

BENT NOT BROKEN

Mvelo and
Ntswaki



Bent not Broken 2

By: Yorahalo

Chapter 1

"Love is not what you say, love is what you do."

Mvelo

Almost dying was a terrible experience. On my parents wedding day anniversary, there was a shoot-out. I took a bullet for my mother and I was in a wheel chair at the age of 16. The past year were terrible for me. I couldn't go to school, heck I couldn't even go to the toilet without being watched. My mother wasn't taking this well at all and I could see it hit her the most. Today, the 2nd of March, I'm turning 18. All the physiotherapy has been really helpful, that's why I'm able to celebrate my 18th birthday. I thank God every single day for the people around me because without them, I wouldn't be here. Isabelle Davids, Sydney Van Vyk, my mom, my dad and my grandparents. I was giving up on life and they were always here to lift my spirits and told me to never give up. I'm glad I didn't give up because today I can walk all by myself. Mom barges into my room with my little siblings holding a cake with candles all around.

Them: *Happy birthday to you*

Happy birthday to you

Happy birthday big brother

Happy birthday to you.

They all snuggle around me giving me hugs and kisses. I blow out my candles and mom hugs me really tightly.

Mom: Happy birthday son. I love you so much.

Me: I love you too mom.

She kissed my forehead and the rascals were jumping on my bed all excited.

Mom: I'll go cut this up for you. Go shower so you can go out today.

Me: and go where?

Mom: I don't know? Your 18 now. You can do whatever you want.

She smiled at me. I took her hand in mine and I kissed it.

Me: well if you say so then.

She laughs and I get out of bed. The rascals leave my room and I go take a shower. It's the first time in a while that I actually get to go out so I'm a bit sceptical but I'm turning 18, why not. I wear my black jeans, a white shirt and a bomber jacket with sneakers. Mom insists I grow my hair like dad so I always have to have it braided. Right now, I have box braids so does NJ, basically meaning we're all a family with hair. I go downstairs and I'm welcomed by the sweet smell of syrup on pancakes, my favourite. I see mom and dad by the stove kissing. I take my seat and clear my throat. They look at me and smile. Dad comes to me.

Dad: happy birthday son.

Me: thanks dad.

My dad and I are exactly the same. Closed off and quiet and that sometimes causes our personalities to clash, meaning we don't always see eye to eye. I love him yes but sometimes, he can be a dickhead. He sits next to me and slides me a black box. Inside is a silver and black Audemars Piguet watch. I look at him and he looks really impressed with himself.

Me: wow, this is amazing. Thank you dad.

Dad: see your first watch is something you should treasure for the rest of your life. I still have mine and both you uncles still have theirs. It's tradition in this family to teach our sons about the value of time. About how important it is to savour every moment in time, to spend time with the ones you love because you never know when their time will run out.

I can see mom smiling from a distance. I never knew about this tradition but I guess it's a good one. I stand up and hug him. I put it on and it fits perfectly. Mom serves us breakfast and while were eating, my phone rings.

Me: excuse me.

I stand up and I walk to the lounge to answer.

Me: baby.

Isa: happy birthday Andrew. I love you so so much baby.

Me: thank you bubbies. I love you too.

Isa: what are your plans for today?

Me: I really don't know but I would love to spend the day with my bubbies.

Isa: I have no problem. We can do just that.

Me: okay. I'll fetch you later okay.

Isa: okay baby.

Me: okay baby.

I hang up and I go back to the table and they eye me.

Mom: so what are your plans for today?

Me: I'm spending the day with Isa. Dad can I please borrow a car.

Dad: which one?

Me: The Maserati.

I know I'm just kidding myself because I know never in a million years would he give me his beloved baby.

Dad: no you cannot take my baby.

Mom: take the Porsche.

Me: it's personalized with your name though mom.

Mom: and?

Me: Ma' Mfusi? Really?

Mom: okay that's understandable.

We both laugh.

Me: I'm taking the mini then. Thanks mom.

Mom: I didn't even agree.

I stand up and kiss her cheek. I run up to my room and I take my backpack and I go back downstairs.

Mom: leaving already?

Me: I'm going somewhere first.

I was glad my birthday fell on a weekend this year and I didn't have to be stuck at school. I take the keys to the Mini and I head out. I drive to van Vyk's house.

Me: goeie more ma. (good morning mom)

Mrs V: goeie more seun. (Good morning son) Happy birthday.

Me: dankie ma. (Thank you ma) Where is this friend of mine?

Mrs V: he's sleeping. You can go wake him up.

Me: okay.

I go to his bedroom and he's dead asleep.

Me: ayy van Vyk word wakker my broer. (Wake up my brother)

Sydney: jou bloedige idioot. (You bloody idiot) Nxx

He sits up and i laugh at him. He looks hung-over.

Me: is jy honger? (You hung-over?)

Sydney: you don't know the end of it. Last night was turnt. die meisies.

He looks up and whistles.

Me: you and huns. Just wake up and let's go.

Sydney: where to?

Me: I'm taking my girl out and I need you to accompany me going to organize.

Sydney: you have no idea what to do neh?

Me: no fucking clue bruh.

He laughs and he gets out of bed. I leave the room going to the lounge. I've never been the romantic type. I just don't have it in me, it's Sydney who knows these things the problem is, he's not looking to be serious with anyone and it really perplexes me. he comes out dressed and we leave.

Me: waar is Lwandile? (Where's Lwandile)

Sydney: vra my nie kak nie. (Don't ask me shit)

Me: okay. ek verstaan nie hoekom jy nie dinge met haar wil oplos nie. You clearly love her. (I do not understand why you do not want to solve things with her.)

Sydney: I'm fine without her. Don't do this it's way too early.

Me: jy idioot, jy wou my nie eers 'n gelukkige verjaardag toe nie. (you idiot, you didn't even wish me a happy birthday)

Sydney: Ek het askies heeltemal vergeet. Happy birthday asshole. (I completely forgot askies)

I showed him the middle finger then we carried on driving. We arrive at Gateway and we go to Mc'D for coffee.

Sydney: stop stressing.

Me: stress is for die meisies. I'm just puzzled.

Sydney: picnic at Freeways, get a hotel room then maybe you can get some and stop this salt trend of yours.

Me: if she's not ready, I won't force her.

Sydney: you see right there my friend, that some gay shit going on.

Me: fuck you.

I punch his arm.

Sydney: walk on the beach, I don't know. Improvise.

Me: so much for the good advice.

Sydney: elke keer as u seksadvies benodig, is ek hier, my broer. (every time you need sex advice I'm here, my brother.)

Me: because that's all you ever think about.

Sydney: moenie die gedruis van my vriend oordeel nie. (don't judge the hustle my friend)

Me: ek bid vir jou. (I pray for you.)

We wrap up then I drive to Isa's house. On my way I call mom.

Me: mommy.

Mom: what do you want.

Me: come on mom it's my birthday, technically, I can get whatever I want.

Mom: emotional blackmail.

Me: I'm taking Isa to Freeways, can I get a room?

Mom: for what? Cela ungangiqhathi noConnie please.

Me: it's not like that mom jeez.

Mom: please don't do anything that involves making babies.

Me: (Laughing) I promise we won't.

Mom: good. I'll call Fundiswa and let her know your coming.

Me: thank you mommy. I love you.

Mom: yeah right.

I laugh and hang up. I arrive at Isa's then I call her.

Me: I'm outside.

Isa: mom says come in.

Me: ahh baby. You know your mother mos.

Isa: just come.

I huff then hang up. Don't get me wrong, I love Connie but sometimes, she goes into mom mode full force. I won't even mention Marlo, Isa's older brother. I try by all means to avoid running into him. I lock the car and I walk toward the house. As I'm about to knock, she opens still wearing her gown.

Isa: hey gummy bear.

She pecks my lips quickly. I walk inside and she leads me towards the lounge where her mother is sitting.

Me: hello Miss Davids.

Connie: Andrew, how are you.

Me: I'm great mam.

Connie: come sit down.

I sit down and Isa disappears down the passage leaving me with her mother who is concentrating on the television. I take out my phone.

Connie: how's your mother?

Me: she's okay.

Connie: I haven't talked to her in a while, I should call her.

I clear my throat as I wish the earth would just swallow me up. Isa walks in.

Isa: Andrew please come and help me.

I look up at her then I turn to look at her mother who doesn't seem to be paying attention to us. I stand up and we go to her bedroom. As soon as she closes the door, she grabs me by my shirt and kisses me like life depends on it. I grab her ass and pick her up. She wraps her legs around my waist. I pin her against the wall and I take back the power. We pull out breathless.

Isa: happy birthday gummy bear.

I peck her lips and I put her down.

Me: this is the help you needed.

Isa: (Giggles) yes. I missed you so much.

Me: I missed you too bubbies.

She goes to the mirror and fixes her dress and re-applies her gloss. She fixes her hair and straightens her dress. She's wearing a backless white and yellow flow jumpsuit.

Isa: how do I look?

Me: beautiful as always my love.

I peck her lips and she takes her bag. We walk out and find her mom still in the lounge.

Isa: mom I'm going out. I'll be back a bit later.

Connie: okay.

Me: bye Miss Davids.

Connie: byebye Mfusi.

Isa takes my hand and we walk out. We get in the car and she connects her music. She plays our favorite song.

Isa: *I had a dream*

We were sipping whiskey neat

Highest floor, The Bowery

Nowhere's high enough

Somewhere along the lines

We stopped seeing eye to eye

You were staying out all night

And I had enough.

Me: *No, I don't wanna know*

Where you been or where you're goin'

But I know I won't be home

And you'll be on your own.

Us: *Who's gonna walk you*

Through the dark side of the morning?

Who's gonna rock you

When the sun won't let you sleep?

Who's waking up to drive you home

When you're drunk and all alone?

Who's gonna walk you

Through the dark side of the morning?

It ain't me.

We look at each other and laugh. Her voice is so beautiful and angelic and I sound like a dying goat.

Me: baby you need to teach me how to sing.

Isa: definitely.

I give her a look and she laughs even more. She's so beautiful and perfect. The love I have for her is real and as young as I am, I do believe that she's the one for me. we arrive at the Hotel and we walk to the garden where our little picnic is set up.

Isa: Gummy bear, this is lovely.

She wraps her arms around my neck and kisses me. we go sit down and she lies on my chest.

Isa: this is lovely.

Me: anything for my bubbies.

She giggles so sweetly, melting my heart. We intertwine our fingers and we just talk about random things, catching up and eating. We started kissing and it got really heated. She stopped and I opened my eyes.

Isa: let's go to the car.

Me: I have a better idea.

We stood up and I took the picnic basket and she carried the blanket. We walked back inside and I went to reception with Isa holding on to my arm.

Me: Mvelo Mfusi.

The receptionist smiled at the both of us and handed me the key. We rushed to the elevator and went up to the third floor and my mom had given us one of the many beautiful suites.

Isa: this place is amazing.

Me: I know.

I drop the basket and I kiss her deeply, throwing her on the bed and she giggles. I look her in the eyes and they sparkle like glitter. I kiss her again and she starts taking off my shirt. I untie her jumpsuit and pull it down, exposing her white lace bra and panty. I leave her mouth and plant kisses on her neck down to her breast and tummy. I slide her panties off and leave a trail of kisses going down.

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She's lying on my chest drawing circles with her finger.

Isa: Mvelo I think I'm ready.

She never calls me by my first name so I know it's serious.

Me: ready for what baby?

Isa: I want you to make love to me.

Isa

Almost losing Andrew last year was horrible. It hurt me deeply seeing him struggle because I love him so much and I don't ever want to lose him. He makes me happy. We've been through things, broke up twice in the 3 years but we still we're stronger. I was so happy when he got out of the wheelchair because it meant he was making progress and when he started walking again, I rejoiced. Right now, a flood of emotions flush me. he's just given me the best head ever but I want more. I'm ready for him to bury himself inside of me, for us become one.

Andrew: are you sure bubbies?

Me: yes I'm sure. I want you to make love to me.

He kisses my forehead and he sits in silence for a second.

Andrew: I'll go buy some condoms.

Me: okay.

He gets out of bed and starts getting dressed. He leaves and I take a robe from the bathroom and put it on. I take my phone and video call my best friend Lwandile.

Lwa: babe where are you?

Me: I'm at Freeways hotel.

Lwa: wait, that's Andrew's mom's hotel right.

Me: yep. Friend, I told him I'm ready?

Lwa: what? Seriously!

Me: yes.

Lwa: so like did you do it already?

Me: no not yet. He's gone out to buy condoms. I'm so scared friend.

Lwa: just go with the flow. Let him take charge and don't overthink things.

Me: I'll try not to.

Lwa: call me when you get home, I want all the details friend.

Me: okay friend I love you.

Lwa: I love you too.

I blow her kisses and we hang up. I go back to the bed and wait for him to come back. He walks in looking all kinds of sexy. I get on my knees and I wrap my arms around his neck. He presses his lips on mine.

Andrew: hey beautiful.

Me: hello handsome.

He smiles and throws me back on the bed, getting on top of me.

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My phone rings, disturbing my peace. I sit up and look at the caller Id.

Me: it's your mom.

Andrew: really?

I answer.

Me: hello mah.

Zuzile: Isa hey. How are you?

Me: I'm great, how are you?

Zuzile: I'm good. Where is Mvelo, I've been trying to call him.

Me: he's right here. I think his phone is off.

I give him the phone but he doesn't take it. Instead he starts kissing my tummy really softly making me giggle.

Me: I'll tell him to call you mah.

Zuzile: okay love thank you.

He takes the phone and throws it on the other side of the bed and starts tickling me.

Me: (Laughing) stop that.

He doesn't stop. When he does, I already have tears in my eyes from laughing. He looks deep into my eyes with his naughty smile.

Andrew: I love you.

Me: I love you more.

Seal it with a kiss they say.

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Me: Andrew let's go.

Andrew: I'm coming.

He walks out the bathroom, takes the keys on the pedestal and walks to me. He kisses my cheek and holds on to my waist. We check out the hotel and we walk to the car.

Andrew: thank you for today.

Me: anything for my gummy bear.

He kisses me then we drive off. We arrive at his house and it looks like there's a party of some sort. As soon as we are by the patio we see all the rugby players from our school that are his friends. There's also some people I really don't know. When they see us, they do that rugby chant of theirs. He let's go of my hand as his friends take him away. I go to the table and take a glass of cocktail. A very beautiful dark, thick lady approaches me. she has short hair and big eyes.

Lady: you look very beautiful.

Me: thank you.

Lady: I'm Andisiwe, Mvelo's Aunt. I'm assuming you are the girlfriend he's always going on about.

I laugh softly and she smiles so genuinely.

Me: I guess I am.

Andisiwe: when he told us he has a girlfriend, we didn't believe him but I guess he wasn't lying. He wasn't lying about you being pretty as well.

Me: you are also very beautiful.

Andisiwe: well I try.

We both laugh and Andrew comes over.

Andrew: mommy.

She hugs her and kisses her cheek.

Andrew: I'm guessing you've just met my other half.

I couldn't help but feel flushed and my cheeks started heating up.

Andisiwe: she's very beautiful Mvelo. Please don't hurt her. Tell me if her hurts you. I'll make sure his father's kill him.

Me: I definitely will.

Andisiwe: okay let me leave you two then. Lovely meeting you Isa.

She leaves and my man holds me by my waist so close to him.

Andrew: I'm sorry about my friends.

Me: no it's fine. I was with you the whole day anyways. You know what, go chill with them, I'll be fine.

Andrew: are you sure.

Me: I'm sure, now go.

He kisses my cheek and he leaves. I go back into the house into the lounge and sit down with my phone in my hand. I start texting Lwa.

Lwa: where are you now?

Me: I'm at his house. There's a party thing going on here.

Lwa: and I wasn't invited. I'm going to catch Andrew.

Me: come friend. I'll call an Uber for you if I must. I'm dying of boredom.

Lwa: are you sure.

Me: just come friend please.

Lwa: fine.

She goes offline and I start going through my Instagram. I upload some of our pictures on my story and on my feed. As I'm busy with that, someone clears his throat and I look up. A light skinned guy stands looking at me.

Dude: are you okay?

Me: yes I'm fine.

Dude: do you perhaps need anything to drink or what.

Me: no thanks.

Dude: ohh I'm Muzi by the way. Technically I'm Mvelo's uncle but because of age, he's like a brother to me.

Me: I'm Isa. His girlfriend.

Muzi: ohh you're his girlfriend. I didn't think she existed.

Me: why are you the second person to tell me this?

Muzi: it's because Mvelo doesn't look like the type that would score.

I shake my head in dismay and he chuckles.

Muzi: it's true. But I'm glad he wasn't lying.

My phone rings saving me from that awkward conversation.

Me: excuse me I have to take this.

I stand up and walk towards the staircase.

Me: hey mom.

Mom: Isabelle where are you?

Me: I'm at the Mfusi's. there's a braai for Andrew's birthday.

Mom: and when are you going to come back?

Me: maybe 22:00. He'll bring me back.

Mom: as long as you are safe. I trust that boy.

Me: dankie mah.

I hang up and I go back to my seat and the creepy guy is gone. I request an Uber for my friend and in less than 10 minutes, she's here.

Lwa: you know I've been here before but I just can't get over this house.

Me: it's a dream.

Andrew's mom walks in the lounge looking drop dead gorgeous as always.

Zuzile: Isa, I didn't know you were here. Hey Lwa.

Lwa: hello Mrs Mfusi.

Zuzile: Mrs Mfusi is my mother in law. I'm Zuzile.

She laughs.

Zuzile: aren't you two bored. The house is filled with boys. I'm sure you would love to go binge watch movies on Netflix at Entertainment.

Lwa: we would love to.

Zuzile: okay then. Isa you'll show her the way. The bar has everything you may require and if you need anything, just buzz.

Me: no problem mah. Dankie.

Lwa takes my hand and I direct her to the cinema. I've been here before and I almost know my way around the house. I know the second floor like the back of my hand because when I'm here, that's where Andrew and I chill. I've never been on the third floor because it's his parent's bedroom.

Me: go fetch popcorn and Rascals from the bar, I'll tune the movie.

Lwa: are you kidding, this place looks like an actual cinema.

Me: the difference is you don't pay for anything and the lounge is way more comfortable.

Lwa: yoh friend, I need to date a Mfusi.

I just laugh at her and sit down to tune the movie. She comes back and we binge.

Chapter 2

"Two souls don't find each other by simple accident"

Mvelo

I'm glad Dad isn't here because I'm high as fuck. It's about 21:30 and most of the gents are thinking of going to a club for more. I know my mom won't allow that. I haven't seen my girl in a while, I think I last saw her when we had cake. I walk to the kitchen and find mom wiping the counters.

Me: mah.

Mom: Mvelo you need to take Isabelle home. it's late now I'm sure her mom is worried.

Me: where is she?

Mom: she's in your room.

Me: I'll take her home right now.

I walk to my room and I find her on my bed sleeping under the covers. She's wearing my hoodie and sweatpants, looking really cute. I shook her lightly

Me: baby, do you want me to take you home?

She shakes her head and turns to face the other way. I turn off the electricity and leave her to sleep. I go back to mom who is tucking in NJ.

Me: she's sleeping mah. I don't want to wake her.

Mom: yabonake Mvelo you don't listen. I'll call Connie and tell her she's asleep. It's not right for a girl to sleep out at this age.

Me: I know and I'm sorry for not listening mom.

Mom: ay suka.

She shoos me away and I walk out. I chill with the gents for a little longer until they decide to go. I walk up to my room and I find mom standing by my door.

Mom: you're not sleeping in here.

Me: why mom. It's my room.

Mom: but it's occupied so you'll go downstairs. Goodnight.

She pushes me down, leading me down the stairs. I take a shower then go to bed. I woke up at 06:00 in the morning and I snuck back to my room. When I entered, I was greeted by an angelic voice coming from my bathroom.

Isa: *"When I least expected it*

I found you and because of you I know how it feels to be loved.

And when I look into your eyes I see love.

I'm so in love

Through you I live and love again

Open the path to happiness

Through you I learn to smile again

I thank god for you."

I strip my clothes and I go join her she gets a fright when she sees me.

Me: I thank god for you too.

I kiss her nose and go down to her mouth as she giggles. She loves giggling and her giggles always melt my heart. We wash each other then we exit. I sit on the bed as I look at her going through my closet.

Isa: babe you know you have to fold your clothes right?

Me: but I don't have anyone to do it for me.

Isa: you have yourself.

Me: oh no I'm not doing that.

Isa: lazy bum.

Me: back at you bubbies.

She punches my arm and I pull her to my lap and I start to tickle her. She laughs out loud.

Me: shh.

Isa: (Laughing) stop tickling me.

I kiss her, deepening it by the second. The door flung open, giving both of us a fright and when we sat up, it was my mother.

Mom: Mvelo.

Her voice was reprimanding and stern and I knew that I had started the fire. Isa hid behind me.

Me: mommy wami.

I smile and she shakes her head. I know my mother, she's too sweet. She can't stay mad at anyone for too long, heck she can't even shout. Dad always does the reprimanding and shouting and mom is just there to comfort us in the end.

Mom: I thought I told you to sleep in the guest room.

Me: and I did mom.

Mom: doesn't look like it.

Me: I came up this morning to shower.

Mom: is the one downstairs broken perhaps?

Me: no but I just prefer my one.

She picks up a pillow from the floor and she throws it at me making me laugh.

Mom: leave.

Me: where to?

Mom: I don't care, this house is big, go.

She looks at me and she can't stop the smile that forms on her face. I stand up and kiss her cheek. I slightly peek in at them when I'm outside and mom comes to close the door shut. I walk downstairs and I find dad in the kitchen drinking coffee.

Me: morning father.

He nods, acknowledging my presence. He does this all the time, I've gotten used to it. I go to the fridge and take out an apple and a bottle of water. As I'm about to walk out, he speaks.

Dad: come and join me.

I'm surprised by this but I walk back to the kitchen. Don't get me wrong, I love my dad but if I'm really and truly honest, our relationship isn't that strong. Yes we sit together sometimes and we talk sometimes but it's not father-son goals. After everything I went through with him and what he did to mom, there's still that part of me that finds it hard to put it behind me. I just believe he's too closed off and he won't let us get to know him the way mom knows him. yes it will never be the same but what he has with mom and the girls, it's totally different. I sit down next to him and at first, he's silent. I start eating my apple.

Dad: look Mvelo, you are 18 now, sooner or later, you are going to be leaving us and going to start your life. I will tell you now, life is not easy, trust me I know the receiving end of it. What I'm going at here is for you to have a good life and to avoid unnecessary problems, make good choices. Now you can't avoid problems, they will always be there but there are some things that you can prevent from happening but it's you that will determine your happiness.

I nod along, wondering where this is going.

Dad: are you having sex with Isabelle?

I clear my throat and he looks at me waiting for an answer.

Me: yes. It's only happened once.

I felt like the room temperature was rising and it was getting hotter and hotter.

Dad: when?

Me: yesterday.

Dad: I hope it wasn't in my house.

Me: no. no it wasn't.

Dad: good. Now I'm sure you were cautious and took the necessary safety precautions.

Me: protection?

Dad: mmh.

Me: yes we did.

I knew this day would come and I would have to have this very uncomfortable weird talk with my father. I can tell that it's weird for both of us but it's not the matter at hand.

Dad: Isabelle is young and she still has a lot ahead of her, so do you. The last thing the both of you need is anything to distract the both of you. You are going to University next year and hopefully, as my heir, you will take over the family business.

You need to put school and building your career and life first before you think about settling down.

Me: yes dad. I'm focused, both of us are and we know the dangers of not being cautious. I love her and she loves me back.

He smiles at me and I smile back.

Dad: okay, I'm glad you get it. Just don't let love cloud your judgment and you end up forgetting what your plans are.

Me: I will.

He nods and we are back to sitting in silence. We are saved by mom and Isa coming down.

Isa: morning Mr Mfusi.

Dad: morning Isa.

Mom goes to dad and he pecks her lips.

Mom: Mvelo please go get your brother and sisters from the cinema. Tell them I'm making cupcakes.

Me: ohh it's Sunday.

Mom: yes. Isa please help me with breakfast.

They walk towards the kitchen and I go to entertainment to fetch the rascals.

Me: heyy, you rascals, mom is making cupcakes downstairs.

Helo: really?

NJ is already out the door running down the stairs. I hear mom shouting from the kitchen and I chuckle.

Me: come.

I carry Lindelwa and I take Helo's hand. Lindelwa still has a hard time climbing up and down the stairs so I prefer to carry her, Helo is just brat naturally. We get downstairs and the Princesses run to their daddy. Seeing my mother and Isa gave me a happy feeling and I couldn't help but imagine what our home would be like, Sundays just as a family, just like we used to do when we were younger. Mom and dad did a great job raising us. Till this day, neither Ntsakisi, Khauhelo nor Lindelwa have seen mom and dad fight, I was just caught up because the toxic time came when I was old enough to understand but still, when they did, in front of us, they never showed. They put all their indifferences aside to raise us and keep up happy at all times and for that, I'm grateful. To think at some point I despised my dad. I hated him for hurting my mother but I hated him even more when she went back to him. I didn't understand but until she explained that she was doing it for us, for our happiness, I decided to never underestimate the power and the strength of a woman.

Isa

I appreciate Andrew's mother and the more I get closer to her, the more I start to take her as my own mother. She's the sweetest most welcoming woman I have ever met. This morning, she walked into us kissing and she couldn't even reprimand her son. What we spoke about was a bit of a shock to me. In a way, she knew that Andrew and I had sex. I'm guessing it's her mother instinct or the women sixth sense but she knew and she was telling me about how important it is to plan your career before wanting to have children and whatnot. I clearly understood where she was coming from, she had her first child at 29, she had a chance to work on her career

with the love of her life right by her side. Her and Mr Mfusi are just couple goals to me. the Sunday morning cupcakes tradition is beautiful. The way they speak and laugh together, the way they do things together has me wishing I had a united family just like theirs. I never had my dad in my life. Mom tells me he left the same day I was born and he never came back. She had to make ends meet for her to make sure Marlo and I are fed and clothed each and every day. I never saw her struggle, not once did I see her shed a single tear. She took us to the best schools and made sure we have everything we ever wanted and I love her very much but sometimes, I just wish I knew what it was like to have a father. I change back into my jumpsuit and sandals after freshening up and I prepare to go home. I go downstairs and Andrew is with his father and little brother playing games on the TV. He turns around and sees me and smiles.

Me: I'm ready.

His mom pops up out from the passage way looking drop dead gorgeous as always in a baby blue strapless body hugging dress. She has her braids in a high bun and has no make-up on whatsoever and it baffles me even more how much a person can manage to look this sexy and beautiful at this age. Her slim body just motivates me honestly. She smiles at me.

Zuzile: I'll take you home baby.

Mr Mfusi hasn't taken his off of his wife and she makes his way to him and briefly kissing his pouted lips. I smile to myself and Andrew then catches me off guard and attacks me with a hug. He whispers in my ear.

Andrew: I love you.

Me: (Giggling) I love you too.

He kisses my cheek and looks at me with sad eyes.

Me: I'll see you tomorrow okay?

Andrew: okay.

He tries kissing me but I shake my head and I hear his dad chuckle then Ma gave him a death stare, causing me to laugh.

Me: Mr Mfusi, thank you for letting me into your home.

Mr Mfusi: you are welcome anytime dear.

I say my goodbyes to the kids and we leave. in the car, we aren't really speaking just the radio playing then this song comes on and Ma turns up the volume and moves her head singing along, making me laugh. I get a chance to listen to the lyrics.

Zuzile: Never felt so good before

Never dreamed I would explore

Making love in the positions that you got me doing

Never thought I'd beg for more

Never thought I'd find a man who could do it again and again

And maybe even do it like once again

I've never trembled in my life

Heard about it once or twice

But now I'm shaking

And I swear the shaking feels so nice

Now I don't know what I'm gonna do

Cause I don't wanna be away from you

It shouldn't have felt so good lord knows I've felt this good

It's wonderful

Where there's only one thing I need to know

Can I stay with you baby

For the rest of the night

Can I stay with you babe

For the rest of my life

Can I stay with you babe

For the end of all time

Ohh baby please let me stay through the night.

I look at her as the lyrics sink into my head and I reminisce about yesterday's events. I lost my virginity to the love of my life and it couldn't have been better than that. This is a very sensual, erotic song. I listen to the second verse.

"never been so weak before

Never met a man so sure

Of how and when and too much

And just how much

I've never been through ecstasy but now I'm feeling it

Over and over and over

And over and over and over

Whatever I can do for you love

You just ask consider it done

And I'll do anything

Whatever you want, whenever you need it

*I just want to give it all to you
More than you could ever expect me to
I swear whatever you do
I'll do it 3 times baby back to you
I'm good to go."*

I find myself smiling as it goes into the chorus again. The perfect love story this is, just like mine. Ma turns to look at me with the biggest grin.

Zuzile: you like it.

Me: it's amazing.

Zuzile: I see it's got you smiling ear to ear.

I'm pretty sure I'm turning purple from all this smiling.

Me: what's the name?

Zuzile: can I stay with you by Karyn White. That woman is a blessing I tell you. You should download her album, you'd love it.

Me: I will.

She drives us to the mall and when we're at the parking's, she looks at me.

Zuzile: let's go spend your father's money.

She has a devilish smile on her face making me laugh. She opens the door and we go inside. We start at Call it Spring and she buys a blue and white clutch bag that matches her dress. I'm just walking around and I spot these lovely pair of shoes. They

are black and yellow highlighted stilettos with a black strap with bling around the ankles. I pick them up and I look at the price tag. I immediately regret doing that because I almost die of a heart attack. What the fuck! Only a pair of shoes and they cost R650. Imagine the things I could do with all that money. Gosh my mother would kill me if she heard I even thought about buying these. I get a tap on the shoulder and I turn around.

Zuzile: those look lovely. Do you like them?

Me: I love them but yoh, they are expensive.

She looks at the price tag and looks unfazed.

Zuzile: take them.

Me: I can't mah. They cost a fortune. I can't afford them and mom would kill me

Zuzile: I'll buy them. Kanti what's the point of us shopping together if you don't buy.

I smile and she smiles back.

Zuzile: give me these so we can go pay. We still have to shut this place down.

She lifts her one shoe up in the air and does dramatic turn, making me laugh. She's such a fun, loving person. I find it easier to talk to her than my mom. My mom is my everything but I'm not able to talk to her about boys and whatnot and with Zuzile, it's just so easy. We leave the shop with several bags and I'm baffled because I thought she only bought one bag. We go to H&M and buy more things, then we move to Naartje for more things for the kids. Heck we even go to Cotton On. By the time we are done, I'm worn out and the car is filled with shopping bags. We get in the car and we start driving. Her phone rings and it's connected to the Bluetooth in the car.

Zuzile: listen to this.

She's grinning and she answers.

Zuzile: hubby.

Mr Mfusi: my beautiful wife. I see you were busy today.

Zuzile: I was indeed. Just abusing resources.

Mr Mfusi: after 8 years of abusing resources, you are still unable to leave me bankrupt.

Zuzile: because that's never the intention love.

Mr Mfusi: only R15000 though? I'm sure you could do better.

I don't know if I heard correctly or not but if I'm sure, I heard him say we spent R15000 on clothes and shoes, in less than 4 hours. Are you joking? I look at her and she has an "I told you so" look and I lose my will to live.

Zuzile: and I have done better love, just wasn't really in the mood today.

Mr Mfusi: (Chuckles) I hear you Ma' Mfusi. Have you dropped Isa of yet?

Zuzile: nope and your on speaker so choose your words mister.

Mr Mfusi: uhhu but you know what I want.

She opens her ashtray and takes out her Air-pod. She connects it and I can't listen to their conversation, just her giggling and smiling. I know phone sex when I see it but that's not my place to comment now is it. We get to my house.

Zuzile: Mfusi uhha manje. I'll see you when I get home.

...

Zuzile: yes I do have it.

...

She cracks up laughing and I look at her smiling. I'm guessing she hangs up because she takes out the Air-pod.

Zuzile: I'm sorry about that.

Me: it's okay.

Zuzile: I'd like to see your mother before I go.

Me: mah I have a favour.

Zuzile: what's wrong nana?

Me: mah please don't tell my mom about what we talked about this morning. I don't think I'm ready to face her because I know she might judge me.

Zuzile: I understand nana but at some point you will have to tell her right?

Me: I know and I will, eventually. As hard as I know it will be, I will have to tell her.

Zuzile: just know whenever you are ready, call me. I'll be there to just hold your hand okay.

Me: thank you mah.

She hugs me and we get out the car and I take my shopping bags, of which there are quite a lot of. We walk inside the house and I find my brother sitting in lounge and my mom in the kitchen. Our house isn't big, it's your normal 4 bedroom house with an open plan kitchen that leads into the lounge and a garage. It's just big enough for the 3 of us. Marlo stands up and charges towards me looking angry, clearly disregarding Mrs Mfusi.

Marlo: where were you? Since when do you sleep out!

Mrs Mfusi move out of the way and my mom comes out of the kitchen just as Marlo is about to slap me.

Mom: Marlo sit down. kan jy nie sien dat ons 'n gas het nie! (can you not see that we have a guest!)

Marlo: nee mamma hierdie een respekteer nie. hoe durf sy uitslaap. het sy selfs vir jou gesê dat sy nie sou terugkom nie? (no mom does not respect this one. how dare she sleep out. did she even tell you she would not come back?)

Mom: yes. jy uit alle mense het nie die reg om te praat soos jy nou is nie. moenie my van Marlo af weglaat nie, anders gaan die hel los! (you of all people do not have the right to speak as you are now. do not leave me away from Marlo, otherwise hell will break loose!)

He clicks his tongue and he leaves. I'm already in tears so Mrs Mfusi holds me tightly.

Mom: I'm sorry you had to see that. That boy has no respect whatsoever.

Zuzile: it's okay. I'm just here to drop her off. It was lovely having her visit us.

Mom: Isabelle please excuse us.

Zuzile hugs me tightly and kisses my forehead, making me smile. I take my bags to my room and as soon as I get in, I change into my sweats. I can't get Marlo's reaction out of my head because really, he might be a crack head and chaotic, but he's always been a loving brother. I push him to the back of my mind and I take out my books to study. Our tests are starting on Wednesday and honestly, I'm already well prepared. I just study now to brush up on my knowledge. I study for so long that I end up getting lost in the words but I'm brought back to life by a knock on my door and mom peeps in.

Mom: hey.

Me: hi.

She goes and sits on the bed and I sit beside her.

Mom: Isabelle you know I love you right?

Me: yes mom. And I love you too.

Mom: I love you so much my baby girl and you should know that I'm always there for you. Whatever you need, don't be afraid to ask me.

Where is this going?

Me: I know mom.

Mom: I know I've made you think that you can't speak to me about certain things and I don't like that. I want you to be open with me. I want you to be able to come to me and tell me things that bother you. Consider me your best friend.

Me: it's not exactly like...

Mom: let me finish. When I was growing up, my mother was strict. She was a single parent, just like I am, the only difference with her was we actually saw her struggle when dad left her. Trust me, it wasn't easy for us and it wasn't easier on her as well. She warned me about boys, she told me that she wouldn't allow me, not once to even look at one because she was scared the thing that happened to her would happen to me. she urged me to stay away, and I did, up until I met your father. He was everything a girl could ask for. Well at my age, I didn't really know about dating and whatnot but the way he made me feel was foreign to me. I wanted more and I got more. My mom warned me but I didn't listen and I ended up pregnant at 16. She was livid and she kicked me out. I was scared to death and I had nowhere to go so I went to live with your father. He was supportive for so long but 4 years later, when I was pregnant with you, he started changing. He would beat me and mistreat me but I tolerated his behaviour because I loved him and I wanted you guys to grow up in a happy home. I remember the day like it was yesterday when he came back home with his mistress and he kicked us out like dogs. We had nowhere to go and I was still heavily pregnant with you. I walked miles searching for help and I got it. A lady

took me in and gave me a job, cleaning her house while she paid for my hospital bills. Isa I am where I am now because of that lady but that's not my moral.

She's in tears and so am I. I knew my mom endured a lot of pain to get her but I didn't know it was this bad.

Mom: I vowed that I wouldn't let my daughter follow in my footsteps. I promised I would shelter her away from boys but as you grew older, I came to a realization. I realised how much I hated it. I hated being watched, being told what not to do and I decided that if I keep you from it, you end up going in my footsteps and I don't want that. I really don't and that's why I want you to be open with me. I want you to speak to me. I know these things and I will be able to tell you the right and wrong.

I nod and she looks at me.

Me: I appreciate it mom. It's really been hard not being able to tell you these things. I've been scared most of the time.

Mom: that's exactly what I was avoiding my love. Back then and now is different. 3 years ago when I heard about the Mfusi boy, I was scared. it had dawned to me that I had to go through what my mom went through with me and I was petrified but I trust you. You won't do anything to disappoint me.

She says that with so much pride and I instantly feel terrible. I look down and tears fall down onto my hands. She lifts my face and sees my face.

Mom: what's wrong Isabelle?

Me: mom...I don't want to disappoint you.

Mom: what have you done?

Her tone of voice has changed from concerned to anticipation and a tad bit of anger.

Me: I slept with him.

Chapter 3

"Anyone can capture your eye, but it takes someone special to catch your heart."

She looks at me with so much disappointment and her eyes start tearing up.

Mom: when?

Me: yesterday was the first time.

She opens her eyes widely at me and tears roll down her face.

Mom: daarom wil jy by sy huis oorslaap, sodat jy met hom seks kan hê. het jy nie selfrespek nie. (that is why you want to sleep over at his house so that you can have sex with him. do you have no self-respect?)

Me: no mom it's not like that.

Mom: hoe is dit dan? verlig my asseblief, want ek verstaan regtig nie! (how is it then? please enlighten me because I really do not understand!)

I'm balling my eyes out because I know when my mom is angry, she goes all coloured on me and starts speaking Afrikaans so I'm in shit.

Me: ons het op impuls ma opgetree, maar ek belowe jou dat ons sy huis nie respekteer het nie. (we acted on impulse mom, but I promise you we did respect his house and his parents)

Mom: so your telling me that you weren't even in your right mind? Are you crazy! Werklik.

Me: no mom. I was. Mom I love him and he loves me...

Mom: stop right there Isabelle. ek weet hoe seuns lyk. Hy gaan jou verlaat. Isabelle moet nie dom wees nie. (I know what boys are like. He's going to leave you. Isabelle should not be stupid.)

Me: maar hy is nie soos hulle nie. (but he is not like them.) He loves me mah. He told me and I believe him when he says he won't leave me. met alle respek mah, nie jy of iemand op hierdie planeet sal hom ooit van my skei nie, want ek is lief vir hom. (with all due respect mah, neither you nor anyone on this planet will ever separate him from me because I love him.)

She looks at me like I've just killed her but I mean every word I've just said. I love Andrew with every fibre in me and I don't care what people say. Even if those people are my mother. She stands up and leaves and I just cry even more, slamming my fists on the bed, screaming. Why can't she just let me be. I won't be like her. I'm not dumb like her. I ended up sleeping because I'm woken up by my phone ringing. I check and it's my gummy bear video calling me. I look at myself in the mirror and I look like a mess. I answer anyway.

Andrew: my bubbies. You don't look okay were you crying? what's wrong.

Me: (Sniffing) I'll be fine. I just had a fight with my mom.

Andrew: what about?

Me: I told her about us and she's fuming.

Andrew: give her time my love. She'll come around. All parents are like that.

Me: clearly yours aren't. why do you have a cool mom and mine is stuck up.

He laughs, making me laugh as well. He just has that effect on me and it drives me crazy.

Andrew: I know the right buttons to push.

Me: ugh you're lucky. You have it all. Both parents that love you and a complete family.

Andrew: let's do this, when we finish school, you and I will run away together and make our own big big family. How about that.

Me: that would be amazing.

He smiles and blows me kisses. We carry on talking and by the time we end the call, I'm feeling a bit better.

.....

I'm sitting on my bed listening to music. I just downloaded the Karyn White album and it's amazing. Mom opens the door and stands by the frame. I take out my one earphone and look at her.

Mom: dinner is ready.

I nod and put my earphone back on. I walk out and I go to the toilet. I pee and I realise I just started my period. Great, just what I needed to dampen my mood. I wash my underwear and I walk back to my room and change into new underwear. I go to the kitchen to take my food and I sit by the island and mom looks at me.

Mom: won't you come and sit with me?

I stare at her for a moment then I walk to the lounge and I sit on the single couch and we eat in silence.

Mom: Isabelle I'm sorry. I'm just scared that the same thing that happened to me will happen to you. I don't want that.

Me: I know you're scared mom but I'm grown. I understand what you went through and I know the signs.

Mom: I'm happy you found love but please be careful.

Me: I won't disappoint you mom, I promise.

She puts her plate on the table and comes to hug me really tightly. As soon as I sit back down, the cramps start and I groan.

Mom: what's wrong sweetheart.

Me: period cramps.

She sighs a huge sigh of relief, making me laugh at her. We eat with a flowing conversation.

Me: where's Marlo?

Mom: let's not go there. he's old enough to take care of himself.

Marlo is really hard to handle. Mom has cried countless tears, bailing him out of jail and paying off his many debts. It's sad actually and that's why I always wish my family was just normal. We finish eating and I take the dishes to the kitchen and wash them. I take my hot water bottle and fill it up. I drink my pills and I go kiss mom goodnight. When I settle in bed, I call my gummy bear.

Andrew: bubbies.

Me: I'm calling to say goodnight.

Andrew: and?

Me: (giggling) goodnight gummy bear.

Andrew: goodnight bubbies. I love you.

Me: I love you more.

Andrew: debatable.

Me: really?

Andrew: yes because I love you more and more.

Me: well I love you the most gummy bear.

Andrew: I love you more and most as well though. You can't beat that.

I burst out laughing and he joins in as well.

Me: well in that case, you love me more and most then.

Andrew: good girl.

I smile like a mad person, the kind of effect he has on me. Till this day, I get butterflies when he says my name. Imagine!

Andrew: I'll see you tomorrow my love.

Me: okay. bye.

We make kissy sounds then hang up. I'm woken up by my alarm and I go to the bathroom. I shower, go get dressed and I make breakfast for myself. Normally, mom takes me to school but Andrew has been quite persistent so sometimes I ride with him. after I finish eating, I pack up my things and comb my hair. My hair is long and

curly. Sometimes I just feel like cutting and going back to having short hair but my mom says when I cut it, I look like a lesbian and I felt offended so I just let it grow. I tie two ponytails and put white ribbons in them. I check myself one more time and I must say, I've gained a whole lot of weight. I'm not curvy, I just happen to have all my fat around my ass area and my boobs, which sometimes doesn't sit well with me. I take my school bag and I go knock on my mom's door.

Me: I'm ready.

Mom: I'm coming.

My mom is probably on night shift tonight so that's why she didn't wake up. She works at Transnet and their shifts change. She comes out and she drives me to school. When I get there, I go straight to the prefect room to prepare for assembly. I'm deputy head girl of the school and Lauren, the sportiest, most smartest girl in the school is head girl. I'm always second to her, according to academics and my goal is to at least beat her once. I put on my blazer and I head to the tuck shop to pre-order my lunch when I feel arms snake around me. his scent just gives him away and I smile from ear to ear.

Andrew: (Whispers) you look beautiful.

Me: thank you.

I kiss the corner of his mouth and I free from his grip going to order. I finish and walk back to him. See Andrew, Andrew is the hot, playboy that every girl drops their panty for. Basically sex on two legs. His body, his juicy lips, ohh lord this man is gorgeous. Story is, we were together in grade 9 but we broke up mid-year because he was cheating. It stayed like that for quite some time, he had his girlfriend and I was single. Trust me, seeing him with that girl destroyed every fibre in my body but I made sure not to show my pain. Instead, I got with Chad, playboy 2.0 and he lost it. He came back on his two knees, begging me to take him back and yes I had my fun with him. grade 10 was a lovely year for me. for once, I bent the rules. Girls hate the fact that he got with me, leaving them. All these rich posh girls for a bursary student, so you

can imagine all the eyes that look at us whenever we are together. We walk to the matric quad and we just sit and talk. The bell rings for assembly and we walk towards the hall. Proceedings are completed and we head to our respective classes. The first 3 lessons fly by quickly and before you know it, it's break. Lwa and I are next door to each other every third lesson so we always wait for each other. We walk down the corridor down to the prefects room and while we're walking, we hear the grade 9 girls talking.

Girl 1: guys Andrew is a flame.

Girl 2: braaahh. Did you see him today at assembly. I like what he did with his hair.

Girl 3: forget about the looks gee, what about the money. The guy is loaded.

They squeal in excitement and Lwa cracks up laughing. They turn around and they give nasty looks. Lwa returns the look and goes all authoritarian on them same time.

Lwa: girls where are your name badges?

Girl one pulls it out of her blazer and puts it in Lwa's face with so much attitude.

Lwa: okay, your marked. You two?

She folds her arms and they take them out.

Lwa: okay that's Friday's detention for attitude towards a prefect, and defect of uniform. You, pull down your socks, it's not Mary Poppins school.

The girls attitude is gone and they have regret on their faces. She takes her notebook and writes their names in.

Lwa: grade?

Girl 1: 9R

Girl 2: 9R

Girl 3: 9B

She shakes her head then shoos them off. As soon as they disappear, I look at her and she gives an evil chuckle.

Me: ohh my friend.

Lwa: these kids are disrespectful.

I laugh so hard at the look on her face and what she just did. My friend though. We get to the room and everyone is just chilling there.

Me: and if we're all here, who's on duty?

Jason: ayy these kids are nonsense, I'm tired of writing people's names down.

Me: well tough. Please go to your duties guys.

They all sigh and stand up. Lwa also leaves and my lunch is delivered. I sit down and eat and my phone rings.

Me: it's school time, you shouldn't be using your phone.

Andrew: but I can't find you and my last result is calling you.

Me: I'm in the prefects room.

Andrew: okay.

I hang up and I carry on eating. There's a knock on the door and I assume it's him. I go open and as soon as he sees me, his lips are pressed against mine. After the breath taking kiss, I look at him and smile.

Me: you know you shouldn't be here.

Andrew: rules are meant to be broken.

Me: nope, not broken, just bent.

Andrew: yes that.

He grips onto my waist and kisses me again. It starts getting heated so I pull out.

Andrew: I missed you.

Me: me too, but not here.

Andrew: I know. I have a surprise for you.

Me: me?

Andrew: yes. Come let's go.

We walk out and some eyes look our direction but we brush them off. We go to the matrix parking lot. We walk towards a silver Audi A3 and it beeps. I turn to look at him and give a mini squeal.

Me: you have a car?

Andrew: late birthday gift from dad.

Me: shut up!

He laughs and I walk towards the car to check out the interior. The brown leather seats and the new car smell, amazing I tell you.

Me: it's amazing.

Andrew: now, we can travel to school together every day.

Me: even better.

I kiss his nose and before I can kiss his lips, the bell rings. We get out the car and we go to our classes.

.....

Lwa and I are walking to the gate after our hockey practise when we see the same grade 9 girls from earlier hovering over Andrew. Really, I'm unfazed but my friend right here is losing her mind.

Lwa: so jy gaan net stilbly? (so you're going to keep quiet?)

Me: what do you want me to say.

Lwa: so those thirsty bitches are hovering over your man and you have absolutely nothing to say?

Me: they're not going to have him so yes I'm not worried.

She tries to storm off, heading in their direction but I stop her.

Me: don't.

Lwa: watch me.

She walks over to them and Andrew just smiles at her but his smile quickly fades when he sees the look on her face. She turns to look at the girls and they quickly scatter. Andrew laughs and Lwa gives him the middle finger. He holds her by the shoulders and they walk over to me.

Andrew: your friend right here is really extra.

Me: I tried to stop her but she's a demon lady.

She both gives us death stares and we laugh at her.

Lwa: wena Andrew you should be careful around those girls.

Andrew: whatever you say mam.

He opens his arms for a hug and she goes in.

Andrew: how about we go for Mc'D?

Lwa: I'd love that.

She jumps up and down and we walk to the car. We drive to Mc'D and we get food then he takes us home. I find my mom busy making food in the kitchen. She's fully dressed in uniform which means she's on her way to work.

Me: I'm back.

Mom: how did you come back?

Me: Andrew dropped me off. I'll be riding with him in the mornings as well.

She sighs and I know she doesn't agree.

Mom: I won't say much. There's food in fridge, warm it up for you and your brother.

Me: (mutters) if he comes back.

Mom: he will come back.

She wasn't supposed to hear that. She hugs me and she takes her car keys and leaves. I take a packet of chips and throw myself on the couch. Our matric dance is on the first of April and that's not far. Andrew and I haven't discussed what we will be wearing, heck he hasn't even asked me. Girls at school have been asked and it's been cute, going down on their knees with corsets or roses. Our theme is Disneyland in Winter and I must say, it's going to look amazing. I take my phone and call Lwa.

Me: friend I'm home alone.

Lwa: sleepover?

Me: study session.

Lwa: I'll be there in a few.

I hang up and I go take a bath. Lwa and I normally do these things when mom is working nightshift because Marlo is hardly ever home as well. When I come out, I wear my short pyjamas and a gown. She comes and we make food then we settle on the couch.

Me: I was thinking about the MD.

Lwa: what about it.

Me: I don't have an outfit, I don't have a character and I don't have a date.

Lwa: Andrew?

Me: he hasn't asked me.

Lwa: he's probably planning something extravagant then.

Me: you think so?

Lwa: you know him though.

Me: let's hope he is because if someone asks me before he does, I'll say yes.

Lwa: Haha you say that because you know nobody has the guts to ask you.

Me: what are you insinuating?

Lwa: everyone knows you and Andrew are the power couple of the school, obviously, you two will be together then.

Me: mmh.

I give her a look and she laughs. We talk about all sorts of nonsense before studying a bit then we go to bed.

.....

The tests have started and they've all been easy. I'm frustrated, I'm frustrated because Andrew still hasn't asked me to MD. Even Sydney asked Lwa and they not even together anymore. I haven't asked him about it because I don't want to be desperate but inside, it's killing me. Jason asked me but I turned him down hoping by now Andrew would've asked but niks! It's break and Sizwe(deputy head boy) and I are patrolling our area and Andrew comes and pulls my hand. I'm trying my best not to pull his head off but I'm containing my anger.

Me: Mvelwenhle.

Andrew: Wat het ek nou gedoen? (What did I do now)

Me: Ek is aan diens, praat asb. (I'm on duty, please speak)

Andrew: your clearly not in the mood so we can talk another time.

I take my had away from his and I walk away. Sizwe gives me a look but I brush him off and we carry on with duty in silence. When break ends, we go to our classes and I

have Afrikaans with Andrew in my class. We normally sit together but today I move to sit at the back with Sydney. It's really hard to concentrate with him busy talking to Andrew who actually followed me to sit in Lwa's place.

Me: sou julle twee daarvan hou, probeer ek konsentreer.

Sydney: daarom sit nerds nie agter nie.

Mr K: Isabelle bly stil.

Me: meneer hierdie twee steur my.

Mr K: kom sit hier.

He points to the desk right by him and I gladly pack my things and go. While I was starting to get my groove back, there was a knock on the door and one of the Grade 8's walked in with a box wrapped with a yellow bow on it.

Mr K: Isabelle jy het 'n geskenk.

Me: my?

Mr K: ja, kom neem dit.

I stand up and I go and take it. I look to the back to see if Andrew is behind this and he looks like he's interested to see what's inside. I go sit down and as Mr K is about to carry on, Sydney shouts from the back.

Sydney: maak dit oop.

Mr K: Van Vyk, hou op om in my klas te skree. sy sal dit in haar vrye tyd oopmaak.

He slides back into his chair and Mr K carries on with the lesson. When he's done, the class starts doing their work. Andrew stands up and goes to the front.

Andrew: meneer, kan ek asseblief u les gebruik, ek wil iets belangriks doen

Mr K nods.

Andrew: Isabelle please open your box.

I take it and look at it. I untie the bow neatly and the sides of the box fall swiftly, revealing the lovely glass container with a floating rose inside with lights wrapped around it. I suddenly feel tears forming in my eyes. I look up at him and I smile. I look at the card and it reads: "*If she's not the one to finally break the spell, you must finally learn to love*". Involuntarily, the tears fall and the class starts making coo sounds. He comes and kneels in front of me. He take my hand and looks at me.

Andrew: please be the beauty to my beast, break my spell and go with me to Disney wonderland.

I nod through my tears and he hugs me. All the girls in the class stand up and they want to see the rose. They fuss over it and they can't stop saying I'm lucky. The bell rings and we go to the next lesson. By the time it's home time, the whole school knows about the promposal and they all are coming to me to ask to see the rose. The fact that he went as far as getting the exact replica of the rose from the movie scares me.

Lwa: you two are all over social media.

Me: seriously?

Lwa: yep.

I look at the video and I'm stunned. My beast comes and we walk to his car.

Me: we're internet breakers.

Andrew: yep, I saw.

Me: and that doesn't bug you?

Andrew: not at all.

We get inside and I immediately connect my phone. He drives off and I play Karyn White.

Me: *If his gonna stay.*

You better tell him the rules, Ladies

Oh yeah... Aint gonna be no staying out late Oh No

He'd better bring it all home to you

Whatever you do. Don't let him do you any kind of way

You gotta make him do rite

Ladies don't you let him do you wrong

Gotta make him do rite

Even if it means that you'll end up alone

Do rite

Ladies don't you let him do you wrong

Gotta make him do rite

Ladies you got to be strong

If his gonna change oh

He'd better promise to be true Yeah

Oh his gotta be true

Aint gonna play Silly Silly Silly games Oh no no no

Don't let him dog you

Or miss use you

Try to confuse you

You gotta let him know where you stand...

I don't have to think it over

Cause I made up my mind

If he don't wanna get married

*Then he can't be... No man of mine
I refuse to be walked on
I can't take much take much more
Well I made my disission
He's got no position
It's my way or it's the door

If he loves you
Make him respect you
Ladies don't you let him do you wrong
If he wants to do you... Don't let him use you
Even if it means that you'll end up alone*

He looks at me and shakes his head.

Me: what's wrong?

Andrew: it's your way or the door?

Me: yes.

Andrew: mom got you listening to her old lady music.

Me: hey it's not old lady music. It's a great song with a powerful message and puts it out there that we don't need men to make us happy.

Andrew: mom needs to stop hanging out with you, she's gonna make you hate me.

Me: I could never hate my gummy bear. Just don't turn on me. Respect me.

Andrew: already do.

He kisses my hand, making me giggle.

Chapter 4

"If someone makes you happy, make them happier"

It's Thursday and tomorrow is the Matric dance. I'm supposed to go and collect my dress today so Andrew is coming to fetch me. He calls and I rush outside. I get in and we drive off.

Me: you're late.

Andrew: I know, I'm sorry.

He takes a turn that leads to Freeways.

Me: where are you going?

Andrew: we're going for your fittings. You said I should take you there right?

Me: but this is not the way!

Andrew: calm down would you.

I huff and look out the window. He's testing my patience really, it's been a long, frustrating week and he's making it ten times worse. We get there and comes to my side to open for me.

Andrew: come.

Me: no. I need to go and collect my dress.

Andrew: just come.

He pulls my hand, forcing me to come out the car. He locks and we walk to the elevator and it opens up to the Royal suite's lobby. I must say, as angry as I am, this

place looks amazing. We are greeted by a butler who then serves us a glass of champagne and takes my bag. We walk through to the lounge and his mom is sitting with a very beautiful, exotic lady with black long hair.

