my rib cage. I scream and clench my eyes as he pulls the trigger.

Everything freezes and falls into a deafening silence, before the sound of his evil laugh forces me to open my eyes. The gun is empty, he made me think that it was loaded.



My heart sinks at once bringing me down with it, as I crumble to the floor weeping. I thought that was it. How could he play with my life like this?

Raven: "This was a teaser, relax. I'll make sure to put a bullet the second time around."

He mocks me.

Mom: "Why so much noise Amara? He didn't shoot you. Would you calm down?"

Would I calm down?

Wow...

Me: "Damn you, Raven."

I yell at him and just then the door swings open and Randall is the first to stride in.

His eyes fall on me first, the permanent pucker between his eyebrows intensifies. The muscles along his jaw clench, his nostrils flare and his face flushes with rage.

Randall: "UZOMA!!!"

He barks with the authority of a man who is not to be crossed, his footsteps thunder on the concrete floor as he marches into the room.

Raven: "Stop."

Raven turns his gun to his brother, this has Randall stopping half way. His breathing growing thin and shabby.

Mom: "Uze it's not what you think."

She still tries to justify her son's actions. Raven snatches my arm to pull me up.

Randall: "Let her go."

He mutters furiously under his breath.

Raven: "No brother."

Raven hooks his arm around my neck from behind, a gun held on my head.

Neo: "Eish, I'm going to check on Liyana, we don't want the child walking in on this."

Neo says as he moves down the foyer, he is here with Styles. Two guards are with them, they seem to be shocked by what they are witnessing.

Neo: "Yeah neh, Ghana."

He sighs clomping up the staircase.

Raven: "Why did it have to come to this Uze? All you had to do was abide to his commands, father needed you by his side."

He's screaming with rage and this has me trembling with fear, the gun might go off.

I think Raven has lost his mind, he is so bent on proving himself worthy to Segun.

Styles: "You're cornered Raven, let her go. This will not end well for you."

Styles will scare him and it will compel him to shoot me.

Mom: "Please, don't hurt my son."

She pleads as she toils behind Randall who does not give her one inch of his attention. His eyes are fixated on this man who has me trapped in his arm.

Mom: "Randall, he's your brother, please don't let anything happen to him."

I don't care what happens to Raven anymore.

Styles: "Get this woman out of here."

Styles commands the guards... their grips on her hands has her shouting... cursing and pleading for the life of her son.

Mom: "Use you better not kill my son, don't touch him."

She yells her last words before the door shuts closed.

Randall: "Raven, let her go."

His unwavering glare held in place, he gives an order.

Raven: "Don't you see what this woman...."

He is not given a chance to complete his quiz.

Styles: "Why don't you let Amara go and then you and Randall can talk this out."

Raven: "This has nothing to do with you, stay out of it"

He retorts.

Styles: "Look I know how you feel, I have been in your shoes before. Wanting to be loved by a father who doesn't care that you exist."

He takes up the role of a negotiator.

Raven: "You know nothing."

Raven clashes.

Styles: "Trust me, I know very well. My father left me before I was born. I didn't know what his voice sounded like until a month ago. I spent my whole life trying to be the person I thought he would want me to be, thinking he might come back. I went through so much without my father, I was abducted at the age of nine, taken to some foreign country where I was trained to be a child soldier.

I was made into a killing machine, women... children of all ages and the elderly. They were all innocent, but we had no emotion, we were trained to shoot and kill.

I swear I couldn't eat without smelling blood in my hands. The moment I closed my eyes to sleep at night, I would see their bodies. Their heart wrenching screams still ring in my head till today. I was only a child but fate had so much in store for me. All because I had no father, I know how you feel.

Your father was around, you heard him call your name. You knew his anger, the sound of his laugh and you had him call you son. Everything I craved for all my life, so you can't tell me that, I can't put myself in your shoes. Actually you're right, I can't put myself in your shoes. You had it all, a family and the voice of your hero under the same roof. Whether he was absent or not, he was there."

It was so difficult for Styles to open up like that, each word and each syllable, he delivered with his teeth clamped together. I feel bad that he has to do this to save my life.

Raven: "I just want my brother to be on my side."

Such a simple thing could've been easily attained if they came together and came to an agreement.

Styles: "Okay, we can make a plan. Right Randy?"

Randall does not respond, his gaze has not left Raven at all.

Styles: "Randall?"

Randall: "Yeah."

He mutters.

Styles: "You see."

Raven: "Is he willing to leave this woman and marry Ruth? This is what my father wants."

Styles glances at me, he gestures that I should remain calm.

Styles: "Randall tell Raven that you're going to marry Ruth and go back to lead your people."

I know it's not what Randall wants, but I need him to cooperate.

He's not saying anything.

Styles: "Randall say it, say you will leave Amara and fulfil your father's dream."

Randall flares his nose and nods.

Styles: "You see? He will do it, now let Amara go. I'll take her back to her aunt's house. You don't have to worry about her anymore."

I can't see Raven's face, but his silence says he is agreeing to it.

Randall: "I'll take care of you."



Randall says to his brother.

He is able to draw near without Raven, freaking out. Leisurely he releases the hold on me. This gives me a chance to run to Randall, but a strong hand pushes me aside, I tumble on the couch. It's Raven, he has engulfed Randall in a hug. Randall's arms refuse to return it.

Styles rushes to help me up. Randall's eyes are blazing murderously, as they glare with an unforgiving judgement.

Raven: "Thank you brother, father will be proud of you."

He declares.

Me: "What's going on?"

I ask Styles. I'm worried about Randall, he is so cold and emotionless.

Styles: "Don't judge him for what he is about to do Amara."

What does he mean?

Is he really going to leave me?

Randall's hand finally acknowledges Raven as it lands on his back. He brings his mouth to Raven's ear and whispers...

Randall: "Segun is dead."

Raven groans in pain, I check to see that Randall has plunged a knife into his stomach while Raven has his arms around him. I cover my mouth as I stifle a scream. Styles holds me back, I would've fallen if he didn't.

With anger on Randall's face, muscles flick angrily at his jaw as he twists the knife as if wanting to cut Raven's intestines into pieces.

I want to hide away from this, but I have fallen numb to the scene before me.

Raven crumbles to the floor as Randall moves away from him. The knife stuck in his abdomen.

He is dead.

Me: "Randall."

I scurry to enwrap him in a tight hug, my mind is disarrayed, but that's the least of my worries.

Me: "Are you okay?"

I cradle his face into the palms of my hands, he's goggling down at me and I crave to see the look of warmth that used to dwell in his eyes.

"RAVEN!!!"

We turn to the piercing cry of Raven's mother, yes just Raven's mother.

She's at the door way. The guards follow behind her, they cease to take her due to Styles raising a dismissive hand. .

I have never met anyone so heartless in my life. This woman was willing to let her son kill me and I had given her a benefit of the doubt.

I thought she would warm up to me.

Mom: "Randall what did you do?"

She cries, toddling to the lounge.

Randall: "I just killed your son."

He confesses coldly.

Mom: "Nooooo, God noooo. Uze you have killed me... you have killed me Uze."

She grabs her weave screaming and pulls it out.

Mom: "Kini o ti se Uze?" (What have you done Uze?) {Speaks in Yoruba.}

In utter anger she sends a couple of slaps on his face, I can't stand to see him hurt like this.

Amara: "No."

I slide to shield him and receive one burning slap before Randall shrugs me to the side.

The look on his face...

Randall: "I want you to take all your belongings and get out of my house."

He says.

Her jaw drops.

Mom: "Uze, you kill my son and you the only son I have left throws me out."

Dramatically she tosses herself on the floor, screaming. I hope Liyana does not hear any of this.

Neo is good with kids, he probably is keeping her distracted.

Mom: "I am finished Chineke, I am finished. Uzoma my son, Uzoma my son. Heeee!!!!" (God.)

She crawls to Raven's body, her hands leading the way and screams escorting her.

Mom: "Oh my son."

We watch her rest her head on his chest.

Randall: "After the wedding, I want you out of my house mother. The only reason you're still alive is because Ife has no one left. Now I want you to take your bags and get out."

Mom: "You can't do this to me Uze, you can't abandon your mother."

Randall: "I don't do well with snakes and I refuse to have one in my house."

It is sad to watch her grieve like that, but she is a snake indeed.

Oh wow!!!

The drama...

Now she is crawling to Randall.

Mom: "My son, don't do this. I have nothing left, please."

She pleads.

Randall: "Styles."

Something is shared as they glance at each other, Styles nods. Randall takes my hand and leads me away, leaving his mother screaming in agony. I'm thinking we are going to check on Liyana, our feet are leading us to the patio.

I am swamped in a tight hug the moment we get to the patio.

Randall: "Are you okay?"

He nestles my cheeks.

Me: "I'm okay, I need you to be okay."

Randall: "Don't worry about me, I'm sorry I'm late."

He presses his forehead on mine, his hands gently playing on my back.

Me: "You were right on time."

I could've died today.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

189\*

RANDALL\*

Styles did a good job with cleaning up the mess in the lounge, you can hardly tell that there was blood shed. If one were to ask me how I feel about killing my brother, I don't know what I would say because I don't have an answer to that.

Amara and Liyana are first in my life, I would protect them from myself if I have to.

Styles: "Earth to Randall, don't tell me that you're back into that world."

Styles...

We are in the back yard, the last few hours have been hell. Nkomo is at the hospital, I'm sure he will be okay. It's nothing major. Styles has not been home yet, I heard him explain himself to Sethu a while ago. Neo had no time for phone explanations, he rushed home without so much as a goodbye.

Me: "So a child soldier, huh?"

I shrug off Styles' jest to accompany the question that, has been playing around in my mind.

I am baffled by the news, I have always known that he had a past he didn't want revealed and today for my sake and to save my family, Styles was compelled to dig into his past.

He glances at me with raised eyebrows, pain painted on his face.

Styles: "Siyabonga, I went by that name. It holds a dark past I want buried Randall."

He witters.

I can tell that he doesn't want to get deep into it.

Me: "I'm sorry that you..."

He shakes his head clogging the rest of my words.

Styles: "I wanted to do it, Raven would have killed Amara and I had to act fast. Besides, I failed you enough today and had to make up for it."

That's a thing of the past.

Me: "So where is this place you were taken to?"

I shouldn't but...



He shuffles uncomfortably on his seat.

Styles: "DRC."

His jaw tightens as his mind takes him down memory lane.

Styles: "There were three hundred of us, if I'm not mistaken. If you're old enough to carry a gun, you're old enough to be a soldier. These words are still fresh in my mind."

Me: "How did you escape?"

Styles: "I was found half dead by a South African journalist, my uniform had told him what I was. It didn't keep him from helping me though. He hid me in his house, nursed me back to life. He brought me back home, I had to start life from scratch.

Finding my sister was not hard, she was at the same orphanage I had left her in. The past haunted me. Every day felt like I was at war, the bombings, the gunshots... screams of innocent souls... mothers wailing for their children... wives for their husbands and grown men weeping for their families. By some means I pushed the memories somewhere in my mind, I had to move on. I had to be strong for Asanda, she deserved a better life and that's what I was willing to give her."

And I thought I went through so much, this goes to say, do not judge someone by what you think you know about them.

Me: "I wasn't a brother to you Styles, I failed to see the pain you hid inside."

I say.

What he went through could have contributed to his psychotic mind.

Styles: "I disagree, without you I would have crumbled man."

He curves a brow as he ogles at me.

Styles: "This stays between us and Amara."

Me: "Don't worry, she won't say a word to Sethu."

There is a bit of silence in between that is broken by deep sighs.

Styles: "What happened to you back there? You had us terrified for a while."

Me: "I have no idea, all I remember is being with my grandfather and him reprimanding me. He said something about losing it all and how I was not focused. When I came to, all I could think was, Bensen has to die."

I can't recall much.

Styles: "Your old man means business hey."

He takes up a chortle that has him shake his head, either in disbelief or disagreement.

Me: He is trying to protect the throne."



Styles: "The throne or the one who is to sit on the throne? We have gone through so much for the sake of this throne."

Me: "Tell me about it."

There is so much to look back on.

Me: "You won't believe this, grandfather said Segun is not with them."

Styles squints his eyes as if gathering his thoughts together.

I expected that to happen to Segun, he turned his back on his people and the gods.

Styles: "What does that mean?"

He asks.

Me: "They didn't accept his spirit because of what he did to Uche, he killed her and drank her blood, which is an abomination they can never forgive."

Styles is elated with this news.

Styles: "So his soul is lost somewhere."

He grins.

Me: "Somewhere in hell."

And this remark pushes a quick laugh out of him.

Uncle: "Didn't your mother tell you?"

Uncle interrupts, he was listening in on our conversation.

Me: "Huh?"

I raise my eyes at him in confusion.

Uncle: "I know that you two are talking about the curse of the Okolies."

He splashes his body on the chair, crosses his leg over the other and keeps his hand busy on his beard.

Uncle: "Yeah, I know all about the Okolies and their witching ways."

He proclaims, arrogantly.

Me: "Our witching ways uncle?"

Uncle: "You know what I mean Uze."

He sniggers and no I don't.

Uncle: "Segun that son of a gun, he was a heartless bastard. So, who killed him? Was it you Uze or your boy there?"



He probs.

How does he know about Segun?

Me: "Who informed you about that?"

Uncle: "Uze, Uze, Uze. How many times did I call you?"

He's pulling his ear lobe and his head tilted back with this question. I glance at Styles who seems to be enjoying this.

Me: "Uncle?"

Uncle: "You kids should not worry about Segun, that bastard was rejected by his ancestors."

Me: "And you know this how?"

Uncle: "I just know."

Great answer...

Really?

Styles: "So, whoever spilled his blood is safe?"

Uncle: "Yes. Your mother should've told you Uze, Segun lost it all when he let his greed get the best of him."

Me: "Mother isn't as innocent."

She holds the same dark heart as Segun.

Uncle: "Don't be too hard on your mother, she only wants what's best for you."

Is he trying to leave my house? Because that can be arranged.

Me: "Don't go there please."

Uncle: "She's alone now Uze and..."

Me: "I am not going to sit here and talk about that woman."

I get up to leave him with Styles.

Uncle: "Uze wait, listen to me."

Me: "No uncle, Amara and my baby were in danger and she didn't bother to stop Raven. How do you think that makes me feel? I'm sorry, but what she did to Amara is something I will never forgive."

My speech has him looking defeated.

Me: "Let's concentrate on the negotiations next week, I'm getting married Uncle to the most amazing woman I have ever met and I am happy. Let me hold on to that please."

He nods.

Styles: "Yeah, man I am not looking forward to seeing Jonas' ugly face."

Tongue click.

Me: "Jonas hey, that man better not deny me my woman."

I mosey back to my seat.

Uncle: "You know that if they say no, you can't have her."

They wouldn't dare.

Me: "Amara is mine, I took her once and it will be easier this time."

He's laughing.

Uncle: "Oh Uze, you have no idea the power that uncles have."

Styles: "Please tell him."

Styles adds as he turns on me.

Uncle: "Pregnant or not they can take her from you."

Okay, I said I was not afraid but now I am terrified.

Me: "Maybe we should sign in court before the negotiations, just in case they try something stupid."

My suggestion sounds good, I'm given weird stares for my idea though.

Styles: "If you have a death wish then suggest this to Amara. Come and tell what she said, that's if you will still be alive."

I don't want to start a world war.

Moreover, it is about time we move on with our lives. The wedding has been delayed for far too long.

NKOMO\*

My mind is situated around the curse that has been bestowed upon the Mkhizes. How Do I escape it?

"Mr. Mkhize, I think we're done."

The doctor states as she walks back into the hospital room.

"You're good to go, it's only a few stitches."

The doctor says.

Me: "It's not infected?"

Doc: "No."

Me "Thank you doc."

She smiles.

Doc: "You will be fine, I will give you something for the pain. Don't strain the leg so much."

Me: "I'm not planning on it."

You know that nettling feeling when you're expecting a text and your phone beeps only to find that, it's your network provider?

That's how I feel right now.

What the hell is Mkhize doing here? This man will not leave me alone.

Doc: "Excuse me."

The doctor walks out leaving me with him, he stands by bed.

Me: "What do you want?"

It's clear that he wants something.

Mkhize: "What did the doctor say?"

Surely Mkhize does not think that I will answer him.

Mkhize: "I was worried about you."

He utters.

Me: "You should be, after what you did."

I don't want to think what my punishment will be like.

Mkhize: "I'm..."

Me: "Get out of here Mkhize."

I will never come to forgive him.

Mkhize: "I know what I did was wrong Nkomo. What can I do to make it up to you?"

Me: "Can you bring my mother back?"

He drops his gaze.

Me: "I didn't think so."

Mkhize: "Tell me what to do and I will do it."

Me: "I want to meet her family."

I introduce.

I know nothing about my mother, Mkhize might not like my idea. But this is the only way he can atone for his sins.

Mkhize: "Who?"

Me: "My mother, I want to know about her."

He scowls as if questioning my sanity.

Me: "What is her real name and where is she from?"

He sighs, takes a sit and buries his face in his hands.

STYLES\*

I receive a call from Kenneth as I pull in my garage, I just got home from Randall's and I have some explaining to do.

Me: "Kenny boy."

He clicks his tongue.

Kenneth: "Don't start with me, I'm having a bad morning."

He does sound grumpy.

Me: "Is it done?"

Kenneth: "Yeah, the bastard is behind bars."

That's what I like to hear.

Me: "How is she?"

Kenneth: "Broken, but she's a strong woman."

Me: "She's not as strong as she looks, Khethu has always depended on someone her whole life. She has lost so much and doesn't deserve to lose her mother."

I failed to look past Khethu's tears, I could sense the great amount of pain in her voice.

Kenneth: "How long do I have to comfort her?"

He's impatient.

Me: "Just until her father gets there, you can disappear after that. Please Kenny, don't be a cow."

He chortles, but I am dead serious. What Nkomo did with Ruth was a low blow, he almost

destroyed our friendship.

Kenneth: "You know my heart is taken."

Hell no.

Me: "If you want that heart ripped out of your chest, then continue with your nonsense. I have seen the heartless Randall and trust me you wouldn't want to cross him."

The sound of his snicker is proof that, he does not believe me.

Me: "I have told you countless times before Kenneth. Forget about Amara, she will never be yours. Unless you want to go to war with Randall and you know I'll be on his right hand side."

He sighs in frustration.

Kenneth needs to move on.

Kenneth: "Don't worry, after this mission you have appointed me. I'll go away for a while, you won't see me anywhere near Amara."

Kenneth doesn't usually express his feelings, I don't know how deep the feelings he has for Amara are, but there is something there.

Me: "Where are you going to go? What about the taxis? Mkhize still has meat on his plate."

Kenneth: "Don't worry about that, I've got it. It won't be long till your dream comes true. Mkhize will be washing taxis at Bree by Christmas."

Me: "That's my boy."

Kenneth: "I'll talk to you soon."

Me: "Thank you, Kenneth and that information you gave me on Bensen, boy did it come handy."

Kenneth: "Is he really dead?"

Styles: "He's probably charred as we speak, along with Segun."

I love the thought of that.

Kenneth: "Good, they were not as powerful as they thought hey."

Me: "Now you can take over the cult."

Kenneth: "I don't know, I think I want out. I have a sister to protect and I don't want her exposed to this dark world."

He says.

What happened to Bensen and Segun proves that darkness never prevails.

Me: "Do what you must."

Kenneth: "And that, I will."

Me: "Thank you bro, I owe you much."

Kenneth: "Brothers never say thank you."

Me: "We'll talk."

Sethu must have heard the car, let me go and explain myself.

Women!!!

AYIZE\*

Today is my first day with Doctor Singwane, Neo suggested that I change doctors since my relationship with doctor Lawson was not working. So here I am in his little office in Kibler Park, sitting on a couch. I have to introduce my rape ordeal to another stranger, I will never get used to flashing back.

It's like reliving the same thing over and over.

Neo like the caring person he is said, it would be better if I were hypnotised just so to forget. I know the memories will haunt me one day. I would rather face it now.

Me: "You're the second doctor that I'm actually seeing."

I recite what he already knows.

Doc: "Why do you think it didn't work with the first doctor?"

Their calmness can be annoying sometimes, especially at times when I feel like screaming at them.

Me: "I don't know."

I shrug before digging my nails into my hands, I'm nervous. I'm about to take that dreadful trip.

Doc: "How do you feel now?"

My shoulders welcome another shrug.

Me: "Dirty."

To sum it all up, honestly.

Doc: "What do you mean?"

Shrug...

Me: "The thing I can't get out of my head is his face. He was enjoying it and that is what is haunting me."

Doc: "Who is he?"

He asks.

Me: "My uncle."

I will never regard him as my father.

Doctor Singwane scribbles something on his note pad, Lawson used to do that as well.

Doc: "So you haven't healed from it even after seeing a doctor."

How does he want me to put this?

Me: "I guess, you're the doc."

He smiles.

They smile a lot too.

Doc: "You're right, tell me how you feel when it comes to being intimate with your partner."

Me: "Neo is a great lover, he's touchy and clingy a lot. Sometimes I try to avoid his touches because I know that one touch from him gets me excited. The way he kisses me to the way his hands plays on my body, my heart jumps from thinking about it. He is everything I want in a man, but the fun stops when he..."

This is uncomfortable.

I press the seams of my lips together, fidgeting with my hands.

Doc: "It's okay, you can speak your heart out. What you say to me will not be repeated out there, not even to my dog."

That's meant to be a joke, I'm still not comfortable.

Me: "When he penetrates me, my body goes on strike."

Doc: "Do you tell him to stop?"

Me: "No."

His question has me scowling.

Me: "I let him finish. I don't want him going out there to get it."

I can't fathom it.

Doc: "You think if you don't have sexual intercourse with him, he will cheat on you?"

Who says sexual intercourse?

Me: "Sex?"

He snickers.

Doc: "Yes."





Me: "Isn't that what all men do?"

Doc: "Not all men. Do you trust your partner?"

Me: "With my life."

Without a doubt.

Doc: "So why do you think he will cheat on you?"

Me: "Have you ever cheated on your wife?"

The silver ring on his finger tells me, he's tied down.

Doc: "This is not about me."

There's my answer.

Me: "Don't all men cheat doc?"

He scribbles again.

Doc: "Statics say not all."

Where is my shrug?

Oh here it is...

He's jotting down again, I only shrugged my shoulders, what is to write about that?

Me: "Can I see what you're writing there?"

I stretch my head to peek in, he laughs hiding the pad from my prying eyes.

Doc: "You're a curious woman, aren't you?"

Me: "I would like to think that, I'm woke."

The scribble again...

Me: "Did you just write woke?"

He laughs.

Doc: "No."

He gives me a head shake.

Doc: "I want to give you a task, try playing soft music during intimacy. One that will relax you."

Me: "Like on TV?"

He smiles.

Doc: "Yes, like on TV."

I get up from the couch, I think that's it.

Doc: "The session is not over yet."

Me: "Oh, I thought we were done."

I sit my ass down.

Doc: "That's okay, I will see you on Wednesday?"

Me: "Right on the dot doc."

He shoots me a smile.

That went well...

Soft music hey? I hope it works. I have kept Neo waiting for far too long, he might grow weary.

We're swanning to the car after the doctor's appointment when Neo's phone beeps. I see a victorious smile form on his mouth.

Neo: "It's official, I have full custody of Kagiso. My son will be with me now."

He shows me a text from his lawyer, Styles really went through for Neo with this one.

Me: "Oh baba, finally we can bring him home."

I hope his mother will not have a problem with Kagiso living with us.

Neo: "I can't wait for the three of us to be a family."

He kisses me.

We're in public and I am not yet comfortable with it, I feel like everyone is watching us which they probably are. I pull out from the kiss.

Me: "People are watching Neo."

Neo: "So, let them watch hau, they must know that we are in love."

His hands tightly grip around my waist.

Me: "You know how I feel about this."

He narrows his eyes.

Neo: "Look at that lady there."

He points at a woman walking towards us.

Neo: "She has been eyeing me since she walked out of the mall."

The lady is coming this way and probably looking where she is going...

Neo is so dramatic.

Me: "She is not looking at you."

Neo: "She is, she will approach me, you will see."

He is so confident about it.

Me: "Fine if she is not coming to you then, you're washing the dishes for the week."

Neo: "Deal."

Yeah the confidence.

Like I predicted the lady passes us without so much as giving us a second look.

Me: "What did you say?"

Neo: "She was, let me ask her."

Please tell me he is not going to ask her...

Neo: "Sorry ousie..."

No....

Neo though. Where is the filter?

The poor lady stops.

Neo: "Did you want to tell me something?"

Wow.

No, Lord I change my mind, I don't want this one anymore.

"Askies?" (Excuse me?)

The woman is confused.

Neo; "I saw you eyeing me there and thought maybe you have something to ask me. A date or my numbers?"

I should be walking away from him and he is so serious about it.

The lady clicks her tongue, gives him an infuriated look, turns and walks off.

Me: "What were you saying?"

I'm fighting a guffaw, Neo shakes his head.

Neo: "It's because you're here, she is scared of you."

Liar.

Me: "Let's go home and stop making up things."

I begin to walk to the car.

Neo: "Yes, walk girl."

What?

I turn to catch him taking a video of me.

Me: "Really Neo? Stop."

I'm probably wasting my breathe.

Neo: "Yes baba, yes. Look at those legs when she walks, isn't she lovely? Isn't she beautiful?"

He's singing now and I have lost my strength. The fact that people are watching and think he's funny...

Do I even have the right to complain?

His sweet gesture leaves me smiling, you can never win with Neo.

Me: "Let's go home baba, the sun is hot."

Now I'm whining.

Neo: "I am coming, I'm still admiring my woman."

Eish!!!

Me: "Put that phone away."

He shrugs his shoulders, somehow I think this was a test. I don't take videos since the sex tape Lethabo made.

Neo: "Are you okay?"

I zoned out.

Me: "I am perfectly fine."

I jump on his back as I proclaim my wellbeing.

My arms are around his neck, he grabs my legs so I don't fall.

Neo: "Be careful Zee."

He is too cautious lately.

Me: "Race us to the car."

Neo: "If you fall, I will not be responsible for it."

Me: "I won't, you've got me."

Neo is goofy and I love that about him, today's session with the doctor marks a new journey for us.



NTOMBI\*

I don't know what Mashoto did with the money, she was only able to give Moses about 60 000 rand. She failed to tell us what happened to the rest. I gave up asking, the girl is as stubborn as an avocado tree that refuses to grow.

I'm at the hospital along with Moses, Mhambi and Petunia, Jonas had some work. He will be here in a while.

Lelo is giving birthday today, she's only seven months pregnant. Mbuso said they have to do an emergency operation, the baby was at risk.

My baby is going to be a mother.

Moses: "Why are they taking so long?"

This waiting room has become small due to Moses bustling around. Can't he sit like Mhambi?

Me: "Moses wait, wait."

I take his hand stopping him from his strides. Is he trying to lose weight or what?

Moses: "What is it?"

Me: "My head is spinning."

I rub my forehead, as I hold on to his arm.

Moses; "What is it Ntombi? Are you okay?"

The worried tone...

Me: "No, you're making me dizzy with your pacing."

He gives me a bored look.

Moses: "Ngempela Ntombi?" (Really Ntombi?)

Me: "Yebo ngempela hau, we are all worried about Nombulelo, you know?" (Yes really.)

He clicks his tongue.

Moses: "Ndodana." (Son.)

Mbuso is here, he has this stupid smile on his face and I know that it's good news. We all meet him half way.

Me: "How is she?"

I ask anyway.

Mbuso: "Lelo is fine and so is the baby."

Oh God.

Petunia: "Siyabonga Baba." (We thank you Lord.)

Mbuso: "You should see her face, she is the most adorable thing I have ever seen."

He reveals the sex of the baby.

Me: "A girl?"

He nods with that same smile.

Mbuso: "Yes, our Goku is a girl."

Yeah!!! We'll talk about this name some other time.

Moses: "Can we see her?"

Moses cannot hide his excitement, I hope Lelo will not shrug him off.

Mbuso: "You can only see Lelo for now, the baby has been taken for observation."

Me: "Is she okay though, I mean she still had two more months to go."

Mbuso: "She's fine, follow me."

Moses: "Can you believe we're grandparents now Ntombi?"

He holds my hand as we follow behind Mbuso, I claim it back. We are not like that, we don't hold hands.

Me: "Yeah, go figure. Moses is finally an old man."

He smiles.

Moses: "Nawe magogo." (You're also a grandma.)

His retort hits home, but I don't care. I'm excited to see Lelo and her baby.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

190\*

Unedited

### STYLES\*

She's in the kitchen standing behind the stove, I love how Sethu finds comfort in the there. It's her little sanctuary, her happy place, she says.

I am welcomed by a nettled glare, as I approach her. I stop and hope that she is not as upset as she looks. She side eyes me, clicks her tongue and oh man, am I in trouble?

Think Sishi, think.

<<<Wamuhle we ngani>>> {She is beautiful.}

<<<Ng'amthatha abe nami>>> {I took her to be with me.}

<<<Wamuhle we ngani>>> {She is beautiful.}

<<<Ng'zokushada we ngani>>> {Why not get married?}

She pretends not to hear me, I see a smile forming on the corner of her mouth. I meander to hug her from behind, my face finds a comfortable place in the curve of her neck. She stops chopping, her sweet scent fills my nostrils and birth goose bumps on my skin.

Me: "Ungikwatele mama?" (Are you upset with me, my lady?)

This whisper in her ear has her shivering against me.

Sethu: "Yes."

Which in the language of love is translated, no. I nibble her neck, she slants her head to the side trying to deny me access to the crook of her neck.

Me: "How about now?"

I move back the braids that cover her neck. Gently brushing my finger tips on her bare skin, the scarcely touch leaves tingles behind. I let my lips wander on her skin. It has her shivering with pleasure.

I wrap my arm around her, moving closer to her, her breathing is on its way to another planet.

Sethu: "Mmmhhh..."

She moans.

I've got her...

I replace the kisses with the tip of my tongue, mildly licking her neck from top to bottom. She tilts her head back giving me access.

Sethu: "Styles."

Soft moans emit from her mouth, my hands find her bosom. They feel like heaven cupped in my hands.

Sethu: "We need to talk Styles."

If anything, then this ruins the mood.

Me: "What is it?"

I step back, she turns to face me... a bashful stare cleaves her eyes.

Sethu: "The vasectomy."

She says...

I lean back on the counter, hands crossed across my chest.

Me: "I had it reversed."

I come clean.

Sethu: "When?"

Me: "That day I came looking for you at church."

Don't let her freak out.... Don't let her freak out...

I repeat the line in my head. She's biting her finger, something is bothering her.

Sethu: "Are you always this secretive Styles? Do I have to worry about the lack of communication?"

Me: "You know you don't, I share everything with you."

I'm lying.

I don't think that she should know everything.

When I said I have some explaining to do, I didn't mean this...

NKOMO\*

Mkhize tends to be useless sometimes, he gave me a name of an orphanage. As if I didn't know that already. Going against the doctor's orders I decided to come check it out. Mkhize's



information has led me to Park Town, a children's home that has been standing for years. Walking in, I'm first met by the reception area. There's a lady standing with her back facing me. I clear my throat to get her attention, it's not working. So, I try again.

Frankly I find her rude, she should know when to attend to people that come here.

Me: "You know you would cost these kids a sponsor with your rudeness."

I shoot.

I am not a fan of impudence.

"I was raised with the notion that, when you find people in a room you greet them first."

She retorts crudely.

Like I said, I hate impudence.

Me: "Is this not your place of work sisi?"

"Argh, men. I don't blame you, it all started with Adam when he left Eve alone. It showed stupidity and ignorance and sadly men seem to have caught what he had."

What the hell did she just say?

Wait, that voice.

Me: "Zobuhle?"

Swiftly she turns. Lightning is not that fast, might I add.

Me: "Hi."

She recognizes me, I see it in her eyes. She's ogling at me with her jaw dropped. I'm confused now...

Me: "You're Zobuhle right?"

Unless she has a twin.

She scurries around the table runs to me, her arms are around me in a flash. I'm left stumped, I don't know if I should hold her back.

Then again, why is she hugging me?

Confusion takes me back to the throat clearing moment. As if reality hits her, she slowly releases me from her hold. A few steps away from me are taken by this girl who has her eyes dropped.

Zobuhle: "I'm sorry, I tend to overreact out of excitement. I thought you didn't make it out there."

Her gaze falls on my leg, she bites her lip as she winces.

Me: "It's not as painful as it looks."

Predicting the contents of her mind I decide to answer a question only known to her.

Zobuhle: "Shouldn't you be at home resting?"

Me: "I'm okay, How are you? I see you found your way out of the woods."

The bravery of this girl left me confounded.

Zobuhle: "My friends found me actually, I didn't think that I would make it through the night."

Me: "I'm glad you made it out alive."

Her smile is the prettiest thing I have seen in a while, I can tell that it comes from deep within. It varnishes her eyes and ranges into her face.

Trust me, after being locked up for days with no hope of making it out and every day thinking today is your last. There is nothing better than seeing an innocent smile of an unimpeachable young woman.

Zobuhle: "What brings you here?"

Me: "You work here?"

Zobuhle: "I volunteer during my spare time."

She walks back behind the desk.

Me: "I don't know if you can help me, I'm looking for my mother's documents. I was told that this is where she grew up."

The information I have will not help much, I doubt I will ever find her family. MKhize knew so little about her, it will take me my whole life to find them.

MBUSO\*

Lelo looks worn out, I think that I should send everyone away so she can get some rest. Ntombi seems to be the happiest, she hasn't stopped smiling.

Lelo: "Where is Amara?"

An elephant jumps into the room, everyone is quiet and smiles have faded. Moses looks the most uncomfortable.

Me: "She's on her way with Randall."

I break the ice.

Lelo: "When am I going to see our baby."

It's the second time that she's asking me this.

Me: "My love, the baby has to stay in an incubator for a few days. She is perfectly fine though."

A tear nudges her as it streaks down her face.

Lelo: "We have a baby Mbuso, I'm a mother."

I have never seen so much happiness in her.

NTtombi: "You are a mother Nombulelo."

Ntombi repeats.

Mhambi: "You look tired my child, maybe we should leave you to sleep."

You see when God created Mhambi, he put all the spices in there. He is a blessing indeed and Lelo needs a father figure in her. Moses does not fit the bill.

Ntombi: "Hamba Mhambi, we'll see you at home." (Go.)

Then there is Ntombi.

Me: "I agree with umalume, you can come and see her later." (Uncle.)

Moses: "No it's fine, we'll watch her sleep."

Why is he smiling? There is nothing to smile about here. I wish Ntombi and Moses can respect their daughter's privacy.

Lelo: "Mom, please. Listen to Mbuso."

She says, looking defeated and drained. This duo has that, effect on people.

Ntombi: "Okay, I'll be outside until you're ready to see me again. Mhambi and Petunia, please go with Moses."

She orders them and Mhambi is elder to Ntombi, if I'm not mistaken.

Moses... The look he is giving Ntombi could kill.

Petunia: "Wait, have you decided on the name of the baby?"

Lelo glances up at me, takes my hand and her eyes smile.

Lelo: "I want you to name her."

She says.

I am overwhelmed.

"Over my dead body."

An accustomed male voice echoes from behind me, look what the devil dragged in. Jonas has done it again.

Ntombi: "Heeee!!! Jonas, are you trying to kill me?"

She's loud...

Moses: "I knew it Ntombi. Your brother does not want peace in my house."

I agree with Moses. Jonas went and brought Zuma, I am going to kill someone.

Lelo holds on to my hand, her eyes are pleading. She is afraid for Goku.

Zuma: "You can't name my child, I will not allow it. Ubaba engu vuka ethuneni lakhe." (My father would wake up from his grave.)

He strolls in as he spews nonsense from his mouth.

Ntombi: "Makavuke kee uyihlo, ok'salayo akuyona eyakho lengane." (Let him wake up, this baby is not yours still.)

Maybe I won't have to fight him, Ntombi will do just that for me.

Moses: "Jonas, inkinga yakho yini vele?" (What is your problem?)

This was my next question.

Jonas: "I did the right thing, something you people have failed to do."

The nerve of this man.

Ntombi: "Right thing? Because all you're doing is stressing my child, why can't you go back to Mpumalanga bhuti? How long must we suffer because of you?"

Ntombi is naturally loud, I should not have allowed the whole family in here.

Zuma is staring at Lelo and I want to pluck those eyes out.

Zuma: "Lelo, we have a child."

He says.

Me: "What are you doing here?"

With a grimace, he clicks his tongue.

Me: "I am not playing with you Zuma, leave."

I speak with authority as I block him from Lelo's view.

Zuma: "You are powerless Xaba that, child is mine and I can prove it in court."

Lelo: "Court? Mbuso, he wants to take our baby away."

Her voice expresses great shock.

Me: "No one is taking her away."

Lelo: "Uncle, why are you doing this to me?"

She's crying.

Jonas: "I'm doing it for your baby Lelo, you will understand one day."

Jonas responds.

He can't be serious, he is not making sense.

Me: "That's it, everybody please go. Lelo needs to sleep."

I will not stand here while she cries.

Zuma: "I want to see my baby."

Unable to control my anger and fighting the need to punch him, I push him.

Me: "Get out of here."

I shout.

He grabs my collar pushing me back until I'm pressed against the wall.

Zuma: "I said I am not going anywhere before I see my baby."

He grunts in anger.

Lelo: "Mbuso!!!"

Lelo shouts.

I fight to push Zuma off.

Ntombi: "Jonas, stop this boy. What is he doing to my son in-law?"

There is chaos in the room as Zuma and I wrestle each other.

"What's going on?"

The room falls into silence upon Randall's roar, Amara rushes to comfort Lelo. She is very sensitive right now, all of this stress is not good for the baby. How will I keep her family away from her?

Me: "This pest refuses to leave."

Zuma: "Who are you calling a pest?"

He rejoinders indignantly.

Moses: "Ntombi asambe mkami." (Let's go my wife.)

Ntombi does protest, but follows her husband out.

Petunia: "This is wrong baba."

She says to her husband.



Petunia: "You know Lelo's situation will affect the baby, this man is not meant to be here."

I have been trying to say this.

Zuma: "How ma? I am the father of the baby."

Mhambi: "We mfana? I don't know where you get this confidence that you have, but you are very disrespectful." (Boy.)

I know when Mhambi speaks, Jonas listens. The same Jonas who brought a wrecking ball is quietly standing on a corner.

Randall: "Are you going to leave on your own or do we have to drag you out?"

I vote that we drag him out.

SETHU\*

It was only a matter of time till I took that step and walk into my dream. I have registered at the International hotel school, it's about time I move on from nursing. I'm rushing to my car, running away from the sun that has decided to put up a fight with humanity today.

There's a taxi, so I stop to let it pass. He's driving as slow as he can. By the time he passes, I would have fainted from the sweltering heat.

Why is he stopping?

I take a step to walk away...

"Excuse me."

He's calling out to me.

Me: "I'm fine thanks, I don't need a taxi."

I deny what I think to be an offer to drive me to town.

Oh, okay. He's jumping out of the taxi.

Run Sethu, run.

He blocks my way as I begin to race to my car.

Me: "Get out of my way or I will scream."

"Cha cha sisi, I don't mean any harm." (No lady.)

He waves his hands to show peace. I have learnt not to trust people.

"It's just that you look familiar. Have we met before?"

I have heard this line before.

Me: "I'm not interested."

He blocks my path, I need to get out of here.

Me: "Bhuti, I don't know you. We have never met, please let me pass."

He's getting on my nerves.

"Nontobeko Malinga?"

He says as I push past him. He knows my mother?

Me: "What?"

"You're her daughter, aren't you?"

Me: "How do you know my mother?"

It's been long and this is the first time meeting someone who might know my mother.

"She was an old friend. Where is she? She just disappeared, no one knew of her whereabouts."

He looks too young to be my father so that, logic is out.

Me: "She died, twenty five years ago."

He drops his head.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Mkhize must have been distraught, he loved her."

He crosses his arms across his chest after dropping a bomb on me.

Me: "Who is Mkhize?"

I ask.

"Mkhize was the only man Ntosh loved, he was her MK. Although he was older, they were good together. That old fool was in love for once in his life and I thought he only had sons. But here you are."

Could this Mkhize person be my father?

Me: "Why do you think that Mkhize is my father?"

"Well although you look like Ntosh, I see a bit of Mkhize in you."

He answers.

Could this be a chance to finally meet my father?

Me: "Do you have a picture of him?"

Do I want to meet him, though?



"Sethu let's go."

What is Neo doing here?

Me: "Neo?"

He's glaring at this man as if he knows him, the anger plastered in his eyes says he knows him.

I'm being lugged away before I could ask for the man's numbers.

Me: "Neo why did you do that?"

I pull my hand from him.

Neo: "What is wrong with you Miss S?"

I was Sethu back there.

Neo: "Didn't you learn last time you were kidnapped?"

I'm not used to the angry Neo.

Me: "I'm sure he meant no harm, he knows my mother."

I correct his guesses.

Neo: "It's 2020 Miss S. Anyone can easily attain information from the internet."

Neo is leering behind me, I turn to see the taxi slowly drive past. He and this man seem to know each other.

Something is amiss here.

To be continued...





## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

191\*

NEO\*

Me: "I'm on my way."

I'm on the phone with Stylos while driving home.

Styles: "And Sethu?"

He asks, sounding agitated.

Losing Sethu is his new found biggest fear. If Mkhize finds out about her. God knows what he will do, the man is sick and perverted. What if he doesn't feel any fatherly affection towards Sethu, but a perverted desire?

Me: "I'm driving behind her."

Stylos has had Sethu guarded after she was kidnapped by Tyson without her knowledge, of course. I was closer to her location when he called me and said some man in a taxi was following her.

Styles: "How is she? Did he..."

If he continues like this, he will have a heart attack.

Me: "No, I doubt that idiot revealed anything. Though I heard him mention Mkhize. So it's been planted in her mind that her father's name is Mkhize."

I hear him sigh out of frustration.

Styles: "Dammit."

His anger lately...

I shall not touch on that for now.

Me: "If only he was a changed man, then maybe..."

Styles: "Then nothing Neo, I have known that man since forever and nothing good comes out from him."

Me: "Nothing good, but cow."

I don't like that man.

Styles: "Really? Must you go there?"

Me: "Yes, ke ntse ke u koatetse Stylos. Mara uena sometimes u ka ba dom jeer." (I'm still upset with you, you can be stupid sometimes.)

I couldn't sleep that day, I had nightmares about Uze dying and Bensen chasing me.

Styles: "Nkomo is a friend, don't you think he deserves a second chance?"

Me: "Second chance ke mau, he can go to hell for all I care." (Cussing.)

The problem lies here, I'm serious while as he finds my quip funny.

Stylos: "Aii, I'll talk to you later Neo."

Me: "Yeah, matha. Jou nonsense." (Run, you nonsense.)

He hangs up on me, Nkomo will destroy us if we are not careful.

NOMBULELO\*

Zuma wants my life, I am convinced. He will never let me be happy, he will always be a pest. I hate that Mbuso has to go through this because my baby is fathered by the world's biggest imbecile.

Me: "Mbuso."

He turns to the sound of my hysterical voice.

Me: "I want them out of my room, everyone must get out and I don't want this man anywhere near my baby."

By everyone I mean Zuma and Jonas.

I hate crying, but these tears are allowed. I'm crying because I'm angry, I'm crying because I have Jonas as an uncle and I'm crying because my father continues to fail me. He says that he wants a second chance. Why is he not taking up his role and protect me from Zuma? Something he should have done when Zuma hit me that day, instead when the tough gets going, he scurries out of here like the place is on fire.

Zuma: "Lelo don't push me away like this please."

I don't care about him anymore, he can plead all he wants. I am done with Zuma.

Randall: "Let's go and have a talk outside?"

Randall is shadowing Zuma in a corner, I can't miss the intimidated look on his face as he looks up at Randall.

Zuma: "I am not going anywhere with you."

Clearly he is not overawed.

Randall: "I don't know if you missed this, but I wasn't asking. Are we going to do this or not?"

Teeth gnashed together, Randall's voice tingles with menace. It has Zuma gulping, his analytical eyes visiting me as they seek for an assertion to stay.

Me: "I don't want to talk to this man please get him out of here."

I'm asking Randall for a favour for the first time.

I have to hide my face from Zuma, he's pleading with his eyes.

Jonas: "Nombulelo, the child will fall si..."

How dare he?

Me: "No uncle, I will not let you say such things about my daughter."

He knows you don't speak ill of a baby, lest the negative words fall on her like a plague.

What is wrong with uncle Jonas?

"Hey don't touch me."

Zuma yells as Randall lugs him outside, he is not able to fight back. Mbuso is following behind.

Amara: "Don't worry Lelo, he won't get to you anymore."

Amara offers comforting words.

Zuma is obstinate, he won't stop until he gets what he wants.

Me: "I hope you're right Amara, I am tired of all the bickering. My child cannot be exposed to all this hate."

Amara: "The storm will pass, you will see."

The storm seems to be taking forever to pass.

Petunia: "Amara is right."

She adds.

Petunia: "You need to focus on your baby now."

Me: "And Amara's wedding."

Amara smiles, my offramp has Mhambi and Jonas walking out of the room.

Me: "Are you excited?"

Amara: "I am though, I'm not looking forward to going back to the house."

She responds suddenly unsettled.

Me: "Don't dwell so much into it."

I say.

Mbuso should be back by now, I am worried about him.

MKHIZE\*

Sika budes into the office and salutes me with tongue clicks.

Me: "What happened?"

His nostrils flare in anger, depicting his irritation.

Sika: "It didn't go well, that little boy came and took her away."

He serves another tongue click.

Me: "Shit, we have to do something Sika."

Sika: "I planted your name in her mind, she will search."

Me: "If she is my daughter, then I can't let her be with that boy, Sishi. He will destroy her Sika."

I stress.

Sika: "That's a dangerous path we should not take, Sishi will kill us."

He says.

It's possible but...

Me: "I might have a little girl to protect, I will fight then."

Sishi is not God, it's inevitable that, he will perish someday. If Ntosh and I had a child, then I am willing to protect her.

AMARA\*

That Saturday.

I'm in his arms, holding on to him as if I won't be coming back. Today is the day I will officially belong to Randall. My uncle won't be able to intervene after the negotiations. Uncle Jonas should have joined a political party, where he will practise his dictatorship.

My heart has been thumping hard as if yearning to be seen, I am going to enter Ntombi's house after a long time and I cannot comprehend how this has come to be my biggest fear.

Randall: "Amara."

He's trying to break from the embrace, I am not ready to let go. So I hold on much longer.

Randall: "You do know that you're coming back?"

I know, but fear has me feeling clingy.

Me: "Is it so wrong to want to hold on to my future hubby."

His chest vibrates as he chortles, he has found pleasure in something I said.

Randall: "Hubby? I have been called many things, but I love this. Let's throw baby out of the window and we'll use hubby from now."

He jokes, he is jesting right?

Me: "You mean I... will use hubby. I'm the one who seems to be suffering with the pet names. While you, Mr. Okolie are stuck with me hemma." (My queen.)

Randall: "That's because you're my queen and I will never do away with this name."

He says, still trying to get me off of him.

Me: "Stop it.."

I whinge.

Randall: "Hai Amara, I need to breathe."

He wins in pushing me off.

Me: "You can't breathe? Are you not the one who couldn't get enough of me when I first got here? Now you can't breathe."

Camping my arms across my chest is starting to become a mission. I have a feeling, I will be the biggest I have ever been with this pregnancy.

Wait, where did my mind go?

I surge back to find Mr. Okolie smirking at me, a naughty smile has him by the throat.

Me: "I'm listening."

He is going to utter nonsense.

Randall: "You know if you want us to have sex, you can ask? Holding on to me like this is not flirting me hemma, if that's your idea of it then baby you need tips."

The award for the most annoying man in a woman's life goes to Randall Okolie.

Me: "Funny how you always manage to drop me down the moment I'm soaring on the wings of love and remind me I was last in line to getting that perfect guy."

He narrows his eyes as he gasps at my canard.

Me: "Yeah, carry on with your breathlessness."

I toss my rejoinder out there, it's up to him if he will catch it or not.

Randall: "Where are you going now?"

I'm going to the car, he will meet me there and I am not going to answer his question.

Randall: "Pregnant women."

His complaint makes me want to go back and demand an explanation. R.J, you need to calm down. Papa is being an idiot, we can forgive him for now.

"Kose kafra me hemma." (I'm sorry my queen.)

His voice reaches me as I approach the front door.

Kose kafra my foot... (I'm sorry.)

I pick up my pace as I hear his footfall clumping behind me.

AMARA\*

In Vaal Ntombi's house\*

This house holds so many bad memories, I didn't think that I would be back here. This should be a home away from home, but here I am terrified of every memory that lies in this place. Each wall testifies of the brutality I was accustomed to.

"Ayy ayyy ayyy, sadla amasaladi." (We're going to eat salads.)

Ayize enters the kitchen dancing in jubilation. She ululates loudly...

Ayize: "Siyashadisa la ekhaya." (There is a wedding in this family.)

She continues to dance and ululate.

Ntombi frowns at her, while Sethu looks embarrassed next to me. I'm thrown into a fit of laughter as Petunia joins in. It sounds and feels like a wedding day.

Ntombi: "Are you people crazy? Petunia, umdala man, you should be teaching this child respect." (You're old.)

She berates them.

That broom on her hand is ready to stroke someone and I know that it's not Petunia.

Ayize: "Hau aunty! You should be happy. It's a wedding, auntiza." (Aunt.)

Ayize takes Ntombi's hand, forcing her into a dance. I see her wanting to give in, but is kept back by something.

Ntombi: "Okay, okay. It is a wedding, can we not make noise kee, please? The uncles will be here



any minute now plus, my husband is stuck at a tavern because my brother decided to chase him out of his house.”

The old Ntombi did not grumble this much.

Petunia: “You girls should stay in your room and don’t leave until we call you.”

She instructs.

Sethu: “Yebo ma.” (Yes.)

Petunia: “And wena.” (You.)

She points at Ayize.

Petunia: “Cover those shoulders and wear a doek.” (Head wrap.)

It’s funny how Ayize’s mouth just plunged.

Ayize: “Ha, why auntiza?” (Aunt.)

Her day is officially ruined, the makoti look is not her style, hence the sleeveless dress. (Bride.)

We gave up trying to convince her to change.

Petunia: “Just cover up, now go.”

Ayize coos as she moves her feet, she pulls me with her.

Ayize: “Does Petu get some? It seems like Mkhulu bae is not giving her.” (Grandpa.)

She whispers in my ear as we walk into Lelo’s old room.

Me: “That’s disgusting.”

Honestly.

Sethu: “Are you okay?”

I wouldn’t be able to do this without Sethu and Ayize, their love and support is tremendous. Lelo is at the hospital, nursing her Little Goku, so she couldn’t make it.

Me: “How long do you think the negotiations will take? I am ready to go home.”

Ayize: “That’s if they will happen at all. Did you see the uncle with the grey hair?”

Uncle Jonas.

Ayize: “Mkhulu bae is so serious, you would think he is ready to demand millions.” (Grandpa.)

Sethu: “Ayize don’t scare her.”

Ayize: “It’s the truth though, if every girl in the world has Mkhulu bae as an uncle, not one of them will get married.” (Grandpa.)

I was not afraid at first, but Ayize is painting the picture. Jonas is capable of that, he is still

fighting that Zuma be a part of Goku's life.

Me: "I trust uncle Mhambi."

Ayize huffs scornfully.

Me: "What is it now?"

Ayize: "Uncles and money, same WhatsApp group. Wait and see." (Uncles love money.)

Sethu is approached by a depressed look, as she throws herself on the bed.

Me: "I don't want to stress about this anymore, I will attract good things."

I join Sethu on the bed, I'm hungry again. This baby does not give me a break.

Me: "Today has to be perfect, I have been through enough. I deserve this Ayize."

I declare looking back at my past.

Ayize: "At least he is not here, Moses I mean."

I am not looking forward to seeing his face.

Sethu: "What exactly did he do to you?"

Taking up a curious look, Sethu probes. What Moses did is not something I would want to get into on my day.

Me: "He molested me and sold me to some old man."

What the heck anyway? I might as well tell them.

Ayize stands with her back against the wall as she crosses her arms across her chest. This is a sensitive topic for her, Sethu too. They went through so much.

Me: "The reason I have been on lock down is because of him."