Andrew: okay, let me leave you guys.

I look at him and he kisses my cheek and leaves. I feel like running after him but it would embarrass me so I just keep my composure and I walk towards Mrs Mfusi and sit down next to her.

Zuzile: Isabelle, this is my good friend Estelle. She's from Paris and she's here to help you choose a dress for you Matric Dance.

I look at her with my eyes almost popping out of their sockets. She smiles and so does Estelle.

Estelle: lovely to meet you Isabelle. Mrs Mfusi has told me a lot about you and I'm sure working with you will be delightful.

She has a French accent and she sound so sexy. I shake her hand and I try containing my happiness. Here I am in a basic jean and a top and my mother in law is looking like the queen in a black high-low off the shoulder dress. She has a Brazilian weave on and it's in a simple ponytail. The way she crosses her legs and the way she holds her champagne glass, makes me want to be a lady, I mean she's so perfect. We stand up and I follow them to a room which is almost as big as my whole house. It has rails but they're all empty. There's a couch and Zuzile and I go sit down. Estelle and another girl come in pushing rails and there are dresses covered up.

Estelle: so Isabelle, I have dresses for you to try on and you'll tell me which one you like the most okay.

I nod and the girl comes to take my hand. We walk to this closet like place and on the hanger, there's an exquisite looking Royal blue mermaid dress that has gold studs at the bottom. I put it on and it fits perfectly. It has long sleeves and I don't like long sleeves but it looks lovely. I walk out.

Zuzile: you look beautiful.

Estelle: it's a dress from the Carolina Herrera collection.

I look at myself in the big mirror and I don't like it on me. The long sleeves are a turnoff actually.

Me: I don't like the sleeves.

Estelle: you don't like them on the dress or you just don't like sleeves in general.

Me: I don't like sleeves in general.

Estelle: (laughs) okay then sweetheart, what is your preference.

Her laugh is so perfect. I just feel like pinching myself because I can't believe I'm standing in the Royal Suite of an Exquisite hotel, in a Carolina Herrera dress, saying I don't like it. Someone really pinch me because I think I'm dreaming.

Me: since we're going as beauty and the beast, I was looking for a more traditional yellow Belle dress. Design wise, it doesn't have to be exactly like hers, just yellow and no sleeves obviously.

Estelle: I have loads of yellow for you to try on.

I go back and they have another mermaid but this time, it's yellow. It has the same silhouette as the other one except for the long train it has. It has no sleeves as well,

just lace covering the boobs. I like it. I model it for them and I'm told it's by Givenchy. I mean how come. I'm here wearing famous people's clothes, just for MD. If only I knew when I was a child that this would happen. I try a few more on but there this one dress that I fall in love with before I even try it on. I put it on and it's a perfect fit. It's a yellow sleeveless V-neck ball gown. It's perfectly simple yet so amazing. I walk out and as soon as I look at myself in the mirror, an unexpected tear rolls down my cheek. Mrs Mfusi walks over to me and hugs me.

Zuzile: I think we've found the perfect dress.

I smile through my tears and she gently wipes them.

Estelle: amazing choice. By Christian Dior.

We are served glasses of champagne and we do a toast.

Zuzile: to Estelle, for helping my beautiful daughter find a perfect dress.

We click glasses and drink up.

Zuzile: go change baby so we can brief you about tomorrow.

I walk back to the change room and I'm back to my normal jeans. I walk back and I sit next to Zuzile.

Zuzile: so tomorrow is the big day.

Me: I feel like I'm getting married.

Zuzile: trust me, it feels like that for every girl. It's your first wedding before your real on.

Me: it's overwhelming.

Zuzile: that's why you shouldn't stress so much. Tomorrow, after school, there will be a driver designated to fetch you and Lwandile then you both will come back here to get ready. Everything will be in place for the both of you. Estelle and her team will make sure you both look like true Disney princesses.

Me: oh my goodness mah really?

Zuzile: yes, everything is covered. You will pass by your house after getting ready so you mom can see you, I don't want her missing out on such.

Me: thank you mah. I really and truly appreciate everything. Thank you.

I hug her and my tears start to fall. See I wasn't lying when I said this woman is the kindest most tender and bountiful person you could ever meet, she just inspires me to be a better person. She's the epitome of perfect and she short of nothing, she has a loving husband, a beautiful marriage, beautiful children and lots and lots of money. Like? She kisses my cheek and when we wrap up, they take me home. I find mom in the kitchen and I run to her screaming and yelling.

Me: mom I'm going to be wearing a Dior dress to my matric dance!

Mom: I see the fittings went well.

Me: you knew!

Mom: would you stop shouting please.

I giggle like mad and she looks at me smiling. It's hard to contain my happiness really. I sit down next to her.

Mom: Zuzile called me telling me that she's got a stylist friend and she want to be in charge of you tomorrow.

Me: she's so amazing. The dress mom, out of this world.

Mom: I'm glad you're happy my love because that's all that matters.

Me: eek!

I can't stop squealing from all the excitement.

Me: let me go call Lwa.

I run to my bedroom and I video call Lwa.

Me: frieeennnnnddd!

Lwa: someone's in a good mood.

Me: how can I not be when we are getting pampered tomorrow!

Lwa: yeah I also can't wait!

Me: so I'm seriously the only one who didn't know.

Lwa: your man wanted it that way fam.

Me: he's so wrong. He doesn't even want to show me his tux.

Lwa: I trust he's going to look hotter than all the guys there.

Me: I, for once want to upstage Lauren.

Lwa: I heard she's going with Chad as Cinderella.

Me: yep. She can't have the brains, the beauty and the crown, oh hell no.

Lwa: you really don't like her.

Me: not one bit. How's Sydney?

Lwa: not sure. We don't really talk.

Me: I thought there was a reason behind him asking you though.

Lwa: me too but I guess he was doing it for the eyes.

Me: I don't think so. He wants you back.

Lwa: I'm going back to him to deal with more of his nonsense. We're fine as friends.

We carry on talking until mom calls me for supper.

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I'm glad school's out because all I've been hearing today is this Matric Dance. Andrew and I haven't really spoken today because I was busy prepping the final arrangements for the dance. Now Lwa and I are on our way to the gate and we see a black Jeep with dimmed windows parked and a driver standing by it. As soon as he sees us, he waves us over and we go to him. he drives us to Freeways and when we get there, we go to the Royal Suite. Lwa's mouth is literally hanging when we enter the lobby.

Me: it's not even half of it.

The same butler, who I now know is John takes our bags and we walk to the lounge.

Lwa: the view here is glorious.

Me: dude.

Estelle and Zuzile come down the stairs. I won't even say much about Zuzile because she looks pretty as always. She greets us and we walk back to the room we were in yesterday but this time, it has those spa beds and room dividers.

Zuzile: I'm leaving you guys here to relax. I'll be back to see you before you leave.

Us: yes mah.

She hugs us and she walks out.

Estelle: this is my team and before we start getting ready, let's pamper you guys so I'd love it if you would change into your robes and get ready for massages.

We nod and we walk to the change room.

Lwa: is she French.

Me: all the way from Paris, imagine.

Lwa: just for us?

Me: I guess so.

Lwa: isstomush!

We burst out laughing then we go back. We get a full body massage and I must say in full, it's the best shit in the world. While we are having a facial, someone does our nails and toes.

Lwa: can life get better than this?

Me: I doubt friend.

My phone rings and it's Andrew calling me.

Me: gummy bear.

Andrew: hey bubbies. Am I disrupting?

Me: yes very much.

Andrew: (Chuckles) oh okay, I was just calling to check up on you and to tell you I love you.

Me: I love you too gummy bear.

Lwa: ncooh, gummy bear.

We both laugh at her craziness and I hang up.

Lwa: you're so lucky to have him.

Me: I really am blessed.

We both laugh. I go take a shower right after getting my mani pedi done. Estelle comes in with a guy who is introduced as Duke the make-up artist. I ask for a natural, simple and sophisticated look, just like Belle. She's so down to earth and quiet, she doesn't demand attention but her quietness draws people closer which is why I like her so much. Lwa is going as Princess Merida, the strong independent princess that would fight anything that gets in her way. I still haven't seen her dress but I'm sure it's exquisite. I opted to do wet curls in my hair and I must say, it's the best decision I've ever made with my hair because I look like a black Barbie doll. I'm taken to the room and I see my dress laid out and the shoes I bought at Call It Spring next to it. I just thought it would look even better together. Estelle comes in and helps me into my dress and a lady with a camera walks in and starts taking pictures while Estelle ties my corset. I match my dress with diamond studded string earrings and a pendant with a yellow diamond all given to me by Zuzile. the lady carries on taking picture of me and when I step out of the room, I see Lwa in her green lace dress with one shoulder. It look amazing and she has on a high ponytail. She looks stunning.

Me: friend you look stunning.

She isn't even talking, she's just staring at me.

Me: what is there something wrong?

Lwa: you look perfect.

Me: you do as well. Oh my.

Lwa: no, you. That's not the dress you had chosen.

Me: it's not. Estelle helped me pick it yesterday.

Lwa: Isabelle you look like you've just stepped out of a bridal catalogue.

I laugh but the look of shock on her face is permanent. Zuzile walks in holding two corsages in her hand.

Zuzile: your princes await you my ladies.

We smile and we walk towards the door. Lwa walks out first and I'm told to wait by the door. I then walk out and I stand at the top of the stairs and they take a picture of me. I walk down a few with my long train covering each step. I stop when I see Andrew at the bottom of the stairs in a royal blue tux and a crisp white shirt. His hair, he neatly braided it and it's cut all around. He looks hot and he's all mine. I smile and I walk down to him. when I finally get to him, he takes my hand and kisses it.

Zuzile: I hope everyone got that dramatic entrance.

The whole room bursts out laughing. I didn't realise I was being dramatic, I was just caught up in the moment. We are escorted to the porch to take pictures and it's blissful. When we finish, we are escorted by big men in black to our car. We are driving in a Rolls Royce with dimmed windows. Andrew and I go into the first one and Sydney and Lwa go to the other one. There's another SUV in front of us and another following behind Sydney and Lwa's car.

Andrew: did I tell you how mesmerizing you look.

Me: yes, like it's the hundredth time now.

Andrew: just getting my point across, you look beautiful bubbies.

Me: you also look like my gummy bear.

Andrew: (Chuckles) like my earrings?

Me: yes, they make you look even hotter. Makes me want to drop my panties for you.

He laughs so hard tears start coming out.

Andrew: I'll drop them tonight.

Me: really?

Andrew: that's a promise.

He kisses my hand and then the car comes to a stop. And the spotlights shine through the dimmed windows. The driver opens the door and Andrew steps out first and the screams are deafening. He holds out his hand for me and as soon as I put my foot to the ground and my shoe is revealed, the screams go louder and louder. Andrew looks at me and shakes his head smiling. I get out of the car and flashes from every angle go off and I feel like some sort of celebrity. I mean this is supposed to a matric dance, why are there so many journalists and photographers. As we walk down the white carpet hand in hand, I see familiar faces, some of the grade 11's helping out and most of them being the photographers. My jaw drops to the floor when I see what they've done with the auditorium. It actually looks like a winter wonderland. When we get to the door, it's like the whole room went quiet and just took a moment to look at us. There's a long Aisle down to the drinks table and we walk, turning heads.

Me: (Whispering) why are people looking at us like they've never seen us before?

Andrew: it's because you look stunning. The girls envy you and the guys wish they had you.

Me: really?

Andrew: and I'm the only guy that can have you.

He grabs my waist and kisses me and when we pull out, all eyes are on us and they are making cute sounds. Lisa, Lwa and Funeka come running to us and they pull me away from him. Lisa and Funeka are my other friends and we're on the same hockey team.

Funeka: and that grand entrance!

Lwa: apparently, that's her thing today.

Me: that wasn't a grand entrance, we literally just walked down the aisle and everyone was giving us looks.

Lisa: that's because you look like an actual Disney Princess. You are bringing our self-esteem down, that's what you're doing.

Me: you guys also look amazing. Princess Rapunzel and Pocahontas. Princess Merida.

We all courtesy and laugh afterwards. We go take some champagne and start mingling. The music comes to a halt and the lights dim, and focusing a spotlight by the door. Lauren stands there, making a grand entrance. The piano goes on and she graciously walks down.

Lisa: she just thinks she's everything.

Lwa: there was no point really.

Chad comes running in holding her glass slipper. She sits down and they fit it perfectly on her foot. There were clapping and people go back to mingling, not really paying attention to her. She looks beautiful but Cinderella was too obvious. Almost half of the

room is Cinderella. I was surprised that I'm the only Belle here because she's very popular.

Funeka: she missed a real grand entrance, hers was bland.

Lwa: tell me about it.

There tell us that we have to vote for the best dressed couple and King and Queen of the year. I'm a bit sceptical about this but I go ahead and vote for my bestie and Sydney. I mean they look out of this world in their emerald green. When I go back in, my lovely beast sweeps me off my feet, carrying me bridal style, making me giggle.

Me: put me down.

He puts me down and he kisses me so passionately.

Andrew: my queen.

Me: my handsome beast.

I fix his bowtie and straighten his jacket.

Andrew: let's ditch.

Me: nope. I'm still enjoying myself.

Andrew: okay fine. But I have you to myself this whole weekend.

Me: what are you talking about?

Andrew: the Royal Suite is ours the whole weekend.

Me: seriously!

Andrew: yes.

I jump up and down while I squeal in excitement. He hugs me tightly. He whispers in my ear.

Andrew: remember my promise?

I nod because it's hard to speak with his warm breath down my neck sending tingles down my spine, making my knees weak.

Andrew: I intend to keep it.

He grabs my ass and plants a soft kiss on my neck, making me moan softly. he leaves me and I take my time to take a breath and I walk back inside. I bump into Sizwe.

Sizwe: we're performing in 2 minutes.

Me: performing?

Sizwe: yes. Come.

What the hell is he talking about. He pulls me outside and we used the back door that goes into the stage.

Sizwe: we are singing Beauty and The Beast by Ariana and John so I'll be by the piano and you'll be sitting on it.

Me: but I don't know the lyrics properly.

Sizwe: they'll be on the screen when you look up, just so nobody see where they are, just you and I.

Me: and why are you only telling me this now.

Sizwe: because I didn't know that the Deputies have to do something for the Matrics.

Me: that's a stupid tradition.

Sizwe: come, you have to be on that piano.

Me: that sounds wrong.

He chuckles and we walk out. He helps me sit on top of it and because the lights are off, nobody can see us. I already have a headset on so when the fairy lights go on Sizwe starts on the piano. I look at the screen up top

Me: *Tale as old as time
True as it can be
Barely even friends
Then somebody bends
Unexpectedly*

Sizwe: *Just a little change
Small to say the least
Both a little scared
Neither one prepared*

Us: *Beauty and the beast
Ever just the same
Ever a surprise
Ever as before
And ever just as sure
As the sun will rise*

Ever just the same

Sizwe: *And ever a surprise*

Us: *And ever a surprise*

Me: *And ever just as sure*

Us: *As the sun will rise*

Me: *Tale as old as time*
Tune as old as song

Us: *Bitter-sweet and strange*
Finding you can change
Learning you were wrong

Sizwe: *Certain as the sun*

Me: *Certain as the sun*

Sizwe: *Rising in the east*

Me: *Tale as old as time*

Sizwe: *song as old as rhyme*

Us: *Beauty and the beast*

Me: *tale as old as time*

Sizwe: *song as old as rhyme*

Us: *beauty and the beast.*

That was the first time I was singing in public and I had so much fun. I didn't know Sizwe could sing this beautifully. His voice is angelic and the way we killed the song, the applause was amazing. He helps me off the piano and we take a bow.

Funeka: that was a lovely surprise. Your voices are angelic.

Me: it was my first time singing in public. I was literally told two minutes before we went on.

I feel hands snaking around my waist and it's my prince charming.

Andrew: that was amazing my love.

Me: Thank you honey.

MC: let's give another round of applause for our deputies, that was magical.

They all clap and Andrew kisses my neck and his arms are still around my waist.

MC: you all look stunning, ladies with you Princes, you made them dress up just for tonight, that takes a lot of skill. The Drama department worked really hard to get this up and running so we should also give them a round of applause. Then for the crowning we've all been waiting for. Who is the King and Queen of the class of 2019?

My friends are screaming my name and Andrew just shakes his head laughing.

MC: okay, we'll call out the results. Starting with the king, best dressed guy here and obviously stole all of your attention. Andrew, come my guy.

The chants from the rugby boys are deafening. He untangles himself from me but before leaving, he steals the juiciest kiss from my lips, making me blush and I can't stop smiling. They crown him and he just stands there with a smirk on his face and really, he's just feeling himself.

MC: a King cannot rule a kingdom without his Queen so without further due, I present your Queen, His Queen, Miss Beauty in yellow.

I stand there, waiting for the girl to go but nobody goes.

Lwa: go!

Me: why.

Funeka: Because you're the Beauty in Yellow!

Me: Me?

All three of them push me to the front, making the rest of the people laugh. Andrew meets me halfway and crowns me himself. Honestly, I wasn't expecting it. I was expecting it to be Lauren since she always gets everything. He carries me down, making me laugh and the guys chant even more. They all come and they carry me out and they throw me. I swear, I was dying. The way they were exchanging me was death scary I even started crying a bit. By now everyone had followed outside to look at what was happening. They were red in laughter while my heart was on the floor. After they finished laughing, they realised I was crying and they hugged me. it was so sweet.

Sizwe: your lucky we didn't throw you in the pool.

Me: you wouldn't do that, you guys love me too much.

They laughed and we went back inside and the festivities went on. People were sneaking in alcohol so they were starting to get wasted. Andrew invites the whole first team back to the Royal Suite to have an after party. All the girls that were with them sure felt lucky as hell because they got a chance to go back. In the car, it's just me and him. I have a glass of champagne in my hand. He whispers in my ear.

Andrew: I want to do things to you.

Me: naughty things?

Andrew: dirty things to you.

He nibbles on my earlobe, making me moan. As he plants kisses on my neck, the partition slowly goes up. He goes down to my feet and takes out my shoes. He disappears under my big tutu and I feel his hands sliding down my thong. I lift my legs and put one on each of his shoulders and his tongue makes contact with my nana and a loud moan escapes my mouth.

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*
*

As soon as the door closes, his lips are already pressed against mine as we make our way to the lounge. He undoes my corset and my dress falls to the floor and I'm left in my black thong and my cupping bra. He pulls the shades behind me closing them, moves the coffee table pulls me to the mat.

Me: wait, what if someone walks in.

He takes a remote from the coffee table and presses something and a clicking sound goes off.

Andrew: locked.

*
*
*

We made love on the floor, on the couch on the coffee table, heck we even did it on kitchen counter. The best decision I ever made was letting him break my virginity because this man can stroke. He fills me up nicely and when he goes nice and slow, my heart beats faster, making me love him even more. I walk upstairs to go take a shower. When I open the walk in closet, it has four LV suitcases by the island. I open them and there are girl clothes.

Andrew: that's yours.

I turn around and he's standing there with only a towel around his waist.

Me: mine?

Andrew: yep. The guys are here.

Me: I'll be down right now.

He takes his shorts and a white tee and walks out. Really, I could get used to living like this, just me and him in our own space. I look through the clothes and they are my type of style but they are all brand new. I pick out a black flow jumpsuit and black sandals to match. My hair has gel in it so redo the curls and walk back down. the place is crowded with people, some I know some I don't know and the music is pumping really loud. I'll be surprised if we don't get kicked out and banned from this hotel but I know we won't because the hosts mother is the owner. Perks guys. I go to the kitchen and I have a glass of water. I had too much champagne and I just need to wash it down. I get the fright of my life when I feel someone pinch my waist.

Dude: hey Isa.

Me: uhhm hey.

Dude: it's Muzi, don't tell me you've forgotten me already.

Ohh yeah, the awkward conversation guy.

Me: ohh hey, I'm really sorry. I'm not good at remembering names, and faces as well.

Muzi: it's fine. Great party you guys have going on here.

Me: I'm a guest as much as you are. It's Andrew's party.

Muzi: that's what you call him, Andrew.

Me: yeah, he thinks it's cooler than Mvelo.

Which in actual fact is.

Muzi: whatever makes you cum darling.

I pop my eyes out and he laughs so hard.

Muzi: hey I'm kidding. Look, my girl is downstairs in the car and she doesn't want to come, please convince her to join us.

Me: you want me to keep her company?

Muzi: that would be great, thanks.

He slaps my shoulder and leaves before I can ask him which car.

Me: (Mumbling) like I'm supposed to know which car you came in. Nx.

I put down the glass and I storm out, bumping my way to the lobby. I take the elevator down to the undercover parking's and I look for the expensive cars with a girl possibly sitting inside. I see a light shining in a white Golf 7 and I walk towards it. I knock on the window and she opens. My self-esteem drops to zero, making me evaluate my dress code when I see this girl. She's got a bob weave and has caramel skin. She's wearing a tartan mini skirt and white top and knee high, high heel boots.

Me: uhhm hey. I'm Isabelle and Muzi sent me here.

Girl: to get me?

Me: yeah I guess.

She gets out the car and she's one tall ass chick with the body of a supermodel. She closes the door and she signals me to lead the way. I walk in front of her and behind me I can hear the clicking sound of her heels and I'm walking around in sandals. At least I'm comfortable. She hasn't said a word to me and I get the feeling she's one of those trust fund babies, spoiled and doesn't recognise another person. As soon as

we get to the Suite, that should actually be called a penthouse, my friends come pulling me.

Lisa: your man just jumped into a freezing pool, where were you.

I point at miss trust fund with my eyes and she laughs.

Me: why would Mvelwenhle do that?

Lisa: it was dare. Come it's really fun to watch.

Me: let me go take the girl over there.

I walk over to her and I poke her lightly.

Me: well, I'm going to the party room, two doors to the right, if you need me, I'm there.

She nods and I look at her but she's not paying any attention to me. I walk back to Lisa and she just chuckles. As soon as I walked in, the woo's and the grunts filled the room.

Gift: get the vodka ready, it's about to get real.

Lwa and some girls from netball pull me to join the circle and I'm sitting opposite Andrew.

Jane: playing never have I ever, barman, shots please.

Sam sets a shot in front of each of us.

Jane: if you have you done it, you drink, if you can't handle it, you stop. Okay Isa.

Me: you're throwing shade?

Jane: you know you can't handle it.

The all make shady sounds but I disappoint them. I down the shot, although it burns my throat, I soldier through.

Me: less' go!

Today I plan on doing all the things I never thought I'd do. I'm going to get wasted and if I was still a virgin, I would've lost it tonight.

Sizwe: wait, virgins can't play. Mfusi boy phuma.

Andrew: aibo z'thin.

They all laugh and Lwa stands up first.

Lwa: never have I ever had sex on the kitchen counter.

Andrew and I look at each other and I down the shot. I won't even begin to explain the looks I get. Funeka goes next.

Funeka: never have I ever done it with more than one person within 24 hours.

Almost everyone takes a shot and me, Lwa and Lisa are the only ones that don't. I look at Andrew. Sizwe goes next.

Sizwe: never have I ever fallen asleep watching porn.

Nobody drinks and I just look around and shake my head. The game goes around the circle until it gets to Andrew. I eye him and he holds his shot in his hand.

Andrew: never have I ever cheated.

He looks at me and I drink up. His eyes turn dark and he drinks as well. I've just started a war. I've never cheated on Andrew, I was just waiting for him to drink, which he clearly wasn't going to do so I did it for him. the game carries on but he hasn't removed his eyes from me.

Jane: I think some people aren't having fun anymore.

Gift: strip poker!

They all shout and they bring out all the cards. they literally combine two decks of cards because there's too many of us. They shuffle and hand them out. Each time you lose a hand, you lose an item of clothing. I'm a bit worried because I'm in a one-piece and it easily comes off. I hope I win. We play the first hand and the first person to lose is Funeka.

Funeka: ayy this is unfair.

She takes of her shirt and is left with her bra. This games gets heated, people taking off their shirts, some even their pants. I'm still fully dressed and so is Andrew.

Sydney: I know it's not only me that can sense the sexual tension in here? Who needs to fuck some shit out of their system?

They all clear their throats and look at Andrew.

Andrew: I'm fine.

Sam: sure you are. Isa please do you job. He's dampening our mood.

Andrew: leave her out of this. Let the game carry on.

He deals his hand, making me lose which means I have to strip. I give him a look and he give me "go ahead" look. I stand up and take of my Jumpsuit and I'm left in my thong and Push-up bra. He looks at me with lustful eyes. They hype comes back slowly and I'm making sure I don't lose because I do, I take off my bra and I can't afford to do that. Already Lwa is sitting out because she lost and they saw everything. You see these people have no cap and that's why it's so much fun hanging with them. Funeka is left in her underwear, lost her bra three deals ago, she's lucky she doesn't have to strip anymore. I play my hand and when I think I've won, Andrew puts down a hand that can't be beat, meaning I have to take off my bra. He sits back in his chair and smirks.

Andrew: go ahead.

Me: you're being unfair.

Guys: strip! Strip! Strip!

They cheering me on and I slowly unhook my bra from behind. Before it could even come off, Andrew is already in front of me, hiding my boobs.

Andrew: I think you've seen enough.

He covers me with a fleece blanket and picks me up like a sack of potatoes over his shoulder. He carries me to our bedroom. He places me on the bed and locks the door. He leans against it and stares at me. He's angry, I can feel it.

Andrew: jy het my verneuk

Me: nee nooit.

Andrew: then why'd you drink?

Me: I don't know.

He's stepping closer and he looks so sexy when he's angry, he's got me swallowing hard. I suddenly have no explanation as to why I did what I did. I can't put it in words.

Andrew: no you're not making sense...

Me: but I am.

Andrew: don't interrupt me.

I clear my throat and look down because his voice is deep and it's commanding.

Andrew: if you didn't cheat Isabelle, then why the fuck did you drink?

Me: uhhm I don't think that's the correct way to phrase the question.

Why, why do I choose to be a smart mouth at a tough time like this.

Andrew: come here.

I look at him for a long time before standing up. I'm still covered by the fleece.

Andrew: drop the blanket and come closer.

I drop it, revealing my bare breast and I walk really slowly towards him. when I get to him, he looks me deep in the eyes.

Andrew: you want to be a smart mouth huh?

He's so close to me that my breathing starts hitching and he chuckles softly. he goes down and slides off my underwear, making me shake. His finger dig deep into my waist.

Andrew: keep still.

His fingertips make contact with my skin as he runs them up and down my pelvis and belly button. He kisses my cookie and starts eating me out slowly. The way he kisses me down there, every bite, lick and nibble sends my body to heaven. I push his head closer and he replaces his tounge with his fingers, going faster and faster. I tense up and as I'm about to release, he stops.

Me: no, please carry on.

Andrew: you want more?

I nod like a helpless puppy and he carries me to the bed. He strips off his clothes and gets on top of me. I feel his tip at my entrance.

Andrew: let's talk.

He slowly slides into me and I moan out loud. He moves slowly.

Andrew: like this?

Me: faster.

He moves faster and faster. I hold on to the sheets.

Andrew: why did you lie to me?

Me: I...I'm sorry.

Andrew: no, don't apologise, tell me why you did it.

Me: I wanted to see your reaction. I just thought maybe you'd drink as well

Andrew: don't. Test. My. Patience.

He's ramming into me harder and it's starting to get difficult to hold back the screams.

Me: Mfusi I'm sorry.

Andrew: don't lie to me Isabelle.

Before I could say more, he turns me around and pounds from behind.

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I'm woken up by soft kisses on my face. I slowly open my eyes and I see the biggest smile and tiny eyes looking at me.

Andrew: morning sweetie.

Me: morning.

I recall last night's drama. I hardly got any sleep to be honest, he fucked me properly and thoroughly. We only clocked in at about 06:00 in the morning.

Me: why are you up?

Andrew: because it's late.

I check the time and it's only 10:00 in the morning.

Me: come on.

Andrew: I have breakfast.

He moves the tray to my lap. On the plate is a fruit salad and a glass of coffee. He knows me so well.

Me: thank you.

Andrew: eat up so you can drink the pill.

We didn't use protection last night so I'm guessing he's talking about the morning after. I nod and I stand up and I go to the bathroom to freshen up. I come back and I eat then drink the pill. I put on my robe and I make the bed. The weather is really gloomy today and it's I just want to cuddle up in my bed and watch a good romance movie and cry. It's just the effect this weather has on me. I walk downstairs and everyone is on the couch cuddling. By everyone I mean Muzi and miss trust fund and Sydney and Lwa. Muzi and the girl on one couch under one blanket and Sydney and Lwa far from each other as possible.

Me: morning people.

Miss TF: she's finally up.

Lwa: I'm sure she had a good night sleep.

I look at them and they chuckle.

Me: for your information, yes, I did get a good night's sleep. How about you guys?

Lwa: I barely got any sleep. I don't about you guys.

The other firmly agree with her and I give them strange looks.

Me: why?

Lwa: I don't think one could be able to sleep when all we can hear is "Yes, harder. Faster Andrew, Faster."

She banging on the table as she mimics my sex voice. I cover my face with my hands and they burst out laughing.

Muzi: damn the nigga can lay it down!

They laugh even louder.

Andrew: nizohamba.

Muzi: kabani? Kasisi? Forget it laitie.

Andrew: jy het vergeet om jou eie meisies te fuck in plaas van om te luister na my gee aan myne. (you forgot to fuck your own girls instead of listening to me give it to mine)

Sydney: ohh spicy.

Andrew: fuck you.

They laugh and I stand up, going back to the kitchen. I wash my dishes and I go back upstairs. I take a long steamy shower then I walk out to get dressed. My body is in knots from last night and I have a mild headache from the drinking. I wear my leggings and Andrew's sweater with a pair of socks for my feet. I tie my hair in a messy bun and I go back downstairs.

Chapter 5

"Time is non-refundable. Use it with intention."

Mvelo

December. It's been hectic but now, I can finally say I'm a free man. I just wrote my final exam and I'm leaving high school. I feel like I'm dreaming because these exams were shit and it's kind of hard to believe that I'm done with this place. I've had a lot of great memories here and most of them were great. If I didn't go here, I wouldn't have met my bubbies, who is great as always. She's just the best thing to ever happen to me and I'm lucky to have her. The eight months have been great no lie, just the exams getting to us but all in all, it's been good. We once had a pregnancy scare in June and my mom almost murdered me. I swear I've never seen my mother that angry. I didn't mean for her to find out but things just got out of control and I broke. Isa had missed her period and we panicked but when we spoke to mom, we calmed down. she didn't tell dad or Connie because shit would've gotten real. Van Vyke and Lwa got back together. It was bound to happen and after we found out that

they fucked at MD, they put their indifferences aside and they got back together. It's decided that next year, I'm attending Stellenbosch University to study Art. My father was fuming mad but there is nothing he can do about it, it's what I love. I love drawing and I see my career taking off as an artist. I'm also going to take Architecture just as something to fall back on as my dad says. Convincing them that me taking art would take me somewhere was one of the hardest things to do. I know your also thinking, where is art going to take me? I want to be an animator, just draw for a living. My happy place. I'm at home in the kitchen sitting with mom while she cooks.

Mom: what's on your mind?

Me: I'm thinking about next year.

Mom: I can't believe you're already leaving me. Who am I going to talk to now.

Me: (Laughs) aww mommy. There's Helo and Lindelwa, you can always do girl things together.

Mom: mxm, daddy's girls.

Me: Ntsakisi?

Mom: they all love their father, your my one and only, my baby boy and your leaving me. this is so unfair.

Her voice starts to break and I then realise that's she's actually crying. I quickly stand to be by her side and I hug her tightly.

Me: mom, I'd never leave you forever. I'll only be a flight away. You can always call me anytime and when I miss you, I'll also call you. I love you mom.

Mom: (Sniffing) I just don't understand why you have to go so far.

I chuckle and I hold her tighter. The relationship I share with my mother is something nobody in this big wide world could ever take away from me. although she didn't give birth to me, she raised me and she never made me feel like I wasn't hers. I love her so much and I just can imagine my life without her because I know what love is

because of her and I was lucky to find someone to love that is like her. Isa reminds me so much of mom, the way she carries herself and the way she speaks, just like my mom.

Me: I'll miss your cooking and the way you tilt your hips when you stir the pot.

Mom: no I don't do that.

Me: yes you do, like this.

I mimic her and she bursts out laughing. Just what I wanted to see. I wipe her tears and kiss her forehead.

Me: don't cry Ma' Mfusi.

Mom: okay, I won't cry. Grate some cheese for me please.

I give her a look and she returns it meaning the no-nonsense boss lady with a kind heart is back in action.

Me: yes mom.

She smiles and I grate the cheese. Dad walks in carrying Lindelwa and he puts her on the counter.

Lindelwa: mommy.

Mom: yes baby.

Lindelwa: Lindelwa want cookies mommy.

Mom smiles and dad disappears into the pantry. Lindelwa always refers to herself in third person and it's just the cutest thing.

Mom: daddy will get Lindelwa cookies nana.

She claps her hands happily, making my heart smile. I love my siblings so much. Lindelwa might not be mom's biological child just like me but she treats her just like her own. Heck she even looks like her a little and really, it baffles me. all of us look like dad exactly, only Helo has some of mom's genes but the rest, it's Mfusi all the way. I know that we had a big sister, Lynn and I was told she died when she was a baby. I wasn't told what happened though and I never bothered to ask, all I knew was she also wasn't mom's child. She would be 21 this year and I do believe it would've been great to have a big sister but life happens right. In total, I would have 7 siblings, imagine! It's 7 because I remember 7 years ago, mom was pregnant but the baby died before it was born and the other two were the twins she lost 3 years later when dad almost beat her to death. I know all of this because I was there to experience all of it. It was a very traumatic time in my life. I still recall her lying in her own pool of blood, crying helplessly, begging him to stop. That's when I hated dad the most and I promised I would never do something like that to the person I love. Mom begged me to forgive him but it wasn't easy. I went through so much in order to forgive him, nightmares, counselling and even prayers but I got through it and I forgave him. I forgave him but I never forgot. The anger and the resentment I had towards him, I never forgot it because it scared me emotionally and I will never be a normal child because of that. I'm brought back to life by a tap.

Helo: mom is talking to us.

Me: I'm sorry you were saying.

We're all at the dinner table.

Mom: I was saying that where would you guys like to go for the holidays.

Me: anywhere is fine for me.

Helo: I want to go back to the pyramids.

NJ: that place is scary. I want to go to the beach.

Dad just chuckles under his breath as the brats bicker. Lindelwa doesn't know places that well because really, she's just small so she's just sitting quietly in her chair.

Mom: I don't know why I bother.

Me: I'd love to go to New York, experience the big ball drop.

Mom: in the cold snow. No thank you.

Dad literally laughs and she shoots him a death stare. I don't understand why he's quiet.

Me: dad, suggestions.

Dad: I just follow, she's in charge.

He laughs again when mom pokes him.

Mom: on a serious note, what are we doing this Christmas?

Me: Dubai?

Mom: yes!

Dad: come on, we've been there so many times.

Mom: we've never taken the kids though. You said I choose, you follow right.

She gives him puppy eyes.

Dad: fine we're going to Dubai then.

If there's one thing my parents never missed out on, it's travelling. They've been all around the world, Brazil, The States, Korea, everywhere. Other times, they went with us but because of school and other things, sometimes we couldn't come. I've been to Jamaica, Congo, Switzerland and Australia and I believe these places are all magnificent. After dinner, I help mom wash the dishes and I call my bubbies before going to bed.

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Today is a very emotional day because my mom is going back home. We arrived in Cape Town last week, to get me settled in. She insisted we leave last week so she can help me pack up and clean my apartment and today she's going back because classes start tomorrow. She couldn't stop crying last night at supper. We're now at the airport

Mom: (Crying) you saw where I put the bedding right?

Me: yes I did mommy.

Mom: (Crying) you must change it every week. Clean the house and cook as well.

Me: I will.

Mom: I love you so much.

I hold her tightly and she sobs, breaking my heart. She's so emotional.

Me: I'll be okay mom. I promise to call you every night and every morning. I love you.

I kiss her forehead and she's escorted by the guards to the boarding gates. She waves at me and I feel a tear threatening my eyes but I push them back and I walk back to my car and drive off. The good part about moving is that my bubbies is also here. She lives at res and we'll be in the same school. I haven't seen her much this week because I've been with mom and she's also been busy but I miss her so I call her.

Isa: my gummy bear.

Me: hey bubbies.

Isa: I've missed you. Where have you been?

Me: I just drove mom to the airport. She wasn't taking it too well.

Isa: I can imagine.

Me: I miss you too. Are you busy?

Isa: nope. I'm just lying around here.

Me: okay then. I'm on my way there.

Isa: great.

She squeals, making me laugh and then I hang up. I get there and I call her. I get out of the car and I lean against it. She comes out dressed in a denim skirt and a baby blue vest with fluffy flops. She straightened her hair and she looks beautiful. She stops midway and looks at me and smiles.

Isa: wow.

Me: come here.

I walk towards her and she jumps into my arms and I hold her tightly. She buries her head in my neck and giggles.

Isa: I missed you so much.

Me: I know you did. I missed you too.

She gradually wraps her legs around my waist and I look straight into her eyes and I kiss her. When I put her down, I open the door to the car for her to enter. I go to my side and we drive off. We pass by Mc' D and we get food then we go to my apartment for the first time.

Isa: I won't even say much.

Me: (Laughing) why?

Isa: I always think the last thing your family pulls out of their sleeves will at least be the best thing so far but you never cease to amaze me. this place is great.

Me: it still needs a woman's touch.

Isa: as long as you keep it clean, you won't need a woman's touch.

Me: you sound like mom.

Isa: because that's all it is.

She walks to the kitchen and starts opening the cupboards and I'm guessing she's looking for the plates. She finds them and she comes and places them on the table. She sets the table and makes me sit.

Me: then you laugh when I tell you how much you remind me of mom.

Isa: she's a great person so I feel honoured to be compared to someone like her.

She smiles and her eyes glisten like the stars. We eat over a light conversation and I just take time to look at her. She's just so beautiful. The way she pouts her lips when she's thinking or how tiny her eyes become when she's laughing. Her sweet giggles always melts my heart and her soft lips, heaven.

Isa: staring is rude you know.

Me: I'm sorry bubbies. I just can't get over how beautiful you are.

Isa: that's so random.

Me: I'm not joking. I love you so much and everything about you just makes me so happy.

She blushes and I grab her hand.

Me: I want you by my side forever. I don't ever want to live without you.

Isa: I don't want to ever live without you too.

Me: forever?

Isa: forever.

She holds out her pinky and I link it with mine.

Me: pinky promise.

She stands and comes and sits on my lap and gives me a breath-taking kiss.

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She's lying on my chest paging through her phone after the great love-making session we just had.

Isa: Lwa is having the time of her life in EC.

Me: you miss her?

Isa: a lot. I just wish she was here with me.

Sydney is here in Cape Town but he's attending UCT. It was so sad when they had to break up but what happened happened.

Me: you'll make new friends babe.

Isa: I hope so.

She sighs.

Isa: I'm glad I didn't have to lose you. It broke my heart seeing Sydney and Lwa break up. I wouldn't have survived if that was us.

Me: me too. I love you.

Isa: I love you too.

I kiss the top of her head and I drift off to sleep. I'm woken up by shuffling in the room. When I open my eyes, I see Isa getting dressed.

Me: leaving already?

Isa: uhhm yes. I'm sorry to wake you, res gates close at 6.

Me: why didn't you say so.

I say getting out of bed and start getting dressed.

Isa: you looked so peaceful, I didn't want to disturb you. I already called a cab.

Me: cancel it then.

Isa: I can't, he's already on his way.

Me: I'm taking you though, no discussion.

She huffs and turns to look at me with a bored look.

Me: and then?

Isa: then what.

I walk towards her and carry her, putting her over my shoulder. She starts kicking and screaming, telling me to put her down. I lay her on the bed and pin her hands above her head.

Me: I asked you a question.

Isa: and I answered.

She has a "what are you going to do to me" look and it's turning me on.

Me: why so much attitude uhh?

I slowly kiss her neck while holding her hands. She moaning and moving, clearly wanting to hold me.

Isa: (Moaning) Mvelo stop.

Me: stop what, this?

I move down to her bare chest and leave soft kisses all the way to her breasts. She's trying to worm her way out from the grip on her wrists but it's hard. Her phone rings and I stop kissing her. I don't let go of her wrists and I answer. it's the Uber guy.

Guy: hello. It's the Uber, I'm outside.

Me: I'll be on my way.

She gives me a look and I hang up. I check the time and it's 16:40 meaning we have over an hour to torture each other.

Me: stay here.

She sits up and nods. I take my wallet and take out some cash. I get downstairs and I pay the Uber guy. When I come back, I find Isabelle in the same position.

Isa: take me back to res.

Me: where's the rush. We have a whole hour.

Isa: no.

She gets off the bed and walks to the closet door.

Isa: don't come closer.

Me: or what?

I move a step closer to her and she runs inside. I follow her and I stop in my tracks when I see her with a hanger in her hand. I chuckle.

Me: please, kill me with a hanger.

Isa: it's not funny. Take me to res.

Me: or what?

Isa: Mvelwenhle, moet my nie toets nie. Please not now. (do not test me)

Me: or what?

I say moving closer and she's moving back. She's holding in a laugh and I can see it.

Me: wat gaan jy doen.

I smile as I realise that she's back against a wall.

Isa: neem my terug na koshuis. (take me back to residence)

Me: wat as ek nie wil nie. Wat as ek jou wil straf? (what if I do not want to. What if I want to punish you?)

Isa: punish me for what?

Me: for being cheeky, for having an attitude towards me and for calling another man to fetch you when I'm in sight.

I say moving closer until I'm inches away from her face. Her breathing hitches and I know I've got her. I smirk and she puts the hanger in between us.

Isa: nice try.

She tries pushing me away but I take the hanger and snap it into two. She jumps and I pick her up bridal style. I place her on the bed and she bounces, making her giggle.

Me: now, where was I?

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My mom has already called me twice, asking what I've eaten. I took Isa back to res not so long ago and I just came back. I bought myself some Nandos for damage control. I take a picture for my mom and she calls right away.

Mom: junk? Really?

Me: I wasn't going to cook today mom.

Mom: I left half of the lasagne in the freezer in a freeze bag. Eat that before you cook.

Me: thank you Ma' Mfusi.

Mom: cela uziphathe kahle bandla.

Me: when have I ever misbehaved mommy.

Mom: never, and keep it that way please. I want you focusing on your books, not girls and parties.

Me: the only girl I see is Isa.

Mom: behave!

Me: will do. Where's father?

Mom: he's next to me.

Me: send my regards to him and the brats.

Mom: sure will. I love you.

Me: I love you too mom.

I hang up and I finish eating.

Narrated

Kabelo is driving to the warehouse because there's a code red. Their product was hijacked, therefore, it never made it to the customers. On the other route is Siyanda and Sbu with Lungelo already at the warehouse tracking them.

Lungelo: G, someone is tailing you, take a turn at your next left. There's a road block.

Kabelo: won't they stop me?

Lungelo: no. park by the stop sign and Fingers will be there now.

He takes a turn and the police don't stop him. he stops at the sign and Siyanda is already there.

Siyanda: what seems to be the problem?

Kabelo: I'm being tailed.

Lungelo: you can go back. You're out of danger. You don't have enough time though.

Siyanda goes back to the car and as Kabelo is walking back to his, gunshots go off and he gets hit on the shoulder.

Kabelo: I've been hit.

Siyanda: get in the car and go back home. back up is behind you.

He gets in the car and drives off. He calls Dr Mazibuko.

Kabelo: come to my house now, I've been hit.

Mpilo: on my way.

He drives back to Ramsgate with blood oozing out of his shoulder. Luckily, the kids are at school so no one is at home. as soon as Zuzile sees her husband covered in blood, she panics.

Zuzile: what happened, are you okay

Kabelo: just a bullet wound, I'll be fine.

She leads him to the couch and scurries away to the kitchen to get him some pain tablets. It's not the first time this is happening so she knows the protocol. He downs the pills and Mpilo walks in. he attends to the wound.

Mpilo: it's just a flesh wound, it will heal but take it easy, I know what you can be like.

Kabelo: I'm on a mission, I can't be resting.

Mpilo: make sure he rests.

Zuzile nods and he walks out. He walks with him upstairs and tells him to lie down. meanwhile, Nyakallo is pacing up and down his office with his brothers staring at him.

Atile: would you stop pacing, your making me dizzy.

Nyakallo: don't speak to me like that. I will fuck you up real quickly. Nx.

He gulps down his whiskey and he goes to sit behind his desk. He hasn't heard from the hit man he hired to assassinate the G, who is trying to take over his route.

Nyakallo: why isn't he answering his phone.

Tebello: he's probably still busy, give him time.

He huffs and spins around his chair. Ntswaki, their little sister comes in with food and she can sense the tension.

Ntswaki: the bad energy in here. I should pray for you guys.

Atile: that would be great, we are going to war.

Ntswaki is the only sister among the Mohau men, she is also the last born. She was raised by all three of them because their parents died when she was young. She is the glue that holds them together. They stand in a circle and she goes in the middle and leads the prayer.

Ntswaki: molimo ea ratehang ke tla ka pel'a hau ho tla u kopa ho sireletsa bara ba hau. Ba tla tobana le sefefe 'me ka kopo ba sireletse, ba koahele ka mali a christ mme ba tsamaee le bona ho pholletsa. ka lebitso la jesus kea rapela, amen. (dear God I come before you to ask you to protect your sons. They will face the storm and please protect them, cover them with Christ blood and walk with them throughout. in the name of Jesus I pray.)

Nyakallo: amen.

Atile: amen.

Tebello: amen.

Amen.

Chapter 6

"The right people hear you differently."

Isa

University is amazing I swear. I think it's because I have a sense of freedom away from mom and away from Marlo. In terms of school work, I'm holding up. It's not as hard as I expected it but the problem is the amount at a time. It's April already and I have 2 practical's to complete before month end. I also have an assignment due next week plus tests. We went back to Durban last month for Andrew's birthday and I must say, it was amazing. I joined them for a family supper and everyone was there, it was great. Today he's flying back to Durban for his dad and Helo's birthday. He is surprising them because he had told them he couldn't make it due to school but he managed to finish all his assignments before-hand. I'm sad but he'll be back on Monday and I'll have him to myself again. Our relationship is just there. we haven't had any major problems or explosive fights that threaten to destroy us but like any other couple we disagree on things. Like last night, he didn't put down the toilet seat and I shouted at him or last week when I found a shitload of dishes in the sink. I was fuming mad and I had to make him wash those dishes and clean the whole place because it was filthy but other than that, we're doing great. I'm in my room reading a book and Sabrina, my roommate and new friend walks in with Ayanda and Chloe, the girls we normally hang with.

Sabrina: what did I tell you. It's a Friday and she's reading.

Me: Ek hoop jy praat nie van my nie.

Ayanda: she is praat about you.

I take my pillow and throw it at them, making them laugh.

Me: bae is leaving this weekend so I have to take him to the airport.

Chloe: who is your bae. You always talk about him but we've never met him.

Ayanda: does he even exist.

Me: yeah he does, don't be bitter.

Sabrina: it's hard for me to do this but yes girls he does exist.

Me: why is it hard for you to admit the truth.

They all give me the "really" look and I roll my eyes.

Sabrina: she's never here, every weekend she's with this mysterious guy.

Chloe: I want to meet him.

Sabrina: I'm game.

Ayanda just folds her arms and shakes her head.

Me: you'll meet him when he comes to fetch me.

Chloe bounces on my bed and Sabrina goes to the closet to change. Chloe and I get along just fine, I can almost consider her my friend but Ayanda is a different story. I feel like she's jealous of me so I try by all means to keep her out of my business. She's lying on her back in between my legs and I'm playing with her hair.

Chloe: is he hot?

Me: a flame.

Chloe: I can't believe you've never told us about him. how long have you guys been together.

Me: almost 5 years now.

Chloe: seriously?

She shouts whispers and I laugh.

Sabrina: what are you two whispering about?

Chloe: girl stuff.

My phone vibrates under me and I take it and answer without checking the ID.

Me: hello.

Andrew: ouch I'm hurt. That's so cold.

I chuckle softly.

Me: gummy bear.

Andrew: that's more like it. Are you ready, I'm outside.

Me: yeah. The girls want to meet you.

Andrew: which girls?

Me: my friends.

They all already have their eyes piercing through me.

Me: they just want to greet, nothing much.

They nod in agreement as if he can see them.

Andrew: okay baby.

I hang up and I get off the bed.

Ayanda: I thought you were kidding.

Me: I guess you learn something new every day right?

She rolls her eyes but I pay no mind to her. I wear my sneakers and I brush my hair properly. Sabrina is already waiting by the door.

Sabrina: make fast.

Me: he's not a celebrity you know.

Chloe: but he's your prince charming, we want to examine, now hurry.

I take my bag off the bed and they literally drag me out. Chloe and Sabrina are clinging to my arm while Ayanda follows behind us. They are genuinely excited to meet him and it's kind of rubbing off on me. we get to the gate and he's standing next to the security booth, clearly talking to Mr Zimu, the security guard. They get along very well so they are always talking.

Chloe: where is he?

As I'm about to answer, he spots us and he comes towards us looking like a party dropper. Sabrina pinches my arm as she signals to him with her head and I nod, acknowledging that her assumptions are indeed correct. They both loosen the grip from my arm and he grabs hold of my waist, pulling me to his side. I put my arm around his waist and his goes around my neck.

Andrew: hey ladies.

They all simultaneously, in a daze harmony sing hello. I just chuckle under my breath when I see the looks on their faces.

Me: this is Mvelo, but I call him Andrew, my boyfriend. Gummy bear these are my friends, Chloe, Sabrina and Ayanda.

Andrew: lovely meeting you guys.

Them: likewise.

I love how they maintain the synchronization in their tone of voice. I didn't know they were shy. He smiles and they smile back.

Andrew: I'd like to treat you guys to lunch sometime after I come back from Durban, just to get to know you a bit better.

Sabrina: we would love that.

Andrew: lovely.

He gives them all a hug and I wave them goodbye as they stand there in awe. As we walk to the car, as soon as I close the door, they already giving me smirks, or the two of them are giving me funny happy faces. I smile and we drive off.

Andrew: your friends are something.

Me: they're not always that dumbstruck, trust me.

Andrew: they seem like nice people though.

Me: they are. They didn't believe me when I told them about you.

Andrew: really?

Me: yep. They thought I was making you up.

Andrew: well they should get used to the idea of me being around because I'm here to stay.

He takes my hand and kisses it. We arrive at the airport and I leave him at the drop off zone. My heart sinks when I have to leave but I kiss him goodbye and he walks away. I decided on spending the weekend at his place so I can do some catching up on work and finish my assignments. I go to res to fetch some of my warmer clothes and my books. When I'm halfway through packing, Sabrina waltz in.

Sabrina: you didn't say you were dating thee Mvelo Mfusi! How come?

Me: why does everyone seem to know who he is?

Sabrina: the son of Zuzile Mfusi, owner of Freeways! Are you kidding me, she's making moves.

Me: yeah, she's also the kindest person you could ever come across.

Sabrina: really? She looks a bit snobbish.

Me: not at all. The things she does for people, for her family, it's out of this world. She literally flew in her friend from Paris to dress me for my matric dance. She took care of everything and when I say everything I mean everything.

Sabrina: that was you?

Me: me what?

Sabrina: the girl that went as Belle in a Dior gown?

Me: you seem to know a lot about this family.

Sabrina: just the lady, she inspires me.

Me: then you should meet her.

I carry on telling her about Andrew's mom and she's just in awe about the fact that her and I share such a close relationship. By the time I'm done packing, I've already shared everything with her.

Sabrina: I've been meaning to ask, where are you going?

Me: Andrew's place for the weekend.

Sabrina: aww, so you're leaving me.

Me: let's go. We can have a sleepover.

Her face lights up and I stick my tongue out at her. She takes out her little bag and I receive a call, it's Lwa.

Me: hunny bear, boo boo cakes, lovie!

Lwa: you don't love me anymore.

Me: I've been so swamped lately, I haven't had time to call. How are you.

Lwa: I'm good I guess. How are you?

Me: I'm great, I just miss you.

Lwa: I miss you too, it's really hard for me to make friends, no one gets me.

I feel a pang of guilt wash over me. I've already made friends and my best friend is struggling.

Me: you also have to be open to making them and stop pushing everyone away.

Lwa: I'm guessing you've made them.

Me: yes but you'll always be my number one, you know that right?

Lwa: you better hope your telling the truth for you own sake.

Me: (Laughing) swear it on my life.

Lwa: good. How's Van Vyk?

Me: he's good. I haven't really linked up with him since I got here but him and Andrew are still going strong.

Lwa: I miss him. he's not taking my calls.

Touchy subject this is because I heard that he's moving on already. It breaks my heart to know that out of all of us, she's the only one that went to a different school all alone. Funeka and Lisa both went to UJ and the rest of the prefect body that we were close with either went to Vits or UCT.

Lwa: why are you quiet?

Me: I'm thinking about how much I miss you. You should come to Cape Town during the holidays, I want you to meet my girlfriends.

Sabrina looks at me smiling and I laugh.

Lwa: I'd love to. June right?

Me: yes, catch up session just like old times.

Lwa: just like old times.

Sabrina finishes up and I say my goodbyes to Lwa.

Sabrina: best friend?

Me: more like a sister to me now.

Sabrina: cool. Let's go.

She snatches the keys from the counter and skips to the door in excitement, making me laugh. We drive to Roman's Pizza then straight to the apartment. Her mouth hangs when she sees the place.

Sabrina: I know these people are rich and stuff but for their student son to live in a place like this while we live in a cooped res, it's unfair.

Me: (Laughs) perks dude.

She punches my arm playfully and starts walking around. It's a 3 bedroom apartment with a lounge, kitchen and a balcony by the lounge that has the view of the ocean. It's beautiful I tell you. I put the pizza in the kitchen then I carry my bag upstairs. When I come back I find Sabrina chowing on a slice of pizza.

Sabrina: I find it very offensive that he gets to live here while we live in that shoe box.

Me: (Laughing) this is bothering you neh?

Sabrina: hell yes. His parents should just adopt me and stop messing around hay!

She claps her hands, making me guffaw even more. After a while of her complaining and me laughing, we decide to go settle on the couch.

Sabrina: it's Friday.

Me: yeah, I'm watching a movie on Netflix tonight.

Sabrina: come on!

She rolls her eyes.

Me: what?

Sabrina: party?

Me: nope, no. I'm supposed to go to the doctor tomorrow.

Sabrina: what's wrong?

Me: I want to start the injection.

Sabrina: good luck, you'll blow up like an elephant.

I give her a death stare and she chuckles.

Sabrina: back to the matter at hand, we are going out tonight whether you like it or not.

Me: you can't force me.

Sabrina: watch me.

She takes her phone from under her bum and she dials a number.

Sabrina: Friday night.

...

Sabrina: good girl. Now we have a slight problem.

...

Sabrina: code blue.

...

Sabrina: cool.

She hangs up and she carries on eating her pizza.

Me: I'm not going anywhere with you.

Sabrina: we shall see about that.

Mvelo

Everyone was really surprised to see me back home, especially mom who started crying when she saw me. I'm back for Helo and dad's birthday. Dad's is on Sunday and Helo's is on Monday but they'll have a big bash for her 12th birthday on Saturday and a family Sunday lunch. She's just elevated from a brat to a spoiled rich kid and for that, I blame dad. Yes she is regarding of other people but she's unable to be compassionate like her name says. It's annoying how disregarding of other people's feelings and it's not a good trait she carries. Mom is always telling her about changing her ways but she always runs to dad. Ntsakisi on the other hand is just like me but instead, he's a daddy's boy that's why mom always complains and tells me she misses me because all the others love daddy because he spoils them. Okay just to get my point across directly and uncapped, all my siblings are big headed like dad but I love them nonetheless. I'm driving Helo to the mall for shopping, Dad's orders again. I decided to treat her myself though. I might not be working but I do have a black card of my own and I can get whatever I want.

Me: Khauhelo.

Helo: bhuti.

Me: let's talk.

Helo: shoot.

She doesn't put her phone down.

Me: phone down.

She huffs and I take it from her and switch it off.

Me: have you got a school you want to attend?

Helo: I want to go to boarding school but dad won't have it.

Me: have you tried talking to mom about it?

Helo: no.

Me: why?

Helo: mom is hardly home though.

Me: that's not true. If you had paid attention you would know that mom is a stay at home wife. You're too busy with your phone to give her the time of day. You know she calls me every night just to check on me.

Helo: that's because you're her favourite.

Me: she doesn't have favourites Helo, you have preferences, you prefer being with dad rather than mom.

She keeps quiet and I know I've hit a nerve.

Me: mom loves us all equally Helo and you constantly hurt her feelings when you don't want to spend time with her. She may be more strict than dad but that doesn't mean you should distance yourself from her.

Helo: but why don't you and dad get along.

Me: that's a story for another day, just know that my relationship with dad is on our terms, we know what we are doing. You need your mother Khauhelo, it's not everything you can tell dad, remember that.

I carry on driving in silence and she keeps stealing glances at me. she might take it lightly but it really affects mom. The lack of affection between them is heart-breaking. We arrive at the mall and we walk in together. She's taking me store to store, buying clothes and shoes like it's a hobby. We're at the fitting rooms of the fifth store already and I'm tired. She comes out wearing a pink backless long sleeve cocktail dress.

Helo: is it nice?

Me: it looks beautiful.

Helo: I think I'll wear this tomorrow.

Me: great, can we go now.

Helo: fine.

She goes to change and she goes to pay. We drive back home and the house is buzzing already, décor people measuring and prepping for tomorrow. Mom is in the kitchen with Aunt Thandi, Aunt Thato and Aunt Ane.

Me: my favourite women.

Aunt Thato's eyes almost fall to the ground when she realises it's me.

Aunt Thato: Mvelo you've grown so much!

Aunt Ane: he even has a beard, hebana! Zuzile what are you feeding him kanti?

Mom just laughs and I go to hug all three of them.

Aunt Thandi: you look handsome son. How's varsity?

Me: it's good.

Mom: this one has a girlfriend that's why he doesn't visit anymore.

Me: hawu mah.

Mom: am I lying?

Me: let me leave before ngithethiswa.

I walk away with them in stitches. My mom's friends are like her sisters and they treat me like their own as well so we have love from many different angles. I'm shit tired so I go to my room to get a nap before dinner. I decide to check up on Isa.

Isa: gummy bear.

The way she says it always melts my heart.

Me: my bubbies.

Isa: did you just land?

Me: no, I got here at 14:00 then I had to take the princess shopping.

Isa: I'm sure you enjoyed that.

Me: that sarcasm though.

Isa: yep. So what you up to now?

Me: I want to take a nap, I'm jet-lagged and shop-lagged if that even exists.

Isa: (Laughs) my poor baby. Get some rest okay.

Me: orytie, call you later?

Isa: later.

Me: I love you.

Isa: I love you too.

I hang up and my head hits the pillow.

.....

I'm woken up by soft kisses all over my face and I smile. When I open my eyes, I'm met by big brown eyes and a wide smile.

Lindelwa: wakey wakey.

I sit up and pick her up placing her on my lap.

Lindelwa: mommy said I must call you for food time.

Me: for dinner?

Lindelwa: yes.

Her tiny voice is just so adorable. I got off the bed and I went to the bathroom to freshen up and I came back. I carry her and we walk down to the dinner table where everyone is seated. I place her in her chair and I go sit opposite Helo. Mom says grace and we start eating. For the first time ever, the table is silent. Normally, there's chatter, mom asking me about school or Helo and her daddy speaking about relevant issues but it's just the clatter of the spoons against the china and I sense the most tension coming from mom and dad. I look at Helo and she shrugs her shoulders.

Helo: mom, how is business going.

What a way to break the silence. Mom slowly lifts her head, turning to look at dad who is concentrating on his plate, then me then Helo.

Mom: fine I guess.

Helo: ohh.

She looks down and plays around with her food. After a while, she stands up and runs to the kitchen. I look at dad who clearly doesn't look fazed and mom looks at me.

Me: excuse me.

I stand up with my plate and go leave it in the kitchen and I find Helo leaning by the sink with tears running down her cheeks.

Me: Helo are you okay?

She shakes her head hysterically and I pull her in for a tight hug.

Helo: (Crying) she hates me and it's all my fault.

Me: don't talk like that sis. Mom doesn't hate you, she will never hate you. She loves you so much, she loves us all.

Helo: (crying) but I've been treating her badly, you were right, I'm a bad child.

I just brush her back and she cries on my shoulder.

Me: listen beautiful, you are mommy's first daughter, her first child. The amount of happiness you brought to her life was unmeasurable and till today, you still bring her joy. Why do you think she named you Joy?

Helo: (sniffing) because I brought her joy.

Me: yes, true. Just give her a chance. It's not going to be easy getting back your groove but just take it slow okay. it's your day tomorrow, birthday girls don't cry

She chuckles and I kiss her forehead.

Me: you'll be okay, I promise you, just please stop crying.

Helo: okay.

I go towards the sink and I get her a glass of water. She drinks up and she smiles at me.

Helo: can I go to bed.

Me: yeah sure.

I hug her one last time and she walks upstairs and I go back to the dinner table.

Dad: where's Helo.

Me: she went to bed, she's not feeling well.

Mom: what's wrong, must I go check on her?

Me: I think she'll be fine.

She sighs and I carry on eating my food. When I finish, I go to wash the dishes and I go to the cinema.

Narrated

Kabelo is in the bedroom on the bed going through some documents with Zuzile in the bathroom shouting at him.

Zuzile: I don't understand how you would want to leave on your daughter's birthday.

Kabelo: her birthday is on Monday, I'll be gone tomorrow.

Zuzile: and you only think about telling me today?

Kabelo: but I also didn't know.

She storms out of the bathroom and stands by the door frame with her arms across her chest obviously fuming mad.

Zuzile: Kabelo you don't get it do you?

Kabelo: get what, that I'll be away for a party but I'll be here for actual birthday. It's not like she'll need me tomorrow.

Zuzile: wow, you're so unbelievable.

She walks back to the bathroom and she finishes brushing her teeth. She steps back out and walks to her side of the bed.

Kabelo: I'm doing this for us, to protect this family and if I don't leave tomorrow, shit is going to go down. You have to understand that your safety is way more important than some function.

Zuzile: you see this is the problem, you involve us in all of your shady dealings and when your "shit" gets real, you expect us to run and hide. We all have things to do and you continue to put our lives in danger!

Kabelo: calm down. everything I do is for you, for us and for this family...

Zuzile: by putting us in danger!

Kabelo: I'm always there to protect you guys what else do you want from me?

Zuzile: I give up on you, honestly.

She gets into bed and switches off her bedside lamp.

Kabelo: since when do we go to bed angry?

Zuzile: since I don't feel like arguing with you anymore.

He sighs and switches off his light. Helo wakes up with a pain in her lower abdomen. She turns on her lamp and realises that her bed and pyjamas are spotted with blood stains. She starts to panic, realising she just got her period. She runs upstairs to the third floor and knocks hysterically on her parents door.

Helo: (Crying) mom! Mommy please open.

Both Zuzile and Kabelo come rushing to the door.

Kabelo: princess are you okay. What's wrong?

Helo: (Crying) I want to talk to mom.

They both exchange looks and Kabelo walks back to the room.

Zuzile: what's wrong baby?

Helo: I'm bleeding and I have a pain here mommy it hurts.

Zuzile smiles when she realises that her daughter has received her first period.

Zuzile: let's go to your room so we can talk.

She nods and they walk towards her room. Helo hasn't stopped crying.

Zuzile: princess I need you to calm down okay, getting your period isn't a bad thing, it's actually a good thing. It means you are not a child anymore but you are a young lady. It means that now, if you were to have sex, you would make a baby. I'm not going to talk to about that right now but I'm going to teach you about the importance of hygiene as a young lady.

A now calm Helo nods and Zuzile smiles.

Zuzile: I'll be back, in the meantime, go to the bathroom okay?

Helo: yes mom.

They both stand up and Zuzile walks to her bedroom. When she walks in she finds a concerned looking Kabelo staring at her.

Kabelo: is she okay?

Zuzile: she's fine, she got her first period.

Kabelo: really?

Zuzile: yep.

She goes to the closet and takes some pads, tampons, plastic bags and feminine wipes.

Kabelo: and then?

Zuzile: let's just say it's going to be a long night.

Kabelo: I'm sorry about earlier.

Zuzile: can we walk about that later?

He nods and Zuzile walks towards her husband. She gets on top of him and gives him a kiss. He tries to deepen the kiss but Zuzile giggles and moves away.

Zuzile: I'll be back.

She walks back to the second floor bathroom where Helo is waiting for her.

Zuzile: I'm sorry for taking so long.

Helo: it's okay mom.

She sets out the things on the sink.

Zuzile: so baby you'll get your period every month and sometimes it will be unexpected, just like now. don't ever be embarrassed about staining your clothes or anything for that matter because it beyond your control okay.

She nods.

Zuzile: always make sure you take off your clothes and soak them in cold water, then wash them.

Helo takes off her pants and her stained underwear, putting them in the sink. Zuzile signals her to go into the shower while she washes the clothes. When she comes out, she wraps a towel over her body.

Zuzile: I've washed the things for you. When you finish showering, before you leave the bathroom, you put on the pad or your tampon.

Helo: what's a tampon?

Zuzile: this.

She holds it up for her and she gives a weird look.

Zuzile: you push it up your nunu to stop the bleeding. it works just like a pad.

Helo: doesn't it hurt?

Zuzile: you don't have to use it but without it, sometimes you are restricted. Some parents only let their children use tampons only after they lose their virginity but because you swim, you might need it. When you are wearing a pad, you can't go into the water.

Helo: so I can't swim when I get my period.

Zuzile: you can, you can just insert your tampon and you'll be fine. You're not going to be using it now but whenever you feel like you need to use it, come to me okay?

She nods looking a little terrified.

Zuzile: don't look so scared baby, this is normal. Give me your panty so I can show you how to put on a pad.

She hands her mother her panty and starts demonstrating it.

Zuzile: you peel this off first and stick it so it sits then you peel off the wings.

When she's done, she gives her the panty and she puts it on.

Helo: this is weird.

Zuzile: I know it is but you get used to it. You'll have to change your pad at least 3 times a day, depending on how heavy your flow is.

Helo: what is that?

Zuzile: how much blood your body produces at a time. For people who have a heavy flow, it's most likely for them to have their period for three days but if your flow is

light, you might go for five or seven days. Whenever you change your pad, you wipe your nunu with the wipes and you make sure you don't flush them. You also don't flush your pad or your panty liner because it blocks the toilet, instead, wrap it up in a tissue, then your pad packaging and put it in this plastic. Now it's your responsibility to make sure you empty this bin once it's full.

Helo: how do I know when to change?

Zuzile: you will feel it. it's going to be weird baby but there's nothing we can do. As time goes, you will get used to it. I suggest that you wear a tight at all times during the month, it's way more comfortable. You must change it at least 4 times a day, depending on how much blood you produce because once it's full, it starts to smell down there okay.

She nods.

Zuzile: let's go change the sheets so you can get some rest, tomorrow is your big day.

She smiles genuinely and pulls her to her embrace. She kisses her forehead and they walk back to the bedroom. Helo changes back into her pyjamas and they start changing the sheets.

Zuzile: so tell me, are you crushing on anyone or has anyone stole your heart?

Helo: no not really. I'm not really a fan of boys, they're just so dumb.

Zuzile: (Laughs) I'm glad you think like that because you're not allowed to date as of yet. You can only start dating when...

Helo cuts her off.

Helo: I know I can only start dating when I'm fifty.

Zuzile burst out laughing and Helo joins her.

Zuzile: did your father tell you that?

Helo: yes, he said he will shave off all of my hair and kill the boy if I do. I still love my hair, I can't lose it.

Zuzile: I was going to say you can start dating after 16. I started dating your father when I was 15.

Helo: did grandpa shave your head?

Zuzile: no, they didn't know, but I don't want us to be like that. I want you to be open with me, I want you to be able to tell me about anything and everything. I was never able to talk about these things with my mother and that made me make a ton of mistakes but I don't want you to fear me. whatever it is, talk to me, even if it means we have to hide it from your dad. You know how crazy he gets.

Helo: (Laughs) right.

Helo looks at her mom and she can't help the smile that creeps on her face. She's never been that close to her, yes they would talk and stuff but she's always been a daddy's girl and she's happy now that she can see they are cementing a stronger relationship. They finish up and Zuzile tucks her in.

Zuzile: is the pain still there?

Helo: it's subsided a bit.

Zuzile: okay then that's good. Try not to sleep on your back, sleep on your side or flat, stomach down.

Helo: yes mom.

Zuzile: get some rest okay. I'll see tomorrow morning.

She nods and Zuzile plants a kiss on her forehead and goes back to her bedroom. She can hear Kabelo snoring lightly which means he's asleep. She gets under the covers and turns to face the other way. Kabelo moves and snakes his arms around her tiny waist and they cuddle.

Kabelo: I'm sorry.

Zuzile: it's okay.

He plants soft kisses on her neck and he doses of.

Isa

What a weekend I had with the girls. I've partied before but never like this. Right now, my head is pounding because of all the alcohol I had last night. Ohh last night was something else. We went to a strip club and we got a pole dancing lesson and lots of stripping, twerking and grinding. I haven't had so much fun in a while. I get up from bed and remember that I didn't call Andrew last night. I go to the bathroom and I freshen up. I brush my hair and tie it in a messy bun then I walk back to the bed. I video call my gummy bear.

Andrew: my estranged girlfriend.

Me: ohh come on baby.

Andrew: you said you would call last night and you didn't. I tried calling but nothing.

Me: I'm sorry, I got caught up.

Andrew: with?

Me: I went to the doctors yesterday then went out with the girls.

He sighs and shuts his eyes.

Andrew: why were you at the doctors?

Me: to get the injection. I'm so sorry gummy bear.

Andrew: it's okay. did you have fun though?

Me: yes, so much fun.

Andrew: what did you get up to?

Me: (Giggling) come home you'll find out.

Andrew: oh really now.

Me: yes.

He creases his eyebrow and gives me a smirk. I blow him a kiss.

Andrew: what you wearing?

I was wearing my black lace panty only. I move the phone down and he moans making me giggle.

Andrew: I'll be there by tonight.

Me: I'll be waiting in a dangerous number.

Andrew: sneak peak?

Me: nope.

I bite my bottom lip seductively and he throws his head back moaning.

Andrew: let me hang up before you turn me on further.

Me: (laughing) okay baby.

Andrew: I love you.

Me: I love you more.

I blow him kisses and we hang up. I take one of Andrew tee's from the closet then walk back downstairs and Chloe and Sabrina are in the kitchen eating cereal.

Me: ma' hoes!

Them: you slut!

I whine my way down to the ground and they burst out laughing. I join in then I move to the kitchen and open the fridge.

Me: guys last night was off the hook.

Sabrina: I know how to party.

Me: you sure do.

Chloe: at least now you can dance for your man.

Me: yaass.

I shake my ass and they cheer. When I say we learnt a lot last night, I mean a lot. From the strippers that actually pole dance there and stuff. Heck I even got a compilation of songs to strip to because the girls suggested I try it with Andrew. Am I scared? oh hell yes! What if I mess up or fall. I've never been kinky before, I always let him take the lead but they told me that I should just pleasure him.

Chloe: when is he coming back

Me: tonight.

Sabrina: that means we have to go shopping!

Me: seriously? I'm so tired.

Chloe: you'll rest when we come back. Remember the element of surprise.

Me: yeah. Don't talk, your moves should do the talking.

Chloe: good girl now eat up so we can go.

I shake my head smiling as I look at these girls. They are so ahead with their train of thought. I mean I never thought at the age of 19 I'd be out hunting for lingerie to strip for my boyfriend. I finish eating then I go upstairs to take a shower. When I get out, I put on my maroon matching lace panty and bra and I take a mirror selfie, then I put on the navy set and take another selfie. I immediately send them to Andrew captioned: "Maroon or Navy?" then I put my phone on flight mode because I knew he would call. I wear my denim dress with a white turtleneck and white platform sneakers with paint splashed over them. I tie my hair into a neat high bun and I put on lip gloss. I take my backpack and head downstairs to find the two waiting for me in the lounge.

Chloe: took you long enough.

Me: cut me some slack would you. These edges don't just grow on trees you know.

Sabrina and Chloe are white so they don't have edges. We walk to the car and I drive. I take my phone out of flight mode then it connects to Bluetooth right away. Sabrina takes it.

Sabrina: yoh! 30 missed calls.

Me: What!

Sabrina: looks like gummy bear has been calling.

I laugh and as the song starts playing, he calls. I answer.

Me: gummy bear.

Andrew: how could you be so cruel? Make me understand please.

Me: but what have I done.

Andrew: you know what you did.

Me: I don't recall. Remind me please baby.

Andrew: cheeky I see, do I need to spank someone now.

Me: (Giggles) we watchful of what you say gummy bear.

Andrew: mmmh. Meeting tonight, 20:00 pm sharp.

He hangs up and the girls burst out laughing.

Chloe: you two are just the cutest!

Sabrina: right!

Me: he doesn't know what in it for him.

We giggle loudly then we jammed all the way to the mall. We head to Woolworths and they made me buy a black lace number and black stilettos that I know I will never wear again. We then head to Circus Circus for brunch then I drive them back to res. When I got there, I threw myself on the couch and I drifted off. I was woken up by a phone call and it was my mom.

Mom: jy hou nie meer van nie. (you do not love anymore)

Me: mommy. How are you.

Mom: I'm good, how are you?

Me: I'm okay.

Mom: you sound like you were sleeping.

Me: yeah I was taking a power nap. I miss you.

Mom: ek mis jou ook, hoekom het jy nie saam met Andrew gekom nie? (I miss you too, why did you not come with Andrew?)

Me: Ek het werk gehad om in te haal. It's a very hectic semester with exams also around the corner so I took the weekend to myself. (I had work to catch up)

I'm glad I don't have classes tomorrow because I still haven't finished my assignment so I'll be finishing it up.

Mom: please concentrate on your books. I don't want anything distracting you especially now.

Me: I won't let you down ma.

Mom: good. I love you.

Me: I love you too mom.

We talk about school further and she tells me about Marlo, who was arrested again and again, mom had to bail him out. Honestly, it's frustrating. He just behaves like a hood rat and it's starting to annoy me because he constantly gives mom headaches and cause her heartache. To think I used to look up to him and he has disappointed me. I hang up after some time then I go to the kitchen. I make spaghetti and mince for supper then I head upstairs. I took a long hot steamy bubble bath with bath salts and scented candles to help me relax because I was freaking out. I'm sure you're wondering about the salts and candles and bubble bath, after all, it is a man's apartment. Well, I made him buy them. He hardly ever takes baths but I love them so what's a better way to enjoy a bath than with salts and bubbles. After an hour and 30 minutes of soaking and singing, I came out. The plan was to make him think I want him then when he gets here, I deprive him then the stripping comes in. I take the tissue oil from my bag and I moisturise. When I'm done, I put on the lingerie and the shit is uncomfortable as shit. I put on his sweatpants and a hoodie. I untie my bun and I wet my curls then I go downstairs to dish up for myself. I settle on the couch and eat while I watch the new season of the Housewives. I'm just obsessed with them and I know how much it annoys Andrew. He's allergic to cat fights, or so

he says and the housewives always argue and it pisses him off that I sometimes zone out when I'm watching them. When I finish eating, I wash my plate and I go back to snuggle on the couch. At about 19:30, I hear the key turning in the key whole. I stand and as soon as he opens the door, I jump on him wrapping my legs around his waist, squeezing him for dear life. Heck I didn't realise I missed him so much. His scent fills my nostrils and my eyes sting.

Me: heck I missed you!

Andrew: I missed you too.

We shared a kiss.

Mvelo

It's refreshing to have someone be so excited to see you, someone telling you how much they missed you. The way she jumped on me made my heart so happy, it did flips. We kiss and I lead her to the kitchen and place her on the counter. I try to deepen the kiss but she pulls away.

Isa: I missed you so much Mfusi.

Me: I missed you too. You cooked?

Isa: yep. I had nothing better to do.

Our eyes lock for some time and her blue eyes sparkle like the ocean at horizon. We both chuckle and she climbs off the counter.

Isa: go put your bag down so you can eat.

Me: okay.

She moves to the pots and I go upstairs to leave the bag. The neatness in the room, it looks like nobody has been here. I move to the closet and I find a woollies bag on the bean bag. Inside is a black pair of shoes and they look really nice. I put it back down and I put my bag in the corner then I walk back downstairs. I sit down in the lounge and she comes in carrying a tray. She places it in front of me.

Me: thank you baby. I should just make you my wife.

She blushed and she settled down next to me.

Me: aren't you eating.

Isa: already did. you said we have a meeting at 20:00.

I turned to look at her and she had an innocent look painted across her face which made me smile.

Me: pop back those blue eyes, it's not 20:00 yet.

She pressed the "i" button on the remote and it was 19:40.

Isa: 20 minutes.

She smiled and stood up going upstairs. I finished up eating by 19:50 and I went to put my plate in the sink. I decided to wash it because I know she would snap my head off if I didn't. I switched off all the lights downstairs and I walked upstairs. As I

was approaching the bedroom door, I could hear music playing softly. I enter and there's a chair right in the middle but she's nowhere.

Me: Isa.

The lights in the room were dim and I could feel my dreams coming true. There was a soft clicking sound and when I turned to the door, she was leaning against the door frame in a black lace lingerie and the shoes I saw earlier. She looked shit sexy and I could feel my Mfusi twitch. She slowly entered and closed the door. When she turned around to lock, her ass was out and it was nice, round and firm, heaven. She moved closer to me and she started pushing me, clearly directing me to sit in the chair. I sit down with my eyes still glued to her. She moves to her phone and she presses play. She leans by the door with her leg out. She starts sliding down slowly but in a sexy motion then opens her thighs giving me a sneak peak then gets on her knees. She crawls gradually towards me and stops half way. She flips her hair and gets on her side. She forms a perfect triangle with her legs making me want to fuck her then. The way she moves is so gracious, it's a sexy I'd never imagine I'd see right in front of my eyes. She's now on her feet and starts walking towards me and puts her legs on either side of the chair. She grabs a hold of my shoulders while I snake my hands around her waist. She throws her head back, swinging it back and she faces me. I attempt to kiss her breasts but she puts her finger on my mouth slides down to grab my shirt. She starts whining slowly, not breaking eye contact with me. the way her body moves in-sync with the music turns me on. She gets off of me and I curse under my breath. She stands behind me and places her heel on my thigh and I brush her thigh gently. It's going to be a long night.

Chapter 7

"Souls tend to go back to who feels at home."

Isa

Finally, schools are closed after the exams and I can finally breathe. I've been suffocating with the exams and the studying. Ayy I was lying when I said it's easy because it's nothing close to easy. Those exams showed me flames but I studied real hard and I trust myself. Tomorrow, Andrew and I are going to Durban for the holidays and I'm so excited to see my mom and Lwa. Today, I'm going to the doctor to get my contraceptive. I get it every three months and the last time I took it was in April. It's really affecting my daily life though. I haven't had my period and I'm gaining a whole lot of weight. I didn't really worry because the day I got the shot they told me about the period and the weight gain as well.

Andrew: will you be fine?

Me: yes. I'll call when I'm done okay.

Andrew: alright love.

He kisses my cheek and I go out. I go to reception and they tell me to sit in the waiting area. While I wait, I go through my Instagram and I see pictures of Andrew and I. I find myself smiling as I think about the last three months. They have been pure bliss and nothing short of the word. I think that show I put on for him really strengthened our relationship. He was so happy and I'm happy when my baby is happy. My thoughts are disturbed by a tap.

Nurse: please follow me.

I stand up and we walk to the doctor's office.

Dr: Miss Davids

Me: Isabelle.

Dr: Dr Collins.

I shake her hand and I sit down.

Dr: I understand you are here for your contraceptive?

Me: yes.

Dr: first time?

Me: no, second.

Dr: do you perhaps recall which contraceptive was used.

I took out my card and handed it to her.

Dr: Sayana Press.

Me: I was told that it has side effects like not getting your period but the nurse reassured me I would get it just a light flow but I didn't receive it at all. Should I be worried?

Dr: it may be a concern because this one apparently agrees with you. I'm going to have to make you take a pregnancy test.

My heart started beating out of my chest and my palms became sweaty.

Me: for what.

Dr: just to be sure. Are you sexually active?

Me: yes.

Dr: okay.

She stands up, disappearing into the next room and she comes back with a small cup.

Dr: I'm going to ask you to pee in here for me so I can take it for testing.

I nod and take the cup. She directs me to the toilet and before I can do it, I say a silent prayer, asking God to walk in my favour because I can't afford to be pregnant. when I finish, I wash my hands then I walk back to the office. I give Dr Collins the cup and she walks out leaving me alone weighing the possibilities of falling pregnant. the many times we didn't use protection because I was on the injection, what if it didn't work. Oh Good God I can't be pregnant, my mother would be disappointed in me. after 15 minutes, the doctor walks in and she sits down.

Dr: sorry for taking so long, I'm coming from the lab and I asked your tests be done immediately.

Me: do you have the results?

She nods and I start biting my nails, something I do when I'm nervous.

Dr: congratulations you are 13 weeks pregnant.

I don't know what happened but I suddenly went numb and I couldn't breathe. I think she saw this because she quickly gave me a glass of water but I couldn't even hold it properly because I was shaking. She helped me drink while the tears streamed down my face.

Dr: should I call somebody?

I shook my head no and I tried to collect myself. How the fuck am I pregnant, I'm not even showing. I haven't been sick or having weird cravings or being emotional.

Me: how, I'm perfectly fine, I don't have any cravings or morning sickness.

Dr: it differs for every woman, some don't even experience morning sickness, I guess you're the lucky bunch.

I looked at her.

Dr: I'll prescribe some medicine for you. You need a lot of calcium and vitamins as well. Would you like to have a scan?

Involuntarily, I nod. I'm still in shock state and I'm shit scared of the reactions I'm going to get. She leads me to the bed and I lift my shirt. She applies the cold gel and moves the transducer around. A loud heartbeat goes off and she turns the screen for me to see. All I could see were patches and spots. She points to the tiniest dot, it's almost invisible.

Dr: that's your baby right there.

A tear escapes my eye and I wipe it off quickly. She prints the scans and wipes the gel off of me. I get off the bed and we go back to the office. She writes the prescription and hands me the scans then I leave. I didn't even want to call Andrew anymore so I just called an Uber and it took me straight to res. Luckily, Sabrina had already left for PE so I was alone and I was crying my eyes out. I cried until I fell asleep because I was woken up by a loud knock on my door.

Andrew: Bubbies open up, are you here?

I quickly gathered the sonograms and put them in my bag. My eyes were all red and puffy so how was I going to explain that. I went to open and he attacked me with a hug.

Andrew: I was so worried about you, where were you? You said you'd call, how did you get her and why are your eyes swollen, were you crying? Isabelle?

So many questions at once.

Me: I just had a headache, I'm fine though the doctor gave me some pills. I took an Uber.

Andrew: why, I told you to call me.

Me: my phone died. I'm sorry.

Andrew: you scared me.

He pulled me to his embrace. I wanted to break down but I tried to hold back.

Andrew: are you sure you're okay. you even have hiccups.

I faked a laugh.

Me: that's because before I fell asleep, I was watching Titanic.

Andrew: but you've watched that movie a million times, why does it make you cry till you have hiccups.

Me: it gets to me I guess.

I smiled and we got on the bed and cuddled. I wanted to tell him so badly but my heart wouldn't let me. what if he hates me and leaves me.

Andrew: what you thinking about?

Me: you.

Andrew: me?

Me: yes you. Have you packed?

Andrew: yes mam.

I chuckle but I sound weird with my blocked nose. He kisses my forehead.

Andrew: spend the night with me.

I'm contemplating a way to say no so I go quiet for some time

Andrew: bubbies?

Me: I can't.

Andrew: what do you mean you can't.

Me: I still have to finish packing.

Andrew: we can do that now and you leave with me when we done.

Me: your making my life difficult.

Andrew: no I'm making it easier. I'm going to help you.

Me: but I said no. I don't want your help what don't you understand about that.

I pushed him off of me and he gave me look of disbelief. I was frustrated and he didn't understand.

Andrew: what's your problem.

Me: the problem is that I'm telling you that I don't want to and your trying to force me.

Andrew: but I'm not. Come with me please.

Me: no, leave. go I want to be alone.

Andrew: I'm not going anywhere.

Me: LEAVE!!!

I'm irate, frustrated and in all of this, I can't tell him why. I just really want him to hold me and tell me I'll be fine but I can't. I feel guilty. He comes closer to me and I'm here thinking he's trying to slap me but he initiates a kiss. I don't know how but I slapped him so hard and as soon as I did it, I regretted it because he almost slapped me back. I could see him holding himself back from hitting me and it dawned to me that I had crossed the line, big time. I tried to apologise but he stormed out slamming the door, making me cry even more.

Mvelo

Isabelle laid a hand on me, she actually slapped me for trying to kiss her. Lord knows how much it took for me not to slap her back. Something in me told me to walk away because I knew I would lose my brain. When I'm angry, I fume. From a young age I've been like that. I go home and I pace up and down trying to calm down. normally, I would punch and kick the boxing bag but I don't have one here and the only resort is to pace. How could she? What's upsetting her to the point of her being physical towards me. I fail to understand. I go get a glass of water but I crush it with my hand and it breaks, giving me cuts. I start bleeding so I go take the first aid and I clean it up. when I finish, I go to take my sketch book and pencils. I drew my pain away.

Isa

I woke up with a death summoning headache feeling like the whole world is weighing on my shoulders. I'm fucking pregnant! I slowly get out of bed and I check the time, realising it's 7:00 in the morning. After what happened last night, I really don't know if Andrew is going to fetch me because the plan was to leave together. Nonetheless, I have too much pride to call him so just to be sure, I'll get ready. I look at myself in the mirror and my whole face is pink, even my eyes are red. My nose is all blocked up and I'm really struggling to breathe. I look down at my flat stomach and shake my head in disbelief with fresh new tears running down my face. Slowly lifting my shirt, I place my hand on my tummy. I feel this wave of unexplainable emotions wash over me and I feel like jumping up and down. I'm scared, I'm scared of the reactions I will get, my mom and my brother will be disappointed in me. I'm only 19 and I'm not even half-way through my university life and I'm already knocked up. My thoughts are disturbed by my phone ringing. I go to check and his name pops up making my legs wobble. I answer then go silent.

Andrew: get ready I'll be there in thirty.

Before I can get a word in, he hangs up. My heart breaks even more and I just cry. After some time of balling my eyes out, I go take a shower. The thing about me is I'm too organised, I had my suitcases packed the day before yesterday so I was just fooling him last night. When I finished getting dressed, I took an apple and I went to stand by the window. I had a clear view of what was going on at the gate so I stood there to wait for him to come. I take the scans out of my bag and stare at them. I feel some type of emotion in me but I can't really put my finger on it. What if he doesn't want a child. Obviously he won't want a child because he's still in school and so am I. This would just be a major setback and cause us heartache. My mind retracts to Zuzile's advice last year. She told me to prioritise, to keep what I want ahead and make it my daily goal to work toward achieving my long term goal. She's a very smart woman and I should have taken her words to heart that day. I should have had them ringing in my head from the start. I see his car turning on our street and I gather my bags and start walking downstairs. When I reached the reception, my phone rang and it was him so I just ignored it and walked out to the car. Normally, he would come out and give me a massive bear hug but he doesn't. I wish he did, I

needed him now more than ever, for him to hold me and tell me it will be okay. I carry my bags into the boot and I get in the front seat. I contemplate whether I should greet or not but it would be rude not to so I gather up my shit and put aside my full blown pride.

Me: morning.

He nods and takes his air-pod, putting it in his ear which clearly means he doesn't want to talk. I take a glance at him and he has a small scratch where I hit him, I'm guessing I scratched him with my nail. I quickly turn to face the window when he turns his face. The drive is probably the coldest most awkward drive I've ever had and it's just me and him for another 15 or 16 hours. He drives to the petrol garage and gets out the car. It's like he forgot something so he comes back.

Andrew: do you want anything?

Me: water please.

He nods and goes to the store. I have never ever been this uncomfortable around him, the tension is too much. This shit headache is still not going away so I just recline the seat and close my eyes. I hear the car door open after some time and he throws a plastic at the back.

Andrew: your water is in the back.

Me: thanks.

He gets in and drives off while I take out the water and drink it. I realise he also bought a whole lot of snacks I'm guessing for the road. I take out the pain tablets from my bag and my scans fall out. I quickly gather them up thinking that he might have seen them I sigh really loudly, making him turn to look at me.

Andrew: are you okay?

Me: I'll be okay.

He raises his eyebrow and I fake a smile. I take the pill and I start dosing off.

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I wake up with a strong urge to puke so I quickly sit up.

Me: stop the car.

He looks at me shocked.

Me: stop the car!

I shout this time and he comes to a screeching halt. I open the door and run to the side of the road and I vomit like hell. all the water I had came out and I felt him holding my hair back.

Andrew: are you okay?

Me: I think I had too much water.

Andrew: did you have breakfast?

Me: no.

He gives me a look of disbelief and walks me to the car. We drive in silence and when we get to Beaufort West, he drives to the mall. When he gets out, he comes to open my door. We walk in and he leads me to Circus Circus. We get a table and sit with him busy on his phone.

Me: Andrew.

He looks up at me and his handsomeness just makes my heart skip a beat.

Me: I'm sorry about last night. I should...

He cuts me off.

Andrew: let's get one thing clear, what happened last night is to never happen again. I don't want to know what fuelled it because you clearly don't want to talk about it but please respect me.

Me: I do respect you Andrew it's just that I lost it and...and.

I started crying again. He holds my hand tightly in his.

Andrew: it's okay.

Me: (Crying) I won't do it again and thank you for not hitting me back.

Andrew: I'd never do anything to hurt you.

I put my head on the table and cry louder, making him stand, running to brush my back.

Andrew: Isa.

Me: (Crying) you're making me feel worse about yesterday. I really shouldn't have done that but you don't need to remind me how horrible of a person I am.

Here I am ranting and crying in a public place with people watching. I hear Andrew sigh of defeat and he just rubs my back.

Andrew: you're not a horrible person, you were just angry right?

Me: (crying) yes.

Andrew: and I pissed you off?

Me: yes.

Andrew: then stop feeling so bad. I forgive you okay and I love you so much.

He kisses the top of my head and then peck my lips.

Me: I love you too.

I've calmed down now but I still have hiccups so he signals a waiter to bring me water. We order and eat in silence.

Mvelo

It has been the longest 17 hours of my life. It's just after midnight and we've arrived in Ramsgate. I love Isa with everything in me but today was hectic. First I find her and she's a crying mess, then she flips out and slaps me now she's just a waterfall. I honestly regret saying we must drive to Durban because damn it was hell. she was so jumpy and acting all weird like she's hiding something but I decided against asking her. I wanted her to be the one to tell me. she's fast asleep and snoring lightly next to me. I drive up the driveway and I park right outside the garage and I go to open. I carry all our luggage in first, leaving it in the kitchen then I go fetch my sleeping beauty. The way she clutches on to me is amazing. She gently lays her head on my chest as I carry her to my room. I put her down and I go to fetch the bags, making

sure I lock up. I went to take a quick shower and I change a sleeping Isa into her jammies. I look at her body and she looks rounder than before. The way her boobs perk up now is different from before and I just love it. Her ass is bigger as well, much to my enjoyment. She puts her hands and covers her boobs.

Isa: you're such a perv.

Me: just looking at my assets.

She giggles in her sexy sleepy voice and I kiss her nose. She gets up and gets dressed and joins me in bed. We snuggle closely together and before I can start talking, I can hear her snoring lightly, meaning she's asleep so I join her.

.....

I wake up to see my beautiful girlfriend sitting by the mirror busy fixing her hair. She's wearing a blush pink tight fitting turtle neck dress with long sleeves. I sat up to look at her properly.

Me: morning.

Isa: morning.

Me: you look beautiful.

Isa: thank you. I'm going back home. please take me.

Me: after breakfast.

Isa: ohh gosh. Okay.

She smiles and carries doing what she's doing by the mirror. I stand up and make the bed. I then go to take a shower and I step out. I take out black jeans and a pink panther tee with white sneakers.

Isa: now were matching.

Me: there's nothing wrong with matching.

She giggles and comes to give me a forehead kiss.

Me: one here. And here as well.

I point to my lips then my cheek and she giggles as she plants them softly. I get dressed and we walk down to breakfast. Mom's face lights up when she sees us and stands to hug us.

Mom: you two snuck in last night we didn't hear you. I missed you.

She kisses my cheek and I swat her hand away when she holds my hair.

Mom: Isa you look absolutely beautiful.

Isa: thank you.

She smiles and looks down. We sit and greet dad and the kids and as normal, they ask us about school and life in Cape Town. Helo and mom look like they gel more than before and that makes me happy. Ntsakisi is an exact photocopy of Bab' Msizi and it's really shocking. We finish with breakfast and I take Isa back home. when I go back home, the house is quiet. Schools are closed so the rascals are home. I go to my room and I find a girl busy folding laundry on my bed. She really looks young and I doubt she works here.

Me: hello.

Girl: sawbona bhuti. I'm Yolanda, I work here.

She has a caramel type of skin and has big round eyes. She's a bit plump and has curves in all the right places. She's also really short and the blue jeans she's wearing are just hugging her the right way. She chuckles making me snap out and I realise I'm kind of staring.

Me: I'm sorry.

Yolanda: it's fine.

I walk to my closet and take out my pencils and as I'm about to walk out, I stop at my tracks and turn around.

Me: aren't you a bit too young to be working?

Yolanda: I'm Phelo's little sister and yes, I'm 17. I'm going to be helping her out for the holidays.

Me: okay, makes much more sense.

She smiles and I walk out leaving her. I'm going to the kitchen and I find mom talking on the phone.

Mom: yes today.

...

Mom: I'm glad because I'm really starting to worry about his behaviour.

...

Mom: I'll be watchful. Thank you.

She turns around and sees me.

Mom: were you eavesdropping?

Me: no, I was just passing by. Where's everyone?

Mom: dad went to work, Helo is at Yamukela's and Ntsakisi went to the shop.

Me: the shop?

Mom: he's taking a walk to the shops.

Me: ohh. There's a girl in my room.

Mom: are you asking me or are you telling me.

Me: leading to a question. Why is she working here.

Mom: she wanted to. It's holidays, she has nothing better to do so she decided to come help out her sister.

I nod and she squints her eyes at me. I smile and she tries not to but she can't resist and she smiles making me chuckle. I kiss her cheek and I walk out to the patio and get I lost in my canvas.

Isa

As soon as Andrew dropped me off, I called Lwa. I got in the house and it was quiet meaning mom was at work. The whole trip from Cape Town coming here, I took time to think about how I'm going to handle this situation and I decided to get an abortion. It pains me deeply, I even had a nightmare about it but it's what's best for me. the reason why I'm calling Lwa is because I want to tell her everything and I'm going to go to the clinic to get the abortion. She arrives in less than 30 minutes and I sit her down on my bed and I start narrating the story.

Me: I'm pregnant.

Lwa: you're what!

Her face goes pale and her eyes pop out. My tears start coming out again.

Lwa: you're not kidding.

Me: how could I kid like that.

Lwa: have you told Mvelo about this.

Me: no and I won't tell him.

Lwa: that's a dumb idea because you'll obviously start showing, how far along are you?

Me: 13 weeks. That's why I called you.

Lwa: you want me to help you tell him?

Me: no. I decided that I'm getting an abortion.

When I hear that word come out of my mouth my heart breaks and I can't help the sob that escapes my mouth.

Lwa: no, why. Isabelle no, I can't let you.

Me: (Crying) you don't understand Lwa, I can't have this baby. My mom would be so disappointed in me, what will I do about school as well. I can't quit school to take care of a baby. I can't Lwa.

Lwa: you should talk to Mvelo first because after all, this is also his baby, he has a say.

Me: Please Lwa. Let's just keep this between the two of us. It will be our secret. Please I beg of you.

I sit there and cry while she goes quiet and sinks her head in her hands and sighs loudly. She speaks after a few minutes.

Lwa: okay. It's your decision. Let's go.

I wipe my tears and give her a big bear hug and I just cry in her arms and she cries with me. after some time of balling, I call an Uber and it fetches us. In the car we are both silent but she keeps stealing glances at me. We get to the clinic and I go to reception and register. The look that the nurse at reception gives me is enough to send me to my grave. She's clearly judging me and disgusts washes over her. I look down ashamed and when we finish I go back to my seat. I'm literally shaking and Lwa holds my hand tightly. A beautiful dark lady comes to us and says my name. I stand up still shaking and she gives me a warm smile that immediately calms me down a bit. We get to a room and she has the trays set out in front of her. I get on the bed and I wait for her. She comes in and stands in front of me.

Nurse: you are very beautiful Isabelle.

Me: thank you mam.

Nurse: I'm Ntswaki. Before we go on, are you sure you want to carry on.

She has pity and concern painted across her face.

Me: yes.

Ntswaki: I don't want to be a nuisance but it's in my nature to be concerned about people that look innocent like you.

She holds my hands and they feel so warm and homely. Involuntarily, my tears fall and she gradually wipes them.

Ntswaki: why do you want to do this?

Me: (Crying) I don't want to disappoint my mom. She was a single parent at a young age and so was my grandmother, her mother. I promised her that I wouldn't be like

them because I saw how she struggled with raising us but I found love and here I am pregnant, just like my mom was.

Ntswaki: have you told your boyfriend?

I shake my head no and she sighs.

Ntswaki: so you took this decision alone?

Me: I'm still in school and so is he, we can't afford to raise a baby. His parents are well off but we're old and we can't depend on his parents forever. I can't stop going to school just to raise this baby, I just can't.

Ntswaki: does he love you?

Me: yes, a lot.

Ntswaki: don't you think you owe him the satisfaction of knowing he planted his seed inside of you. Boys have pride and knowing he's done something as big as getting you pregnant is like an achievement to him but that's not the point here, the point here is that your life doesn't have to go on hold just because you had a baby. I know a lot of teenage mothers and they are doing the most. You have people around you that love you and I know it won't be easy to tell them but when that baby comes, it will bring happiness. You can make it work just don't abort it. I'm 23 years old and when I was your age, I got into an accident and was told I couldn't have children. That was the worst day of my life because there's nothing I wanted more than children. It pains me that I can't have one of my own and I don't want any woman going through the same. Please, think twice about this.

Her eyes were welling up with tears and I was a crying mess.

Ntswaki: it's not the end of the world. I know I don't have experience or I've never been in this situation but I know the pain of losing someone you love and in my case, I didn't know I could love it before I lost it.

Her tears dropped and she held her flat tummy. I looked down on mine and thoughts came running through my mind. This could be my only chance to have a baby.

Ntswaki: a baby is a blessing from God and not many are blessed with them. Excuse me.

She walked out and left me with my thoughts. I'm being selfish and cold hearted but I'm confused and scared. I know Andrew loves me, he wouldn't want me to kill his child. He wouldn't let us starve, neither were his parents but my mom. My mother wouldn't forgive me if I told her. I hold on to my flat tummy and I started speaking.

Me: I'm so scared. I'm scared and confused because I want to be selfish and keep you but I'll lose everyone I love.

I stop and remember something. *"you could fall in and out of love with everyone but the love you have for your child is endless. You brought them into the world and they are your first real love."* It's something I read from Zuzile's book. It made sense to me. it felt so wrong to want to be selfish but I couldn't bring myself to admitting that whole-heartedly, I wanted this. Ntswaki comes back in and she gives me a glass of water and a pill.

Ntswaki: drink that and it will terminate the foetus. Then we will take you to clean out the womb because clotting my occur.

Me: I can't. I'm sorry but I can't kill my baby.

She smiles and pulls me in for a hug. I feel so connected to her it scares me. I cry on her shoulder and she brushes my back.

Ntswaki: I know it's not an easy decision but I'm glad you took it. I hate seeing beautiful people like you cry. Whenever you need help, don't be afraid to come to me okay.

I nod and she caresses me. after I've calmed down, she gives me water.

Ntswaki: do you live here in Durban?

Me: my home is here but I'm in Cape Town because of school.

Ntswaki: I can get you a really good gynaecologist that side, he's a good friend of mine. I want you to take care of my little baby in there.

I giggle and she smiles.

Me: I'll take your number so I can call you.

Ntswaki: whatever you need okay.

Me: thank you.

I hug her one more time and she walks me out. Lwa rushes over to me with concern written all over her face.

Lwa: are you okay, that was really quick.

Me: I didn't do it.

She beams and hugs me tightly and squeals.

Lwa: so I'm going to be an Aunty.

Me: I guess so.

She hugs me again and I just wish her excitement could rub off on me.

Chapter 8

"Sometimes feelings stay when we have to beg."

Mvelo

Being at home is refreshing. Getting to spend time with my siblings and just bonding with them makes me happy and content. I sense a cold vibe between mom and dad but I'm hoping it's not anything horrible. Isabelle. I sigh out loud every time I think about her because I really don't understand what the heck is going on between the two of us. Ever since that night we came back, she's been weird. She's not taking my calls and not responding to my texts and it's been 5 days already. I even went to her house the other day but no one was there. I've also had my eye on Yolanda these past few days. Something about her caught my eye and something in me wants to explore her, both emotionally and physically. I think mom caught me staring at her on one occasion because she warned me about what was going through my head. Now the thing with Mrs Mfusi is that she knows me inside and out so she's able to read me whenever. I'm sitting in the cinema with my siblings watching a movie since it's a cold day. Yolanda comes in and stands by the door.

Yolanda: bhuti, uMah is calling you.

I look at her and smile but she looks down and I'm assuming she's blushing.

Me: I'm coming.

She nods still looking down and she rushes out.

Helo: she likes you.

Me: excuse me?

Helo: SHE. LIKES. YOU.

She shouts it and I give her a death stare causing her to laugh.

Me: what do you know about like?

Helo: I know that she likes you because I know.

Me: I promise you Khauhelo, if you dare tell me you like someone, I swear I'm going to kill that boy.

Helo: (Giggling) hawu Mvelo! I didn't say anything.

Me: Ntsaki, watch out for boys that go after your sister.

NJ: don't involve me please.

He puts his hands up in surrender with a smile on his face. I give her a death stare.

Mom: Mvelwenhle!

Helo: go, mom is calling you. Hamba!

She stands up and she pushes me out. I carry her and start tickling her and she laughs out loud. I go out the cinema with her still in my arms.

Helo: (Laughing) Mah, uBhuti is tickling me!

She's turning red with laughter and even tears are coming out. Mom graciously steps down from the third floor.

Mom: Mvelo put her down.

Me: apologise.

She shakes her head no and I tickle her even more.

Me: Apologise!

Helo: (Laughing) I'm sorry bhuti. I'm sorry!

I put her down and she runs away still giggling and mom and I just smile at each other. I put my arm around her shoulders and we make our way down the stairs.

Me: you called for me?

Mom: yes. I wanted to ask about Isabelle.

I stop and clear my throat. She looks at me.

Mom: what's wrong?

Me: nothing.

I carry on walking and I go silent.

Mom: you know you can talk to me right?

Me: yeah I know.

Mom: what's wrong? Why haven't I seen her around.

I shrug my shoulders.

Me: I don't know but she hasn't been taking my calls. I've texted her, called her, I even went as far as going to see her at her house but she wasn't there so I've just decided to give her space.

Mom: did you guys fight.

Me: yeah, we fell out. She slapped me.

Mom: she what?

Me: she slapped me.

Mom: why?

The shock in her voice is just something else.

Me: she was feeling emotional and I guess I provoked her. I think she's on her period though. She only overreacts like that when she's there.

Mom: but you guys looked fine the other day.

Me: we had talked and she apologised but after I took her home, she ghosted.

Mom: try calling Lwa. I'm sure she knows where she is or why she's acting this way.

Me: I'll just give her space for now. she'll talk when she's ready.

She sighs out loudly.

Mom: a piece of advice my boy, don't give her too much space, she'll resent you. She's obviously sad about something and needs you but she won't show it to you. When you give her too much space, she'll think you don't care at all.

Me: why are woman so complicated.

Mom: men are complicated. We give you signs but you brush them off.

Me: ayy, I'm not going to argue with you.

Mom: because you know I'm right.

I chuckle and kiss the side of her head.

Mom: fix things and stop flirting with Yolanda.

Me: I am not.

Mom: you seem to forget that I can see right through you Mvelwenhle.

Me: ohh jeez not this again.

I try freeing from her grip but she pulls me back.

Mom: ngsakhuluma.

Me: yes mommy I'm listening.

Mom: stop what you are doing with Yolanda. You are going to get her confused and make her think you love her. I don't want you breaking girls hearts.

Me: I'll stop.

She stops walking and looks at me, putting both hands on my shoulders.

Mom: I'm being serious Mvelwenhle.

Me: I'll stop flirting mom.

She squints her tiny eyes and I chuckle. I kiss her forehead and we carry on walking.

.....

I'm in the kitchen making a shake after my morning jog when the brats come down the stairs all dressed up.

Helo: Morning bhuti.

NJ: morning bhuti.

Me: morning brats. Where you going this early?

Helo: shopping with Mom and aunty Thando.

Me: and you?

NJ: Aunty Thato is taking us to watch the monster trucks.

Me: you and who?

NJ: Noel and the twins.

Me: oh, okay.

They make breakfast while I go upstairs to my bedroom. I take my phone to see if I have any missed calls from my bubbies but nothing. I miss her so badly but she just won't answer my calls. I call her and this time it goes straight to voicemail. I put my pride aside and call Lwa. She answers right away.

Me: heyy, Lwa.

Lwa: Mvelo, how are you.

Me: I'm good. It's been so long.

Lwa: right. We should link up.

Me: we should. I need your help.

Lwa: whatcuneed?

Me: where's Isabelle?

She goes quiet for some times then there's shuffling.

Lwa: she's at home.

Me: really?

Lwa: yes, she's been there since the beginning of the holidays.

Me: she's been ignoring my calls, is there something wrong I did?

Lwa: no, no please don't feel bad.

She spoke so fast, I knew she's hiding something.

Me: mmh.

Lwa: I promise you she's okay. you did nothing wrong but she's going to talk to you soon.

Me: why not now?

She sighs.

Lwa: I don't know Mvelo. Look, I'm sorry, I have to go. I'll text you later.

She hangs up before I can say more and my gut tells me there's a lot more to this than what meets the eye and I'm going to find out. I take off my vest and I wrap a towel around my waist preparing for my shower then there's a knock on my door.

Me: come in.

The door opens slowly and Yolanda walks in. she looks down shyly when she realises I'm half naked.

Yolanda: uMah is leaving she said I must ask you if you need anything.

Me: no I don't need anything.

Yolanda: okay.

As she's about to walk out...

Me: wait.

She turns and looks at me then immediately drops her head.

Me: is everyone gone yet?

Yolanda: Phelo has gone home for the day, she's coming back in the evening and Mr Mfusi is at work. Mah and the girls are on their way out now.

Me: ohh.

She nods and walks out. I chuckle and shake my head at the way she humbles herself in front of me. I go take my shower then wear my sweatpants with a hoodie and black sneakers. I take my car keys and phone then go downstairs. I find Yolanda in the lounge cleaning.

Me: Yolanda.

Yolanda: yebo bhuti.

Me: I'll be back.

She nods and goes back to her cleaning. I get in the car and I drive to Lwa's place. I knock on the door.

Lwa's Mom: Andrew, hi

Me: hello mah. How are you?

Lwa's Mom: I'm good son, come in.

I go in and she leads me to settle in the lounge.

Lwa's Mom: how are you in this cold weather?

Me: ayy, we are all trying to survive mah. Is Lwa home?

Lwa's Mom: yes, I'll go call her for you.

Me: thank you mah.

She disappears down the passage and moments later she comes back with a shocked Lwa.

Lwa: Andrew.

Me: Lwa, how are you?

Lwa: I'm good.

Me: can we talk.

She swallows hard and gives me a look.

Lwa: sure, let's go.

We walk out all the way to my car. She gets in the front seat and I drive off. She exclaims.

Lwa: ungisaphi?

Me: for a drive.

She rolls her eyes and crosses her arms across her chest.

Lwa: your being unfair.

Me: you hung up on me.

Lwa: I told you, I was busy.

Me: with what.

She goes quiet and I give her a look.

Me: Isa.

Lwa: she's at home.

Me: okay.

I take a turn, an unexpected one that is causing Lwa to cuss at me.

Lwa: you piece of shit! You almost killed us.

Me: calm down. take out your phone.

Lwa: nx, asshole.

I chuckle and she gives me a dead stare and I quickly recover. She takes her phone.

Me: call Isa, I want to see her

Lwa: she doesn't want to see you.

Me: why? What did I do wrong?

Lwa: you did nothing wrong.

Me: then why the fuck won't she see me!

I punch the steering wheel, causing the car to brake and I bang my nose.

Lwa: (Shouting) Andrew! Take me home, you are going to get us killed.

Me: no! we are going to her house.

I carry on driving with Lwa busy kicking and screaming next to me. we get to her house and she's huffing and puffing like a cavewoman.

Lwa: you are crazy! She won't see you. Not like this.

Me: call her.

Lwa: no.

Me: CALL HER.

I'm angry now. she's making my life ten times difficult. My nose is bleeding, my head is pounding and I'm fucking pissed off. She calls Isa and puts her on loud speaker.

Isa: friend.

Lwa: friend are you at home?

Isa: yes, why?

Lwa: with who?

Isa: just me. are you okay, you sound like you've been crying.

Lwa: I'm good. I'm outside, can I come in.

Isa: sure. The gate is open.

Lwa: see you now.

She drops the call and I park the car properly. She goes out and I attempt to follow her but she stops me.

Lwa: no, stay here.

Me: that's bullshit. I'm coming.

She sighs and walks up to the gate. I follow behind her gradually. We finally get to the door and she knocks once then opens. I can see her but she can't see me. she's beaming and looks absolutely beautiful. I go in and her face turns pale.

Isa: Andrew.

It comes out as a whisper and she staggers. Lwa holds her up and fans her.

Isa: what are you doing here.

Me: you're ghosting me. I've called, I've texted but you blatantly ignore me. what did I do wrong Isabelle?

Isa: nothing is wrong Mvelo. I'm fine.

Me: then why are you pushing me away. Please make me understand.

Isa: I just need some time.

Me: time?

Tears start rolling down her cheeks and I attempt to come closer but Lwa blocks me.

Isa: I need space to think Mvelo.

Me: you're breaking up with me?

Isa: no, no Mvelo I'm not. I'm just saying I need time. Please.

I feel my heart break and my eyes start to sting.

Isa: please.

I shake my head and tears roll down, so do hers.