Sethu: "He's still after you?"

She asks.

Me: "I don't know, but we can never be sure. I was kidnapped twice, the first time Styles and Randall found me before we could get anywhere. The second time I was taken to his house, only to find my uncle there. He brought Moses to convince me to marry him, if Randall didn't get there on time. I would be married to him."

Ayize: "God bless Randy baby's soul."

She proclaims stridently, her demeanour gives off a message that, we should deter from this fretting topic.

Sethu: "Today is a good day, let's not invite sadness."

Ayize: "I agree with you. We need some music and something to drink."





I disagree.

Me: "You don't drink. Where is this coming from?"

She sighs.

This is bad.

Ayize: "I think Neo is going to leave me."

She slouches her body, as she settles down beside me and emanates another sigh.

Sethu: "What happened sis?"

Worried, Sethu moves to sit next to her.

Ayize: "We haven't been intimate, he doesn't say it, but I see that he's frustrated."

Sethu: "Is it still that problem? I thought you were seeing another doctor."

Ayize's situation is a sad one, she was emotionally damaged and healing seems to reject her.

Ayize: "I am, he keeps me giving me these tasks and they are not working. My uncle is haunting me, I see his face each time Neo and I start to..."

She pauses, exhales in a silent snort.

Me: "It could be spiritual you know, I mean he was your father and you were never introduced to your ancestors. Your aunt did say, he lived everyday with regret of what he did to you."

I'm drivelling, but it makes sense to me.

Sethu: "I doubt it, we just need to pray about it."

Yes, we have a pastor in the house.

Ayize bursts out laughing, you would swear that she was not sad just now.

Ayize: "Wow Sethu."

Sethu: "What?"

She asks, she cannot find the joke in her statement.

Ayize: "Nothing, forget about me. I will be fine, I've been through worse."

She is trying to convince herself.

Me: "You and Neo will be fine my love, he loves you and will never leave you."

I place my arm around her shoulder to comfort her.

Sethu: "I agree with Amara, we will find a way out of this."

Ayize: "We have to because hey, salt is killing me."



This girl is something else, she has us laughing.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

192\*

### STYLES\*

Jonas has held a straight face from the moment we hollered at the gate, he made things difficult for us. He is not playing today. Mhambi on the other hand well, he is not all smiles because money is involved and we are emerging two families today. But I know he is not bitter like his brother.

His demeanor though, makes this living room seem small.

Neo has decided to compete with Jonas by taking up a straight face as well, you would think he is an uncle too. Randall's uncle is quick to learn and so here it goes.

Neo: "Where do you expect us to get that kind of money? Do you know how much petrol costs?"

He might look like an uncle, but does not talk like one. Noe though...

Jonas: "You want our daughter right? Then you have to pay up, you thought you would come here and pay peanuts."

Jonas speaks with malice in his voice. Are we sure he is the good uncle that wants what's best for his kids?

Iheme: "I disagree, this is daylight robbery."

Randall's uncle adds his cents, I did say he is catching on.

Jonas: "Day light robbery is getting our child pregnant and hiding it from us and because of that, we have doubled the demand. Our daughter was not pregnant when she was stolen from us."

Me: "Stolen from you?"

He sure knows how to insult you without putting it straight.

Jonas: "We all know that you people stole our daughter, she was not courted. You should pay for that too."

I see Jonas thinks money grows on trees.

Neo: "Aua, angeke malume. You will leave us broke moes." (Never uncle.)

Neo jumps in with his broken Zulu, his head moves to and fro in disagreement.

Me: "Neo is right, and we are here for the lobola. A date should be set to tackle other matters." (Dowry.)

I have met opportunists like him.

Jonas: "Kuyacaca wemfana ukuthi usasemcane, lendaba idinga abadala. Amara finished her high school, she was going to go off and study further before she was abducted." (It's clear boy that, you are not matured. This issue needs elders.)

Not if Ntombi and Moses had anything to do with it.

Iheme: "I don't understand, are we not here to bring our kids together?"

Please ask them.

Mhambi: "We are."

Mhambi softly accounts.

Iheme: "Then, why are we being bashed for our short comings? There is absolutely nothing wrong with what our son did, he saved your daughter. She would not be around if it were not for him."

He lays the truth out on the table and I hope Jonas will swallow it, as bitter as it is. Need I mention, he is a proud man. He carries it on his head for anyone to see.

Jonas: "Nonsense."

He shouts and there is no reason for that.

Jonas: "Are you saying we owe you because your son bought our daughter? Are you people here to insult us?"

We should call an ambulance, the old man is about to have a heart attack.

Me: "That is not what he meant baba, we have to look at the bigger picture here. Randall saved Amara from a sick man, yes we agree that he went about it the wrong way, but throwing it in our faces while we're trying to build a lifelong relationship is downright wrong. Is this what he will have to go through during family gatherings? Reminded of his past mistakes? How will his children feel, seeing that their father is not welcomed in their mother's family?"

With hard eyes, Jonas scrutinizes me, making me feel like I have affronted his entire lineage with my choice of words.

Jonas: "You speak with so much pride and arrogance boy."

If he dubs me boy one more time...

Jonas: "You seem to forget who the victim is here."

He states with a tint of anger in his voice, which states that he will never forgive Randall for what he did.

Jonas: "I say we cancel this ceremony, let our daughter get an education and a job. Let her be independent and only then will she decide what she wants. She is still young. Why are you rushing her?"

He says we are rushing her...

I am convinced that Jonas does not want to see anyone happy.

Neo: "Hai, malume. Let's leave it kee, keep your daughter. Saphela egoli, because of people like Jonas."(Uncle.) (We have had enough.)

Why did we bring Neo here?

Me: "Neo, don't say that."

Jonas might just take the offer, Neo scowls at me with squinted eyes.

Neo: "Ke 'nete Stylos, we have suffered enough. Le Miss S, le eena..." (It's true.) (True.)

What the hell?

Me: "Shut up."

I mutter through gnashed teeth.

Me: "You will ruing things for us."

I chide him, he sits back on the couch resting his crossed arms on his chest.

Mhambi: "I think we should all calm down..."

The voice of reason speaks...

Mhambi: "Can we take a short break please, I would like to have a word with my brother."

Throw in a punch while you're at it, he deserves one...

We excuse ourselves as we tread outside, leaving Jonas mumbling secreted words, probably cussing us.

Neo: "Where is Amara? We have to go home."

He is walking around the kitchen.

Me: "Where are you going?"

Neo: "To get Amara, we're going home."

He is not asking me, he's telling me.

Me: "Get back here, Randall expects us to bring him his bride and that's what we're going to do."

I reprove him, the frown he holds is justifiable. I too am seething, but I refuse to mess this up for my brother.

Iheme: "You didn't tell me we were going to meet Lucifer himself."

Jonas has that thing that, leaves people defeated and drained.

Me: "I have to update Randall, he must be going crazy."

I move away from the door, Randall is around somewhere. He answers before I could hear the ring tone. He must've been glued to his phone.

Me: "Remind me again why I didn't bring my gun?"

I start to introduce, this should paint the picture for him.

Randall: "What happened?"

A tint of panic covers his voice.

Me: "He knows about the pregnancy and wants to stop the whole thing."

I answer with a flood of what could be bad news.

Randall: "Where is Amara?"

His voice becomes overwrought.

Me: "In the house of course."

Randall: "Tell her to come out."

He demands with a dangerous twinkle in his voice.

Me: "What?"

Randall: "Tell... Amara... to come out, I'm coming to get her."

If I were stupid and an idiot, I would give in to his brazen demand.

Me: "Calm down. Do you think Jonas would actually do that?"

I'm trying to convince myself that he wouldn't, the hate in his eyes confirmed that he would. If we're too lenient on him, we might walk away empty handed.

Randall: "Yes he would do it, that man hates me."

He replies as if the answer is observable, which in this case it is.

Me: "Don't tell me you're on your way here."

I can hear the sound of footfall.

Randall: "I am, I will take Amara from there. Jonas does not know me."

Randall is being irrational, this is not how things are done.

Me: "Randy stop, we're taking care of this. Remember they had to accommodate you by holding the negotiations here and not back home.

Randall: "I don't care Styles, Amara is mine. Jonas can't stop us from getting married."

Me: "He can't yes, but you know custom says you need to pay lobola. Just like your ancestors don't play, Amara's are the same." (Dowry.)

Randall: "Then talk to Jonas, get him off that high horse he is on."

He grunts.

Me: "I'll handle Jonas, don't come here. Unless they tell you to."

Randall: "Fine."

He clacks his tongue and disconnects the call. Jonas is taking chances and I will not let him.

AMARA\*

I have been biting my nail and tapping my foot in agitation, waiting for this trialling time to pass. Knowing Jonas, he's probably standing on the table with a stick commanding them where to sit, and what not to touch.

Ayize: "Girl I feel for that finger you're biting. Uyabona, this is what you get for hanging around Sethu. Her annoying mannerisms are contagious." (You see.)

Ayize says, as she tugs me out of my thoughts.

Sethu: "For the sake of peace, I will not say anything."

Good girl...

Ayize: "Ifoni yakho iyakhala, our husband must be stressed hey. I have to teach him patience." (Your phone is ringing.)

She adds letting her eyes reel up in annoyance swirled with amusement.

Me: "It's not him, I don't know this number."

Who could be calling me?

Maybe Lelo....

Me: "Yes."

I answer.

"Amara."

An unacquainted male voice greets me.

Me: "Who is this?"

I'm ready to drop the call.

"Kenneth."



Ohh! Okay...

I glance at Ayize and Sethu who are conversing softly, not minding me at all.

Me: "Hi."

What does he want and I don't remember giving him my numbers.

Kenneth: "I heard that today is the ceremony."

Heard from who?

Me: "Yes, how did you get my numbers?"

He gurgles.

Kenneth: "I have my ways."

That is not a direct answer.

Kenneth: "Are you happy Amara?"

I am not comfortable with this question now that, I know what he expects from me.

Me: "What is it Kenneth?"

Like a lion that has spotted its prey, Ayize turns her head to look at me. Her face accepting a scowl that, has me feeling bad for talking to this man on the day where I will be given off to Randall.

"Put him on speaker.

She undertones, I do it unbeknownst to Kenneth.

Kenneth: "I'm going away for a while..."

I doubt that will make a difference to me.

Kenneth: "I thought I should check up on you before I go."

Sethu and Ayize look at me like I am doing something wrong.

Me: "Okay, thanks. Listen, I have to go."

I have to get rid of him.

I get a nod of approval from Ayize.

Kenneth: "Sure, I wish you the best."

Me: "Thanks."

Ayize is the one to cut the call.

Ayize: "If this is not cheating, I don't know what is."



She drops a comment of which I completely disagree with.

Sethu: "Cheating is taking it a little too far Ayize."

Ayize: "Do you know that this might as well be your wedding day and talking to a man who is crushing on you is considered cheating. Ask Steve Harvey, he'll tell you."

Steve Harvey is unaware of this.

Me: "I didn't know it was Kenneth when I answered the call."

A disappointed stare sprouts from her eyes.

Ayize: "It's a good thing that he's going away."

Me: "Even if he wasn't, I have nothing to do with him."

I don't know why Kenneth called me, honestly.

My phone is ringing again...

Ayize: "Let me speak to him, I'll tell him where to get off."

She reaches her hand.

Me: "It's Randall."

You would think that he sensed Kenneth's call.

Me: "Randall."

Randall: "Why was your phone not going through? Who were you talking to?"

Where is this coming from?

Me: "I didn't..."

Gosh, I have never lied to this man.

What excuse should I come up with?

Randall: "You didn't what?"

I leer at Sethu and Ayize in search of a way out of this. They have no clue what Randall just said to me.

Me: "What's wrong Randall?"

It is only now that, I take note of the dread in the tone of his voice.

Randall: "If I say come with me and forget all of this, would you do it?"

Without a doubt.

Me: "Remember what I said last time, I will always centre myself around your existence."

A sigh of relief emerges from him.

Me: "Why do you ask me this Randall?"

Randall: "Just asking."

Me: "Did something happen? Did Styles say something?"

Randall: "No, please answer your phone when I call or I start thinking the worst."

Why would he think the worst? I'm in the house, nothing would happen to me.

Me: "Are you sure everything is okay?"

Randall: "Yes, don't worry about anything."

I can't promise that.

Randall: "Listen, I want you to be the one to serve me food okay."

Wow!!!

Me: "Why me? Your other wife will serve you."

I comeback with this line, it has Ayize entertained. She winks at me like she knows what is being said.

Randall: "I'm serious me hemma." (My queen.)

He stresses.

Randall: "Styles says you have to kneel when you serve me?"

I see where he's going with this.

Me: "So you want me to kneel before you?"

Randall: "Yes."

I hear a twitch of amusement in his voice.

Randall: "Me hemma, you don't have to worry about the number of times you kneel in front of me because when you get up, you will look even higher in my eyes." (My queen.)

Mr. Okolie is learning, I am enthralled.

Me: "In that case my king, I will kneel at your feet."

I give my retort with a smile dancing on my face.

Ayize and Sethu exchange looks as they cackle at my response.

Me: "I have to go, I'm getting looks."

I state, shying away from these women.

Randall: "Keep your phone with you."

That sounds like a 'just in case something bad happens.'

Me: "I will."

We hear a loud noise followed by ululation as I bid Randall goodbye.

Randall: "What is that?"

Me: "I think it's done."

My heart jumps to sit on my throat for a second.

Randall: "Really?"

He seeks assurance.

Me: "Yes, there's a celebration."

He exhales in relief.

Randall: "So, you're officially mine?"

Not without a ring, but...

Me: "Yes."

Randall: "Okay, I love you Amara, so much."

This is something I will never forget.

Me: "I love you more Randall."

Randall: "Let me call Styles, I'll see you inside, I guess."

That means he is not sure if he will be let in the house.

Me: "I'll see you inside baby."

He drops the phone and immediately Sethu takes me into her arms, Petunia flies in ululating... and... The noise begins as Ayize joins her.

Sethu: "Congratulations Amara."

She hugs me again, Petunia is the second one.

Petunia: "May no one cast an evil eye on your life."

I receive.

Ayize gives me a quick hug.

Ayize: "Sister-wife, I welcome you into our family."

She says pulling me into her arms, I am at my happiest at this moment.

Me: "I just want to be with Randall, right now."

They laugh at me.

Ayize: "Now you can have all the sex you want."

A hug is given with this disconcerting comment.

Petunia: "Yey wena?" (Hey you.)

Petunia chastises her.

Ayize: "Auntiza, ucansi is not a secret hau. How did we all get here? Our parents had to..."

Sethu smashes her hand on Ayize's mouth, hindering her speech from reaching its finish line.

Petunia: "Ntombazane?" (Girl?)

Ayize will traumatise the poor woman.

Ayize frees herself from Sethu's hand, with a frown on her face steps away.

Petunia: "Get ready, you will have to serve the guest."

She walks out with that.

I have no words to express how I feel.

KHETHU\*

My father blames himself for what has happened to my mother. I tried to convince him that it is not his fault, but talking to him is like chasing a moving aeroplane.

He refuses to go home and shower for he has found a place next to my mother's bedside. If that chair could talk, we'd be shocked by what it has to say.

Me: "Honestly dad, the doctors will start complaining about the stench in this room."

It's not that bad, I'm trying to get him to go home.

Dad: "No, I can't go leaving her behind."

He has learnt to be stubborn at that.

Me: "I am here dad, I will keep an eye on her and let you know if anything comes up."

That head shake that, he is giving me is starting to annoy me.

He's holding her hand with his eyes engrossed on her battered face. It's been days, but her face remains unrecognizable. Her swollen eyes don't look like they will grace the light anytime soon,

as they are clung together like a magnet to steel. Her lips are five times plump than their usual size, a white bandage wraps around her head as if fighting to keep its contents in one place.

Observing her, there is no glint of hope in me that tells me that, she will come back to us.

The doctors stand with their reviews, she is caught between life and death.

Dad: "I should have been here Khethu, I failed her."

This is what I mean, guilt is eating him up inside like a deadly virus.

Me: "Will you stop? Blaming yourself will not help her. We need to be strong for mom."

Dad: "Oh Nobayeni, how can such a tragedy befall you?"

He continues to ignore my advice.

Me: "Timothy will pay for what he did."

I proclaim through clenched teeth. I plan to go and confront him, I want to know why he did this to my mother. Kay was of great help, I don't know what I would have done without him. He came like a guardian angel and disappeared like one too.

NOMBULELO\*

Me: "I'm happy for you Amara."

Amara has just told me over the phone that the negotiations went well, I am surprised because uncle Jonas is...

Well... he is uncle Jonas.

Amara: "Thank you Lelo, I wish you were here."

With amusement in her tone, she declares.

Me: "Yeah but hey, I'm a mother now."

Amara: "Yes, isn't this great. Things seem to be going well for us."

Not us, I still have a demon by the name of Zuma to vanquish.

Me: "I really am happy for you, but also I think you should delay the wedding and study or something. Remember how you wanted to do that? You had dreams."

I remind her of what she used to brag about.

Amara: "I'm not stupid Lelo, don't think that I have forgotten my dreams because of a man."

Me: "I know but, do you think Randall will let you study after you're his wife? He will want you to stay home and Look after the kids."

A least a simple course will do.

Amara: "I think I know Randall better than you do, getting married and being a parent does not stop one from studying. You know how I have been in the middle of a war zone, nothing has been easy. I assure you though that, I have not forgotten my dream and I will fulfil it."

She states, I think I might have offended her with my words.

Me: "I'm glad to hear that."

I am honestly.

"Amara come here."

That's Randall's voice in the background.

Amara: "I have to go, I'll see you tomorrow. Kiss Goku for me."

She states in a hurry, the line is disconnected depriving me a chance to bid her farewell.

Each time Mbuso walks in this room, I keep expecting to see Goku in his arms.

I can't believe I'm calling my baby girl Goku, we need to name her.

Me: "I want to see our girl."

He walks up to me to paste a kiss on my cheek.

Mbuso: "You will, just now."

He gives a mischievous smile as he turns to the door. A female nurse walks in with a baby in her arms wrapped in a white blanket. My heart stops and beats fast in a space of a second. My eyes swell with tears and the urge to hold her overwhelms me.

Me: "My baby."

I stretch my arms out to the smiling nurse, a surge of emotions rush over me.

Mbuso: "Thank you."

He dismisses the nurse.

I can't take my eyes off my baby, she is so tiny. I was only able to see her from afar through an incubator and now that she's in my arms, it feels amazing.

Mbuso: "She's beautiful, isn't she?"

He leans in closer, as she brings her little hand to stretch herself, it doesn't get that far.

I have officially fallen in love.

Me: "She's perfect."

I answer, counting her minuscule fingers and toes.

Mbuso: "They are all there."

He titters, amused by his remark.

Mbuso: "Our little chubby cheeks, look at them."

Her cheeks are chubby and it's adorable.

Me: "Have you thought of a name yet?"

Mbuso: "Are you sure?"

He enquires, uncertainty written on his face.

Me: "Yes, I want you to name her and I want her to have your surname."

His eyes smile at me before they move to the baby.

Mbuso: "Uluthando Goku..."

Me: "No, not Goku please."

I can't stop laughing.

Mbuso: "Hey, I thought we agreed that the name will be on the birth certificate."

Not if I have anything to do with it.

Me: "You and who else? Mbuso, I will not have my child carry this name all her life."

He laughs at my mention.

Me: "Uluthando Xaba, sounds perfect."

An emotional wave claims his face as he fights a surge of tears.

Mbuso: "Thank you Lelo, I promise that I will be the best father and husband."

I believe him and I am lucky to have a man like him in my life.

Me: "Don't avert yourself, you're already doing a great job."

Mbuso: "I spoke to a lawyer about the adoption, he is processing the papers."

Suddenly the thought of Zuma swirls in my mind.

Me: "How are we going to keep Zuma away from us?"

He worries me a lot.

Mbuso: "Don't stress about him Lelo, he won't be back."

Huh?

Me: "What does that mean?"

Mbuso: "Simply that, he is not going to bother us again."

My mind is telling me that Mbuso and Randall had Zuma killed. Mbuso cannot be capable of that.

Me: "Is he alive?"

He grimaces at my question, I could be offending him by asking this.

Mbuso: "He is, why would you think that we killed him?"

He is offended.

Me: "I'm wondering what you could have done to him."

I feel bad for my quick assumption.

Mbuso: "Randall had a talk with him, he will never bother us again and that's that."

I talk too much sometimes.

I am relieved though, I wouldn't want Mbuso involved in any of this."

To be continued...





BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

193\*

BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

Unedited\*

193\*

NEO\*

“Should we get something for the girls to eat or will you cook when you get home?”

I question Zee as we're driving home from Vaal, I haven't voiced this out to her, but I know she has been drinking. I can smell the alcohol on her.

Ayize: “I'm too tired to cook, we'll get something.”

She replies rubbing her head.

Me: “Why did you drink?”

Swiftly she turns to leer at me.

Ayize: “I had a glass.”

She mutters as if it's okay.

Me: “I know, but why? I thought we were making progress Zee.”

Ayize: “I didn't relapse, if that's what you think.”

It is exactly what I think.

Me: “Are you going to tell me why you drank?”

Ayize: “Neo please, not now.”

She mutters, wincing in pain as she rubs her head.

Me: “We'll get you something for that headache.”

I find her staring as I turn to give her a brief look.

Me: “What is it?”



Ayize: "You know you can leave if you want out, right?"

She introduces.

I can't comprehend what she could be talking about.

Me: "If I want out of what?"

Ayize: "The relationship."

She gives an answer like I should know what she's talking about.

Rapidly I hurtle the car and park it on the side of the road, her body almost slams against the dash board.

Ayize: "What was that for?"

She raises her voice at me.

Me: "What the hell did you just say to me?"

My eyes fixed on the road, I query.

Ayize: "I said you can leave if you want out."

She has the audacity to say this to me? Her statement does not sit well with me and provokes me to grab her arm out of rage.

Ayize: "Neo."

She mumbles.

I make sure to look into her eyes.

Me: "Don't ever say that to me again."

I grunt, sternly.

Me: "Na u nahana hore re bapala crèche mona?" (Do you think we are playing games here?)

I can endure a lot of things, but this nonsense.

Zee motions a negative affirmation.

Me: "Where did you get that? What is making you say this to me?"

She tries to pull her hand away from my firm grip and fails.

Ayize: "We haven't had sex Neo and I thought..."

Me: "You thought that I would leave you?"

I cut in.

Ayize: "Yes, you're a man and..."

She is about to say something dumb.

Me: "You think I would cheat on you?"

She shrugs her shoulders, trying to get her arm back.

It hurts me to know that she would think such a thing. Haven't I loved Zee enough to show her that, I would never leave her?

Me: "I'm not an idiot, do you think that I live for tlof tlof? So when you see me, o re tlof tlof ke enoa" (You say here comes sex.)

She's suppressing a smile, does she know how serious this is?

Ayize: "No, Neo."

She whines, repossessing her arm.

Me: "Then ke eng? O batla eng ho 'na Zee? I'm trying here." (Then what is it? What do you want from me?)

Ayize: "I'm sorry, I thought..."

I cut her off again, she should control her thoughts because her mind is accommodating garbage.

Me: "Stop thinking, I want you to remove that thought out of your mind. I don't know if it's the alcohol that's making you say shit to me. But don't ever repeat those words Ayize, not even to yourself."

I know that I wit around sometimes, but to have her smiling like this....

Me: "What are you smiling about?"

The mope on my face should help haul over the coals, it's not a laughing matter. To have her thinking that my mind is filled with thoughts of other women, I should be affronted.

Ayize: "You look so sexy when you're angry, it turns me on."

She's giggling and...

Wait! What did she say?

Me: "Really?"

I have to confirm, I'm failing to curtail the daft smile on my face.

A nod from her is adequate.

She's winding in a sensual way that has my erection twitching. Her eyes are lustfully skimming me, as she seductively bites her lower lip.

Me: "Well, I like it when you're crazy, it turns me on."

This is one crazy woman.

Ayize: "Ngempela?" (Really?)

She queries, in a mutter.

Me: "Ka 'nete." (Really.)

I confirm, biting my lower lip.

Keeping the naughty look on her face, she snakes her body down on the seat and starts touching herself. Erotic moans discharge from her, damn I have never seen anything so sexy.

Me: "Zee, what are you doing?"

My voice refuses to work with me, I clear my throat to remove whatever it is that has clogged my voice box. It is suddenly hot in here, I almost choke on my spit as she slides her under garment down to her legs.

She grabs it and throws it at me, I fail to catch it due to nerviness.

I have lost count of the numeral times that I have cleared my throat. Zee sits with her legs wide open.

What is this woman doing to me?

I lean in, she meets me half way. A naughty smile perusing her face.

My hand finds a place on her thigh as we engage in a slow kiss.

Ayize: "Mhmm!"

She moans, sitting on top of me. Her knees on either side of my thighs, her dress up to her hip bone exposing her thighs. My hands wander on their own, clasping her miniature, but fleshy waist that, has blood rushing through my veins. The kiss is soft and smooth.

We breathe heavily as we pull out, her eyes bashfully look into mine.

Ayize: "Let's do it here."

She whispers, her eyes moving back and forth from my lips to my gaze.

Me: "Here?"

I have figured that one out already...

It's a wild, but fun thought, we're in the middle of nowhere. The dark streets are not so crowded and I want to have her now.

Ayize: "Yes, I want to do it here."

She is crazy and I love her.

Me: "Na ua e batla?" (Do you want it?)

I smirk.

Ayize: "Kea e batla." (I want it.)

Her titters sound, I recline the seat back as far as it goes.

Me: "Tloo baba, ke o fe." (Come baby, let me give it to you.)

I capture Zee's lips into mine, her hands are under my t-shirt pulling it up until it leaves my body. She kisses her way down to my lower torso, her eyes find me as she unbuttons my jeans.

Thinking she will go down on me, I bring her up and kiss her like I want her breath. She is still fragile and I can't explore with her yet.

Slowly, I slide into her. She moans loudly, as she tightens her arms around me. She winds and humps on me with slow moves, while we exchange kisses and pecks.

My hands are loving the feel of her skin, as I map her whole body. They are under her dress and leisurely moving up to caress her breast.

Ayize: "Hmmhh, Neo."

Her eyes closed, she moans louder and louder. The way she is grinding on me drives me insane, it makes me want to profess my love for her.

Me: "O ntirang baba? Shit?" (What are doing to me baby?)

She moves her hand down to play with my balls.

I raise my head, feeling a great need to shout out of pleasure and...

Me: "Awooooooooooooo, ou ou ou."

I howl like a wolf, it has her laughing.

Ayize: "Yes rabobi yes." (Spiderman.)

She growls with a silly smile on her face.

I tightly grab her waist to hold her down, her movements drive me crazy. Although mine are limited they have her moaning with pleasure. A sweet sound I haven't heard from her.

Me: "Fuck baba, o monate demedi man." (Dammit, you're enjoyable.)

I utter.

A deep moan answers back, she's humping and grinding and wheezing and she is about to reach her climax.

A tickle is creeping up on me from every corner of my body, an urge to scratch engulfs me. But where do I scratch, Zee continues to hump while I fight to thrust. I'm desperate to flip her over and go deep on her.

Me: "Shit, Zee. I can't cum, I have to stretch my legs."

The space in the car is too small.

The tickle intensifies, there is this desperation to have it stop but, I want it to continue forever as well.

Ayize: "Neo, I'm leaving you. I can't hold on anymore."

She shouts in a sexy tone, that has my body shivering. I clutch my hands on her butt, squeezing them, as I lead her to her happy place. She holds on to me for dear life as she screams her way into an orgasm, her body shudders as its pressed against mine. I kiss the side of neck trailing my way down to her shoulders.

We don't break from the tight hold as I push to get my million dollar orgasm. Damn I have been waiting for this day, let me have it at least. Zee moans loader that, I wish I had turned the radio on just in case someone is passing by. However, it's unlikely to happen.

I feel vulnerable, but yet powerful seeing her orgasm face. She's going for seconds and it's an accomplishment, a war we have been fighting for a while now.

Me: "Kea shoa Zee, ntsoare kea shoa." (Hold me, I'm dying Zee.)

I exclaim, I'm pretty sure I'm dying. Sex is going to kill me today. My heart is palpitating wildly, suddenly an itchy, scratchy sensation claims my entire body. My muscles tense up, my eyes roll back and I shut my lids as my body trembles and there it is, my happy ending.

This little space is filled with our heavy breathing.

My forehead pressed on hers, I kiss her one more time, gently caressing her back. She jumps back to the passenger's seat with giggles.

Ayize: "You're going to die?"

She smirks at me while fixing herself up and trying not to laugh.

Me: "Have you ever seen the gates of heaven?"

I did not tell a joke, she shakes her head sniggering.

Me: "I swear, I saw Jesus today, he was standing at the gate calling me. I thought I was going to heaven."

I explain my ordeal.

Me: "I've heard that people die while having sex, today I had a near death experience, stru." (It's true.)

I continue.

Zee falls back on the seat laughing out loud, it's the truth though. But, what the hell? Her laugh is contagious.

Ayize: "I am going to have the best time of my life with you, Neo Maake."

I love the sound of that.

Me: "I love you baba."

I proclaim, my eyes locked with hers.

Ayize: "I know, le 'na kea u rata rabobi waka." (My Spiderman.)

Another soft quick kiss takes centre stage.

Me: "Eish, ke tshaba tlof tlof, it makes people speak in tongues. Listen to you, you've forgotten your Zulu and speaking Sotho. The power of tlof tlof neh." (I respect sex.)

Zee taps my shoulder while a soft laugh evades from her, she takes up a serious look as if she never laughed.

Ayize: "Don't start with me, rabobi." (Spiderman.)

She sulks, her lips curving into a pout.

Me: "This is what I'm talking about, I'm rabobi now, from Neo to a superhero in one night. Ai tlof tlof ke bozza saan." (Spiderman. Sex is the boss.)

This is what I would like to hear every day, the sound of laughter.

NTOMBI\*

The way my brother is counting that money, you would think that it's all his. He keeps telling me to leave the room.

Where am I to go? This is my living room plus, I want to see how much is that.

Mhambi, oh my dear brother. No wonder he will never leave Pongola, he is not displaying any interest on the money. What kind of a woman is Petunia? She needs to help her man see that, money is important in life.

You will not guess where she is...

That's right, in the kitchen.

Apparently, this is not our business and I shouldn't be here as well. She knows that Mhambi will walk away with something for them both.

What about my husband? He's not home yet.

Where is he anyway?

Me: "How much did that boy pay Bhuti?" (Brother.)

He gives me a black look, continuing to flip through each note. I'm pretty sure that it has been divided between two people, Jonas and Mhambi. Leaving Moses out in the cold, the same man who raised Amara.

Me: "Bhuti hau, I asked you a question." (Brother.)

He raises his cold eyes.

Jonas: "What do you want Ntombi?"

Is it not clear?

Me: "Haibo, kanjalo nje? You will ask me that question?" (Just like that.)

The door swings open, a sweaty and wheezing Moses comes running into the house like something is chasing him.

Me: "Moses yini?" (What is it?)

I jump to him.

He slouches over, his hands pasted on his knees. Why was he running to begin with?

Me: "Moses khuluma." (Speak Moses.)

He raises his head, his breath hitting my face. I step back a little, I'm not trying to feel someone's warm breathe on my face. There is nothing more annoying than that.

Moses: "How much did they pay?"

He ran all the way from the tavern for this?

Me: "You could've died Moses, you're not young anymore hau."

Moses: "Jonas."

He says turning to him, Jonas does not want to be friendly today.

Moses: "How much is that?"

He settles down on a seat, I stand beside him waiting for my brother to tell us the good news. It looks like a lot of money and we should all get a fair amount.

Jonas: "This money is going into Amara's education."

My mind must be flowing around the money that, I must have missed what Jonas just said.

Me: "What did he say?"

I ask a Moses who has his hands supporting his head.

Moses: "He said the money is going..."

He doesn't have to finish it, I heard right.



Me: "Kanjani bhuti?" (How brother?)

Moses: "Yeah, kanjani bhuti?" (Yes brother, how?)

I am flabbergasted by Jonas' absurdity.

Jonas: "Amara lost everything when her parents died, she couldn't get an education..."

Moses: "Hayi, hayi. We paid for her school fees from grade 1. Does that not count?" (No.)

Moses complains, I second him.

Moses: "What is your problem Jonas? You don't want to see anyone happy."

He questions and exclaims, Jonas glowers at him. Mhambi should be saying something, but my brother is just there like a wet chicken.

Me: "Hayi cha, I give up on you bhuti." (No, brother.)

Jonas: "Excuse me?"

He heard right...

Moses: "I have always known that something is not right in that head of yours, inqondo yakho iyakushiya." (You're losing your mind.)

Me: "Yeah tell him, Moses."

Mhambi: "Ntombi don't speak nonsense, Jonas might as well be your father. How dare you say this to him?"

He's here? I thought he was lost in Pongola or something.

Moses: "This is a conspiracy right? You two want to punish us for what happened with Amara?"

He says, pointing at them.

Mhambi: "Put that finger away Moses."

Mhambi castigates him, this is the first time I hear Mhambi raise his voice. Money will even make the mute speak.

Jonas: "Let them be Mhambi, calculate all the expenses you spent on Amara and I will subtract from here."

He says unashamedly, the money won't be enough to sustain us.

Me: "I don't understand why you're doing this bhuti. My house is made of bricks while Amara's house is made of money." (Brother.)

Moses: "Not only that Ntombi, they have a tree where they pluck money, while ours has to be buried under a tree."

Today it's our money?

Men are all the same, I am surrounded by idiots.

Jonas: "I don't care what you have to say Ntombi, you too Moses. I have made my decision."

He dismisses us.

Me: "Mhambi! Are you going to let him do this? You have four girls in boarding school, think of them."

Mhambi grimaces, I am right though. Amara has it all, she does not need this money. Jonas should not be selfish.

Moses: "Plus, we just had a granddaughter and we need the it."

Eish!

Couldn't he think of a better excuse?

Mhambi: "Ntombi is right Jonas, Amara does not need the money. Our son in-law promised to take care of her and he will do that."

That's my brother.

Jonas ponders upon Mhambi's words.

Jonas: "Fine."

Moses: "Yes!!!"

He jumps to sit on the edge of the seat... Too soon if you ask me.

Jonas: "10 000 rand for Ntombi and Moses, each."

He utters.

I don't blame him, he is used to uttering nonsense.

Moses: "You're a witch wena Jonas, lalela la, we will sit here until you come up with a better deal. Ungazodlala ngathi man." (Listen here. Don't play with us.)

I agree with Moses.

Lord is this how we age? I will pass, I don't want to be like Jonas.

AMARA\*

Finally we are home, I need to sleep and my feet are killing me. The house is quiet, everyone has gone to be bed.

I feel Randall wrap his arms around me from behind as I toddle to the lounge, he is kissing me and I know what he wants. Firstly I am not in the mood and there is something that has been

eating me up inside. The phone call with Kenneth, what Ayize said made me feel bad.

Me: "I need to tell you something."

I move away from his arms and settle on the couch.

Randall: "What is it?"

The furrowed brow makes it hard for me to tell him. He carries his hands on his back and takes up a dominant stance.

Me: "Kenneth called."

Randall raises his brows, giving me an intimidating look. Maybe I should have kept my mouth shut.

Randall: "When?"

He queries with composure.

Me: "Back at the house."

He grinds his jaw, letting me know the level of his anger.

Me: "I don't know how he got my number, I answered the call because it was a private number."

To smooth the crumple on his face, I elucidate the issue, so he does not think that I wanted to speak to Kenneth.

Randall: "What did he want?"

He quizzes.

He hasn't moved an inch, sitting here and having him standing there makes me feel like a kid explaining to their parent why I came home late.

Me: "He wanted to say goodbye, he's going away."

His braced teeth decide to linger on.

Randall: "Where is your phone Amara?"

I need help, I'm struggling to tell if he's upset or not.

Me: "In the charger."

Forget upset, he is incensed. He walks away, either to get the phone or to cool off.

Should I follow him?

Randall and his mood swings will send me to an early delivery. I need water, my throat is dry. As I gulp down a glass of water, I see him approaching from the corner of my eye. He stands too close... Why is he handing me the phone?

Me: "What is it?"

I would do anything to hide away from his sharp gaze, it's as though he is looking into my soul searching for something.

Randall: "Why does your phone have a password?"

Is it not supposed to?

Me: "I don't know, Liya put the password. You know how she is always using it."

I reply while I unlock the bloody phone, I should have kept my big mouth shut about Kenneth. Now look at us, both our nights have been ruined. Is it supposed to be our honey?

If I am not mistaken, Randall is deleting Kenneth's numbers.

Me: "Done?"

That's right, I know what you we're doing.

Randall: "Yes, can we go and have sex now?"

He's leaning in and I want to slap that smile off his face, but I love him and his stupid smile... and his horny-self and... I wouldn't trade him for anything in this world.

To be continued...

BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

194\*

KENNETH\*

I don't know what I really feel for Amara, but I know that I want to be around her. Thoughts of her have found a home in my mind, while my heart remains void of her love. It screams out her name in every way possible, but in a world where she does not exist, hence she cannot hear a thing.

It hurts to know that Amara is someone's wife now and I can't chase after her. If there was a way to have her with me, I would go for it.

I am no saint, I live my life for the devil, but I have committed the biggest sin in the eyes of God. I have lusted after Amara.

What I would give to have her in my bed.

I guess this will remain this... a little dream that will never be fulfilled.

Sipho: "Are you really leaving?"

I asked Sipho to house sit while I'm away, if possible I would have him move in until he lives that place he calls a house. I don't know why he is so comfortable with the life he is living.

Kenneth: "I am, take care of my house."

He is standing on the door way of my bedroom.

Sipho: "You know I will, I hope you don't have any monkeys hiding in one of the rooms in this house."

He says with a straight face.

Me: "Do you have a monkey in your house?"

He chortles lowly at my remark.

Sipho: "I'm serious Kay, why black though? Couldn't you go for other colours? It's creepy enough that you're part of that dreadful brotherhood."

I left the brotherhood, I know they won't take it lightly. I'll do anything to protect my sister, it's a good thing she's not in Joburg.

I hang my travel bag on my shoulder and amble towards the door.

Sipho: "You're going to give up just like that."

He moseys beside me with this probe.

Me: "Do I have a choice?"

Sipho: "Fight for her."

I would, if it were easy.

Me: "Let it go Sipho, she's married."

Sipho: "Our fighting spirit is not the same, I would fight tooth and nail for the woman who holds my heart."

He declares, maybe it's something I would do but...

Me: "If I could get a night with her, just one. I will live forever after that."

He throws his head back laughing heartily.

Me: "Did I say something wrong?"

Sipho: "You will live forever? What are you drinking in that brotherhood?"

I want to laugh at his jest, but my heart is heavy.

Me: "I think I should call Amara one more time."

I announce as we stroll to the door, I have to hear her voice.

Sipho: "Like I said, fight for her."

Me: "If she wasn't with Okolie, I would fight for her."

I proclaim as I open the front door, only to be welcomed by an ear-splitting bang, before I'm stung by a hot intense pain on the right side of my abdomen.

I feel a sudden impact of no sensation, a numbness washes over the area and my body gives in to paralysis. Okolie is standing on my door step with a gun aimed at me, his face holding nothing but rage. I have seen the eyes of a killer before and I am looking into them.

"Kenneth!"

Sipho catches me before I crash to the floor. He sinks down with me, as Okolie strides into my house. The gun hanging on his side now, he's wheezing and panting like an animal.

Me: "What the hell did you just do?"

I grunt in pain as speaking has become difficult.

Randall: "What did you say Mkhize? You want to fight for Amara?"

He growls glaring down at me.

Sipho: "Get the fuck out of here?"

Sipho can be aggressive, but he doesn't have the strength to stand up against Okolie.

Randall: "I warned you Mkhize, I told you to stay away from her."

He barks as he flouts Sipho's mandate and aims the gun at me.

Me: "I did just that."

He is going to kill me, I don't want to die. My sister needs me.

His face becomes harder, his jaw clamps.

Sipho jumps at him, but Randall pushes him off.

Randall: "You stay out of this."

He urges a warning, I'm bleeding profusely and I might die if I don't get medical help.

Me: "Don't you think you have done enough Okolie."

Randall: "No, I'll be satisfied when you're lying dead in a coffin."

He pulls the trigger, piercing my thigh.

Me: "Dammit."

I growl as the burning pain aches like nothing I have ever felt.



Randall: "I want you to beg for death."

This man has no conscience, he is so heartless.

Me: "Randall wait, don't shoot please. I have a sister, she's only fourteen and she has no one."

I plead as he prepares to shoot me once again, he wants to torture me till I die.

Randall: "You should have thought of that when you laid your eyes on Amara."

I shut my eyes, preparing myself for another excruciating pain.

"Randall stop."

Styles?

I must be out of it. Randall turns to his left, I follow his movement to see Siphon holding out a phone.

"What are you doing there?"

Styles shouts from the receiving end.

Randall: "Something I should have done a long time ago."

He leers at Siphon like he wants to murder him.

"Go home Randall, it's late."

Styles says, I don't see Randall agreeing to it.

Randall: "Stay out of this Styles."

"You will regret killing him, you know that? Amara is pregnant, go home to your wife Randy."

Although in pain, Styles' words sting my heart. I can't think of Amara with this beast of a man.

Randall glowers at Siphon, turns back with a grimace and eyes ready to kill.

Randall: "If you survive this Mkhize, know that if you even dare pursue Amara, I will finish what I started."

I have never seen so much animosity in one person, my heart is banging against my chest. Will I survive another bullet?

He shoots me on my leg, my body is weak and I feel myself fading away.

"Kay."

Siphon yells.

"Randall!!!"

Styles shouts over the phone.

Randall clicks his tongue before walking out the same way he came.

NTOMBI\*

Me: "Moses come here."

He has been sitting on that couch since we were promised the money, Jonas should have given us already, but each time we ask him he nods and continues to watch TV.

Jonas is testing us, I won't lie and I am tired of him.

The money has been kept in Mhambi and petunia's room, we can't enter because the door is facing the living room and Jonas is watching it like a hawk.

Me: "Moses come."

Moses gives Jonas a deadly stare of which Jonas is unaware of, he has his eyes glued to the TV. He and Mhambi are sharing a joke, Amara must get married so these people leave my house.

Moses follows me to our bedroom.

Moses: "What is it? I have to keep an eye on Jonas, so he knows that we haven't forgotten that he owes us."

He tells the innards of his mind.

Me: "Didn't he tell you how much they were given?"

Moses: "No, he won't tell me. Jonas is very greedy. How can he deny us Amara's Lobola money?"

I thought it was obvious.

Me: "I'm sure the day you decided to molest Amara, you didn't think that this day will come?"

He frowns at me.

Moses: "What's wrong with you? Why are you always reminding me of my mistakes?"

Me: "Because you don't want to learn from them, this is all your fault Moses. Now we won't have money because you couldn't hide that thing between your pants. Sies Moses, awuswabi kodwa?" (Aren't you ashamed?)

Moses: "Is this why you called me here? To insult me?"

He says, looking offended.

Me: "It's not an insult Moses, it's the truth."

I retort and get a cold stare.

Moses: "Forget that, help me find a way to get into Mhambi's room."

He whispers, not wanting to be heard.



Me: "What are you going to do there?"

Moses: "I want to see how much it is."

He presents.

Moses: "I have a plan, we have to get into that room and take some of the money. What are we going to do with R10 000? And that's if Jonas will give us."

I know I have insulted him enough and probably my insults went into his head.

Me: "We are not going to do that."

His jaw drops.

Moses: "Ntombi, did you see that money? Jonas won't notice if a single note is missing."

Me: "He will probably know, I am not going to mess with Jonas especially, after what he did to you. He knows how to call upon his ancestors and they listen when he calls."

He waves his hand, dismissing me.

Moses: "Oh please, my ancestors are probably stronger."

If they were, they would have protected him from Nkosiyabo.

Me: "Sorry Moses, but I am not going to steal anything. Let's see how much Jonas gives us, if it's too little then we'll convince him to give us more."

He's done with me, yeah that walk says it.

RANDALL\*

Styles has this tendency of stopping my plans, I had him. I had Kenneth right in my hands, I went to his house to confront him about the phone call and when I heard him talk about fighting for Amara, my wife. Anger rose inside of me and I wanted to see him take his last breath.

How dare he think he can challenge me and take Amara? After all I have been through with her, I am not about to let her go.

Dammit Styles.

I have an incoming call from Amara, she should be sleeping by now.

Me: "Me oyere." (My wife.)

I can never get used to this.

Amara: "Where are you?"

Me: "On my way, I needed some air so I went for a drive."



I'm lying.

I was livid when she told me that Kenneth had called, I tried with all my might to stop myself from punching the wall. I hate that Kenneth has set his eyes on her. Why didn't he heed my demand when I told him to stay away from Amara.

Amara: "Okay, hurry home. It's late."

It sounds to me like she's sulking.

Me: "I'm almost there. Don't wait up for me, rest my love."

Dazed, she gasps.

Amara: "My love? Mmhh! Being a wife comes with its perks hey. This is an upgrade."

She gags.

Me: "No, I was trying to convince you to go back to sleep. You have an early morning tomorrow remember."

She sniggers.

Amara: "Don't remind me about tomorrow please."

Me: "Why not?"

Amara: "Because I should be planning my wedding, not learning how to drive and my instructor is not kind. He's always snapping at me."

She pronounces.

Amara said that she wants to learn how to drive, teaching her has been fun because I get to get under her skin and it's kind of fun to watch her sulking.

Me: "I don't blame him, you're probably not following the rules."

Amara: "No, he is just controlling."

I have an incoming call.

Me: "I will try to be gentle next time, I promise."

I need to take this call, I have been waiting for it.

Amara: "I don't see that happening anytime soon."

She says.

Amara is a faster learner, it won't take long for her to get the hang of it. She is a smart woman and has a great future ahead of her.

Me: "I'll see you now me hemma." (My queen.)

Amara: "Is something wrong?"

I must have used the wrong tone.

Me: "No."

Amara: "Then talk to me till you get home, please."

R.J can't make up his mind, sometimes he wants me around and sometimes he hates the sight of me. He must be having the time of his life, looking at me through his mother's eyes.

Me: "I have an important call me hemma, go to sleep." (My queen.)

My request forces a sigh of frustration out of her. Yes, R.J is demanding.

She hangs up, she is peeved. That little brat will get me in trouble with my wife.

I return the call, this man better have good news for me.

"Mhlonishwa." (Boss.)

He says, sounding happy. It must mean he has good news.

Me: "Give it to me."

"We have her boss."

My night couldn't get any better.

Me: "Good, keep her there."

I like it when I plant and something brews from it. I have a rage that has been longing to be unleashed. It's time I remove the mask and remind people that scar is still alive.

This plan was meant to go smooth, everything has come crashing down and I have to think of something.

STYLES\*

Next day.\*

Me: "I didn't believe in marriage before I met you. You have changed my life Sethu and made me believe in love again..."

The sound of my phone ringing gets in the way of my practice session, I plan on proposing to Sethu today. I'm taking her out to dinner, it's about time I take that step. I want her with me all the time.

I spoke to Randall earlier, he explained why he shot Kenneth. He has no remorse for what he did, I have seen many sides to him, but the one that comes out when he has to protect Amara seems to be the most dangerous.

Kenneth suffered three gunshot wounds, the fatal one was the one on his stomach. He is in a



perilous condition, however the doctors say he will pull through.

Sipho was ready to snitch to the police and I had to put him on a leash. Randall made a mess and did not care about cleaning up because... well, he knows where most of his money goes at the end of the month.

Neo: "Go on social media now."

Neo says as I answer the call, with no sense of emergency in his voice.

Me: "What's on social media?"

I remain calm, my mind oblivious of what could be there.

Neo: "Your girl put up a page. Help me find my father."

Here it is, there's a picture of her mother.

<<< Help me find my father>>>

< Mother's name: "Nontobeko Jacobeth Malinga. >

< As known as: Ntosh.>

< Possible father's name: Mkhize/ M.K.>

She goes on to state that if anyone knows them or Mkhize himself, they should send her a direct message.

Me: "Shit, shit. When was this put up?"

I ask, panicking.

Neo: "Two days ago."

Me: "Dammit! How did we miss this Neo?"

If Mkhize sees this, it will be confirmed that Sethu is his daughter. I didn't ask Sethu about her meeting with Sika, I have to get her away from Mkhize. Divert her mind away from these thoughts. She's been asking about his picture, the one I burnt months ago. Till today she continues to look for it.

Neo: "The past few days have been hectic, planning the negotiations and the wedding. That's why we missed it, doesn't Miss S tell you these things Stylos?"

She would if I gave her a chance.

Me: "We have to take it down now."

I utter, my mind is disarrayed. I hate it when something misses me, Sethu and Mkhize could be communicating and I don't even know it.

Neo: "I'm on it as we speak, I wanted you to see it before I press the button. We can only hope that it's not too late."

Me: "Thank you."

Neo: "You need to speak to her Stylos, she is so close to finding out that Mkhize is her father."

"Mkhize is Sethu's father?"

Ayize's voice sounds over the phone.

Neo: "Ke mang Mkhize?" (Who is Mkhize?)

Neo answers her.

Me: "Shit, Neo."

"The man you're talking about. He is Sethu's father."

She replies.

This is bad.

Me: "Neo fix this."

I order.

Ayize will want to tell Sethu the truth.

Neo: "Hade Stylos." (I'm sorry.)

Dammit! Sethu can't know that Mkhize is her father. Neither can Mkhize know about her.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

195\*

MBUSO\*

Today Lelo gets to come back home, we are going to sign at the magistrate's office. Amara and Randall will be our witnesses.

I pull up outside my mother's gate, I say my mother's gate because my father does not live here anymore. She is still oblivious as to who he's having an affair with.

Me: "Mom."

I knock on the kitchen door, this is where I would usually find her, but today it's different. The kitchen is empty, it looks like she hasn't cooked in here in a while.

Me: "Mom, where are you?"

I call out to her.

"I'm in the living room."

I follow the sound of her voice. She is sitting on the couch, reading a bible.

Mom: "Hi."

She smiles, but it's not a full smile, it's not a candid one as well. It says a lot of things, that she is broken and in pain.

Me: "Are you okay?"

I kiss her on the cheek as a greeting.

The house is not as warm as it used to be. It must be the absence of a father that, has left these walls covered in gloom.

Mom: "What do you think?"

There is nothing I can do about her situation with dad, she refuses to confront him about the supposed affair.

Me: "Where is dad?"

She sips her tea as she decides not to answer me.

I position myself on the couch, I hate to see my mother like this and wish that I can take care of her. But she tends to be toxic. Now that Lelo and I have a child, I can't have mom around unless she accepts her.

Me: "I thought I should tell you that, Lelo and I are getting married in court."

I observe her face to see what her reaction would be, she continues to keep her gaze on the bible.

Mom: "So you're serious about this?"

She questions.

ME: "Yes, we have a family now. Does it matter to you that I am happy mom?"

The smile I seek comes in a form of a downward smile.

Me: "Okay, let me go. I hope you will be okay and that you'll finally confront dad. You deserve to know the truth."

I kiss her cheek and head back out, I should not have bothered coming here. She will never come to like Lelo and that's alright, we have each other now. It's us against the world.

STYLES\*

Richard is waiting for me at an eatery, I just arrived in Lyndhurst. I have decided to let him explain himself, it better be a good one. He waves as I saunter in. A waitress approaches the moment I get to the table and enquires about our orders.

Me: "No, thank you."

I send her away, Richard is nervously staring at me.

Me: "I'm here."

I state the obvious.

Richard: "Thank you son."

Me: "We are not there yet."

He takes a moment to clear his throat.

Richard: "Won't you have something?"

He's planning on wasting my time.

Me: "What do you want Nixon."

Richard: "I'm sorry, where do I begin?"

He quizzes, agitated.

Me: "The beginning."

The throat clearance again, he shuffles on his seat before placing his elbows on the table and intertwining his hands together.

Richard: "I would like to think that, meeting your mother was fate."

He starts, it's been years and here I am talking to someone who knew my mother. My stomach is in knots.

Richard: "I was driving home this one time and this lady runs in front of my car, thankfully she only sustained minor bruises. I had to take her to the hospital due to shock. That's when everything started, we fell in love. I'm not proud to say that, I was married when I met her."

The same shame he speaks of has him dropping his gaze.

Me: "You fell in love with her while you were married?"

Richard: "Yes, Lindiwe was a beautiful woman. She made me feel good about myself and respected me. I never had a woman make me feel important, I felt like a king in her presence. I was going to leave my wife, but she found out about us before I could tell her. She threatened to take my son away and everything I had worked for, my parents were on her side. They were going to leave me dry and out if I had chosen the only woman I loved."

So this is his excuse? Inheritance?

Me: "Did you know that she was pregnant when you abandoned her?"

There's a resistance in his eyes, my question has stung him like a bee.

Richard: "Yes."

He mutters, it's something I have always known.

Richard: "I wanted to stay Styles, but I was going to lose everything I had. My son and the..."

Me: "So rather lose the son of the black woman who had nothing to her name?"

Richard: "No son, I was going to come back and..."

He stammers.

Me: "33 years later Richard? You've got to be kidding me."

He is making me angry, I shouldn't have come here.

Richard: "Where are you going?"

He raises his head to enquire something palpable.

Me: "We're done."

He jolts up on his feet.

Richard: "Please don't leave like this. Give me a chance, let me make it up to you."

Me: "What do you want from me?"



I enquire.

I have searched for this man my whole life, he hid from me and now he decides to invade my life and play daddy.

Richard: "I want to be your father, don't deny me this second chance Styles. I owe it to you..."

Me: "You don't owe me shit because you are nothing to me."

I grunt.

He clenches his eyes and this is what I want, I want him to feel the pain my mother felt when he rejected her.

Richard: "I owe it to Lindiwe, I loved her Styles. You were conceived out of..."

Me: "Stop."

I yelp.

Me: "Stop telling me these things, I have nothing to say to you anymore."

Richard: "Your siblings are here, they want to meet you."

Ready to walk away from him forever, he announces as I take a step.

Me: "What?"

He fiddles with his hands.

Me: "I don't want to meet them."

I lie.

They have nothing to do with the beef I have with Nixon. Am I ready to meet them though? It is rather too soon.

Richard: "They didn't want to wait any longer, I'm sorry, I told them that it was too soon."

Me: "It is too soon and who said I want to meet them?"

Richard thinks he can come into my life and force himself in. I have enough to deal with as it is, if his reason for leaving us were different. I probably would give him this chance that he sings about, he will have to prove himself. I gave up on this man a long time ago.

"Brother Styles!"

I swivel to the sound of a little girl behind me, she has pale white skin and her black hair flows freely on her face.

Richard: "Gracey, I told you that I'll call you."

This must be the Gracey that he mentioned last time.

Gracey: "I'm sorry, I couldn't wait. I wanted to see my brother."

She validates her waywardness, I raise my eyes to see two men ambling over to us. They look like Richard and this is when I know that, I don't want to do this, not today. I have to fight this pain that's nudging at me, they had a father all their lives while I had to pave my way through life.

Me: "I'm sorry, I can't do this."

I scurry out of the eatery with no plans of looking back.

NKOMO\*

Her presence hovers on my shoulders as she toddles behind me, while I tread near to the door step of my apartment. A friendship that began in the darkness of the night has become my lifeline.

If healing came in a human being, from them being there, then who needs to take antidepressants.

I loved, only to have it tossed back to my face, Ruth seemed like a dream. The type of woman whom I would like to share a life with, but she proved me wrong. Evil can hide itself so well that, you won't even know it when you see it. I have made a decision not to dwell on the past, moving on is what I shall do. I will not be giving myself to any woman yet, I'm still in search of the trust that Ruth escaped with.

A friendship from my side is all I can offer for now and this smart woman seems to understand.

Me: "Welcome to my humble abode."

I make room for Zobuhle to enter, I have known her for a little while, but it feels like forever. She takes up that smile that has my heart dancing, a tamed heart it has become. It knows not to jump at the first sight of a woman's incorruptibility.

Zobuhle: "Well, thank you M.K."

She calls me M.K, for whatever reason. I don't know how it makes me feel, considering that I was once N.k.

Zobuhle: "This is where you hide when I don't see you hey?"

She moseys around the place, her eyes scanning every corner, every picture album and every appliance.

Zobuhle: "A man cave I see, so there is no women in your life?"

She spins to glance in my direction, her eyes are searching for an answer.

Me: "No."

And I would like to keep it this way.

Me: "Now that you have seen the man cave, how about some coffee?"

She makes a sour face.

Me: "What is it?"

Zobuhle: "Coffee in this heat? Don't you have something strong?"

The smile again.

Me: "Something strong?"

Zobuhle: "Yes."

I watch her as she tangoes to the couch, spins and lets her whole body fall on it. She crosses her leg over the other, her arms spread out on the head of the couch.

Me: "I'll see what I have."

I didn't know that she drinks, but oh well.

SETHU\*

I am so used to having Mbali and Ginger around that the house screams with a piercing silence in their absence. I understand why they would rather spend time at Neo and Ayize's place, there is a male figure and having two adults under one roof gives them a sense of family.

A knock on my door grabs my attention.

Me: "I'm coming."

I holler, swiping my wet hands on my jeans. Whoever is behind the door is not patient. Have mercy on my bloody door, would you?

Annoyed by the loud pounding, I have decided that, I do not like the person assaulting my door and my mien will speak for me the second I meet their face.

The first thing I notice is his expensive clothing, a tailored brown check suit. A black hat supported by his head, and a walking cane that serves as a third leg.

I don't know this old man, he must be lost.

Me: "Can I help you?"

My eyes are on a quest to find anything dodgy on his face. I don't trust strangers by the way, my experience with them has been a nightmare.

"You're looking for M.K.?"

My mind for a second gets lost in a muddle, but slowly slips its way back and I am reminded of the post I had published on social media.

Me: "Who are you?"

Could he be the M.K I have been searching for?

He sends his hand to me, I look to see a photograph of Nontobeko wrapped in the arms of a man. They are leaning against a red car, I can't tell the make of it. The man though, looks too old for her, he could have been in his early thirties.

"Do you recognize this man?"

He points at the picture, I shake my head.

"I remember this day like it just happened. I had just bought my first car, she was so happy as if I had gifted it to her."

Okay, this does not prove anything.

Me: "You're the man on the picture?"

"Yes, I am Nontobeko's M.K."

He smiles, and I am astounded. My father is standing right here, on my door step.

Me: "You're my father?"

I stammer.

"I have no doubt that you are my baby, your nose gives it away and these big ears."

He reaches to touch my ears and has me stumbling a few steps back. He does not seem bothered about it.

"I have searched for you Sethu, someone out there has done a great job in keeping us from meeting."

What does he mean?

Who would do such an odious act?

Me: "Who?"

"Sishi."

He spews out his name as if it's poison to his soul.

AMARA\*

"Mara."

I am looking at the cutest thing right now, Liyana is standing with her hands on her back while swinging her foot back and forth. I know that she wants something when she takes up this

posture.

Me: "Yes baby."

She leans on the couch as she moves closer to me.

Liyana: "Mbali and Ginger asked if I can come over to their house for a sleep over."

I know, I saw the messages on my phone and I can't allow that, not when there is so much going on.

Me: "You're too young for sleep overs Liya."

Liyana: "But Mara..."

I am not going to fall for that pout, although I am tempted.

Me: "You know we can go back and forth about this."

I am not saying yes to any sleep overs.

Liyana: "Mara, you're not fair."

I hear this from her a lot lately, if it's not sleep overs, it's play dates at the park.

Me: "I know baby, a time will come when you will go to as many sleep overs as you want."

Well, not as many. Maybe one or two.

Liyana: "You're always saying that."

She hugs her tiny chest with her arms.

Randall approaches from the foyer and something clicks in Liyana's mind. An innocent smile forms on the corners of her mouth. I know what she's thinking...

Me: "I already told your father and he said no you can't go."

She pouts her lips and bounces away.

Randall: "What's wrong with her?"

His eyes follow her, he's used to her throwing herself in his arms upon seeing him.

Me: "It's the sleep over thing."

He seats next to me, leans over actually and I am scooting back.

Randall: "Maybe we should send her away, and Chioma. We'll have the house all to ourselves, you'll scream my name to your heart's content."

I know this gender can be strange, but Randall does not fall under this category. I doubt there is a man out there like him and he had to locate me of all the women in this world.

Life does not love me.

Me: "Why am I the one screaming?"

By now he is pushing against me, if Liyana comes back...

Let me hold that thought...

Randall: "Because you're always screaming when we're having sex."

He undertones burying his face on my cleavage, his hand begins to wander under my dress.

He calls it sex, not making love. Should I correct him? Or will I be wasting my breath?

"Aren't you two tired of each other? I thought you would be over each other by now."

Ife! This child always comes like a storm, she does not report her visits.

Ife: "You do know that this is not healthy."

She points at us as if we're are sinning on this sofa. I'm up on my feet and fixing myself in an instant.

Hot flashes alert...

Ife: "Hate each other at least. I don't know, maybe set a date, say Fridays? While romantic men..."

She gives Randall the look, he is not troubled.

Ife: "...go on date nights, you and brother will have a hate date. Break dishes, slash his car tires. Cut off his favourite shirts and spill his favourite whiskey down the drain. Hate the guy, geez woman."

Wow, she came with a force.

Randall: "Did you buy a return ticket Ifeanyi? I think you should hurry and catch tonight's flight back to Ghana."

He states as he ambles to give her a hug.

Ife: "Brother, I missed you."

This is a moment and it's an overwhelming one.

Me: "What about me?"

I get a smile from her, she stretches out her arms and I fall into them.

Ife: "What happened to the advice I gave you? Didn't I say learn to hate the man?"

No she didn't.

Randall: "Don't make me kick you back to your land?"

He pinches her ears, she squirms. The smile on her face recites a sad story.

Randall: "What's wrong?"



He takes her hand as her tears seek to be acknowledged.

Ife: "Mama has locked herself into a world where only she exists. The only thing she utters is the name Uzoma. It's as if she's searching for him and tears would leave her eyes each time his name befalls her mouth."

Mrs. Okolie was booked at a hotel. How come we haven't heard any of this?

Randall: "Who told you that?"

Randall might not say it, but he is worried about his mother. I see it in his eyes when his uncle is around.

Ife: "I was there when she had a break down."

Me: "I don't understand. You just came back from Ghana."

We are surely, missing something.

Ife: "Mom is in Accra, I thought you knew."

Randall releases a hefty sigh.

Randall: "Who is taking care of her?"

Randall asks.

My heart breaks upon seeing the despondency on his face.

Ife: "Nana suggested that we take her to a hospital." (Granduncle.)

She says, toddling herself to a seat, I'm beside her in a jiff offering a shoulder to cry on.

Me: "I'm sorry Ife."

What was the poor child told about her father and brother's deaths? Searching for answers to my question, I gawk up at Randall who now stands with his arms across his chest and his eyes have fallen into nothingness, as if his mind has taken him into a journey.

Me: "Baby!"

At the sound of my voice he blinks once, I gesture this question in hopes that he will catch what I'm trying to say. He does not get it, I'll ask him when we're alone.

Randall: "What about the Royal house Ife? Who is there?"

Ife: "Nana's younger brother, he was appointed to stand in for you. The Ashanti people couldn't be left without a ruler since agya's sudden disappearance." (Grandfather) (Father.)

They think he's missing?

I meet Randall's gaze for mere seconds. His thoughts are hidden from me. Is it okay to have them think that Segun is missing? Don't they have a right to mourn him? Good or not, Segun was their loved one.

Ife: "The family has fallen apart brother, agya is missing, Raven is dead and mother is frozen in time." (Father.)

Me: "You know we're here if you need anything?"

I never asked Randall what the claim was regarding Raven's death, he would have told me if he felt that, I needed to know.

Randall: "Yes."

The way he hurdled to answer the call puts me in a seat of suspicion, he has been disconcerted since morning.

He winks as I set my eyes on him, wanting to find out what is making him jumpy.

Randall: "I'm on the way."

The tone he uses is cold, I know this man. When he's worried and edgy like this something is definitely cooking.

Me: "Are you leaving?"

My question was ready while he entertained whoever was on the phone.

Randall: "I have an important meeting to get to."

He says, grabbing his car keys from the table.

Me: "We have to go to court remember? We can't keep Lelo and Mbuso waiting."

He responds with a ghost of a smile.

Randall: "I'll be on time, I promise."

He walks close to kiss me, it's quick and rushed and I'm worried.

SETHU\*

Styles oh Styles!

What am I going to do with him? Why would he do this to me?

He knows how important this is to me, he knows very well how hard I have toiled to look for my father.

"Kitten, why is the door open?"

I hear his voice with a mixture of his footsteps treading to the living room, his face turns pale white upon seeing the man seated across me on the couch.

His eyes turn into rage and his hands form tight fists.



Styles: "What is going on?"

He should know what's going on.

"Sishi?"

The man says as he gets up to his feet.

"You won't believe this , I have found my daughter."

He speaks with pride or is it a scornful gibe?

Styles: "Mkhize? What are you doing here?"

Is he seriously asking him that? After lying to me, this is what he has to say.

Me: "Is it true that you know this man and that he is my father?"

His eyes are fixated on Mkhize.

Styles: "I can explain."

He says, I wish he would forget Mkhize and look at me.

Me: "Explain how you knew who my father is and kept it from me?"

Styles: "Did he tell you all of this."

Why is he focused on him and not me?

Me: "Would you stop Styles, I want the truth."

I don't mean to, but my voice is loud. He pierces me with his gaze, he has never looked at me this way.

Mkhize: "Come on Sishi, tell the girl why you knew that she is my daughter, but kept it from her."

Is he mocking Styles?

Styles: "Sethu, you can't believe what he's telling you, okay? He is a liar and..."

Me: "What about you Styles? Dammit you lied to me."

My loudness seems to aggravate him.

Styles: "Don't talk to me like that."

Maybe I should not have yelled but...

Me: "You kept my father from me.?"

I'm failing to control the level of my voice.

Styles: "Do you think that gives you the right to practise your impudence on me, Sethu?"

He's standing afar off but, his heavy presence weighs me down, Mkhize's existence has upset

him, not as much as my outburst.

Me: "Disrespect is what you did, you had no right to keep the truth about my father from me. I am not your wife."

He tilts his head to the side, either shocked by this revelation or it has deepened his anger.

Styles: "Your father? Do you know this man? Do you know who he is?"

Me: "He's my father."

He laughs.

Styles: "Father? The same man who bought Amara from her uncle just so he can marry her, the man we have been fighting to keep Amara same. The same man who chases after young girls. Do you know how sick he is?"

He's shouting, each word leaves his mouth like a sword and stabs my heart. Mkhize turns his eyes away from me as I glance at him in shock.

Styles: "I see he didn't tell you that part."

Me: "Is it true?"

Mkhize refuses to look at me.

Me: "I am talking to you."

I yell.

Mkhize: "I'm not perfect and I have made some mistakes in my life. It does not mean that I don't love you."

Me: "Get out of my house."

I can't have another father who would betray me like this.

Mkhize: "Sethu..."

He gasps.

Me: "I said get out of my house."

I repeat.

He glares at Styles, I can almost taste the hate they have for each other.

Mkhize: "I don't care what you do Sishi, you will never keep my daughter from me."

Mkhize declares, looks at me before walking out the door.

Oh God! This is messed up, this is all messed up.

Styles: "I am not going to let him ruin your life. He doesn't deserve to be in your life."

He says, crossing his arms on his chest.

Me: "Who does?"

His brows furrow with concern.

Styles: "You would stay away from that man if you know what's good for you."

I don't think that I want to be around Mkhize, not after what has just been revealed. Amara's story left a hole in my heart. Never in a million years would I have thought that my father would be the man who destroyed Amara's life.

Me: "Why must you be like this Styles?"

Styles: "What do you mean?"

I feel like an idiot because of the look that he's giving me, I think I hate that he is not sorry for keeping the truth from me.

Me: "You have outdone yourself, you manage to prove to me that you will never change. You will always be that same selfish person."

He clamps his teeth.

Styles: "I'm selfish Sethu? I was trying to protect you dammit."

He voices with his teeth clung together.

Me: "The least you could've done was tell me the truth, this is the problem with you Styles. You're used to having things your way, you think that you can control people's lives. I understand that Mkhize is not perfect, but it was not your decision to make. You don't see me get in the way of you killing people..."

Where did this line come from?

Styles: "You know what? Fuck this shit, I'm done."

He hisses, turns around and my heart sinks as he starts to walk away.

What just happened?

What the hell did Styles say?

Is he leaving me? I feel my chest closing in, no... he can't leave me. I can't live without him.

Me: "STYLES!!!"

I scream at the top of my lungs, but he doesn't turn. Yes, he is wrong and can be selfish, but he is my Styles and I love him.

Me: "STYLES!!!"

I am about to lose the only man who has ever loved me. Feeling suffocated and my world spinning, I drop to my knees and my face falls in the palms of my hands. The fear of losing him

overwhelms me, this is what 'I would die without you' feels like.

I feel a hand on my shoulder, lo and behold, it is Styles. I'm met by this angry look on his face. I know that he is mad as hell and honestly it scares me, but my heart doesn't care. He's here with me.

He helps me up and I'm in his arms in a flash, he holds me back, but with one arm. I don't know this hug, his body feels tense. I messed up, I have to think of something and...

Me: "I'm sorry."

Let's start here.

Styles: "Let's go."

The tone of his voice is not helping at all, I break from his hold, the look on his face has me feeling like I should have kept my face hidden.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

196\*

RANDALL\*

As I arrive at a flat in Berea, I find Nkosi waiting for me outside.

Nkosi: "Mhlonishwa, dankie...siyabonga." (Boss, thank you.)

Nkosi's voice is low-pitched and guttural (deep.) You would think that he is a peaceful man. This little devil's heart is as dark and cold as winter nights.

Me: "I'm disappointed in you Nkosi, it took forever to find this woman."

I voice out my frustrations while he leads the way into the flat.

Nkosi: "Ngisho." (No.)

He chortles lowly and not because he is amused but... because he can.

Nkosi: "I was having fun chasing her. Pity she is not my type, or else I would have taken her as my second wife."

And he means it.

Me: "If she was your type, you wouldn't have brought her to me."

The chuckle again...

Nkosi: "You know I would not dream of betraying you."

Me: "Good because I would kill you if you do."

I give him a brief stare as we enter the elevator, he's cleaning his nails using a pocket knife, unbothered by my threat.

We get to the sixth floor.

Nkosi: "She's this way."

He points at the second door after the elevator.

This woman knows how to hide very well, she has kept Nkosi on his toes. He has her bound legs and hands as if she would slither her way out of those ropes. Nkosi can be insensitive.

Her eyes widen as she sees me walking in.

"Y... y... you?"



Shock has her numb, striding closer I see that her face is covered in bruises.

Me: "What did I say about beating her up Nkosi?"

He continues to clean his nails, unwittingly.

Nkosi: "You said not to touch her."

This man is so sure of himself and arrogant as fuck.

Me: "Then, what is this on her face?"

Nkosi: "Uxolo mhlonishwa. If she was my type, I would have spared her. But it was only a few slaps." (Boss.)

He brings his eyes to smirk at this young woman. Arguing with him is a waste of time.

Nkosi: "Dankie... siyabonga." (We thank you.)

He bows his head a little, the slight grin on his face widening.

"Please let me go."

The lady pleads.

Me: "You couldn't do a simple task woman?"

Greed got to her and she blew up the whole plan.

Me: "All you had to do was make them destroy each other."

I remind her of the task she was given.

"But sir, I gave him the portion that made his wife obsessed with him. He was supposed to grow tired of her and that would have caused them to fight."

Desperation has her on lockdown as she stutters.

Me: "Nkosi?"

He leers at me.

Nkosi: "Mhlonishwa!" (Boss.)

Me: "Do you trust her?"

He huffs at my question. Who am I kidding? He doesn't trust anyone.

Nkosi: "Yebo Mhlonishwa, I have seen that woman and she can't take a piss without her husband in her mind." (Yes, boss.)

He answers with a snigger. I turn back to the sobbing lady.

Me: "Why did you leave the house?"

I know the answer to this question, I want to hear her say it.

Me: "I asked you a question woman, answer me."

I snap. I'm losing my patience with her.

"I'm sorry."

Wrong answer.

Me: "Why did you leave that house?"

"I needed the money and..."

Me: "The one I gave you wasn't enough?"

I question.

"It was..."

She answers, humiliation has claimed her face.

Me: "Listen to me, I want you back in that house. I don't care how you do it, make them hate each other. I want Moses and Ntombi to destroy each other. Ever heard of a crime of passion?"

She shakes her head.

Me: "Find out, that's what I want to happen with those two. You have wasted enough of my time, continue to do so and I won't hesitate to send you back to Venda in a coffin."

Sometimes if you want something to be done right, you have to do it yourself. Moses thinks he has gotten away with what he did to Amara.

How can I forget the despicable things he did to her?

I have been waiting for his destruction for too long, death would have been peaceful for him.

Jonas did me a great job by making him lose his mind, but my thirst was not quenched. Moses has not suffered enough.

This woman has not done a great job, instead of causing havoc in that family, she lived in luxury and did her own things.

The time has come for Moses and his wife to take a dive in the deep end.

NOMBULELO\*

The first thing I notice is that the child looks like Mbuso, the nose, those big ears. All I can think of is that this cannot be happening to me, at the first grasp of happiness, something comes and snatches it away.

This woman standing before me has not said a word since I opened the door and my tongue is tied, I'm insensate by this fact before me.



"Is Mbuso here?"

Her tone matches the look on her face, rude and unkind. I goggle down at the child who is clinging on to the hem of her shirt, he's shyly hiding his face from me as he steals glances occasionally. He could be about the age of four or five.

"Excuse me lady? Is this the right place? Flat number 303, I was told that Mbuso lives here?"

My heart is not too strong for this, I feel like I'm going to pass out any second now.

The only thing I'm able to do is nod positively, Lord tell me what I am agreeing to. The possibility that this child could be Mbuso's or that the Mbuso she's enquiring about lives here.

"Look, I don't mean to be rude..."

Too late, I met your rudeness the minute I opened this door."

"You're staring sisi and it's getting uncomfortable."

I don't care about that, and her attitude. This child is my biggest worry, if he is Mbuso's child. What does it mean for Uluthando?

Me: "You said that you're looking for Mbuso Xaba?"

I must confirm, I could be hearing things.

"Yes."

Do I let her in?

Me: "Mbuso lives here, can I help you with something?"

She scans my body with a cold stare.

"I came to drop this boy here."

I guess my assumptions were right, it is Mbuso's son.

Me: "I don't understand sisi."

She sighs.

"Mbuso's mother called my cousin over to her house, a few minutes later I received a message from her, saying that if I don't hear from her in two hours I should bring Ntando here."

The little boy must be Ntando.

"I don't know what's going on, something is wrong because she is not answering her phone."

Me: "Mbuso is not around sisi, is he aware of this?"

What am I saying? Of course he's not.

"I don't know, all I know is that this boy is a Xaba. Mbuso's father and Nomasonto are in love. They are planning on moving to Cape Town next month."



Did she say Nomasonto? Could it be the ex? Mbuso's dad and Nomasonto have a child? Lord, what is going on?

Me: "Let me call Mbuso."

Mbuso left the house saying he's going to get a haircut.

Perplexed, I dial his number.

Mbuso: "Lelo."

There's noise in the background, I can't hear him clearly.

Me: "Mbuso, where are you?"

Mbuso: "They are gone Lelo."

I can't make out the audio of his voice, it's loud wherever he is.

Me: "Who?"

The lady is watching me with an inquisitive look.

Mbuso: "Mom, dad and Nomasonto. They are dead."

He shouts through the noise and my mind goes blank for a second.

Me: "What are you saying?"

Mbuso: "They are dead Lelo, my parents are dead."

He's crying, I couldn't hear him properly at first, now it's pretty clear. What do I say to him? How do I comfort him?

The line dies, we must have gotten cut.

"What did he say?"

Great, now I have to tell her that her cousin is dead.

Me: "She's dead."

I whisper so the child does not hear. My question still stands, do I let them in the house?

Her mouth falls open, shock has taken over her face.

"I have to go."

She announces pushing the child to me.

Me: "Wait, what am I supposed to do with him?"

"Look I was told to bring him here, I can't take him with me. My husband will not let him stay with us. I have to go."

She scuttles away. The boy does not cry for his aunt or whatever she is to him. He looks up at

me and I see Mbuso in him, he is like the younger version of him.

Me: "Let's go inside."

I pull him in, he is not fussy.

Me: "My name is Lelo, what is your name?"

I interrogate as I squat to reach his level.

Ntando: "Ntando."

He responds, fidgeting with his fingers.

Me: "Nice to meet you Ntando. Are you hungry?"

He nods bashfully, I lead him to a seat and turn the TV on for him. First I have to call someone, Mbuso is alone out there. How are we going to fix this mess?

Me: "Randall, please get to Mbuso now."

He is the only person I can think of.

Randall: "What happened?"

Does he always sound this calm?

Me: "I don't know what's going on, he's at his parent's house. He says they are dead, I don't know what's going on. I can't leave the house because of the baby."

I can't think of Mbuso in so much pain. Oh Lord! I have to be with him.

Randall: "Okay."

He says and hangs up. What has happened in that house?

STYLES\*

Dinner has been cancelled, I was ready to propose to her a few hours ago and right now I am ready to walk away. I need to know if Sethu sees me in her future, I will not deal with tantrums from another woman.

Me: "I should have told you about Mkhize, I'm sorry."

My introduction is short, this is how I slide into the topic. I brought her to my house, she's sitting on the couch next to me.

Sethu is brittle, I detected this from the day I met her. Hence the act she pulled back at the house.

Me: "I thought you knew by now that everything I do, I do it for you. Don't you know that I would

protect you with my life?"

She doesn't answer, but keeps her head down. I need to know what she's thinking.

Me: "Sethu!"

I snap her back, from the rapture she is caught in.

Sethu: "I heard you."

Me: "And?"

Sethu: "I know that you would do."

Okay.

Me: "You might want to know your father, but take this advice from me, he is not what you think he is. If you're expecting that 'dance with my father' type of relationship then you need to lower your standards."

I hate him and I want him dead.

Sethu: "I don't think I can look past what he did to Amara."

Her eyes are cast down, I put my hand on her chin to lift her gaze.

Me: "Sethu, respect means a lot to me. I can't stand insolence, it puts me off and it is unattractive."

I put the comment out there and it leaves a scowl on her face.

Me: "Being angry does not give you a reason to shout, you express your feelings in a civilized manner. Have I ever made you feel that I don't respect you?"

She shakes her head.

Me: "Then why do you do it to me? You don't deem me worthy of your respect?"

Sethu: "I was angry Styles, you hurt me."

Me: "So, this is how it's going to be in the relationship? You'll shout at me every time I make you angry?"

She shrugs her shoulders, my question is not answered by this.

Me: "Talk to me, you're an adult Sethu. We can't communicate like high school students."

I say.

I am getting frustrated, this is not what I want. We are past the stage of wiping unnecessary tears and throwing words of comfort because she feels that life is not fair on her.

Sethu: "No... I don't know."

Me: "What does that mean?"

Sethu: "I don't know Styles, I'm sorry."

I can only huff at her response.

Me: "You know how much I hate that word, especially when said without any sentiments."

Khethu's favourite saying, she ate and breathed the darn word.

Sethu: "But I mean it."

It is not written in her eyes. I know a genuine apology when I hear one, I had great practise with Khethu. Her apologies were meaningless and empty.

Me: "Are you happy?"

I randomly ask.

She gasps in shock, her mind has conveyed something to her.

Me: "Well?"

I raise my brows waiting for an answer. She sits with her mouth slightly open and her eyes fixated on me, the words are ready to come out and waiting for an approval to emit.

Sethu: "Are you breaking up with me?"

Like I said, her mind was conveying something. I didn't expect this. Sethu is fragile, her bruises are quick to seek attention. However, insecurity was unfamiliar with her. It could be the grief she went through, I'm only making up my own conclusions. I'm not sure I know anything, nevertheless I am aware that I want my Sethu back.

Another failed relationship will throw me into the sea with a rock tied on my leg. I won't be coming up for more, I'm tired.

Me: "You're not listening to me, I asked if you're happy."

She's still confused.

Sethu: "I heard you Styles, I want to know why you're asking me this question. Are you thinking of breaking up with me?"

Her eyes swell as they glisten with tears, I can't work with tears. We are both adults here and need to talk like adults.

I get on my feet, my hand jumps in the pocket of my jeans. A heavy sigh discharges from my nostrils as the tips of my fingers find the ring that I have kept for later tonight. Although wanting to spend my life with Sethu, I have mixed emotions now. Do I commit myself to this woman? Or do I let go? I see her in my future, kids that look like her and a home filled with her scent and the sounds of her laughter.

Me: "Are you happy?"

If she's not I will have to let her go, the love I have will eventually vanish with time.

I keep a stone cold face as she prepares to speak, the confusion in her eyes has told me what her next words would be and a wave of disappointment washes over me. Sethu is a smart woman so, I keep my Fingers crossed that she will rephrase from what she is about to say.

Sethu: "I am."

She replies.

We are treading on the same path now.

Sethu: "You make me happy and I wouldn't want to be with anyone else but you. I can be immature sometimes, the fear of losing you grips me and I tend to overreact. I am sorry Styles, I shouldn't have yelled at you."

The matured Sethu has come out to play, I have waited for her. Hopefully she is here to stay.

RANDALL\*

The place is crammed, people are gathered outside the gate. Whispers emanating from their mouths, you can almost smell grief in the atmosphere as the neighbours carry heavy shoulders and low-spirited postures. Police cars and an ambulance are parked on the side of the road.

A body is being carried away from the house, it's in a body bag. Mbuso must be in the house. I push my way through the crowd, two more men walk out of the house carrying another body.

What happened in there?

I hurry in, to find Mbuso standing in the middle of the living room with his hands on his head and his gaze lost somewhere on the floor, a person lies lifeless in a body bag right before him.

The body is carried out. Mbuso's bloodshot eyes meet mine as he attempts to follow the morgue workers.

He stops, furrows a brow, fighting tears that are ready to explode from his eyes. So much pain lies in his eyes, for a second I think he's going to vomit. He's heaving, his chest looking like a bubble that is about to burst.

A quick sob escapes between the seams of his lips, he blocks it by smashing a hand on his mouth. Tears stream down his face before he crushes down on the floor, landing on his knees.

He sits to bring his legs together, uses his arms to keep them in one place and hides his face between his thighs. I can't hear his sobs, only the convulsion of his shoulders tell me that he is crying.

I don't know how to comfort him, I place my hand on his shoulder. Now that I'm closer I can hear him snivelling.

Me: "I'm sorry bro."



How do I help him? He is in so much pain, to have lost both parents in one day.

"Excuse me, you're not allowed to be in here. An investigation is still going on."

A lady in a formal attire says, she must be one of the investigation detectives.

Me: "My friend just lost both his parents."

"I understand sir, but no one is supposed to be in here lest you temper with evidence."

Is she stupid or what?

Me: "Are you deaf? I said my friend just lost his parents."

She frowns.

"And I said I understand, but no one is supposed to be in here. Please vacate the house."

She pushes and frustrates me while at it.

Me: "Lady get out of my sight, you're pissing me off."

I snort.

She clicks her tongue and walks off. Nonsense.

Mbuso is getting up, sniffing while wiping his tears.

Me: "Are you okay?"

Thoughtless question, I know.

He doesn't say anything, but stands to browse the area. What was meant to be the happiest day of his life, has turned out to be his worst nightmare. Overwhelmed by this gruesome discovery, I feel a need to call Amara.

"Baby!"

She addresses softly.

Me: "Something has happened, Mbuso's parents were found dead in their home."

I deliver the bad news.

Amara: "Oh my God! What happened?"

She witters, her voice tinted with shock and disbelief.

Me: "I don't know, Mbuso will brief us. I'm coming to get you, your cousin will need you."

Amara: "Okay sure."

Me: "I love you."

Amara: "I love you too."



Me: "I will see you later."

I offer my farewell.

I have to get Mbuso out of here before he suffers a breakdown, his mind must be replaying all the memories spent in this house as he stands while looking around.

Me: "Let's go home."

He nods and takes off before me.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

197\*

### NOMBULELO\*

Ntando is peacefully sleeping on the couch, the poor child must be confused. He was thrown into a new environment. Uluthando is sleeping in the room upstairs, Mbuso's phone is still off. It is hard to believe that his parents are gone, I doubt that he will recover from this.

I hear the unlocking and opening of a door, I leave everything in the kitchen to check who it is.

Mbuso walks in accompanied by Randall and Amara. His eyes fall on me and for a second he fails to maintain eye contact, he's trying hard to hide his eyes from me.

I want to hold him in my arms and tell him that everything will be okay, somehow I feel that it's not what he wants at the moment.

The sight of Ntando sleeping on the couch stops him in his tracks, a deep glower builds up on his face. He turns his head to look at me, I'm guessing that this is the first time seeing the little boy.

Me: "His aunt said Nomasonto told her to bring him here."

I answer the question that's flapping around his head.

The deep look in his eyes says he knows what this means. We will get through this my love, we have to get through it.

I'm holding him in my arms as I say this in my inner thoughts, a word of comfort from me will probably awaken the pain and he'll break down into a sob.

Mbuso: "I need to see my daughter."

He says moving out of my arms, I watch him as he makes his towards the flight of stairs.

Amara: "Do you need any help in the kitchen?"

Amara asks.

What was I doing in the kitchen again?

Randall: "You shouldn't over work yourself, you're pregnant."

Why the frown though?

Sometimes I still think he doesn't like me, this is the scowl that got me disliking him. I am yet to be introduced to the human side of him, you know, the one who smiles with his eyes and shows



his teeth like a normal person.

Amara: "I am pregnant, not sick and I'm only four months. I can even run a marathon."

I want to laugh at her comment, but Mbuso's melancholy look has put me in a depressive state. Randall frowns like Amara said something wrong.

Randall: "Not with my baby."

He responds, she is fighting the urge to roll her eyes. I for one would have given in, as a matter of fact, they just flipped over.

Amara smiles at him, she puckers up and they share a quick kiss. The scowl is still intact, maybe I am reading too much into things, maybe she is happy and this is Randall's personality.

I mean, I can hardly remember anything he said from that two seconds conversation, I had with him earlier on the phone.

I guess Amara has forgotten about the offer to help in the kitchen, they are sitting on the couch engrossed on each other.

Should I go check on Mbuso or let him be? I am not good at comforting someone who has lost a loved one, the moment becomes awkward for me.

Amara: "Lelo."

The smile flickering on her face is proof enough that she is happy, Randall is kept busy by the tips of her fingers as he brushes his fingers on them. Throwing in kisses as well.

He's clingy, serious as a heart attack, frowns like he hates everyone around him and looks at my cousin like she is the only woman ever to exist.

This is a strange combination.

His frown deepens as he finds me staring, my stupid eyes. This is what happens when you give your mind permission to go on escapades in front of people. It betrays you.

Amara: "Did you hear anything I said?"

Did I hear what she said?

I'm trying to work with my memory box, I must've heard what she said.

Five, four, three...

Ahh! Heck it...

I didn't hear anything.

Me: "What is it babe?"

Amara: "I said you should check on Mbuso."

She is right, I should do that. I run my eyes to Ntando, the child sleeps like the world is not on

fire. How I wish to trade places with him, life as an adult can be cruel as hell.

My plodding is stopped by the sound of Amara's giggles. Randall is whispering things into her ears, sweet nothings I presume.

This is my chance to offer an apology, I judged him unfairly. He does love my cousin and she is happy.

Me: "Guys."

Amara turns to me with a smile plastered on her face, Randall's gaze remains fixed on her hands as he plays with them.

Me: "I would like to apologise, I know I have been a jerk and I'm sorry."

She simpers, giving me a look that says, I don't need to apologize. Randall places his hand on Amara's small baby bump and goes on to rub it, I have accepted that Amara is his obsession and he is not about to look up anytime soon.

Me: "Randall."

He gives me a brief look before going back to whatever he is doing.

He is so focused, like it's a mystery.

Me: "I'm sorry for what I said about you that day at the house, I have no excuse for what I said and I owe you both an apology."

That wasn't so bad.

Amara: "Don't stress about it Lelo, we are over it."

She says.

Amara: "Randall?"

He raises his eyebrows as he looks up at her, okay he's naturally rude. He should keep eye contact or at least seem interested.

Randall: "Yes."

That's it?

For some reason I have a feeling that I have been alone in this sinking ship. They moved on with their lives as if nothing happened while I was left on board trying to get water off the ship? so I don't go down.

Me: "Okay, let me go and check on Mbuso."

With all that being said, life should go on. Obsession is not always a bad thing, these two are proof that there is a beautiful kind of obsession out there and it's called love.

KENNETH\*

To say I have nine lives would be an understatement, I am not going anywhere as long as my sister is alone in this world. I will continue to fight whatever is trying to keep me from her. Randall is one mean fucker, he is lucky Styles and I go way back.

I hate hospitals, if possible I would go home and heal there.

Sipho is livid, he wants me to retaliate. I dismissed him on the spot, for the sake of the friendship I have with Styles, I will not be going against his brother.

My priority is to keep my sister safe, a war would put her life at risk. My plan of leaving the country still stands and I don't plan on coming back anytime soon.

Life is not always kind? I have come to accept that, I can't always have what I want.

AYIZE\*

Neo is going to kill me, his mother calls and says she's at Park Station. Neo went to get her.

What's with the surprise visit? I am not ready. I had to send Mbali and Ginger to Sethu's. It's getting late, Neo left around 6pm, he should be back by now.

What's let now is for the couch to complain, my butt has lost its feeling from sitting.

I think that's them, I jolt up at the sound of the gate opening. I peep out the window, to make sure and it is them. His mother is carrying Kagiso while Neo lugs a suitcase.

Seriously... suitcase?

What do I do?

Should I go to the kitchen, pretend to be busy? Mothers -in-law want us to slave for their sons.

Too late, the door flies open, she is the first to get in. The first thing she does is scan her eyes around. There is an impressive smile on her face, the pride of a mother.

"Titi..." (Zee.)

Kagiso yelps as he sees me, he calls me Titi. I think Zee became too hard for him. The poor child was trying to put the words together and came up with this weird name. He wriggles as he tries to get off, she puts him down and he toddles to me in speed. His steps are still wobbly.

Me: "Hey, be careful. You will fall baba."

He doesn't care, he's in my arms, his tiny arms wrapped around my neck.

Neo walks in, he gestures if I'm okay. I want to say no, but I nod positively anyway.

His mother has not made eye contact and I don't know why. Is she short sighted?

Neo: "Ousie Ntsoaki, hobaneng o me?" (Why are you standing sister Ntsoaki?)

Ousie Ntsoaki? Neo addresses his mother by name?

Me: "Dumela mme." (Hello mom.)

I should greet now, she turns to look at me but is not looking directly at me. She squints her eyes, trying to make out who the person in the room is. Neo is more nervous than I am.

Ntsoaki: "Ke mang ole Ndumiso?" (Who is this?)

Ndumiso?

Ahhh! Yes, we are still in 2020. Wonders have not ended yet.

Neo: "Eish!!! Ke Zee ousie Ntsoaki. Remember I told you about her." (It's Zee.)

He sounds annoyed by her memory loss.

Ntsoaki: "Oh, monyaluoa oa rona." (Our bride.)

I'm a bride? How come I was not told about this?

Neo: "Yes mama, she is the one. Kagiso's mother."

Kagiso's mother? Yes baba, drop the bombs. I love the sound of that.

Ntsoaki: "How are you my child? Come close so I can see you."

She reaches her hand to me, I guess she can't see me from here.

Neo: "Come close Zee, she doesn't bite."

I'm going to get him for this.

She wraps me in her arms as I get closer, Kagiso is caught up in a sandwich hug. He squirms as he fights for freedom.

Kagiso: "Mmhh, mmhh, mhhh."

The child is whining.

Me: "Okay, nana. Askies baba." (Sorry baby.)

He doesn't care about my apology, as long as he's free from these two women.

Neo: "Zee, this is my mother Ntsoaki."

He says wrapping his arm around my waist.

Ntsoaki: "Ke tla u otlā, ke mang Ntsoaki?" (I'll hit you. Who is Ntsoaki?)

She's pulling his ear.



Me: "Yes mama, please hit him. Ha a hlompe Neo." (He is disrespectful.)

I add, Neo gives me a frown.

Ntaoski: "Come let's sit, so you can tell me more about yourself."

She takes my hand and leads me to a seat.

Neo: "What about me?"

Ntsoaki: "Go make us some tea."

She replies. Neo can't make tea, he makes the worst.

Should I tell her? She probably knows, he is her son.

Neo: "Ke lata motho e mong ko park station and I still have to make her tea?"

He's complaining.

Neo: "Mme, what happened to that guy? The deacon or was it an usher? I thought you two had a thing, shouldn't you be married by now?"

His mother has a boyfriend?

This is hilarious.

Ntsoaki: "Why are you asking about him Ndumiso?"

He sighs, heavily. This is his frustrated sigh.

Neo: "He should be the one making you tea, nahana. Motho a re 'make me tea." (Imagine, she says.)

He complains, imitating her voice.

Ntsoaki: "Uena Neo, jou moor skont. Otla swaba nou, ek is nie jou pal nie." (Hey Neo, shame on you. I am not your friend.)

Oh! A female version of Neo? I did not expect this.

Neo: "Che ousie Ntsoaki, o nka ma chance mona." (You're taking chances here.)

He's mumbling but, we can hear him.

Ntsoaki looks around her and finds a cushion, Neo ducks as she throws it at him. This innocent act of violence leads him to the kitchen.

Ntsoaki: "Yeyi, nyonso." (Nonsense.)

She clicks her tongue in annoyance.

Neo: "Ok'salayo ke nnete." (It's the truth.)

Neo shouts from the kitchen, it's not long till we hear the kettle boiling. The disaster that is

going to come out of that kitchen.

Kagiso: "Dada."

He points to the direction Neo went to, he wants his father.

Me: "I'll take him to Noe."

This will give me a chance to inspect his terrible culinary skills, he's sitting while scrolling on his phone.

Me: "Neo, what happened?"

His facial expression has told me that something is wrong.

Neo: "Ke Mbuso, his parents have passed away."

I don't know Mbuso that much, but I feel for him though. Neo glances at me as we embrace a silent moment. He moves to wrap his arms around us, Kagiso is okay with this hug, he is not complaining. This is a 'If tomorrow never comes' type of a hug.

Neo: "I love you Zee."

He nettles my cheek in his hand.

Me: "I love you too baba."

A quick kiss.

Kagiso: "Titi, wuv you." (Love you Zee.)

He cups my cheeks with his minuscule hands and pecks my lips.

Neo: "Yeyi uena saani, yeyi uena saani." (Hey boy.)

He takes Kagiso from me and puts him on the floor, Kagiso is not aware of what is happening. He is looking up at us with this cute little frown on his face.

Neo: "E-ea ho nkhone oa hau." (Go to your granny.)

He pushes him a little with his foot, Kagiso staggers. He's laughing at what I think to be his father's absurdity.

Me: "Hayi Ndumiso." (No.)

Neo clicks his tongue. How come this name is not in his ID book? Neo is so sly, he must have removed it.

So, his father was Ndebele.

Me: "It won't be nice when I start kicking you. Leave my baby alone."

Neo: "Zee, umshado uyaphela because of people like Kagiso." (Marriages end.)

Why am I laughing at this? Probably because he just murdered my language. This love thing is

actually fun though.

AMARA\*

We are still with Lelo and Mbuso, he is not okay. He has not said anything yet, he's packed on the couch next to the little boy. Lelo explained who he is.

The only thing the detectives could tell Mbuso was that they died from poisoning.

I'm glad Lelo called me to the kitchen this baby eats more than a hungry lion.

She is cooking pap, but I think sandwiches would have been okay.

Lelo: "How are the wedding preparations going?"

She asks as she stirs, in the pot of gravy.

Me: "Stressful."

The wedding is in two weeks and with the rate I am going, I'm afraid I won't fit in my dress.

"Me hemma." (My queen.)

He probably wants to go, he's held this awkward facial expression since Mbuso came back down. It's the snivelling that has him feeling uncomfortable, he doesn't know how to comfort him.

"Amara."

Gosh. He must as well tell them that he wants to go, his voice is not doing a great job in hiding it.

Me: "I'm coming."

Right after I finish this plate.

Lelo is giving me the look, she wants me to go.

Me: "What? His child is hungry so I must feed him first."

Oh here he is, his hand is stretched out to me as he hands me a white envelope.

Me: "What is it?"

Randall: "Mbuso wants me to read this to him."

He doesn't want to.

Lelo rushes to snatch it, we follow her to the living room as she scurries to meet Mbuso.

Lelo: "Mbuso, what is this?"

Mbuso: "A neighbour gave it to me, please read it. I can't do it."

I ogle up at Randall beside me, my eyes hold a question of which I might know the answer to.

Randall: "It's a letter from his mother."

He mutters before ambling to a seat, I follow in. Lelo has taken up the job of reading it to Mbuso.

<<< My son, I have failed. I couldn't live with this shame. I am sorry that I have to take this route. Your father said he wants a divorce, and has fallen in love with Nomasonto.

Am I that stupid that they played me like that? They had an affair Mbuso. Your mother failed, I failed to keep the family I dedicated my whole life to. Your father doesn't deserve to live, neither does this woman who laughed in my face every time she saw me, knowing that she was sleeping with my husband.

I'm sorry that I have to give in to the voices in my head. I wish nothing but happiness for you my son and the woman you have chosen for yourself. >>>

That's it, she explains the murder suicide. She took two lives plus her own.

Lelo: "I don't understand."

His deep pain dancing around him in circles, Mbuso clenches his jaw. He's fighting back tears, or words he might want to say.

"Bhuti." (Brother.)

The child is awake and calling out to Mbuso, the sight of a familiar face seems to put him at ease.

Lelo: "I thought you have never met before."

Lelo...

Mbuso: "Yes, this is my first time seeing him."

He's mystified by Ntando knowing him. Mbuso takes Ntando and places him on his lap, Ntando begins to play with his hands as shyness consumes him.

Me: "He probably met you through pictures."

I give my opinion.

What other theory could there be except this? If this is the case then his father did well. Ntando won't have to feel alone and abandoned, it is up to Mbuso if he will be a father or brother to Ntando or both.

NTOMBI\*

I might as well open a small shop in the yard if people will bang my door as if I owe them.



Me: "Ngnyeza." (I'm coming.)

I shout walking towards the door, to meet a tall black woman with a little boy. If I'm not mistaken he's seven or eight and I would pass her off as a 30 year old.

Me: "MOSES!!!"

This is my first thought, Moses has done it again. I will kill him this time.

He dashes into the living room from the bedroom.

Moses: "Yini Ntombi?" (What is it?)

Me: "Who is this woman?"

Moses: "Who?"

Can't he see this woman standing at the door?

Me: "Don't dare me Moses, I tolerated Mashoto. I will not go through the same thing again."

Why is he taking a closer look?

Moses: "Hayi, no I don..."

He pauses, takes another look at her, while zooming in. Moses thinks that I am an idiot.

Me: "Moses!!!"

Moses: "Hayi, I have never seen her before." (No.)

He scrutinizes her again. Why is he not sure about it? Are they that many that, he's forgotten their faces?

Moses: "Sisi, have we met before? Let me see that child, you can't trap me with this one."

He bends over to look at the boy who's resting his head on his mother's hip.

Moses: "This nose is not mine."

He declares.

Moses: "Ntombi sthandwa sami, now I am certain that I don't know this woman." (My love.)

He's sure after observing the woman and her child.

Moses: "Siyabonga sisi, bye bye." (Thank you.)

"Wait..."

She calls while he pushes the door to close it and...

"Saziso?"

Jonas says as he walks back from the bathroom.

Moses: "Eehhh!!!"

Me: "Bhuti?" (Brother?)

Jonas is stunned, he didn't expect to see her.

Saziso: "Baba."

Baba?

Moses and I exchange glances. What is going on?

"Daddy."

The brat says in excitement, he's in his arms in a second.

Jonas is a daddy? When? How?

Who is she? And where has she been?

Jonas: "How are you my son?"

Me: "Hee, my son? Bhuti?" (Brother.)

If I were older I would suffer a heart attack.

Moses: "And then, enye isuitcase? Ntombi hayi, angeke phela. Maybe we should leave the house, we'll come back when everyone has decided that their holidays are over." (Another suitcase? No Ntombi.)

Moses is worried about suitcases?

Jonas has a family for Pete's sake...

Saziso: "I'm sorry I didn't tell you that I was coming."

They are sitting in my living room now, Jonas is not going to tell us what is really going on.

Jonas: "How did you cross the borders? You don't have a passport."

Passport? Borders?

This is where to go if you want to hide a dead body, Jonas Buthelezi.

Moses: "Boarder from where?"

He's sitting on the edge of the couch, intrigued and astonished.

Saziso smiles.

Saziso: "Zimbabwe."

Moses: "Heee!!!"

He's too dramatic now, he should take it down a notch. We don't want to scare the lady.

Moses: "When did Jonas go to Zim? We thought you were hiding in Mpumalanga sbali." (Brother in-law.)

Me: "Forget that Moses, Jonas has a son and a woman."

Moses: "And she calls him baba."

Moses adds.

Saziso: "I'm his wife, we're married."

She brings her hand up to show us a ring.

Moses: "Ngisho ne stop nonsense Jonas?" (There is even a wedding ring?)

We are hit with a bomb right in our living room, Moses' jaw drops as he gasps in shock. While as I have out-used my shock tokens.

Jonas has this smile on his face, he is happy. His attention has fallen on the little boy as he plays with him. Must we beg him to give us an explanation?

Will he sit there and let poor Saziso explain herself?

Me: "Bhuti, we are waiting."

Jonas: "For what?"

Moses: "The truth, who are they?"

Jonas: "She told you, they are my family."

I give up, I don't know anything in life.

Great! Mhambi and Petunia are here, wait till you see their faces. This is a real shocker.

"Malume." (Uncle.)

The brat bounces to Mhambi, a big smile taking over his face. That's it, I want to die.

Mhambi: "Andile, mfana wami." (My boy.)

Mhambi whisks Andile up, the little boy giggles with each spin. Petunia is in the same boat.

Did I miss any years in this life perhaps?

I am finished.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

198\*

AMARA\*

"Me hemma wake up."

I don't want to wake up. Why is he waking me up?

Randall: "Amara wake up."

I don't know why he has to snap.

Me: "It's too early for that frown, don't you think?"

His brow curves, he doesn't get the joke.

Me: "Why am I being tortured so early in the morning?"

Randall: "You have to get ready."

That sounds more like a command.

Me: "Why am I getting ready? I want to sleep Randall."

Randall: "It's too early to be calling me Randall, don't you think?"

Okay, he did get the joke.

Me: "What is it Randall?"

I too shall pretend that I can't find a map to his sally.

Randall: "When last did you visit your parent's graves?"

My heart sinks to the tips of my toes. Where is this coming from?

Me: "Why are you asking me this?"

Randall: "Tell me."

I won't be getting an answer.

I have never been brave enough to visit their graves, afraid that I will relive that night like I did in my dreams every night

Me: "Ntombi never took me to see them. She said there was no point because they were dead. So, I built tombs for them in my heart."

He slants his head to the side, his side view showing his tightened jaw. I'm over it, maybe I'm lying.

Randall: "Would you like to visit?"

I don't know? Do I? Is my heart ready for that?

I feel a warm hand on mine, he's grazing into my eyes. He wants an answer. Must I have an answer for everything?

Me: "I guess."

This must mean something, I never took time off and thought about visiting them.

Randall: "Are you ready though?"

I might be ready, but my heart repudiates the offer from my mind. They are at longerheads with each other.

Me: "Yes."

The time when I have to see them will come, it might as well be now.

Randall: "Get ready then, your uncles are here."

Huh?

The shock in my eyes...

Randall: "Mhambi, Jonas and your aunt are here to take you to the cemetery."

He says it as if saying 'good morning', I'm stunned.

Me: "You called them?"

Randall: "No, it was Mhambi's idea. He called me late last night, you were sleeping. He thinks it's time."

Me: "But you just asked me if I'm ready. What would you have done if I said no and they are already here?"

Randall: "Decline their request."

That's his response.

I believe him just so you know. I should get ready, before my uncles think that, I'm a lazy makoti (Bride.)

SETHU\*

Nothing says good morning like the smell of coffee, I am an addict by the way. Thanks to Styles

Sishi, the coffee junkie. I have to open my eyes for this, the room shines bright with a stream of light cracking in from the windows.