Isa: please. I just need this, please.

I turn and go out the door and as soon as I step out, I hear a huge wail. I go to my car and drive off, heading straight home. when I get there, I find Yolanda in the kitchen chopping.

Yolanda: bhuti, are you okay?

I turn to look at her and concern is painted all over her face. I then remember that my nose is bleeding.

Yolanda: let me get you ice.

She scurries around the kitchen, taking ice and a cloth. She dampens the cloth and put the ice inside. She gives it to me to hold against my nose.

Me: thank you.

She nods and turns to go back to her chopping. I grab her wrist and pull her to me. our eyes lock and she looks down. I put my index finger under her chin and lift her to face me. I get lost in her dark brown eyes. She closes her eyes and I slowly press my lips on hers. I gradually start sucking on her bottom lip and they taste like strawberries. I kiss her more and eventually, she kisses me back. I grab her ass and she wraps her legs around my waist. I walk with her to my room and I throw her on the bed, without breaking the kiss. It's starts getting heated, I'm planting wet kisses down her boobs. She's now left in her leggings and I take them off too. I take a second to admire her beautiful curves, how thick her thigh is, how good she looks. I slowly go down on her and eat her out. She has her legs wrapped around my neck and her hands pushing my head further in. Her moans drive me crazy and when she lets go, I clean her up.

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She's lying next to me staring at me.

Me: what's wrong?

Yolanda: nothing, I just can't believe what happened.

We fucked. Yes I know it's wrong but my girl just dumped me, I was feeling something else, I felt anger and hurt all at once and fucking her helped me take it out. I should feel some type of way but I don't, I don't feel sorry for fucking her because it was the best sex I've in a while. I sit up.

Me: look Yolanda, what happened now, no one is to ever speak about it.

Yolanda: yes definitely.

Me: it was the first and last time it was happening, understood.

She sits up and looks at me.

Yolanda: why, didn't you enjoy it.

Me: nothing is wrong with you, it's just that there's a lot happening in my life right now, I don't want to burden you.

Lies, lies, lies. I know, I'm an asshole but who am I kidding. I'm not about to string her along under my parents roof, what happened was bad on its own.

Me: I live all the way in Cape Town, even though we would be together it wouldn't work.

Yolanda: so you do want to be with me.

Me: yes it's just...

She cut me off.

Yolanda: then be with me. we have the rest of the holidays.

Me: my parents, my dad is very vigilant, it will be very hard to be with you with him around.

Yolanda: we can make it work, I promise.

I sigh because I know I don't have a way out of this plus I don't want to break her heart, I just fucked her goodness sake.

Me: okay. we can try it out.

She squeals and gives me a kiss.

Yolanda: let me go back downstairs before they come back.

Me: okay.

She gets off the bed and gets dressed. I can't get over her ass though. So round and firm, it's the best. She walks out and I get off the bed to take my phone. I have missed calls from Sydney, Sabrina and Lwa. I call Sydney first.

Me: Van Vyk.

Sydney: Mfusi, what's your deal?

Me: with what?

Sydney: I received a call from Lwa telling me she's been trying to reach you.

Me: I was busy.

Sydney: call her back please.

Me: okay. she's got you by the balls neh.

Sydney: fuck off.

I chuckle then hang up. I then call Lwa.

Lwa: Mvelwenhle Mfusi I've been calling and calling!

Me: what do you want Lwa. Please tell me what you want from me.

The sarcasm in my voice is evident and she clicks her tongue.

Lwa: you're such an asshole, you know that?

Me: Lwandile spare me please. You were there when your friend dumped me.

Lwa: Mvelo she needs you, she's not doing okay.

Me: she said she needs space, I'm giving her space now fuck off.

I hang up and throw my phone against the wall but instead, it lands on the couch so it doesn't break. I go take a shower and go downstairs to chill in the lounge.

Isa

Seeing his face when I told him I needed space broke my heart into a million little pieces. Lwa had to hold me because I was almost out the door chasing him. I'm now sitting on the bed with her and Ntswaki and tears keep rolling down my cheeks.

Ntswaki: you need to calm down, it's not good for the baby, please.

Me: (Crying) I can't, I want him. I want my gummy bear Lwa!

I bang on the bed and Ntswaki and Lwa pull me to them and they hold me tightly as I sob.

Lwa: Isabelle your mom will be home soon and she can't come home to you like this. Please.

Me: call him.

They both look at me.

Me: call him, tell him to come. Please. I'll even tell him if I have to. Please.

The tears just keep falling and I keep wiping them with the back of my sleeve. Lwa calls him and it rings unanswered. This goes on until she gives up.

Me: no.

I shake my head with tears undulating down my cheeks.

Lwa: let me try Sydney.

She calls Sydney.

Lwa: Van Vyk.

...

Lwa: yeah I'm good. Look I have a problem.

...

Lwa: I'm trying to get a hold of Andrew but no avail. I think he's ignoring me because we fell-out earlier.

...

Lwa: yes that would be great, thank you.

...

Lwa: okay.

She drops the call and looks at me.

Lwa: Sydney's gonna call him okay

I nod and we sit in silence staring at Lwa's phone, hoping he's gonna call. It rings, making me excited but my excitement goes down the drain when I realise it's Sydney. She answers and judging by her response, he didn't get a hold of him. the water works start again and Ntswaki is busy comforting me.

Me: I shouldn't have ignored him this whole time, I shouldn't have told him I wanted space. I don't need fucking space! I want him.

The last part came out as a whisper. I lay on Ntswaki's chest and she brushes my hair. I feel my body getting lighter and I end up falling asleep. I'm woken up by shouting and I see Lwa on the other side of the room pacing.

Lwa: you're such an asshole, you know that?

...

Lwa: Mvelo she needs you, she's not doing okay.

...

She looks at her phone shocked and I just know that all hope is lost. She looks at me with eyes filled with pity.

Lwa: I'm sorry, I tried but he just won't have it.

Me: I understand. Thank you though.

She came to hug me and I sobbed softly. Ntswaki came in with a cup of tea and she gave it to me.

Ntswaki: drink this, it will calm you down.

Me: thanks.

Ntswaki: Belle please stop crying, a beautiful girl like you should never cry. I want to see you smile, not cry okay.

I nod and she wipes my tears. Ntswaki and I have grown close these past few days. She might be older but we understand each other and she and I have this crazy connection that no one could ever take away from us.

Ntswaki: I have to get going baby, my brothers are waiting, are you sure you'll be okay?

Me: yes, I'll just sleep and I'll be fine.

Lwa: please get some rest and calm down. Andrew will come around.

Me: I hope.

Ntswaki: we love you okay.

Me: I love you guys too.

We shared a group hug and they left.

.....

Mom has been pestering me about why I'm crying since she came back from work and really, I don't want to talk about it because when I do, I just burst of into tears. I'm obviously not ready to tell her about the pregnancy so it wouldn't make sense to try to explain the reason behind my immediate outburst of emotions. After dinner, I wash the dishes and head to my room. I just sit and stare into space thinking about if I really made the right decision about keeping this baby. I mean I am starting to bond with him/her, it's what I've been doing for the past 2 weeks but I also pushed away Andrew. I was selfish because I should've told him what was bugging me instead of pushing him away. Maybe that's why he probably hates me. my door opens and the concern on my mother's face breaks my heart even more. In an instant she's by my side holding me tightly as I sob.

Mom: please my Belle, talk to me.

I shake my head wiping my tears and break from her embrace.

Me: I'll be okay.

Mom: you've been like this the whole day and I don't like seeing you cry. Please just tell me what's wrong. Is it Andrew?

As I hear his name, a loud uncontrollable sob escapes my mouth.

Mom: what happened my love please talk to me.

Me: he thinks I broke up with him.

She sighs a loud sigh and rubs my back. I'm glad she's not asking me anymore questions because I won't be able to answer them. She rocks me back and forth like her little baby and I drift off to sleep. I wake up with a note on my bedside. *"Had to leave for work, I made you breakfast, it's in the microwave. I also called Lwa, she'll be there. I love you and please just get some rest. xoxo, Mom."* I smile to myself and

put the note in my drawer. I get out of bed and go brush my teeth. I look at myself in the mirror and my eyes are swollen, my nose is red and my whole face is pink. I chuckle, shaking my head and walk out going to the kitchen. I warm up my breakfast and I go snuggle on the couch with my blanket. I call my mom.

Me: morning mom.

Mom: morning angel, how you feeling.

Me: better I guess. I saw the note.

Mom: yes, get some rest and try not to cry too much today.

Me: okay. thank you for the breakfast.

Mom: you're welcome my love.

We spoke a bit more until there was a beep meaning there was an incoming call.

Me: mom can I call later, there's an incoming call.

Mom: okay baby. I love you.

Me: love you too.

I hang up and answer the call.

Me: hello.

Zuzile: Isa, how are you?

My heart rate increased as soon as I heard her voice.

Me: I'm good mah, how are you?

Zuzile: I'm good. I haven't seen you around, where are you hiding yourself these days?

Me: I'm just at home, kind of having some me time.

Zuzile: I see. Are you home now?

Me: yeah.

Zuzile: okay, I'm gonna come to just check on you later, your mom tells me your upset about something.

I sigh loudly.

Me: I'd love that, thank you mah.

Zuzile: it's okay. I'll see you later then.

Me: later.

I hang up and finish eating. I tidy up around the house then I take a long steamy shower. When I step out, Lwa is in the lounge watching TV.

Me: you're here.

Lwa: yep. I couldn't let you stay alone and suffer.

Me: you're such a good friend.

Lwa: you better other than me.

Me: Andrew's mother is coming over later.

Lwa: seriously?

Me: yep. She called me earlier.

Lwa: lucky you.

I just chuckled and I went to get dressed. It was nothing spectacular, just my gloomy clothes, grey sweatpants and a baggy shirt and socks. My messy hair in a bun, I really wasn't looking my best but who was going to judge, my mood matches my dress code. We are just chilling on the couch, me and Lwa when my phone rings and it's a video call from Sabrina.

Me: baby!

Sabrina: why do you look so ugly.

Me: I was crying fam.

She shakes her head and she waves at Lwa, who waves back with a smile. I appreciate it when my friends get along because it's just easier.

Sabrina: why do I sense that this has Andrew written all over it.

Lwa: because it does.

Sabrina: I thought I had threatened him, why does he go against his promise?

Me: (Laughs) because you threat wasn't threatening babe.

Sabrina: whatever! He should've respected me. I'm gonna kill him I swear. Look how ugly he made you look.

They both laugh and I just shake my head smiling.

Me: guess who's coming over.

Sabrina: who?

Me: Thee Mrs Mfusi.

Sabrina: what! No unfair!

Me: ja! Who's ugly now.

Sabrina: you still ugly. You better tell her about me!

Me: ohh hell no.

Sabrina: Lwa help me out here!

Lwa: relax girl, I got you.

Sabrina: yaass good. And you miss ugly...

Me: stop friend!

We just laugh. It's just what I needed, someone to cheer me up and make me laugh. It feels good to laugh. We carry on babbling about irrelevant content. What I love about my friends is that even though I feel bad, they won't want to make me talk about it, instead they do all they can to help me get through it, whether it's just making me laugh or boring me with their own eventful lives. We hung up and later, Zuzile came by. She choose to snuggle with us on the couch with me in the middle. She bought us ice-cream and lots of chocolate and snacks.

Zuzile: let's talk. Tell me what's wrong?

Me: well, I haven't been feeling like myself these days so I just needed some time to myself, just to nurse myself and hold myself together because I'm just falling apart.

Zuzile: what's causing this, have you been to the doctor?

Me: no, no it's not anything physical, my spirit is just down for some reason, I think it's because of my period.

Damn I'm lying through my teeth but when push comes to shove, a girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do.

Zuzile: he tells me that back in Cape Town you slapped him.

I take a big scoop of ice-cream and put it in my mouth.

Me: I did but I really didn't mean to. I was just annoyed and I guess I took it out on him. I'm grateful to him for not slapping me back because I utterly disrespected him and I did apologise.

Lwa looks at me and shakes her head.

Me: I thought maybe if I just take some time away from him it would be better.

I could feel the tears wanting to come out again but I breathed out and threw my head back, trying to stop them.

Zuzile: it's okay to cry.

Me: no, it's just that I've cried too much now. I'm tired of these tears.

They finally drop and she rubs my back comforting me.

Me: I realise that it wasn't the best decision to ghost him these days but I just needed it, I needed the space.

Zuzile: I understand my love. I know what you feel.

Me: thank you. I just feel like if I hadn't take the space, our relationship would probably be over now because I was just not in the right state of mind.

It feels good to vent and take it off my chest.

Zuzile: now I'm gonna speak from my point of view about this whole thing. I know the way you handled this seems like it's the best way but it's not. Baby, in a

relationship you can't be selfish, you don't think for yourself only because there's two of you. You know the saying that says there's no I in team.

I nod.

Zuzile: it simply means when you are committed to something with someone else other than you involved, can't think about yourself only but put into consideration the feelings of the other party. If you felt like you needed space, time to think and gather yourself, you should've consulted with the other party. You should've let Mvelo know that you just want time to yourself for a few days, just to gather yourself up and get back on your wheels because everyone needs some "Me" time right?

Me: yep.

Zuzile: your actions really hurt him.

Me: I get my being wrong mah and I feel terrible for my action, I just wish I could make it right.

Zuzile: it's not too late to do so.

I just sigh and shake my head.

Me: he was here yesterday, he looked like he was in a fight of some sort, his nose was bleeding and he looked kind of mad.

Zuzile looks shocked by this and shifts to get more comfortable.

Lwa: he came to my house first, demanding me to call Isa, then we drove here. I was telling him that he can't force me to bring him here when you didn't give consent then he hit the brakes real fast and he hit his nose on the steering wheel.

She gasps at her sons actions, so do I.

Zuzile: he could've killed you guys, that boy is really losing his mind.

Me: I don't blame him, it's my fault.

Zuzile: no, don't do that. What if something had happened to the both of them, no matter what, he has no excuse for his carelessness.

I just sigh so does Lwa.

Zuzile: so what happened when he got here?

Lwa: nothing much, he wasn't violent or anything.

Me: I just told him I need space but he just assumed I was breaking up with him and he left. I immediately regretted it and when we tried to call him, he wouldn't answer.

Lwa: when he finally called back, he didn't want to hear any of it and he told me to fuck of.

Zuzile's eyes almost fall out and my heart just breaks all over again.

Zuzile: unbelievable.

Me: (Crying) I actually wanted to apologise mah. I wanted to say sorry but he...

I don't even finish my sentence because I burst out into a loud sob. This baby I'm carrying is making me an emotional wreck. They comfort me and I calm down.

Zuzile: I'm going to have a talk with him, he's really getting out of hand and I won't be having it.

I just nod in agreement as my tears wet her chest. She breaks a piece of chocolate for me and I laugh when she hands it to me.

Zuzile: let's binge eat our sorrow away.

Lwa: I second that.

I chuckle and Lwa goes to fetch a packet of chips from the kitchen and we sit on the couch watching Notting Hill.

Chapter 9

"All we have is now."

Mvelo

It was the first time I had ever been shouted at this much by my mother. I swear to Christ she was someone else. She had woken up that morning and left for the whole day. When she came back, she was fuming mad at me, heck she even slapped me. guess about what? Isabelle. You know someone ignores you for a whole flippen week and when you just give up, you end up with a slap. I just can't fathom why she would make me a bad person in this whole thing. Mom has invited her for supper tonight and I'm really not looking forward to it, with Yolanda around, it's not going to be much fun. Yolanda is very territorial and always in my space, which is not something I'm really hyped about. It's like she tries to get us caught, I mean there are no feelings for her but the sex is good. I'm sitting in the lounge with dad watching the rugby match when mom comes in.

Mom: Mvelwenhle, a hand.

She's still mad about the other night so it's just the cold shoulder for me.

Dad: Where's Helo, she can help. we're still watching the game.

I sit back and think he's got me.

Mom: I need another set of hands, unless you want to come.

She raises her eyebrow and dad just shakes his head and looks at me.

Dad: I tried.

I shrug my shoulders and I follow mom to the kitchen.

Me: what you need help with?

Mom: there are boxes in my car, I need you to take those for me and put them in my office then you going to fetch Isa.

I choke on my saliva and I start coughing. Mom turns to me.

Mom: phuza amanzi and hurry, she's waiting for you.

I huff and take her car keys from the counter and walk to the car. I carry out the boxes, which are really light by the way then I head back inside to change my shoes then left. When I got to her house I just sat in the car feeling really dumb because now I don't know what to do. Should I call her because I'm definitely not going in, if

my mom is as mad as she is, then maybe her mom is furious. I take out my phone and call her.

Isa: Mvelo.

Her voice sounds so calm and soft and the way she whispers my name makes the hairs at the back of my neck stand.

Me: Isabelle, hi.

Isa: hi.

Me: mom asked me to come fetch you since you're joining us for supper.

Isa: ohh.

Me: yeah.

We both keep quiet but I can still hear her breathing.

Me: uhhm, I'm outside.

Isa: oh, oh okay. I'm almost done.

Me: okay.

She hangs up and I breath out. That has to be the weirdest conversation we've ever had, ever. Her gate opens and she walks down to the car. She's wearing all black and she looks absolutely stunning. Black pants, black turtle neck, black coat and black high heel boots paired with a beautiful pendant necklace. She also has a beanie on her head and her long curly hair flowing beautifully on her shoulders. She looks mesmerising, I'm not going to lie. She gets in the front seat and faintly smiles at me, her whole face pink from the cold.

Me: how are you.

Isa: I'm good, just cold.

Me: let's fix that.

I turn on the heater and her seat warmer and we both chuckle. We drive in silence with only her music playing on the radio. Every time she gets in the car, her phone automatically connects, it's just how it is. I keep stealing glances at her as she bops her head to the music, humming quietly.

Me: sing.

Isa: uhh?

Me: sing. I miss hearing your voice.

She giggles and my heart melts once more. She buries her face in her hands. I turn up the volume and I poke her arm.

Me: sing.

Isa: no.

Me: come on, please.

Isa: *I reminisces the way we kissed*

It felt so personal

You took the chance

To get my love and now you know

That I don't need no one baby

Without you I'm incomplete

Our love is just like the bar

Put it all on me

You're the one.

Her cheeks turn red and I look at her smiling.

Me: that right there was lovely.

Isa: you're such a bully.

Me: but you love me.

Her smile slowly deteriorates and I clear my throat. I turn to face the road and we drive in an awkward silence. We get home and I go open her door for her. I realise how much weight she's gained, her hips and thighs look much bigger. She walks ahead of me and I follow behind her like a lost puppy. We get to the door and I open letting her go in first. To my surprise, Lindelwa comes running to her and she picks her up. she has her head resting on her shoulder and she just seems so content. She goes to hug my mom and when she's about to take Li, she starts to cry, not wanting to.

Mom: I guess she missed you.

Isa: and I missed her too.

She kisses her forehead and they walk further to the lounge, where everyone is sitting. I settle next to Isa and Li. I also attempt to take her but she just won't budge so I let her be. Helo and Isa are talking freely with dad's input going in once or twice. I'm not really paying attention to what's going on around me until Yolanda comes in, serving us drinks. She looks up at me and I look away, Isa looks at her then realises she's looking at me and then carries on talking to Helo. Yolanda walks out and I put my hand on Isa's knee, she turns to look at me.

Me: can we talk.

Isa: sure.

We excuse ourselves and we walk to the game room. She's walking in front me, looking as lost as I am then she stops walking and turns to look at me.

Isa: you wanted to talk?

Me: yeah uhm...

Isa: look Andrew before you carry on, I just want to apologise. We are going through all of this because of me and my selfishness. I'm sorry but I just wanted time to myself, to let this thoroughly sink in.

I looked at her confused.

Me: let what sink in?

She looks down at her feet and play with her hands. I put my index finger under her chin and make her look at me, her eyes glistening with tears.

Me: you worrying me.

Her tears fall but she quickly wipes them with the back of her hand and looks at me.

Isa: I'm pregnant.

I gradually took a step back and I looked at her with a shocked reaction on my face. Inside I'm burning up, my head is spinning and I feel like I'm gravitating. I open my mouth to try and speak but my voice fails me.

Me: how?

Isa: (Crying) I don't know.

I stand there dumbfounded. I want to be happy, I really do but something is pulling me back. I walk closer to her and pull her to my chest and she lets out a loud heart-breaking cry. We stay in that position for a while until mom comes in with us still in the same position.

Mom: sorry to disturb, dinner's ready.

Me: we'll be down.

She nods looking concerned then walks out. Isa pulls out of the embrace and wipes her tears.

Isa: we should go.

Me: you're pregnant?

Isa: yes, I'm pregnant.

Me: how far along?

Isa: 14 weeks.

Me: and that is?

She chuckles wiping her tears.

Isa: almost 4 months.

I nod.

Me: I'm sorry for being such a jerk, I didn't know, I should've known.

Isa: no, please don't blame yourself, it's not your fault. My being selfish and over emotional ruined everything.

Me: I understand and I love you very much. We're going to do this okay.

She nods and I kiss her forehead then her lips for some time.

Isa: I love you too.

Me: let's go so you can wash your face.

We walk out hand in hand and we go straight to my room. She washes her face then we walk back down to the dinner table, where everyone is having dinner. We apologise for being late then we start eating. The conversation is flowing with Helo throwing questions at us about high school and the rush. You can tell she can't wait to get there. I'm afraid of how things may change and the things she'll be exposed to when she gets there. I just can't help but feel the need to shield her away from the world. My sister is hands down very beautiful and I wouldn't want boys taking advantage of her and playing with her heart. She deserves only the best.

Mom: so guys, we have something to run by you and we want you opinions on it.

Dad holds her hand and we all turn our attention to them.

Mom: we were thinking about having another baby.

Isa grips on my hand tightly under the table and I just fake a smile. Helo and Ntsakisi are ecstatic.

Me: but mom aren't you guys too old to have babies?

Dad shoots me a look and I chuckle looking down.

Mom: no Mvelo we're not too old to have babies. Anyway, I wasn't going to carry the baby.

Helo: so you were going to get a surrogate?

Dad: no, even better.

Us: how?

Mom and Dad: we're adopting.

We look and them stunned and they have the biggest smiles on their faces.

Mom: I mean we have everything now, you three are all grown up, Mvelo you live far away, Helo you want to go to boarding school and Ntsaki, you'll probably want to go as well. Lindelwa is going to be left all alone and eventually, she'll grow up as well so for now, she'll have the new baby to play with, until she's all grown up.

Helo: we're happy for you guys and I hope you go through with your decision. It would be fun to have a new baby running around here.

NJ: I'm game for a new baby.

Mom: Mvelo.

Me: I'd love to have another sibling.

Mom beams and dad kisses her hand. I slowly move my hand to Isa's belly and we both smile. If mom and dad do go through with this adoption, we'd have 2 new editions to our family. Dinner finishes and everyone moves back to the lounge with

conversation flowing. At 20:00, everyone retreats to their bedrooms and I take Isa home.

Me: so we're having a baby?

Isa: yep.

She gives me a half smile, she's troubled and I can just feel it.

Me: we'll be fine, I promise you.

Isa: how Mvelo. I'm scared. what about my mom and school, what about your parents. Did you see how excited they were tonight about having a baby and we are having one. They're still thinking about being parents but in actual fact, they are going to be grandparents. How will we be fine?

Me: for now, I don't know, I still need to plan this out but I won't let you two down.

Isa: I'm gonna start showing soon. Sure we will be back in Cape Town but we have to come home for Christmas and New Year's, what will we do then? Maybe we should just tell them.

Me: please stop panicking. I've got you okay. I don't know, what we'll do then, but for now, we'll just act normal.

Isa: you mean lie?

Me: it's not a lie if they don't know Isa.

She huffs.

Me: please just trust me.

Isa: I'll try.

I turn to look at her and she's rubbing her forehead which means she's frustrated.

Me: who knows?

Isa: just me and Lwa, now you. Can it please just stay between the three of us.

Me: sure. Is it a boy or girl?

Isa: I don't know yet.

Me: so have you been to the doctor yet?

Isa: yes I have.

Me: next appointment?

Isa: for now, I don't have a stable gynae so I have no scheduled appointments but Ntswaki said she'd get me a doctor back in Cape Town, a good friend of hers.

Me: Ntswaki?

Isa: a nurse that helped me out.

Me: oh.

Her eyes roam around. We are now parked outside her gate. I put my hand on her tummy and she puts hers on top of mine.

Me: this is all so sudden but I will make sure I don't disappoint the both of you. I'm going to be the best father and the best boyfriend, I'll do anything for my two favourite people.

Her tears fell down on our hands and our eyes locked. I moved closer and gave her a kiss.

Me: I love you two so much.

Isa: and we love you too.



Today is the last day of the third semester and our parents still know nothing about the pregnancy. After we left at the end of June holidays, we never came back to visit, making excuses about school and whatnot. It's been fun, just the 3 of us in our little bubble of joy. The pregnancy isn't treating her bad, no morning sickness and no moodiness, just a lot of cravings, that results in immense weight gain. Now she won't stop shouting at me for letting her eat. She's sitting in the kitchen and I'm in the lounge.

Isa: I need to go back to res.

Me: for what?

Isa: I've been here for a month now, they're probably going to call my mom.

Me: you're not going back there, even if it means we call Connie and tell her you're here.

Isa: meaning we also have to tell her about the pregnancy.

She says walking to the lounge holding a packet of chips and a bottle of water. I look at her and shake my head.

Isa: Mvelwenhle.

Me: I did nothing.

She squints her eyes and I laugh while she sits down, putting her feet up on my lap.

Me: I really don't want you staying at res alone, who's going to take care of you?

Isa: Sabrina is there, she's always helping me out at school. Just look at this, mom gets called and they probably end up telling her about the baby. We're already the talk of the school.

Me: and why does that bother you. Trust me, it's not their place as the school to be involved in personal matters right?

I suck on her toe and she smacks my head.

Isa: your disgusting.

Me: but you love me.

She just shakes her head stuffs her face with chips. I pull her to lie on my chest.

Me: I love you.

Isa: I love you too.

She cuddles closer to me and I kiss her forehead.

Isa

I can't believe it. I honestly and truly cannot believe that here I am 8 months pregnant, looking ready to pop with my secret child. As to how I got through my final exams, lord knows, although, it didn't really show me flames, I still expected at least some harsh memory that would want to make me hate pregnancy. Like I was the healthy up and running girl I usually was, just with a big bump and a massive appetite. I never used to eat a lot but I ate 10 times more than what I would eat. That and always being in the toilet, it's one of the things I really won't miss actually. With regards to the parents, I don't know. We decided to keep this a secret up until the end of exams, which are now finish but both of us suddenly have cold feet. Mind you, I'm due in January. We were almost caught the last time we had holidays because they wanted us to come back but I made excuses, saying I was finishing up some work. I forced Andrew to go back though because that would look extra

suspicious if we both refused to come back. The apartment is already filled with baby things, Andrew was just too excited and he went all out. It still scares me that I was able to come this far with this pregnancy and have to hide it from my mom, it's been hard. Sometimes I would have a nightmare, begging mom to forgive but I would never understand why, I'm guessing it was a sign that I should indeed tell her what's going on. After each nightmare, I would then cry to Andrew, begging him to take me back home but he would just refuse, reminding me why we are doing such a terrible thing. Today, I'm going to res to fetch the rest of my things since I would be moving in with Andrew permanently, another thing that the parents don't know. These lies and secrets just keep on piling up and it's going to be harder to keep up. I come out the shower and get dressed. I wear my khaki leggings and white vest with push ins and a denim jacket. I tie my hair into a messy bun and take my backpack, going downstairs. I stand in the kitchen and take out a snack then go around looking for Andrew. I find him in the room we are putting all the baby stuff in.

Me: gummy bear.

Andrew: yes baby.

Me: we're going, we'll be back soon.

Andrew: okay. please drive safely, don't speed.

Me: I promise I won't.

Andrew: okay.

He came over and gave me a slow soft kiss then pulled out, planting a soft peck on my forehead and my belly. As soon as he removed his hands from my tummy, she started moving. Yes, we are having a girl and Andrew just seems to be over the moon.

Me: she's moving.

He places his hands back on and the smile that forms on his face is enough to light up the whole world.

Andrew: daddy's girl.

I look at the fascination on his face and I can't help but feel emotional. It hurts so bad that I can't share this joy with my mother, I can't share this joy with the world, show them how happy I am, being able to be happy without any boundaries.

Me: I love you.

Andrew: and I love you too.

He wipes my tears and I chuckle.

Me: let me get going.

Andrew: okay.

He kissed my cheek and I walked out. I drove straight to res and I found Sabrina and Ayanda packing up.

Sabrina: it's the pregnant lady.

I laughed and she came to give me a hug, rubbing my bump.

Me: how are you?

Sabrina: I'm great, you look...

She looks at me.

Me: fat?

Sabrina: yes that's the word I'm looking for.

I slap her arm and she laughs out loud.

Me: I'm pregnant gee, come on.

Sabrina: and I'm the godmother.

Before I can say something she places her finger on my lips and pulls me to the bed, making me chuckle. I sit down.

Me: hey Ayanda.

Ayanda: hi.

She doesn't even look up from her phone but I just brush her off. I take a pillow from behind me and make myself comfortable.

Sabrina: you really don't love us anymore.

Me: what have I done now?

Sabrina: ohh come on, when was the last time you were here?

Me: uhhm.

Sabrina: you see. The only time I see you is at school.

Me: but you still see me right?

Sabrina: right. How's the baby daddy.

Ayanda turns her attention to me and I just giggle.

Me: he's the sweetest person ever. If this pregnancy wasn't a secret, I swear I would scream it to the whole world.

Ayanda: so your parents don't know anything?

Me: we haven't told them.

She nods and goes back to her screen. Sabrina gives me a look and I shrug my shoulders.

Me: I'm actually here to pack up.

Sabrina: pack up?

Me: yes, I'm moving in with Andrew.

Sabrina: seriously.

I nod and she gives me a sad look.

Sabrina: you're such a bad friend.

Me: I'm sorry babe but when the baby is born, we are going to have to be together, to take care of her.

Sabrina: I understand friend.

Me: so help a pregnant lady out would you.

Sabrina: oh hell no!

Me: ohh come on, please.

I give her puppy eyes.

Me: do it for your niece.

Sabrina: goddaughter.

Me: niece.

Sabrina: forget it then.

Me: okay goddaughter.

She squeals and stands up.

Sabrina: where do we start.

We spend about two hours packing and gossiping, Ayanda decided to go when we started because she didn't want to help out. We're now busy packing the last of my shoes when my phone rings.

Andrew: (Whispering) babe, where are you?

Me: why are you whispering?

Andrew: my mom is here.

Me: you mom! Like your mother Zuzile is there?

Sabrina's eyes pop out and she jumps up and down excited.

Andrew: no, my uncle's wife, she's here to check on me.

Me: oh thank goodness.

Andrew: I don't know when she's leaving but I'll call you when she's gone neh.

Me: orytie.

Andrew: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

I hang up and Sabrina is already holding my shoulders.

Sabrina: she's here?

Me: no, his uncles wife, he calls her mom as well.

Sabrina: oh.

Me: don't be so disappointed love, you'll meet her one day.

Sabrina: hopefully.

We carry on packing then when we finish, we sit and watch movies, waiting for Andrew to give me the go-ahead.

Chapter 10

"Let's not waste the rest of our lives wondering what we could've been."

Narrated

Kabelo and Zuzile are sitting in the lounge with the kids, watching TV when Zuzile's phone rings.

Zuzile: yes babe. What did you find?

Andisiwe: he was acting really strange for some reason, he wanted me to leave.

Zuzile: was there anyone in the house?

Andisiwe: I think he was alone.

Zuzile: then he definitely is hiding something.

Andisiwe: I think you two should just fly down and check this out.

Zuzile: I think it's due time as well. Thank you for trying.

Andisiwe: okay love. Send my regards to mancane and the kids.

Zuzile: will do. Bye.

Andisiwe: bye.

She drops the call and Kabelo shrugs his shoulders.

Zuzile: your son is acting weird, Ma' Mfusi thinks he's hiding something.

Kabelo: when is he coming home?

Zuzile: he was supposed to come back last week but nothing.

Kabelo: call him.

She stands up with Lindelwa in her arms and goes to put her down. she goes to say goodnight to Helo and Ntsakisi then retreats to her bedroom where she finds her husband sitting busy on his iPad.

Zuzile: what you doing?

Kabelo: checking his car movements.

Zuzile: and?

Kabelo: it says at about 12:00, the car was at Stellenbosch Irene Residence.

Zuzile: Isa stays there.

Kabelo: it was there until 16:00.

Zuzile: but how? He was with Andisiwe between those times.

She sits back trying to piece things together.

Kabelo: maybe Isa had the car and he told her to go to res while he tries to chase Thandiwe away.

Me: I swear I'll kill that boy.

Kabelo: call him, tell him to come back home.

She takes her phone and calls Mvelo. She puts him on loud speaker.

Mvelo: Ma' Mfusi.

Zuzile: Mvelwenhle when are you coming home.

Mvelo: next week mah.

Zuzile: that's what you said last week but you're still not here.

Mvelo: I'm still trying to fix something this side with regards to my marks, as soon as I'm done, I'll drive down.

Kabelo looks at her and shakes his head.

Zuzile: and what about Isa.

Mvelo: uhhm, Isa is waiting with me. we'll come together.

There's silence for a while.

Zuzile: I want you home by Saturday afternoon, latest Sunday midday.

Mvelo: but mom.

Zuzile: I have spoken.

Mvelo: okay.

She hangs up.

Kabelo: you know that he isn't going to come back.

Zuzile: he will. If he doesn't I would be disappointed in him.

Kabelo just chuckles and gets under the covers.

.....

When Zuzile wakes up in the morning, her phone is flooded with messages and notifications. She goes onto Twitter and realises she's been tagged on a picture. When she opens it, she nearly falls off the bed with shock. She quickly shakes Kabelo.

Kabelo: mkami.

Zuzile: you have to see this.

He sits up and she hands him the phone. He looks at for a while then looks back at Zuzile.

Kabelo: this is?

Zuzile: look closer.

He zooms the picture and there he realises the baby bump on his son's girlfriend.

Kabelo: this is Isa.

Zuzile: yes.

He almost crushes the phone with his bare hand as anger washes over him.

Zuzile: Mfusi calm down. please.

Kabelo: we're going to Cape Town.

He gets out of bed and Zuzile sighs looking at the picture in disbelief.

Mvelo

Isa looks at me after dropping the call.

Isa: what are we going to do?

Me: we obviously have to go.

Isa: (Crying) you see, you being stubborn brought us here. I told you that we should tell them earlier now they're going to find out like this. Mvelo I'm scared.

Me: it's going to be okay my love I promise. They're going to accept it, they have no choice but to accept it, we are having a baby.

Isa: we're having a baby.

Me: yes.

I pull her closer and she cries against my chest until she falls asleep. Early in the morning, Isa's phone rings. She fishes under pillow and answers.

Isa: hello.

...

Isa: what are you talking about?

...

Isa: calm down, I don't understand a word you are saying.

...

Isa: what picture, I didn't upload any picture.

...

Isa: oh no. please tell me you're joking.

...

Isa: shit. Okay thank you.

...

Isa: bye.

She drops the call and tears well up in her eyes.

Me: what's wrong baby?

Isa: someone uploaded a picture of me with my baby bump and tagged your mom.

My heart nearly stopped, like literally. I tried speaking but my mouth went completely dry and words couldn't come out. Isa wailed loudly and I just held her to my chest. After sometime of crying, she pulls away and looks at me.

Isa: do you think she's seen it yet?

Me: I don't know babe. I doubt she has though, mom barely checks her socials.

Isa: I hope you're right because I don't want any surprises please. I don't want them to find out like this.

Me: we'll be fine, I promise.

She clicks her tounge and gets out the bed, going to the bathroom. I stand up and make the bed. I take my phone and call Helo.

Helo: bhuti.

Me: morning Helo, how are you?

Helo: I'm okay, you?

Me: I'm good. Where's mom?

Helo: I don't know actually. Her and dad woke up early in the morning and left.

Me: where are you guys?

Helo: I'm at Yamu's house.

Me: ohh okay. I'll call you later neh, I love you.

Helo: I love you too. Bye.

I hang up and call mom but it goes straight to voicemail. I try her a few more time but give in then try calling dad but it's the same thing. I throw my phone on the bed in frustration. She comes out the closet dressed in a floral summer dress and stands by the door.

Isa: I'm going to make breakfast.

I nod and she walks out and I go take a shower. When I finish, I head downstairs and I find Isa almost done with breakfast.

Me: do you know who posted the picture?

Isa: it's between Sabrina and Ayanda because I was with them yesterday.

Me: let me see this picture.

She opens her phone and gives it to me. I look at the picture and she sitting with her legs crossed, with a pillow on her lap so her bump isn't really visible but when you look properly, you can see it.

Isa: I think it's Ayanda that posted it. Sabrina wouldn't do that to me.

Me: this is why I didn't want you to go there.

Isa: don't blame me for something I didn't do Mvelo.

Me: I'm not fighting with you.

Isa: neither am I but you clearly are trying to say it's my fault.

Me: it's not your fault babe. I know it's not. I'm sorry.

Isa: okay.

There's silence in the kitchen while she dishes up for us. We start eating but then she stops.

Isa: did you talk to your mom.

Me: voicemail.

Isa: did you phone your siblings and ask to talk to her?

Me: I called Helo and she told me she left with dad in the morning.

Isa: they know. Oh good god they know.

She throws her fork and starts hyperventilating. I stand up and get her a glass of water.

Me: Isa calm down, we don't know if they know or not.

Isa: that's the problem Mvelo, we don't know.

Me: drink this.

She holds the glass and I help her drink. I wipe her tears.

Me: I think you should lie down a bit.

Isa: okay.

I help her up and walk her upstairs. I open the windows and the door for fresh air then I lay her on the bed, covering her with a light throw. I kiss her forehead and go back downstairs. I finish up eating then I wash the dishes then I go chill in front of the TV. My phone rings and it's Andile, my brother.

Me: bafo.

Andile: aye bafo you are in shit.

Me: what are you talking about?

Andile: umithisile?

Me: and how do you know that?

Andile: mom told me.

Me: mom knows?

Andile: yes, dude it's all over social media.

Me: do you think my mom knows?

Andile: apparently, mom tried calling her but it went straight to voicemail.

Me: you think she knows.

Andile: I doubt but you're still in deep shit my nigga.

Me: don't remind me.

Andile: how is Isa?

Me: she's sleeping.

Andile: be ready for anything bro.

Me: I'm just hoping they give us time to explain.

Andile: ayy. We'll speak when you get to Durban.

Me: okay. Bye.

I hang up and go to wake up Isa for lunch.

Me: baby wake up, I'm going to make lunch.

Isa: orytie, I'll be right down.

I walked down to the kitchen taking out the all the things for the sandwich. I saw Isa slowly making her way down the stairs and there was a key turning in the key hole at the door. I rushed to the door but before I could block it, it flew wide open and a punch landed on my face.

Narrated

Zuzile's eyes are fixed on Isabelle's big belly as she stands by the stairs too shocked to move. Zuzile comes back to her senses when Kabelo pins Mvelo against the wall, holding him by the neck. He throws another punch to his face and his lip busts and

starts bleeding. Zuzile holds him by the shirt pulling him back begging him to stop. Kabelo loosens the grip around his neck and Mvelo almost drops to the floor but before he can, he tries to punch back his father and that has to be the worst mistake he ever made because he quickly blocked his fist and his face changed to rage, kicking him in the gut.

Zuzile: Kabelo calm down! Please stop it!

When Mvelo is down, Kabelo puts his knee on his neck and looks at him huffing like a mad man.

Kabelo: don't you ever again attempt to hit me boy.

Zuzile has even stopped trying to make him stop she's just crying silently. Mvelo nods and Kabelo removes his knee from his neck and Mvelo coughs, attempting to stand up. Zuzile rushes to his side and helps him stand. She calls Isa and tells her to come down. At first she just stands there, scared to even walk past Kabelo who was still fuming angry.

Zuzile: Isabelle come help me.

She snaps out of her thoughts and she walks down, squeezing next to Kabelo who gives her a look that could send her straight into labour. They help Mvelo up and put him on the couch as he winces in pain. Kabelo walks out to the balcony leaving the ladies tending to Mvelo. They give him an ice pack and Zuzile stands up going to the balcony to her husband. She finds him smoking.

Zuzile: Kabelo I thought the doctor told you to stop smoking.

Kabelo: I won't listen to anyone telling me what to do with my life.

Zuzile: Kabelo.

Her voice was firm and authoritative. He threw the cigarette on the ground and put it out with his foot.

Zuzile: what happened to keeping calm?

Kabelo: Zuzile don't.

Zuzile: don't what Kabelo, you just beat the shit out of my son and you're telling me not to be angry.

Kabelo: angry? You're angry because I beat him up?

Zuzile: you had no right to!

Kabelo: I warned you Zuzile, I told you that one day, I would beat him up. That boy is doing this shit he's doing because of the way you treat him. You spoil him too much.

She goes quiet and looks at him defeated.

Kabelo: I am definitely not going to apologise to you or him for disciplining my son.

She sighs and looks at him. He pulls her to his chest and kisses her forehead.

Kabelo: I love you.

Zuzile: I love you too.

They share a short deep kiss then they walk back inside, finding Isa cleaning Mvelo's bruises. They sit up when they see them coming in. they both sit on the two sitter couch looking at Isa and Mvelo.

Kabelo: Mvelwenhle o qala ho bua. (Start speaking)

Mvelo: she's pregnant.

Isa clears her throat and shifts uncomfortably.

Kabelo: don't be smart with me, I will kill you.

Zuzile holds onto his hand really tight.

Kabelo: explain.

Mvelo: uhm...

Zuzile: when?

Mvelo: April.

They go quiet and Isa cleans his bruises keeping quiet.

Kabelo: you hid this from us since April.

Mvelo: we found out in June.

Kabelo: but nothing occurred to you, both of you, nothing at all told you guys that what you are doing is wrong and you should talk to us?

Mvelo: we were scared.

Kabelo: of what?

Mvelo: this.

Zuzile: and when exactly when were you going to tell us? When the baby is born?

Kabelo: you both are dumb. You thought you would stay here in hiding until when?

Mvelo sighs.

Kabelo: does your mother know?

Isa is caught off guard. She shakes her head no and Zuzile just sighs.

Kabelo: we're going back to Northgate together then Saturday morning, we are heading back to Durban.

He stands up and goes to the kitchen looking in the fridge.

Mvelo

My father beat the shit out of me. at first I let him because I kind of deserved it and did expect it but when I saw the rage in his eyes quickly fade, I thought I could strike back but I was just as dumb as ever because that old man is sharp. I tried throwing a punch at him but he held my fist, twisted my arm and tripped me. never again will I attempt to fight him. he then told us we're going back to Northgate with them and that is a disastrous idea. I don't understand why we should go all the way back there when we can stay here and they leave. Isa is busy pacing up and down the room. I stand and grab her wrists.

Isa: it's happening.

Me: calm down, please.

Isa: how do I calm down? how because my mom probably knows already, just like the rest of the world.

Me: it's not the whole world baby come on. My parents have this handled I'm sure of it and you are going to have a chance to speak to your mother before everything spirals out of control.

Isa: I'm just scared.

Me: it's going to be okay. come.

I hold her closely to my chest and she sighs. I put my hands on her belly and my little jelly tot moves.

Me: see, jelly tot agrees.

Isa: she's not a jelly tot anymore.

Me: but she'll be sweet just like you.

She looks up and smiles. I place a soft peck on her forehead and pull her back to my embrace. The door opens and mom leans by the door frame.

Mom: I'd suggest you start packing up everything because we aren't coming back here, if there are any baby things, bring them as well.

I nod and she walks out. She looks so drained and tired.

Isa: we made her like that.

Me: like what?

Isa: she's never this cold, especially towards you and we've disappointed her.

Me: she's just shocked and I understand, it's totally our fault.

Isa: I hope she'll be as excited as we are about the baby though.

Me: deep down, she is.

Mom can't have any more children so having jelly tot in her life will make her very happy. Yes it's not the same as having your own child but she gets to be a grandmother which is also a great joy. We start with packing some of our clothes and important toiletries, well I did the packing while Isa sat there pointing to whatever she thought was important. She was sitting with a bowl of ice, chowing away.

Me: won't that make you sick.

Isa: I'm feeling hot. You know how stuffy it is in here.

She then stands up and opens all the windows even wider and stands by the balcony. It was December after all and it really was hot so I can imagine how she's feeling. Mom comes in later in the evening and tells us it's time to go so I carry out our things to the car and we drive off to Northgate in complete silence. We stop at the mall and mom looks at Isa, giving her a warm smile.

Mom: where do you feel like eating today?

Isa: anything is fine with me.

She looks nervous so she looks at me and I shrug my shoulders.

Mom: are you sure. I know how cravings can be.

Isa just bites her nails and squints her eyes.

Isa: okay some onion rings, and chicken...preferably spicy.

Mom just laughs a little and she says they must go to order together, leaving dad and I in the car alone.

Dad: why?

I clear my throat and shift my eyes from my phone to him.

Me: dad?

Dad: kea u botsa lebaka. (I'm asking you a question)

So when he speaks Sotho, I know he's serious and sometimes I really don't understand him but I learnt a few words here and there.

Me: it wasn't planned.

Dad: what did we talk about last year, back at home?

Me: being careful, planning and focus.

Dad: you've let me down boy.

He goes quiet and I feel so much guilt in my heart.

Dad: I trusted you to make the right choices and be extra careful but you just let me down.

He was calm but you could hear the mixture of anger and hurt in his voice.

Me: I'm sorry.

Dad: is it a boy or girl?

Me: girl.

Dad: o se a le tseleng, kahoo re tlameha ho mo amohela. Re tla mo rata joalo k aba bang kaofela. (she is already on her way, so we must welcome her. We will love her as much as anyone else.)

Me: thank you dad. That really means a lot to me.

Dad: good. She might be your sperm but she's my daughter.

Me: hawu.

Dad: yes. You are going back to school, you will have your first child when you are 23.

Me: but that's being unfair.

Dad: I was 22 when Lynn was born, I had my life in order.

Me: you're such a bully old man, you get to raise 3 daughters.

Dad: I could raise more if I wanted to. You just have to suck it up.

I just chuckle and sit back. Still, my father is closed off and cannot be vulnerable with me but at least he accepts my daughter and it makes me happy that he is willing to raise her. Any other parent would've abandoned their children but he was able to accept my mistake and take my apology and for that I'm truly grateful. Mom and Isa come back with the food and we drive to Northgate. When we get there, Isa has a stunned look on her face.

Isa: (Whispering) is this one of the many houses owned by your dad?

Me: yep.

Isa: shut up.

She slaps my arm and walks around, making me laugh. She looks so adorable with her tummy.

Me: I don't like this house.

Isa: of course the spoiled brat would say so.

She rolls her eyes.

Me: seriously. I tell you why later.

Isa: nothing can justify your craziness Mvelwenhle.

The way she says my name is kind of funny and cute because she can't get the last part right and it just kills me.

Me: still can't get it right.

Isa: don't start.

Me: Mvelwenhle.

I say mimicking her voice and she shoots me a death stare, making me laugh.

Me: come let's go settle in.

Isa: okay.

We go upstairs and she changes into her nightie then I put the bags in the closet. I also change then we go back downstairs to warm up the food. She sits on the Island table and I go to mom in the kitchen.

Mom: Mvelwenhle.

I chuckle and look at Isa.

Me: that's how it's said.

Isa: see baby, your dad is making fun of me.

I think she kicks because Isa smiles broadly and places her hand on her tummy.

Mom: is she kicking?

Isa: yes.

She rushes to her side and places her hand on the tummy and tears start welling up in her eyes.

Mom: Mvelo call your dad.

Her tears drop and she quickly wipes them. I just smile and walk to the lounge.

Me: dad, mom is having an emotional crisis.

Dad: what's wrong?

He's already on his feet looking extra concerned.

Me: jelly tot is kicking.

He literally runs to the kitchen and when I get there, I find all of them with their hands covering Isa's belly with mom in tears.

Mom: I'm going to be a grandmother.

She smiles and I go give her a hug and kiss her head.

Mom: thank you Mvelo.

Chapter 11

"Moments with you, that's when I wish time would stop"

After the whole kicking situation, we had dinner with them questioning us. My mom can't even hide her excitement anymore, she's just overjoyed. After dinner, we all went to bed. Isa is doing her night stretches, I also don't know for what but it's become her routine.

Me: aren't you feeling hot?

Isa: I'm burning up.

Me: then stop torturing yourself and come to bed.

Isa: I'm almost done.

I just shake my head and carry on with my phone then I hear moans coming from the other room.

Me: jesus here it goes.

Isa: what's wrong.

Me: this is why I don't like this house.

Isa: why?

Me: come closer.

She rests and comes to bed and goes quiet. I can hear my mom moaning and screaming.

Isa: ewe ewe! I don't want to listen to this.

She gets of the bed and looks at me, I just laugh and she's looking at me covering her mouth.

Me: I told you.

Isa: so they're doing it.

Me: unfortunately.

She bursts out laughing and we laugh for a good 5 minutes.

Isa: this is wrong. So you always listen to them?

Me: no, never! Back home, their room is soundproof, it's the first time hearing them actually.

She leans against the wall again and I smack her arm.

Me: stop!

Isa: (Laughing) damn your dad has stroke.

Me: oh good lord!

I cover myself with the cover duvet and she laughs even louder.

Me: you're gonna give birth if you carry on.

Isa: (Laughing) no don't say that.

I look at her and her eyes are blood red from the tears as she laughs.

Isa: I wish I could take a picture of your face right now.

Me: mxm.

She laughs until she runs out of breath and she settles next to me, the sex sounds still audible.

Me: you're done.

Isa: I'm sorry Mfusi.

I kiss her nose then peck her lips.

Me: let's sleep.

Isa: right.

She laughs again and I roll my eyes. She cuddles closer to me and we attempt to sleep.



I wake up and Isa is on the floor, doing her morning stretch.

Me: Belle.

Isa: Mvelwenhle.

Me: good morning.

She giggles and looks at me with a smile on her face.

Isa: good morning gummy bear.

I stand up and give her a big wet kiss, making her giggle sweetly. I kiss her baby bump then I help her up.

Me: did you sleep well?

Isa: yeah, I can't complain. You?

Me: not the best sleep I've had but tolerable.

Isa: I'm not looking forward to seeing them.

Me: we'll be fine babe, just don't laugh or be weird.

Isa: I'll try.

She sniggers and I just give her a look. We make the bed and go to take a bath together. We then head downstairs for breakfast and mom and dad are in the kitchen being all flirty like teenagers.

Me: good morning.

Them: morning.

Dad steps away from mom and sits by the island chairs like the rest of us.

Mom: did you guys get some rest, we have a long day ahead of us

Isa: yes we did.

I look at her and she holds my hand tighter.

Dad: Msizi is coming today, you know the protocol.

Me: yes dad.

Dad: you're still skating on thin ice boy, remember that.

I clear my throat and look down. I know Bab' Msizi, he's a no nonsense man, like dad but 15 times worse and when he's involved, shit gets real. I am expecting another beating from him, I really won't be surprised if I do. We have breakfast then mom forces dad and I to do the dishes. After that, we all sat down just talking when Bab' Msizi, Mamkhulu and Andile arrived. I wanted to go into hiding and be never found because I was shit scared. unlike dad, Bab' Msizi's zulu is on point and he can intimidate you by just looking at you. Mom told me to go with my dad so I followed him out to the car. I ran into Mamkhulu and she gave me a big hug.

Mamkhulu: how are you?

Me: I'm good mah, you?

Mamkhulu: I'm great. Good luck with your fathers, they're not happy.

Me: eish, thank you.

She walks inside and I walk to the car and get in the back seat with Andile.

Me: sawbona baba.

He looks at me in the rear-view mirror and nods then drives off in silence. We drive all the way to Stellenbosch at the Winery. We follow them to the basement and before we enter the dark room, they both take out their guns and load them. Andile looks at me and I shake my head. We walk further and we finally reach the light. I don't know when or how but I felt a massive blow to my gut and I fall to the ground. I try get up but he puts his foot on my chest, preventing me from breathing.

Bab' Msizi: get up. angithi wiyindoda wena uyamithisa, Sukuma-ke.

He presses harder and I start coughing loudly. Dad is just looking at me and I'm on the verge of dying. He removes his foot from my chest and I turn around, get on my knees and try to catch my breath. He pulls me up, holding me by my shirt and gives me another punch, making my nose bleed instantly. I thought I had got it rough from dad but it was nothing. He started kicking me and I felt my bones crack then He takes out his gun and he points it at me.

Bab' Msizi: ungrateful bastard.

By now I'm spitting blood and I feel like shit.

Bab' Msizi: what don't we do for you? Where do you get the nerve to go around impregnating peoples daughters?

I just stare at him, not knowing what to say. He puts his gun back in his belt and signals dad to follow him and I'm left with Andile.

Andile: bafo.

Me: help me up.

He gives me his arm and helps me up. the excruciating pain in my chest pangs so hard I almost fall back down.

Andile: he fucked you up dude.

Me: I was expecting it.

He helps me limp to the couch on the side and I sit down, groaning from the pain. We sit in silence until we hear a gunshot go off in the next room and the two come out, dad covered in blood. It's clear that it's not his blood so the next clear explanation is someone just lost their life. After Mom and dad's anniversary wedding, when I got shot, I realised that maybe it had something with crime because you obviously won't have people want to kill you unless you've done them wrong. From that day I accepted that maybe our money comes from criminal activities. I never asked what it was about, I never asked about the person that shot me and I don't want to know. Today, part of my suspicions have been proven. Andile and I stand and we follow them back to the car. We drive back to Northgate with dad and Baba just talking amongst themselves. When we get there, Dad goes in first

followed by baba. When I enter limping, I see Isa's eyes glisten with tears but she doesn't come to me. Mom and Mamkhulu attempt to come to me but Baba tells them not to.

Mom: bhuti you can't do that. He clearly needs a hospital. How dare you!

She starts crying and I walk to her.

Me: I'm okay mom, I promise. I'll just sleep it off.

Mom: are you sure?

Me: I'm sure.

I wink at Isa and her tears drop but she wipes them quickly. Mom kisses my cheek and I limp to my room. I sit on the bed and Isa comes in with tears rolling down her cheeks.

Me: bubbies please don't cry, you're breaking my heart please.

Isa: (Crying) I was so worried. I saw so much blood and...and I...

She groans out in frustration and her breathing hitches. I open my arms for her and she comes closer to hug me. I flinch a bit and she shakes her head. I wipe my tears and I wipe hers.

Isa: (Crying) I'm so sorry baby. I'm sorry this is all my fault.

Me: Isabelle look at me.

She lifts her face and looks at me and she's in tears.

Me: I'd go through it all over again if it means I get to have you and my jelly tot right by my side. It's not your fault, it's not anyone's fault, this is our miracle from God and nothing else matters to me than the both of you. Now please take back those horrendous words.

Isa: it's not my fault.

Me: it's no one's fault.

Isa: it's no one's fault.

I kiss her forehead and brush her back. There's a knock on the door and mom peeps in.

Mom: am I interrupting?

Me: no, come in.

She walks in holding tablets and water in her hands.

Mom: take these for the pain, I'll run you a bath so long so you can soak.

Me: thanks mom.

She gives me the pills and I drink them then I stand and take off my shirt while she runs me a bath. Isa goes to take clean towels and lays them on the bed. She helps me take off my shoes and pants and they walk me to the bathroom. This frustrates me because it reminds me of the time when I was crippled and how much I hated being waited on and helped out with every single thing.