Styles is seated on the edge of the bed, he's staring. I am not a fan of my morning face and I have to apologize to the ones who were exposed to it.

I turn to hide my face on a pillow, I need to get that morning look off. Swollen red eyes, plump lips and a scratchy throat.

Styles: "I have pictures you know."

What is he...

Oh hell no...

The confession alone is enough to make me jump up in search for his phone.

Me: "Let me see."

The dazed look daubed on his face is not okay with me, he damn well knows what I'm talking about.

Styles: "See what?"

Me: "The pictures."

Styles: "They are not here."

He says.

Me: "Oh, okay. There are no pictures, thank God."

I lean back on the headboard, accepting a cup of coffee from him.

Styles: "They are at the studio."

He reveals, sipping on his coffee, like what he said will not make me choke on mine. He takes the cup from me as I cough, trying to unclog my throat.

Styles: "Are you okay?"

Am I okay?

Me: "What studio?"

I get a look that confirms my insanity, I have been told that I am not normal.

Styles: "Some studio in town, I'm having them framed and we'll use them at our wedding."

I'm not okay and I am normal, there is no doubt about that. While as this man placed in front of me is as crazy as they get.

Me: "You know the divorce rate is high in this country, scratch that, annulments are quicker. Snap of a finger and it's done."

There, is the look again and again it has me questioning my sanity.

Styles: "Don't say that, don't ever say that."

His voice is low-pitched, but holds an authoritative tone. I was only kidding, but I give him a nod.

If you are wondering what Styles Sishi is afraid of...

Losing a loved one is his biggest fear in life, I have not made things easy for him with my tantrums.

I am handed back the mug. Why is it half-full?

Me: "Where is the rest of the coffee?"

Styles: "I made you half a cup because you never finish it."

He's right, the number of trips I make to the microwave to warm the coffee, I will not drink is embarrassing.

Me: "Are you sure about the pictures Styles? You took pictures of me sleeping and you are having them framed, not just that, you want to display our wedding venue with pictures of my crusty face for the whole world to see?"

I prattle as I try to make sense of what he said.

He smiles for the first time since I opened my eyes.

Styles: "I'm kidding, it was a joke."

That ghost of a smile does not tell me that, it was a joke. Why is he nervous?

Me: "What did you do?"

I give him the look, yes you're busted. Although, I don't know what he did.

Styles: "Nothing."

He's staring at my cup as I gulp down the hot beverage.

Me: "I don't believe you."

He shrugs his shoulders.

Styles: "How is the coffee?"

Fine, as always.

Me: "Okay."

He is undeniably up to something.

Styles: "Drink up."

I'm done... Why is he... Oh my God... He didn't.

My jaw drops, I'm insentient.

Styles: "Kitten!"

He says softly and I can't get my eyes off the cup. Right at the bottom, it's written {Will you marry me?} in bold letters.

Styles: "Kitten!"

I bring my gaze up, his nerves have intensified.

Styles: "What do you say? Let's build a life together and have my babies?"

He's holding his breath and I want to put him out of his misery.

Me: "How did you do this? When?"

I should be saying yes and not barrage him with questions.

He forces a smile, it's gone like it was never there. He is too nervous to smile.

Styles: "Should I call an ambulance? Because I am about to pass out."

He's joking.

Me: "Yes, I will marry you Styles."

An immense exhalation discharges from him and a genuine smile takes over his face. He takes me into his arms, kisses me like it's the first time.

I'm waiting for my ring now...

And... he is gaping at me.

Styles: "I didn't think the ring would fit."

What ring? There is no...

This man is sneaky today... I raise my left hand to see a beautiful ring wrapped around my finger, he must have slipped it on while I was sleeping. That's why I found him gawping, my tears decide that they want a share of the attention I'm getting from this man.

Me: "I love it Styles, it's beautiful."

His lips dance on mine for a minute.

Styles: "You're beautiful and I love you Kitten."

Me: "I love you too babe."

I would love him more if I could.

AMARA\*



My heart is sitting on my throat, the jump happened when we left the house. I have gorged down two bottles of water trying to calm myself. My feet go numb as they hit the ground at the cemetery,

A surge of emotions build up on my throat as they form a lump. These are tears I won't be able to control no matter what. They have been long coming, Uncle Mhambi puts his arm over my shoulders.

He pats it and brings me closer to him. I rest my head on his chest while we plod towards my parent's graves. Randall and Jonas are sauntering behind us.

Ntombi and Moses didn't give me a chance to mourn the death of my parents.

My heart drops, everything comes back... the screams... the gunshots... my father's desperate pleas and I'm engulfed in emotions.

I didn't cry for my parents that night, I did not cry at their funeral. It was hard to believe that they were gone. I spent the first few years thinking they would walk through the door and take me back home.

Until one day it hit me, the molestation... the abuse and the hatred from the people who were meant to protect me, forced me back to reality.

That is when I knew that they were gone forever, crying was the last thing I wanted to do. Instead I was consumed by anger, anger that they left me and I was deprived a chance to say goodbye.

"Amara!!!"

I hear Randall calling me, his voice stained with concern. I try to control my tears as my uncle continues to tap my shoulder, his way of comforting me.

Suddenly a pair of familiar arms encircle around me from behind. Randall presses his lips on my ear, whispering words of comfort. I wish he would stop because it's fuelling the tears and pain. I can't cry any more than this.

Wrapped in this man's arms, I hear uncle Jonas clear his throat. He has probably killed Randall a thousand times with a death stare.

Mind you, he is the one who gave me away to this man after money was brought forth of course. Jonas gave away his complaining rights when he accepted money from the Okolies.

Petunia: "Take heart my child, all will be well."

Her words force me out of Randall's embrace.

My parents were buried next to each other, there are no head stones on their graves, but what was once a pile of soil.

Mhambi and Randall remove the stones and dead leaves disseminated on the graves. Mhambi



says we will have an unveiling next month, it breaks me to see how my parent's graves have been neglected.

Petunia: "You can talk to them Amara."

I kneel down on the dirt, I don't know where to start. I had so many questions to ask them and now my mind is vacate.

I look up at Mhambi, he motions a go ahead before he kneels next to me. Jonas takes the other side.

Mhambi: "Buthelezi, Shenge, Sokwalisa." (Clan names.)

I listen while he recites the Buthelezi clan names.

Jonas: "Nansi indodakazi yenu. Ulapha ukuzonibona emva kweminyaka." (Here is your daughter, she is here to see you after many years.)

Jonas looks at me and nods agreeing that I take over.

Me: "Baba, yimina indodakazi yakho uAmara. I'm sorry that I have not come to visit you. I miss you so much, wena no mama." (It's me, your daughter Amara.) (You and mom.)

This is harder than I thought, I look up at Randall. He's here, next to me and I am sure that I will be okay with him by my side.

Me: "I'm getting married next week mama, I wish you were here and when I said yes to the dress, you would have loved it. Baba, to have you walk me down the aisle is a dream I will never see come true.

I ask for your blessings as I venture into this new life. You would have loved the man who has chosen me, he is my protector and it's what you wanted for me baba. To have someone who will love and protect me and our children. A man like you. Did I tell you that you're going to be grandparents?"

I clench my teeth as I fight back tears, my children will never know them. Only in pictures that are stagnant, pictures that will lose their memories with each passing year.

I glance at my uncles, my father lives in them. How can I be lonely when they are here? My children have not lost anything, they will have two grandfathers who would do anything to protect them.

NTOMBI\*

The power of love, people. That thing will make you do the impossible. So my dear brother Jonas with the help of Mhambi, transformed the garage into a bedroom in a space of two days.

He temporarily moved his things there with Saziso and their brat.



Jonas is set to leave for Mpumalanga with his family after Amara's wedding. It feels strange that he has a family, I was convinced that my brother wanted to die alone. He is happy and I can't complain, he deserves it.

Apparently, Saziso's birth certificate had burnt in a house fire and she couldn't apply for a passport. It was the first thing she did when she attained her birth certificate.

Please, I plead that no one questions me about Mhambi and Petunia. I have a good mind to think that Petu has convinced her husband that, she loves my kitchen and wants to stay here forever.

I can't deal with that, they are cramping my space. She is a good cook yes, but then again food is food. We lived with my cooking before they came and we shall continue to do so after they are gone.

I must have missed a meeting where people came together and conferred about invading my house.

There is always someone knocking at my door, Jonas should pay us the money, so I can get a house maid. I can't work to open doors, my feet will sink in the ground from all this walking to the door.

Three old men are standing on my door step, they remove their hats as soon as I appear.

Me: "Can I help you?"

I hate visitors, and it looks like they are here for me.

"Ingabe kukwa Mngoma lapha?" (Is this the Mngoma's residence.)

If I say no, they will go away. I want them to go away.

"Yebo, ngingalisiza." (Yes, can I help you?)

Great, Moses has beat me to it.

"Good day sir, we come in peace."

One of them says, showing so much gallantry. Of course they come in peace, what could they have against us?

Moses: "Ntombi please, bring us chairs. We will sit outside under a tree."

He points at Mashoto's crime scene. I want to know what the visit is about, so I run in the house, grab three chairs, Moses will have to seek for a rock to sit on.

I am back in seconds. Good, they haven't started yet. They are silently standing and they appear to be nervous.

Moses: "Thank you, please get us some cold water."

Really?

He gestures that I leave when his eyes meet mine.

My second rush to the house is not going to be as quick, I have to get glasses and a jug. I hurry outside with the water.

Moses: "Yeah it is hot today, summer days are not the same anymore. One minute it is hot and the next it's cold."

Don't you just love small talk?

The men agree with him, their nervous smiles have halted. I sit down on the ground next to Moses, he gives me a look and I don't care. I'm not going anywhere.

"Moses: "We may begin madoda." (Men.)

There are throat clearances and I can't comprehend what has made them so nervous.

"A pressing matter has brought us here."

One starts, he looks the oldest. The wrinkles on his face point him out as the oldest.

Moses: "Ngilalele." (I'm listening.)

We are listening, he means.

The older one clears his throat, as the younger ones look to him.

"I know that we were meant to write a letter and set a date, but this is urgent and it has to be addressed soon. Our son damaged your daughter."

Hell no, not that idiot Zuma again.

Me: "You mean to say that, you are the Mhlongo's?"

"Yes, please hear us out before anything."

Me: "Angeke, Moses!!!" (Never.)

Moses raises his hand as I start to argue.

Me: "Moses, you are not going..."

Moses: "Ntombi wait, go to the house if you don't want to be here."

If didn't want to be here, I would not be giving an opinion.

What are these people doing here?

Moses: "Continue."

Is he going to let them speak? Moses can be a disappointment when he wants.

"Mngoma, we have wronged you in many ways. Our son hurt your daughter and we would like to apologise. We want to pay for the damages, if you let us."



I saw this coming.

Moses: "I hear you but, we will have to discuss this as a family first. Our daughter has been taken by another man and a way forward will have to be discussed with him."

What way forward is he talking about? Lelo stated it that, she wants nothing to do with Zuma.

"Thank you, we would also like to be a part of our grand child's life. Please don't keep my son away from his daughter."

Me: "Sorry baba, your son decided that my daughter was not..."

Moses: "Ntombi awume tu, kanti yindaba ungalaleli?" (Wait, why don't you listen?)

Whatever, I don't care what they agree on. Lelo will never accept that man into her life, she will lose Mbuso if she does.

MBUSO\*

My parents were laid to rest the past weekend, it is still hard to believe that they are gone. My mother wanted to end her misery and decided to take two souls with her. She cooked, invited Nomasonto over, I don't know in what pretext and watched two people eat poisoned food.

What kind of a human being would do that?

I will always love my mother, but I will never forgive her for what she did. The woman who brought me into this world made me an orphan, go figure.

I am left with a reminder of my father's betrayal, Ntando. He is a sweet little innocent boy, and is a victim of this. I don't know how long it will take for him to start asking for his parents.

I need to take Ntando for a check-up at the hospital, he is always sleeping and it worries me. One would think that he senses the death of his parents, we will have to heal together.

We both lost both parents and leaning on each other is all we can do.

My father did well by letting him know about me. I guess he was preparing the child for the day he finally meets me. It makes things easier that he is familiar with me.

"Mbuso please get the door."

Lelo exclaims from the kitchen, I'm only hearing it now.

My lawyer is here, I hope he brought good news.

Me: "Cele!"

He reaches his hand out to shake mine.

Cele: "I thought I should come and deliver the news personally."

Shivers surge through me at his announcement, the thought of Goku legally my daughter is overwhelming.

Lelo: "Is it done?"

Lelo queries while making her way from the kitchen, tension visible on her face. Cele gives a look of satisfaction and I know that it's done.

Cele: "Congratulations Mbuso."

It almost feels like a dream, I have waited for this day, finally I can claim Uluthando as my own.

Lelo: "Thank you so much."

She gives Cele a handshake, unable to fight the smile on her face.

Cele: "You two take care and enjoy your baby, they grow up so fast. Trust me, I know."

He proclaims as he dawdles to the door, ready to bid farewell.

Me: "We will, thank you again."

I turn back to Lelo after shutting the door, she has her eyebrows raised. An inquisitive look pasted on her face, she's holding back a scream and I feel it too. I want to shout at the top of the roof, so the world knows how happy I am.

Lelo: "Baba ka Goku." (Goku's dad.)

And God, I could dance to the sound of that.

Me: "I have a Goku."

A frown replaces the smile that had built a home on the corners of her mouth. I said something stupid, didn't I? The simper gradually claims its home back and she is in stitches in a twinkling of a miniature.

Me: "What happened now?"

She is not stopping.

Me: "If Goku wakes up, sizoxabana." (You'll hear it from me.)

She covers her mouth as she strains to halt her loud guffaw. What I said was not funny, at all.

Me: "I have a Goku, chubby cheeks. It's a dream come true."

My arms take over her waist as I pull her close to me, breathing her scent and this positive energy that hovers over me. She gives consent to the cuddle by enwrapping her arms around my neck.

Her face so close to mine, I can feel her warm breath on my skin.

Me: "Thank you for choosing me Lelo, I want you to know that I will always choose you. In this life or the next, if there is a thing. You will always be the one for me, the one my heart desires."

Taking up a bemused mien, she furrows her brows. Her eyes narrow at me.

Lelo: "Are you proposing again Xaba? Because I have already said yes."

Crazy...

Me: "And thank you for saying yes. I have a request."

I release the grab, I need to see her clearly with this.

Me: "Ntando lost both parents, I am all that he has now and he is so young. He will need a mother, I don't want him to ever feel like an orphan. Can you be a mother to him Lelo? Fill that void Nomasonto left in his heart."

A tear brushes down her plump cheek, she tosses it away with a quick brush of a finger.

Lelo: "Mbuso, you don't have to ask me this. I will love Ntando like he is my own. I promise that the word stepmother will never cross his mind."

She assures me, I trust her and my heart exudes into luxury.

Now about that hug and possibly throw in a kiss.

Lelo: "Okay, okay."

She slants her head back, moving away from the insatiable kiss that, has my heart thudding with excitement.

Me: "You know the kids are sleeping, we have time. Maybe about..."

The palm of her hand falls on my mouth, pressing my lips against my teeth.

Lelo: "I know you are not about to say 2 minutes."

Unexpected indeed, I was about to say that actually. How long does sex last again?

Me: "I have been..."

Vexed as if she has predicted my next words and they are slowly putting her off, she takes a step back. Two steps... okay she's taking more steps away. What did I do?

Lelo: "You have been timing our sex marathon?"

Sex marathon? I can't...

Lelo: "I'm serious Mbuso, it's not a laughing matter."

Her arms comfort her bust as she crosses them.

Me: "Sex marathon?"

Lelo: "What is it called? You said you've been counting."

Me: "I love you so much Nombulelo."

If I could paint it for her, I would. Her face eases. The ghost of a smile lights up into a full blown simper as her teeth show up behind her lips.

Lelo: "I love you more Xaba."

Something I know and very confident about.

Me: "Why do you move out of my arms if you know that you will find yourself back? Women like straining themselves."

She takes joy in my words and I have to admit, I love the sound of her laughter.

Me: "I feel that we have been given a second chance to do this marriage thing right, I will speak to my uncles. You, my shero deserve all the cows in my father's kraal." (Heroine.)

I was not making a joke.

Lelo: "We are back to being cheesy now, are we?"

Her words fall out, leaving a smile on my face.

Me: "For real, though. You will be a bride, my bride."

She buries her face on my neck and I know that she is crying, my arms clasp around her.

Me: "UGoku ayenzi uma wena usukhala?" (You're taking up Goku's job now.)

A titter erupts out of her.

I will do right by Lelo, she deserves that at least.

To be continued...





## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

199\*

unedited\*

NEO\*

My mother left for Pretoria today, unfortunately I couldn't take her there. We have just arrived at Uze's house for lunch, Amara wanted to do a get together before the wedding on Saturday. Did I say Amara? I meant Zee put her up to it.

Ginger is walking beside Zee with Kagiso in her arms, while Mbali bounces along.

Me: "Let me take him Ginger, he's heavy this one. This big head of his will give you a backache, you see what happens when you make babies with just anyone? Nahana nje, giving my child a big head nx!" (Imagine.)

I get a disapproving stare from Zee.

Zee: "Don't say such things in front of the kids Neo."

She castigates me.

Me: "They need to know that you don't just choose a partner, you need to be woke. Can't be carrying a big headed baby all your life."

Ginger laughs.

Ginger: "But Kagiso looks like you uncle Neo."

Me: "Yes, he has my facial features, mara hlooho ena? I am not taking the blame for it, ke innocent nna." (This head? I'm innocent.)

My words are not reaching Zee well.

Zee: "Stop insulting my baby."

She takes Kagiso from me.

Me: "What did I do?"

Mbali: "Uncle Neo, you're weird."

Mbali expresses and she falls into sweet titters along with Ginger.

Zee: "I find him weird too."

Zee agrees with them.



Me: "Mbali, you must knock. You don't budge into people's houses like that, nahana if they had a dog. You'll be in pieces by now." (Imagine.)

I shout out to Mbali who already has a foot in the house, she freezes at the sound of my voice.

Ayize: "Yey, come back here."

Zee chides her.

I love her strict nature, she will make a great mother to Kagiso and the girls.

Mbali: "But the door is open already and I'm in."

She complains.

Mbali is full of life, I hear she was not this person before exposing the blood of the Okolie child to light. Those Okolies are darn good, I have to give it to them.

Ayize: "I said come back, you need to learn some manners wena."

Zee pulls her ear, dragging her back.

Me: "No Zee, take it easy on the child."

Liyana comes running from inside. The three girls engage in a hug, loud giggles and scurry somewhere in the house.

Me: "I am convinced that women are crazy, you all laugh for no reason."

I say to Zee who is shaking her head in divergence.

Zee: "Men are foolish that's why they end up saying things like 'women are crazy.'"

She mimics my voice, I decide to let her be. Her comeback has left me speechless, actually. We follow the noise to the back yard, everyone is here. Stylos, Miss S, Uze and me hemma. Mbuso and Lelo as well with their little ones.

Neo: "Is the bacon still there or u e qetile dokotela?" (You finished it doctor.)

Mbuso scowls, he's cradling Uluthando in his arms while Ntando clings to his arm.

Me: "Hey, I would've come earlier, but you know the struggle of having a house full of women. Kagiso and I have it hard."

Styles: "I knew it was you when I heard the noise from the foyer."

Mbuso: "Only Neo can create such noise."

Mbuso adds, I don't appreciate the criticism.

Zee: "Thank You Mbuso, Only Neo can make such noise."

She cheers him on, while greeting the others with hugs.

Amara: "We haven't started yet."



Amara tells me something I am aware of, I find a place to sit next to Uze. I nudge him as I settle down while he brings a glass of juice to drink from it. A few drops spill on his t-shirt.

Randall: "Really?"

He frowns at me.

Me: "Sorry Oga, I was greeting you. At least you're wearing black, the stain will not show."

He grabs a soviet to wipe it off. How is he going to get married looking like he's ready to slaughter the whole world. He needs to fix his face.

"Hi Neo."

Ife is here too, I didn't see her.

Neo: "Ah ah, my sister. How na?" (How are you?)

Her little welcoming smile transforms into a frown.

Ife: "Fine, how are you Neo?"

The enthusiasm she had when she first greeted has gone with the wind.

Me: "Notin' spoil." (All is well.)

Zee is bamboozled as she glares at me with her mouth slightly open, am I saying something wrong to the child? I need to watch my words. Ife twitters and this has Zee clearing her throat.

Ife: "I like that t-shirt on you Neo, it brings out your eyes."

Okay...

A compliment, it's not every day one is acknowledged.

Me: "Did you hear that Zee? This colour, the same t-shirt you told me to change brings out my eyes."

Her nostrils flare up before she turns away, riled.

Me: "Ahh, Ife you too much ooo." (You are far too kind.)

I bring about a smile on her face with my gratitude.

Randall: "My friend, stop staring."

Uze snaps at Ife, who takes up an offer to roll her eyes, seemingly piqued by her brother's censure.

Sethu: "Where are the girls?"

She glances around in search of the two little rascals.

Zee: "Somewhere around with Liyana."

Stylos and Sethu look more in love than ever, a ring can do wonders hey.

Me: "Oga, just a few more days till you're tied down. You still have time to change your mind and I can fetch the lobola money from daai grootman Jonas."

Everyone is talking at the same time and I can't grasp who is saying what.

Me: "Hey, one person at a time. I know that you love me but chill guys."

Styles: "Voetsek Neo, that's what I was saying." (Piss off.)

Sethu: "Randall is already tied down."

She speaks out.

Lelo: "Unless Randall has a death wish, he better not think about it."

Okay...

Zee: "You're sleeping on the couch tonight because of your stupidity."

Okay this one hits the most.

I look at Amara.

Me: "You me hemma, what was your complaint about?" (My queen.)

She smiles...

Amara: "My love portion is strong and there is no escaping me."

Eish!!!

Me: "So, my assumptions were right all along? You gave the poor guy a love portion, I knew Uze was not capable of loving someone."

Randall: "Are you sure you should be sitting here, next to me? I am about this close to losing it with you."

He threatens and I know it's only that. I am used to it by now.

Me: "Relax Oga, I am trying to save you a lifetime of tears. Am I not allowed to look out for a friend?"

Marriage is not a bed of roses.

Styles: "Your look-out sucks."

Stylos talks too much lately.

Me: "Miss S, what are you feeding my boy? He has a mouth?"

Styles: "Ask that question again Neo and see what I will do."

He threatens, his finger pointing right at me.

Me: "What question Stylos? I don't know what you're talking about."

I should dodge this bullet.

Ife: "You know I don't understand how you and Styles are taken, couldn't one of you be single?"

The girl states randomly.

I hear people clearing their throats.

Zee: "I love this girl, listen sweetie. I'm selling Neo, any amount you have will do."

Ouch!!!

Me: "Zee, refrain from any form of insults. I have not eaten yet, and you don't want me to know how I get when I'm hungry."

NTOMBI\*

Moses received a call this morning he left the house in a hurry and he is not back yet. I'm starting to worry about him. The world out there does not love him. I have tried his phone, it sends me straight to voice mail.

"Mama, I want daddy."

That's Jonas' little brat, he has not stopped crying for Jonas since he left the house, he took Mhambi with him.

Sazizo: "Eish Andile."

Kids can be annoying, I am glad that I have passed that stage.

Me: "Where did Jonas go?"

She smiles a lot, need I mention.

Sazizo: "He's running some errands, something to do with his business."

I know that he's running some errands, but where? Men are sly, you can't trust those creatures.

Me: "Mmmhhh, okay."

The child is lying on her lap, fidgeting like he has a stomach bug.

Me: "Is he okay?"

One slap and he will be okay, I don't spoil kids and Jonas treats him like he will crack the moment he drops him.

Sazizo: "He's just being a nuisance that's all."

She brushes his head instead of smacking it.

Me: "So, who was Saziso before Jonas happened?"

I have been wondering and I want to hear how a pretty woman like her came to love an old man like my brother.

She is a smiler for real, it's starting to get to me.

Saziso: "Well, where do I start? I was born in Bulawayo."

I know where you were born...

She could have skipped that part.

Saziso: "My father and mother are still alive. They named me Memory Saziso, everyone back home calls me Memory."

I don't care about that either.

Saziso: "Jonas refuses he says that he will not address me by a western name when I have a native one."

Can we skip to the part where she tells me what she does and how they met?

Me: "What work did you do?"

I hope she doesn't start by telling me what her father does before answering my question.

The smile... Jesus take it away.

Saziso: "A few jobs, here and there. I have an accounting and finance degree, I haven't been lucky in finding work in that field. I have my fingers crossed though."

Cross sister, cross those fingers.

Me: "Well, let's hope luck finds you hey."

Just as I turn away from her smile the door opens and Moses strides in. He looks gloomy, I'm next to him in a second.

Me: "Where have you been?"

He looks at me like I am covered in vomit.

Me: "Moses, I asked you a question. Uphuma 'phi?" (Where were you?)

He flinches at the sound of my voice as if it annoys him.

Me: "What is wrong with you?"

Is he drunk? I move closer to smell his breath. He steps back as if I was going to kiss him.

Moses: "What are you doing?"

Finally he speaks...

But, why is he asking me nonsense?

Me: "Will you tell me where you were or should I keep repeating myself like a broken record?"

He flinches again, I don't like the way he's looking at me.

Me: "I have had it with you Moses, tell me where you were or I will..."

Moses: "What will you do Ntombi? What will you do?"

He yells, out of the blue.

I am flabbergasted by his attitude. All was well when he left the house.

He clicks his tongue and proceeds to our room.

What the hell just happened?

I turn to leer at Saziso to see if she noticed Moses' behaviour. Maybe I am seeing things.

She and her brat are minding their own business. I have to find out what Moses was up to.

NKOMO\*

I received an invitation from Styles, to have lunch with them at Randall's. He said Randall is okay with it, so I decided to take my chances and join them. The first thing I hear are sounds of laughter as Chioma opens for me.

Chioma: "Nkomo, how have you been? I heard about what happened."

Me: "I am okay ma, thank you for your concern."

Chioma: "Everyone is outside, I believe they are waiting for you."

Me: "Thank you Chioma."

I saunter to the back yard, everyone is scattered around. I spot Styles with Randall, Neo and Mbuso. The ladies are gathered at a corner, it seems like they are deep into gossip while the kids run around the playground making enough noise to give you a headache.

Neo: "Ahh Khomo, finally. We thought you were not going to make it." (Cow.)

I have just been spotted by the wrong person.

Me: "Sorry I'm late."

I give an apology as I join them.

Neo: "That's okay, it would have been better if you didn't make it"

Neo states, I am getting used to his sallies.

Styles: "Stop being an idiot Neo."

Neo: "Ke nnete Stylos, where there is Khomo, there are blood sucking cultists and men eating women. Eish Ruth was a man-eater saani, etlek she ate you senseless ntwana." (It's the truth.)

A past I don't want to be reminded of.

Me: "I have no comment for that Neo."

Neo: "Yeah, what will you say?"

Styles: "Are you okay?"

Styles has noticed the look of worry on my face.

I give a nod.

Me: "Randall can I have a word with you?"

He scowls, probably wondering what I want with him.

Randall: "Sure."

He states as he moves away from everyone, I follow. He has a plate of food and is eating like it's his last day on earth.

Me: "Don't you want to sit or something?"

He might want to sit... I'm wrong. He shakes his head, tossing a spoon-full of what appears to be rice. It is Chioma's special Jollof rice, that woman is a goddess in the kitchen.

Me: "I want to apologize."

Here it goes.

He is staring at me with raised eyebrows while his teeth grind the food in his mouth. You would think that he is the one who bears a seed in his belly and not Amara, which is far-fetched.

The look on his face says continue...

Me: "What I did to Amara back then..."

Something clogs my throat, it's the darn intimidating look that he's giving me.

Me: "I didn't formally apologize, I am sorry Randy. It still haunts me till this day and I ruined our friendship."

He's glowering at me, while he chews the last of his food. Disappointment rushes over me as he turns and walks away. Okay, I tried. There is nothing I can do now.

Oh!!! He was going to place the plate on the table. He's coming back and my mind is oblivious to what he is going to say next. I can't read the look on his face, he hides his emotions pretty well.



Randall: "I don't trust you Nkomo, it's not a secret. Getting back into the same lane with you is going to take a long time. You are a friend though, but the apology that you offer is not mine to accept. Amara is the one you should be apologizing to."

He says...

That's true... Where is Amara?

Me: "Thank you."

I don't know what he means by shrugging his shoulders, he turns his head behind him to find Amara staring back at him. He waves his hand to gesture that she comes, a frown takes over her face. For a minute I think she will not bother, here she is.

Me: "Hi."

She salutes with a smile, Randall crosses his arms across his chest. He is going to let me do the work.

Me: "Hey."

Amara glances up at Randall, she wants to know why she has been summoned here. Saving her that day with Kenneth made it easier for me to face her, I guess I should be lucky that she does not hold grudges against me.

Me: "Amara, when we first met. I was fighting my own demons and..."

Randall is giving me a glare that says I should stop. Justifying my actions is not the way to go, Amara was a victim to my selfishness and lust. I have walled uneasiness around her, she crosses her arms as if sheilding her body from a predator's gaze. This is how most women who have been assaulted act or if they feel bad vibes from the person they are talking to.

It shows that she has emotionally withdrawn from this discussion and is not accessible to communication.

I started it off the wrong way.

Me: "I'm sorry, there is no justification for what I did to you. I'm sorry for everything and I hope you will find it in your heart to forgive me."

She nods, that's a start right?

Randall takes her hands into his, he holds this serious look on his. A remorseful gaze and regret of some sort.

Randall: "I'm sorry too me hemma, that you had to go through that. It's not right for a woman to fall prey to sexual harassment, whether it were words or physical touch or rape. And I'm sorry for what your uncle did to you." (My queen.)

He cups a crying Amara's cheeks into the palms of his hands while he hunches to look into her eyes.

Randall: "You were alone and had no one to support you. I can't imagine how you must have felt, with no one to turn to and nowhere to go. I am truly sorry me hemma, you didn't deserve that."  
(My queen.)

He apologises for what her uncle did and to think that Moses is not ashamed about it, he refuses to take responsibility for his actions.

I know Amara went through so much, but I have no idea to what she was exposed to, my mind cannot comprehend it and as a man I cannot relate or understand the pain she felt. Defenceless and with no voice, she had to wake up to the eyes of a monster every day.

Ayize is toddling this way, the serious expression on Amara's face has lured her here. I hear that she is overly protective of her, Sethu as well. Both sisters find a space to stand beside Amara. Lelo has followed them.

Ayize: "I couldn't help but eavesdrop on the conversation."

She was listening in.

Her arms settle around Amara.

Ayize: "Coming out of that storm shows that you are strong Amara, most people never made it out alive. Some were killed and others took their own lives even after making it out. The memories and the pain, doesn't go away. It stays with you forever."

Styles, Neo and Mbuso are also brought to this gathering, probably wondering why we have grouped up.

Lelo: "A lustful look from a guy would make me feel so dirty that, I take a dozen showers to wash off his gaze that is stuck on me. That feeling stays with you, you keep asking yourself. Did I do something wrong? Was I making eye contact and gave him the wrong impression or was it the clothes I was wearing. Maybe I made gestures at him unknowingly. It's not just the man touching you or making sexual remarks. One look kills you."

Lelo adds and this I did not know.

Sethu: "The words that cannot be taken back, the tongue cuts deeper than a blade. The words become a part of you, they build a home in your mind and torture you to death until you give in to them. I lost count of the number of times I tried to take my own life. Ntokozo's words had made themselves comfortable in my mind, they were my daily bread. He broke me with just words 'The world would be a better place without you.' And I believed him, I sought after death from that moment."

I didn't think that my apology would escalate to this.

Neo: "No man, can we please stop for a minute. This is too much to take in and we came here for a celebration not to share so much pain."

He's wiping his eyes.

Styles: "Don't cry man."

Styles taps his shoulder with a genuine consoling hand.

Neo: "I'm not crying Stylos man."

He's crying alright.

Randall: "I agree with Neo, my wife is pregnant and I don't want her stressing."

His arms are forever around Amara.

Ayize: "You know what I think would lighten up the mood?"

Sethu: "Do we want to know?"

Ayize feigns a smile in response to her sister's remark.

Ayize: "Music, as loud as possible."

No one agrees with her.

Ayize: "Come on people, siyashadisa man. Uze weds Amara." (There's a wedding.)

She says out loud, breaking into a dance. This act of hers has brought smiles back on everyone's faces.

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

200\*

READERS DISCRETION ADVISED... NOT FOR SENSITIVE READERS!!!

## NOMBULELO\*

The deep conversation has brought us to our seats, it has escalated to this. Sethu and Ayize have just told their stories, I found myself shedding tears. Is it wrong of me to wish that Amara does not share her story? I'm not ready to hear the terrible things my father did to her.

Amara: "I was nine when my uncle started assaulting me. I remember he came to our room."

She looks at me... We shared a room, but there were days when she was not permitted to sleep in it. I didn't understand it then.

Randall: "Amara!"

He places his hand on hers unsure that, she is ready to talk about this.

Amara: "It's okay, I want to speak out."

Randall: "Are you sure?"

She squeezes his hand, and nods.

Amara: "We were preparing for school and Lelo was bathing while I was getting dressed. He walked in just as I was naked, I grabbed a towel and immediately covered myself. I was young, but I knew that he wasn't supposed to see me naked. The smirk on his face terrified me. 'What is it Amara? Why are you hiding from me? Am I not like your father? Open up and let me see if your breasts are growing. Just a glimpse, I want to see if my baby is growing into a lady.' My mind couldn't comprehend what he was doing, the look in his eyes covered me with so much fear, that my whole body began to tremble. We fought over the towel and he proved to be stronger. I was left exposed, pinned against the wall, my hands were too tiny to cover my private parts and my breast that were only developing. His eyes fell on my private parts, I will never forget the perverted look on his face."

My heart breaks into a thousand pieces. This is my father that she's talking about. How could he be so heartless? Randall looks ready to explode, you would think he will pull out a gun and shoot us all.

Amara: "My head spun when he reached out his hand to touch my breast. 'I am only checking if they are real, it's my job as your father Amara. Can I have a lick, I want to know how they taste.'"

Oh God, this is too much to listen to.

Amara: "The next thing his hands were all over me, while he was licking my breast, he would make these disgusting sounds like he enjoyed what he was doing."

She stops for a while, her eyes glistening with tears as she refuses to accept them.

Amara: "I received my first slap from him that day when I screamed, I guess Lelo didn't hear me. I wanted her to hear me, I wanted her to come to my rescue. She was my only hope then, but she didn't come."

She clamps her jaw, her tears win against her. Randall has claimed her hand.

Me: "Amara."

She glances at me.

Amara: "You didn't come Lelo, I had never been desperate for anything in my life than to see you walk through that door. I knew in my mind that he would never do those things in your presence."

Me: "I'm sorry."

This is all I can contribute, a lousy apology.

Randall keeps moving on his seat. He is not okay, if he were lighter he would be pink from anger.

Amara: "After he hit me, he pressed me against the wall and went down on his knees to reach my level, I guess. His hand was on my private part while the other covered my mouth to stop me from screaming. 'Open your legs Amara, vula umalume angene.' He would say." (Open so uncle can enter.)

She turns to leer at Randall, her tears adorning every edge of her face. I have never seen a bigger pucker than the one that he's holding.

Amara: "I fought Randall, I swear... I fought him but he... he was too... too strong for me... I couldn't... push him away."

She cries, her eyes imploring that he believes her. Randall wipes her tears as he frames her cheeks into his hands.

Amara: "He pushed his finger inside me... I remember the excruciating pain that made me wish I was dead... I wanted him to kill me, but no matter how much I wished for it, it never came. My body trembled against the cold wall, while he kept..."

Amara is having a difficult time with this confession, I want her to stop. It's painful to watch her in so much pain and hearing what she has been hiding in her heart.

Randall: "Amara please, stop. I can't..."

He presses his forehead with a desperate request, his hand slides behind her neck.

Amara: "Please let me finish..."

She mutters in tears and moves back from him.

Amara: "He kept pushing his finger in... My screams were trapped behind his large hand, I swear I screamed for help. I didn't just stand there, I fought. But he made it seem like I wanted it to happen. You believe me Ayize, don't you? I didn't ask for it, you have to believe me."

She weeps.

Ayize is crying next to her cupping her face into her hands.

Ayize: "Of course I believe you baby, we all believe you."

Amara: "He said I begged for it that, it was my fault, but I didn't. I believed him though, I was only a child. I didn't know anything."

Randall: "I can't listen to this."

He grunts as he shoots up to his feet, Amara grabs hold of his hand. She wants him to stay, she's pleading with her eyes.

Randall settles down along with his heavy breathing, anger has him around its little finger. Amara exhales, wipes the tears that are streaking her cheeks and I can tell that she is preparing herself to continue speaking. She's not ready for this, her eyes snitch on her.

Amara: "Lelo came back too late, I heard the door handle and realised that Moses had locked it, he opened for her and said something about the handle being stuck. I was packed at a corner after he assaulted me, trembling like a leaf. My mind was still trying to put together what just happened, I was in so much pain and he forced me to go to school and..."

She pauses, the saddest sound is when you hear a crack in a person's voice when they are about to cry only, she has been crying and with each syllable the pain deepens.

Ayize: "Where was that godforsaken woman Ntombi?"

My mother was forever at work, she was unaware of what my father was up to.

Amara: "She was working nightshift, I think he loved it the most when Ntombi was not home. Sometimes he would send Lelo to school and say they had not paid for my school fees, so I had to stay at home. He would do things to me, made me touch him. This one time he showed me a video where he and some woman were having sex, I didn't know what they were doing. I was never exposed to such things, my parents wouldn't even let me watch people kissing on TV. He said he wanted to do those things to me and

..."

She bursts into a sob, Ayize is quick to bring her into her arms.

Randall: "Fuck!!!"

Randall grunts, his fist clenched as if ready for a fight.

Styles: "Randy."

He brings his angry eyes to Styles, they are conversing through gestures. He would be storming

out of here if it were not for Styles.

Ayize: "It's okay my love..."

She comforts her.

Amara: "I'm sorry, I can't continue..."

She wipes her never ending tears, my heart breaks for Amara. My father deserves nothing, but death.

Randall: "Come here."

Randall pulls her from Ayize's embrace and into his.

Randall: "You're going to be okay, I promise."

His voice quivers from what I think is anger, it's deeper than usual.

Neo: "Can we kill Moses?"

Neo's mind decides to drop a question, no one is shocked by it. I see nods, chests rising and falling. Sethu continues to wipe her tears, Ayize is in tears as well. I can't breathe, I'm losing my mind at the realization of what my father is capable of. I wish to turn back time and change Amara's fate.

Ayize: "Amara."

She starts.

Ayize: "I don't care what that old man said to you, his words are empty. You are not going to give him power over you Amara. He is a liar, the things he said to you were lies. What does that verse say again Sethu? The liar, the devil and the father..."

The first laugh is actually heard in this sad blue moment.

Neo: "No baba, no man. Word of advice, don't quote bible verses in front of my mother, she will find an exorcist so they remove that demon in you."

Jaded by his statement, Zee waves him off with her hand.

Sethu: "The devil is a liar and the father of all lies."

Sethu corrects her, I still have to get used to Ayize and her wildness. Seems like I'm the only one who finds her strange.

Ayize: "Yes, that one. Moses is the devil himself and whatever comes out of his mouth is a lie Amara, I know that it's hard to talk about your experience, but at least you started. You are on your way to recovery and you will get there. You will heal my love and it will be okay again. You will be free, we are here for you. Randy baby, I your sister-wife and these baboons here."

Her proclamation causes titters but Randall, I can still feel the heavy weight of his wrath. Great way for Ayize to lighten up a sad moment. She might be crazy, but her wisdom surpasses her

insanity.

Neo: "You're sleeping on the couch tonight Zee."

Neo complains, how do they cope with each other?

Styles: "A day in the Maake household, this is something I would like to see. Honestly, negative to negative do not attract each other, they repel. How is it possible in this case?"

Sethu: "Babe, are you really going there?"

Sethu says.

Styles: "Seriously, am I the only one who has wondered about this?"

There are more noes than the two yeses given by Ayize and Neo.

Styles: "Ever heard of induction?"

He assents this strict look on his face.

Neo: "Not now professor Stylos."

Neo carps.

Ayize: "You mean introduction?"

She gets a black stare from Neo, I think she made a mistake by asking Styles a question.

Styles: "Yes but this one has to do with electrostatic force."

Complaints, mumbles and tongue clicks...

Styles: "Listen, let me explain why neutral objects are attracted to charged objects and how Ayize and Neo are non-aligned. I'm sure you have noticed that when you take clothes from the dryer they cling together, right? So there's an attractive force between those two pieces of clothes..."

I see stiff faces with a mixture of annoyance, Mbuso happens to be the only one who is paying any attention.

Neo: "Not now Stylos, eish. Etlek I'm hungry now, where is Chioma?" (Actually.)

Styles: "Am I wrong though?"

Mbuso: "Styles is right, opposites attract and you two are two peas in a pot."

Neo: "It's fine, let us be peas just spare us from this lecture please. I failed physics, don't take me back."

Ayize: "But I want to know more."

Sethu: "Unless you want to question your level of intelligence, forget anything Styles has said thus far."



Sethu knows him best.

Me: "I think I get where he is coming from."

I add my two cents, I don't really know where he was going though.

Neo: "Okay, get it alone and leave us out of it. We are still recovering from years ago. People, my lecturer was a demon sent from science hell, that man would speak and you wouldn't hear a thing he said. Entlek there is a place for people like Stylos, ba e bitsa Sterkfontein." (They call it.)

Styles does not seem to mind being made fun of.

Silence demands our attention as Randall gets up on his feet and takes Amara with him, they were quiet this whole time.

Styles and Neo worked so hard to obviate the substantial subject and put a smile on Amara's face. It didn't work, speaking out has brought back all the painful memories.

I wish there was something I can do to help her, I have long removed my father from my heart. Luckily I will not be keeping his surname after the wedding, I am over him.

After emanating a hefty sigh, Ayize being the one to break this fretting silence, grabs a glass of juice.

Ayize: "This is to all the women who fought..."

Her voice cracks and she blinks a few times trying to push back her tears.

Ayize: "...and the ones who had no strength to fight... You are not alone..."

This time her voice quavers as she delivers with a lump on her throat. Neo rests his hand on her back to comfort her.

Ayize releases another sigh, emotions verifying that they will always have a hold on humans as tears leave her eyes. She wipes them away with two swipes on both her cheeks.

Ayize: "Womandla." (Power.)

She holds a fist up and takes a sip from the glass of juice, Sethu and I raise our fists to be followed by the men. The tears in my eyes become so hard to curb, Sethu is in tears as well. And Ayize... well she stands eye ball to eye ball with the pain. If you were to ask me to point out the strength of a woman then, I will point this woman out.

RANDALL\*

I walk out of the room after Amara has fallen asleep, my mind is racing at a full speed thinking of a thousand ways to kill Moses. The plan I had is taking longer to be executed, I haven't heard anything from Nkosi yet.

"Mhlonishwa." (Boss.)

Nkosi salutes over the phone.

Me: "If that woman has not made a move yet, kill her."

I'm done playing games.

Nkosi: "She's right at work Mhlonishwa." (Boss.)

Me: "I want results Nkosi."

Nkosi: "You know I deliver."

Me: "Good."

Nkosi: "Dankie Siyabonga." (We thank you.)

He hangs up.

God-knows how I will face Moses at my wedding.

SETHU\*

The gloomy atmosphere has died down, Amara is resting. We're about to wrap up and head our separate ways.

Styles: "Kitten, there is someone I want you to meet."

Styles introduces as she pulls me closer to him and walks away from everyone. His hands create an oscillation on my back.

Me: "Who?"

I know everyone gathered here.

Styles: "Come with me."

He turns me around and I see Nkomo standing with hands packed in his pockets. I'm confused, who am I being introduced to?

Nkomo: "Hi."

A half smile creeps up on the corners of his mouth.

Me: "Hi."

I run my eyes around the back yard, I don't see any unfamiliar faces.

Me: "Babe, who am I meeting?"

Styles: "Your brother."



My brother?

I don't have a brother.

Styles: "Sethu, I would like you to meet Nkomo Mkhize. Your brother."

My brain falters for a minute and my eyes fall out, Nkomo is just as dazed. His eyes and mouth are unmoving, wide open in an expression of dumbfounded.

Nkomo: "Styles?"

His hands jump out of his pockets as he takes a step to me.

Me: "You're my brother?"

Nkomo: "Okay, wow..."

He smiles, opens his arms and a chuckle escapes his mouth. It is true that God works in mysterious ways, I have gained a brother. I have no words to express how I feel, we break the embrace. I turn back to find Styles dawdling away.

Nkomo: "How? I don't understand, my father could only bear male children."

He says...

Me: "I don't know, but here I am."

Nkomo: "I have a sister, wow."

His laugh is not that of joy but shock.

Me: "I have a brother."

I am dragged back into another hug.

Nkomo: "Now I have a reason to hate Styles that man is impossible to hate."

I know...

Me: "Just don't overdo it hey, we don't want the poor guy to suffer."

Nkomo: "Nah, I'm going to go all out. This is a dream come true, I have someone to protect."

He's kidding...

He is kidding right?

Nkomo: "We have so much to catch up on. I want to know everything, how your mother met Mkhize and where have you been?"

We find seats and position ourselves, darkness is drawing in and it is getting a bit windy. The kids are somewhere in the house, Chioma is so good with them.

Me: "How is Mkhize? I heard about what he did to Amara."

His chin slopes to his chest, his jaw stiffens. Hate is visible on his face, I am yet to find out if it is due to Amara's nightmare. Or Mkhize himself.

Nkomo: "Don't expect anything from that man, he is a narcissist. The most selfish person I have ever known."

I am right about the hate, it is directed at Mkhize.

Me: "Why do you hate him?"

I feel like an idiot as he give a discordant shake of his head.

Nkomo: "Mkhize killed my mother."

Me: "What?"

I almost choke on the word as it swims out of my mouth.

Nkomo: "I don't know how their relationship was like, but she found someone else, kept it from him and he killed her when he found out that she was having an affair."

Mkhize is capable of such things? My heart was not given time to digest all of this, I wish I never asked him. It would have been better if I didn't know. My father was a bad man and now I find out that my biological father is the same if not worse.

Nkomo: "Don't let that get to you."

He says, observing the incredulity on my face.

Me: "I am sorry."

The shrug of his shoulders confirms that he is not bothered about it, or he chooses not to dwell on it like he just advised me.

Nkomo: "There is enough time to tell you about Mkhize, I want to hear all about you. And what you've been up to all these years."

He announces as he wears an inquisitive mask.

Me: "You need to sit back for my story."

He does that and crosses one leg over the other, he is goofy and it's adorable. I have a brother, Christmas came early for me. My eyes search for Styles, he's standing with Neo and Mbuso. He is staring at us, I gesture a thank you and he winks at me. Maybe this is my beginning, a beginning of a great future...

AYIZE\*

Kagiso has been having sleepless nights, he cries the whole night and sleeps during the day for a few hours. He's feverish and the doctors see nothing wrong with him. It pains me to see him

like this, he's just a child. Not knowing what is wrong with your baby is the worst thing to happen to any parent.

Neo called mamSonto over, he went to get her at the taxi rank.

"Hey, how is he?"

Sethu inquires as she walks through the kitchen door, I called her to help me out. Kagiso can be a hand full when he's fussy. Thankfully he is asleep now.

Me: "I don't know Sethu, I managed to put him to sleep. I hate that he can't sleep peacefully."

The child is granted a few minutes of sleep, such cruelty though.

Sethu: "I can only imagine. Remember how hard it was with Mbali, I can't even think what Kagiso is going through. What could possibly be scaring him?"

She positions herself on a chair, I'm preparing a remedy I found on the internet. Apparently it reduces fever.

So Kagiso woke up screaming two days ago, we couldn't put him back to sleep and had to rush him to the E.R only for the doctor to tell us the child was fine.

Me: "I have a bad feeling about this Sethu, something does not add up. There is this thing he does before bursting into screams, his eyes pop open as if there is something in front of him and clings on to me as if that thing is trying to attack him. He's able to at least calm down when Neo takes him in his arms and by that time his body is shaking from fear."

Sethu: "We'll hear what this woman has to say, I pray it's not as bad as we think."

Yeah, hopefully.

Me: "I saw your post on Facebook, Miss. Engaged."

Kagiso's situation stresses me out so I would rather change the subject.

Sethu: "Tracy put it up not me, she was excited when I told her about the engagement and said that I can't keep the news to myself."

Sethu does not listen.

Me: "How did Tracy get a hold of your account? Don't tell me you gave her your password."

She is naïve like that.

Sethu: "No, I was online and she took my phone, uploaded a pic of Styles and I. I wanted to delete it, I guess I forgot."

Stupid...

Me: "What did I say about keeping your private life private and staying away from that girl?"

Sethu: "It was an innocent post."

She does not get my view.

Me: "What happens to be an innocent post could escalate into something bad, Sethu you have enemies out there. Not everyone wants to see you happy or with Mr. S. You better remove that post and I don't trust Tracy, get rid of her."

She doesn't like being carpeted. But how else can I make sure that she is safe? Sethu thinks everyone has a halo. Hasn't life shown her enough to believe that it's survival of the fittest out there? Everyone wants a piece of something and if they see it in someone else, nothing will stop them from going after it.

Neo arrives with mamSonto, the woman doesn't waste time with small talk. We're seated in the living room, a silent Kagiso lies in my arms.

Mam'Sonto: "Where is the mother of this child?"

Neo glances at me, confusion builds up on his face."

Neo: "Soshanguve."

Mam'Sonto has not said anything and he has let anger cover him. With a clenched jaw and a clenched fist, his chest rising and falling under his garment.

I want to know what's on his mind, he is not going to tell me. His gaze is on Kagiso.

Mam'Sonto: "Tell me Neo, how did you end things with her?"

Neo: "I don't understand."

Mam'Sonto: "She is angry, she wants her child back. Fire for fire?"

His anger intensifies.

Mam'Sonto: "This is about revenge, you were burnt once and..."

His eyes race to Sethu, shock visible in them.

Neo: "MamSonto a re tlohele ele." (Let's leave that.)

Neo and Styles did something to Matshidiso, I know that look in his eyes.

Neo: "What is that woman doing to my son?"

He grunts in anger, Neo is always able to curtail his anger. Today he is having a difficult time doing so.

MamSonto: "She and her grandmother have a picture of you in a shrine."

She's looking at me.

MamSonto: "The child only wants his father when he's sick right?"

True, he's only calm when he's in Neo's arms.



Me: "What did I do?"

MamSonto: "Like I said she wants her son, Kasigo will eventually become invalid, this will cause a rift in your relationship. Neo will think that you bewitched his son, and eventually leave you. He will go back to that woman, she will have full control over him."

I have never...

What am I hearing?

Neo's gaze is on me now.

Sethu: "Witchcraft?"

Her voice breaks in astonishment.

MamSonto: "Why do you think the child seeks his father when he starts seeing things? They want you Neo to think that Zee knows what is wrong with the child."

This has to be a dream.

MamSonto: "How is your sex life?"

Okay...

When did we cross over to here?

Neo: "Zee?"

Me: "What??"

Neo: "Tell her hau."

He is as embarrassed as I am, he wants me to fall first.

Me: "At first it was terrible."

He curves a brow. What did he want me to say?

MamSonto: "Your body would freeze right?"

Me: "Yes."

I now she is a seer but... How the hell does she know?

Neo: "Don't tell me that Matshidiso had something to do with it as well."

MamSonto titters, there is nothing funny here. Ancestors think they have a great sense of humour.

MamSonto: "You are quick Neo, this all goes down to destroying this family."

Me: "What about my father, I would see his face when Neo and I..."

She cuts through my words...

MamSonto: "You had to have a reason for your situation, so they gave you one."

I don't know those people, yet they hate me with such passion. This world is cruel.

MamSonto: "I will help you, don't worry everything will be okay. There are things I will need you to do and buy."

She seems sure of herself and I have to take her word for it. What exactly did Neo do to that woman? MamSonto gives us a list of what to get.

Neo: "When can you come again?"

Mam: "Sunday if that's okay."

Neo looks at me for approval.

Me: "Sunday is fine ma and Kagiso, how do we help him in the meantime?"

The boy has suffered enough.

MamSonto: "Nothing prayer can't fix."

She replies with a smile, I glance at Kagiso who has fallen asleep in my arms and hope that he will not be disturbed in his sleep.

MamSonto: "Sethu."

Strange woman, we didn't tell her Sethu's name.

Sethu: "Yes."

I hope she is not about to hit us with another bomb.

MamSonto: "There is a storm coming, you need to pray. I see flames, screams, pain and agony. And you my child, will take your own life."

Shivers undulate through me at her words, this woman will cause one to have a heart attack.

Neo: "What are you talking about mamSonto?"

Me: "Why would Sethu take her life? Why will she burn herself?"

She smiles and I can't...

MamSonto: "It's not her on fire, there is a past that threatens your future. There are two men in your life, they are fighting for you. Correct?"

Sethu is too astounded to speak, I jump to her rescue.

Me: "Yes, her useless excuse of a father and Mr. S."

MamSonto chuckles and shakes her head.

I'm confused as to how she finds these things funny.



MamSonto: "The spirit of a prayer warrior lies in you, it was passed on to you by your grandmother."

Which one?

MamSonto: "Her blood is in your veins. The one who brought your father to this world."

Sethu: "Which father?"

Me: "Hello, that bum Mkhize of course. She said her blood runs in your veins."

MamSonto: "I believe you just found him? He loves you child, but his hunger for power surpasses the love he has for you."

Were we not talking about fire and brimstone?

Me: "MamSonto you said that someone is going to burn, who is it?"

Neo: "Is it Mkhize? Please let it be Mkhize mamSonto."

The laugh again...

MamSonto: "That's all I was shown, I can't see beyond that. Pray my child, pray like your life depends on it. Nothing will be okay if you don't pray."

Yes mamSonto, kill us and then leave us hanging.

She doesn't say goodbye when she leaves, Neo walks her out.

Sethu: "I am confused."

Join the line.

Me: "Do you think she was talking about Styles?"

Sethu: "I don't know, my heart wants to jump out of my chest."

Fear has her trapped. She will have to pray like she was told to...

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

201\*

RANDALL\*

There are only two days left until we tie the knot and Amara is not okay. I see it in her eyes, she pretends that everything is normal, but she is in pain. She hides behind the wedding preparations, and keeps herself busy with Liyana or whatever she can find.

"Brother."

I turn to Ife who is strolling towards me from the kitchen.

Me: "What is it?"

Ife: "Can we visit Neo? I want to see his new house."

Me: "Get out of my face Ife."

She laughs.

Ife: "I'm kidding brother, relax."

Me: "Have you seen Amara?"

Ife: "She is in the kitchen."

Amara is avoiding me, either that or I am seeing things.

Like Ife said, there she is, behind the sink washing dishes. I told her not to overwork herself.

Me: "Amara."

She gives me a brief look and turns back to the sink. Today is Thursday and the wedding is on Saturday, she can't even look at me. How are we going to say our vows?

Me: "Amara."

I miss the look of love in her eyes, I knew that she shouldn't have dug into her past. It was too soon or maybe it would have been different with a psychologist.

Amara: "Yes."

Her voice sounds normal, like the Amara I know. I'm standing behind her, I don't know if I should touch her or not. She is fragile lately and one touch could startle her.

Me: "Turn around, please."

Amara: "I'm busy Randall."

She exclaims. I take her hand, and turn her around. Her eyes fall, I get a feeling that it is shame that has her dropping her gaze.

Me: "Talk to me."

Amara: "We're talking."

Me: "You know what I mean Amara, you don't look at me anymore. Tell me what's wrong, let me make it better."

I beseech with her.

Amara: "I'm sorry, I don't want to see the disappointed look in your eyes."

She's not looking at me as she proclaims.

Me: "Why would I be disappointed in you?"

I question.

Amara: "Because..."

She shrugs her shoulders...

Amara: "Because of what happened in my past, I'm not exactly the purest person on the face of the earth."

This is why she was avoiding me? Guilt and shame has imprisoned my queen.

Me: "Amara, I will not let you do this to yourself, you hear me? What happened to you is not your fault. You are innocent, you didn't ask for it. You will not trap yourself in that world, don't do that please."

Her eyes are cast down still.

Me: "Look at me."

I use my two fingers to push her chin up so her eyes meet mine.

Me: "You are pure and you're worth it Amara. You will be okay, this I promise you me hemma."  
(My queen.)

I declare...

Amara: "Thank you Randall, for everything. I would have died if you didn't take me out of that place, I would have given up on life."

I hate these kind of talks, I hate the thought of being without her. It shreds me to pieces.

Me: "Don't dwell on that. Are you sure you want to take your sessions after the wedding? We can make an appointment for tomorrow."

Amara has agreed to see a psychologist, it's been a long time coming.

Amara: "No, I have wedding jitters. I won't be able to concentrate."

It baffles me that in the midst of her pain, she still insists on going forward with the wedding. It is my duty to make sure that she is happy and forgets her pain.

Me: "Well, wedding jitters or not. We are getting married. Did I mention that in the Ghanaian culture there is a ceremony done before the wedding? You have kneel before your future husband and serve him palm wine."

I'm lying...

Amara: "Is it too late to change my mind?"

She enquires, my statement has her scowling.

Me: "No, there is no turning back. Even if there was, I wouldn't let you. Khethile khethile." (You have chosen, there is no turning back.)

The sound of her laughter fills my ears, I have won in putting a smile back on her face.

Amara: "Where did you hear that?"

Me: "Liyana and the twins, I found them singing to it the other day."

The thought of it makes her laugh.

Amara: "Liyana is too much hey, I can't imagine how she will be when she's a teenager."

Amara has found her way back, all I can do is admire her courage and strength to fight.

Me: "Mafe wo, me hemma, don't ever stop talking to me." (I miss you, my queen.)

I pull us back into seriousness.

Amara: "I won't and don't complain when you're tired of my blabbering."

She jabs my chest with a fist, I catch her hand and bring it back to my chest.

Me: "M'akoma bo ma wo, Amara. Woma m'ani gye." (My heart beats for you, Amara. You make me happy.)

I am not accepting strange looks, this woman is a fast learner.

Amara: "If you keep talking to me in Akan, I might just fall pregnant again before giving birth to this child."

She japes and it brings me into a quick laugh, my arms are around her in a jiffy.

SETHU\*

A loud knock brings me to the door, to find Styles with bags of takeaways. I thought he had a key... Oh well...

Me: "Hey, I didn't know you were coming."

I'm given a kiss and a hug, before he slides into the house.

Styles: "You didn't want to sleep over, so I thought, let me follow my lady."

Me: "Okay, but let me warn you that, I'm not sleeping tonight."

He likes the sound of that, if only he knew.

Me: "Wipe that smirk off your face, I'm not talking about that."

He slouches and trudges to the living room.

Styles: "Why won't you be sleeping tonight?"

He questions as he puts the food on the table, I thought he knew his way to the kitchen. He reaches for a book lying on the couch, flips through a few pages. He doesn't seem to see what's happening there. It's a cook book, he tosses it on the table.

Me: "I was with Ayize and Neo today."

Styles: "Yeah, Neo told me. How is Kagiso?"

I settle down beside him.

Me: "MamSonto prayed for him, Ayize says he's been sleeping since."

Styles: "That's great, is it not?"

He's asking if I'm okay.

Me: "It is, there's something she said though. She told me a storm is coming my way and I need to pray. Something to do with two men in my life."

His bottom lip drops and I can't stop myself from laughing.

Styles: "There are two of us? Why didn't you tell me, I have competition so I can put on my best amour?"

He says, throwing me into a loud guffaw.

Me: "Stop."

Styles: "What did she say exactly?"

Me: "That one of you is in danger, I will lose either one and that will lead me to suicide."

A wrinkle builds up on his forehead.

Styles: "Did she have to scare you like that though?"

Only Styles would give this response to such an important matter.

Me: "Styles promise me that, you will be careful, I don't want anything to happen to you."

Styles: "You know I'm always careful Kitten."

Me: "I wouldn't be able to take it if something happens to you."

Styles: "Let's say something does happen, don't do anything stupid."

What is he saying?

Styles: "If I were to die Sethu, I want you to continue with your life. Don't take your life because you feel..."

I don't give him a chance to finish his stupid request as I dash to my room. Why is he saying those things to me? I hate that, how can he expect me to live without him? Haven't I lost too much already?

Styles: "Sethu."

I feel him behind me, I don't want him touching me. I am so angry at him, I don't want to see his face.

Styles: "Won't you turn for me Kitten?"

He'll talk to himself... Fool...

I'm sitting on the bed, the wardrobe bears witness to my tears. I'm about ready to pull out my ugly cry. Styles is an idiot, he doesn't think before he speaks.

Styles: "Don't you think it's bound to happen? Death is..."

It happens so fast, he's dodging before I realise what I just did.

Styles: "Don't ever do that again."

He says, his voice low and dyed with disappointment.

Me: "I'm sorry."

He glowers at me...

Shit! He hates this word, this is how it all began with Khethu. I just brought a whole bag of bad memories...

Styles bends over to take my phone, I don't care about it. I want to know if he is not upset with me, I didn't mean to throw the phone at him.

Me: "Styles..."

I take his hands.

Styles: "I thought we spoke about this."

We did and...

Me: "I am sorry, genuinely. I didn't mean to, it's just that you spoke about death and I wanted you to stop. Styles the thought of you dying kills me."

He gets it, he does. My stupid move has just put him off, that's all.

Styles: "We have to face reality though."

Can he ever be insensitive?

Styles: "We don't throw things at each other Sethu, we don't hit each other. Respect should reign in this relationship. Love is meaningless without it. I will not stand abuse, do not even go there with me."

He thinks that I will abuse him?

Me: "No, I would never do that to you Styles."

He has me biting my nail with that look he's giving me. I need to control my hormones, plus Styles is a bit sensitive with this abuse issue. Khethu really bruised him.

Styles: "Just control your anger, you don't have to act each time you're angry."

Noted... Mxm...

He's leaving me in here?

Should I follow him to see if he's still upset?

Of course he's still upset Sethu... idiot...

MBUSO\*

I rush to the telecom as it calls for attention.

Me: "Yes."

The guard tells me that there is a man downstairs by the name of Moses, the only Moses we know is Lelo's father. I can't send him away, he's here so he might as well state his reason for visiting.

"Who is it?"

Lelo is standing behind me, with Ntando next to her. The boy worries me, he has started asking for his mother. How do I tell him that she is not coming back?

Me: "Your father."

She clicks her tongue at the mention.

Lelo: "You can't let him in here, I don't want that man anywhere near my daughter. Do you know what he is capable of?"

I was there when Amara told her story.

Me: "He won't go anything near Goku, I promise. Let's hear what he has to say."

She clicks her tongue and proceeds to the kitchen, Ntando doesn't follow her. He looks at me then at Lelo, he's deciding who to go to.

Mbuso: "Are you okay?"

I query, he looks at me then back at Lelo and runs after her. He is confused and I can understand, he is still learning to trust these two strangers.

There's a knock at the door, Lelo is extremely annoyed, she hates that Moses is here.

Me: "Greetings."

Moses: "Greetings."

He returns the acknowledgment.

Moses: "Lelo my child."

He salutes Lelo in the kitchen. Lelo blatantly ignores him, Moses fails to hide to amount of hurt he feels.

Me: "Is everything okay? We didn't think you would come over."

Moses: "I'm sorry, I should have called but there is an emergency."

What emergency?

Me: "Is everything okay?"

It suddenly sounds like there is a war in the kitchen, Lelo is banging dishes and spoons. The sound of the kettle boiling joins in, we should get a new kettle because this one...

Moses is struggling to continue due to the sounds of frustration coming from the kitchen. I understand that she is upset and feels some type of way towards her father, but I need her to curtail her resentment.

Me: "Lelo..."

She can hear me, her stubbornness has taken over. She bends over, gives Ntando a packet of snacks and utters something to him. Ntando bounces through the living room, heads toward the stairs excited about this little gift he was given.

Moses: "I see the little boy is settling in."

Me: "Yes."

Moses: "I came with an urgent appeal..."

I hear a tongue click from the kitchen.

Moses clears his throat, he knows the reason behind Lelo's hostility. My hands are tied.

Oh!!!



She is bringing him food, well that's my first assumption. She's carrying a bowl of water, poker-faced.

Will she give her father water while standing?

Oh my God!!!

Me: "NOMBULELO!!!"

I am too late, she pours the water on his lap in one go. Moses jumps up screaming.

Shit!!! Goku is sleeping.

Moses: "NOMBULELO!!!"

He shouts, as he jumps around the living screaming. His loud lamentations will scare the kids.

Me: "Lelo, what have you done."

Moses: "Hayi Kodwa yini Nkosi yami. Buka lengane ongiphe yona, hau kodwa Jesu." (Lord, look at this child you have given me. Why Lord?)

He cries out loud. How did she gather up the courage to splash hot water on her father?

Lelo: "This is for what you did to Amara."

She speaks with calmness, swirled with anger and acrimony.

Moses: "Lelo, is this why you're doing this to me? Because of Amara?"

He questions, bewildered.

Lelo: "Don't say her name, that dirty mouth of yours is not worthy to utter her name."

She states, her voice lower than usual.

Moses is astounded, the cat has caught his tongue.

Lelo: "Get out of my house."

She snaps pointing at the door.

Moses: "Nombulelo uxosha mina, uyihlo?" (You're ousting your father out?)

I can't intervene in this case.

Lelo: "Ngithe phuma!!!" (I said get out.)

She shouts, losing her serenity.

Moses: "Hey, this world will shock you."

He declares, fanning his thighs with his hands. You can tell that he's in so much pain.

Lelo: "Mbuso tell this man to get out now."

Tears streak her face, it is anger and pain that I see on her. I have no choice but...

Me: "I'm sorry baba, I'm going to have to ask you to leave."

Moses is not bothered about this request, his insistence or ignorance rather provokes Lelo to run to the kitchen and I think she's...

Wow, she's bringing more water...

Moses: "Hayi." (No.)

He screams and scurries out of the house.

Lelo clicks her tongue, she glances at me with a furrowed brow.

Me: "Hot water?"

Her tongue dances into a click.

Lelo: "He's lucky I didn't castrate him."

okay... She means business...

I can't argue with that.

Me: "I'm going to check on the kids while you calm yourself down."

She's huffs.

Me: "One more thing Chubby Cheeks, should I be worried?"

She frowns.

Lelo: "About what?"

Me: "You know, maybe sleep with one eye open. Just so you know, if you burn little man here you will starve and it will take me months to heal."

My plan to make her laugh backfires.

Lelo: "Just go Mbuso."

Me: "Too soon hey?"

I get a stern look...

Me: "Definitely too soon, I'll check on the kids."

I wouldn't want to be Moses right now...

SETHU\*



It's 3am as the sound of my phone irritates the hell out of me, I should have chosen a different ring tone. I knew that I have always hated this song. I want to sleep but I have to pray, Styles is snoring beside me.

I had chosen a verse before going to bed, it's a powerful scripture and I won't go wrong with this one Psalm 35...

<<< Plead my cause, oh Lord, >>>

<<< With those who strive with me. >>>

<<< Fight against those who fight against me. >>>

<<< Take hold of shield and buckler >>>

<<< and stand up for my help. >>>

<<< Also draw out the spear, >>>

<<<And stop those who pursue me.>>>

Me: "Father I come before your throne of grace and mercy through the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Lord you said..."

Styles: "Sethu, keep it down please."

Really?

This is what happens when you're in an unequally yoked relationship.

Me: "You can't interrupt me while I'm talking to God."

I should have ignored him, he's leering at me with half-lidded eyes and a wrinkle between his eyebrows.

Styles: "Okay. Can you and God keep it down? I'm trying to sleep."

Why, am I not stunned?

Me: "I told you that I will be praying at 12am and at 3am, but you insisted on sleeping over."

Styles: "12am was okay but 3am? Come on Seriously. I'm sure the man upstairs heard you the first time. Stop troubling him, he is probably sleeping as well and your scratchy voice is there on his ear like a mosquito."

Did he just call me annoying?

Me: "God and I happen to be close okay, closer than you and me."

He sits up... Why is he sitting up? I didn't open a discussion, I need to pray.

Styles: "Should I be jealous?"

Gosh...

Me: "Lord, I think I wasn't specific when I said I want a Boaz like Ruth. Or a Jacob like Rachel even king Xerxes would have sufficed, I mean Esther found favour in his sight. I am stuck with Styles Sishi, see my fate Lord."

I feel the weight of his eyes on me.

Styles: "There are more? I thought it was just me and God fighting for your attention."

He is not as stupid as he makes himself seem, don't mind him. Idiocy happens to knock at his door once in a while.

Styles: "What time are you going to church on Sunday?"

Do I want to answer that?

Me: "At 10am, why?"

Styles: "I need to have a talk with the man upstairs."

The man upstairs, Styles? Really though?

Styles: "This setup is not working for me. We have to come up with a strategy, it's my time now and I can't cuddle with you because he wants your attention."

Nx!

I should go before his foolishness rubs off on me.

Me: "I'm going to pray in the living room."

I get up from my knees and begin to plod out.

Styles: "You see, this is what I mean. I'm left out in the cold."

I will pray for his saneness while at it.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

202\*

AMARA\*

Liyana: "Mara wake up."

Liyana's tiny voice and her minuscule hands on my face arouse me out of a deep slumber. She is sitting on the side of the bed, still in her nightwear.

Me: "If it's not your father waking me up, it's you baby."

She giggles.

Liyana: "Papa wants to talk to you."

She holds me a phone. Where is Randall? Why is he calling me?

Me: "Baby."

I salute as I place the phone on my ear.

Randall: "Maakyee me hemma." (Good morning my queen.)

Good morning? I have been disturbed from a nice sleep and he says it's a good morning...

Me: "You could have told me this in person. Where are you?"

Where could he have gone so early in the morning?

Randall: "Were you not the one who sent me away? Amara you sent me away from you because we are getting married today."

Oh Lord!!!

Liyana falls back on the bed laughing at me as I jolt up.

Me: "Randall, why didn't you wake me up?"

I'm bustling in the room and I don't know what I am doing. What to touch, where to go. My mind has fallen into a pool of confusion.

Randall: "Relax, it's still early."

Yeah... So he says. I'm a woman and time is my enemy.

Randall: "Is this what you call wedding jitters?"

Yes, that day he went on to ask me what wedding jitters are. I thought we were making progress

with this man.

Me: "Randall, I overslept."

I whine.

Randall: "Not today Amara, you will not address me by my name today. Unless you're saying your wedding vows. I love it when you call me baby, please call me baby."

We won't get anything done like this.

Me: "You're playing Randall, there is no time to play."

Randall: "You see, you should've replaced Randall with baby. We would be done talking by now."

Am I committing my whole life to this man today?

Me: "Okay, baby drop the call now or I'll be late."

Randall: "Amara."

Liyana is jumping on the bed singing out loud, the child can't get the lyrics right.

Randall: "Meet me at the altar."

He is so cheesy, it's cute...

Me: "I'll be the one in white."

He snickers at my rejoinder.

"Hey, hey sister-wife alert. I might just get jealous and stop it with the movie quotes."

Ayize states, she is here and Sethu is striding beside her.

Me: "I have to go, Sethu and Ayize are here."

Ayize scoops Liyana and puts her down.

Ayize: "Uzowa sisi." (You will fall.)

Liyana scurries out of the room, she's probably going to check on the girls.

Randall: "Okay, don't be late. I'll be waiting for you."

Me: "I know, I won't keep you waiting."

Today feels so surreal, I am going to marry the love of my life.

NTOMBI\*

Moses is different, he hardly talks to me. He won't let me touch him and the sound of my voice

still rankles him. I am losing my patience with this man.

Today is the wedding, the house is busy. There is no space to move, we're fighting over the bathroom.

Jonas and Mhambi being men are ready to go. It's 8am and the wedding starts at 12pm, how they are ready, baffles me.

Me: "Other men have bathed Moses and polished their shoes, wena you're still sleeping?" (You.)

This is how he looks at me lately, since he came home that day. His gaze has not been kind to me, I wish to gouge those eyes out of their sockets. He came home on Thursday crying that Lelo burnt him with hot water.

What was he doing there to begin with?

Me: "I am talking to you Moses."

Moses: "Ntombi, Ntombi yini? Do you want to kill me? What if I don't want to talk to you?" (What is it?)

He's forgetting who I am, I see.

Me: "You will talk Moses, you will talk today."

I stand before him right at the foot of the bed, my arms traversed across my chest.

Moses: "I am not going to the wedding."

He broadcasts and I saw this coming, he is mortified by what he did to Amara.

Me: "So you can't face your demons?"

Moses: "What are you talking about Ntombi? What demons?"

No, not this Moses. My husband will never own up to his mistakes.

Me: "I mean, what you did to Amara."

I don't have to explain, he knows what he did to the girl. He sits up emanating the heftiest sigh, he is bothered about a certain matter.

Me: "Lelo will come around..."

He cuts me as I try to help him feel better.

Why I bother? I will never know.

Moses: "Why is Amara marrying that man?"

Huh!!!

Me: "What did you say?"

Maybe I heard wrong.

Moses: "No, think about it Ntombi. He is not her type, we were supposed to choose a husband for Amara. She should be marrying a man of our choice, we know nothing about that man or where he's from."

Me: "Where is this coming from?"

His eyes run from mine, I smell a rat.

Moses: "What do you mean Ntombi? We raised Amara and it's not fair that Jonas has the last say when it comes to her life. He hasn't even given us the money, it shows that he doesn't take us serious."

He articulates.

Moses is honestly worried about this. What I can't grasp are his words. He should not care about Amara's choice.

Me: "Yes, we raised Amara, but remember you abused her? What do you want from her?"

Moses: "What do you mean? That girl should be here, she has to come back home."

He growls.

I sense a bit of jealousy in him, God let it be my imagination.

Me: "Did you want her for yourself?"

When he turns to face me there is a trace of possessiveness in those narrowed eyes, hard and cold they pierce me. The same eyes that used to look at me with adoration, gaze at me like I am an enemy.

Moses: "Don't ask me nonsense."

He might say that, but the tone of his voice testifies the truth.

Me: "I'm right, aren't I, Moses? You want Amara for yourself?"

I am pulled into suspicion by his statement, he speaks like a man who is losing the one thing that, he cherishes to his biggest enemy.

Moses: "Ngithi mina, Amara must come home. I have to stop that wedding."

My husband has decided to be a comedian overnight.

Me: "If you have a death wish Moses, try it. Go and stop that wedding, but just know that you will not be coming home tonight."

My forefinger is pointed right on his face, warning him of his vacuity.

Moses: "What do you know?"

He shoves my hand away from his sight, pushes me to the side and walks away leaving me in the presence of mix-up and complete misperception. If he thinks he has a life with Amara, then I am ready to dig his grave.



NKOMO\*

I have not seen a more peaceful sight than the one I am bearing witness to at this moment. The woman who has graced my bed left me broken, she took my whole being and shredded me to pieces to a point that, love felt like a punishment from a higher being.

I was sure to hate women after Ruth happened, but came this lady and switched my humanity back on.

Meeting her in the bushes that night was not a coincidence. I would like to think that my mother had something to do with it and now I sit here on my bed watching her serenely sleeping.

“Bhuti.” (Brother.)

I forgot that this minion is around...

He has this dull-witted look on his face, jaw thrown-down and his eyes popping out of its sockets.

“There is a woman in your bed bhuti.” (Brother.)

He points at her as he whispers what his brain is telling him to be a mystery.

Me: “Get out of my room idiot.”

Zwe: “But, who is she? What happened to that one from Ghana?”

Zwelethu is forward. I can't have privacy in my house, I need to send him back to his father's house.

Me: “You will leave this room if you know what's good for you.”

He replies with a dunce-like smile.

Zwe: “You should pick one and get married bhuti, you're getting old.”

Me: “Zwelethu!”

Chastising him will not do, he does not listen.

Zwe: “I am the only person who will ever tell you the truth.”

That's it.

He runs out as I charge at him, this has Zobuhle waking up.

Me: “I'm sorry, I didn't mean to wake you.”

Zobuhle: “I wasn't exactly sleeping, I was enjoying having your eyes on me. I had to bask.”

I have seen how she looks at me and I am afraid that I can't give her what she wants. Not right



now, maybe one day. She is a beautiful woman to behold.

Me: "I wasn't looking at you, I came to wake you up. Breakfast is ready."

Zobuhle: "I thought we were going to a wedding."

Me: "We are but you know the rules, eat before you go to a wedding."

I'm still captivated by her smile and the sound of her laughter.

Zobuhle: "I can't eat anything, my dress will show everyone that I eat a lot. My stomach is not loyal M.K, it gets too excited after I have satisfied it and filled it with food."

She states, lifting her top up and squeezes her stomach with a goofy face.

Zobuhle: "It has a life of its own."

Me: "You're something else, you know that."

Zobuhle: "Something sweet?"

The smile... She shows her teeth.

Me: "Something sweet, yebo maNxumalo." (Yes.)

I like how she could be unshrinking one minute and bashful the next.

Zobuhle: "You didn't have to sleep on the couch, you know?"

I did, I don't want to give her the wrong impression.

Me: "I'm a man Hlehle and I can't share a bed with a woman who is not fully mine."

Did I say fully?

Zobuhle: "Fully huh? So that means there is a chance that I might fully be yours? We're half way there."

Me: "That's not what I meant."

Zobuhle: "Well! How would you feel if I said that, I want to be yours M.K, fully?"

She moves to kneel on the bed, she's moving in on me. Her gaze stuck on mine and I want to move back, but I don't. Why am I not moving back? I'm not ready for this.

I will forever remember this look in her eyes.

Her lips brush against mine as she presses closer. I find myself holding her and pulling her into me. I will perish, this is I know.

Dammit! She feels good and tastes good. My mind is screaming that I stop, I have never had a woman pursue me before. Zobuhle is different, she goes for what she wants and right now she is going all out and is determined to have it.

I am okay with the single lip kiss, her hands caressing the back of my head and her breast

pressed against my chest. Her breath in my mouth.

She makes me feel wanted and she is passionate. I love how her touch is soft, I'm enjoying smelling her and having her close to me. This feels so much sweeter than sex, there is something about the way she is kissing me and the little sounds she's making. She is showing me how much she likes me instead of telling me.

Me: "Wow."

She has left me staggered, coyly she drops her gaze. This is what I meant, she can be bold and daring one minute and shy the next.

Me: "MaNxumalo! What did you just do to me?"

She giggles.

Zobuhle: "I think we should get ready for the wedding."

She states as she moves to jump off the bed, I grab hold of her and she falls on me. I have to taste her again.

Me: "You can't kiss me like that and leave me hanging."

I whisper against her lips, my hand slides on her lower back while the other takes a place on her cheek. I have to feel her again, her innocence and her madness.

Me: "Wow."

She laughs, hiding her face on my shoulder. I take this chance to enfold my arms around her and pull her close to me. You only live once and I shall take this and go with it in hopes that, she will be as genuine as her kisses tell me.

SETHU\*

So far it's just the four of us, Lelo is on her way with her kids. Chioma went all out with the breakfast preparations, everything is set up in the patio. I think she is excited about the wedding, I noticed a little bounce in her walk and a twinkle in her smile. Hey, her son is getting married...

Amara is far in thought, she has a picture of her parents in her hand. I don't know how I will feel not having my parents at my wedding.

Ayize: "You know they will start complaining if you stare at that for too long?"

Ayize breaks through the heavy silence, the things she says though. I think she fell on her head as a child. I am glad that Amara is not snubbed. She finds a joke in it.

Amara: "I wish they were here."

She reveals her thoughts.

Me: "They are here Amara, in spirit."

Ayize: "Yes and you shouldn't be sad on your wedding day. They wouldn't want you to be."

Ayize is right, an uninvited disconsolate aether lurks in the air. Amara deserves to be happy today, I am trying to think of ways to bring a smile back on her face.

Ayize: "Why is it quiet here? Music-nyana." (Where is the music?)

She is going to beat me to it.

Ife: "Yes, please I am so bored. It doesn't feel like a wedding."

Ife yawns, she is part of the bridal team along with Ayize and I.

Ayize plugs her phone to a radio and...

Eish... Wow... Gosh...

Ayize: <<< Thath' isgubhu, thath' sgubhu.

<<< Usfake ezozweni, ezozweni...>>>

She's dancing and Ife throws in her body as well, it's crazy how they have rhythm. I can't dance to save my life.

I'm still trying to figure out why this song.

Amara is laughing while I am tempted to turn off that thing.

Me: "Really Ayize?"

Ayize: "What? I grew up dancing to this song. This is real music, u ne u le kae? Waar was jy? Where were you?"

Her dance moves are just as crazy as the song.

Ayize gives me a piqued look as the music stops, I doubt that Chioma will appreciate the noise.

Ayize: "You are too young for Mr. S."

She nit-picks on my lack of fun.

Me: "The fact that you have this song on your playlist worries me."

She waves me off.

"Ife!!!"

Chioma hollers from the kitchen, Ife is highly annoyed.

Ife: "Yes."

She yelps and dashes away after Chioma has called her for the second time.

Ayize: "Mrs Randall Uze Okolie!!! How does that sound baby? You're going to be a queen in a few

hours.”

Her attention has gone to Amara who emits a sigh.

Amara: “It’s overwhelming, but I can’t shake this feeling that something bad is going to happen.”

No.

What is going on?

Me: “Can we pray?”

I get weird look for my request.

Me: “We need to ask God for guidance and protection. His presence alone is enough to deliver us.”

Ayize is not pleased but joins in still. Nothing should go wrong today.

RANDALL\*

Looking back from where I have come from, running away from my father’s repression in search of liberation and wanting to find myself. The self I had lost when my sister died, the self I had lost in my father’s words and dictatorship. I was so sure that he loved me the most amongst his children, all his attention was given to me and I was made to feel like I was the future the of the Okolies.

Much to my knowledge father had his own agendas, my life meant so little to him that he used me as bait to get what he wanted. His decisions pushed me away from my family and here I am today, I have grown from a boy to a man. A man who has a woman to love, a family to love and protect.

Life sure is a mystery, I have heard that fate can be cruel and I have had my share of its malice. But all of that has led me to this moment, a new start.

That must be Styles and Neo at the door, these two men will be accompanying me to the new journey along with Mbuso.

To my astonishment, I find my granduncle at the door. He is my grandfather’s younger brother, a guard escorts him.

He looks like his brother, you would swear that he resurrected and is standing before me.

Ife’s words resonate in my mind and remind me that he sits on the throne now, I am thrown to my knees by the revelation.

Randall: "Nana." (King.)

My head bowed down, I send my respect.

Nana: "Get up, you're the King, I am only your servant."

His hand falls on my shoulder. The guard is made to wait outside the door. Nana finds a chair to position himself, I place myself right opposite him.

Nana: "How are you my son?"

He has this thing of looking into your eyes when addressing you, one's eyes can never lie to him. It must be the wisdom that comes with age, this man before me is on his way to reaching 90 years old. I am in awe of how he has held on to life for so long.

Me: "Happy."

He smirks.

Nana: "You still give one word replies?"

Actually I don't.

Nana: "Don't tell me that, till this day you fail to express your feelings."

He knows me.

Nana was there when growing up, he and grandfather were inseparable and family meant the world to them.

I have no comeback for his report.

Nana: "Between you and I, I'm glad you ran that night. You would have perished in the hands of Segun."

Me: "Nana?"

He nods.

Nana: "I saw you leave, although it hurt, I couldn't be selfish and stop you. Uze you were not happy in that family, I saw your pain and the tears you shed for your sister every day. Everyone was too busy to notice that you were drowning. I had to let you go my son, your grandfather was angry with me, but he came to understand. Now look at you today, you have grown and are wise."

I don't know about wise, but I will take what he's giving me.

Nana: "I am proud of you Uze and the man that you have become."

Me: "Thank you nana." (Grandfather.)

His words mean the world to me.

Nana: "You have found your bride?"

I love that smile on his face.

Me: "I have."

It is replaced by a proud look in his eyes.

Nana: "You have done well, your grandfather is proud of you."

I wish he was here.

Me: "Thank you."

This is my time to take a leap of faith and express how I feel about moving to Ghana and taking up a huge responsibility.

Nana: "You know that we are waiting for you and your bride to come and lead your people?"

He says as if he predicted my next words.

Nana: "There is no rush, don't take too long though. Lest we grow weary and I'm getting old, time is not on my side Uze. You have responsibilities, don't forget that."

I trust him to lead the Ashanti people, I won't be going back anytime soon.

Me: "I won't, thank you for believing in me. I will let you know when I am ready."

My comeback does not seem to bother him, which is a relief for me. I am not ready to be pressured into kingship.

Nana: "I should go, I'll see you at the ceremony."

I get up with him and mosey to the door.

"Uze."

Neo says the second I open the door, he came alone.

Me: "Where is Styles?"

I leer down the hall way, there is noone in sight.

Nana: "Uze."

He bids me goodbye.

Neo: "Ntante-moholo." (Grandfather.)

His way of greeting, nana nods and saunters away.

Me: "I thought you were coming with Styles."

He shuts the door behind him, Neo is always the last to get ready. I am surprised that he is all dressed up.

Neo: "I told you to make me your best man, look now, we have to wait for that white man. God knows when he'll be here."

He is prattling and not answering my question.

Me: "Are you going to tell me where Styles is?"

He stands in front of the mirror to admire himself.

Neo: "I don't know where he is."

He retorts, fixing his tie.

Neo: "Eish saan, mara Zee ukhethile monna. If I knew that I looked good in a suit I would have bought one khale." (Ayize chose well.) (Long ago.)

He is not focused.

Me: "Did Styles say anything before leaving?"

Neo: "He received a call, for a second he was a little shocked and the next thing he was running out of the house. Nahana I went to fetch him and he leaves me in his house." (Imagine.)

Something is not right, Styles always informs me if we have a meeting and he's going to be late. My phone beeps, it's a text message from Nkosi and... Oh shit...

Me: "Not on my wedding day Neo, not on my wedding day."

I growl as I grab the keys to my car and phone from the table.

Neo: "What is going on Uze?"

Funny, the same question torments me.

Me: "I'll tell you in the car. Are you coming?"

The wedding is in two hours, this is bad.

Neo: "Oga kea stroya vandag, I can't dirty my suit." (I'm a groomsman today.)

I'm in the hall way as his complaint reaches me, he will decide if he's coming along or not. There is no time to spare...

To be continued...





## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

203\*

STYLES\*

Darn it! Richard is not answering his phone, I don't have his sons' numbers. He called me saying Gracey has been shot, he said men broke into their house. The line was cut before he could explain and I had to rush to help him. Minutes later he sent me the location.

I wasn't thinking straight when I left the house, Asanda suddenly came to mind. I wasn't able to save her, maybe I can save Gracey.

I arrive in Melville, the house is situated at a far corner. It is a quiet neighbourhood, there is one car parked outside. The gate is open, so I stride in.

Me: "Richard!"

The door is open, I knock one more time. I can't invite myself into someone's house.

"Come in, I'll be right there."

He says.

I guess I should, this hardly looks like a family house and it's small. There is no sign of a struggle here or anything stating that there was a robbery.

Me: "Where is Gracey?"

I ask plodding to the direction his voice came from, shock catches me and I halt on the spot.

Why is she here?

Me: "What are you doing here?"

Khethu stands with a smug look on her face.

Me: "Dammit Khethu, what have you done to her?"

What is going on?

A sharp pain pricks the side of my neck as I attempt to charge at her, I send my hand to rub away the soreness and turn to see a man with a syringe on his hand. My vision blurs in an instantly, weakness claims my knees and I am losing this scuffle.

Me: "What have you...."

It feels like slow motion as I fall to the ground with a thud and everything goes blank.

NTOMBI\*

Moses is in the toilet, I don't know what he's doing, but he has been in there for a while now.

Everyone is ready to go and I... Well I have plans for that stupid man of mine. Moses will tell me today what his intentions are and what he plans to do with Amara.

Petunia: "Ntombi, why are you not dressed? We are going to be late."

Shut up, I have more pressing matters to worry about than the stupid wedding.

Me: "You people can go, Moses and I will follow behind."

Petunia: "If you say so."

Mhambi, Jonas and his family are in the car already, we were not going to fit anyway.

Moses comes out of the toilet when the car pulls out.

Moses: "Where is everyone?"

He questions inquisitively.

Me: "I told them to go, we need to talk."

He narrows his eyes at me as he slouches to the couch, he stands on his plan of not going to the wedding.

Moses: "Khuluma." (Speak)

He sighs, I haven't said anything and he is annoyed by me.

Me: "What you said back in the bedroom about Amara, worries me. What did you mean?"

He's smiling as if it's something to be proud of, I am troubled by these sudden feelings he is showcasing. How did I not see that he feels something for Amara?

Me: "I am talking to you Moses, tell me what is going on. You're up to something and I want to know what."

I am yelling at him.

Moses: "This is your problem Ntombi, you nag a lot. That's why I agreed to meet up with Mashoto that day."

Me: "You did what?"

Moses: "Let me tell you since it's out, Mashoto and I met for drinks."

He lacks sympathy and remorse as he says this.

Me: "What do you want with Mashoto?"

If he thinks he will bring her in my house again, he has another thing coming.

Moses: "Have you ever thought that Mashoto is calmer than you Ntombi? She doesn't stress me out, she's not forever on my case and annoying me with her voice. Wena nje that's all you know and I can't do this with you anymore."

Hehehe...

What about me? The love I have given and shown to him should surpass this nagging he speaks of.

Me: "What are you talking about Moses? What do you mean you can't do this with me anymore?"

Moses: "This marriage thing, I want out."

He exclaims.

Unless I'm a fool, this has to be a joke.

Me: "So you want out? Ufuna bani ke if you don't want me?"

He drops his eyes and I find my answer from there.

Me: "Awee maa, Jesu. You are a fool Moses, you think you will have that child? Amara is your niece for crying out loud, are you not ashamed of what you did to her? Now you want her as your own?"

These words are actually coming out of my mouth and I am flabbergasted. This man is evil, after everything I have done for him. This is the thanks I get? I am not Ntombi Mngoma if he thinks I will let him trash me like that.

Moses: "Lalela Ntombi, you wouldn't understand. There is something about Amara, I saw it when she came to live with us. I loved her then and I knew that I will marry her one day." (Listen.)

He dodges the glass I just threw at him.

Moses: "Uyahhlanya wena?" (Are you crazy?)

He yells at the top and dammit, I can yell just as loud.

Ntombi: "Ngiyahhlanya Moses? You think I'm crazy? Uzongitshela amasimba and you ask me, if I'm crazy?" (Am I crazy Moses? You tell me shit.)

I'm on my feet, rage has me by the belt and I am ready to release my wrath on him. He covers his ears at the loudness of my voice.

Me: "Yebo Moses, yebo ngiyahlanya. Is this what you want to hear? Twenty years, twenty years of my life I dedicated it to you wenja and now you want to forget about it? You want to leave me Moses? Angeke, ubaba engavuka ethuneni lakhe. Awuyindawo wena." (Yes, I am insane. It will be a cold day in hell before you leave me.)

I hate the sound of his laughter right now, I am nauseated by it and the way he's slouched back on the couch. This man is really laughing, he is mocking me and my intelligence.

Continue Moses, continue thinking that I am a fool.

Moses: "Awu Ntombi mtaka ma." (My mother's child.)

His mother's child?

I am his wife for bloody sakes.

Moses: "There is nothing you can do now Ntombi, iyavalwa icasino sisi. Luphelile uthando. We don't have coins to play the game anymore." (There is no love between us anymore.)

Me: "You think you are clever neh? And then you call me your sister, you think you are clever wena Moses."

I am trying to be calm, but it is not working.

Moses: "I am clever, I mean I'm leaving you. This toxic marriage has come to an end. At least Amara has a piece of you, you should be happy about that"

He is delusional if he thinks he will get Amara.

Me: "What is your plan with Amara? Do you think that she will follow you and sail off with you into the sunset?"

I don't like the smug look on his face, he has a plan up his sleeve.

Moses: "Awumazi Us'godi wena, heyi leyandoda inamandla. Hayi shame ngiyam'vuma." (You don't know what S'godi is capable of.)

Me: "Try it Moses, try me and see what I will do."

Today he will know the woman he is married to. He rushes out of the living room, laughing. This is all a joke to him, he thinks this is funny.

I will show him 'funny.'

Moses: "Hau Ntombi, ngizokukhumbula mkami shame yazi." (I will you my wife.)

Nonsense.

AYIZE\*

It's 11:30am, we're at Shepstone gardens in Johannesburg. The ceremony and the reception will be held here. Khanyisile is a show off, I am impressed.

The décor is beautiful. Amara went for simple, white calla lilies, her bouquet is made of them as well.



They will be getting married in the garden under the beautiful sun. The sky is blue and agrees with this wedding.

The aisle is arched with white calla lilies all the way down to the altar, the chairs are adorned with off-white linen drapes. I can't wait to see what the reception looks like.

Sethu and Lelo are with Amara in the changing room, I had to go and check why the men are not here. Amara will go into early labour if she finds out, Neo is not taking my calls and I sense that something is not right.

I spot Khanyisile strolling towards me, she is all dressed up for the wedding. She waves as she gets closer. There are about a few guests seated, some look annoyed by the scorching heat while others are riveted by their phones. I like how everyone has kept to the white collar theme and the colours chosen for the guests. Strictly black and white. So far, so good.

Khanyisile: "I have looked everywhere and there is no sign of them."

She has been helping me search, Mbuso left in search of them and he hasn't gotten back to me yet.

Me: "Where could they be? I know Randy baby, he will never miss this day for anything. Khanyi, he loves that woman and this is odd."

Amara deserves better than this.

Khanyi: "They must be stuck somewhere."

That better be all or they will answer to me, Neo namely. Since when does he not take my calls?

Khanyi: "The guests are growing weary. I will find something to keep them busy."

Me: "Thank you so much Khanyi, I would have lost my mind if you were not here. It's not easy being a sister-wife you know."

She takes off in laughter, I have to check on Amara. We have fifteen minutes left and she thinks Randall is around.

"Zee."

He finally answers his phone, there is noise where he is.

Me: "Listen to me Neo, I don't care where you people are. I want your arses back here before the clock strikes 12pm."

If you laugh with these men, they take advantage of you.

Neo: "Eish Zee, that won't be possible."

He is not listening to me.

Me: "I don't want excuses Neo, I said get here now."

Is my voice not firm enough?

Neo: "We can't find Stylos, he is in trouble and we have to help him Zee."

He gives a reason for their absenteeism.

Me: "Neo, what is going on? Why today of all days? You guys cannot do this."

I declare.

Is this the life I truly want, always fighting enemies? If it were a different day, I would understand, but they were supposed to prevent this from happening.

Neo: "I'm sorry Zee, I promise we'll make it back in time."

Me: "In time Neo? It's 11:50 and the wedding should start at 12. Where is Randall? Tell him to call Amara and explain where he is because I am not ready to break her heart."

He sighs.

Neo: "Zee please, just do this favour for me. Come up with something, anything, we'll find Stylos."

Is Styles the one getting married? This brotherhood is starting to piss me off, you'd swear that nothing else matters.

Me: "An hour is all I can promise, Uze will have to spend the rest of his life apologizing to his wife for keeping her waiting."

I am not sure if Amara will believe whatever lie I will present at the table.

Neo: "Thank you baba, I love you."

That is not going to work with me.

Me: "Keep that to yourself, I am angry with you."

He exhales in frustration.

Neo: "How is Kagiso?"

My baby is okay since mamSonto prayed for him. She will be coming over to the house tomorrow. I can't wait to get rid of the dark cloud in our lives. Since she revealed Matshidiso's evil acts, the house seems a bit dark. You can almost tell that there is a dark presence.

Me: "He's with Chioma and the girls, he's okay."

Neo: "Okay, I have to go."

Me: "One hour Neo."

I remind him.

Neo: "Yes my love, one hour."

Now I have to think of a lie to tell that poor woman.

## STYLES\*

I try to stretch my body as I get ready to expose my eyes to the light. I can't move, my hands and legs., I open my eyes to see myself lying on a bed. I do not recognize this room. My legs and hands are bound.

The woman standing by the window looks familiar, I blink away the fuzziness and dammit. It was not a dream, Khethu is here. She trapped me.

How did I fall for it? I could swear the person I spoke to on the phone was Richard.

Khethu: "It's amazing what an impressionist can do hey."

She says turning around, she's wearing a red lingerie, her baby bump popping out.

Me: "What did you do Khethu?"

Khethu: "The man on the phone. That wasn't daddy dearest, it was some actor I paid. He deserves an Oscar, don't you think? I didn't think that you would fall for it, I mean the great Styles Sishi. Heaven is on my side this time, honestly I didn't have plan B."

It was all a lie

Me: "What is going on?"

My mind has not put anything together yet. How does she know about Richard and his kids?

Khethu: "How is it that you're getting married Styles?"

She climbs on the bed and now that she's closer I notice the amount of makeup she has on her face, the red lipstick recklessly smeared on her lips and the black eye liner that's flowing down her plump cheeks. She almost looks like a crazy woman. Khethu was making progress, unless she led us to believe that.

Khethu: "You know I almost burnt my house down with myself in it, when I saw the post on social media. Styles Sishi is engaged."

Tears seek to be seen as they flow down her cheeks.

Me: "Untie me, Khethu."

She is not startled by my growl.

Khethu: "You are a great actor Styles, all these years with you, you made me think that you do not believe in marriage. I don't want to get married Khethu, marriage is not for me Khethu.' Then, what is this?"

She shouts on my face.

Khethu: "What is this Styles? Why have you chosen her?"

Me: "Let me loose now."



I can't bring Sethu up, this might set her off and at the state she is in, anything is possible.

Khethu: "I'm sorry styles, I can't let you go. I will never let you go."

Her declaration shoots shivers down my spine.

Me: "What are you talking about?"

She grins, gets off the bed and I lose my mind as she starts pouring gasoline on me, I think I'm having a panic attack.

Me: "Khethu no, don't do this please."

I have never pleaded for my life before, life will humble you for sure.

Wide eyed, I watch as she pours the rest of the gasoline around the house and the last one on herself. She is going to kill us both.

She is back on the bed, straddles me, reveals a lighter and swipes it on. My heart throws tantrums in my chest that, it feels like it's going to stop.

Me: "Please don't do this baby, please. We can go away together, we'll get married and raise our baby. Just don't do this."

My world crumbles from beneath me as she throws the lighter across the room, the flames spread, meeting from one corner to another. Instantly the room is filled with smoke and sweltering heat.

Khethu: "This is the only way we can be together, no one will come between us again. I promise baby, we'll never be apart."

She runs her hands on my torso while kissing my chest. I fight to get out, the rope seems to be cutting through my skin.

She lies on me and her head stuck on my chest, her fingers keep playing with my ears. The flames and smoke have taken over the room, air can't find a way in my lungs as smoke has rented its home. My desperate pleas have fallen on ignorant ears and the more I speak, the more smoke I inhale, I'm struggling to breathe.

The room blurs, my life flashes before me, I see Sethu and the children we were going to have. How will she survive without me, she will take her life. My kitten is fragile, another death will be her down fall.

Randall will be devastated, I am the only brother he has. My father, I was going to start a new life with him. I was willing to give him a chance and now he will never know how I feel about him. He will live to think that I hated him.

Me: "Khethu, release me."

I mummer, my voice is beginning to fail me. Khethu is humming to a song, she sounds like she is drifting away.



This is it, the lives I have taken. The families I have ruined, it all comes down to this. This is how my life is going end and in the hands of the woman who once lived in my heart. She is sending me straight to hell on a train of fire.

NTOMBI\*

Moses comes from the bedroom carrying a suit case and he is ambling to the door with much as an explanation.

Me: "Uyaphi?" (Where are you going?)

Moses: "I am going to stay with Shotos for a while, until I am able to get Amara."

Me: "Nkosiyo or whatever demon has possessed my husband, please let him go."

He laughs.

Moses: "Hayi asazi." (I give up.)

He's walking out on me and I can't let him, he can't leave me, not like this.

Me: "Moses don't go."

I shout after him and he arrogantly raises his hand and waves goodbye without turning to look at me.

Me: "Moses wait."

I can't stand it, I can't take it. It's too much to handle.

Moses cannot walk away from me, not after everything I have done for him. All that we have been through, I will not let another woman eat from my table. I am angry and aggravated by the fact that, he doesn't care about me. Or if I will cope without him.

This is the only way I can stop him, this is the only way he won't leave me. The loud piercing sound meets me first before he falls face down, my hands tremble as I drop the pistol.

I can't feel anything, I'm standing here watching him on the floor and he is not moving. I don't know if he's alive or not...

HELL HATH NO FURY LIKE A WOMAN SCORNED!!!!

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

204\*

Unedited\*

NTOMBI\*

What do I do now? I killed him, I killed my husband.

So I snuck into Mhambi's room when Moses was in the bedroom and took Mhambi's gun, I wanted to scare Moses into staying. He made me so angry that the only thing I wanted was to see him dead.

Me: "Moses!!!"

I stammer.

I haven't moved an inch from where I was standing when I pulled the trigger, I don't know if Moses is alive or not. I want to check, I want to see if he is okay. I want him to be okay, also I don't want him to walk out of that door and leave me.

Somehow seeing Moses lying in a pool of blood is more comforting than the thought of him walking out on me and having another woman have what belongs to me.

Yes... Moses brought this upon himself, he might as well have pulled the trigger. But I have to do something, I have to hide him or bury him.

The gunshot was so loud, I hope no one heard it. The bullet went through his spine, he couldn't have survived it, right?

How am I going to drag him outside, he is heavy.

Moses never listened to me when I told him to lose weight, look now, I have to struggle with his pot belly.

Nonsense.

I peek out the window, the streets are packed. We should have chosen a better location than this, these neighbours are too nosey.

I almost go crazy at the sound of a knock at the door. Who could it be? I am not expecting anyone.

Me: "Who is it?"

In frustration, I yell.



"Tebogo."

How come I didn't see her outside when I peeped out the window?

Me: "What do you want Tebogo."

I toddle to the door just in case she tries to push it open. You never know with these things.

Tebogo: "I heard a gunshot."

It had to be Tebogo of all people. I have to send her away.

Me: "A gunshot Tebogo? Are you sure it came from here?"

I ask, I should not be giving her the time of day.

Tebogo: "Yes Ntombi. Open the door, why are you talking to me with the door closed."

This woman... She will be my next victim.

Me: "Eish Tebogo, that was the gas stove. My husband and I have it under control, ngicela uhambe tuu." (Please go.)

When will Tebogo stop being that nosey neighbour, she wants to know everything that is happening in the neighbourhood.

A few seconds later I hear the sound of her footsteps fade away. Now I have to deal with Moses, I can hide him under the bed until the coast is clear. I told him that we should've gotten a bigger gate, a stop nonsense. Now everyone who walks past these streets sees everything that happens in this house. That's how long their necks are.

I grab Moses' legs, he's body is still warm.

How am I going to get him out of here?

We have a wheel burrow in the back yard, I rush outside through the kitchen door. Now the mission will be to put him on top. He is too heavy for me. Nothing is thought through here.

I hear the sound of the front door open and shut as I push the wheel burrow in the house.

Someone is here, I run back to the living room to find Jonas kneeling in front of Moses' body. He leers up at me and... Lord help me, my brother is on the phone with someone. His eyes are judging me. My mind works over time trying to think of an excuse. How it came about that I shot my husband in cold blood.

My tears speak first, I don't know why I'm crying. Is it that I have been caught or that I have lost my husband?

Jonas: "I knew this day was coming."

That's all he says, I can't grasp the level of his calm demeanour. It's as if he expected me to do this. The disappointed look on his face kills me.

Me: "Bhuti, I didn't mean to shoot him, he wanted to leave me. He said he was going to marry

Amara, he said S'godi was helping him and that..."

He stops my prattling by raising a firm hand. He's holding a hard face, his teeth clamped. I swear to God I can smell the disappointment that's oozing out of him, anger weighs more than it though.

Jonas: "Moses is still alive."

He rises and moves away from the body.

Wait...

He said Moses is still alive? He is not dead? I am at least relieved that I did not kill my husband but also, I want him to stay in this state that he is in.

Jonas: "The police are on their way."

He is angry, that look in his eyes feels like a thousand needles in my heart.

Me: "Bhuti?" (Brother.)

God, did I miss that as well?

My own brother is sending me to the jail bird.