Me: I can do it myself.

Mom: we're trying to help out.

Me: I'm not disabled, I'm just hurt, I can handle it.

I free from their grip and I stagger to the bathroom, leaving them there shocked. I take the bath and I go back to the room where Isa is sitting. She looks at my bruised

neck and torso, my busted lip and my blue eye. I must say, I look extremely horrible now, the old man really messed me up.

Isa: your mom said the doctor will check you out before we leave tomorrow.

Me: okay.

I carried on getting dressed then I went to get into bed. Isa came to settle next to me and we took a nap together. When we woke up, it was dark outside and I was feeling hungry.

Me: I'm going to get us something to eat.

Isa: we're going to eat here?

Me: you want us to go downstairs?

Isa: yes.

I nod and help her up then we freshen up and go back downstairs where everyone is having dinner. She follows me to the kitchen and I get her a bottle of water. Andile walks into the kitchen and greets.

Andile: hey Isa.

Isa: hi.

She smiles faintly, so does Andile.

Andile: bafo, they're saying you two must join us at dinner.

Me: we're coming.

He walks out and Isa breathes out.

Isa: do we have to?

I nod and she nods as well. I hold her hand and she follows behind me. as soon as we enter, they all look at us and Isa looks down. we sit and greet them then I dish up for the both of us.

Bab' Msizi: we were talking about this situation today and we have made a decision.

I look at him and the whole table goes quiet.

Me: what decision?

Dad: after Isabelle gives birth, Amohelang will come stay with me and your mother...

Me: Amohelang?

Dad: yes.

I put down my fork and I felt my blood boiling.

Me: you named my child without my consent?

Bab' Msizi: your child?

Me: yes my child.

Isa holds my hand and tells me to calm down because I can feel my body temperature increasing.

Bab' Msizi: awunangane wena, you are still a boy. You have school to finish and no school child has a baby.

Dad: unless you want to have your child, take her but you lose us. You will have nothing because you think you are a man right. You think you can claim things. Listen here boy, as long as I am your only source of income, you are a child. I wasn't asking for your opinion or consent, I was telling you. Now it's your choice.

He looks at me and I look at mom who is just looking down.

Dad: before I was rudely interrupted, Amohelang will come live with us in Ramsgate, you two will go back to school and complete your studies. We will allow you to come back every 2 weeks just to visit her.

Me: mom, you won't say anything about this?

Mom: there's nothing to say about this. It's what's best for both of you. When you are both finish with school and ready to start your lives, she can be yours again.

Me: bullshit.

I stand up and leave the table, going outside. I start pacing up and down trying to calm down.

Me: Amohelang, what kind of name is that. They're crazy if they think they will take my child.

I feel warm hands on my shoulders. I turn around and it's Mamkhulu.

Mamkhulu: come here.

She opens her arms and I go in for a hug. She brushes my back and I just sigh.

Me: why are they being so irrational mah. It's unfair.

Mamkhulu: Mvelo I know you're angry at your fathers but they know what they're doing and they're doing this for you.

Me: how if I'm not going to be with my baby. She's our baby mah, they can't just take her away from her parents.

Mamkhulu: that's where you get it wrong my boy. They aren't taking her away from you. A baby is a whole lot of work, you and Isa are just in school, you won't be able to take care of a baby. Who is going to watch her when you both have classes? Who's gonna wake up in the middle of night and nurse her when she cries? You both have class in the morning and if you wake up for more than 3 hours, you'll fall asleep in lectures and your marks will drop. If she stays in Durban with your parents, you still able to fly down on weekends to see her, you'll have holidays with her and she can also come this side to visit you guys. No one is taking your parental rights away from you, we're just trying to make your lives easier and thinking for your future, so you can bring her up in a home like yours. You want that right?

Me: yes.

Mamkhulu: then please think about it.

She has a valid point. She makes sense but I just feel like I'll be cast out of her life, I feel like she won't know me if I'm not there all the time. I wanted the experience of being able to take her out, do daddy-daughter things you know.

Mamkhulu: let's go back to them and you will just tell them what you are feeling. I'll be in your corner okay.

Me: thank you mom.

We walk back inside and there's laughter and chatter. Isa and Andile are not in sight though. I sit down next to mom and mamkhulu sits next to me.

Dad: kahoo u nkile qeto efe?

I look at him because I didn't catch what he said.

Me: please translate.

He chuckles and I look at mom.

Mom: I also don't know.

Dad: I said what decision did you make.

I roll my eyes.

Me: I don't mind you taking her to live with you. I now understand that it won't be easy but I don't appreciate you naming her without my consent.

Dad: well my boy that's not your decision to make. You never get to name your first born. I didn't name you, your granny did, I didn't even name your other siblings, your grandfathers did. I'm the grandfather, I name her and her name is Amohelang.

Me: it can be her second name.

Bab' Msizi: it's not up for discussion Mvelwenhle.

Me: we're not even Sotho but she gets a Sotho name.

Dad: I'm Sotho, all of you have Sotho blood running through your veins. Lebitso la hae ke Amohelang le hore ke la ho qetela. (Her name is Amohelang and that is final)

I always wonder why my dad only speaks Sotho but he's Zulu, our grandfather is Zulu and so is mom, he grew up here so why does he speak Sotho.

Me: okay.

Dad: good.

They sit and carry on talking while I just sit and look at them. I then decided to go to bed because the pain is still there. I get to bed and Isa is fast asleep and I join her.

Narrated

The Mfusi's woke up early in the morning and boarded the jet back to Ramsgate. Mvelwenhle wasn't told that today, his mother and Andisiwe would be taking Isa back home to report her pregnancy. They get to the house and Helo and Ntsakisi are shocked to see Isa's big belly. They settle in and Kabelo takes Mvelo and Ntsakisi to work. Zuzile sits Isa down.

Zuzile: Isa, today we're going to tell Connie about the pregnancy.

She's shaking and her tears are falling.

Isa: I'm so scared mah. I've disappointed her, I did the one thing she asked me not to do.

Zuzile: I've got you baby, I don't want you stressing out. I just want you to stay positive my love. We can make this work. I know she won't be happy at all about this, but she will accept the princess and she will love her just like we do. Just like we learnt to accept her.

She kisses her forehead and helps her stand up. they walk to her car and she gets at the back seat because Andisiwe is in the front. They drive in silence and when they get to her house, they all just sit and look at each other.

Zuzile: look Isa, we're going to go in first, just to talk to her, brief her about this whole thing then we will come call you in when we're done.

Isa: okay.

Andisiwe: please stop stressing my love. It will be okay.

Isa: I'll try.

She chuckles nervously and they step out the car, going towards the gate. They walk in and when they get to the door, they knock. Marlo opens the door and looks at them.

Zuzile: hello young man, I'm Zuzile and this is my sister Andisiwe. Is your mother home?

Marlo: yes. You can come in.

He moves out the way, and they walk to the lounge and settle in. Connie comes down the passage in her robe, coming from her sleep.

Connie: oh wow, Mrs Mfusi. What a pleasant surprise.

Zuzile: Connie, it's been so long.

She stands and hugs her.

Connie: would you like anything to drink so long. I'll just go change. I was working night shift.

Zuzile: we're so sorry to disturb your sleep. Just water would be fine.

Connie: it's okay. I'll be back now.

She goes to tell Marlo to serve them water then she goes to change into something presentable. She comes back and settles on the couch.

Connie: these children still don't want to come back home?

Zuzile: that's exactly what brought us here. Oh and this is my husband's brother's wife, Andisiwe.

They exchange greetings.

Zuzile: we just flew back from Cape Town this morning.

Connie: did you get through to them? Why did they not want to come home?

Andisiwe: I live around Stellenbosch so 2 days back, I went to the penthouse to visit Mvelo and he was just so jumpy.

Connie: was Isabelle there?

Andisiwe: no.

Zuzile: they wouldn't take our calls anymore so my husband tracked his car activities which threw us off guard because at the same time he was with Andisiwe, his car was parked at Isa's res.

Connie: meaning she was using the car.

Zuzile: right.

Zuzile takes a sip of her water.

Zuzile: are you aware of the fact that Isa was planning on moving into the penthouse with my son?

Connie: no. why did the res not contact me?

She sighs and so does Zuzile and Andisiwe.

Zuzile: when we heard that, my husband suggested that we fly down to Stellenbosch and we made a shocking discovery.

Connie: what?

Zuzile: there's really no way to say this and I hope you just find it in your heart to forgive your daughter and my son because they have made a mistake. Isa is pregnant.

Connie's brain shuts down and she feels like the world is spinning. She puts her fist on her forehead and breathes out loud.

Connie: she's what?

Zuzile clears her throat.

Zuzile: preg...pregnant.

Her heart rate increases and she stops breathing. Her face starts turning red and Zuzile panics.

Zuzile: Connie, please calm down.

She stands up and brushes her back then gives her the glass of water, helping her drink up. she breathes in and out until she calms down and Zuzile goes back to her seat.

Andisiwe: I know this is not easy to digest, it also took a lot for us to accept it but you have to calm down.

She nods.

Connie: how far along is she?

Andisiwe: 8 months.

Connie: she's 8 months pregnant!

She shouts out loud and Marlo comes running in.

Marlo: mah is alles okay?

Connie: go.

Marlo: you sure?

Connie: yes, go.

Marlo walks out and Connie redirects her attention to the two ladies sitting across her. She shakes her head in disbelief.

Connie: you knew?

Zuzile: no, as we had explained, my husband and I flew 2 days ago because we wanted to come back with them but when we saw the her, we were also as speechless.

Connie: where is she?

Andisiwe: in the car. Should we call her?

Connie: yes.

Zuzile excuses herself and goes to fetch in the car. When she gets there, Isa's hearts starts beating fast.

Isa: what did she say?

Zuzile: not much. She wants to see you.

Isa: ohh god.

She sighs and Zuzile helps her out of the car and they walk towards the house. When they get to the door of the lounge, Isa stands behind Zuzile, waiting for her to walk in first. She enter and looks at Isa. When she walks in, her eyes directly meet her mother's eyes and they well up with tears. She looks down and her tears fall. Zuzile holds her hand and directs her to sit between her and Andisiwe where she just keeps her head bowed down.

Connie: look at me.

She slowly lifts her head and is met by her mother's bloodshot red eyes. She presses her palms together and goes to kneel right in front of her with tears streaming down her face.

Isa: (Crying) mom I'm sorry. I'm so so sorry. Please forgive me.

Connie: why?

Isa: it wasn't meant to happen, I didn't mean for it to happen mah, I'm so sorry.

Connie: I asked you nicely...I begged and pleaded you to behave yourself...you know our history, this family history and you choose to betray me like this, you disappoint me like this.

Isa: I tried...

Connie: no you didn't try! If you tried, you wouldn't be on your knees with a child in your stomach begging me for forgiveness Isabelle. I warned you about boys.

Isa: he's not the same. I know he won't leave me mom.

Connie: you are stupid! You are just too stupid to see!

Isa: please mom.

She tries to hold her hands but he yanks them away and screams in frustration.

Connie: (Crying) you've disappointed me. I will never forgive you for this Isabelle. I asked you so nicely and you do this to me. you are letting history repeat itself.

She wipes her tears quickly and looks at her.

Connie: you know what, it's not worth it. I don't want you next to me.

Isa: mom you can't do that.

Connie: no Isabelle. Not only did you disobey my rules and disregard my parenting, you hid it from me! you saw it best to keep this whole thing from me, disrespecting me further. No, I don't want you next to me. take your baby and your little boyfriend and leave. never come back, you disgust me.

Zuzile gasps and Isa looks at her in disbelief.

Zuzile: Connie we can discuss this as elders, we as a family are willing to come pay damages for the baby, we also want to take care of her while the both of them go back to school.

Connie: I don't care what you do after this. I don't have a daughter. My daughter is dead. So please kindly leave my house and never come back.

Andisiwe: please don't be irrational, we can talk about this properly with the rest of the family...

Connie: NO! Go, all of you, leave my house!

She stands and points them to the door. Zuzile stands up and helps Isa stand as well then they walk to the door. Zuzile stops and looks at her.

Zuzile: please think about this.

Connie: (Whispering) go.

She holds Isa's hand and they walk to the car. They enter and Andisiwe sits with her at the back and she lets out a heart-breaking wail.

Chapter 12

"Fight for those who keep you, even on your worst days."

Ntswaki

Introduction

My name is Ntswaki Mohau, I am 23 years old and I'm Nurse by profession. As my name suggests, I'm the only girl amongst 3 boys. I have three brothers, first born being Nyakallo, aged 43, second born is Atile, aged 38 and Tebello, aged 29.

As I had mentioned, I'm a nurse at the public clinic. I just finished school and graduated last year. I was raised by my brothers, all three of them. Apparently, our parents passed away when I was only a year old in a terrible car accident. They really struggled with raising me, because they were also just kids. I must admit, I had the best childhood ever. I was never short of anything, I never struggled with anything but I always wished I had my mom with me because it's not everything that your brothers can tell you.

That became a big deal in my life at some point and I lost it. I became super rebellious, going partying at a young age, hooking up with every tom dick and harry around. This one day, my friends and I bunked school and we went to a house party. When we got there, we were all drinking and smoking but something different was happening to me. I started worrying so I went to the toilet and I started vomiting out the alcohol from my system. I told my friends that I was leaving but when I got to the gate, my legs stopped working. I started to panic and I had fear so I called my brother. He shouted at me first but he then took me to the hospital and they checked me out. They found out that I was poisoned and that same day, was the day I was told I couldn't have children.

At that age and at that point in my life, I really didn't care about having children but when I was told that I had lost the possibility to even conceive, my world was shattered and that gave me a rude awakening. I then decided that I would fetch my life and strive towards becoming a better person. I started concentrating on my studies and I did extremely well in my matric year. I wanted to be a nurse so I did a nursing course and last year, I started practicing.

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I'm currently staying in my own apartment in Hibberdene and I work at Gcilima Clinic. I moved out of my brother's house last year because I couldn't stay with them for any longer. Those three are just don't want to go their separate ways. They are all capable of buying their own houses but they still insist on staying together. Maybe it contributes to them being bachelors. I only ever visit them on weekends and when I just need my brothers.

A few months ago, I met this lovely young girl at the clinic, she was there to terminate her pregnancy. She's only 19 and she fell pregnant so she was scared to tell people about her pregnancy. Normally, the nurses at the clinic convince me to try talk out all the girls that come to terminate, and I almost always succeed. This time, I felt something different. I somehow felt this unexplainable connection with her. I actually wanted her to keep her baby, not for the clinic but for myself. I wanted her to know the joy I would never experience, motherhood. Ever since that day, her and I have been closer than close. She's due next year January and it hasn't been easy on her at all. Her and her boyfriend both kept this pregnancy a secret from their parents. She called me last week in tears, saying that her mother said she wants nothing to do with her. I felt my heart break and we all cried together. She was just the most sweetest most vulnerable person I had ever met, she didn't deserve this kind of treatment. On the better side of things, she has the best boyfriend, the best mother-in-law and the best best friends she could ever need. She might have lost her mother's support but she gained even more. yesterday, Mrs Mfusi, her boyfriend's mother, thee Zuzile Mfusi invited me to her surprise baby shower that they are having later next week. She called me, Sabrina, Lwa and Chloe, asking us to meet up with her today so right now, I'm getting ready. I wore my mustard yellow body suit and a short denim skirt. I'm a really curvy person, I've always been chubby. I've always been bullied about my being curvy and my melanin skin but now I've learnt to love myself without having to worry about other people's opinions. I pair that with white sneakers. I'm a really short person but I've never been a fan of high heels so I avoid them by all costs. I tie my afro into a neat puff and I drive straight to Freeways Hotel. I'm always early, it's just in my blood. I always make sure that I arrive at least an hour earlier, just to calm myself. I go into the restaurant and they lead me to the bar, telling me to wait for the host. It's midday so I just order cranberry juice and a donut. Part of the reason why I'm chubby is because I love food, I'm a total foodie. I just sit checking out my socials, nothing special when I get a tap on my shoulder. I

turn around and I'm met by the sexiest eyes. I scan him from top to bottom and he looks yummy. I kind of stare at his pink lips until he clears his throat.

Man: I couldn't help but notice how beautiful you look.

Me: why thank you. You're not so bad yourself.

He chuckled and sat next to me.

Man: why is such a pretty lady sitting alone?

Me: I'm waiting for somebody.

Man: that person clearly doesn't know what's waiting for them. You look amazing.

Me: thank you.

I blushed and he took my hand and kissed it. He was this light skinned man with big eyes and pink lips. He had a neatly trimmed beard and a bald head. He looked like a typical Zulu man and his deep voice just seduced me.

Man: may I get a name.

Me: Ntswaki, Ntswaki Mohau.

Man: lovely meeting you Miss Mohau, I'm Dumisani Gumede.

I just smiled and he smiled back, showing his perfect teeth. We carried on talking for almost another 30 minutes, just getting to know each other. He has a 11 year old son and he lives alone with him. He's never been married and he's a business man. He refuses to tell me his age and it's really hard to tell exactly how old he is. I see Zuzile walking through the door along with Lwa.

Me: my dates are here.

Dumi: can I please get your number, I would like to take you out on a real date sometime.

Me: than maybe you can tell me your age.

He rolls his eyes and laughs, making me laugh. I give him my number and I stand up and he gives me a tight hug and I inhale his scent. He smells heavenly, I really must admit. I walk towards the reserved table and he follows me, strange. I greet then sit down. Zuzile then stands and hugs Dumi and they talk like old friends.

Zuzile: Dumi I saw you harassing the poor girl.

Lwa and I laugh and he just looks at Zuzile.

Dumi: I didn't harass anyone. I was just getting to know her.

Zuzile: I'm watching you.

Dumi: yeah whatever. Ladies, I'll see you around.

Us: bye.

He kisses Zuzile's cheek and he winks at me.

Me: mme, can I ask.

Zuzile: go ahead.

Me: how old is he?

She just chuckles shaking her head.

Zuzile: double your age. Stay away.

I just chuckle in shock and she laughs. Sabrina and Chloe arrive and we start planning the basics over a lunch. We agree that Chloe is gonna say she's visiting her aunt for the holidays and she wants them to go out for the day just so they can keep her away from the house, to buy time to set up. after lunch, I drove straight home and I went to take a nap.

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Today is the 19th of December and it's Isa's baby shower. I woke up at six in the morning and I'm sitting in bed, talking to Dumi. He took me out on Saturday and I willingly agreed to date him. although he is 24 years older than me, (ridiculous right) I'm attracted to him. I haven't told my brothers about him, they would kill me. I mean this man is old enough to be my father. In the few days that we've been together, he's just the best person. I also found out that he owns half of Freeways shopping centre, freaky right! Anyways, the theme for today is teddy bears. I was to be wearing a light pink knot front skater dress and block heels. I got out of bed and I went to take a shower after almost an hour of talking to Dumi. I clean up the house, have breakfast then I get dressed and leave to run some errands.

Mvelo

Today is Bubbies and Jelly tot's baby shower. I wasn't invited to the party so I decided that I would take her out for the day while they set up since it's a surprise. I booked a photographer for an hour so we can have a maternity shoot. I'm standing by the door waiting for her, we're already running late.

Me: babe, for the last time, let's go.

Isa: why are you being so impatient Andrew. You see baby, daddy is rushing us.

I roll my eyes.

Me: we'll be late, please.

Isa: okay, okay stop whining. Take my bag please.

She takes her jersey and I grab her bag and we walk out. We pass by the kitchen and mom is there.

Us: good morning.

Mom: morning. Going somewhere?

Me: yes, we're already late. See you.

I attempt to pull her but she stands firm.

Isa: (Whispering) Andrew I'm hungry.

I hear mom chuckle, I guess she heard her.

Me: we'll grab something on the way please. We are running late as it is.

Isa: okay.

She says in a low voice and pouts. I peck her pouted lips and she laughs. We pass by Roco Mamas and she orders her food. She ate as we drove to the Waffle house for the shoot. We met up with the photographer and we went to have the shoot. Isa was so excited, she was about to pop. We had so much fun and I knew I had done well. We then went to eat then Chloe met up with us.

Chloe: Andrew, are you treating my baby okay?

Me: your baby?

Chloe: yes.

We both laugh and they walk away and I go meet up with Sydney.

Ntswaki

After buying the gift, I drove straight to Ramsgate. When I got there, everything looked absolutely beautiful. The yellow and grey décor was just fantastic. I put the gift on the table and I went to greet some people. I didn't really know all the people here but I knew some of Isa's close friends. I went to take my seat and I was on my phone. Zuzile took the stage.

Zuzile: a very good afternoon ladies, thank you for coming, we all look stunning. The baby and the mama bear should be arriving soon so please help yourselves to some food.

She stepped off the stage and walked towards the door. I saw Chloe enter which meant she was here. Everyone got excited and we all stood by the door waiting for her. Zuzile walked towards me holding a massive teddy bear and handed it to me, telling me to give it to her. Some had the little bears and some had their own gifts that they had bought. I could hear her laugh from a far and as soon as she reached

the door, we all shouted "Surprise!" and she started crying. I went to her with the big bear and I gave her a hug. I must say, she looked absolutely stunning in her white body-con dress and grey head-wrap. It's like she knew the memo was yellow and grey. She went over to sit at her place while everyone else went back to their places and the fun and games begun.

Zuzile: since this is a baby shower, there is no alcohol but as a generous host, I want to make a deal. I have little bear socks hidden all around the garden. Inside this sock is your admit one ticket to the bar for one glass of any beverage you want.

Most of us erupted into laughter and some started lurking around. I don't drink alcohol, I stopped in high school so I'm not really bothered. We played lots of fun games and she looked like she was having tons of fun and that's all we wanted for her. She even shed a few tears from joy and it was just a sight for sore eyes. It was time for her to say her thank you.

Isa: heck I don't even know where to begin to explain how happy I feel at this very moment. At the beginning of this pregnancy, I felt nothing but pain and suffering. I was scared of the great damage it would bring into my life, change it forever and I was totally correct. I may have lost my mother but I gained another, I couldn't have chosen a better family to give children to.

I chuckled and she dropped a few tears, Zuzile hugging her from the side.

Isa: Mah, thank for welcoming me into your family. It really isn't under the best circumstances but non the less, you have welcomed me, us, with open arms. You and Mr Mfusi are truly blessings. I wasn't even expecting a shower, I mean the situation wasn't the best but you went out of your way planning this day for me, thank you. To my wonderful friends, Ntswaki, Chloe, Sabrina, Lwa, what would I be without you people. Always there to wipe my tears, to pick me up and to nurse my weird cravings. Chloe and Sabrina, you know how bad baby was.

They laughed shaking their heads in agreement.

Isa: thank you. And to everyone else, thank you for making today special, I've never really had a party so this is just something big to me. Thank you.

She sat down and I went to her.

Me: mama ka Amohelang.

Isa: (Laughs) yoh, you need to teach me how to say that.

Me: you looked beautiful.

Isa: I feel amazing, today has just been magical. Zuzile is really excited about baby.

Me: it's her first grandchild, she has to be happy. I'm glad you are feeling amazing then.

Isa: you know, thank you for everything, I know you also had a hand in this.

Me: what? Why do you think so.

I was saying in a surprised tone.

Isa: ohh jeez, teddy bears?

Me: okay, you got me. they are a weakness though.

Isa: ahh, so fluffy and so soft.

We both laughed and I gave her a tight hug.

Me: I'll be on my way now, thank you for taking me out the house.

Isa: (Laughs) thank you for making the present scheme for my baby a success.

Me: Present scheme?

Isa: it is what it is.

Me: I wonder.

She chuckled and she hugged me one more time. I said my good byes to the others then I left.

Mvelo

It's January and Isa is due next week. The holidays have been great, we didn't travel anywhere this time because Isa was pregnant so we had the whole family come down. my grandparents from my dad's side were so happy about Amohelang, not really the response I was expecting but I'm glad they accepted her. We had such a nice time and they just adored Isa, she really was the best and we were just in love with each other. My parents are considering buying her a car since the baby is coming. I don't know how she feels about that though. I just woke up and I make my way downstairs because there's a lot of noise. When I get in the lounge, mom and dad are just sitting there singing to each other.

Them: *When the dark clouds arrive*

I will stay by your side

And I know we'll be alright.

I will stay with you.

I go sit in between them and they hug me and we sway side to side singing along.

Us: *I will stay with you*

Through the end of all time

I will stay with you.

Mom kisses my cheek and I just laugh. I love the love my parents share. It's so real, so authentic and genuine. They were made for each other definitely.

Me: good morning.

Them: good morning son.

I attempt to stand but mom pulls me down.

Mom: we want to talk to you.

I wonder what I've done now.

Dad: don't look so worried, we just want to say thank you.

Me: ohh.

I sounded shocked and relieved at the same time, making them both chuckle.

Mom: I know it's so random of us but you have given us great joy and happiness. We can't tell you how happy we are about baby Amo.

Dad: we know at first we weren't as loving but I'm sure you understand that it wasn't something we expected, something we had imagined for you so soon but now, we think about the idea of being grandparents and it brings us so much joy.

I felt like crying and I did shed a few tears because what they were saying to me was heart-warming. It made me happy that they accepted her and Isa because most parents wouldn't. my heart breaks when I imagine what Isa goes through, with her mom saying she doesn't want anything to do with her, it's not easy.

Me: thank you for being the best people, I couldn't have done this without you and just being wonderful parents. I love both of you very much.

Them: and we love you too.

Mom kissed the side of my head and dad gave me a fist bump. After that heart to heart, I went back upstairs and I found Isa doing her normal morning stretch.

Me: my bubbies.

Isa: baba ka Amohelang.

I smiled because she was struggling with the name and Zulu in total but she was trying. She put out her hands to help her up and I gave her a breath taking kiss. She giggled in between and when we pulled out and I looked at her.

Isa: hi.

Me: hi.

She laid her head on my shoulder because her cheeks were burning up. she was just so beautiful and she made my life so worthwhile. I can't imagine a life without my sunshine, my bubbies.

Me: how are my favourite girls doing?

Isa: we're doing great daddy.

Me: and how did you sleep.

Isa: like a baby.

I smiled and pecked her forehead.

Me: let's go take a shower.

Isa: you'll give me a foot massage?

Me: anything for my bobbies.

She clapped happily, skipping to the bathroom and I just shook my head smiling. We showered and then we went to have breakfast. The conversation was just flowing and everything was so much fun then there was a buzz at the gate.

Mom: Helo go get that.

Helo: ahh, why me mom?

Dad: Helo.

Helo: yes Father.

She rolled her eyes and stood up. she had so much attitude and I could see dad was surprised by this. We carried on eating then she came back with a brown thick envelope and gave it to me.

Helo: for Mvelwenhle Mfusi.

Me: I didn't order anything. (To Isa) did you?

She shook her head no and dad's face started changing.

Dad: open it.

Me: oo-kay.

I peeled it open and it was a photo album. I put it on the side and took out the frame that was inside. It was the maternity shoot pictures from last year. I just smiled and Isa leaned over my shoulder to look and she also smiled.

Mom: who is that?

I handed it to her and they looked at it with dad while we paged through the photo album that had all the other pictures.

Helo: this is beautiful.

Mom: it really is.

Me: I should call Stella and thank her.

Dad: you should do it together.

Isa: we'll call her later baba.

She was trying to speak some Zulu and it was really a cute attempt. We finished breakfast and we just had the rest of the day to laze around since it was hot.

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I hate this. Pregnant woman are a headache. It's been two weeks since her due date passed and still nothing. she's just a walking zombie. We had false labour last week but that's all it was, false! Her frustrations are being taken out on me and it's no fun at all. Gone is the sweet bobbies and all I know is grumpy angry Isabelle. We've tried everything, we tried the spicy food and the exercise but nothing. My mom, my sweet mother, the one that raised me, suggested that we have sex, it will also help. I

laughed in her face, not because it was funny but hearing it coming from her mouth was just funnier. I googled it and I saw that it actually helps but my dearest girlfriend turned it down saying: *I'm two weeks late and all you can think of is your selfish dick Mvelwenhle!* I stopped trying after she said that. I decided I would let her suffer, it's not like I was in any sort of pain. Now she wasn't talking to me at all. Another person that was making my life difficult was Yolanda. Her jealousy was just distasteful. Her and I broke up, I had fixed things with my bobbies, I didn't want anything to jeopardise that. She didn't really take it that well but I could care less. I was home alone with Isa, schools had opened, Helo was doing grade 7, Ntsakisi doing grade 6 and Li going to crèche. Mom and Dad had also went back to work so it was just the two of us and Phelo and Yolanda. Isa is napping upstairs after a break down. I'm by the pool doing my sketches when Yolanda came out the kitchen and pulled me to the pool house.

Me: what do you want?

Yolanda: you're such a man whore, do you know that?

Me: you're swearing at me in my own home? seriously? You seem to forget you work for me, I can get you fired any time.

Yolanda: go ahead Mvelo, you've already broken my heart.

Me: I told you that I was in relationship.

Yolanda: but you slept with me.

Me: that doesn't mean anything Yolanda. The mother of my baby is upstairs sleeping, that's who I'm with, the person I love now please leave me alone.

She held my neck and forcefully kissed me. I didn't kiss her back but instead I pulled out and I slapped her so hard she started crying. she ran to the pool house crying and I went back to my drawings.

Narrated

Isa woke up because she had a strong urge to pee. Something in her was hoping that she was ready for birth but it was just her normal pee. As she sat on the toilet seat, she held her belly.

Isa: baby when are you evacuating, I just can't wait to meet you. Please mommy's angel.

The baby moved around and she just smiled then stood up. she washed her hands and walked to the kitchen to make some food. She could hear voices outside and she looked outside and she saw Mvelo and Yolanda, the helpers sister arguing. She was about to walk out to find out what the problem was but she stopped on her tracks when Yolanda kissed him. she could feel her head spinning and she held on to the counter for balance from the shock. She turned and walked out the kitchen with a broken heart but what she didn't know was that Mvelo slapped her. She proceeded to her bedroom and she just cried. After some time, Mvelo walked inside the room and found Isa sitting on top of the bed, staring at the door with blood red eyes, tears streaming down her face.

Mvelo: bubbies are you okay?

He tried to hold her hand but she yanked her hand away from his.

Mvelo: what's wrong Isa, is it the baby?

Isa: why?

Mvelo: why what?

Isa: Don't make me a fool Andrew, I saw you!

Mvelo's heart rate increased rapidly because he knew what she was talking about.

Mvelo: it's not what you think it is.

Isa: then what Andrew huh! What because I saw you kissing her! Tell me please. Make me understand.

Mvelo: she kissed me, I didn't kiss her back.

She took a pillow from behind her and threw it towards him but he caught it.

Mvelo: babe, please. I'm telling the truth.

Isa: so now a helper can just shove her tounge down her bosses throat?

He stood there blank and he cleared his throat.

Isa: liar! I'm carrying you goddamn daughter for goodness sake, I'm miserable, it's fucking hot and you give me this. What is wrong with you!

She was screaming at the top of her voice and Zuzile rushed in to see what was happening, coming from fetching the others from school. She gets there and the door is locked. She starts banging it.

Zuzile: Mvelo open the door.

Mvelo: not now mom.

Zuzile: what's going on.

She's worried because she can hear Isa crying on the other side of the door. She carries on banging the door but no response. She decides she's going to fetch the spare key for the room. She gets there and unlocks it. She finds Isa sitting on the bed

with Mvelo standing over her. She pushes past him and gives Isa a tight hug and she just cries on her shoulder, breaking Mvelo's heart even more.

Isa: (Crying) tell him to leave mama, it hurts so bad.

Zuzile: (Defeated) Mvelwenhle go.

Mvelo: but mom...

Zuzile: go.

He walked out and she cried in her arms. When she was finally calm, Zuzile asked what the problem was.

Isa: I saw him kissing Yolanda mama.

Zuzile: he was what? What for?

Isa: I don't know, I feel so betrayed.

Zuzile: I don't like it when you cry my love, please calm down, for Amo...

Isa: ahh! She just doesn't want to come out, I'm so tired, I'm just tired mama I can't.

She groaned in frustration and buried her head on Zuzile's shoulder and she brushed her back.

Zuzile: I'll go make you some tea, just so you can calm down and you'll talk to Mvelo properly.

She just nodded and Zuzile left. She then went to Mvelo, who was pacing up and down the lounge. She went to stand behind him and when he turned around, she gave him a slap from hell. he stumbled back a bit because he wasn't expecting it at all. He held his cheek and looked at his mother who was red in the face.

Zuzile: you push me Mvelwenhle! You make me this monster, WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU!

She was so angry with him her heart was racing and Mvelo just stood there looking at his mother.

Zuzile: answer me damnit!

Mvelo: I'm sorry mah. Can I just please explain myself.

Zuzile: explain.

Mvelo: Yolanda told me that she wants me, she's been letting me know these past few months but I told her I don't want her. What Isa saw wasn't consensual, she forced herself on me.

Zuzile: and you kissed her back.

Mvelo: no, I slapped her.

Zuzile: you slapped her!

Mvelo: I know it's not right, I acted on impulse. She just annoyed me so much.

Zuzile just breathed out loud and looked at her son in disbelief.

Zuzile: go up there and fix this. I don't want your father finding out about this. I'll talk to Phelo.

Mvelo: thank you mom.

She rolled her eyes and walked away. Mvelo sat on the couch and put his head in his hands.

Mvelo: what have I done.

Meanwhile, Zuzile goes to give Isa her tea.

Zuzile: what else would you like?

Isa: anything spicy will do.

Zuzile: okay, there's some left over biryani in the fridge, would you like that?

Isa: yes please.

Zuzile: I'll get that for you, meanwhile please just talk to Mvelo. He has a lot of explaining to do.

Isa: currently, I don't want to talk to him, I don't even want to see him mah please.

Zuzile: it's okay, I won't rush you. And not a word about this to Kabelo. He'll kill Mvelo.

Isa: that's also an option.

Zuzile just laughed and shook her head.

Zuzile: he's still my son.

They both laughed and Zuzile kissed her forehead then went to get her some food.

Chapter 13

"Sometimes we create our own heartbreaks through expectations."

Zuzile called Phelo and Yolanda to the lounge to talk to them.

Zuzile: can you please sit down.

Yolanda has her head bowed because she know why they're being called in.

Zuzile: Yolanda I'm guessing you know why I called you here.

Yolanda: yes mam.

Zuzile: why?

She looked down and tears started forming in her eyes.

Phelo: what happened mam?

Zuzile: your sister is pursuing my son, today she had her tounge down his throat without his consent.

Phelo looked at Yolanda but she just cried.

Yolanda: I'm sorry Mrs Mfusi, I shouldn't have done that.

Phelo: yes you shouldn't have. I brought you here so you could work and make yourself some money, not to flirt and harass your superiors.

Zuzile: I would appreciate it very much if you could go to apologize to both Mvelo and Isabelle because she saw everything.

Phelo: I'm sorry on her behalf mam. After you apologize, I'm sending you back home because you can't behave yourself.

Zuzile didn't say anything because it wasn't her call, after all they were just fine with Phelo around. Yolanda nodded and she stood up and left the lounge, so did Phelo. Zuzile then went back to Isa. She was on her yoga mat stretching.

Zuzile: I spoke to Yolanda, her sister is sending her back home.

Isa: but why?

Zuzile: she's causing a rift between you and Mvelo but it wasn't my idea, her sister wants to.

Isa: no mah please don't allow that.

Zuzile: are you sure?

Isa: yes, I'm sure.

Zuzile: okay, I'll talk to Phelo then.

Isa: thank you mah.

Zuzile: let's go take a long walk on the beach.

Isa: hopefully Amo will decide to evacuate today.

Zuzile: fingers crossed.

They both chuckled. She helped her up and she went to change into a baby blue flow dress. They then drove to the beach and they bought ice cream just talking and walking along the sand, stopping every now and then to catch their breath. At 18:00, they decided to go back home because it was starting to get dark. They got home and Isa went to take a shower, they had dinner then everyone retreated to their rooms with Mvelo in the guest room.

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At 01:00 in the morning, Isa was up, pacing up and down the room, trying to ignore the contractions. Her water hadn't broken yet so she thought it was false labour again. She went downstairs to the kitchen to get a bowl of ice and after taking them,

she was about to walk out when she stepped on water. She looked down thinking she spilled water on the floor but she touched her pants and they were soaking wet.

Isa: (Whispering) she's coming!

She left the ice right there and she went back to the bedroom. She took a quick shower, got dressed and took out all her bags that she needed. She then went to the third floor and knocked on Kabelo and Zuzile's door. Zuzile opened and looked at her shocked.

Zuzile: (Yawning) why are you all dressed up?

Isa: I'm in labour.

Zuzile: what? Are you sure?

Isa: my water broke.

Zuzile: okay hang in there, let me change so we can go.

She closed the door and Isa went back downstairs and she was sitting eating her ice when her contractions started. An unexpected scream came out of her mouth, alerting Mvelo in the next room. He got out of bed and he found her kneeling on the floor balancing on the coffee table, breathing in and out.

Mvelo: what's wrong Isa?

Isa: I'm in labour.

Mvelo: really. She's really coming?

Isa: (Sarcastic) no, I'm faking it.

She let out another scream as another contraction hit. Mvelo attempted to hold her hand.

Isa: (shouting) stop! Don't touch me.

Zuzile and Kabelo came running down the stairs, Mvelo took the baby bags and they helped her get into the car, rushing her to the hospital. When they got there, she was booked into her ward and the doctor came.

Dr: she's only dilated by 2cm.

Isa: ohh my goodness gracious.

She started crying. Zuzile was brushing her forehead, telling her to calm down. Mvelo held her hand and Isa yanked it.

Isa: this is all your fault! I don't want you here, leave.

Kabelo and Mvelo just looked at each other than looked at Zuzile.

Zuzile: nangivulela amehlo, Mvelwenhle hamba.

Mvelo: hawu mah.

Zuzile: go!

He walked out and Kabelo followed behind him. another contraction hit and she gripped onto Zuzile's hand so tight.

Isa: this is so painful mah, I can't.

Zuzile: don't give up now, in a few hours, you'll get to hold your princess and you will forget all about the pain, I promise you. Let's go walk up and down the stairs so you can dilate quicker.

Isa: okay.

She helped her stand and they walked out the ward and Mvelo stood up with so much worry.

Mvelo: is everything okay?

Zuzile: we're going to climb the stairs so she can dilate quicker.

Mvelo: ohh okay.

He went back to his seat while the two ladies went to climb up and down the stairs. While they were busy, Lwa, Sydney and Muzi arrived at the hospital. It was now 06:00 in the morning and Isa was only 6cm dilated. Everyone was sitting with her in the ward and she was busy chowing her ice.

Isa: you guys didn't have to come, it's still so early.

Lwa: I couldn't miss this for the world.

Muzi: me too, I'm a grandfather at age 21, wow.

Everyone laughed and they carried on talking with Isa having weird outbursts here and there but everyone understood. Ntswaki came at 07:30, when she was 8cm dilated. They started doing the stairs together again and finally at 09:00, she was fully dilated and ready for pushing. Only two people were allowed inside the ward and she asked Zuzile and Ntswaki to be there. Mvelo wanted to die because she was still angry at him and she was doing this on purpose. Kabelo told him to just listen to her and he stayed outside. Meanwhile inside, the doctors were asking Isa to push. She could feel that she couldn't breathe properly so the doctors told her to breath in and out.

Dr: take a deep breath and push as much as you can.

She pushed with all of her might but she felt like nothing was happening.

Dr: I can see the head, I need you to push for me again.

Ntswaki: come on Belle, you can do it, push.

She pushed once more and the more she pushed, the weaker she felt. She just wanted to sleep.

Dr: okay she's almost here, I need one more big push. Just as much as you can okay.

She nodded and she pushed, she pushed again then Amo's cry filled the room and everyone cheered. Zuzile was given the scissors to cut the umbilical cord. They cleaned Amo up and they went to give her to Isa. She had her eyes closed, it looked like she was sleeping. The doctors started panicking and they checked her pulse.

Dr: her pulse is weak, take the baby to the nursery and bring the defibrillator.

They scattered and Zuzile was just standing trying to wake her up, the doctors sent her out and Ntswaki stayed behind because she was a nurse. She walked out worried and as soon as they saw her, they came running to her.

Mvelo: is it over? Is she here?

Zuzile: yes, she's beautiful.

Mvelo just smiled and hugged his mother. She didn't say that Isa had a weak pulse, he was too happy. They all hugged each other and they sat down.

Mvelo: how's my bubbies, I'm sure she's excited. I can't wait to see her.

Zuzile just gave him a sad unsure look.

Mvelo: is everything okay mom, you don't look happy.

A tear dropped from her eyes and Mvelo just held her closer to her. Just before he could ask what was wrong, the doctor and Ntswaki walked out the ward and Zuzile rushed towards them, with the rest of them following behind her.

Zuzile: how is she?

Mvelo: who?

Dr: I'm sorry Mrs Mfusi, we tried our best to save her but it was too late. She went into cardiac arrest.

There was a moment of silence and Mvelo saw the tears forming in Ntswaki's eyes. His heart broke and he walked away, Zuzile looked at Ntswaki who had tears in her eyes.

Zuzile: is it true?

She kept quiet.

Zuzile: (Shouting) is it true!

Ntswaki: yes, she's gone.

Before she fell to the ground, Kabelo held her to his chest and she wailed out loud as Ntswaki's tears dropped. The doctor patted her shoulder and left. Lwa and Sydney held each other tight and they just cried while Muzi just stood there shocked. They just didn't want to believe that she was gone.

Mvelo

As soon as I saw the worry on mom's face as she came out the labour ward, I knew something was wrong but she was brushing us off. When the doctor came out with the nurse who was on the verge of tears, I knew I should expect the worst.

Mom: how is she?

Me: who?

She blatantly ignored me, causing me to be more angry.

Dr: I'm sorry Mrs Mfusi, we tried our best to save her but it was too late. She went into cardiac arrest.

Now I was even more confused. One of the two most important people in my life has lost their life and I don't know which one it is. I just stormed out because I felt my head spinning. As I reached the lift, I heard a loud wail and my heart broke and my tears just streamed down my face. I guess my daughter died. That's why my mother was like this, she died before I got to meet her, to hold her and kiss her. The lift opened and a bunch of people stepped out and I got in. it was moving really slowly and it was annoying me even more. I got out on the ground floor and I walked to the

parking lot where we had parked the car. Before I could make it to the car, I felt someone pulling me by the shirt and I turned around it was the nurse that was with the doctor, I looked back at her and it looked like she was also crying.

Me: what do you want?

Nurse: your dad is calling you.

Me: tell him to fuck off.

I tried to open the car door but she tugged on my shirt even harder, causing me to turn around and face her. Her facial expression had changed to anger.

Nurse: we are all hurting and we were not expecting this but you will not disrespect me when I'm just the messenger.

She wasn't shouting, I just felt like she didn't know how to shout. Her voice was soft and low yet it carried so much power and authority at the same time, just like Isa's.

Nurse: now will you come with me or not?

She sounded so defeated, like I had just taken away her will to live.

Me: let's go.

She walked in front of me and I just slid my hands in my pockets and walked really slowly. She was crying and sniffing the whole way and when we got to the maternity waiting room, everything looked so sour, mom was sobbing on dad's chest and Lwa and Sydney were just sitting on the benches, with Lwa also crying. mom broke from dad's embrace and came into mine, crying even louder than before.

Mom: (Crying) I'm so sorry my son, I'm so sorry.

I didn't know how to feel, I was still confused, yes my heart was shattered but it was hard to cry for me. I didn't even know what was going on. After some time of crying with my mom, she calmed down and looked at me.

Me: (Sniffing) when can we see her? How is she doing? I need to see her mom, my bubbies must be devastated.

Mom looked at me with no answer, I looked at dad and he looked down, Lwa had her head buried on Sydney's lap and that all just confirmed it, I had lost the love of my life. I pushed my mom away from me.

Me: no. no you're all lying, she'll never leave me.

Lwa stood up and tried to hug me.

Lwa: I know it hurts bro, it hurts but she's gone.

Me: NO! Don't touch me! you are all liars.

I stormed off once again and dad chased after me and he caught up with me and gave me the tightest hug and I just cried. I cried in my father's arms like a little child and he held me. have you ever felt like the world is ending, like you have nothing to live for anymore. That's how I felt. I felt like a piece of my heart had been ripped out of me and I felt like I wanted to die along with her. I wanted to follow her because my heart was with her. I didn't even care about the people that were now looking at us, I didn't give a shit about them, I was in pain. I felt my dad dragging me out of the

hospital and we got to the car and I just looked at him with tears streaming down my face, he looked so devastated, like he felt sorry for me.

Dad: son I'm so sorry for what you are going through. I wish I could take away the pain from your heart and carry it for you because you're my son, I love you and seeing you hurt is something I don't like seeing but this is God's will her time had come. I know it hurts but it will be better with time, I promise.

Me: how dad? What will my life be like without her, waking up in the morning knowing I can't call her. Knowing I will never see her again, or hear her laughs or see her beautiful blue eyes, I can't dad, I can't.

I started crying all over again and for the first time since I've been born, I saw my father crying. he wasn't really crying but he shed a tear and I felt comforted, I felt like we shared a connection and he wasn't as closed off, he was vulnerable with me. he gave me his hand and he pulled me closer into another hug. I opened my eyes after some time and I saw my mom standing looking at us with tears running down her face. I broke the hug and she came to hug us both.

Mom: we need to go and see Amo.

I had forgotten all about her. She held my hand and we walked back to the hospital, straight to the nursery. There were a lot of people crowding against the window, waiting to see their other babies by the glass window. It was so annoying so I asked mom to pull some strings because I knew she knows people here. A nurse came to take us and we walked to a small private ward and they brought her in. as soon as she walked in, mom was on her feet but nothing motivated me to take her. I dreaded seeing her, I really couldn't bring myself to do it. Mom now had her in her arms and she looked so tiny, she really was a jelly tot. she came to sit next to me and told me to take her. She helped me hold her properly and I looked at her. She was so pale, her chubby cheeks made it look like her eyes couldn't open. She had her tiny hand over her right cheek and her lips slightly pouted, just like my bobbies. Looking at her just reminded me that I had her, but lost her mommy. I attempted to give her back to mom.

Mom: Mvelo you need to bond with her. She has no one else but you, she has to know you.

Me: I can't do it mah.

Mom: I'm not asking you Mvelwenhle, I'm telling you. Now sit down and take of your shirt.

I sat back down and took off my shirt while my mom unwrapped her. She then placed her tiny body on my chest and she just snuggled up, like she found comfort on my chest. It felt so wrong but so right. I just thought about how difficult the road ahead was going to be. Never in my whole life did I think I would be a single parent , let alone at the age of 20. I thought about how unfair this is. My baby girl didn't even get to meet her own mother, she'll only hear stories about her. It's just unfair. I think about myself, I can't imagine a life without my mom, she's my everything and without her, my life would probably fall apart. I kissed her forehead and my tears hit her tiny forehead.

Me: you don't deserve it, it's unfair that you don't get to meet your mommy and I'm sorry my love, I'm so sorry my Paloma.

We had come up with that name together. We hadn't told anyone yet because we were still discussing it further but I wanted it so bad, it stood for dove. A dove is a symbol of peace and she is our peace. The nurse then walked in and separated us and she wailed loudly. Her voice was sharp and loud, unlike her mothers. That broke my heart and I wanted it to stop but she just didn't. at that moment I just couldn't take it anymore, I was fed up with the setting and all this heartbreak so I just left.

Narrated

Back at the Mfusi mansion, 4 days after Isa died and Paloma was born, people are coming in and out the house, preparing for the funeral the next day. Zuzile and the other Mfusi wives have been to Connie to tell her that she passed away and she didn't even want to hear it. Zuzile was hoping that maybe she would want to take over the funeral and want to be in Paloma's life but she didn't. Mvelwenhle hasn't been taking this well at all, he's never home, he's always out drinking, just trying to forget about the pain in his heart. He hasn't held Paloma since the day at the hospital and Zuzile is worried about her son. Ntswaki and Isa's other friends have also come down to attend the funeral and have been there since day one. Currently, there is a small night vigil held at the beach for her by her friends. They are all dressed in white and they are busy setting up lanterns while waiting for Mvelo. Sydney and Andile had to drag him out of a bar, meaning he's wasted. They get to the beach and they walk towards where the others are. They all look at Mvelo with eyes filled with pity.

Mvelo: don't pity me, she's not coming back I know.

He frees from their grip and he stumbles across to the bean chair next to him. Lwa goes and kneels in front of him and gives him a bottle of water.

Lwa: bro you can't keep on carrying yourself like this. You have a daughter and she needs you.

Mvelo: (rambling) and I need my bubbies.

Chloe and Sabrina also kneel next to Lwa.

Sabrina: we are all here for you Andrew, we love you as a brother and we want to see you better for both you and baby Dove.

Chloe: please, it hurts we know, we are also hurting but please, Paloma needs you.

She gradually wiped the tears from her eyes and held his hands. Another thing that was going on with Mvelo was he wasn't crying anymore, he was just an angry person who drank a lot. The others patted his shoulder and everyone held onto their lanterns. Chloe started humming the tune to a song...

Chloe: close the door, shut the world away

All the fights gone from this wounded heart

Across the floor, dreams and shadows play

Like windblown refuges.

Sizwe: call the man who deals with love beyond repair

Chloe: he can heal the world of hearts in need of care

Shine a light ahead when the next step isn't clear

Call the man, he's needed here.

Both: I close my eyes

I remember when

Her sweet love filled this empty room

The tears I cry won't bring her back again

Unless the lonely star should fall.

Sizwe: call the man who deals with love beyond repair

Chloe: he can heal the world of hearts in need of care

Shine a light ahead when the next step isn't clear

Call the man he's needed here.

Both: call the man who deals with once upon a time

Maybe he can mend this broken heart of mine

Shine a light ahead

Now the future is in clear

Call the man, he's needed here.

Lwa was sobbing along with the others while Mvelo just sat there looking at them. He couldn't cry anymore, he was just angry.

Lwa: (Sobbing) we are calling upon the man, dear God please heal our broken hearts.

Lisa: (Sobbing) with these lanterns, we are paving the way for her to you, you are a loving and protecting God, you will keep her safe for us.

Jane: Also light the way for us, make us learn to open our hearts dear Lord...

Sabrina: (Crying) to be able to live without her.

Jane: it was your will and it has been done.

Chloe: (Sobbing) soften our hearts and let us have no anger or resentment, for it was out of our control.

Funeka: and let us remember that you are always watching us.

Sabrina: always keeping us safe and protecting us from evil.

They went quiet for a while.

Mvelo: (Rambling) teach me to live without her.

Everyone: Our Father, who art in Heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done. On earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thy is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen

At that, everyone let go of their lanterns and they flew into the sky in all different directions, lighting the way to heaven. Tears were endless and the pain that struck

each and every person was unexplainable. It hurt so bad to let go of someone they had been with for so long, someone they had loved for so long. After 10 minutes, all of the lanterns had vanished from their eyes and they decided to go back home. Muzi and Andile had to drive a drunk Mvelo home so they did just that. When they got there, Zuzile and Kabelo were in the kitchen with Zuzile sobbing softly. it's been the mood since that day at the hospital. They take him to his room and he falls asleep on the spot. Andile sets an alarm to wake him up in the morning for the funeral and then they leave.

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Mvelo is sitting on the edge of his bed looking at a picture of him and Isabelle, still unable to cry. It's the day of the funeral and he is dreading to go, he dreads seeing the many pitiful faces he will get from the people, The sad stares just anger him. Zuzile walks into the room carrying a crying Paloma.

Zuzile: Mvelo the funeral is starting, please come.

Mvelo: why is she crying?

Zuzile: I don't know. She's been like this since this morning.

He felt as if head was spinning and it's not because he had been drinking the night before but her piercing cry made him want to rip his heart out of his own chest. Zuzile was about to walk out on him when he stopped her.

Mvelo: bring her here.

Zuzile: are you sure? I don't want her to bother you.

Mvelo: can I just try mom.

Zuzile: okay.

She gave him Paloma and as soon as she settled on his chest, she calmed down and was eventually sleeping. They then made their way downstairs where the service was going to be held. Isa had told Mvelo before that she didn't want to be buried but she wanted to be cremated so that was what was going to happen. Mvelo sat in the front row next to Lwa and Ntswaki with Paloma still peacefully sleeping on his chest. Lwa gripped onto his hand tightly and the service started.

Zuzile: I stand here this morning feeling a great amount of pain and sadness in my heart. We have suffered a great loss, a loss amongst friends and a loss amongst a family. It very hard for me to process this myself but God has taken away our Isa because he saw she had served her time on this earth, that he didn't want her here but with him, as one of his angels. To my son: it will pass, it will get better. I have a letter to you and Paloma. It does not come from her but it's what she would have told you, it's something she would've wanted you to know. So here it goes: "when tomorrow starts without me and I am not there to see; if the sun should rise and find your eyes all filled with tears for me; I wish so much you wouldn't cry the way you did today, while thinking of the many things we didn't get to say. I know how much you love me, as much as I love you and each time that you think of me, I know you'll miss me too; but when tomorrow starts without me, please try to understand that an Angel came and called my name, they took my hand and said my place was ready, in heaven far above, and that I'd have to leave behind all those I love dearly. If I could relive yesterday just even for a while, I'd say goodbye and kiss you and maybe see you smile. But when I walked through heaven's gates, I felt so much at home, when God looked down and smiled at me from his golden throne. So when tomorrow starts without me, don't think we're far apart, for every time you think of me, I'm right here in your heart.

For the first time since she died, Mvelo shed a tear and Zuzile saw this and smiled. People got to speak about her and it was nothing short of beautiful but Mvelo wasn't paying attention. He was trying to process what his mother was telling him. He kept looking at Paloma who was dead sleeping and thought to himself. He was brought back to life when he felt someone patting his shoulder. He looked up and saw Ntswaki.

Ntswaki: everyone is gone.

Mvelo: ohh goodness.

He looked around and everyone had indeed left.

Ntswaki: do you want me to take her for you.

Mvelo: yes but I don't know you.

Ntswaki: oh I'm sorry. I'm Ntswaki, I knew Isa from the hospital.

Mvelo: ohh you're the famous Ntswaki. I've heard so much about you actually.

Ntswaki: I'm flattered.

Mvelo: she loved you dearly.

Ntswaki: and I loved her too. I will make sure that Paloma is well looked after.

Whatever you need, I'm here for you.

Mvelo: thank you so much, I truly appreciate it.

She gave him a smile and he returned it. He then gave her Paloma and they walked back inside to get ready for the cremation. There were two cars driving to the place where she would be cremated and it was only close people that went. It was Mvelo, Zuzile, Kabelo, Andisiwe, Msizi, Andile, Lwa, Muzi, Ntswaki, Paloma, Sydney and Sabrina. They cremated her body along with her casket and they placed her ashes in a urn and gave them to Mvelo. When they got back home, Mvelo set the ashes by his bookshelf in his room and walked back downstairs to have lunch. Ntswaki gave him a plate of food and he thanked her then they moved to sit outside by the pool area to eat. They ate in silence but Mvelo decided to break it.

Mvelo: Isa never told me how you two met because if I'm not mistaken, you're from here.

Ntswaki: yes, I work at Gcilima Clinic.

Mvelo: so? How did she meet you?

Ntswaki: I don't think that's important right now, what's important is that I would've done anything for that girl and I loved her more than anything. I still do and even though I knew her for a short while, she made a mark on my heart. I want to make sure Paloma is happy so whenever she needs anything, don't hesitate to call me at any time of the day.