STYLES\*

The flames have spread out, time seems to have stopped. The thick black smoke hovers across the room, instant coughs and tears gush out of me.

Time seems to have stopped, all I hear is the sound of fire dancing with the objects in the room.

My gaze is transfixed on the door. If only I can get out of these ropes that are binding me, I will make it out of the house before the room is completely swallowed by flames.

Only a small amount of flames have occupied that space, I have been trying to release my hands from these ropes as weak as my body is. I have to fight for my life, fight to live.

Khethu has halted from the lullaby she was humming to, she must have passed out from the smoke. I don't care, I don't want to think about her right now. The main goal is to get out of here alive.

"STYLES!!!"

That's Randall's voice.

"He's here Uze, there's smoking coming from here."

Those bastards came for me, I want to scream for them. The relief I feel is overwhelming.

Khethu: "What... are they doing here?"

I thought she had passed out, she coughs hysterically as she holds on to me.

Khethu: "I love... you Styles... I love you too much to let you go."

She struggles to speak.

The door flails open, Randall and Neo stagger back a few steps as the smoke targets them.

Randall: "Styles."

Zooming in through the thick smoulder, I see Randall looking right at me. The amount of anger pasted on his face is a sight I have never seen. He covers himself with a blanket and Neo pours a bucket of water over him.

Randall scurries into the room. He frowns at the sight of Khethu on top of me while he cuts off the ropes from my legs and wrists, the smoke has made him an enemy too as he coughs it out of his lungs.

He pushes Khethu to the side, and helps me up. I am covered with the same wet blanket. I can't see where I am going as I have my head bowed, but his hands are holding me steady.

Suddenly they leave my shoulders, I turn back to see that Khethu has clutched his leg, clogging his movements. He grabs her by the neck and throws her on the bed.

She is pregnant Randall... I want to tell him to save her as well.

A strong pull lugs me out of the room.

Neo: "Ugrand Stylos?" (Are you okay?)

He's walking me away from the door to a seat.

Me: "Randall has to save Khethu."

I say, my eyes stuck on the blazing bedroom.

Neo: "Oa hlanya nou Stylos? After what she did to you?" (You're crazy.)

He gives me a glass of water, a frown taking over the softness of his face. Randall is coming, he's dragging Khethu by the hand. He drops her the moment they are far from the burning room, she falls on her hands and knees coughing.

Me: "Khethu..."

Randall frowns, the mention of her name seems to aggravate him.

Randall: "You bastard, how long will you continue to cheat death?"

He touches my shoulder, chuckling at his remark.

Neo: "We have seen it all Stylos, but this? I wash my hands."

He claps once.

We all turn to look at Khethu who is lying on the ground trying to catch her breath. The coughing

has ceased, the child must have inhaled smoke. She needs to get medical help.

Me: "She is pregnant."

I mutter.

Randall: "She is."

He agrees.

Neo: "U spati." (She's pregnant.)

Neo adds.

Khethu is baffled by these men who are leering at her, a frown has covered her face.

Me: "Should we help her?"

I am considering it.

Randall: "No."

He replies and he will not be going back from this.

Neo: "Makafe." (Let her die.)

Neo grunts as well.

Me: "I say we help her."

I am aware of my surroundings and what I am saying.

Neo: "Shut up, you can't even speak, but you're crying for that woman."

Neo snorts, slapping the back of my head.

Khethu sits up, fear consumes her. Her brain is trying to find a reason why we are glaring at her, she is trying hard to read our faces.

There is an irritation in my lungs, a scratch I can't reach. I rub my throat and take another sip of water.

Randall: "We have to go, this house is going to be in flames."

Randall says, caring nothing about Khethu.

Neo: "This witch will find her way out, if it were up to me, I would have left her in that room. She deserves to burn to death for her evil deeds."

Vexed, Neo clicks his tongue.

I understand where they are coming from.

Randall helps me up, he's leading me to the exit.

"Styles don't go, please."

Khethu's voice meets me. She will have to see herself out of the house.

AMARA\*

No one wants to tell me what's going on. Why the ceremony has not begun yet, instead I am kept in this room like a child. It's been over an hour and I don't know where Randall is, I can't make a phone call because Ayize came in here, took my phone with her and said not to leave the room.

These two Sethu and Lelo have multiple excuses as to where their phones are. I am being kept in the dark about something and I have to find out what.

For a while I can't recognize the person in the mirror as my mind has drifted into a faraway land. My life has not been an easy ride, it's time I move away from the stormy winter night. I have to fight for my happiness, for my children's future.

Me: "Where is Ayize?"

I have thrust the smile out of the window, this is how it feels when your patience is being tested.

Me: "Fine, I am going to look for Randall myself."

I carry the heavy veil of my wedding dress, as I drag my body up.

Lelo: "No Amara wait, you can't go out there."

Lelo stands in my way.

Sethu: "I agree with Lelo, let's wait a bit. I'm sure they are on the way."

These two have not seen the wrath of a pregnant bride.

Me: "Lelo and Sethu, do not test me. Move now."

I'm trying to breathe, it's not working. I want to scream and throw myself on the floor. My knees are weak and my heart is racing faster than the speed of light. I have been dreaming of this day, It can't be taken away from me. I won't let it.

Sethu: "Amara please."

She's touching me, someone tell her not to touch me. My anger is this close to kicking the door and I will burst any minute now.

Lelo: "Sethu."

Lelo pulls her back after the black stare I give her.

I lift my bridal tail and continue to gale to the door, my breath and my heart have opted to team up and turn against me. I am seething with anger, but pain wins against it. Deep down, I want to give up and walk away.

I am tired of fighting, when will it stop? What kind of battles go on for so long? Even the two world wars ended at some point, right?

Why is this struggle on going?

This is Randall's fault, he promised to make me happy, I am not happy right now. At this particular moment happiness is nothing, but a stranger. The feeling I had this morning of finally being Mrs. Okolie is gone, I don't know how it feels anymore.

A sense of relief washes over me as Ayize stops at the door, her eyes are bugged-out and she holds a mobile phone in her hand.

Ayize: "He wants to talk to you."

She holds it to me, I leer at it then at her. My heart is banging harder, my hands are trembling. The look on her face gives me anxiety and I am unmindful of what is on her mind. So many question swim around my brain. Is he here yet? Is he okay? Will we go on with the wedding?

I send my shaking hand to take the phone, I want to shout at him. This is the first thing that comes to mind. I am stagnant though, my mind has gone blank as I hear his breathing over the phone. It's what I am thankful for at first, his life and secondly that my kids still have a father.

Randall: "Me hemma!" (My queen.)

I am welcomed by a worried tone.

There is a jump in my heart, thank you Lord, he is okay.

Me: "Don't 'me hemma' me, where are you Randall?" (Don't 'my queen' me.)

I don't want to cry, I am not going to cry. Today is my day and it has to go right.

Randall: "I'm sorry I..."

Me: "Randall, why must you do this to me? Where are you?"

Nothing seems to be going right for me, I am going to fight for this. I deserve it, I deserve happiness.

Randall: "Amara, you would know where I am if you'd let me speak."

He does not have the right to be upset.

Breathe Amara, breathe. It's not working.

Randall: "Remember what I said this morning?"

How can I forget? it's all I have been thinking about.

Me: "You said to meet you at the altar."

I respond, softly. I am trying to keep myself calm.

Randall: "Have I ever let you down?"



I can't remember a day.

Me: "Never."

All eyes are on me now, I find my way back to a seat.

Randall: "Good, don't ever forget that."

He utters.

How can I? But when panic takes over there is nothing that one can do to curtail it.

Randall: "Now come and make me the luckiest man alive, I am waiting for you. You said you won't keep me waiting, remember?"

I can hear amusement in his tone.

Me: "You're here."

Randall: "I'm here, I'll always be here."

This man's mission is to make my heart stop in a bad and good way.

MKHIZE\*

I never thought this day would come, Bangizwe Mkhize has applied for bankruptcy. Sometimes I wonder if the curse of the Okolies still follows me, Franco was lucky to have escaped it through death.

I had a tight knit family, my brothers worshiped the ground I walked on. My word was important them and now I can hardly recall their faces nor hear the sound of their voices in my mind. Is it out of old age, or they have distanced themselves from me that far.

Like my beloved son Nkomo, Zwelethu has gone away from me, I have no one. The looks I get from my wives make me wonder what goes on in their minds, I am not the man that they used to look at with reverence.

I don't like the look Masibiya carries on her face, for how long will I be surrounded by bad news?

MaSibiya: "Baba."

She sits next to me on the couch.

Me: "What?"

She's fiddling with her fingers, there is something that she wants to tell me but she's struggling with the words.

Me: "Khuluma mfazi." (Speak woman.)

MaSibiya: "Our first wife is leaving us."

She introduces and I can't say that I am surprised, the situation in the house is not a secret.

Me: "Hai, if she feels that it's what she wants, then don't stop her."

She expected a different reaction from me.

MaSibiya: "Ngempela baba?" (Really?)

She is shocked.

Me: "Do you want to leave as well MaSibiya?"

I wouldn't want her to leave me, I'll be left with nothing. She is the pillar of this family.

MaSibiya: "No baba, I will follow you where ever you go."

She states bringing relief in my heart. This woman has stood by me through everything. Where do I begin to tell her that, this place she has called a home for years will be repossessed by the bank?

We have nowhere to go, my children will lose their home.

My taxis disappeared like a shadow in the night, I have five taxis left. What will I do with five taxis?

To be continued ...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

205\*

NARRATED\*

His heart has been racing since he stood down the alter waiting for his beloved, the day has finally come and he is as nervous as hell. His eyes are fixed down the aisle, he can't see anyone else. His mind is on her, waiting to see her.

Tears fill Randall eyes when his bride appears, she stands in a pure white wedding dress. Styles his best man has to pat his shoulder when Randall cups his face with his hands crying. Randall didn't think that he would cry the moment he catches a glimpse of Amara.

His emotions take over and he can't control them, the love of his life is coming to him, she is finally going to be his wife.

The day he has been longing for. What he is about to do was a last minute decision, his sister Ife has been by his side.

She cheered for their relationship from day one... sing for her, she will love it. The wise little sister had given him this idea a week before the wedding, Randall was not sure about it, he is not a good singer as far as he knows.

Yet singing to his soon to-be wife, didn't seem like a bad idea. A song was chosen that same day and he had been hard at work practising.

He looks at Ife who is seated with the twins, Liyana as the little bride has taken her place beside the three women who agreed to walk Amara to her new life. Ifeanyi gives him a thumbs up. Seeing Amara there gives him courage to do this.

<<< Kukhal'isginci sakho enhlizweniyami. >>>

<<< Umasumamatheka ngivele ng'zule. >>>

<<< Ndibon'ubuhle bakho ikhanda lizule >>>

<<< Kodwa K'vele kuthi huu uma ng'cabanga >>>

<<< ngithand' intombenhle kangaka >>>

<<< Sengicabangile bona ngiyosebenza >>>

<<< Wangenz' umuntu ungibona mna ngiyak'thanda >>>

<<< Wangenz' umuntu ungibona mna ngiyak'thanda >>>

<<< Khaw'tshel umama no baba inkomo zikhona >>>



<<< Seng'shoda ngawe sthandwa sami ngibe yindoda >>>

<<< Akekh' omuny' onothand' olunjena >>>

<<< Nguwe wedwa sthandwa sam' enhlizweni yami >>>

Randall's singing has some of the guests gazing at him while some wanting to see the bride's reaction.

Amara has to stop herself from crying as hard as it is, Mhambi is the one walking her down the aisle.

She can literally feel her heart racing, this is the second time that Randall is singing to her and again, the man has stolen her heart.

Her eyes wander around the beautifully decorated garden, almost every chair is occupied.

Randall continues with the song as his bride slowly ambles to him, his eyes are on hers the whole time and Randall Uze Okolie has been brought to tears.

It is finally happening after everything they have been through, they finally made it.

Naturally, they smile at the same time as their hearts are filled with excitement and joy.

Amara closes her eyes and stops for a second, her skin covered with goose bumps and her body trembling. Randall knows she is still coming to him.

She just has to stop and thank God for the person he sent her.

The moment she opens her eyes she sees him smiling and tears rolling down his cheeks. He stops the song mid-way, his emotions would not let him continue. The song is replaced by the traditional wedding song.

Amara takes her time walking to Randall, trying to grasp everything.

There is no turning back now, they are going to be joined together, something they had been longing and yearning for.

Mhambi: "Ndodana please take care of her."

The uncle says while handing her to Randall, he takes her hand.

Randall: "With my life."

He responds. Mhambi steps back to find his seat next to his wife. They are situated in the front row, the Okolies are on the same spot. The bouquet is given to the maid of honour Lelo.

Randall: "You look beautiful, almost took my breath away."

He whispers in her ear after taking her hand, with her hands in his they stare in each other's eyes.

Amara: "You were not singing like someone who was short of breath. When will you stop surprising me, Mr. Okolie?"

Amara's retort is found to be funny by this man who's looking at her like there is no one else around.

Randall: "Well, it has to stop at some point."

Amara gasps.

Randall: "Styles said it, not me."

He throws the blame on Styles who is standing behind him, you can't tell that the man went through the fiery furnace. Sethu's eyes have taken the job of a thief as they keep stealing glances at Styles.

He's different, she thinks.

There is something about the way he keeps avoiding her eyes, they haven't spoken yet and she has millions of questions for him.

Styles knows it too and he is not looking forward to explaining, he wants to forget everything that happened and live like it's his last day on earth.

Neo doesn't seem to understand why the couple is whispering to each other, their conversation should be heard by everyone. That is what's done at weddings.

Neo: "Uze, we can't hear you."

As loud as Neo usually is, his complaint flies across the yard tickling everyone.

The pastor takes over from there, he gives them a chance to say their vows after he's done with the formalities.

Amara: "It's official, I get to marry the best man I've ever dreamed of, my best friend, the king of my heart. As a child I've always believed in fairy tales until there came a time when life proved me otherwise, but then I met you Randall Okolie and you made me dream again.

You showed me how to live again and proved to me that fairy tales do exist because every day with you is a fairy tale. You love me for me, you love my flaws and my imperfections. You protect me and sometimes more than you should and I have to admit it gets on my nerves sometimes."

They both laugh along with the guests.

Amara: "But I love it, it's who you are and I can't deny you that. And get this, although it took you forever. You check on me to make sure I'm okay and if I've eaten and that too can be a bit annoying sometimes, I love it still. I love everything about you Randall. I love your good strong heart, I love your compassion towards people, believe me you are compassionate. You just don't know it yet."

She has to clarify that, it has him smiling and the crowd twittering.

Amara: "I love how you inspire me and encourage me. I love that hidden smile of yours, I never told you this but it always makes me weak in the knees."



She clears as the smile appears as if it was called forth.

Amara: "I love you beyond reason, I love you through it all. I love you with my heart, my body, my mind and my soul. Thank you for being the best man that you can be, thank you for our baby girl Liyana, I promise to love and protect her with my life. She will find a role model in me and a mother who will guide her through life. I am not perfect Randall, but I promise to be what you and Liyana need."

"And R. J."

Someone whispers from behind her, Amara giggles as she realizes that it is the one and only Ayize. Who else can it be but her?

Amara: "And R.J."

She didn't think she would go so deep, but her heart took over like it always did. Tears are falling her and Randall is finding it hard to control his. He too has a mouthful to say.

Randall: "Me hemma, today you are finally becoming my queen. I have been waiting for you all my life. Why did you keep me waiting?" (My queen.)

Neo: "Ntante-moholo." (Grandfather.)

Neo comments as he reaches to pat his shoulder, Randall is made a joke as the crowd laughs at his friend's comeback. He shakes his head and continues with his vows.

Randall: "I have waited for this day the moment I caught a glimpse of you, I knew it would be impossible to live without you. They say the most beautiful thing in the world is when two people become fluent in choosing one another and I choose you. My heart has chosen you, with every breath, every move and every chance in life, I will forever choose you. I panic when I'm away from you, that's how much you've become a part of me. I don't think I'll ever like anyone as much as I like you. I said it the other day and I'll say it again, I like you a lot. You make me laugh and believe me no one else can achieve that."

He says and frown smiles at the sound of the guests laughing.

Randall: "You know me better than I know myself. You always seem to know what I'm feeling, thinking or what I'm about to say. It creeps me out a bit sometimes but..."

Again the sound of laughter and giggles, Amara is made to smile.

Randall: "...It makes me happy because I know that I am loved beyond anything, what more could a man ask for? When I have to go somewhere you call to check if I got there safe and send me thousands of texts. You're the only woman who makes me cry and that too tears of joy. You taught me how to love myself and people around me, you taught me forgiveness and how to let go of the past. I am the man I am today because of you, I have grown in all aspects of life. I live for you Amara Buthelezi. Saying I love you will never be enough, hence I will prove it every day, I will live it and I will show it. I promise that you will feel my love for you in everything I do."

Randall speaks with every inch of him, he loves this woman and this kind of love only comes once in a lifetime. As the pastor declares...

"You may kiss the bride."

Randall smiles genuinely.

Neo: "Go for it Oga, don't hold back." (Boss.)

Neo the friend who seems to always have an opinion, has become the clown at this wedding. He gets a warning from the only woman who knows how to put him in his place.

Randall goes for it like Neo suggested. The kiss is meant to be brief, this is what they had discussed because well... Mhambi and Petunia are from the deep rural, kissing is probably done in the bedroom with the lights off where none of them can see each other. It's got to be an abomination.

Randall: "Mrs. Randall Uze Okolie, I love that and I love you."

He whispers to her after kissing her and leans over for another kiss. Mrs. Uze Okolie, see how he embraced his native name. The same name that made him despise his blood and his culture.

It really was an emotional ceremony.

The reception is as beautiful as the garden.

Randall: "I still can't get over how beautiful you look."

He says as he holds her in his arms while they dance in the presence of family and friends.

Amara: "You look breath taking yourself Mr. Okolie."

She declares swaying in his arms.

Randall: "I am happy and I love you, thank you."

He places a kiss on her lips.

Amara: "I love you more."

She says.

"May we cut in?"

They turn to Lelo's voice and Mbuso is standing next to her.

Amara: "Why not?"

Amara...

She glances at Randall, he doesn't seem to like the idea.

Lelo: "Don't worry Randall, she'll still be here."

Lelo laughs as she dances with Randall while Amara dances with Mbuso.

Lelo: "I have never seen her this happy before."

Lelo introduces, they are both staring at Amara who is having a laugh with Mbuso.

Lelo: "Please take care of her, she's been through so much."

She adds.

Randall: "You know she's my life, I'll always make her happy."

Randall...

There is no question about it, it was his life goal from the moment he saw her.

Lelo: "I know this is not the time or place, but I want to ask you to make sure that crazy man doesn't come anywhere near my sister."

Randall's face changes. He looks angry and enraged, he knows who Lelo is talking about.

Randall: "I will kill him before he does."

She just had to bring him up.

Lelo: "I'm sorry I shouldn't have spoken about him, not today."

Mkhize has been a thorn in the flesh, it has not been easy to get rid of him. A coffin with his name is ready, but the thought of him set free by death does not sit well with Styles and Randall. How about he loses power and everything he cherishes?

A man like Mkhize rides on power, he loves respect and dominance dines with him at the table. Losing his position in life will destroy him more than death ever could. He is a man who is respected and feared in the taxi business. Men older than him look up to him and young men want to be him when they grow up.

Styles has thought this through, a new life awaits that man.

Lelo: "That's the thing, he'll always be on our minds because we don't know when he'll strike. I know Amara hasn't said anything, but I know she thinks about it too."

Lelo says to a Randall whose eyes keep meeting his bride. She can tell that he is mad about something and wants to go to him.

Lelo: "She looks worried, let's not talk about it she can see you're upset."

Randall winks at Amara, he wishes this dance with Lelo would end.

He doesn't want Amara to worry about anything especially on her special day.

"Sis Amara."

Mbali says, stopping Amara and Mbuso's dance session. She gives her, her phone that had been with Liyana since the reception started.

Mbali: "Your phone was ringing, there are messages."



Amara finds it odd, who could be calling her? All the family members are present at the wedding except for Jonas, Mhambi had explained that he had to rush to a business meeting. Elders teach about the wrongs of lying while they master it like the devil himself.

"You don't know what you have just gotten yourself into."

The message reads and she drowns into a flood of confusion. The text is strange and leaves her with nothing but questions.

Mbuso: "What does that mean?"

Mbuso asks and this is when Amara realises that she actually read the message out loud.

Mbuso: "I'll call Randall."

Mbuso says when he notices the fear in her eyes.

"No."

Amara stops him.

"No, Randall can't hear about this, not today. He'll go crazy, please don't tell him anything. This is Mkhize, he's trying to ruin my day."

She wishes Mbali had kept the phone.

"Don't say anything to who?"

Amara turns around and there he is standing behind her.

Randall: "What happened?"

He questions, he sees how her mood has changed.

Amara: "Nothing."

She wraps her arms around his waist.

Randall: "What were you talking about?"

He probes after Mbuso has walked off. He wants to know what has made Amara upset.

Amara: "Nothing important."

She can't tell him, knowing Randall he would stop everything and go looking for the idiot. But he is clever too, he knows when she's keeping something from him. As bad as the feeling is, he doesn't want to ruin their day by insisting, if Amara has something to say then she has to trust him enough to tell him.

Randall: "Should we sit?"

He says and leads her to their seats, it's not long till a song starts and the couple knows who is behind that, Ayize. The sister-wife as she would call herself.

Almost everyone is brought to the dance floor, it is a song that brings people to their feet.

Brenda Fassie's Vulindlela.

Styles has not given off anything to Sethu and he is thankful that she has not asked him anything although, her looks have said a thousand words.

Styles, Neo and Mbuso are seated on Randall's right hand side while Amara and her bridal team are on the left.

Nkomo brought his new fling, he is seated at the same table with the Okolies. Ife, Chioma, Liyana and the girls. Nana is present at the table as well.

Styles is the first to deliver a speech he is the best man after all, a mic in hand and all eyes on him. He clears his throat.

Styles: "Where do I begin?"

Neo: "From the beginning Stylos."

Neo shouts from where he's seated.

Styles: "Thank you Neo."

Styles says, he takes a second to recall everything he has been through with these two men. Randall more especially, they have come far.

Styles: "I was sixteen when I first met Randall, he was fresh from Ghana. He was short and skinny and I bullied him. Don't let the big body fool you, he was a mouse back then."

Styles has cracked his joke, according to the people. Randall can only smile at his silliness.

Styles: "We became close and I knew that I will die for this man and he would do the same for me. As small as Randy was, he had a smooth tongue. Could talk anyone into anything.

Styles' mention has Randall moving on his seat and Amara giving him the look. She knows where Styles is taking this, Styles notices the damage he is about to spew in this peaceful union.

Styles: "So, this bastard couldn't spell the word love. He literally ran away from anything that, had to do with love until Amara happened. She became love to him and he was drawn to her, I knew that there was no running away this time. He was trapped and believe it or not Randy, I anticipated this day. You in the white tux sitting next to that woman. I am glad that you didn't deny yourself a chance to love, but you fought for her and here you are today. I wish you all the happiness in the world and Amara give the man as many children as you can, he wants twelve by the way."

The room erupts into guffaws, Amara is left shaking her head. The only thought she has is that,

one child is enough.

Randall: "You heard that?"

Randall says leaning in on her, she wants to give him that smile, but the supposed twelve kids have held her smile back.

Styles: "Once R.J is born, you two are going to be busy. We want a soccer team and Neo has names for them."

Such a private matter that should not be said in the presence of the elders. Maybe it's about time they retire for the night.

Styles: "Here's to a happy marriage to Randall and Amara, you two deserve all the happiness in the world. I love you guys."

Glasses are raised across the room as a toast is made to the newlyweds. Randall is given the mic, he decides not to take the stage but stand where he is.

Randall: "Thank you bro for that lengthy speech."

Randall teases when he gets up, he smiles at the sound of the guests laughing. He turns to his wife who is seated right beside him.

Randall: "Mrs. Okolie! You don't know how long I have waited to call you that and it feels so good saying it. My wife, my love, my baby welcome to my life once again and thank you for saying 'I do'. Thank you for tolerating me, I know I can be such a big baby sometimes. Thank you for letting me be myself with you, I can't wait to start life with you. Me do wo, me oyere." (I love you, my wife.)

He ends with a ghost of a smile on his face, kissing her as he sits back down.

Amara: "I see Randall kept it short."

Amara jokes as she looks at Styles with a smile, again the laughter coming from the invitees.

Amara: "Randall! I really don't know how to express what I'm feeling right now, but I am happy if that sums it up. I never thought I would ever find someone like you, someone who loves me beyond my flaws and mistakes. I'm not perfect, but in your eyes I see my worth. You never let me be angry for any reason even when it's necessary for me to be. No matter what I go through just a glimpse of you, makes everything seem alright. Thank you for loving me this much. The past year spent with you has been amazing. Wo ne, me do wiase. Medo wo nka ara, me okunu. (You are the love of my life, I love only you, my husband.)

Ayize breaks into loud ululation as she swings into the dance floor and breaks into a dance of a young Zulu maiden. She is joined by women who are rejoicing in this moment of bliss.

Cheers, laughs and applauds fill the reception. Amara spots Petunia in the midst of the crowd and she can't be happier, Mhambi is around as well she sees her parents in them.

It is said that practise makes perfect, just like the groom had been hard at work with the song he sang. Amara too was in a quest to perfect something, all for love.

Randall stands up, wraps his one arm around her waist and kisses her. Words can't express how they feel for each other.

He catches a preview of nana, seated at one of the front row tables. He nods in agreement, pride calling him by name and this affirms Randall that nana approves of this woman beside him.

Ife: "Okay I think we heard enough of the sweet words at the wedding ceremony."

Ife says laughing with the amused visitants. Everyone was given a chance to say their bits and pieces.

AYIZE\*

Who tested the devil and gave Neo the platform to speak? This is a disaster, if I could hide under the table I would.

Neo: "Yeah neh!"

He is looking at everyone with a judgemental stare.

Neo: "Le batle mense, dammit. Ke Christmas vandag, ho monate." (You're beautiful today.)

Lord I'm ready, take me now. I don't have to wait for your second coming.

Neo: "Some of you have had a long distance relationship with water since winter, kea tseba hore you don't bath during winter. Mara guys, ke summer nou. Hlapani toe. Le uena." (I know.) (Please bath, it's summer now.)

He points at a guy in front of him.

Neo: "Jean ena e white. Was it white or brown? U e bleach-ile? You pulled a Khanyi Mbau on it. Mara u strong my guy, jeer." (Did you bleach your jeans?)

Neo get off the stage, it's strange that people are laughing.

Neo: "Uze le me hemma, re tsoa hole yoh. Who would have thought that the great feared Uze would fall in love hey? As shaka would say, us'gaqagaqa. Now me hemma she de carry belle?" (Amara and Randall, we have come a long way.) (Mr. Tough guy.) (Amara is pregnant now.)

"Shut up Neo."

That's Styles.

Neo: "Stylos don't make me start with you, today is not your day."

Some things are not necessary.

Neo: "I wish you guys all the happiness in the world."

Amazing he's done. He won't embarrass himself further.

Neo: "With all that being said, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the woman who has taken my heart, the one who bewitched me just to have me in her life. Eyy Basadi guys le boloi, same WhatsApp group." (Women and witchcraft are inseparable, but we still love them.)

Okay, this is the moment where I hide. He is looking at me and I want to run out of this place.

Neo: "Like the Zulu men would say, sponono sami, swidi lami lomkhuhlane. Thambo lami le kentucky, awu suka madoda ngiyayi thanda lentombi." (Love praises.)

There is laughter, Neo has turned a wedding into a comedy show.

Neo: "Aii shame, mazulu a na le drama." (Zulus are dramatic.)

He has captured everyone's laugh bones.

Neo: "Oga, if you don't mind can I steal this moment from you? You're already the King of Ghana so you have to share the spot light."

Randall nods, I wish he didn't. I can only wonder what this Sotho man has to say. Oh no! He's walking up to me.

My life is not exactly a fairy tale.

Neo: "Zee, I love you and I want you to marry my mother."

Someone burry me now, it's even embarrassing that people are laughing.

Is he proposing? Or what?

Neo: "I mean mother my marry, no no, I mean..."

Breathe Neo."

Styles shouts from across the table.

Neo: "Okay, let me start, Zee will you please be my mother."

That's it, it's over. Strangely I find him cute with his mama's boy tendencies.

Mbuso: "Leave that to the professionals Neo, izinja zegame." (The bosses.)

Shame, the joke is on Neo now.

Nkomo: "Maybe we should call mommy, he needs help."

I am offended, I should be offended. I should say yes to whatever he's asking and get him out of his misery.

Neo: "Don't make me swear at Uze's wedding. Have you people seen this woman? Of course I would be nervous."

He's sweet. He digs into his pockets and I did not expect this.

Neo: "With this ring, I thee wed."

He says and I am ready to move to China and start teaching English. Giving up on love would be ideal right now. People are dying of laughter, the couple has lost the spot light. It's now on us and how do I hide my face?

Me: "Neo focus, you're all over the place."

I cup his jawline as I whisper to him, the man is sweating.

I grab a napkin and wipe the dribs of fluid from his forehead.

Neo: "Okay, I can do this. I can do this."

He repeats a mantra to himself.

Neo: "Ayize would you make me the king of your heart and marry me? Would you be Kagiso's mother and complete our family?"

You see? He just needed time.

Styles: "Finally, I thought the rest of the night would be about you."

These men enjoy teasing Neo and the crowd is having a great laugh about it.

Me: "Yes baba, I will marry you."

Nkomo: "Great, I guess I'm the only one who hasn't caught the wedding fever. I need an umbrella, I can't be caught under this rain."

Who died and made him master of ceremony? I don't care anymore, I'm engaged.

Narrated\*

The night is going well, better than the couple expected.

"It's that time of the night where we say goodbye to the newlyweds as they depart to their honey moon, Randy baby wouldn't tell us where they are going."

Ayize announces to everyone while glancing at Randall.

Randall: "I couldn't risk my wife finding out and ruining the surprise."

He says as he places his hand on Amara's.

"What do you say Mrs. Okolie, shall we get out of here?"

He continues, she smiles back.

Amara has no clue where they are headed to, Randall has kept this secret locked up.

To be continued...



NOMBULELO\*

Mbuso: "Hey, we should get the kids home. Where is Ntando?"

Mbuso says as he stops in front of me. The couple has left so there is no reason for us to hang around here.

Me: "With the other kids, I want to speak to my uncle first."

Mbuso: "I'll come with you, let me take Goku."

Uluthando is such a sweet child, she's hardly fussy nor does she cry a lot. Mbuso takes the baby from me, as we walk towards uncle Mhambi and Petunia who are getting ready to leave. I'm still dazed that uncle Jonas is married, he has a family.

Petunia: "Awu Jesu, let me see this beautiful angel." (Oh Jesus.)

Smiling in adoration, she takes the baby from Mbuso.

Mhambi: "She's growing."

My uncle has not held Uluthando in his arms yet, he lets Petunia do the honours. I don't know if it's out of fear of dropping the baby or a notion he follows.

It's only been a few days, Uluthando still looks as tiny as she did the first day. God has been good to me, our child does not have any complications.

Me: "We came to say goodbye."

I start, no one is looking at me. Uluthando has captivated them.

Mhambi: "Okay my child, we are also leaving."

Me: "We can drop you off."

Jonas is not around, neither are my parents. I don't care about them, I'm glad they are not here.

Mhambi: "Don't worry about it, our son in-law took care of it."

Will he ever address Randall by his name?

Me: "Where is malume?" (Uncle.)

There is a stare between Mhambi and Petunia, it dresses me with worry. I hope he's fine. Saziso looks okay, there is no worry or concern visible on her face. That means Jonas is okay, he has to be.

Mhambi: "Your mother has been arrested."



Again?

Me: "What did she do this time? I hope it has nothing to do with Tebogo's cow."

Mhambi: "She shot your father."

Wow.

What a way to end the night, then again my mother couldn't have done that. I'm having a hard time believing that she's capable of such a thing.

Mbuso: "Is he okay?"

I was not about to ask this question, I want to know if my mother is okay. Moses? Not so much.

Mhambi: "He's in the hospital."

That means he's still alive.

Mhambi: "Your uncle is waiting to hear more, we are praying that Moses doesn't die. If he does, your mother will be charged with murder."

I have been through a lot with my mother, I loved her and hated her. At the end of the day she is my mother and I wouldn't want to see her suffering.

Mbuso: "What will happen to Ntombi?"

Great, he's forgetting that he's talking to Mhambi. Addressing Ntombi by her name is disrespectful according to him, thankfully it seems uncle missed this part. He is too concerned to notice.

Mhambi: "I don't know yet, there is no escaping this one. Nombulelo, your mother will be away for a long time."

The thought of her behind bars scares me.

Me: "This is my father's fault, he destroyed her malume." (Uncle.)

Mhambi: "There is no use in playing the blaming game Nombulelo. What's done is done."

He is calm about this, maybe he's dying inside. Mhambi hardly show his feelings.

Petunia: "Will you see your father?"

Not a chance.

Me: "I'm done with him aunt."

Mhambi: "He is still your father."

I don't care about that, but I can't say this to my uncle lest he sees it as back chatting.

STYLES\*

Randall's plan actually worked, I spoke to Nkosi a while back. He says Mashoto managed to build a bridge between Moses and Ntombi. Moses is lying in a hospital bed as we speak. This is only the beginning, if only he knew what's in store for him.

"Styles."

Nkomo calls as he walks up to me with a girl.

Me: "Hey,"

Nkomo: "Great wedding hey."

Me: "It was, I didn't think that it will go so well, seeing how trouble follows us."

He sniggers after clearing his throat.

I see an introduction coming, the lady is smiling while holding on to his arm.

Nkomo: "This is Zobuhle."

Yep...

I'm waiting to hear who Zobuhle is to him, although it's as clear as day light.

Me: "Hi."

She reaches her hand for a shake.

Zobuhle: "I have heard a lot about you Styles."

I can't say the same about her, Nkomo is good at this secret thing.

Me: "Good things I hope."

She twitters.

Zobuhle: "Only good things, I promise."

Me: "Nice to meet you, Zobuhle."

Zobuhle: "Likewise."

She returns.

Nkomo: "So, where is the couple headed?"

He asks.

Me: "Road trip across the country, he thought she would love that. You know how her movements have been limited, so a short left in each province should give them a breather."

Randall came up with this idea, why not tour the country. Amara is into simple things and this would be a great surprise for her.

Nkomo: "Trust Randall to give such an idea."

Is he complaining or what?

Zobuhle: "I think it's romantic, South Africa is beautiful. I'm sure Amara will be elated."

I know she will be.

Me: "True."

Nkomo: "We have to go now, I don't want to catch the wedding fever. Seems like you and Neo have been caged."

He chortles at his saying.

Me: "You're an idiot, your time is coming."

The look on his face says he doesn't believe me.

I see Sethu approaching us, she looks dead tired.

Sethu: "Babe."

She hugs Nkomo after I get a nudge on the shoulder.

Nkomo: "Are you good."

Sethu: "I'm tired, my feet are killing me."

She finishes off the last line with a yawn.

Me: "We should leave then, Liyana is coming with us."

Sethu: "Yes, Chioma is with her and the girls in the car."

Zobuhle has been staring since and it's getting uncomfortable.

Nkomo: "Can we do breakfast tomorrow morning?"

He's asking Sethu, I believe Sethu has met Zobuhle, I saw them dancing together a while back.

Sethu: "Can I let you know in the morning?"

Nkomo: "No problem, you should rest."

I think we should leave now, the stares I'm getting from this girl.

Nkomo: "Hlehle, staring is rude."

Thank God he noticed.

Zobuhle: "I'm sorry, it's just that you look familiar. Maybe I'm going crazy but if you were not lighter I would literally call you uncle right now."

What?

She clenches her eyes as she bites her lip, none of us seem to grasp what she just said.

Nkomo: "How much did you drink MaNxumalo?"

Nkomo and his Zulu pride.

Zobuhle: "Sorry again I mean, you look so much like my uncle. Only you're younger."

She states and I am confused.

Sethu: "Is your uncle, Richard?"

Zobuhle frowns, Sethu has tangled her mind.

Zobuhle: "I don't know who Richard is, but I know a Sbusiso. He's my uncle and you look just like him, you sound like him too."

Could this be the puzzle I have been trying to solve? There is no way that this Sbusiso she speaks of is my father. He could be my mother's something.

Me: "Tell me about him."

Zobuhle: "Well he lives in Diepkloof ext with his wife and son. Their older daughter is married. She's about my age."

Me: "I'd like to meet him if that's okay."

Zobuhle: "Sure, I'll have a talk with him and I'll let you know."

Me: "Does he have any siblings?"

Zobuhle: "No, he's the only child. He married my aunt, she's my father's sister."

She says, taking away the little hope I just bagged. I should meet up with him, there must be a reason why I look like him. Unless Zobuhle's vision is not to be trusted.

Nkomo and Zobuhle bid us goodbye, I take Sethu by the hand. She rests her head on my arm as we walk out of the building.

Me: "Are you hungry?"

Sethu: "More like tired, my stomach is full. I want to sleep now."

Me: "Hey, I told you to go easy on that plate. You should have seen my face when you went for seconds. I didn't know you eat that much."

She lets go of my hand and pushes me.

Me: "What happened now?"

Sethu: "You don't tell a girl that she eats a lot even if she does."

Me: "That's not fair, you tell me when I eat a lot."

Sethu: "Because you're a man. You're not allowed to be offended."

I'm pressing the wrong button here.

Me: "Have I signed myself to a lifetime of bullying."

Sethu: "Yes and your first task is to massage my feet as soon as we get home."

There goes my freedom....

OKOLIE RESIDENCE...

This must be a dream come for Randall, to have the house all to themselves. Something he wanted from the time he had this woman who is walking beside. She is finally his wife and he couldn't be happier.

Amara on the other hand is sulking as they take steps up to their bedroom. She's upset with him and he has noticed. But, what is stopping him from asking her what the matter is? She wants to vent and complain and scold him and maybe throw in a kick in the nut. This is not what she saw on Chioma's TV shows, the man carries the woman in the house when they get home from the wedding.

Not Randall Okolie, he is not Brad Pitt and this is not Hollywood, but real life where the likes of Randall Okolie reside.

"Me hemma." (My queen.)

He stops her halfway up the staircase, she crosses her arms and takes up a frown.

Who is she kidding?

She has forgiven him, he is not the most romantic man on earth and that is something she has to live with.

Randall: "Sadness in your eyes on our wedding day?"

Technically, it's past 12am, their day has passed with the last few minutes.

Amara: "I am not sad."

Spoiled is what she would christen herself, she sulks and he falls at her feet and demands to know why the queen of his heart has left her stool of happiness.

Randall: "We're still going to have sex right?"

Raising his eyebrows he tilts his head down, wanting to catch a glimpse of her eyes, the windows to her soul, the only place where the truth dwells.

Amara: "Am I being tested?"

Her question causes a frown on his face, he is not sure if he said something wrong. It's bad enough that his words are not scripted nor are his moves directed, but at least he tries.

Randall: "I'm only making sure because you're sad for a reason I cannot find, even your eyes have opted to conceal this matter from me."

Forget that she was upset a few seconds ago, his words can be adorable.

Who speaks like that?

Randall: "So, this smile means that we are having sex tonight or do I have to wait till we get to our honeymoon?"

He calls it sex, she calls it love making. To Randall it's one in the same thing, but his bride has different meanings for it. Sex is just sex, meaningless and rushing to get to orgasm and love making is when two souls connect and flow together on the rivers of love.

It is when you give your whole being to this person that you trust, enough to let them inside you. It is a sanctified union that births a different love each time it is performed.

Amara: "You're full of jokes tonight Uze."

He cringes, it's all new to him. She doesn't call him Uze. Randall presses himself against her. He wants to feel if her heart is racing. If it is, then she's thinking about it or considering it.

Randall: "Is that a code for yes we are having sex?"

All of her strength falls with the last word he utters.

Amara: "Please take me to the nearest bridge."

She draws in a deep breath, this is her giving up on this man.

Randall: "Me hemma, you're killing me." (My queen.)

Amara: "How?"

She knows she will regret asking him this.

Randall: "You're speaking in riddles today and I am too horny to be guessing. Am I not your husband? Shouldn't you be feeling sorry for me?"

Amara can only find a scowl to answer his question, words to answer it have not been made yet. Deciding to walk away from him, she continues with her steps to the bedroom. Maybe she should try that thing.

A surprise that was reserved for the honey moon has to be opened now because she is married to typical Randall.

Randall: "Wait for me."

There, is that whisk she's been sulking about, it is rather too late though. They are in the house.

Amara looks up at him as she hooks her arms around his neck, his eyes are staring back and it has her feeling bashful.

Amara: "Why am I not using my feet?"

A ghostly smile is invited to this lips, a flash that disappears in the blink of an eye.

She sits up from the bed and spreads her feet forward. He's on top their lips moving together as one.

Amara: "Wait, let me go freshen up."

He doesn't understand the statement, hence the glower on his face.

Randall: "You don't need to freshen up, you're okay."

She pushes him as he leans in for another kiss.

Amara: "Exactly, I don't want to look okay. It's our wedding night, let me look sexy for my husband."

Nothing can make his heart jump like that, than hearing her call him husband.

Randall collapses on the bed, making way for her to move.

Amara disappears into the bathroom, she knows what to wear. It was carefully thought out.

Randall is probably sleeping by now, she thinks to herself. She has been locked up in the bathroom for too long. He went from whistling to humming all in the space of fifteen minutes.

"Amara."

A groan passes through the bathroom door, he's complaining.

Amara: "I'll be there."

She smiles at his impatience.

Randall: "Hurry before I start servicing myself."

The smile is wiped away by his words.

Amara: "You wouldn't dare."

She yells back.

Randall: "You're daring me Amara, come out of there."

Three babies in the house, how will she be able to deal with that? Who is worse, Liyana or Randall?

She finds him lying on his back, in all probability counting the tiles on the ceiling. Amara has to clear her throat to get his attention, he lifts his head and almost jumps up seeing her in a lingerie. It's a mini dress that covers her four months old baby bump.

Randall: "Wow."

As strange as it may sound, this is the first time seeing her in a lingerie. His mind has packed its

bags and is on a plane to Dubai, leaving his head empty.

Amara nervously waits for a comment from him, apparently if seeing her in that outfit doesn't drive him crazy, then she has failed. The astonished look he bears is a confirmation that he is blown away by her.

Randall: "Amara, if I were to ask for anything then this would be more than enough."

He's on his feet now as they lead him to her. Her nerves take a back seat, the look in his eyes has made it easy for her to be comfortable in that little outfit.

Amara: "I want to service you today my king."

Her hands have employed themselves, snapping one button at a time on his white collared shirt. She plants kisses on his bare chest until she has popped the last button, the shirt slides down to the floor with the help of Amara.

Randall: "What are you doing me hemma?"

This question... because she has never taken lead in the bedroom.

Randall: "Are you sure?"

He doesn't trust that she would be comfortable with pleasing a man after what she went through.

Amara: "You know if I lose interest I will go straight to bed?"

Of course she is not experienced in dominancy, but there is no harm in trying something new, plus she feels sexually empowered.

Kissing her is his way of saying continue I am not stopping you.

As their lips find their way to each other, she kisses him in a new way. A way he is not aware of, he loves it still.

She pushes him to sit on the edge of the bed, he looks up at her she moves to sit on his lap facing him and her arms rest on his jawline.

The passionate kiss takes place, Randall has his large hands on her back rubbing and squeezing her. His hands are now all over her body, he has claimed that spot on her neck, she pulls back and pushes him to lie on his back. He smirks seeing the lustful look coated in her eyes.

What could she be up to? He wonders...

Amara: "Did I tell you how I love the taste of your lips?"

She has to kiss him again not waiting for an answer.

She grazes her dry lips across his forehead gradually encircling them over his temple, he shivers at this.



Randall: "Kiss me already me hemma."

He wants to taste her lips again and she is keeping him waiting. He is her king after all and his wish is her command, she flicks her tongue on the roof of his mouth in an arch.

Randall: "Whoa!"

He exclaims, she knew this was going to drive him insane. Removing his pants is not hard nor is it awkward, he's watching her while she nervously pulls them down. Leaving him in his trunks.

Starting from above his knee, she plants light kisses, he can barely feel them but they are there. The pressure of her lips increase as she moves up.

He frowns going crazy with anticipation when she starts over on his other knee. Her fingers fall on his trunks, she wants to expose him and Randall seems to predict what is on her mind. The little gulps of anxiousness, show on her throat. It's too soon for her to go down on him, she has barely started with her therapy.

Randall: "You don't have to do that."

He feels it's best that he stops her, like he said, he will protect her.

Amara: "I want to."

He grabs her hand stopping her from removing his undergarment.

Randall: "Believe me Amara, I want you to, so bad, but not today."

Maybe she wants to take over, maybe she wants to prove to him that she is not boring. But they have the rest of their lives for this, she will heal and learn and show him her deepest fantasies. Not today, today he wants to have her. He wants to ravish her body and awaken her soul.

Slow, gentle love making is what they have been doing but...

Randall: "Do you trust me?"

He questions.

Amara: "I trust you."

And with all her heart she does.

Randall sits up, pulls her to his lap. They are back to that position where she is facing him and her arms are around his neck. His hand is on her face and the other on her waist.

Randall: "Then follow my lead, I want you to feel safe with me. Tell me if I'm hurting you or if you want me to stop."

He whispers, his gaze guaranteeing her that she is in good hands. A nod from her gives him permission.

With his hand on her cheek, Randall kisses her. It's a slow deep kiss that, she feels it at the bottom of her stomach. He grabs a fist full of her braids, tilting her head up a little as he

insatiably kisses her. Biting on her lips and his tongue hungrily plunging in her mouth. They are breathing fast and heavy as the kiss has left them out of breath.

His lips move from her mouth, leaving behind a throbbing and a bit of a soreness from the biting and sucking.

He bites her neck hard, provoking her to scream with pleasure. It's a nice gratifying pain that causes an insatiable swirling emptiness right below her stomach and it has a desperate plea to be filled.

This is different for Amara, Randall is a bit rough today, but in a good way.

She meets him with the same passion, he strips her naked and disposes of the lingerie on the floor. Randall rises and she strides him, he turns to lay her on the bed.

His face is buried in her cleavage, before he nibbles on her breasts. She winces in pain as he lightly bites her nipples, he stops to look up at her.

Randall: "I'm sorry, are you okay?"

Maybe he should stop and go for the usual love making.

Amara: "More than okay, please don't stop."

Out of breath she responds, her hands on his head leading him back to her bust. He makes his way down to her hipbone, biting, kissing and blowing on her skin. This has driven Amara to oblivion, she has been left speechless and the only thing she remembers is his name and it keeps erupting from her mouth accompanied by slow sighs and moans.

She feels safe with him and has surrendered all that she is to him. Using his teeth, Randall grabs the side of her underwear and with slow movements slides it down to her ankles. Amara is left exposed, uncovered just the way she came into the world. He kisses his way back up right after throwing his trunks off, he moves her to the edge of the bed while he stands...

Randall: "I want you to put your feet on my shoulders."

He gives an instruction of which she follows. She feels a slow stretch as he goes in and it's mounting and getting better with every push.

She shuts her eyes in the first few moments when he's trying to fit inside her, her breathing escalating to the roof top.

The tingle sends an invite of its visitation with a slow vibrating wave, starting from her ankles, hallowing into her back and flows out to the top. The feeling is that of an addictive drug and he is not deep inside her yet.

He knows where he is leading her and it is where he wants to go and introducing her to that place has been in his plans.

His strokes are not the ones she is norm to, they go deeper with each push.

Although Randall is wolfish, she surrenders into these moments of intimacy. He has consumed her every being, she is him and he is her.

The pounding sensation and the feeling of being stimulated drives her mad that she finds herself weeping. His heart falls fifteen feet down, did he hurt her? He wonders and stops his thrusts without a second thought.

Amara: "No don't stop Randall, don't stop."

She pleads, those are not tears of sorrow but pleasure. A frown built up on his face, he continues on. He loves the sound of her moaning and whimpering as she tells him to keep going.

Randall loses himself in her as he loses a grip on reality.

Just as she reaches her finishing line in loud moans and soft screams. He removes her legs from his shoulders, she scoots back as he climbs on the bed. He doesn't have to tell her to wrap them around his waist.

She knows what to do.

Amara takes hold of his length and positions it inside her as he leans in to kiss her lips. Her arms tighten on his back as she puts her mouth close to his ear, releases a slow deep sigh and bites his ear, she feels him shudder against her.

She smoothly pulls his head back to the side, nibbles and kisses him from his neck to his shoulder. Randall finds her lips again.

While kissing she flicks her tongue on the roof of his mouth in an arch.

Randall: "Whoa!"

He grins like a geek who just aced his science project.

Randall is used to being the dominant one in the bedroom, Amara wants to be in control and he is giving her that.

But also, she is driving him crazy. He grips her hair with both his hands pulling her closer into him. One hand leaves her hair and falls on her waist. His tight grip on her waist he pushes as hard as he can and she accommodates him with her own grind. She's crying a little because he is going too hard and she loves it.

She clasps her arms around him, her eyes tightly shut, she bites her lower lip as she starts jerking on his member.

Amara wants to scream but is powerless, her body is fixated on the orgasm. Randall leans over, careful not to press into her and nibbles on her neck while he enjoys the feel of her body shuddering.

He tightens the hold on her hair and goes harder, there is an incredibly intense sensation that feels like his entire body is moving inside her. He feels like this is where he is meant to be, where he was trying to be all day long and where his mind had been circulating throughout the



whole week.

His body convulses, his eyes roll back and finally he is there with her. Right at the finishing line. His sweat is dripping down her chest and painting her breast.

Their hearts are beating so fast and hammering against their rib cages. He licks and sucks her nipples for a couple of minutes as he gradually pulls out until he is barely inside her. He gently lays his head on her baby bump, pastes kisses and looks at her with a smirk.

Randall: "I am a happy man right now, can you tell?"

She can tell alright, she'd love it if he would show his teeth once in a while. She loved him regardless.

Randall: "Are you okay?"

He can't help but ask when he hears her sobbing, tears of joy, that's what it is. He made her feel worth it, loved and wanted.

Amara: "Yes."

She says through her tears, she's lying in his chest and he has his arms around her.

Amara: "I'm so happy, I have never experienced such love."

She adds, looks up at him.

Randall: "We are one now, it's just us two."

Randall exclaims softly, a deep meaning lies behind this declaration. He promises loyalty and honesty, he promises a future where there will be no third parties, where she will always be the only woman for him.

Amara "I love you."

The only rejoinder she could find.

Randall: "I love you, me hemma." (My queen.)

And like he had said before, saying these three words would never be enough. Falling asleep like that in his arms for the next fifty years would be heaven on earth, what more could she ask for? Growing old with him is more than enough. The thought of counting each other's grey hairs makes her laugh, it is amazing.

Randall: "What happened?"

Curiosity pushes him to enquire.

Amara: "I can't wait to grow old with you."

Yeah she said it.

Randall: "Amara as a granny hey."

He smiles, the future is bright and he loves it.

Randall: "You know you will be wrinkled right and tired all the time. Your teeth will fall out and your hair and I won't be getting kisses anymore."

There is no use in complaining about him.

Amara: "Why not? I've seen old couples kissing."

Randall: "Old toothless couples? There is no way, is that even possible me hemma?" (My queen.)

This is where she withdraws from this conversation and pretends to be sleeping.

Amara: "I am over you."

Her attempt to move away from his arms is denied, he has her caged.

Randall: "You'll still be amazing, you'll still be my queen."

He makes up for his stupidity and makes her smile.

Randall: "Hey we have a long way to go and every moment will be amazing, I promise."

He can't get enough of kissing her, not that she's complaining.

KHETHU\*

Khethu wake up."

What does my father want now?

He's standing on my bed side, the look on his face startles me.

Me: "Is it mom?"

I sit up.

Me: "Is he okay?"

I may be wrong, I see a glint of disappointment in his eyes.

Dad: "You have to come with me."

Me: "Where?"

Dad is not usually this serious.

Dad: "Your bags are packed."

What is going on? He is scaring me, he says to come with him and he has this grave expression.

I would obviously think the worst, I hope nothing happened to my mother.

Me: "Dad what is going on? Why are you upset?"