Mvelo: that is very comforting to hear but we will be fine.

He stood up and left her sitting there alone. He was pissed off because she didn't want to tell her how they met. He left the plate of food in the kitchen and took his car keys attempting to go when Lwa came up to him.

Lwa: where are you going?

Mvelo: I'll be back.

He walked up to his car and Lwa just stood there defeated. He reversed out of the driveway driving to god knows where. He had music pumping throughout the whole car that all his thoughts were blocked out. Then while he was zoning out, "it ain't me" by Kygo and Selena Gomez played. It was their favourite song. He grabbed the bottle of whiskey from the backseat and downed it.

Mvelo: (Singing and Shouting) *who's gonna walk you through the dark side of the morning*

Who's gonna rock you when the sun won't let you sleep

Who's waking up to drive you home when you're drunk and all alone

Who's gonna walk you through the dark side of the morning

It ain't me!

Tears were streaming down his face. The music stopped playing because his phone was ringing. He answered without checking it.

Mvelo: (Shouting) WHAT!

Zuzile: ay ay ay Mvelwenhle Mfusi! I am not your friend do you hear me. where on earth are you.

Mvelo: what do you care? You don't care about me.

Zuzile: stop spewing nonsense and come back home. you have a daughter and she needs you.

Mvelo: ayy fuck off!

He hung up and carried on driving. He ended up at his favourite bar all the way in Hibberdene and drank his pain away.

Chapter 14

"Always remember my heart holds you when my arms cannot"

After Mvelo hung up on Zuzile, she screamed.

Zuzile: I swear Kabelo on my life, I swear, I'm gonna kill that boy!

Kabelo: okay, let's calm down please.

Zuzile: no! don't tell me to calm down because my son is out there digging his own grave! Ugg he's being so selfish Kabelo. Why is he doing this to me!

She had tears streaming down her face and a sharp pain in her chest. She started breathing heavily because it was getting stronger.

Zuzile: ahh, it hurts Kabelo kubhlungu.

She held her chest and Kabelo told her to breathe in and out. She closed her eyes and they did the breathing exercises together.

Kabelo: you see what I mean when I say calm down. please just take it easy my love, stress is not good for you.

Zuzile: (Crying) I want my son.

Kabelo: okay, okay. I'll take my iPad and track where he is okay. I just want you to lay down and take it easy.

Zuzile: but...

Kabelo: do you trust me?

Zuzile: of course I trust you.

Kabelo: then get into bed and get some rest, I'll go look for him.

She nodded and slowly climbed onto the bed. Kabelo covered her with a blanket and hushed her until she fell asleep. He then walked out and the house was quiet. He passed by the kitchen and in the dining room was Lwa, Sydney, Andile, Helo and Ntsakisi.

Helo: daddy is mom okay?

Kabelo: yes, she's asleep princess. Boys let's go look for Mvelo.

Sydney and Andile stood up then Ntsakisi also stood up.

Kabelo: NJ, sit.

NJ: no, I'm going as well.

Kabelo: I said sit boy, you aren't going anywhere.

He just snatched the car keys from his hands walked in front of them. Lwa and Helo both laughed and Kabelo stormed out to find him standing next to the car.

Kabelo: ayy wena. Ngizokusakaza ngempama, buya la.

NJ: but I said I'm going dad. I'm always left behind. I'm a boy also.

Kabelo: well said, you are a boy. Where we are going is not a place for boys, it's a place for grown men. Give me the keys.

NJ: no.

Kabelo just looked at his son.

Kabelo: unenkani ufuze unyoko. nxx

He got in the car with Andile in the front and Sydney got in the back with a happy Ntsakisi. Kabelo instructed Andile to call Mvelo. He picked up

Andile: bafo, ukuphi?

Mvelo: (Rambling) why do you want to know, you want to come get me.

Andile: yes, I'm with dad.

Mvelo: well you can tell them to go fuck themselves. I'm not coming back there.

Since he was on speaker, Ntsakisi gasped. Kabelo pressed the hang up button.

Kabelo: open the tablet and track his phone.

He did just that and they found his location.

Andile: he's by Hibberdene beach.

Kabelo shook his head and made a fast U-turn and headed towards Hibberdene. They checked at least 3 bars before they found him. he was sitting on a bar stool singing out loud.

Mvelo: *I'm so grateful it ain't me!*

The bowery

Whiskey Neat.

Grateful

I'm so grateful it ain't me.

Kabelo grabbed him by his shirt and Mvelo was about to punch him but he blocked his fist.

Mvelo: (Rambling) ohh, you found me. why can't you just mind your own business vele.

Kabelo: shut the fuck up before I beat you in public. come.

He dragged him out the bar and when they got outside, Mvelo leaned against the wall for support, he couldn't stand up straight, that's how drunk he was. Kabelo slapped his cheek multiple times in attempt to wake him up.

Kabelo: get yourself together. You can't be doing this. You have a daughter for goodness sake...

Mvelo: you know what Kabelo I'm tired of hearing that line. Non-of you have bothered to ask me how I'm doing. Fuck you all actually.

He threw his hands in the air and stumbled down the stairs towards his car. He looked for his keys but he didn't realize that Kabelo had taken them. Kabelo opened it and told him to go in.

Mvelo: give me my keys, I want to leave.

Kabelo: you are not driving in your state. Get in the car, I'm coming.

Mvelo rolled his eyes and got in the passenger seat while Kabelo went to the others.

Kabelo: Andile drive, we'll meet at home.

Andile: yebo baba.

He walked back to Mvelo's car and looked at him. he was passed out.

Kabelo: unfortunately, I know exactly what you're going through.

He shook his head and drove off.

Mvelo

I was woken up by lights going off and they were really bright. I tried to sit up but I had a pounding headache.

Me: fuck.

I slowly opened my eyes and I looked around. I was in my bedroom and dad was standing there dressed in black.

Me: what's going on, is there a robbery?

Dad: get up, we're going somewhere.

Me: what time is it? How did I get here?

Dad: it's 02:30. Stop asking me questions and get ready. You have 5 minutes.

Me: ahh, okay.

He left and I attempted to get out of bed but my head was pounding. I held onto the pedestal and drew in some air. after gathering some strength, I walked to the bathroom and looked in the mirror. My eyes were swollen red and I had a hand mark on my cheek. I touched it and it stung really bad. I sighed and brushed my teeth, took a quick shower and got out. I wore my black shorts and a white vest with flops and socks then headed downstairs. I found Dad in the lounge talking on the phone.

Dad: for your sake, it better be the right person because if it isn't then all hell will break loose.

...

Dad: I'm coming.

He hung up and turned to look at me, scanning me up and down

Dad: go change.

Me: Tf, why?

Dad: go change.

His voice was stern and he didn't look happy. I turned and started walking.

Me: (Mumbling) waking me up at 02:00 in the morning and telling me what to wear.
Nxx.

Dad: you better be happy I didn't hear what you said.

I rolled my eyes and walked back to my room. I changed into black sweat pants and a plain black long sleeve t-shirt then went back downstairs. He threw me the keys to the Maserati and signaled me with his head to follow. I walked to the car and took the driver's seat and he took the passenger.

Me: you're letting me drive your baby?

Dad: don't get used to it. It's the first and last time.

Me: where are we going.

Dad: don't ask questions, just drive.

I started the car and it roared like the beast it is. I understand why dad loved it so much, it was a true beauty. I drove while he directed me. it was a very shady area, there were no houses, just trees.

Dad: take a left here and press that button over there.

I took the left turn and there was a big wall covered by trees. I pressed the button and the wall opened like a garage door. I drove through and there was a massive

cottage like house, it looked even bigger than the house we lived in. there was a huge gate and as soon as we parked in front of it, it opened up. I drove up the drive way and parked by the door. I looked at him in a questioning manner.

Dad: get out, lokhu ngiqhumisela amehlo.

Me: sikuphi?

Dad: phuma bo.

He got out the car and I followed him. I locked it and gave him the key. We walked up to the door and he punched in a code and the door opened. We entered and the place was beautiful, very spacious and cool.

Me: does mom know you have another house?

Dad: we are not here to talk about your mother. Follow me.

I gave him another questioning look and followed him. there were people inside the house, mostly guys and when they saw dad, they greeted him in the tsotsitaal manner. I was surprised, confused and speculating at the same time. We got to the basement of the house and he stopped me.

Dad: look at me.

I did and he punched me so hard I stumbled back.

Dad: that was for saying I must go fuck myself.

I looked at him and he threw another one, harder this time, making me bleed in the process.

Dad: that's for calling me by my name and this...

He kicked my balls so hard I fell on my knees and groaned in agony.

Dad: is for making my wife cry.

He left me there in pain and walked inside the room. I guess I did all these things when I was drunk. After some time of trying to get myself together, I stood up and made a mental note to stop drinking alcohol. I'm guessing the hand mark on my face was dad earlier because I really can't remember what happened. I enter the room and I see him aiming at a target with a gun in his hands. He fires twice and my ears ring. I look around and I find some noise cancelers and put them on. He carries on aiming at the dummy and he hits the spot between the eyes, perfectly. He puts his gun down and looks at me. he tells me to take off the noise cancelers so I do and put them down.

Dad: I'm here to teach you a few things. Sit down.

I sit on the chair and he sits across from me.

Dad: I want you to know that whatever you hear of see here tonight is who I am. It's who I've always been and it's who I'll always be. We are not a normal family, I'm sure you know why I say that.

Me: I kind of have an idea.

Dad: your grandfather has many businesses. He does a little bit of everything and like him, we are all business minded. Msizi owns the Winery in Cape Town while Vusi owns and controls all the taxi's in and around Johannesburg and Durban and I have the construction company. These are all legit businesses and they bring us security but it's not the reason we are this filthy rich. When our father was young, he didn't

have everything, he worked very hard to get to where he is now, making sure that we his children are secure and you as our are children have an inheritance, generational wealth. We are involved in drug dealings and they are one of the main source of our wealth.

I just looked at him and he had a straight face. I thought you would only see these things on TV or something but here it is unfolding in front of me.

Me: so we're like the Khoza's.

Dad: (Chuckles) basically, just better and since you kind of know what it's about, you know this business has a lot of enemies.

Me: so you kill people.

Dad: we all do.

I swallowed hard because I've seen these things in the movies and they are not the best things to watch.

Dad: our dad told us that it's kill or be killed. If you don't want to die, you fight.

Me: why are we doing this now?

Dad: it's the perfect time, you are in pain.

Me: what does my pain have to do with it.

Dad: initially, you'd have to take over when you finish studying so that's when I would've enlightened you but I want to show you something. Before we carry on, you need to learn how to handle a gun.

Me: am I getting one?

Dad: not yet. You have to prove to me that you're ready for this life because it's not all fun like you see on TV. Come here.

I walk towards him and he gives me a tiny pistol.

Me: this is so tiny.

Dad: I'm not giving you a big gun, you've never held one before.

He takes his from the table.

Dad: this thing has a lot of power so you can't just think you hold it and aim. You need to find balance. Stand with your feet apart, just so you are comfortable and you know you won't fall.

I slightly part my legs and look at him and how in the zone he is.

Dad: hold your gun so it is aiming to the target and lock your shoulders when you think you've got the aim correct.

I look at how he does it and he aims for the mouth. He pulls down the noise cancelers and I do the same then he shoots, hitting the exact spot he was aiming for. He tells me to do the same and I aim for the forehead and shoot. The force is so much that I almost fall on my butt and I hit the back wall, away from the point. He shakes his head and signals that I should do it again. I try and try but I just can't get it.

Dad: you are not locking you're shoulders.

He held my shoulders in place and helped me aim for my target.

Dad: pull.

I pull and I hit that target perfectly.

Dad: try again.

I did the same thing and I now aimed for the mouth and I made a perfect shot. He didn't give me the bigger one, he made me carry on using the small one, we even did a moving target and those are not easy. After the harsh lesson, we went back to the place we entered by. He told me to follow him outside so I did. we sat down and he gave me a knife. I looked at it then back at him.

Dad: here, I'm not your father, I'm nobody's father and nobody's husband, I'm the G.

Me: as in OG?

Dad: no as in the Godfather. Listen to me carefully Mvelwenhle, we don't need weak people here, to the outside world, you may be the sweetest most kindest person but as soon as you enter this place, you leave all your feeling at the gate. We don't nurse feelings, it's not part of the job. You are yet to discover horrifying things about me but it's not me.

Me: you're not making sense.

Dad: I know what you are going through. I've been here before.

Me: you loved someone else other than mom.

Dad: no but I lost my first daughter. Mvelo Lynn died because she was shot by hitmen.

Me: how, when?

Dad: she was only a few months old, I was living in Spain, married to her mother.

Me: you were married?

Dad: yes. After my 3rd year in University, my father sent me to Spain to run his business that side. At the time, I had no clue what it was about and when I got there I was shocked to find out it was a drug operation. I wanted nothing to do with it but I

had no other choice. I was brutally trained to kill with no remorse and it was horrifying. I was a troubled person until I met Lynn's mom. We fell in love and nothing else mattered. Our parents found out about us and we found that they were enemies. They wanted us apart but we didn't want to so we eloped to Italy, got married and started our lives there. she had Lynn and everything was just perfect. When dad found me, he wanted me to come back to SA but I refused to leave without my family so one day, I was out, Caroline called me crying because there was a genocide at home and Lynn had been shot. We never knew who initiated the hit but I was told I went crazy.

Me: you were told?

Dad: yes. I don't remember anything.

Me: just like you don't remember beating mom.

He cleared his throat and looked at me.

Dad: I'm a blood hound Mvelo. I love blood, the smell of blood makes my head spin and it drives me crazy so I seek it. When I'm broken and angry, I need just the smell of blood to calm me, that's how I attained the name Butcher.

I almost peed my pants like legit. I threw the knife on the table and walked further away from him. I've heard so many stories about the Butcher, this mysterious man that kills people and here I was sitting with him.

Dad: buya.

Me: Thee Butcher?

Dad: follow me.

I hesitantly agreed and followed him up the stairs on the other side of the house, in the darkness. There was a trap door, it looked like a normal wall but instead there was a door. He pushed it open and walked in and I followed. The place looked like a

normal office space and nothing suspicious about it. He took out a file in one of the drawers and handed it to me.

Dad: all the threats people get from the Butcher.

There were pictures of peoples toes, fingers and some other unidentified body parts and some letters. I wanted to throw up and run away at the same time. He poured himself a glass of whiskey and downed it.

Me: does mom know?

Dad: yes.

I dropped the file on floor and I walked towards the door but I turned on my heels and looked at him but he looked unfazed.

Me: you are the devil himself you know that? Why, how could be this cruel.

Dad: everyone has a fetish and mine happens to be blood.

Me: you aren't my father, I don't know this monster.

Dad: I told you to leave your feelings outside the gate. I'm not your father here, I'm nobody's father.

Me: I can't believe you.

I attempt to walk out but a gunshot goes off and I fall to the ground as quick as lightening. I expected to feel a stinging sensation but I didn't so I looked up and I saw a bullet hole on the wall.

Dad: next time I won't miss. Come back.

I slowly walked back to his direction and he opened another door leading to an open space, it looked like a whole warehouse. There was a guy tied up to a chair and 3 others sitting by him, it looked like they were guarding him. they stood up and bowed.

Guys: heita bozza.

Dad: sho. Uyena lo?

Guy 1: yebo G.

Dad: landa amanzi.

They scattered and came back with a bucket of water. He poured it over the dude and he opened his eyes and looked at him and smiled.

Guy: if it isn't the G.

Dad: yah masimb' akho. You don't get tired of stepping on my toes.

Guy: I see you still think the world revolves around you.

Dad: It does. And you and your brothers think you can get into my territory and not suffer the consequences.

Guy: fuck you.

Dad chuckled loudly and sat down in the chair.

Dad: so I'll tell you now so that you can register it in your mind. Usubhaliwe encwadini kaSatan, he's expecting your arrival in a few. I suggest you start talking.

Guy: what you want to know G?

Dad: what makes you think you can steal my coke and get away with it?

Guy: I don't think it's as difficult if we actually did get away with it. You're not getting it back unless you step off our route.

Dad: and who are to make demands.

Guy: it's simple, stay away from our route and you'll get your coke back.

They carried on going back and forth until I heard a gunshot going off. One thing about me was I hated the sound of guns, they don't scare me like they used to but I just don't want to hear them because they remind me of that day. There was a loud chuckle and it came from the guy, Dad had shot his shoulder. I looked at him and he had so much anger on his face.

Guy: kill me G but just know you are not getting that coke back.

Dad rubbed the gun on the side of his head, making it look like he's thinking hard.

Dad: boys, lights off, let's leave this rat to think.

Guys: yes boss.

They scattered and the guy that was tied up just chuckled.

Guy: you are a coward, you're at a dead end.

Dad decisively shot his other shoulder and then his foot. He looked unfazed and that scared the shit out of me. he walked out after that and I followed quickly behind him and the lights went off in the room. There was silence between the two of us the whole way back home. I didn't ask any more questions, I believed what I saw was traumatizing enough and the fact that my own mother knew petrified me even more. When I got to my room, I got on my knees and prayed.

Me: God, almighty Father, I'm confused. I'm baffled as to how my parents, my whole family can be so cruel. I know I don't talk to you much but I'm failing to understand how you let other people play God and gamble with people's lives. God I'm scared, I want nothing to do with this life so I'm here god to ask you to give me strength to tell my father, protect me from all the harm that might follow me and forgive me for how I've been. I know I neglected you and doubted your strength but I've learnt everything happens for a reason. I hope you have time to listen to my prayer, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dad: Amen.

I turned around and he was leaning against the door frame with his arms crossed across his chest. I cleared my throat and he walked in and sat on the ottoman.

Dad: look son, I also felt the same way when I was told about this. I wanted nothing to do with this business but I had no choice.

Me: if you didn't want to do it why should I? you surely understand what I feel right.

Dad: well for you and all the rest of the males in this family it will be the same. It's not an easy world that we live in Mvelwenhle and you know it. It's us against the world.

Me: it does not mean you should play God with people's lives baba.

Dad: okay which language do you want me to explain this in. it's a kill or be killed world and this, it's just a way of showing you how tough it can be to prepare you because you will meet different types of people. You have sisters, they can't protect themselves, it's your job to do that and if you can't protect yourselves first, you won't be able to. We won't be around forever and the time will come where I'm gone and you have to take things into your own hands and run this business.

I just kept quiet and looked at him.

Dad: you'll sleep now, tomorrow, we're going back to finish him off.

He pats my shoulder and stands up and leaves. I took off my clothes and I got into bed and dozed off.

.....

At 00:00 the next day my dad walked into my room and I was ready to go. We got to the warehouse and it was more packed than the day before. The whole dining area had turned into a computer room, guys were concentrating on the screens and they would shout some tech stuff at each other every now and then. Uncle Lungelo walked in and they were discussing something about trackers and whatnot. I wasn't listening, I didn't want to be here. Uncle Sbu and Uncle Siyanda also arrived and everyone was just up and down. Both Siyanda and Dad told me to follow them to the butcher room. When we got there, the guy was strapped to the table.

Siyanda: ya doti.

Guy: here to finish me off.

Dad: any last words.

Dad was busy putting on gloves and polishing a knife. They started butchering him and his groans filled the room. I didn't want to come closer because I was already disgusted. I could already smell the blood and they looked like they were having fun.

Siyanda: G omncane, sondela.

I shook my head and he laughed. They poured something on him and it made the sound that a pot makes when you put it on the stove when it's wet. It sounded so painful. They decapitated his head and it rolled on the floor. I couldn't hold it in anymore and I puked all over the floor. Dad gave me a glass of whiskey and I puked even more. Not because I wasn't used to it but because the glass had blood stains all over. They left me there and they started burning the body in this big oven thingy

while his head sat there looking very disgusting. Uncle Siyanda took it and put it in a black plastic bag and placed it on a shelf and they took off the bloodied clothes and they walked to the door. Dad stopped on his tracks.

Dad: clean up this mess.

I looked at him with disgust written all over my face and he just looked so unfazed. He closed the door, leaving me in a room with a head, blood and vomit. I pinched my nose and started searching around the room looking for something to clean with. I found a pair of gloves, a cloth and bleach. I used those to clean up the blood and the vomit from the floor then I left, going back to the dining area where everyone was sitting in the same positions I left them.

Lungelo: the coke is in Limpopo. Tools, track the exact location and G get the guys that side ready to strike.

Everyone was on their feet once again and what they were doing looked really serious. Then all of a sudden there were gunshots coming from outside. These people were so good, their reflexes were amazing. They were quickly on their feet, shooting back. I was on the ground. An alarm went off.

Guy 1: they're inside.

Sbu: Mvelo, take this and shoot!

He threw me a gun and I just looked at it. Bullets were flying in and out the house and I was shit scared.

Dad: Mvelo the gun!

I snapped out and I took the gun. As I was about to turn, a gunshot went off behind me and when I turned I fired at least 3 times then I fell down behind the big couch. I then felt a stinging sensation on my right arm. I was bleeding and it hurt as fuck. They stopped after some time and luckily, there were no dead bodies on sight. Dad came to me and helped me up and saw I was shot.

Dad: just a flesh wound, Mazibuko will treat it and you'll be fine. Next time, be quicker and don't let the force of the gun take control of you.

Tf this nigga was lecturing me about how I should be quick enough when I was just shot, he really isn't anyone's father. I just nodded and sat on the couch. Dr Mazibuko came and checked out my wound. It was really painful but he gave me pills and bandaged me properly. They were still going crazy about this attempted shootout and I was just sitting there letting the pills kick in. when I was half asleep, someone shook me violently.

Dad: it's late, we have to go before your mother realises you're not home.

I looked around and everyone had left, only a few people we're left and the sun was starting to rise. When we got out, I looked for the car but I couldn't see it.

Me: where's the car?

Dad: we're jogging.

Me: what?

Dad: you heard me.

Me: why. Come on Dad, I was shot for goodness sake, I haven't had proper sleep and you expect me to jog from here to Ramsgate.

Dad: what other explanation are you going to give to your mother because by the time we get home, she'll be up.

I shut up and looked at him.

Dad: thought so. Asambe.

He started jogging and I followed slowly behind him. it felt like we were running for years and years, that's how tired I was. I do admit, in high school, I was an athlete, I played rugby and did swimming as well but after that, I've been slacking and that caused me to be lazy. By the time we got by our neighbourhood, the sun was scorching hot and I felt like I was going to collapse and my old man was just going strong. When we got home, I threw myself on the couch, breathing heavily.

Mom: Kabelo are you trying to kill my son.

Dad: he's just lazy, it wasn't a long distance.

He didn't even look worn-out and it baffled me to the core. He threw me a bottle of water and I downed it in an instant.

Mom: I'll be back, I'm taking the kids to school, I would kiss both of you manje you are covered in sweat, bye.

She attempted to walk out but dad pulled her arm and kissed her. I just shook my head because she was giggling like a teenager. Hearing her giggle made me miss my bubbies giggle. I think she saw this because she stopped and kissed my sweaty forehead and laughed.

Mom: sies, making me lick you guy's sweat.

The rascals come running down the stairs.

Helo: daddy I would hug you but you're stinky.

Dad: really now?

He picked her up and she laughed out loud. Helo was old, she was going to high school the following year but she was and always will be daddy's girl.

Dad: my kiss please.

Helo: no.

Dad: are you kissing someone else now, why don't you want to give your dad a kiss.

Helo: (Giggling) hawu daddy, but you are stinky.

She covered her face and dad shook his head and put her down.

Dad: I will get you. Go to school.

Helo: mom, defend me here.

Dad: no, don't involve her, she gave me a kiss.

Lindelwa: I'll give you a kiss daddy.

She ran towards him and he picked her up and kissed her all over her face, making her laugh.

Lindelwa: mmh, your face is salty.

Everyone laughed and she got down and gave me a cheek kiss then they all left. I went upstairs and took a long steamy shower then after that, I bandaged my arm again and got dressed and slept.

Chapter 15

“Never put your time in the hands of the ungrateful.”

I'm sitting in the lounge with my whole family and it looks like it's late in the afternoon. We are all just laughing and having fun when there's a ring at the door. Mom stands to go answer and she comes back holding that guy's head. They all look unfazed and I'm jumping off the sofa. It looks like mom is coming towards me, wanting to make me hold the head. I violently kick it and it falls to the ground and I open my eyes. Mom is standing next to my bed looking extra concerned. I jump off the bed.

Me: get that thing away from me!

Mom: Mvelo what's wrong?

She comes closer and I move back.

Mom: I won't hurt you son, I think you were having a nightmare.

I look at my arms and my feet and I'm dressed in the clothes I was wearing during the day. I look at mom and she's on the verge of tears. I realize that I was just dreaming so I move closer to her and she gives me a tight hug. She prays for me while she holds me tight.

Me: I'm sorry mom.

Mom: don't apologize my son, it's normal to have these nightmares.

I look at her confused and she recognizes.

Mom: because you just lost someone you love, it's not going to be easy, just pray please. They will go away eventually.

Me: okay.

Mom: go and freshen up, it's dinner time.

I nod and she walks out. I turn and walk to the bathroom and balance by the sink and look at myself in the mirror. I realize that I'm ruined, I'll never be the same again. What I saw that night was death summoning and I doubt that I will ever be able to erase it. I rinse my face with cold water and then I wipe it. when I look up in the mirror, I see Isa standing there. I wipe my face again, trying to make sure that I'm not crazy but when I look again, she's still there, just staring at me smiling. When I turn around to face her, she's not there anymore. I throw the face towel on the floor and walk out. When I get to the dinner table and greet everyone.

Me: where's Paloma.

Mom: she's sleeping. Are you sure you're okay? you were sleeping the whole day.

Me: yeah, I'm fine, I was just tired.

Dad gives me a look and I return it. I then look down and Lindelwa says grace then we eat.

Mom: on Monday you're going back to Cape Town.

I look up at her.

Me: is it a question or statement?

Helo kicked me under the table.

Me: wat is fout met jou?

Kabelo: hey, no Afrikaans in my house.

Helo: you are being disrespectful to mom.

Me: and where does that concern you, I wasn't talking to you.

Helo: apologize Mvelo...

Mom: enough you two.

Helo: but mom...

Mom: Khauhelo, ima kancane. Mvelwenhle, I was telling you, you are going to Cape Town.

Dad is just quiet, so is Ntsakisi and Lindelwa.

Me: I'm not going back to that place.

Mom: and what about school?

Me: I don't care about school mom, there's nothing left for me in Cape Town so I'm not going back.

Mom: Kabelo.

Dad: he shouldn't go back if he doesn't want to.

Mom: you can't be serious.

Dad: it's his choice.

Inside I'm smiling because it's the first time in history that my father is defending me. he actually thinks what I think matters and that makes me happy.

Dad: can we discuss this after dinner.

Mom and I nod and we carry on eating in silence. After dinner, Dad summoned both me and mom to his study. As soon as we sat down, mom started.

Mom: Kabelo I don't understand how exactly you could agree to this.

Dad: Zuzile, Mvelwenhle is old now, he's also going through a lot currently, you can't just want to force this on him.

Mom: I'm not forcing it on him, it's what's right. He needs to go to school. He's the one that chose to go school in Cape Town, why is it a problem.

I wasn't expecting this from mom. Dad yes but not mom. I just clear my throat.

Dad: I don't understand why you are being stubborn Lethukuthula. He needs us more now than ever, he needs to be around people that love him, if he's in CT, he'll be alone and he doesn't need that right now. there are alternatives, he can always transfer back to Durban.

No I feel like wisdom has been exchanged here. Why is dad speaking so much sense, normally, its mom who's behind my back, fighting for me but it's changed. She goes quiet, like she's thinking hard. I sit there looking at dad and he's just looking at mom, I assume he's waiting for her answer.

Mom: I guess you're making sense.

Me: thank you mom and I'm sorry if I disrespected you in anyway.

She nods and hugs me. I excuse myself and go to Helo's room. I knock once and open. I find her sitting on her bed with her legs crossed and she's reading a book.

Me: hey sis, can I join you?

Helo: no leave, you upset me.

I sit on the couch by her bed.

Helo: I said leave.

Me: I'm here to apologize.

Helo: apologize then leave.

I pull her hand and she looks at me.

Me: I'm sorry.

She looks at me like she's thinking hard.

Me: please forgive me baby sister. I shouldn't have spoken to you like that.

Helo: you should apologize to mom, not me. you know how sensitive she gets and when you disrespect her, she takes it to heart.

Me: I know and I did. now I'm asking forgiveness from my favourite sister.

I give her puppy eyes and I fold my bottom lip and the smile that forms on her face is priceless.

Helo: you're just bluffing.

Me: I'm not, now do you forgive you big brother?

Helo: yes.

I pull her and make her sit on my lap. She gives me a hug.

Helo: you're taking me to school tomorrow and you are going to fetch me.

Me: anything for you.

Helo: oh so you'll put Data for me.

Me: data for what? There's Wi-Fi in the house and we all have monthly data.

she flutters her eyelashes and giggles.

Helo: I finished it.

Me: doing what?

Helo: school projects.

Me: lies, school just opened and it's only the 18th, you are wasting, Dad's going to murder you.

Helo: but you said you would do anything for me.

She flutters them again and I just shake my head and chuckle.

Me: get in bed and stop dreaming. I'll see you in the morning.

Helo: ugh, so much for big brothers.

She gets off of my lap and gets into bed rolling her eyes in the process.

Me: don't forget to pray little one.

Helo: yes Mvelo.

I switch off the lights and close the door.

.....

I woke up in the cinema and I was woken up by a loud cry. I stood up and went to Paloma's room. I found mom pacing up and down with dad also there, trying to calm her down.

Me: mom, what's going on?

Mom: I don't know, I've fed her, burped her, changed her dipper, she even slept, I don't know what's going on.

Mom and dad exchange but it's still the same. She's turned red in the face and mom looks really tired. Her cries are sharp and heart piercing, I can't watch.

Me: dad can I try.

He walks to me and gives her to me but her cried worsen. Mom takes her again but still, she doesn't stop.

Dad: call mom and ask her what to do.

Mom: Kabelo it's 03:00 in the morning, why would I want to wake her up.

Dad: what other choice do we have.

They are also starting to argue and Paloma just screams her lungs out. I take my phone and call Grandma then give it to dad.

Dad: mom I'm sorry to wake you at this hour but are having a problem.

...

Dad: yes, she won't stop crying.

...

Dad: okay.

He put the phone on loud speaker.

Grandma: Lethukuthula, did you put entressdruppels?

Mom: yes mah but still nothing.

Grandma: eehen, uMvelo ukhona lapho?

Mom: yes kodwa naye akamufuni.

Grandma: kusho ukuthi there's something that's bothering her, what about colic.

Mom: I did everything you can think of mah, I really don't know anymore.

Grandma: zikhona izinyamazane?

Mom: I never bought any after uLindelwa.

Grandma: ayy shuti khona into engamuphethe kahle.

Dad: thanks mom for trying, we'll try figure something out. Sorry for waking you up.

Grandma: it's okay, good luck with that.

They hang up and dad gives me back the phone.

Mom: Mvelo go take something that belonged to Isabelle, anything.

I look at her dumbstruck until dad snaps his fingers on my face and I go take a blanket that she loved. I give it to mom and she holds it towards Paloma's face. For a minute, it looks like she's calming down but soon enough, she starts again.

Mom: ayy I don't know mina.

She's also crying now and it looks like she's on the verge of giving up. dad holds her as Paloma cries. I call Lwa.

Lwa: Andrew, at this time? What's going on.

Me: Lwa, I don't know what to do anymore, Paloma just won't stop crying, we've tried everything. Are you still in Durban.

Lwa: no, I left yesterday. I wish I knew what to do Andrew.

Me: why did she leave me to deal with this alone.

Lwa: you are not alone, you have your parents and you have us.

Me: is Sabrina still here?

Lwa: no, they all left.

I sigh out loud, finally giving up hope.

Lwa: only Ntswaki is around, I can call her if you want.

Me: I don't remember her.

Lwa: okay, I'll give you her number, just try calling her and see what she says.

Me: eish okay.

I hang up and turn back to my parents who are still struggling.

Dad: who were you calling?

Me: Lwa.

Mom: why are you disturbing the poor girl.

Me: I thought she might be helpful.

She send Ntswaki's number and I reluctantly call her.

Ntswaki: (Sniffing) Ntswaki hello.

Me: hey, Ntswaki, it's Mvelo.

Ntswaki: Mvelo?

Me: Mvelo Mfusi, Paloma's dad.

Ntswaki: ohh hey.

She sounds like she's crying.

Me: I'm sorry to call you at this hour but we are having a problem.

Ntswaki: what's wrong, is Paloma okay?

Me: no, she won't stop crying, we've tried everything but she just won't stop.

Ntswaki: are you in Ramsgate?

Me: yes we are.

Ntswaki: I'll be there in a few.

She drops the call and I look at the phone surprised.

Mom: what?

Me: she's coming.

Mom: who?

Me: Ntswaki.

Mom just shakes her head and carries on trying to calm down Paloma. All my siblings are up now and they're all trying to hush her but nothing is working. My phone rings and it's Ntswaki.

Ntswaki: I'm at the gate, please open.

Me: okay.

I hang up and rush downstairs to open for her. Her car drives up the driveway and she gets out quickly.

Me: thank you for coming.

Ntswaki: let's go see what's wrong.

I let her through the door first then I walk with her to where Paloma is. She also looks like she's been crying herself and I kind of feel bad for calling her, she's obviously going through a lot. We get to the room and she greets and offers to take Paloma and mom gives her. She gradually calms down, my poor baby even her voice is fading. Ntswaki takes her phone and she reads something to her.

Ntswaki: *Mfusi*

Linda

Mthiyane

Vundisa

Madanyana.

Mom smiles, so does dad and she they join her, reciting them quietly. I move closer and she's falling asleep. She sits down on the rocking chair and rocks her back and forth until she's sure that she's asleep. They look so beautiful together, the way Paloma clutches onto her shirt, it's like she never wants to let go. Mom signals for her to lay her down in her cot so she does and we quietly leave the room.

Mom: wow, you're so good, thank you, I was honestly giving up.

Ntswaki: it's okay mme, I would do anything for little dove.

Mom: we really appreciate it, you'll make a great mother one day.

She just smiles faintly and mom gives her a hug then I walk her out.

Me: superhero, I owe you one, thank you.

Ntswaki: ohh come on. You know how much I love that baby, I love her like my own.

Me: she clearly loves you too. I'm sorry for dragging you out at this time.

Ntswaki: I'd do it all over again, I know Isa would do the same. I wasn't kidding when I said call me anytime you need me, I'll be here.

Me: that really means a lot to me, thank you.

I smile and she smiles back.

Me: ohh wow, you're so nice. Can I at least take you out to lunch. Just to say thank you.

She laughs but something about her laugh is different, she laughs so sweetly.

Ntswaki: sure, whenever you're free.

Me: Friday then.

Ntswaki: Friday.

I give her a thumbs up and she does the same, making me chuckle. She walks to her car and I see her drive off and I go back to my room and sleep.

Ntswaki

I'm coming back from the Mfusi residence and wow! I was driving there so confused yet so happy that he thought of calling me. I know I had told him to call but our last encounter wasn't the best so his reaction really wasn't expected. The way she warmed up to me, it gave me this tingly feeling in my heart, it made me so happy. When she clung on to me for dear life, it gave me so much happiness. That moment actually made me forget my own problems. I'm angry at my brothers because they failed to protect each other. Tebello has been missing for almost week now and they haven't found him. I drive straight to Dumisani's house, I haven't seen him in a while, I kind of miss him. I walk into the house and head straight to his bedroom. I see another figure in the bed and I start to panic. I walk slowly towards the bed and I feel my blood boiling. When I get to his side of the bed, he's fast asleep. I flick his forehead and he opens his eyes as quick as lightening. He jumps out of bed and stands on his feet.

Dumi: babe, what are you doing here?

Me: aren't I allowed to visit my man?

I put my hands on my waist, clearly starting to get annoyed. He puts his hands on my waist and leads me to the closet.

Me: what, you don't want your mistress to hear me uhh!

Dumi: shhh, don't shout my love please.

Me: Why not, why not because you are here sleeping with someone else!

Dumi: I'm not cheating on you.

Me: then what are you doing Dumisani?

Dumi: I'm doing nothing, please just calm down and let me explain.

He holds my wrists and looks me in the eyes. I look down because his gaze makes me quiver.

Dumi: look at me.

I slowly lift my head and look at him.

Dumi: I'm not cheating on you my love, it's just Mqhele, he was having a nightmare and didn't want to sleep alone. You can even go check my love please.

I free from his grip and walk out the closet and like a puppy, he follows me. I walk to the other side of the bed and I find Mqhele fast asleep. I then turn to look at Dumi and he has a 'I told you' look. I guess it's my turn to apologise. I walk up to him and wrap my arms around his neck.

Me: ke masoabi moratuo.

Dumi: it's okay, I just want you to know that I would never do that to you. I love you way too much.

I feel my cheeks heating up and he kisses my forehead then my lips softly.

Dumi: why are you here at this time anyways?

Me: I missed you, it feels like it's been so long.

Dumi: I don't like this thing of yours driving at this time, it's not safe.

Me: I'm sorry, it will never happen again. Now can we sleep, I'm really tired.

Dumi: okay.

He kisses my forehead again then I change into his t-shirt then we get into bed and cuddle. I woke up and 06:30 and woke up Mqhele, he was so happy to see me. I told him to go take a bath then I went to make him lunch and fixed his uniform. While I was making breakfast, the maid walked in.

Maid: good morning mam.

Me: good morning sisi, how are you.

Maid: I'm good mam. How are you?

Me: I'm good. Mqhele is up, I've made his lunch and I'm almost done with breakfast, you can start cleaning.

Maid: oh thank you mam.

Me: please call me Ntswaki.

Maid: yes mam, I mean Ntswaki.

I chuckle and she smiles and walks away. I carry on making breakfast then Mqhele and his dad walk down. they both plant kisses on my cheek then they sit down and I dish up for them.

Dumi: did Siya come in.

Me: yes, I told her to start the cleaning, I'll finish up here.

Mqhele: aunty can you take me to school please.

Me: okay baby, finish up with breakfast so we can go.

He smiles and eats. I run up to go take a shower then I put on Dumi's sweat pants and a hoodie. One of the perks of being thick is that I can wear my man's clothes and it won't look weird, he loves it actually. I put on his slippers and go downstairs and I find him waiting for me. he waves goodbye to his dad then we leave. I drop him off and while I'm waiting for him to disappear into the building, someone hoots at me. I look in the rear-view mirror and it's Andrew. He comes to my window.

Andrew: hey.

Me: hey, how are you?

Andrew: I'm okay, I didn't know you had a son.

Me: (Chuckles) me, no, I was dropping off a friends child.

I just called Mqhele a friends child. I called Dumi a friend? Why?

Andrew: ohh I understand. So you really are superwoman then.

Me: ohh gosh no. I just love children I guess.

Andrew: and they love you too. Look, I have to go, we're still on for Friday.

Me: Friday.

Andrew: sho!

He shouts while running back to his car. I drive off and he does the same. When I get back to Dumi's, he's in the shower. I open the bed and get under the covers because I feel hell tired, I hardly got any sleep last night. He comes out looking so sexy, like he's from a magazine. His perfect back and strong shoulders, ohh goodness, I feel my loins jingling. I think he feels my gaze on him because he turns around and smiles at me.

Dumi: like what you see?

Me: yes, very much so.

He chuckles and walks back into the bathroom. My eyes follow him, feeling rather disappointed that he didn't make a move. I jump out of bed and follow him to the bathroom. He looks at me in the mirror and gives me his heart warming smile. I pull his hand and make him turn to face me then I stand on my toes, wrap my arms around his neck and kiss him passionately. His breath taste like peppermint, his lips so soft and warm. He grabs my ass and turns us around and puts me on the sink. I giggle and pull out.

Me: put me down, I'm too big, I'll break it.

Dumi: I'll buy another one.

Before I can get another word in, he kisses me again. I drop his towel and play with his manhood and he groans in my mouth. He strips my clothes and I'm left naked. The way he draws patterns on my boob, on my nipples with his soft tounge makes my blood boil and my clit dance. I'm really not a fan of foreplay, I hate it and he knows this. He carries me off the sink and walks with me to the bed without breaking our kiss. He puts me on the bed and reaches out to the drawer and takes out a condom. I help him slide it on then he slowly kisses my lips, my neck and boobs while I feel his tip at my entrance.

*
*
*

Dumi: you're not going to work?

Me: night shift tonight.

Dumi: then you need to rest my love. You are not to raise even a finger today, you didn't even get enough sleep last night.

I help him fix his shirt then he kisses my forehead.

Dumi: don't leave before I come back okay.

Me: yes my love.

I get into bed and he leaves. I immediately drift off to a peaceful sleep.

Mvelo

After dad convinced mom that I'm better in Durban, they got me a transfer to UKZN. I'm not thrilled about it but I have no other choice. It's the 11th of February today and tomorrow is Mom and Dad's 12 year Anniversary. We are planning them a surprise dinner since they haven't celebrated it in almost 4 years because of my shooting incident. After that day, mom was just against it but this year, I want her to just see that I'm over it. I've fetched the brats from school after my classes and we are heading to the mall.

NJ: Lindelwa, don't tell your mommy and daddy about the surprise.

Li: I won't. I know the meaning of surprise.

She rolls her eyes at him and we all just laugh.

Helo: so what exactly are you planning Mvelo?

Me: we are recreating their first date.

NJ: and how would you know about their first date.

Me: you guys seem to forget that I'm older than you.

NJ: no, we know you're older but you were also not around on their first date.

Me: well, mom told me all about it when I was small, when she was pregnant with you.

I point to Helo.

Me: I remember when dad was in a car accident, that same day, we had gone out, just the two of us and she had told me all about it.

Helo: and you still remember?

Me: yeah, I remember everything. Or when you were three and you twisted your ankle after jumping off the sofa.

I say looking at NJ. He laughs and so does Helo and Lindelwa.

Me: she went crazy, she went as far as taking you to the hospital for a mere sprain and when the doctor said you were fine, she wanted to beat you but you ran and hid under the bed the whole day and we couldn't find you.

NJ: okay now I think you're lying, I don't remember that.

Me: you won't you were young.

I carry on telling them stories about their childhood and they can't stop laughing. We get to the mall and we go to some grocery shopping for the dinner then we go look for gifts. Mom told me that they had a picnic under the tree of the House in Cape Town, where Bab' Mdala lives now. there's so many complicated things about their relationship that I still need to find out because I'm really curious. Instead of making two small pies, we'll make one big pastry, just to give them the melancholy. We stole the bracelet he gave her from her safe and went to get it polished properly to re-gift her with it and the other things from us. After hours of shopping, go home and put the groceries in the pantry and move all the other things to my room. They all sit with me on the bed looking me with their big eyes.

Me: what?

Helo: tell us more about mom and dad.

NJ: yeah, I also want to know.

Me: I don't know everything.

Li: okay then tell us what you know.

NJ: how did they meet.

Me: yoh, it's so long and complicated. So mom grew up in Umbumbulu, she stayed there her whole primary school life while dad lived in Cape Town with his parents.

Helo: such a distance, how did they meet.

Me: when granny, mom's mom got married to Muzi's dad they moved to Cape Town but left mom. She would only visit once in a blue moon.

Helo: how old was mom?

Me: she was 12.

NJ: she started dating dad then.

Me: no, would you let me tell the story please.

Them: okay!

Me: so when she would visit, dad spotted her a few times and liked her, but never told her or approached her. Then when she was to start high school, she permanently moved to CT and enrolled to the same school dad was attending.

Helo: ncooh, the perfect love story.

Me: no, not really.

Them: aww, what happened?

Me: when mom got to the school, dad had forgotten about her and she also didn't know him.

NJ: how old were they now?

Me: mom was 14 and dad was 17. Eventually, mom started making friends and she settled into the school comfortably. She started noticing dad and had a crush on him.

Li: what's a crush?

Helo: when you like someone.

Li: ohh, so mom liked dad?

Me: yes baby. Back then, there were no proper cell phones so they communicated with letters and her friends convinced her to write him a love letter. I guess this was the great way of letting someone know you like them. Mom still has the letter.

Helo: really, I want to see it.

Me: I don't know where it is.

Li: let's go look for it.

NJ: yes please, I want to see it too.

Me: you guys want to put me in trouble. You know we're not allowed in mom and dad's room.

Helo: but they're not here.

NJ: and they don't lock so it will be quick and easy.

Li: it will be like a mission.

They all smile deviously and jump up and down.

NJ: please bro, I want to see it.

Li: please bhuti ka Lindelwa.

She gives me puppy eyes and I just chuckle and shake my head.

Me: five minutes, if we don't find it, we're leaving. I want to go bond with my daughter.

Them: thank you!

They run to the door first and when I get to the room, they are already standing by the door waiting for me. I open the door for them and they go in. I'm not used to being in here so every time I enter, I'm mesmerized by the beauty.

Helo: their room is so cool.

NJ: right!

Me: you're wasting time. Helo, go to the closet on mom's side and look there, Ntsaki go look on dad's side and Li and I will look here.

They don't hesitate, they go running to the closet.

Me: DON'T MAKE A MESS!

Them: yes bhuti!

I look on mom's side drawer and there's only essential things like Vaseline and her different car keys and things she needs in reach when she sleeps. On dad's side, it's just pills, car keys and a box. I take out the box and put it on the bed. Inside, there are documents and non-of them are the letter. I put it back in place and I look on the

dresser. There's only mom's make-up set so I close up and move to the closet where the rascals are.

Me: any luck?

Helo: I found these.

She holds a box and I take it and we sit down and we open it. I almost faint when I look inside. There are handcuffs, a whip, anal beads, vibrators and other sex toys.

NJ: why does mom have penises in her room.

Me: okay, that's enough for today.

I close the box and put it back where I found it.

Helo: Mvelo, what are those things for.

Me: it's for adult things Helo, you'll see them when you are also married.

NJ: they are for sex.

I swear I almost slapped him, only god knows what stopped me.

Me: shut up, let's go. We shouldn't be up here.

Li: but I want the letter.

She starts rubbing her eyes meaning she wants to cry.

Me: Lindelwa, there is no letter okay, mommy hid it.

Li: it's unfair, you're not my big brother anymore.

I hold her hand and I drag the rest out of the closet. When we reach the door, we are met by mom standing there looking at us with her arms folded across her chest. My blood pressure rises and I feel the room getting smaller.

Chapter 16

"How they treat you is how they feel about you."

A guilty Lindelwa runs to hug moms legs and starts crying and apologizing.

Li: mommy, we are sorry, we just wanted the letter. Please don't shout mommy, we are very sorry.

Mom doesn't pay her any mind. She looks at all three of us as we just stand there as statues. I can't read her facial expression. I don't know if she's angry or what but I'm shit scared.

Mom: nenzani?

NJ: we're sorry mom.

Mom: answer the question.

Helo and NJ look down.

Mom: Mvelwenhle.

I clear my throat and look around the room.

Mom: aibo khulumani wey' ngane. What are you doing in my room, all four of you?

Helo: we were looking for a letter.

Mom: what letter.

Helo: uhhm...

NJ: the one you wrote for dad.

She looks at us confused.

Mom: what are you talking about?

Helo: Mvelo was telling us about how you met dad and he told us that you wrote him a letter and we wanted to find it.

She's speaking very fast and funny enough, the last part came out as a whisper. She chuckles but it's not her normal sweet chuckle, it's her angry chuckle.

Mom: what did I tell you about going into our room without permission?

Us: it's not respectful to you as our parents and adults therefore, we will be punished.

Mom: got it. no TV for the rest of this week, chores are on you, I'll tell Phelo to take the two weeks off...

Helo: ahh but mom...

Mom: I can make it more.

Helo: I'm sorry.

Mom: and the pool needs to be cleaned. I will not have children as detectives. Go, and you better pray your father doesn't find out about this.

Us: yes mom. We're sorry.

We walk out.

Mom: you too, go.

Lindelwa is still clinging to mom and she won't let go.

Helo: Lindelwa let's go.

She looks at mom and mom shoo's her off. She holds Helo's hand and we walk back to my room in silence.

Me: why are you following me?

NJ: you haven't told us the whole story.

Me: I'm done talking to you. You guys put me in trouble. I'm going to take my daughter.

They give me puppy eyes and I ignore them and walk to Paloma's nursery. I find her wide awake with her blue eyes wandering around, just sucking her thumb. I carry her and she snuggles and my chest like always. She's also turning a month old tomorrow, exactly a month after my bobbies died. It's still really hard for me to look at Paloma, sometimes I just get so angry but I love her, I can't go a day without thinking about her, wanting to hold her and play with her. I kissed her forehead and we walked to my room. I found all the brats still crowding my room.

Me: didn't I say leave.

Helo: mom isn't talking to us.

Me: and that's whose fault?

They keep quiet.

NJ: can you at least carry on telling the story.

Me: fine.

I sit down and put Paloma on her little resting chair.

Me: dad never read the letter.

Helo: why?

Me: apparently, he had many letters at once so he never saw mom's letter. When mom was in grade 9 and dad was in matric, he asked her out and they went on that first date picnic.

Them: ncooh!

Paloma's eyes shot up and it looked like she was about to cry.

Me: shh, you're scaring Dove.

Them: sorry.

I took her out the chair and put her on my chest again. Then all of a sudden, there was shouting downstairs and it sounded like mom.

Helo: Mvelo, what's going on?

Me: I don't know.

I stood up and walked to the door. They tried to follow me but I stopped them. I walked to the railing and it was mom and dad arguing.

Mom: you do it on purpose Kabelo!

Dad: shh, don't shout.

Mom: you're so stupid!

She storms to the kitchen and I walk back to my room. I find the rascals sitting there looking concerned.

Me: don't worry, they are just having a misunderstanding.

Helo starts crying.

Me: what's wrong now.

Helo: are they getting divorced. They are always shouting at each other now and they never do that.

My heart almost stopped when she said that, I started to panic.

Me: no, no mom and dad are not getting divorced baby.

I pull her into a hug. All of them snuggle in my arms.

Me: mom and dad love each other, they've been together for more than 30 years now, they're never going to separate. Every couple fights, it's normal. Now I don't want you to ever think that they don't love each other or they will get divorced okay.

They all nod and we stay in that position for a while. I open my eyes and mom is standing by the door watching us. I realise we all fell asleep.

Mom: come down, dinner is ready.

I nod and she walks away. I wake up the brats and tell them to go freshen up for dinner. I go put Paloma in her room but she wakes up so I place her back on my chest and walk with her to the table, where everyone is sitting. I greet dad and Lindelwa says grace. Dad is in a good mood while mom is sulking. He's asking us about school and everything. After eating, mom stands up and goes upstairs.

Dad: what's wrong with your mother.

Li: we upset her...

NJ: Lindelwa maarn!

Dad: heyi wena, don't shout at the child.

He keeps quiet and looks down.

Dad: you were saying princess.

Helo and I give her a stink eye and she keeps quiet.

Li: we did nothing daddy.

He just chuckles and shakes his head. Something is definitely wrong with him but we ignore him and carry on eating. After we all finish I ask to talk to dad and I ask the rascals to do the dishes. I follow him to the study with Paloma still in my arms. He sits and pours himself a glass of whiskey.

Dad: she's a daddy's girl.

Me: she doesn't want me to put her down.

Dad: you'll start going to school with her. What did you want to talk about.

He looks so jolly, it's not often that I see my dad so carefree.

Me: dad this is serious.

Dad: why, what happened?

Me: why are you and mom fighting so much.

Dad: what makes you think we're fighting.

Me: I live here, I can hear and see things.

Dad: okay then if we are fighting, then where does that concern you?

Me: it concerns me because my sister came to me crying asking if her parents are getting a divorce.

He goes quiet and gulps down his glass of whiskey.

Me: with utmost respect dad, please sort out your things with mom, I don't want my siblings to go through the same pain and trauma I experienced because of you two.

I get up and leave him there. I put Paloma down and she doesn't cry. I go to check on the brats and they are done with the dishes.

Helo: where's mom?

Me: in her room.

NJ: can we watch TV?

Me: I don't know.

They run to the lounge and they find that the TV disconnected.

Helo: it's not turning on.

NJ: let's go to the cinema.

They both run there but they come back, disappointment written on their faces.

Helo: it's locked.

NJ: so is the game room.

I laughed at them so much.

Me: your mother is a savage. Good luck with the next week.

I walk up to my room and go on my laptop. I have to gather up all the songs that they love to make a playlist for tomorrow. I hacked mom's iCloud and downloaded all the most played song on there. I couldn't do it with dad because he's a gangster, he will kill me but I know he likes John Legend so I'll just get a few favourites. After hours and hours of trying to pick the perfect songs, I end up with lots songs and I retire to bed after midnight. I woke up at 10:00 in the morning and mom was in the kitchen eating a fruit salad, it looks like she's coming from gym.

Me: hello mommy.

Mom: Mvelo, why aren't you at school.

Me: I don't have classes.

I give her a hug and kiss.

Me: happy anniversary.

Mom: that's today?

Me: you forgot.

Mom: I forget a lot of things these days.

Me: old age.

Mom: heyy wena, hamba la.

I laugh and walk to the fridge.

Me: where's Paloma?

Mom: she's in the garden with Phelo.

Me: she's turning one month today.

Mom: that's also today, oh I'm really getting old.

I laugh at her and she smiles.

Mom: can I take her out.

Me: where can you take her.

Mom: we'll have a photo shoot at the hotel, just the two of us.

Me: oh wow, and what about the daddy.

Mom: ayy, you're not important. Let me go check out some outfits. I'm so happy.

She jumps off the chair and runs upstairs squealing. I make myself some food then I sit by the table and call the chef. We confirm the time then I call the baker and ask about the cake, Everything is sorted for tonight. I'm a bit concerned about my mom's behaviour. She has mood swings and she can't be pregnant so maybe she's going through menopause, or I hope she's not. Phelo and my Dove walk in.

Phelo: good morning Mvelo.

Me: morning sisi. Here's my little dove.

She gives me her and she's fast asleep. She takes her again then I go take a shower and leave.

Ntswaki

I'm at home, just lazing around in my pyjamas when I get a buzz. I drag myself from the couch and go to answer.

Me: who is it?

Mvelo: it's me.

Me: ohh.

I buzz him in and I go back to the couch. He then knocks on the door.

Me: come in!

He bursts in and dumps himself on the couch next to me.

Me: daddy.

Mvelo: mommy.

He looks at me and laughs. This has been us for the past month. We've grown so close, he's like my best friend. We also agreed on me helping him with Paloma whenever and that's where the name mommy came from.

Mvelo: I missed you.

Me: and I didn't.

Mvelo: ouch, okay.

Me: I only miss my little dove, why did you leave her?

Mvelo: she's going to a photo shoot with her granny. She's turning a month today.

Me: I remembered. I was planning to visit her actually.

Mvelo: really?

Me: yes.

He smirks looking unsure and I just burst out laughing.

Me: okay, I was going to call her later.

Mvelo: that it. it's my parents anniversary today.

Me: how many years?

Mvelo: 12.

Me: wow.

Wow, that's a dream.

Mvelo: I know right. I could never.

Me: why?

Mvelo: the person I thought I'd have that with left me.

I go quiet so does he.

Me: you'll find love daddy.

Mvelo: I'm not sure I ever will.

Me: be positive. I'll always be your mommy, you know right.

Mvelo: thanks.

He lays his head on my lap and we sit in a comfortable silence. This is what our visits are often like. Me and him just sitting in a comfortable silence, an escape from the busy world. We fell asleep because I was woken up by Dumi walking into my apartment. Mvelo wakes up.

Dumi: Mvelo, what are you doing here?

Mvelo: I'm visiting the mother of my child.

Okay, so blunt. I know they know each other but I never told Mvelo I'm in a relationship with Dumi.

Dumi: the mother of your child died.

Me: okay okay. Dumi, we'll talk about this, Mvelo can I walk you out.

Mvelo: why am I being walked out?

Me: because you need to leave.

I walk him to the door.

Mvelo: are you dating.

Me: I'll call you.

Mvelo: no are you dating him?

He started raising his voice.

Me: lower your voice. Yes I'm in a relationship. Go home, I'll call you.

I closed the door on him and I walked back to the lounge where a red faced Dumi was sitting.

Me: Dumisani.

He stands up and charges towards me.

Dumi: mother of his child?

Me: can I please explain, please.

I'm now against the wall looking at him breathing in and out. He moves back and I lead him to the couch.

Me: he's my friend.

Dumi: a friend that you cuddle with?

I keep quiet.

Dumi: you said you would explain. Explain ke.

Me: okay, I have nothing to explain but the fact that he's my friend Dumi.

Dumi: then why bother.

He stands attempting to leave.

Me: Dumi wait!

Dumi: what?

I keep quiet and he gives me an 'I'm waiting' look.

Me: I love you.

He keeps quiet and looks at me. I feel my eyes getting heavy and they burn up. it's the first time I've told him I love him. he always says it but I always just giggle or say thank you. The way he's looking at me right now, I'm failing to read his expression. I stand and go to put my hands on his shoulders.

Me: I said I love you.

It comes out as a whisper. It's more assurance to me than him. I'm letting myself know that I'm not lying to myself, that I love him. he moves his face closer to mine until our noses touch. His breath on my face is warm, it's giving me a fuzzy feeling inside.

Dumi: (Whispering) I love you too.

He kisses me slowly.

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*
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Dumi: marry me.

Me: what?

Dumi: marry me.

He sits up and looks me. he looks dead serious, like he didn't just ask me something life changing. I just told him I love him, it obviously means we are taking things slow and he pops the question. Is my pussy really that magical?

Me: Dumi we just made love...

Dumi: shh, I know. Listen to me, I love you and you love me. I've never been in love before. We're not getting any younger, please marry me.

He bites my earlobe tenderly. He knows that's my weak spot.

Me: mmh, I'll have to think about it.

Dumi: please don't break my heart.

I keep quiet because I don't know how to feel about his proposal.

Mvelo

Ntswaki Mohau. My blessing. She's my guardian angel, sent from heaven to hold me through this life. I have no words. In a short space of time, we've become the closest friends, assuming the role of mommy in Paloma's life. I had paid her a visit today and I found that she's dating my mother's business partner and good friend, Uncle Dumisani. I was shocked. Utterly shocked because he's almost dad's age and Ntswaki is only 23. I left the apartment feeling some sort of hurt and a tad bit of jealousy. I kind of felt better knowing she isn't dating but now I feel differently. I don't want her dating, especially a man twice her age. I fetched the rascals from school then I headed home. The house was buzzing with people setting up for the date and it was really looking nice. I heard dad's car driving in and I rushed to him.

Me: father, you are home already?

Dad: yes, it's 17:00 already, where do you expect me to be?

Me: mom's not back yet.

He looks at me weirdly.

Dad: what's going on inside the house?

Me: nothing, where's mom?

Dad: no you are hiding something.

He pushes past me before I can stop him, he's already in the kitchen.

Me: dad, can I explain.

He looks at me with a face I can't read. Helo holds my hand and I look at her and smile.

Helo: daddy you are ruining the surprise.

Dad: what surprise. What's going on here?

Helo: come daddy.

She pulls his hand and they walk upstairs. Everything is going well and the deco is looking great. Mom comes home and the house is dark.

Mom: why is it dark in here?

Me: I like it dark. Come, let's go.

Mom: wait, where's your father?

Me: upstairs. Let's go!

I take her hand and we walk up to Paloma's nursery. I turn on the lights and I take her and put her in her cot.

Me: I'm preparing dinner, please go freshen up.

Mom: ayy Mvelo man. What is going on, I'm tired I had a long day.

Me: just go please, the food is going to get cold.

She huffs and walks out the room and walks upstairs while I go to Helo's room.

Me: where's your father?

Helo: I couldn't stop him, he went downstairs.

Me: it's fine. These people are really hard to surprise.

We walk out and find dad in the garden where the set-up has been made and he turns around smiling.

Dad: wow, this is lovely.

Helo: it was meant to be a surprise.

Dad: I'm sorry I ruined it. thank you guys. Where are the others?

Helo: upstairs. You can go sit down now, mom's coming.

He goes back to the garden and sits. We then turn off all the lights and mom shouts from the stairs.

Mom: Khauhelo, turn on the lights.

Helo: mom, come here.

She walks down wearing a white floral dress and sandals. She looks super mad.

Mom: you two are testing my patients, I told you to turn on the lights. And where the hell is Kabelo!

We are now by the door and Helo turns on the fairy light in the garden.

Dad: surprise.

He says in a low voice with a giant smile on his face. Mom's face turns from red with anger to joy and tears.

Dad: awwu, don't cry, you look ugly when you cry.

Mom: I don't hawu.

She punches his shoulder and cries like a child then dad holds her tightly.

Mom: this is beautiful.

Helo: it was our idea.

Me: no my idea.

Mom: well, I love it. where are the rest of you?

Me: that's a surprise. Please go enjoy yourselves.

Mom kisses both our cheeks and they walk hand in hand. I tune the first song and I hear mom laugh out loud from the garden, clearly means my instincts were right. Lindelwa and Ntsakisi come down in their little uniforms and they model for me.

Me: okay, you know what to do right.

They nod and they I give them the first platters. They serve them and the night goes on, with our parents having fun and falling in love all over again. All my siblings turned in at 20:00 and I stayed up, just bonding with my daughter. It's already past midnight and they walk in, with mom looking tipsy.

Dad: Mvelo, thank you for tonight.

Me: you both needed it. it was my pleasure.

Mom: we love you.

She blows me kisses and she walks up the stairs.

Dad: good night son.

Me: good night.

He half smiles and follows behind mom. I shake my head and chuckle.

Me: you have weird grandparents my love.

She just looks around the room, opening her big blue eyes. She has blue eyes because of Isa. She always wore contacts because she thought she looked weird with her eyes but whenever she was with me, she would take them off because I loved them. I see my bubbies through Paloma's eyes, I sometimes wish I was with her and watch our daughter grow together. I still miss her a lot and I sometimes I wake up thinking she's next to me. it hurts me worse to see people in love because it reminds me of us. We were so happy and to think she died angry at me kills me inside. Then there's Ntswaki. I feel like I'm torn in between the memory of Isa and the love I had for her and the 'brewing something' I have for Ntswaki. I feel so at home with her. It feels like my sanctuary, my safe place when I'm with her. I have a sense of freedom with her, something I've never felt before. Her cherishing, loving soul is heart-warming. Every time I feel like this, I think of Isa. I think about how she would feel, I feel like I'm betraying her. There's just a number of things that are stopping me from wanting to see where my feelings would lead me to and I wouldn't want to find out what would go down if I let them control me.

Chapter 17

"Sometimes the hardest thing and the right thing are the same."

Ntswaki

I'm in my flat getting ready for dinner with Dumi. I've been a bad girlfriend lately, since that night he asked me to marry him, I kind of felt scared. not because I'm afraid of commitment but because I'm not sure of my feelings. I love Dumisani but I can't help feel this something pulling me back. I want to give him my all, I want to give into him and love him unconditionally but this something just won't let me. I wear a black skirt just above the knee and a white shirt with black pointy toe shoes. I tie my braids into a high bun and I leave. I get to the restaurant and I find him sitting, busy with his phone.

Me: I'm sorry I'm late.

Dumi: it's okay my love.

He stands and kisses my cheek. He opens the chair for me and I sit. He goes back to his seat.

Dumi: you look stunning.

Me: thank you. So what are we having.

He chuckles. he should understand that by now I'm a foodie, I mean it's the reason behind all the curves that he loves so much. He calls over the waiter and she takes our orders. The night flows along quickly with us just having a good conversation. After dinner, he tells me I should follow him to his house. I don't protest because I

haven't seen him in almost a week, we should spend some quality time. When I get to his house, he's already standing by the door waiting for me.

Dumi: my love.

He takes my hand and opens the door for me. I walk in and there are roses scattered all over the floor with candles as well. I press my eyelids together as my heart beats out of my chest rapidly. I slowly turn around and open my eyes.

Dumi: I love you. I loved you from the day I saw you and I knew that you were made for me. I'm old enough to be your father but you gave me the time of day and I'm grateful for that. I wasn't joking when I said I wanted you, that I wanted you to bear my children and be my wife so here I am living up to my words. Ntswaki, love of mine, please marry me.

I look at him with tears in my eyes. These aren't your normal tears. They aren't tears of joy but tears of fear. Fear of breaking this man's heart. They drop and he smiles, surely thinking I'm crying because of joy. I want this for him, I want to see him happy because he deserves nothing but happiness.

Me: yes.

I whisper, hoping he won't hear me, giving me a chance to change my answer but he hears me.

Dumi: yes?

I nod and he smiles. He then slide the ring on my finger and gives me a big hug, spinning me around. He puts me down and I hold onto his face and give him a big

kiss. I've never seen him this happy before and it makes me glad to know I made him happy but I'm scared. even when he makes love to me, I feel something different, like something is missing. I just feel incomplete. I'm woken up by my phone ringing. I check the time and it's 04:00 in the morning.

Me: (Whispering) Mvelo what is it?

Mvelo: I'm sorry, did I wake you?

Me: it's flippen 04:00 in the morning Mvelo, what do you expect.

I'm already sitting on the toilet seat in the bathroom.

Mvelo: I couldn't sleep.

Me: so you saw it best you wake me up?

Mvelo: I need to talk to you.

Me: couldn't it wait until the sun is up at least?

Mvelo: I'm sorry Ntswaki.

Me: nxx.

He sighs.

Mvelo: can I see you today?

Me: sure. 17:00?

Mvelo: 17:00 is okay. thank you.

I hung up and I walked to the door. When I opened it, my heart almost stopped when I saw Dumi standing by the door with his arms crossed across his chest.

Dumi: who we're you talking to?

Me: no one, I was just talking to myself.

Dumi: in the bathroom?

The look on his face is making me scared.

Me: I was taking a pee.

Dumi: and you didn't flush, or wash your hands, with your phone?

I clear my throat.

Me: I forgot.

I rush back into the bathroom and flush the toilet and wash my clean hands. I walk back and he's still standing there.

Me: I'm sorry if I woke you.

He just turns and walks back to bed. I get in and I face the other direction and try to get my sleep back. One thing I can't do is beg and if he's angry, he can go to hell.

.....

I'm on my way home from work when my phone rings, it's Dumisani.

Me: Dumisani.

Dumi: what did I do now?

Me: nothing, what were you saying?

Dumi: wow okay. I was asking if you are coming over tonight?

Me: no, I'm going to my place.

Dumi: but I want to be with you, my fiancé.

Me: well you can't. I'm having my friends over tonight.

Dumi: which friends? Last I checked, you didn't have friends.

Me: well said, last you checked.

Dumi: what's with this cheeky attitude vele?

Me: I'm sorry.

He keeps quiet for some time, so do I.

Dumi: it's clear you are going through something. Call me when you feel respectful enough to speak to me.

Me: Dumi wait...

Before I can start talking, he hangs up. I just click my tongue and carry on driving. A newly engaged couple shouldn't fight. I got to my flat and I found Mvelo already waiting outside my door. He smiles so warmly and I can't help the smile that creeps on my face, making my cheeks burn. I open up and he walks in and I follow behind him. we settle on the couch and he take off my shoes.

Mvelo: how are you?

Me: I'm good, how are you?

Mvelo: I'm okay.

There's an awkward silence and for once I'm shocked. There's never any awkward vibes between me and him, our conversations always come so easily. He takes my feet and puts them on his lap and starts massaging them.

Mvelo: you look tired.

Me: I am, I'm just going through a lot, but you said you wanted to talk.

Mvelo: yes, I want to tell you something I feel shouldn't be kept a secret.

Me: oo-kay.

I scratch my ankle but he holds my hand and I look at it. I then realise I didn't take off my engagement ring.

Mvelo: please tell me this is for decoration.

Me: uhhm, Dumisani proposed.

Mvelo: and you said yes?

His voice is kind of rising now and he's scaring me.

Me: Mvelo calm down, please don't get worked up about this.

Mvelo: how can you tell me to calm down Ntswaki when you said yes to marrying a man old enough to be your father!

Me: I'm starting to think this is more than what you say it is Mvelo!

Now I'm also shouting back at him because he's annoying me.

Me: why can't you just be happy for me?

Mvelo: because I know you're not happy Ntswaki!

Me: I'm happy!

Mvelo: you don't love him!

The veins on the side of his head are popping and his jaw is clenched along with his fists. He turns to look at me and his eyes are blood red.

Mvelo: you don't understand.

Me: understand what?

He keeps quiet for a long time, kind of like he's thinking of what he should say.

Me: Mvelo!

Mvelo: understand that I love you Ntswaki. I'm in love with you!

I look at him with my heart beating very fast. He stands and leaves, slamming the door really hard, scarring me even more. I take off the ring and I throw it on the coffee table and groan in frustration as he words replay in my head.

Narrated

In the Mfusi residence, Kabelo and Zuzile are sitting in the study, talking.

Kabelo: so Ma' Mfusi, I'm thinking about retiring next year.

Zuzile: but you aren't even fifty yet?

Kabelo: I know but after next year, I want Mvelwenhle to take over the business.

Zuzile: what if he doesn't want to? You know his mind is set on this art thing of his.

Kabelo: we've spoken about this with him. he knows that as my heir, he has to. He has no other choice.

Zuzile: I don't like this one bit but you are the man right, you know what you are doing.

Kabelo: no, don't give me that, you're trying to make me feel bad.

He stands and goes to hold her hands and helps her up.

Kabelo: you're gaining weight.

Zuzile: Mvelo says it's menopause.

Kabelo laughs and Zuzile rolls her eyes.

Kabelo: you look beautiful though. I have something to show you.

Zuzile: what is that?

Kabelo: just a project I've been working on.

He pulls her hand towards the bookcase and removes a book and there is a door knob.

Zuzile: ohh, secret passages, are we on Dora the Explora.

Kabelo: (Laughs) what, no. just come.

He opens the door and they walk down the stairs in the dark place.

Zuzile: Kabelo you know I'm afraid of the dark.

Kabelo: since when?

Zuzile: since now. where are you taking me?

Kabelo: we are already here.

He switches on the lights and she looks around the perfectly designed room.

Zuzile: you're joking.

Kabelo: it's our own little paradise. Our escape from reality. Our own...

Zuzile: Red Room. It looks so awesome.

She walks around admiring the room.

Kabelo: I'm sending the kids away this weekend, I want us to beat our own record.

Zuzile: 24 hours.

Kabelo: 72.

Zuzile: I'm in.

They handshake and she carries on looking around, feeling rather excited that she gets to explore this side of her life. When she's finished admiring and picturing the weekend ahead, they go back to the study and sit in silence.

Kabelo: what are you thinking about?

Me: I'm just planning something in my head.

He smirks and she smiles shaking her head. There's a knock at the door and Zuzile goes to answer and it's Phelo.

Phelo: mam, could you please come downstairs?

Zuzile: why, what's wrong?

Phelo: my parents would like to talk to both you and Mr Mfusi.

Zuzile: your parents?

Phelo: yes mam.

Zuzile: we'll be right down.

She closes the door and looks at her husband.

Zuzile: that was Phelo, she says her parents are downstairs and they want to talk to us.

Kabelo: why?

Zuzile: we'll have to go to find out.

Kabelo: let's go.

Kabelo stands and they both walk downstairs to the lounge where the Motaung's are sitting with Yolanda.

Kabelo: lumela ntate, mme.

Them: lumela.

Mr Motaung: do you speak Sotho?

Kabelo: yes sir.

Mr Motaung: re masoabi ka ho fihla ha phatlalatso empa re na le mathata a ntseng a emetse ao re lokelang ho a rarolla. (we are sorry for arriving announced but we have some pending issues we need to sort out)

Kabelo: what would that be about ntate?

Mr Motaung: Morali oa rona o re bolella hore ha a le mosebetsing, mora oa hao o ile a nka boroetsana ba hae. (our daughter tells us that when she was here on work, your son took her virginity).

Kabelo turns and looks at a confused Zuzile.

Zuzile: (Whispering) what did he say?

Kabelo: he says Mvelo took Yolanda's virginity.

Zuzile: but that's not true. With all due respect Ntate Motaung, my son would never do that.

Mr Motaung: ntate, ka kopo bolella mosali oa hau ha ke bue le basali. (Sir, please tell your wife I do not speak to women)

Kabelo: ntate, ke tla u kopa hore u se ke oa bua le mosali oa ka joalo ka lapeng la hae mme ke lumellana le eena, mora oa rona a ke ke a etsa joalo. (ntate, I will ask you not to speak to my wife like that in her own home and yes I do agree with her, our son wouldn't do that.)

He keeps quiet and clears his throat.

Kabelo: Yolanda what do you have to say about this?

She keeps quiet and looks at her father.

Yolanda: when I was here, we did engage in sexual activities.

Kabelo turns to look at Zuzile who has her head bowed and her eyes drilling the floor, hoping it would open up and swallow her.

Kabelo: Please excuse us, Lethukuthula.

He stands and Zuzile stands, following behind him. they get to the kitchen and she just looks down and plays with her fingers.

Kabelo: you know?

Zuzile: no, no I didn't know.

Kabelo: you're lying.

Zuzile: I promise Mfusi, I'm not lying to you.

She still has her head lowered and her eyes on her fingers.

Kabelo: look at me.

She lifts her head slowly and looks at a livid Kabelo.

Kabelo: if you are trying to protect your son, it won't work. Talk now before I find out myself and hell will break loose.

Zuzile: Mvelo told me Yolanda was leading him on but he didn't want to. I solved it and it was never a problem again but he never told me they had sex.

Kabelo: what is wrong with your son!

He takes his phone and dials Mvelo's number and it goes to voicemail

Kabelo: where is he?

She shrugs her shoulders and Kabelo just clicks his tongue and goes into the lounge where the Motaung's are seated.

Kabelo: n'tate, Mvelwenhle isn't home and he isn't answering his phone. I think it's late now and we can discuss properly with him here. I'll ask Phelo to prepare a room for you in the pool house, I'm sure there's going to be enough room for everyone.

Mr Motaung: that's okay.

He calls Phelo and tells her what to do then they go. She calls NJ to bring him his tablet and calls his wife to join him in the lounge.

Kabelo: call your son.

Zuzile calls Mvelo's phone but it rings unanswered.

Zuzile: he's not answering.

Kabelo: this boy is testing my patience for real now. and since when do we keep things from each other.

Zuzile: I didn't want you to worry about something that wasn't important. I'm sorry, it won't happen again.

She says walking out on him, leaving him stunned. Zuzile's sudden outbursts of different emotions were concerning to them. They had outlined it and told her about it but she felt she was fine. He tracks his car and finds it in Hibberdene but just sighs out loud and goes to tend to his sulking wife.

Mvelo

ENGAGED! That's what I get when I confess my feelings to the friend of the love of my life. She's fucking engaged! So much for the first of March. Who knew being 20 would come with such shit, sometimes I wonder why I'm still alive. I'm at my favourite bar and I'm planning on getting wasted to the point of forgetting my name. My phone has been ringing non-stop, mom, dad and Ntswaki are calling me. As soon as I walk into the bar, I sit next to this white lady. She turns around and faces me and smiles but the first thing I see are her blue eyes and I think of Paloma. She starts talking to me but my mind is set on Paloma. Here I am sitting in a bar, listening to a lady talk and talk while she sits at home, all alone. Yes she might be with my parents but she's not with her parents. I grab my car keys and stand up heading to the door.

Lady: hey, where are you going.

Me: to my daughter.

The disappointment on her face is priceless but I get in my car and drive like a maniac heading home. I realise the time is 22:00 and she's always asleep at this time. When I get there, I go to her nursery but I stop in my tracks when I see mom and Ntswaki sitting down with Ntswaki on the rocking chair and Paloma in her arms.

Mom: Mvelo hamba, phuma please, I don't want to see your face.

Me: I'm sorry mom.

Mom: sorry for what Mvelwenhle uhh. Lengane ayinamama, uwena uma wayo uwena baba wayo manje muwenzala lamasimba owenzayo ucabanga ukuthi izukhula kanjani ingane? Ungangicasuli mina bandla. Phuma bo.

The look of sadness of Ntswaki's face combined with the look of disappointment on my mom's face is enough for me to want to kill myself. I drag myself out the room and slid down on the wall and buried my head in my knees. My mother's words really cut my heart and she's right. My Paloma's doesn't deserve this kind of treatment, she's just innocent and she shouldn't suffer because of me. I heard the door opening but I never lifted my head.

Mom: wena yeka lento yakho yokuhlukumeza ingane. Nxx, uzongidina ebusuku nje.

She says walking away, breaking my heart even more. I stand and go back to the nursery where Ntswaki and Paloma are sitting.

Ntswaki: you can go, once she falls asleep, I'll let myself out.

Me: don't do this Ntswaki.

Ntswaki: don't do what Mvelo. You know I don't understand you. You shout and scream at me then you walk out on me, now you're here trying to apologise. Mvelo, what goes on in your head, are you okay in the head?

Me: Ntswaki I meant every word I said earlier, I love you.

She keeps quiet and looks at Paloma.

Me: please say something.

Ntswaki: what do you want me to say.

Me: I don't know, anything, just please say something.

She keeps quiet again.

Ntswaki: I do have something to say Mvelwenhle and I hope you understand. You and I will never happen okay. I will marry Dumisani and neither you or anyone is going to stop me. I don't want you doing anything to jeopardise this for me...

Me: do you love him?

I cut her off but she doesn't answer me, she just looks at Paloma's little hands.

Me: I think I know my answer. thank you for being here and I promise you, I'll try my best to be a good father to Paloma.

I kiss her forehead and kiss Paloma's then head for the door. I turn and look at her and she wipes a tear from her eye quickly then I walk away.

Chapter 18

"How do you heal a broken heart that feels like it won't ever work again?"

I wake up expecting my mom and my siblings to walk in singing happy birthday but nothing. That is normally the tradition for birthdays here at home. I check my phone and there are tons of messages from people wishing me a happy birthday. It's not really a happy one for me. my first birthday without my Bubbies and exactly 2 years ago, she gave me the greatest gift. I take her ashes and hold them tightly.

Me: it's my birthday today, my first one without you. I miss you. I feel so miserable, I mean you were my source of joy. You are probably angry at me for being a terrible person and horrible father to our little dove but I promise you, I'll try my best. I love you Bubbies.

I kiss the urn and put it back on the shelf then I make my bed and take a long cold shower. While I'm showering, there's a knock on the door. I close the water.

Me: who is it.

Mom: come down for breakfast.

I hear her footsteps walking out and I carry on showering. When I finish, I get dressed in my navy tracksuit with socks and push ins. I walk to Paloma's room and I find that she's not there so I go down for breakfast. They are all sitting in the lounge with some old people and Yolanda. I greet them then pass, going to the kitchen and I find Phelo.

Phelo: your breakfast is in the microwave.

I nod and take a bottle of water from the fridge and an apple then go walk out the kitchen. When I get by the stairs, dad calls me.

Dad: you done eating?

Me: I'm not hungry.

Dad: come sit.

They're all looking at me then I slowly make my way to the couch. Mom has Paloma in her arms, feeding her.

Dad: son, this is Mr Motaung, Yolanda's father.

I nod with my nose starting to sweat.

Dad: Yolanda tells us that you slept with her, is it true.

I'm not scared of these people in front of me, I'm afraid of my dad because I can slowly see his eyes changing.

Me: yes.

I hear mom scoff in disbelief and I look at her.

Me: I never forced her to do anything.

Mr Motaung: you still slept with my daughter and took her innocence.

Me: innocence? She wasn't a virgin.

Yolanda looks down now it's my turn to scoff. Mom kicks the side of my foot at warning.

Dad: Mvelo what are you trying to say?

Me: exactly that.

Mr Motaung: you are very rude boy.

I look at mom and dad in disbelief.

Me: really, you two aren't going to believe me?

They keep quiet so I turn back to Mr Motaung.

Me: listen sir, you may call me disrespectful or rude but I'm still in my parent's home and I have the right to defend myself if being accused of something I do not know of. I've been with a virgin before and I know how to tell. She wasn't one of them. Mom and dad, I won't sit here being accused of something I didn't do, mom you were here when everything happened, she herself confessed to what she did. the mother of my child died angry at me because of you.

I stand and I take Paloma from my mom's arms, making her wake up and cry. She follows me as I walk upstairs to Paloma's room.

Mom: Mvelwenhle!

I ignore her and strap a crying Paloma in her car seat.

Mom: Mvelo what are you doing.

Me: I'm leaving.

Mom: going where Mvelo, no please stay!

Me: have you bothered to ask me how I am! You all don't care about me, I'm always wrong in your eyes!

Mom: Mvelo that's not true, please just calm down, please.

Me: then what is? You are able to say I disgust you but you forget that today is my birthday. Can you please move out the way.

She standing by the door in tears and I have Paloma's baby bag and car seat in my hands.

Mom: I'm sorry.

Me: please move.

I push her lightly and I leave the room. I go to mine and take my car keys and go.

.....

I'm driving with no direction, I'm just driving. I keep stealing glances of Paloma at the back and she's sleeping so peacefully. I regret saying those things to mom but I was angry and hurt. I kind of have the need for some sort of attention from her, like she used to before. I guess all I need is family right now because I end up in Amanzimtoti, by my grandparent's house. When I enter the gate, I see mummy standing by the sliding door looking at the car drive up. the maid comes and helps me with Paloma and we make our way inside the house. I find granny and mummy sitting in the lounge and they are ecstatic to see me and finally meet Paloma.

Granny: Mvelo, she's beautiful, uyena lo tetema kakhulu?

Me: (Laughs) she doesn't cry all the time, she's a good girl actually, she only cries when she's not feeling good.

She's not even listening to me, she's busy playing and holding Paloma, trying to make her wake up. Mummy is just quiet, she's gazing at Paloma and sometimes shifts and looks at me. she's probably sensing the tension and anger in my heart, she is a sangoma anyways.

Granny: we've missed you all, why didn't you bring your siblings?

Me: I really wasn't planning on coming here, I guess I just followed the wind.

Granny: why, is everything okay?

Me: yes, I'm okay. where's grandpa?

Granny: he's at the office.

Me: but isn't he sick?

Granny: he is but he's stubborn and I couldn't stop him from going.

Me: it's a Mfusi thing.

Granny: I hope you're not like that.

Me: no, not at all.

I feel soft hands on mine and I look up and meet mummy's gaze.

Mummy: happy birthday son.

Me: thank you mummy.

I kiss her hand softly. if you didn't know her, you'd think she was crazy because when she see's something, she just zones out and becomes so weird. Granny smiles and wishes me as well, indicating that they had also forgotten, like the rest.

Mummy: come, I want us to talk.

I don't know why but I look to granny for assurance and she nods. I help her up and we walk to her bedroom. She stays here with granny and grandpa because they believe she's safer with them. She's never been married and has no children and I still find that hard to believe. She sits me on the bed and settles on the chair next to me, taking my hand in hers.

Mummy: how are you?

Me: I'm good.

Mummy: you know there's no need to lie to me right?

I nod, feeling kind of frightened of what might happen.

Mummy: talk to me. why are you here?

Me: I fought with mom.

Mummy: tell me more, I want to know.

Me: there's a girl, she worked for us at home and she had feelings for me. once, I was angry, I slipped up and I entertained her, I ended up engaging in sexual activities with her.

I stop and clear my throat. I'm literally word vomiting right now and I can't stop myself.

Me: she was at home today with her parents and claims that I took her virginity when I know exactly that I did no such and the fact that they don't believe me when I say so hurts me.

She stands and comes to sit next to me. she indicates that I should place my head on her lap so I do so and she runs her hands in my hair softly and I feel my eyes getting heavy.

Mummy: how's your relationship with Kabelo? I know you two have had a tough one these past few years?

Me: yazi I feel like he understands me more than mom does these days. She's just turned on me. I feel like she's angry at me for what happened with Isa. First it was the cold shoulder when she died, then she wanted to send me away now she's just plain mean to me. I'm not used to this kind of treatment, especially from her.

Mummy: let me tell you son, your mom is going through something herself, she's not going to be as nice as you expect her or as she usually is but I promise you, kuzodlula and the blessing that will follow are going to be abundant and beautiful.

I sigh out and she just runs her soft hands on my scalp. She's speaking in riddles and I'm just tired of this. Tired of this treatment from my mom especially.

Mummy: forgive her my baby.

Me: I love her mummy and I want to understand but she's really not making things easy for me.

She runs her fingers behind my ears down to my neck, triggering something in my heart, making me want to cry out. I flinch and she chuckles.

Mummy: how does that feel?

Me: it makes me want to cry. Like something in my heart is breaking.

Mummy: tell me about Amohelang's mother.

She's still massaging the same spot and I feel tears stinging my eyes.

Me: she was the love of my life. I loved her and I wanted to spend the rest of my life loving her but she left me.

Mummy: cry.

I don't want to cry, I hate crying because it makes me come across as weak and in this family, the men don't cry. At least that's what my grandpa told me.

Mummy: forget what they tell you my son, they are not here, it's just me and you. I want you to...

She presses down on my chest and on my neck.

Mummy: put away the pride and let this lump out.

She presses harder, making the tears in my eyes fall onto her lap and my strained voice come out. She then let's go and rubs my back and I sob.

Mummy: talk to me.

Me: (sobbing) she was my everything, my world and she left me. we had so many plans together mummy. We wanted to travel the world and just raise our daughter. We were happy.

Mummy: what about now?

Me: I miss her, I just wish she was here with me.

Mummy: but you're in love with someone.

She's going on about Ntswaki. I just keep quiet and sniff as tears make their way down my face.

Mummy: am I lying?

Me: no, no you're not.

Mummy: tell me about her.

Me: she's beautiful mummy. She's beautiful in every way, she's kind and caring, she's down to earth and she just has this sparkle in her eye. It draws me to her.

Mummy: did you tell her you feel this way?

Me: yes I did but I regret it.

Mummy: why?

Me: first of all, I know people wouldn't approve of us, she's 4 years older than me and she was Isa's good friend.

Mummy: Isa is Amo's mom?

Me: yes. She's also engaged to be married to my mother's business partner.

Mummy: lomfana wakwa Gumede?

Me: yes.

Mummy: kanti unangaki yena?

Me: almost Bab' Msizi's age.

Mummy: and she's?

Me: turning 24.

She keeps quiet I guess trying to digest what I've just said.

Mummy: she's sounds like a lovely person and I think she just has a lot to think about.

Me: I think I'm going to keep my distance from her.

Mummy: why?

Me: she was Isa's friend, that wouldn't look okay.

She keeps quiet and starts brushing my back slowly.

Mummy: son, I'm going to tell you this and I want it engraved inside of your brain and in your heart.

I nod, tears already making their way down my cheeks. Her touch just triggers something in my heart.

Mummy: Amohelang's mother loved you, and you loved her too, you still do futhi but she's not here, akekho la. Everything happens for a reason and a purpose and she served her purpose her on earth, it being giving you your beautiful daughter and showing you what true love is.

I break into a loud sob and she rocks me back and forth like a baby.

Mummy: God always does things for a reason. This girl didn't just show up because of coincidence but because it was meant to be. God knew she was going to take her away from you so He sent this girl to Amo's mother, indirectly telling her to approve of her, indirectly giving her the task of mending your broken heart because He knew it was bound to break. It's not your fault my boy, it's nobody's fault but it's God's will.

I clutch onto her skirt and I cry my lungs out, letting her words sink into my heart and head.

Narrated

Kabelo and Zuzile are in the lounge, Kabelo just paid R10000 to the Motaung's for the damage Mvelo allegedly caused to their daughter. They then told them to leave because they had to now look for Mvelo and Paloma. Zuzile tried to call him but he left his phone in his room.

Zuzile: are you finding something?

She says in a annoyed angry voice.

Kabelo: don't speak to me like that.

Zuzile: you're starting Kabelo? Really, you really want to do this now.

She's now pacing up and down the room looking at her husband with an annoyed look.

Kabelo: I don't know what happened to your manners because these days you tend to forget that I'm not your friend. Get that into your head Lethukuthula.

She just clicks her tongue and walks up the stairs but stops midway.

Zuzile: find my son and my granddaughter. Don't come back without them.

Kabelo: (Mumbling) I won't come back at all.

Zuzile: (Shouting) khulumela phezulu ngikuzwe!

Kabelo: I'll find them.

She carries on with her journey up the stairs, leaving Kabelo shocked. He finds his car is in Amanzimtoti so he grabs his keys and drives out. In 45 minutes, he's there and when he enters the living room, he sees his mother sitting with a sleeping Paloma but something else alerts him.

Ma' Ruth: sit down.

Kabelo: where's Mvelo?

Ma' Ruth: you barge into my house, you don't greet but you can ask me dumb questions.

Kabelo: mom, I really don't have time. I'm sorry for not greeting and whatever else you said I did but where is Mvelo.

Mvelo cries from the other room and Kabelo rushes to Thuli's room and bangs on the door.

Kabelo: please open up! mummy!

Ma' Ruth: Kabelo, suka la you are going to disturb them.

She grabs his arm and drags him back to the lounge where he sits on the couch looking defeated.

Ma' Ruth: he's okay, they're just talking.

Kabelo: but why is he crying like that.

Ma' Ruth: because he's human and he should be given the right to cry when he's hurting. Hold Amo, I'm going to make her a bottle.

He takes his granddaughter and sighs out loud. Meanwhile, in the bedroom, Mvelo has calmed down and Thuli is on the floor, praying. When she's finished, she lights two candles and starts speaking to them and the smoke suddenly fills the room.

Thuli: son, you are going to talk to these candles. Pour your heart out to them, just like you did with me. whatever your heart desires.

He nods and goes to bend by the candles. Thuli walks out and leaves him looking at the candles.

Mvelo: to Isabelle, please forgive me for the pain and hurt you caused me, knowing that you died angry at me kills me inside and it probably adds on to the amount of pain and suffering I feel. I love you so very much and I will love you always but you're not here with me. I've fallen in love with someone else and all I would ever ask from you is to give me your blessing. This may end badly but I will go through with it because you taught me never to doubt my feelings and underestimate the power of the heart. Your blessing would mean the world to me Bubbies, just any type of sign, I will honour and keep your decision. I'm tired of having this anger in my heart, it's not who I want to be for our daughter, help me to soften my heart again.

He gets off his knees and wipes his tears, sighing a great sigh of distress. He walks out to the lounge and sees his father sitting with Paloma. He goes to settle next to his grandmother and she gives him a side hug.

Kabelo: Mvelo, we need to go, your mother is very worried about you.

He just nods, feeling defeated, he knows there's no point in trying to fight with them because he's never going to win.

Mvelo: can you please take Paloma with you.

Kabelo: okay, but don't be home too late.

He nods and places a kiss on Paloma's forehead and says goodbye to his grandparents then he leaves.

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Back at the Mfusi residence, Zuzile is in the kitchen preparing dinner when Kabelo walks in with Paloma, coming from Amanzimtoti.

Zuzile: oh thank goodness you're back. You don't even call me...

Kabelo walks past her, leaving her upset. He goes to tuck in Paloma then goes back to the kitchen to fetch himself a beer. Before he can open it, Zuzile snatches it from him roughly.

Zuzile: I was talking to you.

Kabelo: you are annoying Zuzile, what's your deal vele?

She dramatically opens her eyes at him and she feels tears stinging her eyes.

Zuzile: I'm annoying?

Kabelo: yes, you are getting on my last nerve.

Her tears drop so he just takes his beer and walks to the lounge. At first, she stands there too stunned to go but she goes back to her senses and marches to the lounge then she smashes the TV with the wooden spoon that was in her hand. Kabelo stands up so fast, she starts moving back because she's scared. he looks very angry now.

Kabelo: what for?

Zuzile: (Crying) you said I get on your last nerve Kabelo, how do you speak to your wife like that.

Kabelo: are you sure you're okay, like really okay. do you want me to take you to a mental institution because you're really changing on me. Our son is broken because of you!

Zuzile: No! no I'm not crazy.

Helo and Ntsakisi run down the stairs to see what's going on.

Helo: mom, dad what's going on?

Kabelo: Khauhelo upstairs, NOW!

Helo: but dad...

Kabelo: GO!

They run up the stairs, surprised to see their father this livid. Kabelo points a finger at Zuzile as she whimpers.

Kabelo: You, my study at 22:00. I think I need to teach you some manners. Nxx.

He walks away, leaving Zuzile sobbing. When Helo and Ntsakisi hear the door close in Kabelo's study, they nudge each other and rush downstairs to check if their mother is okay. when they see her sitting on the floor sobbing they rush to her.

NJ: mommy, are you okay? did dad hurt you.

Zuzile: (Sobbing) no my babies, I'm okay. daddy didn't hurt me.

They kiss the side of her head.

Zuzile: go finish your homework, I'll call you when supper is ready.

Them: okay.

They help her up and they make their way back upstairs while she finishes up with dinner. As she is setting the table, Mvelo walks in with his eyes barely open. When he left Amanimtoti, he went to buy weed and has been smoking it. as a result, he's stoned. Zuzile looks at him concerned.

Zuzile: baby.

Mvelo: I'm baby now.

Zuzile: Mvelo I'm sorry. I guess I seem to be getting on everyone's bad side these days.

She sniffs and looks away. Mvelo just walks up leaving her to deal with her fucked up emotions. When she's done setting the table, she goes to call Helo, Ntsakisi and Lindelwa.

Zuzile: Helo, please go call your father and Mvelo for dinner.

Helo: yes mom.

Zuzile walks to Paloma's room and picks her up. she goes to make her bottle then goes to sit at the table when everyone is sitting. Zuzile keeps staring at Kabelo who is paying her no attention. Everyone is just silent with only the clatter of the cutlery hitting the plates. Mvelo is the first one to get up and leave the room, followed by Kabelo who follows him to his room. When he enters, he's welcomed by smoke.

Kabelo: boy, you're smoking in my house.

Mvelo: yes.

He gestures that he should take the joint so he does and sits on the chair next to the bed and takes a pull and puffs out a lot of smoke. Mvelo is kind of shocked that his father is smoking with him but he pays no mind to it and lights another one.

Kabelo: your mother is stressing me out.

Mvelo: she's stressing all of us out.

Kabelo: yerr man!

He pulls again and looks up to the ceiling and puffs it out, making Mvelo chuckle lazily.

Kabelo: she threw a spoon at the TV today.

Mvelo: mummy says we should forgive her, she's not doing on purpose.

Kabelo: I told her to take a pregnancy test and she refused.

Mvelo: no, no dad, she's not pregnant, ukuguga. It's menopause.

Kabelo: ayy uguga kambi.

The burst out in laughter like two idiots.

Kabelo: she was exactly like this when she was pregnant with Ntsakisi.

Mvelo: but she can't fall pregnant right?

Kabelo: she can, she just can't carry the baby full term.

Mvelo: then maybe she knows she's pregnant, she just doesn't want to get attached to a baby she won't meet.

Kabelo: that's smart.

They both keep quiet, just thinking of the possibilities of Zuzile being pregnant.

Mvelo: so she could be pregnant.

Kabelo: maybe. And if she isn't already, she'll fall pregnant tonight.

He says smirking, putting out the joint.

Mvelo: sies dad.

Kabelo: (Laughs) get a fuck buddy if you're really lonely.

Mvelo: I don't need one.

Kabelo: tswai. Nc nc nc.

He says laughing while heading to the door.

Mvelo: (Laughing) good night dad.

Kabelo: Good night boy.

He walks out and goes straight to the study where he waits for his wife to come. He looks at the clock and it reads 21:45. He pours himself whiskey and as he settles down on his chair, there's a knock on the door then Zuzile walks in looking flushed, her chubby cheeks pink and her top lip between her teeth. She stands next to the book shelf that is mounted near the door with her hands behind her back and her face looking down. she's wearing a green maxi dress and push ins. She can feel Kabelo's gaze on her but she's scared to shift from the corner.

Kabelo: Ma' Mfusi.

She looks up and looks at Kabelo. His expression is unreadable and her heart is beating out of her chest. She looks at the space between him and his desk, trying to avoid eye contact with him as much as possible.

Kabelo: woza la muntu wami.

She slowly walks to him while he also stands from the desk and comes towards her. When they meet in the centre of the office, Kabelo places his big hands on her petite shoulders and uses his index finger to lift her chin. She's now shivering and Kabelo notices.

Kabelo: don't be scared, why are you shivering?

He gently rubs his hands up and down her arms, in attempt to warm her up. he bends down and his face is in direct contact with her ear.

Kabelo: I want you to take off your clothes okay.

His warm breath runs down her neck, sending tingles all over, making her tenderloins dance. He walks up to the book shelf and opens the knob that opens the door to their Red Room while Zuzile slowly takes off her dress and leaves her shoes by the floor then walks to the entrance with just her panty. As she walks down the steps, Kabelo looks at her until she disappears into the darkness. He says a short prayer and follows behind her. When he enters, he switches on the lights and places his hands on her shoulders from the back and runs his fingers down her back. He whispers in her ear again.

Kabelo: hair.

She wraps her braids into a bun then she turns to look at her husband.

Kabelo: why did you turn around?

He's still whispering.

Zuzile: I want to see you.

Kabelo: but I didn't say so. Turn around, panties off and bend down.

She turns around then holds the side of her panties and slides them down, leaving them by her ankles. She then bends down just like she was told, putting her fingers on her toes. He holds onto her waist and spanks her bum, making her moan with congenial pain.

Kabelo: when I speak you listen and when I say, you do. Understood.

Zuzile: yes sir.

Kabelo: good girl. Now stand up and go lie down over there.

He points to the bed so she goes there and lies on her back. Kabelo takes off his shirt and makes his way to the bed. He ties her wrists to the poles and cuffs her ankles to an adjustable rod. He then spreads her legs so far apart it makes her gasp. He puts his index finger on her toe then looks at her directly.

Kabelo: I'll start here, all the way up to here.

He runs his finger up her leg, to her inner thigh until he's in direct contact with her clitoris. She moans and wiggles when he starts drawing circles.

Kabelo: you move or you moan, I start again.

Zuzile: yes sir.

He plants wet kisses from her foot all the way to her thighs, biting, licking and kissing her. When he gets to her inner thighs, she lets out a moan and Kabelo just chuckles and moves back to her foot.

Zuzile: Mfusi, don't do this.

Kabelo: rules, you moan, I start again.

The way he holds her bum in his hands drives her insane but she bites her lip to stop from moaning. He finally reaches the clit and starts rubbing it with his thumb with his

long tongue inside of her. The way he rubs her makes it hard for her to suppress the moan so she moans and tries to free her hands, only hurting her wrists.

Kabelo: shh, stop moving, you'll hurt yourself.

Zuzile: Please untie me, I want to touch you.

Kabelo: you can't touch me. this is your punishment.

He blows hot air onto her clit and she cries out. He replaces his tongue with his fingers and moves in and out, in and out quickly. She curls her toes and clenches her walls, meaning she's going to have an orgasm so he removes his fingers and he starts undoing the knots on her ankles as she cries silently.

Kabelo: how was that?

He says looking at her with a huge smirk on his face while she cries.

Zuzile: please don't do this to me Mfusi.

Kabelo: I'm very parched my love. Will you get me my favourite cognac in the cellar.

Zuzile: untie me.

She says with a bit of attitude in her voice. He scoffs and walks away and comes back with anal beads and kneels in front of her vagina. He puts one in and her breathing hitches. He put in two more and she moans. He then starts untying her and she stands up but remembers the beads and crosses her legs.

Kabelo: your robe is by the door.

He climbs on the bed while Zuzile looks at him with a green eye. She walks to door and puts on the robe then she walks out the study. When she gets to the bottom of the stairs, she finds Helo and Ntsakisi sitting in the lounge watching TV.

Zuzile: why aren't you two sleeping, it's a school night.

NJ: we aren't going.

Helo: yes we are not.

Zuzile: why not.

Helo: because you and dad are fighting and we can't leave you two alone.

Zuzile: you two are crazy, go upstairs and sleep before I smack some sense into th...

She was shouting and the beads inside of her were massaging her loins. Her face started turning pink and her kids started looking concerned.

NJ: mom, are you okay?

Zuzile: yes, I'm fine. Go to bed.

They stand up and go upstairs then she walks slowly to the cellar. She gets the cognac and journeys back upstairs, trying to hold them in while they rub against her inner walls. As soon as she gets to the Red Room, she drops them and she breathes out a big sigh of relief.

Kabelo: who said release?

Zuzile: I'm sorry.

Kabelo: why don't you respect me?

Zuzile: I do respect you my love.

Kabelo: but you treat me like I'm your friend. Am I your friend? Do I look like your friend?

Zuzile: no Mfusi.

Kabelo: drop the robe and come here.

She takes off the robe after putting the cognac on the table and walks towards her husband. He makes her lie on his lap with her bum in the air and spansks her once.

Kabelo: ikuphi inkinga?

Zuzile: nothing is wrong Mthiyane.

Kabelo: spread your legs.

She does and he grabs a vibrator from the pedestal and puts it on the entrance and she draws in air. she then opens her legs a bit wider and he slowly pushes it in, making her move in sync with the rhythm of his thrusting.

Kabelo: my name.

Zuzile: Mfusi, ahh, mmmh. Ohh Mthiyane wami.

He spansks her once again making her chuckle lazily...

Chapter 19

Mvelo

Coming home stoned was something I wasn't planning on doing really. I was supposed to go see Ntswaki but something told me not to go and as a result, I found myself at a drug house buying weed. At least I had some fun on my birthday. This

thing with mom is getting more serious because she's now starting to get physical. So I've kind of accepted that she is pregnant, she's just scared to tell us because the baby won't live long. I can see it's affecting dad because he's kind of caught in the middle of me and her. After taking a shower, I went to kiss my baby good night then I went back to bed. Just as I was about to doze off, Helo and Ntsakisi barge in.

Me: aibo aibo! Get out I'm sleeping.

Helo: your room smells like weed, I'll tell mom you were smoking in here.

Me: what's your problem?

NJ: we're worried about mom and dad.

Me: they're fine now get out.

Instead of leaving, they get into my bed and push me to the middle.

Me: you two don't have any respect.

Helo: you aren't taking us seriously.

NJ: I'm sure you know what's going between them, we're seriously worried.

Helo: we don't want them getting divorced.

Me: here you are again with that word. I told you that won't happen. I can't tell you what exactly is going on but I can tell you not to worry about them getting divorced.

NJ: how sure?

Me: 100% sure brats. You two were supposed to be twins ngoba ninesicefe shame.

Helo: but you love us!

She plants a big wet kiss on my cheek.

NJ: sis, I'm sure you noticed mom was acting strange.

Helo: I did...

Me: wait, what time is it. you two have school tomorrow.

Them: we aren't going!

They both chorus sounding equally annoyed.

Me: why?

Helo: because we are worried about mom and dad and we won't leave them alone.

Me: Khauhelo mom is going to kill you.

Helo: ha! She won't. she couldn't even shout at us when she saw us downstairs.

Ntsakisi laughs and Helo joins him.

Me: share the joke.

NJ: she walked down the stairs and her face was pink and when she tried to shout, something happened, I don't know what but the look on her face was very funny.

Me: what was she doing downstairs?

NJ: I don't know but she had a bottle of whiskey.

Helo: only dad drinks whiskey.

Me: what was she wearing?

Helo: a robe.

The only conclusion I can come to right now is that they are having sex, I mean dad did say.

Me: they're having a party.

NJ: and why aren't we invited.

Helo: it's an adult party, no children are allowed.

NJ: so they're having sex.

He rolls his eyes and Helo nods. These two are too smart for their age, that I can tell you. Imagine, Helo is only 13 and Ntsakisi is only 12. At their age, I didn't want to utter the word out of my mouth. I only started being corrupt in high school when I met Sydney or when Muzi made lose my virginity at his matric dance. Ohh good times.

Me: hambani manje, you two talk too much.

Helo: I'm sleeping here.

NJ: count me out.

He says getting out of bed. He bids us goodnight and leaves. I'm sure he has wet dreams, at this age, they are a problem. Helo lays her head on my chest and we doze off. I'm woken up by the most painful boner in history. I slowly remove Helo from my chest and I go to take a cold shower. I haven't gotten laid since last year November. Imagine! Dad was right, I need a fuck buddy because salt, it's bad. After my shower, I wake Helo up so she can get ready for school. I know mom won't buy the whole story they're spinning for not wanting to go to school. She's grumpy but wakes up and takes a shower. When I'm finished, I go to wake Ntsakisi and Lindelwa. As I'm about to take Lindelwa to bath, I run into dad and he's already dressed for work.

Me: good morning.

Dad: good morning son.

Me: where's mom?

Dad: she's sleeping. Clocked in late, she's feeling a little fatigued.

I roll my eyes and he laughs. He pats my shoulder and walks down the stairs while I carry Lindelwa to give her a bath. After everyone's finished getting ready, Dad takes them to school and I drive to my lectures. I'm really not a big fan of school, I've never liked it. It's even worse now that I'm doing something I don't love. After attending 3 lectures in the morning, I drive out to buy lunch when I run into Isa's mother. I feel my blood boil. I hate her so much for what she did to my bubbies, I mean she didn't even have the decency to attend the funeral for goodness sake. She doesn't see me because I'm behind her. As I'm walking towards her, my phone rings and Ntswaki is calling me.

Me: hello.

She keeps quiet but I can hear her breathing on the other end of the line.

Me: Ntswaki?

Ntswaki: (Whispering) he's gone.

Me: who's gone?

Ntswaki: my brother, they killed him, they killed my Tebello.

She's not crying but the hurt in her voice is evident. I walk out the restaurant in a hurry.

Me: where are you?

Ntswaki: I'm at home.

Me: I'm on my way there now.

I don't wait for her to reply, I drop the phone and drive to her brother's house. I call her and she comes out, looking so drained and hurt. She gets in the car and greets.

Ntswaki: you didn't have to come.

Me: you didn't sound okay over the phone, I was worried about you. What's wrong?

Ntswaki: my brother was murdered.

I looked at her and she didn't even shed a single tear.

Ntswaki: he's been missing for almost a month then his killers send us his head. How is that humane Mvelo.

I swallow my spit as I think of that night Dad and Uncle Siyanda murdered that guy at the warehouse.

Ntswaki: it's unfair.

I hold her hand in mine and turn her to face and her eyes are glassy with tears welling up in them.

Me: don't hold them back, cry if you have to. It will get better I promise. I know it's not easy but it will pass.

She drops her tears and I wipe her them with my thumb. I look at her lips and they look so perfect. I look back into her eyes and she's looking at mine. She's so close to my face, we are sharing the same breath and it feels magical. I brush them slowly and softly then she closes her eyes. As I move closer and closer, I feel my heart racing and my palms sweating. I press my lips on hers but the moment is ruined

when someone bangs on the window, causing her to startle. I roll down my window and a dark lady stands there, looking inside the car suspiciously.

Lady: lumela.

Me: hello.

Lady: I was told to come ask who you came to here?

I sit back in my chair, giving her a clear view of Ntswaki and she gives an even more apprehensive look.

Ntswaki: Gladys?

Gladys: Nyakallo is been looking for you. Come now.

She walks away and Ntswaki sighs heavily, leaning back into her seat. Her tears make their way down her face. I take her hand in mine and kiss the back of it.

Ntswaki: I'm so angry at them Mvelo, I can't even look at them.

Me: don't blame them, it was out of their control...

Ntswaki: no, there's no such. They vowed to take care of each other and for their youngest brother to be killed so brutally, it's painful. It's so painful.

I pull her and hold her tightly and she sobs softly on my shoulder. I feel so guilty, it's freaking me out. I think of the man that was killed and mutilated in front of me and I can't help but feel like I was part of it, like I was involved in the murder.

Ntswaki: thank you for being here. I really needed a friend.

I feel my heart break a bit when she says I'm a friend. After a while, she gets out the car and leaves. I put my head on the steering wheel and sigh.

Me: I asked for a sign, not confusion.

I start the car and drive back to campus. I had an opportunity to confront Connie but I let it slip for a 'friend'. When the day ends, I go home and I find mom sleeping in the lounge with Paloma in her rocking chair, sleeping too. I kiss her head and as I'm about to walk out, mom calls my name.

Mom: Mvelwenhle, come here.

I go sit next to her.

Mom: look son, I'm sorry for being hard on you these past few days. I know you're going through a lot and you don't need any more stress. I promise my son, I'll try my best but please forgive me.

Me: it's okay mom, I understand. I'll forgive you on one condition though.

Mom: anything.

Me: please take a pregnancy test.

Mom: okay, I will. Although I know I'm not pregnant, I will for you okay.

I nod and she hugs me. when she pulls away, she becomes serious and looks at me.

Mom: one more thing.

Me: yes.

Mom: stay away from Ntswaki.

She's mad if she thinks I'll do that.

Me: ngingakwenza konke mah but not that.

Mom: I'm not joking Mvelo. For your safety, stay away from her. Please.

Me: why should I?

Mom: because she's an engaged woman.

Me: so now I can't be friends with Ntswaki because she's engaged to your friend, who happens to be twice her age by the way. How is that fair mom?

Mom: Dumisani was here Mvelo and he wasn't really thrilled about your friendship. Dumisani is a sweet person but you shouldn't push his buttons.

Me: what's the worst thing he'll do to me? will he kill me? if yes then he can go ahead but I'm not going to stop my friendship with her because a middle aged man is jealous. She wouldn't agree to this herself.

Mom: unenkani kombe wena.

Me: it's not happening, that's klaar.

I stand up and leave the room feeling a bit angry at this whole issue. He's really willing to go this far, I mean I'm not even fighting with him. I try getting some knowledge into my brain when I get to my room but it's really hard to concentrate with this buzzing in my ear. I take my pods and I work until late. I wake up when I hear the door opening and I realise that I fell asleep with my head on the table. I look up and dad is standing there, he looks really frightening so I sit up straight and look at him.

Dad: we need to go.

Me: where?

Dad: there's a problem at the warehouse.

Oh no, not this again. I dread going to that place, it has a bad vibe to it, obviously it will have a bad vibe to it, he kills people for a living. Imagining that head roll down to the ground still makes me gag. I stand up and drag my feet to the bathroom and I wash my face. Again, I see Isa standing behind me when I look in the mirror. This doesn't scare me anymore because I always see her when I look in this mirror. It appears as if she's behind me but when I turn around, she's never there. something's different today, she's not smiling. She looks disappointed in me. I splash my face with water then I wipe it dry then turn and walk back to the room, totally ignoring her. I'm really not strong enough to go through all of this, where do I even begin to explain that I'm seeing my dead girlfriend in my bathroom mirror to other people. It's insane so I decide to keep it to myself instead. I change to more comfortable clothes then I make my way downstairs. I'm surprised to find everyone at the dinner table having supper. Dad stands up and mom looks at him like she's begging him to stay.

Mom: Mvelo, come sit down.

Dad: he's going with me.