Dad: "I spoke to Sishi, he told me what you did."

Styles is a snitch now? People do change. I have nothing to say to him, I did what I did to get what I want.

Dad: "You need help angel, you will have to go away for a while."

What is he saying to me?

Me: "What do you mean go away? Where am I going?"

Dad: "There are people that are here to take you away."

No, I don't want to go. I can't go to that place.

Me: "I am not crazy dad."

I scream at him, Styles is trying to turn my father against me.

Dad: "This is for your own good Khethu, you're a danger to yourself and the baby."

Me: "So you think I will be safe in a place full of crazy people? Dad you can't do this to me. I am not going anywhere."

I lie back down, he walks to the door. Turns back to me when two men in pink uniforms walk in, they are carrying a straight jacket.

I scoot up from the bed, jumping to the other side.

Me: "Dad get them out of here."

I'm screaming, they don't care about my screams. They hold me steady as I wiggle against them.

Me: "Dad, dad please. Don't let them take me away, please dad."

I don't have the strength to shout anymore, I'm snivelling and pleading that he helps me.

Dad: "I'm sorry angel, this is the only way you will get better."

Me: "No, dad, no."

He drops on my bed and cries, I am dragged out of my father's house like a crazy person. I'm six months pregnant, how will I survive in there?

To be continued...



## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

207\*

AYIZE\*

Neo: "What is this?"

He startles me with the decibels of his voice, it's early in the morning, not everyone is a morning person and right at this moment, I don't want to be pissed.

Me: "Where did you find those?"

If he tells me that he found them in my bag, I will throw this darn plate at him.

Neo: "It doesn't matter Zee. Why are you taking these?"

It's birth control pills, honestly I didn't think that he would know what they are.

Neo: "You would kill a person and hide them Ayize. Where did you drop your heart Zee, so I can get it back for you?"

Why is he shouting? My head hurts, dear Lord.

I drop the plate in the sink, he will finish up washing the dishes.

Me: "What are you talking about?"

I lean on the counter with my arms across my chest, I want to see his eyes when he tells me about the so called heart I lost. I didn't know that my chest was empty.

Neo: "You're heartless oa tseba Zee, you're heartless man."

Neo is really hurt by this. I must have missed the part where we were starting a family? The man doesn't want to use protection, he should have given reasons why. I'm sure he has a calendar where he marked the birth of his second born.

Me: "It's not a big deal Neo, it's not like I had an abortion."

I walk past him, I am going to clean 'his' house. He's getting on my nerves and I don't want to argue with him.

Neo: "You might as well, you killed my babies with these pills."

He's following me. Why is he following me?

Wait a minute... Sperms count as babies now? I knew I should have paid attention in that biology class.

Me: "I am sure that's not how it works."

He grabs my arm, forcefully turning me to look at him.

Neo: "How does it work then?"

Really? No, I mean seriously?

Me: "Neo, you didn't tell me that you wanted a baby."

Neo: "I didn't have to tell you, you know I hated it when we used a condom. I thought you got the message."

What am I? Siri?

I don't know everything there is to know in this world. This is why people sit with unanswered prayers. They play the guessing game with God.

Neo: "Zee, I worked hard during that tolf tlof. Kanti I was playing, I thought I scored you know." (Intimacy.)

Does this make sense in his head?

Me: "Scored without telling me? Do you know who will go through morning sickness, mood swings, crazy food cravings and weight gain? It's me Neo and wena all you'll want from me is tolf tlof even when I'm tired and heavily pregnant, I will have to service you and carry your big headed baby while at it."

I lug my hand back, if he holds me like that again. God forgive me for what I will do to him.

Neo: "Mara Zee, you're not fair ntwana." (Boy.)

Ntwana?

Me: "Call me ntwana one more time saani."

I am certain that he hasn't seen this face before.

Neo: "Eish, askies baba. Mara le uena don't call me saani. I'm your man Zee." (I'm sorry baby.)

So he says.

Neo: "How long have you been taking these?"

We are back there. I am over this conversation.

Me: "I don't know Neo eish. Can we please drop it?"

I am lugged back when I turn to walk away. I know this look on his face, he is about to kiss me.

His hands slide down to my hips as he pulls me closer to him. There is no space between us.

I am too upset to be kissing him back. But Lord... this man.

My body jumps into a volcano, my hormones are forward. Jesus make it rain, I am on fire.



He moves with me to the couch, and I'm starters faster than you can say go. His wet kisses have put me on last place as I fall weak in his arms. He is kissing my body and I'm uttering his name in soft sighs. We were having an argument seconds ago, now I am wrapped up around him like virgin experiencing her first time.

Is it safe to say that I love his mind blowing strokes? Wait! he's mumbling something...

This is awkward...

Neo: "God please... give us a baby... give us a baby."

Dammit Neo.

I am in love with a lunatic. Don't listen to him God, he's confused.

Neo: "Morena ka kopo... just like you did for Marry... Do it for my Zee Lord." (Lord please.)

People pray during sex?

This ought to be a sin, I should go to church with Sethu on Sunday. Funny enough, I'm calling out his name while he mutters such in low breaths and groans.

Neo is lucky I love him, or else he would be on the floor right now. He collapses on the curve of my neck fighting to catch his breath. I am still wrapped around him, legs and arms unable to gather my strength back.

Neo: "Don't ever break my trust like that again Zee."

He mutters, nibbling my sweaty neck...

Break his trust? What the hell just happened?

He's back to kissing me.

I shouldn't have a weakness and why did it have to be his kisses? I will keep my comeback for another day.

NOMBULELO\*

The tension in this room is heavier than a slay queen's eyelashes.

"Ntando is our son, we are who he knows since the day he was brought home from the hospital."

This uncle is the loudest, you can tell he's the type that sits in the kitchen and gossips with women over a hot cup of white tea, with an overload of milk and ten teaspoons of sugar.

Mbuso: "That does not count, Ntando is my father's son. He is a Xaba, you people have no say over him."

Yes, baby tell them.

"Xaba or not, damages were not paid for this child. Therefore he belongs to us. Your father never came forth to claim him, he went around our daughter behind closed doors like a coward."

Did I mention that I hate him?

Mbuso: "Bullshit."

That's right, this man is breathing fire today. He is not playing. Ntando has crept in our hearts in so little time and we can't lose him.

Mbuso's uncle brushes his shoulder, his way or attempt rather of calming him down.

This meeting has been going on for hours, we didn't have time to make breakfast. There was a knock at the door around 8am, we were stunned to see these uncles on our door step demanding to take Ntando back home. Mbuso had to call his uncles over, only two of them could make it.

The opponents are Nomasonto's family, her father is here as well. They want their blood, as they put it.

The mistakes that parents make always come back to haunt the children, whether in the near future or that very instant.

"This goes to show that you are your father's son, rude and cheeky."

Wrong choice of words old man. Why are uncles naturally rude?

Mbuso: "I will not have you insult my father in my house. Who do you think you are?"

He's up on his feet pointing at this loud uncle who has a stinking mouth.

Did I not say wrong choice of words? Mbuso is changing, I don't know if it's part of his growth as a family man or a father, but he wears this hedge of protection for his family.

"Mbuso, ndodana yehlisa umoya. We are not here to fight you." (Calm down.)

Nomasonto's father's jumps in.

Funny he says this because over the past few hours he let his brothers insult my Mbuso. Now he comes in peace?

Bullshit.

Mbuso: "That's not what it seems like, I am not going to tolerate this in my house."

Thank God for open floor plans, I'm in the kitchen watching this episode. I want to give my opinions, I have so much to say and ask. But hey, these are Zulu men and I am not allowed to intervene. They would ask who had the audacity to bring such an unruly child into the world and if I grew up without a father, as if that contributes into one's behaviour.

"How did you come here without informing us?"

Mbuso's uncle queries, he is as livid as Mbuso.

“Their plan was to come and take the child, they think that, they have a say over him.”

The second uncle.

Mbuso: “It’s not happening, we will pay for whatever was required. Ntando’s parents trusted me to look after him and you people will not take that away from me.”

Nomasonto’s father is on his feet ready to riposte.

“We will take this to court if we have to.”

This father was peaceful when he got here and now he seems to be the one causing conflict.

Mbuso: “Do your worst, Ntando bears the Xaba surname. We can fight this case and for years if possible. You will be left with one pair of shoes by the time it’s over and I will still walk away with Ntando by my side.”

The dad gasps in shock. What do they expect Mbuso to say?

Mbuso: “It’s up to you, I don’t mind a nasty court case. What about you Mr. Shai? From what I hear, business is not going well. Can you even afford a lawyer?”

That is Nomasonto’s father by the way. He is left speechless.

Mbuso: “Get out of my house, all of you.”

Appearances can be deceiving, Mbuso is not as calm as he sounds. I knew he loved Ntando, I didn’t know it was this much.

“This is not over, not by a long shot.”

The father says, the look he is giving Mbuso could kill a thousand men.

Mbuso: “You don’t want to take me on sir, it won’t be a nice fight.”

Getting lawyers involved would be a big mistake on their part, Cele doesn’t play nice. He comes recommended by Styles and I have come to know that Styles does not associate himself with losers.

They carry their tails and leave as they came.

MKHIZE\*

I’m standing in the middle of my living room scrutinizing these strange men carry my furniture out of my house. The bank has decided to come and take what belongs to them, the house and everything in it. I turn to see my family standing at a corner with powerless expressions, my children are homeless. I have failed, my brothers refuse to help me out.

MaSibiya: “Where are we going to go baba?”

MaSibiya seems to be taking this lightly, I expected her to throw tantrums.

Me: "You will have to go to your father's house, until I sort something out."

I have no plan, the only place I have in mind is a no-go.

MaSibiya: "No baba, I told you that I will follow you to the ends of the earth if I have to."

It is comforting.

Me: "What about your sister-wives?"

MaSibiya: "They have made plans and they are taking the kids too. Zwelethu is with Nkomo, I think it is better that he doesn't witness this."

My son hates me, he would blame this on me. It is my fault, my thirst for power has become my downfall."

Me: "That's good, you know that life will never be the same again? You won't be living in comfort wherever we will go."

She is not bothered by the thought of it.

MaSibiya: "Ngiyazi baba." (I know.)

"No, give it back. That's mine."

My son's tiny voice catches my attention, he is fighting over his video game with one of the movers.

Me: "Fanyana, leave that."

I take him up in my arms, he wiggles off. He is thirteen and hates being treated like a baby.

Fanyana: "No baba, don't let them take my game."

He cries.

Me: "I will buy you a new one boy, let these men do their job."

He scurries off outside, his mother gives me a look that kills me and makes me feel less of a man. She clicks her tongue and dashes after her son.

How do I fix this? How I get my family back under one roof?

SETHU\*

I didn't think having a house full of kids could be stressful, Mbali and Ginger are quiet when it's just the two of them. With Liyana here, they seem to have lost their minds.

I have to scream... and yell... and chide... and I am tired. I'm making breakfast for five and the

girls have offered to help, but their help has messed up the kitchen. I never cook in a dirty kitchen, yet today I am immobilised.

Gods of the kitchen, please look past this mess, it will never happen again.

Liyana: "Can I make the eggs aunt Sethu."

That's if we are prepared to eat charred eggs.

Me: "You can butter the bread Liya, I'll deal with the eggs."

Liyana: "Okay."

She shrugs her miniature shoulders as if she would rather be doing something else than buttering boring bread.

Ginger: "I'll help you Liyana, I'm done setting the table."

Ginger walks in with this declaration. I gave Mbali the task of washing the dishes, she hates me right now.

At least we will be a few dishes down after we're done with breakfast. And I don't want Styles to find the kitchen a mess.

Why do people keep sugar on the top shelf?

Is it because I decided to grow until a certain height hence I struggle to reach the top shelf?

Me: "Liya, pass me that chair over there."

I love how kids are always eager to help... This chair is bobbing.

Me: "Someone hold the chair steady for me."

"Sethu, what are you doing?"

The panic in his voice brings me crashing on the floor and I land on my buttocks.

Me: "Ouch."

I whimper, trying to get my ass up. I think I broke a hip bone.

Styles: "Kitten are you okay?"

He's helping me up and I am not okay.

Did he have to frighten me like that?

Me: "Why did you yell?"

He helps me to sit on the same object that threw me down.

Styles: "I didn't yell, I was shocked to see you climbing on a chair."

What is shocking about that?

Me: "It's not my first time doing it Styles."

Styles: "You need to stop, call me if you can't reach anything. Don't risk your life like that and my..."

Call him?

And how am I risking my life? It's only a few feet down.

Styles: "Just be careful Sethu, don't be careless please.

I need someone to tell me why Styles is upset.

The kids are laughing, they don't realise how serious this is. I almost broke something.

Me: "I am careful, I'm always careful."

I stand and the room spins forcing me back down. Styles clamps his jaw.

Styles: "That's it, you're going to lie down. I'll finish up here."

I am helped to a couch, given a fleece blanket in this heat.

Me: "I am not sick Styles."

I get a warning stare for my protest, this man suddenly has issues.

Why is he abruptly protective?

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

208\*

NEO\*

MamSonto is finally here. Zee is nervy, she had cited that her heart had been racing since she opened her eyes this morning. She is disconcerted and left in qualms.

Zee: "Can I make you some tea MamSonto?"

She doesn't eat at a house where she prays.

MamSonto: "I'm okay, we should begin."

She gets up from the sofa.

Me: "Yes, let's begin.

We are made to kneel and hold hands.

MamSonto leads us into prayer.

I feel Zee's hands tighten on mine. There is an urge to pop my eyes open and investigate her quivers. A screech fills my ears compelling me to eventually open my eyes. It's Zee, her body is shuddering.

Me: "MamSonto, what is wrong with her?"

I want to let go of her hands, yet there is this thing in me that says I shouldn't.

MamSonto: "Who are you?"

MamSonto interrogates with authority and my mind is still trying to grasp what is going on with Zee.

Refusing to answer MamSonto's question, she presses her lips together and her head moves to and fro, withholding the answer.

MamSonto: "I command you to speak right now in the name of Jesus."

I think I should let go now, another yelp escapes Zee's mouth. It's a shout of a tormented spirit.

Ayize: "No stop, stop."

She screams in agony, her body swinging back and forth.

Me: "MamSonto ke eng?" (What is it?)

Zee bursts into a loud horselaugh, it does not sound human. She is sneering at me, I cannot recognise her blood-shot eyes. They say fear is a lie, it can't be when it feels so real.

Me: "Nie man nie." (No man no.)

I try to pull my hands away, the grip is too firm. I am stronger than this woman as far as I know. She takes up another hair-rising and spine-chilling laugh.

MamSonto: "Who are you? Speak"

Another authoritative demand from her.

Ayize: "This is my man."

She puts her arms around me and kisses my cheek, these eerie laughs are starting to scare me.

Me: "Get off me, MamSonto ke mang eo?" (Who is this?)

I achieve in shunting myself back, this forceful act chucks me on the couch. Eyes widened with horror, my mind can't even fathom what has possessed Zee. She is hissing while swaying her body like a snake.

MaMSonto: "What do you want with this family?"

Zee or whatever is inside her, tilts its head to the side, her eyes roll up and fall on me along with a pointed finger. She smirks and all the hairs on my body stand.

Ayize: "I want him."

I rush to hide behind MamSonto. What is this?

Me: "No, MamSonto. What is that thing? Get it out of her now, I want my Zee back."

MamSonto: "This is the spirit that Matshidiso uses, a serpent."

Me: "So Tshidi is inside her?"

There is no way.

MamSonto: "It's not her Neo, the bible says we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. But against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world. Matshidiso is only a pawn for the devil. People who practise witchcraft choose to work for the devil."

Matshidiso is the devil herself, if she is capable of doing this.

Me: "Then tell it to leave Zee alone. What if it kills her?"

MamSonto: "You need to calm down, God is in control now. You don't have to be afraid Neo, come out from there."

Neo: "No, I'm safer here behind you, where your God is."

I am not showing my face to that demon. Zee is hissing and moving like a snake. How will I get



this image out of my head?

MamSonto: "You evil spirit, how many are you?"

Ayize: "Why do you want to know? Who are you and why have you brought me here?"

It knows that it's in my house? MamSonto has to sanctify the house before she leaves.

MamSonto: "I do not entertain demons, I said how many are you?"

Zee folds her arms on her chest and shakes her head, her lips pouted.

MamSonto: "By the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to speak you demon."

Ayize: "Nooooooooo."

She screams, rubbing her hands all over her body.

Ayize: "Kea cha. Why are you burning me? I was dancing peacefully on the mountain. Why have you summoned me here?" (I'm burning.)

She states in screams.

MamSonto: "Why were you dancing?"

Ayize: "Celebrating her death, we are sitting on the boot of her car. She is going to be in an accident."

She confesses and my heart stops.

Me: "Who do they want to kill MamSonto?"

I whisper in her ear, she ignores me and continues with this demon possessed woman.

MamSonto: "How many are you?"

This demon is stubborn...

MamSonto: "How many?"

But it has nothing on MamSonto's authority.

Ayize: "There are three of us, my grandmother and her mother is involved too. Beauty is a powerful woman."

She finds it funny.

Ayize: "We fetch her from prison every night and come here, it's easy to enter a house that is not protected."

Beauty practices witchcraft in jail?

Me: "Ema MamSonto a re they enter my house at night?" (She says.)

My heart is going to jump out of my chest, I can't breathe. This cannot be real, it has to be a

dream.

Me: "Oh Lord Jesus. What is this?"

MamSonto: "Your time is up, you will not bother this family again."

Zee erupts in laughter, she finds MamSonto's declaration funny.

Ayize: "What will you do to stop us? We have her life in our hands, she is going to die. Neo is mine, he belongs to me."

She shouts.

Me: "The devil is a liar, I rebuke you in the name of Jesus. Fire, fire, fire. Holy Ghost fire, I am not yours. I belong to Jesus. Lord you said in your word..."

My prayer is stopped by her belly laugh.

Ayize: "Neo, Neo, Neo. What power do you have that you can call upon that name? Your hands are stained with blood, I can smell it."

This is evil in all forms, this thing knows about my life.

Me: "MamSonto burn this demon now, I want my Zee back."

I feel light headed, the heavy presence is weighing me down.

Mamsonto: "You buried something in this yard, go dig it now."

Ayize: "Never, we will die if we do that."

Demons are stupid, she is confessing everything.

MamSonto: "I will not tell you again."

Why do I not have the same authority that MamSonto has? I need to be able to stand up against demons.

Zee screams, she jumps up and begins to move towards the front door while whimpering. I walk slowly behind MamSonto, who is mumbling silent prayers.

We get to the garden, Zee kneels down and starts digging with her hands, she reveals an animal skin, the size of a bar of soap. It has different colour beads wrapped around it.

She digs some more and reveals something else. This one is brown fur about the size of an egg, it has purple beads wrapped around it.

Me: "What is that?"

I give up with black people, is this what we are capable of? God must be ashamed of us.

Zee's head shoots up, she releases a loud scream and collapses on the dirt.

Me: "MamSonto they took her."

I'm panicking.

MamSonto: "Relax Neo, it's over now. God will deal with them."

Me: "What about Zee?"

Is it safe to touch her?

MamSonto: "Get her into the house."

I check her heart beat first, thank God she is still alive. MamSonto follows behind as I carry Zee into the house. I lay her on the couch.

Me: "What's next? Will she be okay? What about those things we left outside? Will those people come to my house while we are sleeping? We are not safe MamSonto."

She smiles at my blethering, she cannot keep a straight face. I am terrified to my wits and she has the audacity to smile.

MamSonto: "Don't worry about Ayize, she will be fine. Those who were at war with you will never bother you again, God is on your side."

Me: "So they won't come to my house?"

She simpers.

MamSonto: "No, they won't. I will pray over this house, no one will dare to cast an evil eye on your family."

This is a relief.

Zee is up in fifteen minutes, she cannot recall anything that happened. I will have to explain to her when MamSonto leaves.

\*\*\*\*\*

MamSonto has burnt the things that were dug outside in the garden, Zee is still in denial that any of that took place. I would be too and moreover finding out that you were possessed by a spirit.

"Be Strong and courageous, do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Taking Zee's hand sent MamSonto straight to church, she's parroting a scripture and her eyes are deeply fixated on hers. A crease takes form on Zee's face, there is a fear that plays along those lines.

MamSonto: "You are a good woman Ayize and don't ever doubt that."

She says randomly. Zee is jumbled by her unpredictability.

MamSonto: "Everything happens for a reason, don't compare yourself to other people. God does

not do anything without a reason. You need to trust Him and pray, all will be well if you believe and lean on God."

I am more terrified of her words.

Me: "Is something bad going to happen? Phela uena o rata ho re shocker. Your warnings are always on point." (You like shocking us.)

MamSonto: "God wants you to know that He is with you, even when you feel like He is not. There will come a time when you will want to give up and throw in the towel. Don't give in to that temptation, life doesn't go as we want it to. You might have plans for your life, God's plans for you are bigger than yours. You have been through it all Ayize, life brought you to a point where you gave up on everyone and God. But He understands, if you want Him back, you will find Him where you left Him. He is waiting for you. You are more powerful when you are on your knees. He says I have loved you with an everlasting love. Meditate on this scripture and don't let it depart from your heart.

Isaiah 40:29-31

He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.

Let God sit on the throne of your heart and He will do wonders in your life. He is your healer and your provider, the only one who will wash away your pain and scars. Where doctors fail, He takes over and His healing is forever."

Ayize: "You're scaring me MamSonto. Why are you speaking like this?"

She quizzes.

Needless to say, mamSonto is not going to tell us anything more. Sometimes it is better to listen than to speak and in this case, Zee must do just that.

MamSonto: "Trust God sisi."

These are her last words before I walk her out, I hate that she has left Zee in a state of fear and confusion. It's about time we start going to church in this household, doctors are failing to help Zee overcome her past and like MamSonto said. Where doctors fail, God takes over.

STYLES\*

It's been three days since Randall and Amara left for their honey moon, I only spoke to him once. They will be returning this coming weekend. Sethu and the girls are still here.

I have been up since 4am, insomnia came and necessitated my company. I don't usually lose sleep, my spirit is bothered. I had a dream about my sister, she was telling me something. I

couldn't make out the words.

Liyana: "Uncle Styles, I'm not feeling okay."

Liyana sluggishly walks into our bedroom, I jump from the bed to check on her. Sethu wakes up due to the bed moving.

Sethu: "What's wrong with her?"

I send my hand to check Liyana's temperature, she is burning up. I put her on my lap.

Me: "Are you in pain princess?"

She shakes her head, she is sweating.

Liyana: "A broken heart is a broken home."

She stares intently on the wall as if she's in a trance, it takes a few seconds for her body to start shaking with a slight rapid motion.

Sethu: "Styles."

I lay Liyana on the bed.

Sethu: "Do something."

Me: "There is nothing to do Sethu, the Okolies have a message. Randall told me about her episodes, that we shouldn't panic."

I explain.

Liyana: "A broken heart is a broken home."

She repeats her words. What does she mean?

Sethu: "Whose broken heart are they talking about?"

Me: "I have no clue, I have to call Randall."

His ancestors have no timing, just when everything is going well.

NTOMBI\*

No one has come to see me since I have been locked up. Jonas promised that he will come back, I haven't seen him. I have no clue how Moses is doing, I am worried about him. Anger had me that day and now that I am calm, I am tormented by images of him lying on that floor. It is the only memory I have of him that seems to visit me.

"Ntombi."

A female warden says standing before me.

"You have a visitor."

It must be Jonas, I have waited for too long. I follow the warden out of my cell, I don't like this place. God knows how I will survive here.

I break into sobs as my eyes behold my baby. Nombulelo is here to see me, I thought she hated me.

Me: "Nombulelo."

She's also crying, this is the first real hug we have shared. How did I not see that she will always be with me? Everyone might deny me, but my baby will always stay.

Lelo: "I'm sorry mom, I'm sorry that this has happened to you."

She apologizes for my mistakes.

"Vul' igape sboshwa, vul' igape." (No touching.)

The warden warns, I hate that she addresses me as a prisoner.

Lelo: "Let's sit."

I sit opposite her, I am still in awe that she is here.

Lelo: "I thought you were innocent till proven guilty. Is she allowed to address you like that?"

Me: "Don't worry about it. How are you? How is my baby?"

She smiles.

Lelo: "She's perfect."

I am going to miss out on Uluthando's life.

Me: "I am sorry for what I did to your father..."

Lelo: "I don't blame you mom, he had a hand in this too. I wish I could have prevented that from happening, you don't deserve to be in here."

Nombulelo has hope for me, I have been so caught up on Moses that I failed to see the love my daughter has for me.

Me: "Will you ever forgive me for neglecting you?"

I take her hand into mine.

Lelo: "You're my mother, our relationship is forever, I want us to start over."

I'm not the type that cries, yet here I am in tears.

Me: "Thank you for not abandoning me Lelo."

She laughs.

Lelo: "Call me Nombulelo, it's actually funny and dramatic coming from you."

She laughs at her interjection.

Me: "I need to know if your father is okay or not."

I know that she hates talking about him, but I have to know if I will be going away for a long time.

Lelo: "He's in a comma, the doctors don't know if he will wake up."

She replies and I have to admit, I am thrilled that he is not dead. There is hope that he might make it.

Lelo: "You will be okay mom, I promise."

I should believe her, also it is time that I pay for my sins.

#### AT THE HOSPITAL\*

Moses lies in a hospital bed, his soul trapped in a place he is unfamiliar with. He is looking for a way out, but can't find one.

Moses."

He hears many voices at the same time, fear speaks to him. It says a house has been prepared for him in that eerie place.

Moses shields his ears at the sound of voices that seem to torment him, the voices rise and fall never making the words audible. It is dins no living thing could ever make.

Moses: "Who is there?"

His head is spiralling and his mind is in disarray, he doesn't know what is going on. The last thing he remembers is that he was walking out on Ntombi his wife. Now he craves to see her face, he would do anything to have an argument with her again.

Moses: "Ntombi, ukuphi? Ukuphi Mkami?" (Where are you Ntombi?)

His eyes welcome a stream of tears, he is desperate for a way out.

He feels frozen in time, the many voices torment him.

He curls up on the floor, eyes wide with terror and hands clamped over his ears, hearing everything still as if the noise come from inside his head.

#### IN MOSES' HOSPITAL ROOM\*



Mashoto smiles at the work she just did, she is confident of her herbs. It is a gift passed on to her by her late grandmother, with no doubt the spell she cast on Moses has worked.

Trapping him in the spirit world where he would be tormented was an idea given to her by Nkosi, this is how her life would be spared. Moses dying more than once was in Randall's plans and look what fate had in store for dear old Moses.

A coma where he will probably not wake up from and that is something they will make sure of. His life is now in Randall's hands, he has become the author of Moses' life. As to when they will decide to bring him out of the comma or end his miserable life remains a mystery.

To be continued...





## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

209\*

Pronunciation of:

Pseudocyesis {Soo-doh-sahy-ee-seez}

## STYLES\*

I can't get a hold of Randall, his phone is off. Liyana's words keep replaying in my mind, I left a text and asked him to call me once he gets it.

I didn't think the meeting would be so soon, I'm with Zobuhle and Nkomo we have just arrived in Diepkloof extension. Nkomo parks the car outside a first brick house. A brown gate serves as a barrier between the two walls. There is a man seated on a bench right next to the door, he could be in his late seventies.

Zobuhle: "Let's go in."

She pushes the gate open and plods in, the man is on his feet. He gives me a queer look, bewilderment slowly shapes his face. He clenches his jaw, furrows his brows and his eyes swell as tears seals them.

He turns back, hiding from us.

There's a snuffle coming from him. It builds up, turning into loud cries. It is my first time seeing a grown man weep like that. He falls on his knees, his hands go behind his neck. Zobuhle rushes to him, leaving Nkomo and I in astonishment.

Zobuhle: "Aunty, aunty."

Her shout is sent to the open door, an elderly woman comes running. She doesn't ask what happened, instead commands Zobuhle to get a glass of water. She is consoling this man who I think is her husband.

Gradually he gets back up, tears parading down his hard emaciated cheeks, he glances at me. His emotions seem to be stronger than him, he is crying again.

I have never been so confused in my life, I can't recognize him at all. Whereas he gives the impression that he knows me.

"Oh Lindiwe, Lindiwe."

My mother's name spews out of his mouth in snivels.

"Ntsako look, look. He has done it, God has brought my sister home."

He declares in incredulity, his hands inserted behind his head.

My heart cracks, I stagger back only to have Nkomo catch me. Now I'm the one who is losing to my tears. After so many years, I have found my family.

I feel Nkomo's grip on my shoulder.

"My son, is this really you? You have remembered us."

Zobuhle is back with a glass of water, she doesn't get a chance to give it to him. He's holding me in his arms and we cry together. The feeling is overwhelming, I can't explain it. We are given a moment of privacy, just the two of us.

Aunty, his wife shepherds us into the house. The living room is filled with sniffs and coughs and silence in between.

Zobuhle: "This is him, uncle Sbu, the man I told you about."

Zobuhle dives into an introduction.

Sbu: "I see him my child, I saw him the moment he walked through the gate. You are no doubt Lindiwe's son."

Zobuhle: "Who is Lindiwe?"

Me: "My mother, she died a long time ago."

I have already told him this outside.

Zobuhle: "I thought you were the only child."

Sbu: "I had a sister, it hurt to speak about her while not knowing if she were dead or alive. So I buried the memories and swore never to bring her name up. Lindiwe was abducted when she five years old, I was seven. We looked for her everywhere. My parents were devastated, my father fell into depression. He blamed himself for her disappearance, he turned to alcohol and this ruined their marriage. My mother couldn't take it, she wanted to focus on looking for Lindiwe. They finally went their separate ways, Lindiwe's disappearance changed our lives. Both my parents have passed on, they died without knowing what happened to their child."

Me: "Who could have taken her?"

Sbu: "The police didn't really look into it, it remains an unsolved case till today."

It is not a firecracker, this is how things are in this country.

Sbu: "They will rest in peace now that you are here. You have found your home Siyabonga, your mother will be at peace as well."

He has chosen to call me by this name.

Yes I have found my home and I have found a home for my kids. I am shown pictures of my mother as a child, she looked like Asanda. The family is welcoming, I tell them how she died and how Asanda lost her life as well. This is my time to start believing in miracles.

SETHU\*

Ayize has come to see the kids, she just narrated a whole story about witches and demons and Beauty. I am astounded, people are brave to play in the devil's back ground.

Me: "It's hard to believe that Beauty is a witch."

Ayize: "Her actions said it and you know how they hide behind the bible and God."

It feels like not so long ago when we lived with her, now she has become a stranger we can barely recognize.

Ayize: "Her days are numbered and just so you know, if she happens to die, I will not go to her funeral."

Me: "Ginger and Mbali will have to go, she is their mother."

Mbali will take the news pretty bad, she is more attached to Beauty.

Ayize: "A plan will be made."

She shrugs, she doesn't care about that.

I put my feet up on the couch as I prepare to tell her my saga.

Me: "I need to have a word with you."

My introduction births concern in her eyes.

Ayize: "I'm listening."

She is sipping on a glass of wine, seemingly she is shaken up by what happened at the house and wine calms her down. I have no worries about her drinking, she is able to control her intake now.

Me: "Styles thinks I'm pregnant."

I grew suspicious of his acts, there's a way he would look at me each time I move, like I would crack his favourite egg. I had a meeting with my mind and found out that I missed my periods.

Ayize: "Are you?"

Me: "I thought I was, only to find out that it's pseudocyesis."

Her mouth falls open, I was shocked too.

Ayize: "Wait my mind just ran outside, let me go and get it."

She leaves me laughing out loud, she is at her craziest. She opens the front door, walks out and comes back in a jiff. She grabs a glass of wine, lifts a finger to motion that I must wait while she gulps down what is left of the wine.



Ayize: "What were you saying? And don't repeat that word, or else I will have to go and apply for grade one."

She sits back down.

Me: "It's the belief that you are carrying a baby when you're not, in simple terms it's called a false pregnancy."

Ayize: "How is that possible?"

Me: "It just is. You get all the pregnancy symptoms, the glow, the morning sickness and swollen stomach plus that excitement that crashes your soul when you find out that, you don't have a baby growing inside you."

I don't want to cry about this.

Ayize: "Did you tell Mr. S?"

Me: "And see his heart break? I don't think so."

Styles is excited about this, I presume the mystery behind his weirdness has been solved.

Ayize: "You will have to tell him, he is not a baby. You can't protect him, the more you wait the harder it will be."

I have to follow her to the kitchen, she is going to pour another glass of wine.

Me: "I hate this, life can be cruel sometimes."

My heart speaks out as I lean on the kitchen counter, watching Ayize indulge in wine. Maybe a glass wouldn't hurt, life is too painful.

Ayize: "How sure are you that it's a false pregnancy?"

Me: "I did a home pregnancy test."

Ayize: "Look I am not a nurse, but those are not always accurate, tell Mr. S and go to the doctor together. I told you about secrets in a relationship, don't tread on that path Sethu. It will destroy you and we don't want that to happen."

She is right, I will have to tell him tonight when he gets home. I love how Ayize chastises me, she is the mother I never had.

MBUSO\*

Doctor Xaba, there is someone here to see you."

My receptionist says over the phone.

Me: "I don't have any appointments for the next hour Zandie."

Zandie: "He says it's important sir."

Me: "Who is it?"

Zandie: "He goes by the name of Thabo."

I don't know a Thabo.

Me: "Let him in."

I have to rush home during my lunch break, I hope this man will not take up my time.

Me: "Come in."

I acknowledge the knock at the door, I jerk up at the sight of Zuma walking in. He has the nerve.

Me: "What are you doing here?"

Zuma: "Please hear me out, I beg you."

Desperation is coated on his face as he joins his hands together pleading to be heard.

Me: "Say what you came to say and get out."

I might as well hear him out.

Zuma: "I have not been the best person in the world, I have my share of mistakes. I am not perfect Mbuso and I have no justification for what I did to Lelo. I couldn't have dreamt of doing that to her, I lov..."

He stops as he meets the black stare on my face.

Zuma: "Look I know, I messed up and I want to apologise to her. She will listen to you."

He's leaning against the door, fiddling with his fingers.

Me: "What do you want from me?"

Zuma: "Speak to her please, allow me into my baby's life. Haven't I been punished enough man? Uluthando deserves to know her father."

Me: "She has a father."

I don't like his words one bit.

Zuma: "I know and she is lucky that she has two fathers, don't you think?"

He's taking chances, but he is making sense.

Zuma: "I am willing to pay up damages and apologise to Lelo for what I did to her."

I am reminded of Ntando. I know now how it feels to have a child taken away from you.

Putting myself in Zuma's shoes...

Me: "I will have a talk with Lelo."

His face lights up.

Zuma: "So you named her Uluthando?"

He's getting comfortable and striding in.

Me: "Yes."

I am not about to get friendly with him.

Zuma: "It's a nice name. How is she? Can I see a picture please?"

I can't deny him that and crush his spirit. A few scrolls on my phone takes me to a thousand pictures of Goku. The same smile I have on my face creeps up on Zuma's face, as he takes a trip down my gallery.

Now it is up to Lelo to decide, if she doesn't want him then I won't be able to help any further. However from one father to another, I will have to try and convince her.

AYIZE\*

The following day.

Kagiso needs to go to crèche, he needs to mingle with other kids. I love having him the whole day, but I need a break sometimes. He is taking his afternoon nap, the house is dirty. The leave I took at work to prepare for the wedding is almost over, I am not looking forward to going back.

I rush to open the door lest the knock wakes Kagiso, I won't be able to clean if he wakes up.

Ayize: "Amara?"

Her eyes are swollen and red, she falls in my arms as she breaks into a loud cry. What just happened? Is it Randall? How did she get here?

Me: "Baby, what is it? Is Randall okay?"

Lord let him be okay.

She nods, I don't know what she is agreeing to. Randall being okay or that she is crying because of him. If something happened to him, we would know, right?

SETHU\*

I'm happy that Styles found his mother's family. He is elated that the puzzle has been solved, he is also fixing things with Richard. He's at his happiest. How am I going to break this news to him? He will be heart broken. The brats and I are still camping at his house.

I rush to open the kitchen door as I hear his car pull up outside.

Styles: "I brought these for you, you need to eat clean."

He states, placing a few bags of groceries on the kitchen counter. It's now or never, I have to let him know.

Me: "I am not pregnant."

It's harder than it seemed, I'm waiting for him to say something. I'm standing a few feet away from him, my arms across my chest and my heart dancing to the sound of distress. He stares at me impassively, this is not the time to be hiding his emotions. I need to know what is going on in his mind.

Styles: "How do you know?"

He turns away from my gaze to unpack the groceries, he is not going to tell me how he concluded that I was pregnant.

Me: "I did the test."

My voice is as low as it could be.

Styles: "At the hospital?"

He wants to be clever I see.

Me: "No, I bought a home pregnancy test."

I'm not the first one to do that.

Styles: "You're pregnant."

He is insisting.

Me: "Styles, it's a false pregnancy. It happens when..."

Styles: "Sethu, you're pregnant, I just know it."

Will he at least look at me?

He is upset with me, that's why he won't look at me.

Me: "Babe..."

Oh great!!!

He receives a call, he doesn't waste time to answer it. He listens for a while and only says these words.

Styles: "I'm on my way."

He kisses me and sprints out without explaining, the only thing I could get from his face is a disordered guise.

To be continued...

BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

210\*

MKHIZE\*

This is where I have found myself with MaSibiya, back in Kliptown in my mother's house. Sika had the place cleaned up, but it still carries bad memories.

How will I sleep in this house? MaSibiya doesn't know the horror these walls conceal.

Sika brings in the last bag, he offered that we stay with him, but his house is occupied by his extended family. I don't want MaSibiya to feel uncomfortable, I want her to move freely around the house.

She is sorting out the bedroom.

Me: "What do you have for me?"

Sika: "Their lives must be turned upside down as we speak, she will never forgive him for this."

There is always light at the end of a tunnel.

Me: "Good job Sika, if I am going down then I am taking everyone with me."

He smiles, this is going to be interesting.

STYLES\*

Randall sounded frantic over the phone, he wasn't making sense. He said to meet him at his house, I can't think of what could have happened. Driving through the gate, I see his car parked outside. They had three more days to go, I can only hope that they are both okay.

I pass two guards on my way in, the door is widely open. There he is, at the bottom of the stairs. A cloud of smoke hovers around him, he's stress smoking and has a glass of scotch on the same hand.

He looks up at me, he's been crying.



Me: "What happened?"

He takes a sip.

Randall: "Everything was going well, we were happy and in love. Till a few hours ago, we were at a hotel in Bloemfontein when I came out of the shower and she was gone. I thought maybe she had gone out to reception, a few minutes passed and I grew worried. I don't know how I missed her phone on the bed, there was a note that came with it. {I'm going back home, do not come for me. The text on the phone will explain. I hope you're happy with yourself Randall.}"

He hands me a phone.

Randall: "I almost went crazy, I thought I was losing my mind. How is this happening to me?"

I unlock the phone to see a picture of a group of young men, Nkomo is there. I zoom in to see Randall and I'm standing right behind him.

Randall: "Amara will never forgive me Styles, she will never forgive me."

He says, his teeth clamped together.

Me: "What happened Randall? I don't understand."

Randall: "Check the messages."

I go to the text messages, there is a text from an unsaved number.

"Are you sure you want to spend your life with the man who killed your parents?"

Me: "No way Randy, you couldn't have done that."

He puffs a cigarette the whiff and smoke permeates around us.

Me: "I remember this day, the vision is a little blurry. It was our first job and this guy hired us. We drank ourselves silly just to wear off the nerves. I don't remember what happened after that, I don't remember being in that house."

Randall: "We killed her parents, someone else out there knows about it. They sent this to Amara, just to destroy me."

All of this reeks of Mkhize, I knew we should have killed him.

Me: "I don't know what's going on, but you need to find Amara and tell her that this is a lie. We couldn't have done this Randall."

Randall: "What do you mean Styles? There is a picture that puts us at the scene of the crime."

He's frustrated.

Me: "I know, I also know that we are innocent."

The tracker on my phone says Amara is at Neo's house.

Randall: "What happened that day?"

Sitting like this and cracking our heads will not help. We need to think of a way out.

Me: "Go find your wife and bring her back home."

I don't see any hope in him, he has accepted defeat.

Randall: "Everything is a lie, love, happiness. It's all a façade to keep us distracted from reality. How did I fall for this trap? I am such an idiot."

He throws the glass against the wall, it splatters into pieces.

Randall: "Fate is a mean son of a bitch, I am paying for every pain I have caused people."

He's in the lounge now, pouring another glass of scotch.

Me: "No."

I snatch the glass from him, he frowns at me and takes his attention on the cigarette.

Me: "Uze I am not going to tell you again, go and bring Amara home."

He thinks I'm losing my mind, the look says it.

Randall: "You don't get it do you? Amara wants nothing to do with me, she hates me."

He states, pacing up and down the living room.

Me: "All I'm hearing are excuses, this is not you. Do it for Liyana, she needs her mother. It's the least you can do, you took Olivia away from her."

My dispute hurts him, he scowls at me, pain painting his eyes.

Me: "I'm sorry."

Randall: "You're right, I need to fight for Amara."

He retorts, searching his pockets.

Me: "She's at Neo's house. I will trace this number in the meantime."

Mkhize is going to pay for this.

Randall: "I don't think I can take it if she rejects me. How will I deal with that?"

Me: "Like a man, you're strong and you will overcome this."

The sound of the door opening grips our attention, Amara walks in with Ayize. Her face is hard, her eyes hold anger and pain. I can hear Randall's rapid breathing, he's about to break down. I need to find answers to this, I am 100% certain that we didn't kill her parents.

NOMBULELO\*

If there is anyone I trust more than anything in this world, it is Mbuso. I trust his decisions, I trust his word and right now I trust him when he says Zuma needs to meet Uluthando.

A meeting has been set for next weekend, Zuma is going to pay damages and a truce will be made between the two families. Right after that, Mbuso will do what is expected of him, we will finally have our wedding.

There is silence in the living room as we wait for Mbuso to bring Uluthando. Ntando is quietly playing with his toys on the floor.

Zuma: "How have you been?"

There is no reason for small talk.

Me: "Good."

I am not going to ask about his wellbeing, I don't care.

Zuma: "I'm sorry about..."

Me: "Not now, there will be a time for that."

I have no strength to walk down memory lane, here comes Mbuso with baby Goku. Zuma stands up, a smile forms on the corners of his mouth.

Mbuso: "You need to sit down so I can give her to you."

Mbuso instructs.

He is good at this, Zuma tears up as soon as he has the baby in his arms.

Mbuso is a bit sceptical about this, he has jealousy written on his face. No one will take his place in Goku's life. I will make sure of that.

OKOLIE RESIDENCE.\*

Amara did not come back for Randall, she didn't think that she would find him home. They stand in the living room glaring at each other. Randall stubs out the cigarette he opens his mouth to speak, but Amara walks past him and heads to their room.

Ayize: "I don't know what you did to her, but you need to follow her and fix this."

Ayize is all for a good course, she's cheering for this relationship.

Styles: "Go man, I'll take care of everything."

At his friend's demands Randall rushes to find his new bride.

She is sitting on the edge of the bed, he freezes at the door way. He doesn't say anything, but

waits for her speak.

Amara: "I'm leaving."

She is not going to ask him anything.

Randall: "I didn't do it me hemma." (My queen.)

He wants to move to her, he doesn't know what he will do when he gets there.

Amara: "I'm not an idiot Randall, I saw the picture."

She urges.

Randall: "I know I might have been there that night. I don't remember anything, I was a kid back then Amara."

Amara: "That gave you the right to kill my parents?"

Randall: "I am innocent."

She wants to believe him, but the pictures proved otherwise.

Amara: "I can't stay here, I can't do this Randall."

Seeing her packed bags makes it all real.

Randall: "No, please don't leave. You can punish me in any way you want, but don't leave me Amara. Call the police, get me arrested, anything but that."

He brings himself close to her, she takes a step back.

Amara: "I have been an idiot, all this time I was a fool. You played me Randall. You made me think that you loved me. Stupid naïve Amara, what the heck does she know?"

Randall: "I do love you, Amara. This is me, your Randall."

His attempt to touch her is ineffectual.

Amara: "I don't know this Randall before me, I don't know the Randall that killed my parents in cold blood."

Her retort kills him.

Randall: "Please I will do anything."

Amara: "Can you bring my Randall back. The Randall I fell in love with?"

He hates that she is hurting because of him, Styles needs to hurry with that information.

Randall: "I am here me hemma, I am here I love you." (My queen.)

Randall enwraps his arms around her and she lets him touch her. Tears streaming down his

face, she hates that he is crying. Though she can't ignore the pain in her heart. There is a possibility that the man she loves with all her heart killed her parents.

This is the same man that she trusts, she has put her life in hands. He nettles her cheeks in his palms and presses his forehead on hers.

Randall: "So me mu." (Hold me.)

He pleads in low cries, his heart is racing as the fear of losing her engulfs him.

Randall: "Mma me nko, me hemma." (Don't let me go my queen.)

He pleads, his arms pulling her closer into him.

Amara: "Let me go."

A demand escapes in whisper, Randall does not know this kind of pain. It is all new to him.

Randall: "Please, don't leave me."

Amara: "I can't be with you Randall, you took my parents away from me."

She frees herself from his grip, her heart shatters when he falls on his knees and weeps. The man who has demonstrated strength since she has known him is crying his eyes out. He enfolds his arms around her waist, his head rests on her baby bump.

Randall: "Mente m'akoma Amara, nnyae me." (Don't break my heart Amara, don't leave me.)

She is failing to push him away, his grip on her is stronger than she is.

Amara: "What about my heart Randall? What about my fucking heart?"

For the first time she shouts at him in wrath, anger has put cuss words in her tongue. Randall refuses to budge, this is the woman he loves.

Randall: "Kose kafra me hemma. Mehia wo, mepaakyew nnyae me." (I'm sorry my queen. I need you, please don't leave me.)

Speaking in his native language usually works with her, this is her weakness and she wants to give in. She wants to forgive him and hold him back. Her heart is too broken though.

Amara: "Please give me space."

She cups his face into her hands, kneels before him. He is her husband, just a few days ago she promised to be with him for better or worse and their worse came earlier than expected. She swipes her thumbs on his cheeks, wiping away his tears.

Randall cannot understand what is going on, the only thing he sees in her eyes is pain.

Randall: "I'm sorry."

An apology will never be enough.

Amara: "I know."

This is could be her way of getting rid of him or she really does understand.

Amara: "I want to be alone Randall, please."

She mutters, he doesn't want to leave her alone. He wants them to talk, he wants to take away the pain in her heart.

Randall is back up on his feet, he hesitates before walking out. He has no idea what Amara is thinking or if she will leave him. He can hear her cries from outside the door, there is a strong urge pushing him to go back inside and comfort her. However he can't do that, she asked to be alone.

STYLES\*

I knew that Mkhize had a hand in this, letting him leave has proven to be our biggest mistake. According to my source, he has moved to kliptown. I will not let him have a roof above his head.

Ayize: "Here he comes."

Ayize says, I explained everything to her. She was livid, but eventually came to understand.

Randall is trudging down the flight of stairs, I meet him half way. His eyes are not promising and the first thing that comes to mind is, how will I fix this if he failed?

Ayize: "I'm going to see if Amara is okay."

She dashes away.

Me: "What happened?"

Randall: "She wants to leave me."

He pulls out a packet of cigarette, slips one out and places it between the seams of his lips. I don't like this.

Me: "I thought you quit."

He scowls, ignores me and continues to light it, I follow him out to the back yard.

Me: "What did she say?"

Randall: "I told you."

He looks like a chimney with all of this smoke lingering around him. I thought Amara would hear him out.

Me: "The man who ordered the hit that day was Mkhize."

He rapidly turns with a grimace, this thought was far from his mind.

Me: "His brother, the one who worked with Franco."

Randall: "That fucker Musa?"

He spits his name out as if it burns his tongue.

Me: "He was the leader that night. Amara's father and Mkhize had just started a taxi business, Mkhize became greedy and took him out. The bloody coward used young men to do his dirty work. We were young, we had nothing and when Nkomo introduced us to his uncle. We went for it, they said there won't be any bloodshed. Musa knew when we went into that house that, Amara's parents will not see another day. He killed them and that was after he sexually assaulted her mom."

Randall: "Please stop."

He leans against the wall, puffing on the cigarette as if it's the last one he will ever have.

Me: "Amara has to know that you had nothing to do with this, Mkhize wants to destroy your home Randall."

He can't think of anything past the pain in his heart, his mind seems to be far away.

Randall: "Where is Mkhize?"

Me: "Kliptown."

Randall: "I want him homeless, I want him sleeping under a bridge. Those taxis that he has, I want them gone, Styles. He has to beg for mercy."

Now we're talking.

Me: "What do we do?"

Randall: "Give off a tip, get the community angry and seeking justice. They have to destroy that house, take it down. They should burn it if need be."

This is the Randall I know.

Me: "Done, I'll contact Nkosi right away."

Mkhize sleeping under a bridge? Damn life is good.

AMARA\*

The only reason I came back to this house was to get my clothes, not once did I think I would find Randall here. Seeing him has made it difficult for me to walk away. How do I leave him when my heart won't let me?

It hurt seeing him cry like that, I wanted to hold him and tell him that I forgive him. But the pain wouldn't let me. Ayize tells me that he is innocent and had nothing to do with it, although he was there. How do I look past the fact that he was a part of the men that killed my parents?

Ayize: "Mkhize is sly Amara, he used this to destroy your family. Don't give the devil a platform

to laugh out loud. If you leave that man, he won't be okay. He will never be okay. What about you, Liyana and R.J? You have built a hope for yourself, you found love Amara and you've come so far. You can't give up now."

I hear what Ayize is saying, there are so many buts though. My mind is muddled, I can't think straight.

She joins me to sit on the bed.

Me: "I'm confused Ayize, I don't know what to do."

Ayize: "This is life Amara, it's not sweet. You would think there is someone up there who enjoys making us puppets, look at me. The last man I was with before Neo abused me, he did things to me and now I might never be able to mother a child."

She brings forth sad news.

Me: "How? I don't understand."

A sad look melts on her face.

Ayize: "I've been feeling discomfort in my womb, so I went to get a pap smear and decided to get a check-up as well. The results came back, I'm infertile."

Me: "I'm sorry babe."

Ayize: "Well like I said, life is not sweet. Neo and I will be okay, all things work together for good to those who love God."

Ayize is quoting bible verses now? How long have I been gone?

Me: "You've been going to church?"

She laughs.

Ayize: "Not yet, Neo says we should and I'm game. He makes us pray before bed. This is the scripture that was chosen for the week, he bullies me into reading it morning and night. Now it's stuck in my brain, it annoys me sometimes."

I love this woman.

Me: "I didn't know that Neo attends church."

Ayize: "After being attacked by witches trust me, he has no other option. That man is a coward I tell you."

I'm failing to laugh at her retorts, my heart is heavy.

Ayize: "This God thing works, you should try it. Come to church with us on Sunday, it will be my first time too."

She offers.

Me: "I would love that."



Ayize: "Bring our husband."

I see where she is taking this, it will take time for me to get over what Randall did.

Ayize: "They were young then Amara, I'm not saying what they did was right. They were trapped into thinking that it was only a robbery."

Can love be this stupid that it wants to forgive all the time? Randall hurt me and all I can think about is being with him, I want to hide on his chest and forget that this ever happened.

There is a knock at the door, he walks in as we are wondering who it could be. I didn't get time to carefully look at him, he's an emotional wreck. He is not the strong Randall I know, my heart is in pieces. But I want to make him feel better.

Ayize sees this as an opportunity to leave the room.

Ayize: "Think about what I said, he loves you."

She mumbles before walking out.

Randall: "Me hemma." (My queen.)

He mutters glancing right at me, I can't believe I am about to say this.

Me: "Won't you hold me?"

His eyes amplify, I said the unexpected. His mind is still buffering, trying to catch what I just said.

Me: "I want you to hold me, Randall and make the pain disappear, tell me that everything will be okay. That we will be okay and will get past this."

He is sitting next to me, his eyes deep into mine and his hand cradling my cheek. I'm blubbing, I want the tears to stop.

Randall: "Everything will be okay, I promise. You will be okay again me hemma." (My queen.)

He kisses my cheeks, pulls me on his chest and sinks down on the bed with me. This is where I want to be right now, in his arms. I don't want to think about anything else.

To be continued...

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

211\*

SETHU\*

“Aunt your phone is ringing.”

Liyana states, I’m slaving away in the kitchen for them. Trying to put supper together. While they are engrossed on the TV and not one of them will bother to get up and bring my phone.

Mbali: “Sisi, your phone. It’s making noise, we can’t hear.”

She’s complaining?

What do I do with these kids?

Me: “One of you better give me my phone or I will not cook tonight.”

Ginger is the one to take the jump, I’m still trying to grasp her sweet nature. I used to walk on egg shells around her, she might go back to the hard person she was.

Me: “Thank you sweetie.”

See scurries back, snubbing my gratitude. I don’t know this number, it’s from a land line.

Me: “Yes.”

I answer.

“May I please speak to Sethu Malinga?”

A female voice says on the receiving end.

Me: “Speaking.”

“You were stated as the next of kin on Beauty Malinga’s file.”

My heart taps on my chest.

Me: “How may I help you?”

“She died mysteriously in her cell last night. We need to...”

My mind blocks out the rest of her speech, Mbali and Ginger will have to bury another parent. I have lost interest in Beauty, but these girls mean the world to me.

Narrated\*

Sika has been a loyal dog to Mkhize since he was a young man. He started off as one of his taxi drivers, he would run errands for him and Mkhize grew fond of him. Years later Sika would do anything for Mkhize, even kill for him.

Rage has been crawling in his heart since they found out that Styles and Randall are behind Mkhize downfall, Sika is out for blood.

He wants to go at them guns blazing, little does he know that Randall has found loyalty in a man who is as sly as a fox. Does Sika stand a chance against Nkosi?

A knock at the door brings Sika to his feet, his aunt is sleeping in her room while the rest of the family have gone to do their tasks for the day. Work, school and hustling.

Sika: "Who are you?"

He frowns at the black man on his door step, he is dressed casually and no warning is brought forth to Sika by his intuition.

Nkosi has come to collect.

Nkosi: "You were spotted at the devil's playground and he wants your soul."

He states, Nkosi can be a little dramatic sometimes. He has caused confusion in Sika's mind, it's only but a few seconds that he is tapped back to reality. It's late to pull out a gun as Sika feels a hard object on his abdomen.

He knows that his time has come, but first he wants to know who is after his life.

Sika: "Who are..."

Fate denies him a chance to finish his question as a bullet pierces through his abdomen, two more shots send him on the ground with blood oozing out of his stomach and a little more escaping from his mouth.

"Dankie Siyabonga." (Thank you.)

A victorious smirk on his face, Nkosi slides away, leaving the body on the door step for the family to discover it.

Nkosi picks his phone to make a call, today has been a good day for him.

Nkosi: "Mhlonishwa." (Boss.)

There is only one man he has dubbed with this name.

Randall: "Is it done?"

Nkosi: "His family will be singing amagugu on Saturday." (Funeral hymns.)

Randall: "Good."

Nkosi: "You know me mhlonishwa, 'makuchithek' igazi, kukhal' abantu nama fosholo. Sidla ama seven colours. Dankie siyabonga." (I never miss a target.)

Randall smirks, he loves the sound of that.

Randall: "And Mkhize?"

Nkosi: "That old man will be using a rock as his pillow tonight."

He replies, his voice bursting with pride.

Randall: "Nkosi, you and I have a bright future together."

Nkosi: "Dankie Siyabonga." (Thank you.)

And with that, he dashes into his car and drives off like nothing ever happened.

MKHIZE\*

How did I grab a snake by its tail and not its head? Now it has bitten me. I have lost my home, the only place I had left. I have nowhere to go.

An angry mob came knocking on my door, shouting out loud that, I had killed my mother and they wanted justice.

We escaped through the back door, I have nothing now. My cars were repossessed as well, my taxis have disappeared like a ghost at the crack of dawn.

I had many friends during my glorious days, it is true that when days are dark friends are few. We are in a taxi to Katlehong, I have not told Masibiya where we are headed to. She will not like it at all, but this is for her own good. I would plead with Nkomo to accommodate her, then again he is not taking my calls.

MaSibiya: "Why are we here baba?"

She asks as we jump off the taxi, I have to send her back to her father's house.

Me: "If I could do things differently, I would mkami. I am sorry that this is the only option we have left. I should have secured your future, invested in a business. This would not be our situation, money was the only thing that mattered to me. I thought the taxis were a life time thing. I have lost it all, my accounts have been wiped cleaned and I have nothing to my name."

MaSibiya: "Kodwa I told you that I will follow you anywhere, you are my husband. Please don't send me away."

Me: "I will come back for you MaSibiya, stay here, I will sleep well at night knowing that you are safe."

She is reluctant about it, but eventually agrees.

MaSibiya: "Please come back for me baba."

She's in tears and I have no strength to wipe them away.

Me: "I will."

I can't promise anything, this might be the last time that I am holding her in my arms.

I watch her stroll into her father's house, carrying the few clothes we managed to escape with.

I need to catch another taxi out of here, I search my pockets and come out with a R1 coin, it's all I have. What have I done to my life. The last person in mind might probably help me.

Me: "MaMkhize."

I am surprised that she took my call.

Sethu: "What do you want?"

Me: "Can we meet please? I need to see you."

I don't grovel to anyone, but life has humbled me.

Sethu: "I want nothing to do with you Mkhize."

Sishi has taken everything from me, my daughter as well. The only memory I have of my beloved Nontobeko.

Me: "I'm only human MaMkhize, please hear me out. You're my baby, you can't turn your back on me."

Sethu: "I can and I did, I had a toxic father before you. He hurt me in ways I never thought he could. I trusted him and how do I know that you will not do the same?"

I don't see her giving me a chance.

Me: "You're my precious baby girl. I would never dream of hurting you MaMkhize."

Sethu: "Stop calling me that."

It hurts that she doesn't want to acknowledge her name.

Me: "Can we meet?"

Silence.

Sethu: "I'm sorry."

The line is disconnected.

Bo Khabazela, why have you forsaken me?

RANDALL\*

A week later...

I have spent the past week trying to make it up to Amara, this is the time when she should be ecstatic. We are newlyweds, but there is tension between us. Liyana is still with Styles, she wants to come back home, but I can't have her come back to this mess. Ife flew back to Ghana with nana the day after the wedding, she said she wants to take care of mother.

Everyone who had visited for the wedding didn't waste time to go back to their humbled homes.

I'm bustling in the kitchen trying to prepare lunch for Amara, a little something to cheer her up and maybe get that smile back.

I hear her footfall coming towards the kitchen. Have I ever mentioned how this woman makes my heart stop? I am as nervous as hell, the thought of seeing her and having her reject me again is terrifying.

She stops on the door way, her arms cover her chest.

Me: "Do you need anything?"

She nods, her eyes refuse to glance at me.

Me: "What do you need?"

She doesn't respond but plods to the fridge, she pops her head in. I move closer to her, she almost bumps into me as she closes the door. She has a tub of yoghurt in her hand.

I'm in her way and not willing to let her go without talking to her.

She turns around, I know she wants to use the other exit. I pull her back and cage her against the fridge.

Amara: "Let me pass Randall."

Me: "Call me baby then I will let you pass."

I am pulling a bull by its tail.

Amara: "I am not playing with you Randall."

And I'm not winning.

Me: "I miss you Amara, I miss your smile. I miss you calling me baby and I miss your ugly horselaugh."

I see a smile crack on the corners of her mouth, it goes before it reaches its full form.

Amara: "I do not have an ugly laugh."

Her retort puts a smile on my face.

Me: "No, you don't. That's what we'll tell people anyway."

She smiles fully at my jest.

Me: "Remember when I said don't ever stop talking to me?"

She drops her sad eyes.

Me: "It freaks me out when you're not talking to me Amara. The only thing I am afraid of in this life is losing you."

Her eyes rise, a scowl builds up on her face.

Me: "I don't know what life was like before you. You're a part of me now me hemma."

Amara: "And you're a part of me, I won't lie and say I'm over what happened. It will take time Randall, it still hurts."

Me: "I know, I know me hemma. Let me be with you during this time. I want to make it okay. I love you, tell me, you love me too. I haven't heard it the whole week and baby I can't breathe." (My queen.)

She laughs and drops her forehead on my chest.

Amara: "You are so dramatic."

Me: "I'm serious though. Won't you say it?"

She raises her head.

Amara: "I love you."

Me: "I love you too me hemma." (My queen.)

I missed her kisses even more.

SETHU\*

Ayize wants nothing to do with Lebo just like she wants nothing to do with Lebo's mom and when Ayize makes up her mind, no one can change it. She has a beautiful heart but mess with her and she will hate you like she never loved you.

My aunts and uncles are taking care of Beauty's funeral arrangements.

Styles is against this meeting, but I have to see Lebo.

"I'm going in with you."

I forgot to mention that he offered to bring me to the correctional services.

Me: "You don't have to, you know?"

Styles: "Let's go."

He jumps out of the car, Styles always wants to be too much. He gives me a look when I exit the car. He's waiting for me to change my mind, I want to but Lebo asked to see me.

We sign in and are led to the waiting room, Lebo is here. She jumps to her feet when she sees me. She was sentenced to fifteen years, it is a long time if you ask me.

She wants to hug me, my demeanour prevents her from doing so. She looks different, gained a lot and cut her hair short.

Lebo: "Thank you for coming."

She smiles, looks at Styles and then back at me.

Me: "How have you been?"

I don't think I care, I am only being polite.

Lebo: "I'm in prison, life isn't actually rosy."

Okay.

Lebo: "Did you hear about your mother? She died."

Me: "I know, she will be buried this coming Saturday."

Lebo: "She told me about the babies being switched at birth."

Yes, that.

Me: "It was hard finding out about it."

I riposte, I wish she would tell me why she called me here.

Lebo: "So you're getting married? Congratulations."

She's leering at the ring.

I look at Styles beside me. Is he not going to say anything?

Me: "Thank you."

Lebo: "I'm sorry about everything I did to you Sethu. I hope that you will find it in your heart to forgive me."

Is this why I was summoned here? I don't hold any grudges against her anymore. If I did I wouldn't be here."

Lebo: "I need a favour from you."

She states nervously.

Lebo: "My mother is all alone, please don't turn your back on her. She needs you and Ayize, she told me what my father did to Ayize and I am sorry about that. Please tell her that, I'm sorry and ask her to forgive my mother."





Ayize will not agree to this request, so asking her will be a waste of time.

Me: "I'm not promising anything Lebo."

I rejoinder, she is asking for too much. Aunt betrayed Ayize, as her mother her job was to protect her.

Lebo: "I understand, try at least."

I see desperation on her.

Me: "I will, we have to go."

Her eyes buck, I would think that she is saddened by the announcement.

Lebo: "Okay, thank you for coming."

Styles is the first to get up, he starts taking his first steps. Lebo reaches over for a quick hug, I can't deny her that.

Lebo: "I was always jealous of you Sethu, that's why I saw it fit to destroy your life. I thought your life was perfect, you had everything. My dad lost his job and we were struggling, I wanted it to be your family and not mine. I was led by jealousy and greed. I'm truly sorry, you're my cousin and I want us to have a relationship, I need my sisters."

Her confession comes as a surprise.

Me: "I hear you."

What else should I say? My mind is blank, I forgive her this I know.

\*\*\*\*\*

Styles opens the car door for me, he's still treating me like that egg I had mentioned. Which is so unnecessary.

Styles: "Are you okay?"

He asks as he jumpstarts the car.

Me: "I am, I feel sorry for Lebo. She is not okay in there."

He welcomes a frown.

Styles: "She's in prison, no one is okay in there."

He squelches.

Styles: "Are you considering giving her a chance?"

The thought crossed my mind, maybe we can have that close relationship.

Me: "Maybe."

Styles: "I would advise otherwise, I know you're stubborn. You will do whatever you want. I don't trust her, people don't change overnight. If you decide that you want to build a relationship with her and plan picnics at the prison's waiting room, please do it after my baby is born."

He says my baby, as if he's the one carrying a fetus. I was dragged into the doctor's office and it turns out that we're pregnant. Being a nurse, I had diagnosed myself with false-pregnancy. I saw tears in his eyes that day, now his overprotectiveness gets on my last nerve. I foresee arguments, but for the sake of the baby, I will shut my mouth.

Me: "You don't have to worry about anything, I haven't made the decision yet. I need to talk to Ayize first. If I do decide to visit Lebo often, I will be extra careful around her or I can take my body guard with me."

He curves an eyebrow.

Styles: "Body guard huh? And how much does this body guard get paid."

Me: "How much was he thinking?"

The smirk on his face as he runs his hand on my thigh, he leans in closer to my face. He's kissing me, his hands are all over me.

Styles: "How about more of these and move in with me?"

He covers my lips with his, immediately after his request. I see his plan and this kiss is going to make me give in, I am melting.

Styles: "What..."

Quick kiss.

Styles: "...do you say."

Another kiss.

Styles: "Kitten."

And I have melted into a puddle of mess, I want to move away from this slow wolfish kiss. It's going to make me agree to his demands.

Styles: "Please say yes."

He pleads with lips brushing against mine and pecks in between.

Me: "Fine, I will move in with you. Now stop torturing me."

He gives me one last brush and moves back with a smug look on his face.

Me: "I am planning the wedding when we get home and we are getting in two weeks, I don't do vat 'n sit." (Cohabiting.)

He must know. He laughs and pulls out of the parking lot. Blessings on blessings, this is what I call my life.

To be continued...



Edit with WPS Office

## BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

212\*

Guilt has been eating Dladla up since Khethu was sent away to the mental hospital, he is surrounded by nothing, but loneliness. Nobayeni is showing signs of recovery, she is slowly slipping back to life. The swelling on her face has subsided. Dladla visits her every day and fills her in on his average miserable life.

He is at her bedside waiting for her to open her eyes, his hope is not dead.

He lifts his eyes to the sound of a knock at the door, Mbongeni walks in. It's been long since Dladla has seen him.

Mbongeni: "Mr. Dladla!"

He salutes.

Dladla: "Mbongeni!"

Mbongeni: "I came as soon as I heard, I've been away on business. How is she?"

Dladla releases a long deep sigh, he is exhausted. The thought of giving up has prodded him.

Dladla: "I don't know, she hasn't opened her eyes."

That's all he knows.

Mbongeni: "She is a fighter, she will make it."

Dladla wants to believe that so bad.

Mbongeni: "How is Khethu?"

He narrates a story about Khethu's shenanigans and how he had no choice, but to send her away.

Mbongeni: "What about the baby? Is the baby okay?"

Dladla: "Yes."

Mbongeni: "I want to take care of them if you don't mind sir, I will pay what is due. I want Khethu and our child with me. I still love her, I thought moving on would make me forget about her, but she is the only woman for me."

Hence his previous relationships did not work.

Dladla: "I won't stop you from doing so, Khethu needs to finish her treatment first. We cannot risk taking her out of there."

His head rapidly turns to the sound of someone moaning, Nobayeni is fighting to open her eyes.

Dladla: "Nobayeni!"

He calls with excitement, he has been waiting for this day.

Dladla: "Call the doctor please."

Mbongeni rushes out in speed. Dladla is finally glancing into his wife's eyes.

STYLES\*

I am surprised to see Nkomo at my door step, it's been a while since he visited.

Me: "My idea of a good morning does not involve seeing ugly cows."

He chortles at my salutation.

Nkomo: "No, but it should involve seeing protective brothers, I am here for my sister."

He pushes his way into my house and scans his eyes around, looking for god-knows what.

Me: "What do you mean you're here for your sister?"

He makes himself at home as he sits comfortably on my couch.

Nkomo: "You know you can't have my sister just like that?"

I see he enjoys uttering the word sister.

Me: "Excuse me?"

Nkomo: "Come on Styles, you don't think I would let you marry my sister without paying lobola. She might not want anything to do with Mkhize, but she has me and my uncles. Our uncles, I mean."

Me: "Don't be such a cow Nkomo, Sethu wants nothing to do with the Mkhizes."

Nkomo: "Says who? I know my sister will want things to be done right."

Geez.

Me: "Would you stop saying sister."

I snap at him, he's getting on my nerves. He snickers, Nkomo enjoys torturing me.

Nkomo: "Sorry I wanted to annoy you, it is my job as her brother and my..."

Me: "If you say sister one more time, she will be nursing you back to life for the next three months."

Nkomo: "Relax Sishi."

He continues to laugh.

Nkomo: "Where is she anyway?"

He browses his eyes around.

Styles: "She's here and don't put funny ideas in her head."

Nkomo: "She might want to meet the uncles Styles, I told them about her and they are keen. They want to meet her."

He states.

Me: "Look, I don't know them. I just don't want Sethu exposed to any danger out there. Mkhize is not a saint as we all know."

Nkomo: "His brothers are different, they will treat her like royalty."

Me: "Yeah right, exaggerate much?"

He smiles.

Nkomo: "It's God's honest truth, we honour the women in our family."

Here comes Sethu.

Nkomo: "Where are your bags?"

That's an absurd question.

Sethu: "Why would I need my bags?"

Nkomo: "I came to take you home."

Me: "I'm ready to throw you out of my house."

He grins at my rejoinder, while Sethu greets him with a hug.

Nkomo: "The family wants to meet you."

She sits beside him, her eyes are on me.

Me: "You don't have to."

Sethu: "Actually I do, I want to know my family Styles, they are my blood and our kids will need a home to go to."

She is right.

Nkomo: "Great, I will let them know then. Styles get your uncle prepared and your father, we are not going to play nice. I hope your bank account will survive the lobola negotiations. My sister is priceless of course, but hey, we can't ignore isiko." (Traditions.)

He said 'my sister' again.

Me: "Fuck you cow."

He laughs out loud, Sethu does not like my response.

AMARA\*

Four months later\*

It's been over four months of ups and downs, I can't say that life is perfect. Nothing in life is perfect, we are just two adults who are trying to survive in a world that is bigger than us and raise a little girl who is growing faster than we would like to.

Soon Liyana will be asking for makeup, tight jeans and the next thing we'll be introduced to some boy whose hormones are raging faster than the Gautrain.

I haven't given much thought to how I would feel about it, but I know someone who will die on the spot.

"Me hemma, I don't want to wear this shirt" (My queen.)

Yes, this man right here.

Me: "What's wrong with it?"

He gives me a look I am norm to. I have decided to dress him, he looks good in black don't get me wrong, but he needs to brighten up his wardrobe.

Randall: "It's pink."

He grouses, throwing the shirt on the bed.

Me: "It's not pink, its..."

I should have rehearsed this when I came up with the idea, now I'm standing in front of him while he is looking at me like I escaped from a mental institution.

Me: "Okay it's pink, but it's stylish and classic. It will look good on you."

He doesn't believe me.

Randall: "Where is that shirt I picked out last night?"

He means the black shirt and I am this close to giving up on this man.

Me: "Come on baby, just try it."

He's grumpy now, he should be the one who is nine months pregnant, looks like a balloon and breathes like a Hoover machine.

Me: "I'm going to see what Chioma made for breakfast."

I have become conscious of my weight, it bothers me. I knew I was going to pick up a lot, I just didn't know that it was going to be this bad. Randall says I'm exaggerating, while he embellishes about his weight and how clothes don't fit him anymore.

Randall: "Let me help you down the staircase."

You see this right here is what upsets me, sure I struggle down those flights and I need help to get down. It's the offer that gets to me, it kills me each time he offers to help. We usually end up arguing about it, he calls me the ice queen of Narnia. It's an insult I tell you, I am not harsh at all.

Me: "I will manage."

I lie, he pissed me off with his stupid suggestion.

Randall: "Manage what? What will happen if you fall? Not with my baby please."

Is he serious right now?

Me: "Are you calling me fat Randall?"

This time my inner thighs have this unbreakable relationship, they been clinging on each other for months now.

Randall: "No."

That sounds like a yes and that look in his eyes, he's trying not to scan my body. But his eyes are disobedient, they are judging me. I'm tearing up, I can't help it. Why hasn't this baby come out yet, I am so buying Herbalife after this.

We make it down, I came so close to shrugging his hand off me.

Me: "I didn't need help."

I lie.

Randall: "Yes, you didn't."

His sarcasm is loud and I don't like it, he moseys away immediately before I get to shoot at him with my biggest comeback ever.

Me: "Chioma."

I knew that I would find her cooking.

Me: "Please go buy Herbex, I would ask Randall, but he is on his mood swings today."

She grimaces at my request.

Chioma: "Herbex? Why?"

Amara: "I have gained weight, look."

I spin slowly to show her how my body has changed overnight.

Me: "Look at my stomach Chioma, how can you let me eat like a pig?"





I am not okay and Chioma is smiling.

Chioma: "It's time."

Me: "For what?"

Chioma: "The baby is ready, R.J."

The baby? R.J?

Wait a minute, I leer down at my body and I'm pregnant...

How is the baby ready to come when I don't feel anything and my water has not broken yet.

Chioma: "You just had momnesia."

Me: "What?"

Chioma: "It's pregnancy memory loss, it's not a disease don't worry. Uze must be stressing you, I told him to stop. Whoever gave him these hormones made a wrong decision."

I am not listening to chioma anymore, my back hurts. I need to sit, I move to a chair and it's not working. So, I'm back up on my feet.

Me: "Chioma, I need you to get Randall."

The discomfort is intensifying.

Chioma: "Uze, Uze!!!"

She runs out of the kitchen. Why is she leaving me alone? What if I give birth on the kitchen floor?

Something pops and I feel a warm fluid streaming down my thighs, it splashes on the floor.

Me: "Chioma."

I scream. This is not fun, no one told me that it was going to be this painful. My back is on fire. Where the hell is Randall?

Me: "RANDALL!!!"

Fine, I will drive myself to the damn hospital. I drag feet to the door, this baby wants to kill me.

"Amara."

Oh good, he's here and he's...

Me: "Don't touch me."

I push his hand off, he's confused by this.

Me: "Aaaahhhh!!!! Randall it hurts."

I scream as I clutch my hand on his.

Randall: "Breathe me hemma, we'll get it out. Chioma bring the car."

Chioma can't drive.

Me: "Stop touching me and go get the car Randall."

I snap at him with clamped teeth.

Randall: "Okay, okay."

I pull him back to me as he dives for the door.

Me: "Where are you going? Don't leave me here."

Randall: "You said to get the car."

Me: "Okay hurry."

I paste my hands on my waist, no matter how hard I press the pain away it won't go.

Chioma: "You need to calm down, control your breathing."

Unless she knows how this feels.

Me: "I'm sorry Chioma, maybe you want to carry the baby. I don't know because I can't... calm... down..."

And where the hell is Randall with the car.

Me: "One..."

Breathe in.

Me: "Two..."

Breathe out.

Me: "Aaaaahhhh, it's not helping."

I'm holding on to Chioma who looks more terrified than I am.

Me: "Mmhhhh no, Chioma. What is this? There can't... be a... baby in here. What did Randall put inside me?"

Chioma is laughing at me.

Randall: "I'm here, I'm here. You can stop mooing like a cow now."

If I wasn't in pain and in a rush to get this baby out of me, I would be all over him.

SETHU\*

I knew I was dreaming when I was planning to get married in two weeks. It backfired, it didn't work out for me.



After being introduced to the Mkhize brothers, there were rituals that had to be done. I had to be acquainted with the Mkhize ancestors, taken back home to Inanda to meet the family and step on the soil where my father was born.

Hectic...

Nkomo forgot to tell me that, there was so much to be done. One of the aunts went as far as to say I had to have Umemulo, I hear her strings seem to loosen sometimes. I mean come on, I am pregnant, over four months to be exact.

To think I have seen obsessed fathers. Styles sits on the throne, I have given up on him.

So, Mrs. 'I don't do vat 'n sit' has been living with a man she is not married to for months. The things men make us do.

Nkomo, just like Styles can be obsessive when it comes to me. Each time he sees me, he gives me a lecture about how I should not be playing wife with the guy and poor Styles paid lobola. I wish they would give him a break.

I knew Nkomo's mission was to torture Styles, he left his bank account with cracks. Styles said so, unless he lied to me because I demanded to know how much I was worth. Every woman has that question in mind and I took my chances, but I didn't bring one home for the team.

School is going well, I love it and I cannot wait to start working.

"Kitten, where are you?"

He's home, too early for my liking. Don't get me wrong, I love having him around and cry when he leaves. I mean the baby makes me cry, we'll blame everything on the hormones.

It's his obsessive behaviour that gets to me.

"Sethu, where are you?"

I don't want to roll my eyes, don't let me roll my eyes Lord.

Me: "I'm in here."

I shout from the bathroom, wait till you hear what he has to say.

His footsteps are getting closer.

"What are you doing?"

I'm startled by the tone of his voice, so I jump up only to hit my head against the bathroom sink.

Me: "Ouch."

I whine, Styles is rubbing the pain away and softly blowing on the throbbing spot.

Styles: "Sethu, you need to be careful. How many times must I tell you this?"

He chides me, this is my daily life.

Me: "I would be careful if you would stop freaking out every second Styles, I'm only pregnant, but you treat me like I'm dying."

I protest.

Styles: "That is not true, I'm looking out for you. Why are you washing the clothes using your hands?"

He questions, I want to tell him that there's a stain on my shirt and I wanted to get it off, but I am not going to.

Me: "Kiss me."

Don't blame me, my hormones are raging. I want sex all the time and am I glad that he doesn't complain?

He wants to protest, but my hands have found their way to the belt of his jeans. I sink them in, he cusses as I touch him.

Styles: "Dammit Kitten."

His voice cracks, his arms fall on my hips. I straddle him as he lifts me up, he pins me on the wall, his hands are holding my weight against the wall and my legs are wrapped around his waist.

I can already feel a tingling activate on my thighs, the slow unfathomable kisses get me excited. I feel like I can do this forever, he feels good and I love how he is careful with me.

My nails are digging deep into his back, I'm breathing on his neck. Everything feels natural, it's unrushed. He knows what he's doing, he knows how to hold me.

His phone rings, I know he is going to answer it. He does this all the time.

Me: "Don't... take... it..."

I plead as I enjoy him inside me.

He ignores my plea. Is he going to satisfy me while talking on the phone. I missed the memo where men are the weirdest creatures on the planet. Whoever is on the receiving line has been put on speaker.

"Styles stop having sex, I'm having a baby."

That's Randall, everything dies down.

Styles: "What?"

He says as he continues with his strokes, my mood is gone.

Me: "Styles put me down."

I whisper in his ear, I will not have sex with him while he's talking to Randall.

Styles: "We're not done yet."

He mumbles, I am done.

Me: "Put me down dammit."

I say it louder than I should.

Randall: "Styles put the girl down."

He gives me a sorry look, buries his face on my collarbone and whispers.

Styles: "I'm sorry Kitten."

Not acceptable, I slide down and dash to the bedroom.

Styles: "Sethu."

He calls after me, I will not be talking to him for the next hundred years.

#### AT THE HOSPITAL\*

Randall is seated on a chair holding his son, he's scrutinizing him under his gaze as he is in awe of this little human. With Liyana, he was denied a chance to experience this moment. He is glad though that, he gets to experience it with the woman he loves.

Randall: "He is the most beautiful thing I have ever seen."

He tells his wife who is dead tired from the birth.

Amara: "He is worth all the pain."

She replies smiling at him.

Randall: "You were so dramatic Amara, telling the nurses to cut you open. Was it that painful?"

He teases her, she can only laugh about it now.

Amara: "Says the man who was screaming his lungs out with every push I took."

Randall: "Hey, I was helping you scream. I thought you needed a break."

He lies.

Amara: "And, when you fainted?"

She wants to hear this one.

Randall: "I have one thing to say about that, I am never having sex again."

Amara laughs at his response, only Randall can say that.

Amara: "Tomorrow you will be all over me, I will remind you of this day Randall."

Randall: "Please do."

He says, admiring his baby.

Amara: "You know it serves you right, the nurse told you to stand next to me. But no, Randall wanted to see his son enter the world. What did you think you were going to see?"

Randall: "Not what I saw."

Amara cracks up, before admiring her little family. Liyana will be so happy, a brother is what she wanted.

"Is it safe to come in?"

Styles and Sethu walk in, followed by Neo and Ayize.

Ayize: "Look at this little angel, he looks like our husband."

Ayize states leaning in for a closer look.

Styles: "You're still breathing?"

Styles seems to know something.

Randall: "What are you talking about?"

Styles: "Knowing you Randall, you wanted to see the birth of your son and I bet you a hundred bucks you fainted."

Neo: "Eish, saan. Me hemma please tell me that you took a video." (My queen.)

Amara: "I was busy giving birth Neo, maybe the nurse did. You should ask her about it."

Neo is not going to let this go.

Ayize: "Don't be silly Neo."

Ayize chastises him.

Neo: "Mara baba just imagine Uze fainting, it's not every day we see that."

Ayize agrees with him, she is fighting a smile. Randall is not bothered, he is happy right now and no one will take that away from him. Sethu and Styles are engrossed on the baby, Sethu plays with his fingers while Styles for some reason, counts his toes.

\*\*\*\*\*

It's been over a while since everyone left, it's just the couple again.

Randall: "We should name him."

He proposes, the baby has fallen asleep in his arms. Randall refuses to put him down.

Amara: "You name him."

She gives him the honours.

Randall: "Randall Kwame Okolie."

Randall senior christens the new member of the Okolie family and places a kiss on his forehead.

Amara: "I love it and I love you."

Randall: "I love you me hemma." (My queen.)

He leans over to taste her lips.

To be continued...



BEAUTY TAMES THE BEAST\*

SEASON FINALE\*

213\*

AMARA\*

One year later...

Randall: "Wake up me hemma, it's 5am."

I will never get used to being woken up so early in the morning.

Me: "Five more minutes baby, please."

Randall: "You said that ten minutes ago. Today is your first day at school, remember? You're going to be late."

I'll be studying Broadcast journalism at a local university, I'm excited. Randall is on top of me, yet he is asking me to get up.

Me: "Get off me then, so I can prepare."

He shakes his head smiling.

Me: "What is it?"

Randall: "Thank you for choosing me, me hemma." (My queen.)

Me: "I will always choose you baby."

Randall: "Thank you for the family you have given me."

I should be thanking him, I had nothing and today I can count my blessings.

Me: "Are you trying to get me in the mood with these words?"

He simpers.

Randall: "Is it working?"

His question plants a smile on my face, I have known Randall long enough to know when his eyes are admiring me. He brushes his fingers down my cheeks and busses my lips.

Me: "You're staring."





He still makes me shy.

Randall: "I can't help it, wo ho yefe, me hemma." (You are beautiful, my queen.)

He declares.

I love it when he speaks foreign, he knows that I will be digging my fingers on his back if he continues like this.

Randall: "Me Oyere, woma m'ani gye." (My wife, you make me happy.)

Me: "You make me happy too my king."

He sneers.

\*\*\*\*\*

Everyone is preparing to go their separate ways after breakfast, there is so much chaos. Ife, Liyana and R. J are making noise. The child cannot put a full sentence together yet, but his screams will give you a headache, he is trying to compete with his sister's noise.

Me: "Okay guys, plates in the sink, let's go. Who is driving with me?"

Liyana: "Me."

She bounces up and down, she is going to a new school and is excited about grade five. Ife moved in with us three months after R.J was born, she continues with her studies at a university.

It makes me happy that Chioma is still around, she is of great help, especially when the house is chaotic like right now.

Ife: "Can I drive today, please?"

Randall: "You are not getting behind that wheel until you get your driver's licence."

Trust Randall to ruin someone's mood, R. J looks at him as he walks into the kitchen with this demand. He is expecting to be acknowledged by his father, the rest of us cease to exist when Randall makes his presence known.

R. J: "Dada."

He raises his arms to Randall, Chioma is struggling to feed him now, he's unsettled and in need of attention.

Ife: "Brother come on, don't be boring."

Ife grumbles as she grabs her bag, she plods outside, complaints swooshing out of her mouth.

Liyana: "Wait for me Ife."

Liyana says as she runs after her with her back pack, Ife insisted that Liyana calls her by her

name. Randall disagrees with it, he says lfe will grow up and it won't be nice when her niece calls her by name.

R. J: "Dada."

He screams, funny how I'm the one who pushed him out of me. The brat can't even say mama, I gave up teaching him. I have a feeling Randall has been hard at work forcing the word papa down my baby's throat.

Me: "You're too strict on her, she can drive you know?"

He takes R.J from Chioma.

Randall: "She can't drive until a piece of paper tells her that she can."

He retorts, giving all of his attention to his son who is tittering his life away. This is my queue to walk out, I'm only going to be a third wheel if I stay here.

Me: "You two better hurry with whatever you're doing, we're going to be late."

I announce, bid Chioma goodbye and follow the girls out. The king of Ashanti has forgotten his queen due to his son's presence. I wonder how we'll lead the kingdom one day. Oh yes, the kingdom, we still have time.

STYLES\*

"You know I could have driven myself to work?"

Sethu says or should I say complains, I offered to drop her off at work.

To think that I wanted nothing to do with marriage and children, today I am looking at my wife and our baby girl Esihle who is strapped up on her car seat. She was born five months ago, she's the light of my life. Her mother's stubbornness seems to reign on her, I can't imagine how she will be a year from now.

Me: "I know."

I feel Sethu's eyes piercing me and this compels me to give her a brief look.

Me: "I'm listening."

Sethu: "You know Mkhize won't get to me, right?"

Sethu has been getting these anonymous calls, the number changes each time. We suspect that it's Mkhize, khethu was voted out.

She is at a mental hospital and has no access to phones.

Nkosi has been keeping an eye out at the taxi rank, that old fool Mkhize knows how to hide himself. Desperation has him calling my wife, I know that he wants a second chance. If it were



up to me, he would be dead.

But this is punishment enough, better than death and he is where he belongs, in the slums eating from trash cans.

Me: "I know Kitten, we can never be careful. He is desperate and would do anything to get to you, we don't know how dangerous he could be."

I do, Sethu doesn't think Mkhize could ever hurt her.

Sethu: "I can't believe his family turned their backs on him."

She found out from her aunts how Mkhize supposedly betrayed his brothers and they want nothing to do with him, honestly I knew that Kenneth would pull this off.

Speaking of Kenneth, he is somewhere in China. I don't know when he will be back, I would advise him to take his time. A broken heart takes forever to heal.

I park the car on the side of the road, Esihle is awake and her cries get to me. I hate it when she cries, it breaks my heart.

Sethu: "Why did you stop?"

Me: "The baby is crying, can't you hear her?"

Sethu: "Yes, however this is no reason to stop the car. Babies cry Styles, it's what they do."

I know but...

Me: "I hate it when my baby cries."

I jump out of the car to get her, her cries halt as soon as I take her in my arms.

Me: "You drive, I'll sit here with her."

I shut the back door and make myself comfortable on the back seat. Baby Esihle is sucking her thumb while making baby sounds, I can tell from the look in her eyes that she is happy.

Me: "Look what you did to my baby, she eats her fingers like you."

I make sure to remind her of this, with every chance I get.

Sethu: "I don't eat my fingers."

She protests as she drives off.

Me: "It's all you ate when I first met you, you still do it when you're nervous."

It's something that she will never accept.

Sethu: "Yeah, blame it on me. It could be something from your side of the family. I think I spotted Richard sucking his thumb yesterday."

Her comeback throws me into laughter, Richard is forever in our house. He is hands on with Esihle, he loves being a grandfather. Our relationship has improved in the past year, although I



don't see myself calling him dad.

Sethu: "How will you drive back home with Eshle in your arms?"

She is teasing me, she says I always want to carry the baby in my arms. Sethu suggested that we get a nanny. I have nothing against nannies, but after the videos I have seen, trending on social media of child minders abusing children. I will not let my daughter go through such.

Me: "We'll sit at the restaurant until she falls asleep."

She hates my suggestion.

Sethu: "My boss will fire me Styles, he'll think I'm turning his restaurant into a family business."

Me: "Hey, we are paying customers. Isn't that right cupcake? You and daddy are paying customers."

She throws in a quick baby laugh as I play with her chubby cheeks.

Me: "Did you hear that? Eshle agrees with me."

Sethu: "That doesn't count."

Me: "Don't make me take up that offer of buying the restaurant, then you will be under me."

She laughs.

Sethu: "Under you huh?"

Her mind has travelled far away from the topic.

Me: "We have a baby in the car, don't get carried away."

My statement fuels up her laughter.

Sethu: "Am I your side dish Styles? Are you two sure I am still needed in this trio?"

Me: "We're still thinking about it."

She looks at me through the rear view mirror.

Sethu: "Styles Sishi, you better not even joke about it."

Me: "Hey, it's not me. Talk to your baby, she makes the decisions around here."

Sethu: "Yeah we'll see whose breast she'll be crying for tonight."

Me: "Tell her 'daddy will give me a bottle."

Eshle smiles as if she understands what I'm saying.

Sethu: "You two are skating on thin ice."

Me: "We love you too mommy."

Sethu chortles and shakes her head.

I have a family to call my own. How did I not want such a beautiful thing?

AYIZE\*

How is life on my side?

I couldn't be happier, Neo and I are still engaged. We're getting married in two months, he went from the man who was fighting me for tissue paper to the man I can't live without.

We go to church quiet a lot, sometimes more than I would like to. Sometimes I want to go out with the ladies on a Sunday, but this man hey...

Amara knows how to go out and have fun now, Sethu is starting to loosen up a bit. She will always be Mam'fundisi, it's something we will never take away from her. She is the 'guys that's enough' type.

Lelo is fun too, but she tends to be a little snobbish and it gets annoying. I don't know if it's a package that comes with being married to a CEO. Amara refuses that I put her in her place, one day is one day I tell you.

It is said that Matshidiso lost her mind, she roams around the streets of Soshanguve shouting out her evil deeds for the world to hear. I really do not care about her, Jesus lives in our house now. No demon or witch can enter our premises.

So Mr. Maake wants to be pastor Maake, he has become a prayer warrior, that's how much Matshidiso and her accomplices scared him. I'm kidding, he's always had it in him. I think he would make a great leader.

As for me, I am not ready to let go of my wine days. My Friday night partying, besides I don't see myself in a long skirt every Sunday because the congregation expects me to be a role model to the youth.

I'm okay with Neo in his IT Company, we work hand in hand. The man can be a slave driver, he is a different person at work and puts on his clown outfit as soon as we get home.

Styles and Sethu have a baby, the most adorable thing I have ever seen. Mbali and Ginger are staying with us full time. They are growing and becoming responsible young ladies. Kagiso is so adorable and I love it when he calls me mama, his mind seems to remind him sometimes that, I am Titi. But he falls back on track.

Doctors can't explain why I was declared infertile, it turns out that, I am very much able to bear a child. Neo almost threw a party when he found out, he is a little too extra. I love him regardless.

Here I am standing before him wearing lingerie, it's a different one every day. I'm trying to get the man in the mood. He is as tired as I am, I didn't know trying for a baby can be exhausting.

He is sitting on the bed, his gaze on the laptop. He knows I'm here and it's time, yet he's ignoring me. Stupid.

Me: "Neo man."

I sulk.

Must I beg for it? Who wants a baby more here? He raises his eyes with a furrowed brow.

Neo: "Mara, baba. 'Na ke khatheste ka tlof tlof, everyday mara? Van Damme is tired too, yoh huh ah Zee." (I'm tired of having sex.)

He calls his member Van Damme because according to him, no man could survive the amount of sex we have every day.

I don't want any weird looks, doctor's orders. We have to have sex when I'm ovulating, Neo doesn't seem to understand the medical part of it. He thinks I can't get enough of him, yet he wants a baby.

Me: "Hey I don't mind waiting another year, we can try for a baby when Kagiso is five. He still wants my attention, you know?"

His eyes dilate with shock.

Neo: "Eng? Never, I refuse." (What?)

He says as he gets up from the bed, he starts to amble towards me.

Neo: "You want to invite the devil in my house? I will not allow it."

Now he's interested, he pulls me to him, we fall on the bed and loud giggles erupt from my mouth.

NOMBULELO\*

My mother is serving twenty years in prison, my father is still in a comma. The doctors say there is a chance that he might wake up one day, I am not looking forward to it.

Life with Mbuso is blissful, I love him more every day. Ntando lives with us full time, his grandfather withdrew from fighting for him.

We moved in to a new house two weeks back. I love it, more space for the kids and having your own place to call home, nothing compares to it.

Uluthando is growing, she is a smart kid. She's almost 2 years old and has two fathers who love her dearly, yeah, Zuma is still around.

Finally I am Mrs Xaba, it has been a journey, we're finally here.

Me: "What time are you coming home tonight? Amara invited us for supper."

Mbuso sticks his tongue out, bites it in a goofy way. It's a funny sight to behold. We're getting dressed, its breakfast, work and school after this.

Mbuso: "I almost forgot about that."

He utters as he fixes his tie, his schedule is busy lately. Mbuso was promoted to CEO at the hospital, his passion has brought him this far. He's a hardworking man and knows where he's going in life.

Me: "Please tell me, you're coming."

Mbuso: "What time should we be there?"

Me: "6pm on the dot."

I stand before him to help, he struggles with tying a tie. It frustrates him, yet he doesn't ask for help.

Me: "There you go."

I throw in a kiss on his lips after my completed achievement.

Mbuso: "Thank you chubby cheeks."

He wraps his arms around my waist.

Me: "It's just a tie."

Mbuso: "Not for that, thank you for our beautiful family and for loving me this much."

I remember the day I met Mbuso, I was swimming in pain and sorrow. He dived in and rescued me, not in my wildest dreams did I picture this life with him. Today I'm a nurse, a mother and a wife to the most amazing man God put on this earth.

Me: "Xaba wami, uyindoda emadodeni, ubaba wezingane zami. You're everything I asked for and more. Thank you for showing me what love is, I will forever be grateful to you my love." (You're a man amongst men, the father of my kids.)

Mbuso: "Won't you show me just how grateful you are."

He leans in to kiss me, I tilt my head back.

Me: "No, we have to go. The kids are waiting."

Mbuso: "Just a small mba, hau." (A peck.)

Me: "Yeah it starts with a mba and the next thing you're on top of me and I'm wrapped up around you." (Peck.)

I need to be careful with him, I will lose my job if he keeps making me late.



Mbuso: "It's not a bad thing, we're married and newsflash, it's what married people do."

He protests, his hands digging under my t-shirt.

Me: "I love you Xaba, but control your hormones."

I move away from him and toddle to the door.

Mbuso: "Okay, how about we meet here during lunch? Five minutes should be enough."

I'm not complaining, at least he doesn't say one minute anymore. I feel his arms wrap around my waist from behind, he kisses the curve of my neck.

Me: "If you behave, then it's a date."

He lets go and walks beside me like a civilised person, as we plod to join the kids for breakfast, I love this funny man.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jonas and his family moved back to Mpumalanga while Mhambi and Petunia stayed in Vaal. Petunia has always loved that kitchen anyway. Twenty years is a long time to leave the house empty.

\*\*\*\*\*

Nobayeni and Dladla are back home, she has recovered and will never in her life look at another man. It took a near death experience to realize that Dladla is enough for her.

Khethu is still at a hospital, relapses keep taking her to square one. She would wake up screaming for Styles and claiming that he's calling her name. A love that was once planted in her heart turned into a deep obsession. Mbongeni took their little boy Zulukhaya. He waits for her to recover so they can start a new life together.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Eh baba vuka, this is not a hotel man." (Wake up man.)

Mkhize opens his eyes to a cold morning, a sore back and a throbbing headache. He hardly slept a wink last night, sleeping on a cardboard under a bridge is not his idea of a good night sleep.

Down and out, there is nowhere to turn to. He is too proud to go to his brothers and grovel, the



same men who grew up under his wing have turned their backs on him.

No one knows of his current whereabouts and he intends on keeping it that way, or else he would die of shame if his family were to see him washing taxis.

He has camouflaged himself, grease on his face and old ragged clothes are the only thing he could use for this disguise.

He has no clue where his wives are, only MaSibiya. He has spotted her several times catching a taxi. She still looks the same, nothing screams poverty. Pride won't let him bring himself before her.

"Hurry up khehla, you still have two more taxis to wash. The passengers will start arriving now, fak' amafutha mkhulu, fak' amafutha." (Be active, grandpa.)

The taxi driver says, Mkhize recognizes him as one of his old drivers, but the taxi is different. None of these taxis belong to him.

It was a few days back when his heart stopped for a second as he saw the logo K. MKHIZE. It was the surname that got to him.

Kenneth had won in this mission, all of Mkhize's taxis belong to him. You reap what you sow, maybe if a wise man had told him these words, he wouldn't be where he is.

Life is not for the faint hearted.

AMARA\*

THE OKOLIE RESIDENCE\*

Liyana's goal in life is to make me work hard, the girl just changed into clean clothes. It's barely been ten minutes and she's standing before me covered in mud. Her muddy footprints painted all over the foyer. The guests will be here soon, I want to scold her, but the innocent look that she's giving me is not allowing me.

Me: "What happened?"

I cross my arms as I wait for an explanation.

Liyana: "Sorry Mara."

She's eleven now and she still calls me Mara, I love it. I love how she is not showing any signs that she is going to be a teenager in two years.

Me: "Okay, will you tell me what happened?"

Liyana: "I slipped and fell."



She gives me a short smile and I should not be smiling back.

Me: "You are going to take a bath for the second time, and Chioma is not going to help you get rid of that mud on your hair. You will do it yourself."

She puckers up, I am looking at Randall's daughter.

Me: "Don't frown at me young lady, go clean up."

She scuttles away, leaving more foot prints behind.

Liyana: "Chioma!!!"

She hollers, just like Randall, Chioma can't say no to Liyana. I have to put a foot down each time I see that, it's getting out of hand.

"Haibo, you guys have pigs now?"

Ayize questions in disbelief as she strides in with Neo and the kids.

Neo: "Uze always wanted a dog, I didn't think he would get a pig instead."

Neo adds, he's carrying a sleeping Kagiso in his arms.

Me: "We don't have a pig, it's Liya. Apparently she fell in a puddle of mud, she is trouble I tell you."

Mbali: "Where is Liya aunt?"

Me: "In her room, you can go ahead."

Mbali and Ginger dart away in search of the trouble maker.

Ayize: "Bring Liya to me for a week or two and I will show her how a child is disciplined."

Not a chance.

Neo: "Baba, I am this close to calling the cops on you."

Ayize: "Kids need to be disciplined, or they will boss over you. One slap puts them on the right track."

Me: "In that case, forget about having Liyana for a week."

She laughs.

Ayize: "You know where to find me, when you change your mind."

She is serious about it, Ayize does not play with children.

Neo: "Let me walk away, I don't want to be called to testify when you're arrested."

He hands Kagiso over to Ayize.

Neo: "Let me find him in peace please."

He teases her, Ayize cannot find the humour behind his remark.

Ayize: "Where is everyone?"

She probes after Neo walks away.

Me: "Randall is with Styles and Esihle in the back yard, Sethu will be here later. Mbuso and Lelo are still at work I think and Nkomo is on his way with Zobuhle."

I explain as we toddle to the kitchen, she goes for a glass of wine. I take Kagiso from her, I should take him to R. J's room.

Me: "You're in the mood to party."

Ayize: "I need a glass or two, just in case your cousin decides to walk in with her nose in the air. Who gave her a doctor for a husband? You would think Mbuso invented medicine."

I disagree, Lelo has always been a bit snobbish. It's in her nature.

Me: "You and Lelo need to bond and you will see that, she is not as bad as you think. Go out for drinks or something."

My suggestion does not make her happy.

Ayize: "Forget it, she will come back without her head if that ever happens."

On the other, Lelo should take it down a notch. Ayize is not fond of boasters.

Me: "I will have a talk with her about it."

I get a smile for my cleverness.

Ayize: "You are a doll."

She finishes off her wine, I watch her as she pours another one.

\*\*\*\*\*

An hour later and everyone has arrived, it's a beautiful night. The stars are out showing off their perfect sparkles, with the moon wanting to blend in. We're all gathered outside, food on the table, drinks in our hands and the conversations flowing. The laughter of children fills the place and I couldn't be happier.

I look at Randall beside me to find him staring back with a pucker on his forehead.

Me: "Stop frowning at me."

He leans in for a quick kiss.

Me: "What did I do?"

Randall: "You gave me purpose in life."

He takes my hand into his, everyone goes quiet as if they were ordered to.

Randall: "If anyone told me that this would be my life in a few years, I would have shot them on the spot."

I am still asking myself if God delivered the right one on my door step. Styles, Neo and Nkomo find him funny. Mbuso wants to chide him, I see it in his eyes.

Randall: "Styles, you have been here from day one, you put up with my shit and I am thankful for you bro. You showed me what a real brother is, I don't know if I have ever told you this, I love you brother."

Styles raises his glass.

Styles: "I don't remember you saying it and I never thought this day would come. Let's hope it does not rain tonight."

He teases, opening our laugh boxes.

Styles: "I love you bro."

Neo: "Sho, hai a re tse." (Complaints.)

He grumbles.

Randall: "The same goes for you Neo, although I will never understand you. You're the little brother I never had, I am glad that Styles introduced you to me."

Neo: "I'm glad you brought that up Uze, I actually have a speech prepared."

He draws out a piece of paper from his pocket, scratch that, it's an A4 page.

Neo: "First we're going to pray and thank God for this family, the friendships and for the Mkhizes who have finally turned away from witchcraft. Rea leboha modimo." (We thank you Lord.)

No one is looking forward to listening to that long speech, Ayize grabs the paper from him. Sethu and Nkomo are not laughing at this.

Ayize: "Not now baba, church is on Sunday not today."

Thank God for Ayize, Neo is dazed by the fact that we are laughing at him.

Randall: "I would like to thank my beautiful wife, the mother of my beautiful children. Mrs. Amara Uze Okolie, we have come a long way and look where fate has brought us."

I would say God, but hey Randall will not step foot in church, same as Styles and Nkomo.

Randall: "Thank you for giving me a reason to wake up in the morning, for your love and patience. Me dofo, mewu ama wo." (My beloved, I will die for you.)

I can't control my tears, this is the same man who couldn't express himself and now he does it so easily. He doesn't care that I am shy and he should not be kissing me in front of everyone.

Ayize: "Yes Randy baby, show them how it's done."

Ayize exclaims from across the table.

Neo: "Huh ahh Zee, huh ahh. You don't even know what he said, he could be swearing at us."

Neo does not accept Ayize's appreciation for Randall.

Nkomo: "The pastor is feeling the heat."

Laughter.

The night is going well, Ayize is dancing like she doesn't care. She is the life of the party. R. J screamed for his father until the little prince was brought over by an exhausted Chioma

Sethu is nursing Esihle, she says that Styles is obsessed with the baby, I think they both are and it's adorable. The other kids are in the house with Chioma, she is catching up on her favourite telenovela. I know Liyana is giving her a hard time about her cartoon shows.

Neo: "Guys, guys wait. I hear Mkhize was spotted at Bree taxi rank, I was thinking, how about we donate 5cents each and go help the old man out?"

Everyone turns away and continues with their conversations, flouting Neo's jest.

Neo: "Okay 1 cent, half a cent? God is watching bathong."

No one pays attention to him, he likes clowning around.

Ayize: "Baba, that's enough. You're embarrassing yourself."

Ayize reproaches him.

Neo: "Okay baba, I thought I should help the old man. Ke sono oa tseba." (It's sad you know.)

This is his way of mocking Mkhize, pastor or no pastor, Neo will always be Neo.

NKOMO\*

Days later\*

Today I am going to war, I am meeting the father and the brothers. It's been months since Zobuhle has asked me to meet her family. I can't keep postponing, lest she thinks I am not serious about her.

We arrive at her father's house in Glen Vista, they are all waiting outside and I smell drama. Four brothers and an old man who looks more dangerous than Hitler.

My ancestors have to deliver me from this. As we approach them, I recognize one of the men. Nkosi, the guy who works for Randall. He is Zobuhle's brother? The man knows that I am not a

saint.

Shit...

Zobuhle throws herself on the old man who spins her around in a hug. She hugs the two brothers who appear older than her, nudges the other two who look about her age. Nkosi is one of them, the look he is giving me should have killed me by now.

She moves to stand next to me.

Zobuhle: "Baba and monkeys, this is him. Nkomo Mkhize, the man I love."

She wraps her arm around mine and rests her head on my shoulder.

Me: "Greetings."

I salute, damn these men are angry. None of them has smiled at me nor will they acknowledge me, I am here to take their girl away and like I said, this is war.

Let the games begin...

**\*\*\*\*\*THE END\*\*\*\*\***