She nods looking defeated and dad gives her a kiss on the forehead then kisses the girls. He hands me the keys and walks out first. When I get to the car, I find him sitting there with his hands in his hair. I drive off and the whole way, he's just silent, he looks like he's thinking hard about something. When we get there, he tells me to stay in the lounge and he goes to the basement and I just sit there for about an hour, just twiddling my thumbs. He comes back looking angrier than before, and even more scarier. He signals me to follow him and we go to where I'm assuming he was. In this room, there are piles of boxes, 3 girls, two guys and Sbusiso was also there.

Dad: this coke has to be checked, measured, packaged and sent out by 03:00 in the morning.

They all nod but I'm just as confused as it can get. They all start opening the boxes and I just stood there.

Dad: why are you standing?

Me: I've never done this before, I can't just jump.

He folds his fists and breathes out. He then walks in front of me so I follow him. he takes a brick of it and opens it with a knife. He takes some and sniffs it and I look at him looking even more petrified of him. this person really has a screw missing in his brain, I mean, cocaine is highly addictive and he sniffs it like there's nothing wrong. It's true when they say you see something new every day. He shows me how it's measured then packages it. it's going to be a long night.

.....

When I wake up, I see mom sitting on my bed looking so lost in her thoughts. I find this to be very weird because she's in my room, why is she in my room? I sit up and I guess that brings her back to life because she looks at me and gives a faint smile.

Mom: did I wake you?

Me: no, are you okay?

Mom: I'm worried about your father. Your grandfather is in hospital and it's not looking good. We have to drive down today.

Grandpa has been sick for a while now but he didn't want to stay in hospital or get any help.

Me: where is dad?

Mom: in his study, he's been there since this morning.

She sighs and I pull her into a hug. Why isn't there any peace in my life it's always something that's going to ruin my peace.

Me: I'll try and talk to him mom, don't worry.

Mom: thank you son.

She kisses my forehead and walks out. I gather my shit and I stroll to the third floor. I don't know what I'm going to say to him because I don't really know what the cause of his frustration is. It could be many things, including the saga from last night. I've never seen him this crazy mad, he was a ticking time bomb. I open the door and I'm greeted by smoke. In actual fact, the whole room is filled with smoke, it smells like weed. Through the smoke, I find him lying on the couch facing the ceiling. I sit on the opposite couch and look at him.

Me: Kabelo.

Dad: ubatlang?

Me: mom is worried about you.

Dad: tell her to calm her ovaries, I'm fine.

Me: you're not.

Dad: ahh suit yourself.

He's high. I can tell from the way he's speaking to me, he would've slapped me long ago for calling him by name.

Me: look baba, I'm not here to beg you to talk to me, I'm here to tell you that you need to pull yourself together and get whatever it is that is bothering you and shove it up your ass because we need to go and see your father, he's sick.

He sat up so quickly he gave me the scariest look on the planet, I swear I almost shit myself. I move back and his eyes soften and he chuckles.

Dad: I'm glad you still remember your place. leave.

Me: I'm not leaving unless you follow me. no, in fact, you'll leave first.

I take the joint in his hand and throw it out the door. He looks at me defeated and I know that I've won. I make him stand and drag him out the door, then push him towards his room.

Dad: since when are you this strong?

Me: go get ready.

Dad: you're annoying.

He walks in the room and closes. What the hell was that really? I shake my head and walk to the lounge where mom is feeding Paloma. She smiles at me and I sit next to them.

Me: I got him to go shower, it's the best I could do.

She laughs shaking her head.

Mom: it's a start my love, Thank you. Can you go pack your things so long.

Me: we are leaving today?

Mom: yes, when your siblings come back, they also have to pack. I guess you'll miss out on school, you know family is important.

Me: yes mom. I'll pack Paloma's things.

Mom: no, no you won't know, it's fine I'll do it.

I give her a disapproving look and she laughs.

Mom: I'm sorry son. Thank you for helping out though.

Me: you are most welcome my queen.

I kiss her cheek then peck Paloma's forehead.

Mom: before we go, I want you to know that I took the pregnancy test, it was negative.

Me: but aren't those things wrong most of the time.

Mom: I went to the doctor son, I even got an ultrasound. There is no baby. I know you had hoped I was but I'm not pregnant.

I sigh, I really don't know how to feel.

Me: okay. thank you for going through with it.

She nods and I stand up, going to my room.

Ntswaki

Can all these people leave already, they're getting on my last nerve. Why can't I just grieve in peace, without people walking in and out of my home, giving their stupid condolences. It's not like my brother is going walk right back in and hug me the way he used to, it's not like he's going to kiss my nose and make me laugh like he used to.

Gladys: Ntswaki!

I turn and look at her.

Gladys: aibo khante what's wrong with you? I've been calling you.

Gladys, I have no words for her really. I mean being a girlfriend for almost 20 years now should be a sign. My brother has no intention of marrying her, she should've gotten the memo a long time ago, yet she chooses to stick around and make my life a nightmare. She tells me to cover my shoulders. Yes, I'm sitting on a dumb matress, I've been sitting here for nearly two days now. I don't want to see my brothers, I'm angry at them. They broke a promise they made to me and to each other. They didn't protect each other and I can't forgive them for this. I look up and Dumisani is greeting by the door, my heart just falls, why did he have to come here of all places. He sits on the bench next to me.

Dumisani: Ntswaki.

Me: Dumisani, why are you here?

Dumisani: I came to check on you. You are my fiancé.

I can feel Gladys eavesdropping and Dumisani isn't really whispering too. She tends to word vomit, like when Mvelo was here, she told Nyakallo and he's been on my case about it since. I haven't told them about our engagement, honestly, I'm just not ready. She gets up from her place and leaves us together.

Me: I just wasn't expecting you to show up at my home.

Dumisani: I'm sorry, I tried calling but your phone was off. I don't want you to feel as if I'm not supporting you.

Me: (Sigh) it's okay.

He takes my hand in his but he frowns when he realises my finger is naked.

Dumi: where's your ring?

Me: it's at my flat.

Dumi: why isn't it on your finger?

Me: I can't wear it here, I haven't told my brothers about the engagement.

Dumi: what's holding you back?

I look at him defeated.

Me: can we revisit this conversation after I've buried my brother, please.

He nods and lets go of my hand then we fall into an awkward silence.

Mvelo

Dad was able to get himself together and we drove to Amanzimtoti where everyone was. Grandpa is in hospital and we are currently getting ready to go visit him. he requested that the whole family come, even the children. I'm travelling with Andile, mummy and granny in her car. When we get to the ward, Mamkhulu, mom and Mamncane Thando are there with the rascals. He really looks sick. As dark as he can be, his skin is looking pale. His eyes are weak, they look like they are hardly open. It's not a good sight, especially because I'm so used to seeing him up and about, being the head of this family. Granny goes to stand next to him and hold on tightly to his hands.

Grandpa: swidi.

She just cries, it's not often you see a person like my grandma cry so it just breaks my heart. Now the whole room is just filled with silence, only grandmas silent sobs fill the room.

Grandpa: shh, ungakhali. I'm okay, I'm in just a little bit of pain but I'll be fine and I'll be out of here tomorrow, okay swidi lami?

Granny: okay.

She nods and now the whole room is just sombre with all three of our mothers in tears. Dad and his brothers walk in the ward and everyone finds their person.

Grandpa: why are you all so sad, I'm not dying.

We laugh and so does he.

Granny: you're going to fight.

Grandpa: yes. I am going to fight, I still need to close off that deal with that fool Turner.

Bab' Vusi: dad can you once just forget about business.

Grandpa: if I did, you all wouldn't be this successful. Let me be Vusi.

We chuckle. The more we converse, the more the spirit is lifted and our hope is revived a bit when he smiles and jokes around. Paloma wakes up from Mom's hands and she cries loudly, making everyone smile.

Grandpa: Mvelwenhle.

Me: Mkhulu.

Grandpa: bring my great grandchild to me.

I chuckle and go take her from mom then go to him. it's the first time he's actually going to look at her, let alone hold her. She's still crying her lungs out, making her eyes turn green.

Grandpa: amehlo anjani manje, Mvelwenhle.

Me: (Laughs) her eyes turn green when she cries.

Grandpa: this is a first. Kanti wona anjani?

Me: they're blue.

Grandpa: you see this thing of yours dating coloureds.

Everyone else laughs at his humorous self. He doesn't even seem like he's sick.

Narrated

While everyone is gathered in the ward, Kennedy feels the need to tell everyone how he feels. Kabelo sits by the door, scared to even see his father in the state he is in. Zuzile keeps stealing glances towards him but he just has his head on his lap.

Kennedy: uphi uMancane?

Ruth: he's sitting over there. Kabelo come here.

He sits there immobile. Vusi goes and puts his hand on his shoulder.

Vusi: Kabelo dad is asking for you.

He looks up and his eyes are blood red. Silence fills the whole room and now all eyes are on him.

Kennedy: come here son.

He stands and makes his way to his father, he can't even look him in the eye. He holds his hand.

Kennedy: I'm okay.

Kabelo: no, you aren't.

Ruth signals to Andisiwe to round up the kids so they do that and all the wives walk out, in the room remains Kabelo, Vusi, Msizi, Ruth and Kennedy. The other sons go join their brother by the bed and the grip onto their father's hands.

Kennedy: you three are grown men, you have wives and children, grandchildren even. You shouldn't be moping around because I'm sick. I raised strong men that don't cry, you know if I wasn't on this bed, I would've kicked all of you, never let them know you're weak.

Ruth: baba, it's not the right time to be speaking about this.

Kennedy: Msiziwamafusi.

Msizi: baba.

Kennedy: what did I teach you?

Msizi: never let them know you are weak.

Kennedy: then stop moping around. Kabelo.

Kabelo: baba.

Kennedy: I'm not going to live forever, you should know that already. I'm old now, if it's my time then I will go. At least if I die now, I will die with no worries, I'll know that I've taught you people how to behave, how to conduct yourselves and how to make my legacy grow. You 3 are the first people to carry my legacy, I trust you won't let me down.

Ruth is standing in the corner crying silently and Kabelo and Vusi are on the verge of tears but they hold them back.

Kennedy: Vusumuzi, usadinga indlalifa.

Vusi: yebo baba.

Kennedy: Msizi, I know I taught you to be tough but yeka ukuhlina. Uguga kambi.

Vusi and Kabelo burst out laughing and their mother joined them. It was a bitter-sweet moment for all of them.

Msizi: I'll try not to.

Kennedy: I won't even go to the matter of taking care of your wives. You know the protocol

Them: yes.

Kennedy: Kabelo, I'm very happy that you actually grew up, I don't want you to mistreat Lethukuthula, she's the best thing that happened in your life, I hope you know that.

Kabelo: I am very aware baba, I live for her.

Kennedy: keep it that way. Please call them in.

Ruth calls the wives in and the children come following behind. When everyone starts to settle, the doctor comes in.

Dr: I'm sorry to disturb the family gathering but there's only 20 minutes left for visitation.

Ruth: okay doctor thank you.

He nods then walks out, leaving them so devastated.

Kennedy: come on, why do you look so sad? You'll come back tomorrow to cheer me up just like you did today.

Zuzile stands in the corner in Kabelo's arms, weeping silently. Mvelo's phone rings in the midst of the sombreness and he goes outside to answer.

Mvelo: mommy.

Ntswaki: (Crying) I can't Mvelo, I'm failing please, I need you!

She cries so painfully and his heart breaks.

Mvelo: where are you?

Ntswaki: I'm...at...home.

Mvelo: please give me an hour, I'll be there okay.

She sobs and nods on the other end like he can see her. She drops the call and Mvelo makes his way back to the ward. He pulls Andisiwe aside as he can see his mother is not in a good state currently.

Andisiwe: son?

Mvelo: mah, I need to go.

Andisiwe: where to now? there's only a few minutes left for visitation.

Mvelo: a friend needs my help mama. She's a...

Andisiwe: a girl?

Mvelo: mah please.

Andisiwe: say goodbye to your grandfather then.

Mvelo: I was hoping you would please excuse me.

Andisiwe: fine, go I'll excuse you.

He sighs out of relief and hugs her then rushes down out the hospital. When she walks back to the ward, she tells them Mvelo left and was in a hurry. Kabelo is the first to heave a complain.

Kennedy: let him Kabelo, he's living his life.

Msizi: he should have said bye at least.

Kennedy: you two, stop it. Lethukuthula, sondela sisi.

A weeping Zuzile frees from Kabelo and walks towards him.

Kennedy: I owe you the world.

She smiles as tears cascade down her face.

Kennedy: ngyabonga mama ka Mvelo. You did the unthinkable and like your name suggests, you brought peace into Kabelo's busy life, wamehlisa, wamethulisa. My wife and I worried about him but ever since you've been with him, I've had a peaceful

night knowing he's not doing something that could harm him. god has blessed my son with you, he should be grateful for all he has.

She nods vigorously and Kabelo makes his way to her, kissing her forehead. A nurse walks in.

Nurse: I'm sorry but visiting hours have ended.

Ruth: can we please just a little more time.

Nurse: I'm sorry mam but I can't authorize that, it's against the rules.

Kennedy: mkami, it's okay. she's just doing her job. You all can visit me tomorrow.

She looks at the nurse then back at her husband in pain. She didn't want to leave him alone the whole night.

Kennedy: Swidi.

As her tears drop, she makes her way to him and gives him a big hug.

Kennedy: I love you.

Ruth: (Crying) don't say it like that.

Kennedy: but I love you my wife. Swidi lami.

Ruth: I love you too.

The children are now all standing by the corner holding hands. He called them to him and he all gave them kisses on the forehead. After they've all said goodbye, they leave the hospital, with everyone carrying their own pain in their hearts.

Chapter 20

"Count it all joy, all that you are going through. Even when you are feeling down."

(if you want to experience the fun I'm experiencing while I write this or you want to sing along, there are the songs they were jamming to. Robin Thicke- Sweetest Love. John Legend- Hold on Longer. Tamia- Falling for You. BeBe & CeCe Winans- Stay With Me. honestly had fun doing this!! 😊❤️)

Nyakallo: who are you?

Dumi: Dumisani Gumede.

He extends his hand out to him for a handshake but Nyakallo just looks at it with disgust on his face.

Nyakallo: what are you doing here?

Dumi: I'm here to see my fiancé.

Nyakallo turns back to look at Gladys, then back at Ntswaki who has her head bowed.

Nyakallo: I think you are lost.

Dumi: oh no, I'm in the right place. Ntswaki, tell him.

He raises his eyebrow at Ntswaki and she looks up and Nyakallo who is now facing her, with his forehead popping veins. He clenches his fist and turns around attempting to punch Dumi but he blocks it with his palm then twists his arm.

Ntswaki: DUMISANI!!!

He let go of his arm and rubbed his forehead in anger. Nyakallo charged towards Ntswaki and she started moving back.

Ntswaki: I'm sorry Nyakallo.

Nyakallo: nywori! Nywori for what damn it maan Ntswaki! Who is this man and what is he doing in my house!

Ntswaki: can you please calm down so I can explain.

She was now against the wall, her heart beating out of her chest. He slowly moves back and Ntswaki crouches under his arm and sits on the one sitter couch. She asks the two men to sit down so they do and they exchange a nasty glare.

Ntswaki: Nyakallo, Dumisani is my boyfriend...

Dumi: fiancé.

Ntswaki: please don't interrupt me.

She says in a low voice.

Ntswaki: we've been together for 3 months and he proposed. I said yes.

Nyakallo: 3 months?

She nods with a lump in her throat.

Nyakallo: it's bullshit and as your older brother, I'm saying no. he clearly has no respect first of all, challenging me in my own house. How old are you?

He looks at Dumi and he chuckles sarcastically. Before he could answer, Ntswaki jumped in.

Ntswaki: he's 48.

Nyakallo: ke shwile Ntswaki! Never!

Ntswaki just looked down looking embarrassed. Nyakallo leaves the room fuming mad, Dumi tries to take Ntswaki but she snatches it away.

Ntswaki: where was the point in all that drama huh? I told you I would talk to him Dumi.

Dumi: I'm sorry my love, please forgive me.

Ntswaki: leave, I don't feel like looking at you.

Dumi: But Ntswaki...

Ntswaki: please just go.

He stood up disappointed and left, leaving Ntswaki to wail out loud.

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Mvelo sat in his car that is parked outside the Mohau residence, waiting for Ntswaki to appear. He saw her walk out the gate and he came out the car to meet her half way. She didn't hesitate, she ran into his embrace and let it all out. There they stand

in the middle of the road, under the millions of stars, letting out all their pain in each other's arms. After a good 20 minutes of crying, she finally lifted her face from his chest that was now soaked with her tears and locked her eyes with his.

Mvelo: mommy...

Ntswaki: shh, please don't speak.

He nods and she rests her head on his chest once more. She listens to his heart beat and it beats in the most striking way ever. She gets on her toes and puts her petite hands on his neck, pulling downwards. Their eyes lock for a moment and she smiles. She then closes her eyes and moves her lip towards him. when they finally met, she breathes out, as if she feels relieved. Neither of them make the next move, they both just freeze and listen to what the universe is telling them. He parts his lips, then starts sucking her bottom lip, going in a unhurried rhythm. She finally responds and wraps her arms around his neck and his hands travel down to her waist. Their souls conglomerate and the rain pours down on them, washing away all that was doubt in the beginning. She giggles in between the tender kiss and it's a phenomenon, an experience that only the both of them could ever share. They finally pull out and lock eyes, feeling like they are the only ones on the face of the planet. 4 gunshots go off from the gate, alarming them both. They run behind the car.

Atile: NTSWAKI MOHAU GET YOUR ASS HERE RIGHT NOW!!!

She sighs and hold his hands.

Ntswaki: I'm sorry.

Mvelo: go.

They steal one more kiss and she runs back to her brother and Mvelo gets in his car, speeding off, with his clothes soaking wet.

In Amanzimtoti, the Mfusi wives are in the kitchen preparing dinner. When they finish, they call everyone to the dinner table and Kabelo doesn't come. Zuzile goes to the other house that they use and calls him. when she walks in, she finds him under the blanket, resting.

Zuzile: Mfusi, please come, dinner is ready.

Kabelo: I'm not hungry.

Zuzile: you're lying.

Kabelo: please go and eat, I'll eat when I want to.

She pulled off the blanket and stood looking at him. he didn't even move and that frustrated her even more.

Zuzile: Kabelo!

Kabelo: Lethukuthula, I told you I'm not hungry, I said I'll eat when I am. You can't force food down my throat.

Zuzile: you're acting like a baby.

Kabelo: whatever.

He pulled back the blanket and covered himself. Zuzile was annoyed now so she walked to the kitchen and took a jug. She filled it with cold water, she even put in some ice cubes. She then walked back to the room, pulled the covers away and poured the ice cold water on Kabelo's back.

Kabelo: do you have a death wish?

Zuzile: that you go eat dinner with us.

Kabelo: I swear Zuzile, I swear to God one day I'm going to kill you.

Zuzile: you don't scare me.

She threw him a towel and he took off his wet clothes. After he changed, they went back to the dinner table. There was a lot of chatter but Kabelo wasn't participating.

Thuli: mancane.

Kabelo: you guys need to stop calling me that.

He said with a bored expression making them laugh.

Ruth: Simi, do you know that your husband can sing.

Vusi: kodwa mah.

Thuli: all three of them can sing.

Zuzile widened her eyes, holding in a laugh. She turns to look at Andisiwe and she had the same look.

Msizi: Kabelo, khuza umawakho.

Ruth: ayy Msizi maan, uthe ubaba wakho yeka ukuhlina, uzoguga kambi.

Andisiwe burst out laughing and was joined by the other two wives.

Msizi: nawe Ma' Ngcobo?

Andisiwe: (laughing) I'm sorry but he's right. You should smile a bit more my love.

Vusi: Robocop.

They laughed at him and he just clicked his tongue.

Ruth: my sons.

She gives them pleading eyes and they look at her.

Ruth: please serenade me tonight.

Kabelo: no way mah.

Vusi: not happening

Msizi: no.

Thuli: aibo, bafana.

Them: mummy.

Thuli: your mother is speaking.

Vusi: but...

Thando: I would love to hear you sing for me Mfusi.

Andisiwe: (Gigging) me too.

She gave pleading eyes that just melted Msizi's heart.

Msizi: fine, we'll sing for you.

Kabelo: count me out.

Ruth: aibo why not?

Kabelo: my wife didn't ask me.

Zuzile rolled her eyes and they laughed at his silly ways.

Thuli: Maka Mvelo, awumucele bandla.

Zuzile: ayy mah, uyazitshela uMfusi, I won't ask, he'll do it from the goodness of his heart. If he loves me, he will serenade me.

She shot him a look and he looked down.

Kabelo: emotional blackmail.

Vusi: why today mara mah.

Ruth: aibo, I miss my boys.

Msizi: we are not boys mah come on.

Ruth: ay cha, wena Msiziwamafusi, nawe Vusumuzi nawe Kabelo, you are all my boys. As long as I am still alive, you will be my babies.

Them: yes mom.

After the moment, they finish dinner and they all move to the lounge where there is a massive piano. The ladies settle on the couch with their glasses of wine. The children run down the passage already dressed in their pyjamas and settle on the mat in the middle of the lounge.

NJ: gogo, I know how to play the piano.

Ruth: really?

NJ: yes.

He runs to sit there and starts playing a tune. He was really good at playing, his parents seemed really impressed. The other children gathered around him and started singing their own songs, it was just a merry sound. The atmosphere was inordinate, the children were really lifting their spirits, making them laugh, just like

children should, they brought joy in a trying time. When bedtime came, they were all tucked in and the wives made their way back to the lounge. Msizi was sitting by the piano looking all sorts of yummy, playing a soft tune, with Ruth humming moving side to side. The wine had really started taking its course. Andisiwe went to sit next to her husband and laid her head on his shoulder. At this point, everyone was in their element. Kabelo and Zuzile were tangled on the couch, Thando and Vusi on the mat with Ruth on a one sitter couch and Thuli in between her legs on the floor.

Msizi: Kabelo, what is the name of that song you like?

Kabelo: I like a lot of songs.

Zuzile chuckles and kisses his forehead. Andisiwe presses a key, Msizi presses another one, putting the perfect song in his head.

Msizi: *why do people*

Smile when no one's smiling

It's coz they're thinking of someone their loving

Keep on believing

We are meant to be and

Vusi: *nothing's stopping you and me from going to heaven.*

Msizi: *I've got the sweetest love*

There ain't nothing sweeter

I've got the sweetest love

Can nothing beat it

There ain't nothing sweeter.

The smiles plastered on Thando and Andisiwe's faces are beautiful. They listen as their husbands sing for them, their melodic voices fill the whole room. They are

fascinated to learn and uncover this side of their husbands. All the while, Kabelo is quiet. When they end the song, he gets off the couch.

Kabelo: Move it's my turn.

Msizi: ayy wena, uthuli sonke lesi sikhathi.

Ruth: leave my son, he loves attention.

They laugh and get off the piano he looks at the keys, trying to analyse them properly. He then looks at his beautiful mother and gives her a heart-warming smile.

Kabelo: for my beautiful mother.

The other roll their eyes and he starts playing.

Kabelo: Broken hearts rain on our angelic flies

But I won't run I'm with you that's enough

Kiss me now so you won't run

Out of breath under water

Girl you can hold on longer (x3)

Long as you want

Oh oh oh oh

Love is an ocean

Swimming and try not to drown

Right in the waves

Praying we don't go down

In the undertow I'll pull you out

Out of breath under water

Girl you can hold on longer

I know the waves get stronger

Girl you can hold on longer

Long as you want

Oh oh oh oh

Hold on. (x2)

He now realises that he's made her cry.

Kabelo: mamami.

Ruth: you're making me cry. Thank you.

Vusi: way to steal our spotlight mancane.

They laugh and they just carry on jamming, with the Mfusi brothers finally being able to let loose and do something out of their comfort zone. Thuli and Ruth retire to bed and they decide to move the party back to their house that is situated on the other side of the household. They now connect the speakers and start chilling and talking, drinking even. Zuzile stands when her favourite song comes on and starts dancing around. She pulls her husband and makes him dance to the tune, it's just pure bliss.

Vusi: ayy makoti, udlala ngo mancane manje.

Thando: (Laughing) I'll make you dance too mkhulu. My song next please!

She forces Vusi up and they join in the dancing. Andisiwe and Msizi just sit and look at them. Zuzile changes Thando's song and she runs after her. Before she can reach the door, Kabelo scoops her up and they run outside, with Zuzile laughing her lungs

out. He puts her down and the rain starts pouring down on them making them laugh even more...

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The morning after, the sun shines brightly in the sky. Smiles are mortared on everyone's face, as they wake, getting ready to face the new day. There is a sound of loud chatter coming from the family room where everyone sits, talking and being happy. Mvelo being one of the happy ones among them, after his encounter with Ntswaki last night, he has been unable to remove the smile on his face. Love is just radiating off of his face. The talking comes to an screeching halt when they hear a heart piercing cry that comes from Ruth's bedroom. In an instant, Kabelo and his brothers are running down the passage to check on her. It's as if they know because Vusi sinks to the ground next to her and holds her as she cries ever so painfully. At some point, she tells them that their father has died and they feel their world crumble. Kabelo is the first one to leave the room, feeling this unexplainable pain and hurt in his heart, still unable to believe what he just heard. The wives first instinct was to go check on the situation and take care of it. there was nothing they could do to take away the pain, it was clearly going to last. When they drove to the hospital and Ruth and her sons went to see his body, the painful reality actually sunk in. it sunk in that he was gone and he was never coming back. All they could do now was honour him the right way and celebrate his life. The rest of the family was informed and an emergency family meeting was held, Msizi taking charge.

Msizi: I know we are facing a tragedy, something non-of us expected. We've lost our father and our hearts are broken but we can't be moping around. This man was legendary therefore we have to give him the proper send off, one fit for a king like him. I spoke to the lawyer and he would like to meet with the whole family straight after the burial, but he was able to tell me that dad wanted to be buried in Cape Town, next to his mother. I'm not currently sure about the small details of the funeral, I'll leave that to the ladies, I trust they won't let us down but I know it will be held next week. We will all fly to Cape Town tomorrow morning and start the preps.

Everyone nods in agreement. It's hard for them to sit here and talk like everything is okay but one person has to be strong for everyone and who better than Msizi right? The days ends and everyone retreats to the sleep chambers. The next morning, everyone drives to the airport. The journalists flood them as soon as they step onto the airport grounds, asking questions about the burial. As soon as they make their way to the Jet, they find peace and the whole plane is silent. The Ladies decide to sit together.

Thando: we are already all over the internet.

Zuzile: what are they saying?

She hands her the phone and she reads the article.

Zuzile: they said I'm fat.

Andisiwe: you aren't fat. You look beautiful.

Zuzile: thank you babe. I'm bound to lose all this weight though, I'm in a hell lot of stress.

Thando: how is Kabelo?

Zuzile: I'm worried. He still doesn't know how to deal with pain and it hurts me to know that sometimes I just can't help him.

Andisiwe: he's always been the sensitive one though. Msizi just shuts me out. I've actually accepted it.

Zuzile: I'll fight him if I have to, I do, as long as I don't lose him. I don't want him going back to that dark place again.

Andisiwe: I tried once and it ended in tears, I just let him be.

Thando: I don't think in this case you should let him be. He lost his icon, his role model, I don't think it's going to be easy to deal with this kind of pain.

Andisiwe: sucks marrying the tough one.

She sighs and sits back in her chair.

Zuzile: at least you don't have to worry about your son too.

Thando: Mvelo is still giving you problems?

Zuzile: I'm not coping.

Andisiwe: but you don't have to go through it alone, we are here, he's ours to raise.

Zuzile: that's the problem, he doesn't want to be raised, he's raised himself. I now understand why Kabelo said I spoiled him.

Thando: but it's not your fault my love. You love that child and you raised him the best way, your way. It's not your parenting skills that are the problem, the problem is with him and his choices. Everyone has a choice.

Andisiwe: he seems like he's cleaned up his act though.

Zuzile: there's a lot going on, I just worry about him.

Thando: I know it's not easy to hear but it's out of your hands, let him learn for himself.

Zuzile: and what if he fails, and loses his way.

Andisiwe: I hear what Thando is saying, if he fails, you'll be there to comfort him but let him learn from his mistakes.

Zuzile: can we just exchange sons.

They laugh a little, moving away from the gloominess of the topic. Later in the day, they land in Cape Town and there is no rest for the ladies as they run around and prepare for the funeral. Days pass, sadness in the air, Kennedy Mfusi gets laid to rest. the long day comes to an end and the family gathers in the dining room with the lawyer present.

Lawyer: just to make sure that everyone I need is here, Thulisile Mfusi, Msiziwamafusi Mfusi, Vusumuzi Mfusi, Kabelo Mfusi, Ruth Seiphumo-Mfusi, Thandiwe Mfusi, Lethukuthula Mfusi, Simlindile Mfusi, Andile Mfusi and Mvelwenhle Mfusi. On behalf

of the recipients under 18, their parents or guardians will be in control of their possessions. I must let you know that nothing that is in scripted on this was changed or altered. All of this was the deceased will.

They all nod and listen to him.

Lawyer: the final Will and Testament of Mr Kennedy Mfusi: “the many years I spent on this earth, I was able to build a lot for myself, built something that will last even when I take my last breath. Not only have I built a lot for myself but I built a lot for my family. I wouldn't have a family if it wasn't for my beautiful wife, Ruth. Thank you for the beautiful family you have given me. To you, I leave everything, all my cars, our houses and personal assets. To my sons, Msiziwamafusi, Vusumuzi and Kabelo, I'm proud to call you three my sons. You have made me proud, while alive, I'm sure you'll carry on to do so when I'm gone. With that said, I leave all three of you in control of all my businesses. You will all continue with the wonderful job of growing our businesses and creating generational wealth for our family. With that mentioned, your wives, Thandiwe, Lethukuthula and Simlindile will own 50% of all of those businesses and other ventures that will be taken in the future. A king cannot run a kingdom without his queen and you all know that it's true. Our family would be incomplete without them, without them I wouldn't have grandchildren. To my grandson's, Andile, Mvelwenhle, Ntsakisi Junior and Melisizwe, you 4 are the next protectors of this family. After the era of my son's has passed, you will be the leaders and will head our family. I want them to teach you the same things I taught them, shadow them, to learn the rights and wrongs. I want you to pursue your dreams, grow into something that you want to be. I leave to you \$450,000 in US dollars each to pursue your dreams, make them come true and leave a legacy for your children. All of you will only be able to access this money once you receive a degree. Not leaving out the Mfusi princesses, Khauhelo, Yamukela, Uyanda and Lindelwa. I want you to live life to the fullest, I want you to be the best versions of yourselves and stay Mkhulu's babies forever. I won't forbid them from marrying that wouldn't be fair but stay in their family, not abandoning them. I give you all \$500,000 in US dollars as a start-up, as a sign that you don't need a man to provide for you, your Mkhulu already did. they will also only access their money after completing their degree. To my sister, MaMfusi, Thulisile, I leave my wife. I entrust you with the biggest task of all, I entrust you with taking care of my beautiful wife. I'm gone, I'm never coming back, I want you to be

her keeper, love her like you loved me. I know my Ruth, she won't want to function without me, I want you to be that reason why she wants to function and see another day because I need her on the earth a bit longer, just to see her fruits flourish. It's all I ask of you. I trust you won't let me down."

The room goes quiet.

1 Month Later

Mvelo

My annoying phone rings on the pedestal, waking me up. I answer and it's Mom calling.

Me: Ma' Mfusi.

Mom: ukephi?

I can't tell her I'm at the hotel, she would lecture me the whole evening.

Me: uhh, I'm in Hibberdene.

Mom: doing what?

Me: visiting a friend.

Mom: I hope it's not Ntswaki.

I breathe out in frustration.

Mom: you aren't with that girl right Mvelo.

Me: yes mom, I'm not.

Mom: it's 18:00 already, your father and I are leaving now, I better find you at the hotel.

Me: yes mom.

She hangs up. I huff and get out of bed. Christine sits up and looks at me.

Christine: are you leaving already.

I turn to look at her. This girl is beautiful, she doesn't deserve this kind of treatment but I can't and won't love her, she's just my sex buddy, that's it. I was sure to make that clear from the beginning, I don't want feelings involved. After my grandfather's death, I couldn't take it anymore, I almost went off the rails. She came along and healed me sexually, now my heart needs repairing and only one person can do that, Ntswaki can but she plays hard to get and I have a short patience stream. The only person that keeps me sane, that gives me reason to wake up is my precious Dove. I fall in love with her every single day and I'm trying my best to be a good father, but it's hard when you yourself aren't happy. The reason why my mother is pestering is because it's my father's birthday and she's planned a birthday gala dinner for him, she wants us there. Christine is now in front of my face snapping her fingers.

Chris: I asked a question.

Me: and your answer is yes.

She walks to the bathroom while I get dressed. My phone rings again and it's mom.

Me: twice in less than an hour.

Mom: don't be smart with me. you and your date should go to the presidential suite to get your tux and dress, I know you didn't even bother looking for one.

Me: date?

Mom: ayy Mvelo man!

Me: mah you never told me about any date.

Mom: you don't listen to me, kanti elani lelo khanda elikhulu. Don't stress me out please. Ask one of your friends, I've got a lot to deal with.

She hangs up on me again.

Me: CRAP!!!

She keeps making my life difficult for no reason. Now I have to ask Christine to go with me, I have no other choice but to ask her, this was obviously sprung on me on the last minute. The problem is she's going to get comfortable and start thinking we are serious, when we aren't. I don't want to give her mixed signals. She walks out the bathroom and she looks at me like I'm crazy.

Chris: you okay?

Me: yeah sure. I have a favour to ask you.

Chris: shoot.

She's not even looking at me anymore, she's busy getting ready to leave.

Me: I need you to be my date to a gala dinner.

Chris: when?

Me: now.

She freezes and dramatically turns and looks at me.

Chris: why are you telling me this now?

Me: I didn't know I needed a date.

Chris: you know how much admin it takes to get ready, I don't have a dress or...

Me: they are waiting for us upstairs, everything is covered.

She shakes her head.

Chris: you owe me.

Me: thank you.

Christine

I'm Christine, Christine Zondo. I'm 19 and I'm an Interior design student at UKZN. There isn't much to my life other than the fact that I'm currently getting ready to go to a gala dinner with my acquaintance. I can't exactly call him my friend because he isn't but he also isn't my man, he's my crush, I'm his booty call. Welcome to my world. I had to pretend as if I wasn't keen, heck I was super excited that he asked, I mean our affiliation started a week ago. He is the most coldest person, our relationship is only based on sex. I've always had a crush on him, I craved to have what Isabelle had. Not that I was envious of her, no, I just loved him ever so dearly. When he approached me, I felt the stars fall onto my lap. I simply appreciate the little thing we have and I'm dumb enough to hope it could grow into something greater. It doesn't help that my friends tell me that I look like Isa and he's just replacing her with me. I'm also mixed, I have a white mom and a black father. I don't know my mom though, she died giving birth to me. The only difference I have to Isa is that I don't have blue eyes. When I see their daughter's pictures, I almost always melt. She is just the cutest. I wish I could meet her but I know that's a bit far-fetched. When we get to

the presidential suite, I'm left in awe, this place is amazing. They take me and they doll me up. I feel like I'm in a dream really. When I look at the dress they give me, I almost faint. It's a Prada dress, off the shoulder sweetheart cut, tight-fitting dress with sparkles. It goes just above my knee and it has a slit that runs up all the way to my thigh. I look like a million bucks.

Mvelo: we need to go, before my mother arrives.

I would've appreciated a 'you look beautiful Chrissy' but I've gotten used to it. he grabs my hand and we take the elevator down to the ball room.

Chapter 21

"If their absence brings you peace, you didn't lose them."

Mvelo

I feel nothing short of the word repulsive as I stand here looking at her, smiling, pretending to be happy with him. why are they here, people like them don't deserve our kindness. She turns to look in my direction but I don't drop my eye contact, I want her to see that I can see past this façade she's putting up. she gives me pleading eyes but before I can respond, Chris tugs my shoulders.

Chris: you okay?

Me: mmh.

My phone beeps in my pocket and it's a text, from Ntswaki.

Ntswaki: can we talk, outside. Please.

She's looking at me as I read this text. I type okay then walk out the building, my parents have to forgive me for missing their big entrance. When I get outside, she pulls me to the side.

Me: you wanted to talk.

Ntswaki: why are you being cold towards me all of a sudden.

Me: I'm not being cold, I'm treating you the same way you are treating me.

Ntswaki: can you stop being childish, please.

Me: I'm the one who's childish?

Ntswaki: yes.

I grab her waist quickly and kiss her. I know she's caught by surprise because for a moment, she freezes and doesn't respond. After a few magical moments, we are both out of breath, looking at each other.

Me: yet you still don't know what you want?

Ntswaki: I do know Mvelo.

Me: no you don't. you can't keep on doing this with me, you know exactly that I am in love with you but you choose to mess with my feelings.

Ntswaki: I'm sorry, it's just...

Me: look Ntswaki, it's high time you choose, is it me or him.

Ntswaki: you can't make me choose.

Me: what have you got to lose?

Ntswaki: you, Paloma, the people I care about.

Me: then your decision should be easy.

Ntswaki: I love him Mvelo...

Me: so you've made up your mind?

Ntswaki: yes...no...

Me: I'll be coming to take Paloma's things, you won't be around my daughter if you're not decisive about such big decisions. Please delete my number, and spare my life.

Probably the hardest thing I have ever had to do but it has to be done. She's in tears but I have to stand up for myself. I've tried, I really have but I won't run a useless marathon. I try to walk away but she grabs my arm.

Ntswaki: (Crying) please don't go.

I yanked my arm and walked away. Before I could get to the entrance, the rain poured down on me.

Ntswaki

He left me in the rain, I just looked at him, tears cascading down my face as he walked away, leaving me with a void in my heart. He's being selfish, why did he have to deny me the chance to see Paloma, that is my death. To make things worse, he give me a breath-taking kiss. He's confusing me, I love Dumisani not him. I can't love him it's impossible. I'm in my flat, chilling on the couch, watching TV, The house phone rings.

Me: hello.

Security: there's a Andrew Mfusi at the gate for you.

Me: let him through.

Was he serious about wanting to break all ties with me, I mean he didn't even call to say he's coming, he normally would or just use his remote, that I gave to him. I stand by the door, waiting for him to knock, my heart beating out of my chest. When he knocks, my heart accelerates. I open and I meet his dark russet eyes. This one is a sin, he's a trap to womankind, sex on two legs.

Mvelo: Ntswaki.

I cleared my throat and made way for him to enter.

Mvelo: I'm not here to socialize, I'm here to fetch Paloma's things, I hope they're packed and ready.

Me: you were serious?

Mvelo: yes.

I look at him disbelief. He didn't even have an ounce of sarcasm on his face, he was dead serious.

Me: go ahead, I didn't pack them though.

I didn't have any fight in me, it clearly shows that he's not joking. I let him through and I went to sit on the couch, wiping my tears, making sure not to make a sound as I cry. I watched him as he went in and out the room, literally packing everything. I felt my heart breaking. I tried to help him but he flatly refused. When he was done, he walked to his car and packed everything. I just watched him outside the window, I really didn't have the strength to fight him. I saw him walk away from his car so I quickly make my back to the couch and act busy. He walks in and stands by the door, looking at me. gosh I'm trying so hard not to break down and cry. He's folding his arms at me, at me, imagine!

Mvelo: I'm done, here are the keys.

Ntswaki: please don't do this.

Mvelo: I'm just respecting your decision. I'll be on my way now.

Christine

I'm sitting in the dining room going over my notes. My life currently revolves around school, I literally have nothing better to do. Daddy is in his office doing his work, not paying any attention to me. my phone rings and my heart skips a beat when I see his name flash on my screen.

Me: hi.

Mvelo: hi, Chris. Uhhm are you busy?

Me: I'm doing school work, what's up?

Tip to the booty calls like me: never let him think you don't have a life. I literally don't have one but I'm about to make up an excuse not to see him. not because I don't want to and not because I don't miss him but to show him that I have a life without him.

Mvelo: I just wanted to see you, just chill.

Just chill, typical.

Me: give me at least an hour to finish my work.

Mvelo: okay.

He hangs up. such a douche bag! I pack up my things and strut to my room. Now I have to get ready for him, so much admin. Thing is, it's that time of the month, I'm not really in a 'mood'. I'm going to keep this to myself though, I want to see his reaction because I know he only wants to smash. After 20 minutes of trying to find the perfect outfit, I stick to a plain white summer dress. I take a shower and by the time I'm done, he's calling.

Mvelo: it's been more than an hour.

Me: you shouldn't rush me, I'm doing my school work.

Mvelo: but can you at least take a break.

Me: fine.

Mvelo: I'll be right there.

He hangs up on me again, uggh, boys. I go to my father's study.

Me: daddy, sorry to disturb, I'm going to study at a friend's house.

Dad: okay baby, don't be home late.

I kiss his cheek and leave. he wasn't really paying attention to me. when he calls, I make him sweat a little, I mean I shouldn't answer the first time. Then he calls again then I answer, he tells me he's outside. Tip number 2: make him realise you don't need him. you don't need him vele, he needs you more. They were right when they said catching feelings for your booty call is a full time job. Again, I take my sweet time and when I get to the car, he attempts to kiss me but I look away.

Mvelo: how are you?

Me: I'm good. How are you?

Mvelo: I'm good.

That's the end of our conversations, always. He never lets them get too deep because I'll catch feelings or whatever, too late, I already have. The drive to his house is super silent, only the radio playing, kind of cutting away the tension. He listens to Phora, you can tell by the way he recites his lyrics, softly under his breath as he taps his steering wheel, bumping his head with the beat. He looks like a sex-god. Probably one of the most handsome humans I've ever met. His stylish cornrows, his round face, his dark brown eyes. Gosh, people can make yoh. We get to his house and I'm blown away. It looks like it stepped out of a magazine catalogue, like literally. The beautiful flowers around the green grass on the front lawn, the massive glass window, it's all just gracious. He leads me to his room and I must admit, he has taste. It's the first time being here, he's never brought me to his home. I sit on the bed and he follows suit. Now this is the awkward part, where we have to hold up meaningless conversation, not my favourite.

Mvelo: look I'm sorry for dragging you here.

I nod. He places his hand on my thigh and shivers run up my spine, literally. I turn to face him and he cups my face and kisses me. I don't know if it's because I've already caught feelings for him or what because he gives the most passionate kisses. They are filled with so much emotion and lust. He lays me down, not breaking the kiss and starts caressing my thighs with his hand. Beat me up for being heartless but when he tugs onto my underwear, I grab his hand and stop him.

Mvelo: what's the problem?

Me: I'm on my period.

He gets off me and sits on the edge of the bed looking at me.

Mvelo: so you let me drive all the way to your house just to tell me you're on your period? Seriously?

Me: you said you wanted to "Chill"

I used air quotes, let me just play the player in his own game.

Mvelo: you know what "Chill" means Chris.

Me: it means sit and talk.

Mvelo: you're being smart with me.

Me: I'm just schooling you.

He stood up and gave me the scariest look on the planet, I swear I felt my ovaries shifting.

Mvelo: didn't I make it clear that our relationship is only based on sex Christine.

Me: you did.

Mvelo: then?

I stand up and unbutton my dress. It falls to the ground and I'm left in my black matching underwear. I make my way to him and I grab his neck. He's tall so I stand on my toes and kiss his lips. While he kisses me back, I take off his shirt and my hands run up and down his torso. He roughly grabs my ass and I moan in his mouth. I stop kissing him and plant soft pecks down his chest to his abs. I get on my knees and pull down his pants. His junior comes out to play and I'm ready to play too. I take him into my mouth and he moans. I start out slow then bit by bit, I increase my pace. He starts to grab my hair, controlling my strokes. I'm gagging but he doesn't care. I keep my eyes locked with his throughout and when he's about to cum, he says in his husky voice, pulls out and spills his semen on my boobs.

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I'm lying on his chest, going through my Instagram. We never do this, the cuddling thing, it's the very first time. I come across a post about chocolate and I can't help the moan that escapes my mouth. He looks at me weirdly.

Mvelo: and then?

Me: chocolate.

Mvelo: chocolate is making you moan like that?

Me: yes. I love chocolate.

Mvelo: women and chocolate.

Me: I'd kill for a slab of chocolate right now, maybe even 3.

He chuckles under me and that makes me smile.

Mvelo: let's go buy some.

Me: then you have to wait while I take a shower.

Mvelo: for what now?

Me: so I can be fresh and clean.

Mvelo: you'll take too long. Just stay, I'll go and get them for you.

My heart was doing summersaults, why is he being so kind? I nod and he gets up, gets dressed and leaves. I waltz to the shower and I sing my joy away. At least he's showing some compassion towards me! it's a step right? When I get out, I go to take one of his shirts in the wardrobe and put it on. I'm chilling on the bed when I hear voices in the passage. That could be his siblings, all of a sudden, my palms start sweating. When the door handle turns, I expected to see him but much to my disappointment, it's his mother. My heart literally stops beating when she stands by

the door looking at me. she's the one of the most prettiest woman I have ever met. She's so natural yet she does it effortlessly. She's carrying a baby and I'm guessing it's baby Paloma. I swallow the lump in my throat and gather up some courage to greet.

Me: sawbona mah.

Zuzile: hi. Where's Mvelo?

Me: he went out just now.

Her gaze is so intense, I'm literally shaking inside, I'm burning up actually.

Zuzile: what's your name?

Me: Christine.

She nods then looks around the room, more like scanning the area. After that weird encounter, she stares back at me.

Zuzile: nice meeting you Christine.

I nod and she side smiles, then walks out. I let out a big sigh of relief.

Mvelo

I'm coming back from buying Chris chocolate. The one thing I learnt from Isa is that when a girl is on her period and she wants something, she'll move mountains to get it. I park behind my mom's car and walk towards the kitchen. I find her feeding Paloma.

Mom: Son, where are you coming from?

Me: I was at the shop, what's wrong?

Mom: I need you and your father to babysit tonight.

Me: but you don't have to ask mom.

Mom: thank you.

She stands and kisses my cheek. I take Paloma and she starts pulling my nose, giggling.

Me: hello Momo, daddy missed you.

Before I walk upstairs, mom speaks.

Mom: your girlfriend is cute.

Me: which girlfriend.

Mom: Christine.

I don't say anything, it clearly means she was up there and saw her.

Mom: say thank you phela.

Me: no, I won't say that.

She has a huge smirk on her face and it's super ridiculous. I walk up to my room and Chris is in my wardrobe, clothes scattered on the floor. She's sitting on the floor folding them.

Me: Chris.

Chris: mmh.

Me: I have your chocolate.

She turns around and her brown hair falls to her face. She has long straight hair and has bangs. She's cute, clear light skin and a petite body. She also has coloured genes or she looks like she does, I've never really asked. She stands and comes to me. she takes the chocolate from me and stares at Paloma with a big smile on her face.

Chris: she's adorable.

Me: want to hold her.

She takes Paloma and she willingly agrees. She has this tendency of not wanting to go to strangers. It's always a mission going with her in public, everyone just thinks she's this marshmallow and they all want to hold her and play with her.

Me: what's going on here.

Chris: I got bored so I started packing your wardrobe. It looks terrible.

Me: what a way to cure boredom.

She's not even paying attention to me, busy playing with Momo. That's what Lindelwa calls her, she can't say Amohelang so she stuck to Momo now everyone calls her Momo. She looks so content in her arms, I think I should be worried. I grab Chris's phone from the pedestal and snap a picture of them. She looks up at me and smiles.

Me: stolen moments last forever.

Chris: and who said that.

Me: I did.

She laughs at me and I roll my eyes. Momo falls asleep and I go to fetch her rocking chair. Chris goes back to her packing and I just sit there watching her. I look up in the mirror and I see Isa looking at me, smiling, in actual fact, she's laughing, her laugh is sweet and sincere, just the way I remember it. I looked back at Chris and she was busy with the chocolate. When I looked back in the mirror, Isa was gone. My phone rings, it's Ntswaki, she's been calling me since I left her flat this morning and it's really starting to get on my nerves now. I answer then keep quiet.

Ntswaki: I'm so glad you finally answered...

Me: I thought we agreed to stop talking.

Chris turns to look at me. when she realises I'm on the phone, she goes back to sorting.

Ntswaki: you can't make that decision for me.

Me: I don't want to waste my time talking to you, it's pointless. Just please stop calling me. please.

Ntswaki: but you aren't wasting time Mvelo...

Me: you are indecisive, I won't be around you when you don't know what you want. It puts my life in danger. Goodbye Ntswaki.

Ntswaki: Mvelo...

I hang up, lie on my back and close my eyes. Ntswaki pisses me off, she's making my life difficult. If she doesn't want to be with me and be with Dumisani then she should

go ahead and leave me alone. I feel Christine getting on top of me so I open my eyes and I meet her big smile.

Chris: I'm done sorting your wardrobe. Can you take me home now?

Me: sure, can I do something first?

She nods innocently so I flip her and she's under me. she giggles and I cup her face and kiss her. She wraps her legs around my waist moans. She loves moaning, it's something I've noticed about her. When I break the kiss, she covers her face with her hands and giggles softly.

Me: now we can go.

She playfully pushes me off of her and goes to take her clothes off the couch and starts getting dressed.

3 months later

Mvelo

The 21st of July, it's my Bubbies birthday. It explains why I just feel so off today. When I get to the table where everyone is having breakfast, I'm welcomed by Paloma's loud gurgles and screams. She's such a busy body, she's currently trying to crawl and it's really going to be difficult considering she's a fat baby. Mom always makes sure to feed her.

Helo: Momo, look, there's daddy.

I smile faintly and she claps her hands happily. That brings my heart so much joy. I take her and sit down.

Me: good morning.

Them: good morning.

They all eating and chatting while I sit with Paloma. She's pulling my hair and my ears but I'm not paying her any mind.

Mom: Mvelo bamba!

I snap out of my thought and realise she almost threw the plate on the floor. Luckily, Ntsakisi held it in time.

Mom: kanti kwenzenjani?

Me: nothing, I'm okay.

I stand up, put Paloma back in her chair and I go take my keys.

Dad: where you going this early.

Me: I'm going to clear my head.

I can hear Paloma cry but I can't be here right now, I'm not in the right state of mind. I drive aimlessly and I end up parked in front of Christine's house. It's 08:00 in the morning. I call her and she answers in a sleepy voice.

Chris: mmh.

Me: did I wake you.

Chris: mmh, yes.

Me: I'm outside. Can you please come out.

She hangs up. I'd like to think that was a yes and she's coming. After a few minutes, she comes out. She's still in her pyjamas, and they happen to be very sexy. She gets in the front seat.

Me: good morning.

Chris: nothing good about it.

She looks grumpy.

Me: why are you so grumpy?

Chris: you woke me up.

Me: the sun is scorching hot and you're sleeping?

Chris: you're the reason I slept late.

Me: yet I managed to wake up.

Chris: ufunani Mvelo.

See the thing with Chris and I is that we are totally opposite. We like different things, we do things differently and we almost always never agree on things. We are always going back and forth.

Me: I'm feeling sad.

She huffs out loud and turns to look at me in disbelief.

Chris: so let me get this straight, you drove all the way here and woke me up from the little sleep I got just to ask me for sex?

Me: did I say I want sex?

Chris: that's why your implying.

Me: I'm not implying anything Christine, I was just having a terrible morning and I wanted to talk to someone.

Her faces falls. She then gets off the seat, and sits on top of me.

Chris: I'm sorry. So what happened.

Her breast are in my face and her inner thighs around my dick area, it's really hard to concentrate. I kiss her breasts.

Chris: you said you wanted to talk.

Me: that's going to be hard considering the gruelling position you have me in.

I cup both her boobs in my hand, pull down the top and expose them. She knows I have a fetish for tits. I start sucking on the one while rubbing the other one.

Me: you have nice boobs.

Chris: thank you sir.

I'm sure she can barely remember her name, that's how horny I've made her. My hand travels to her honey pot and she's dripping. I shift the pj bottoms and come

into direct contact with her clit. I rub it softly and she jumps up. Sex with Christine is always great, considering the fact that I was her second. Not to mention her blows. She give the best head in the world. It doesn't take long for her to have my dick in her hands, rubbing it. she positions herself in...

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Chris: I need to go, my dad must be worried.

Me: I'll see you tomorrow.

Chris: okay.

She kisses my cheek and walks out the car. I drove back home and I headed straight for the shower. I was about to leave again when my mom called me.

Mom: Lwandile called, she said she would like to see Momo since she's this side.

Me: she can.

Mom: ujahe kuphi?

Me: I'm going to sort out some things. I'll see you later.

I walk out and drive to Isa's house. I feel like I won't be able to get over her death if I don't find closure. That closure will only come once I know why Connie did what she did. when I knock on the door, a young girl comes and opens.

Girl: hi.

Me: hi, are your parents around?

Girl: yes, my daddy is home.

Me: can you please call him for me.

She skips down the passage and when she comes back, she comes back with a middle-aged man.

Man: sawbona.

Me: good day sir, uhm, I'm here looking for Connie Davids.

Man: Ohh, she was the previous owner of the house. Her son sold it to us 3 months ago.

Me: do you perhaps know where they moved to?

Man: she was admitted into a loony bin, I'm not really sure about the son though.

Loony bin? Why is she in a loony bin?

Me: thank you sir.

Man: you're welcome.

I walk away feeling a bit shocked. I get in the car and sit back in my chair. Where the hell am I going to find her now? let me call Lwa, maybe she knows something.

Lwa: ANDREW!

She sounds so excited.

Me: hey Lwa.

Lwa: how are you bro?

Me: I'm okay. how are you?

Lwa: I'm good. Did mom tell you that I want to fetch my niece today?

Me: yeah, she mentioned. Look, I need your help.

Lwa: shot.

Me: where's Connie?

Lwa: eish, I really don't know. I haven't spoken to her since before the funeral. Check the house.

Me: I'm here now. apparently the brother sold it and she's in a loony bin.

Lwa: yoh, that's hectic.

Me: do you mind coming with me, I really want to find her.

Lwa: sure, we can go. We all need answers.

Me: I'll come fetch you now.

Lwa: okay.

I hang up and drive straight to her house.

Chapter 22

"No reason to stay is a good reason to go."

We've been up and down almost the whole day, going in and out of loony bins in and around Ramsgate. We are at the last one, we're just hoping to find her here.

Lwa: good afternoon mam, we are here looking for Miss Connie Davids, we heard she was admitted into a hospital.

Receptionist: we do have her here, are you family.

Me: she's my daughter's grandmother.

Receptionist: only family is allowed in, unless you provide proof that you are related to her, you won't be allowed in.

Lwa: if we bring her granddaughter?

Receptionist: with provided proof, yes you would be let in.

Lwa sighs and turns to look at me.

Lwa: tomorrow is still a day right?

Me: I guess so.

We walk out and I drive her home. when I get home, I found mom and dad spooning on the couch. I don't even greet them, I just walk past.

Dad: where were you?

Me: I was running some errands.

Dad: what errands?

Me: I was sorting out some personal things.

Dad: mmh.

I walk out, I don't know why he should feel entitled to my whereabouts, I'm not a minor anymore. I went to take Paloma from Helo.

Helo: She wouldn't stop crying for you.

Me: I had to sort out some things.

Helo: well mom is really angry at you.

Me: she didn't die. I'm here now.

I decided that I'll sleep with her tonight so I carry her to my room and place her on the bed. After taking a well-deserved shower, I go and join her. I was sitting on the couch in the lounge in Cape Town. Isa was sitting right across me. she looks so close to me but she's so far.

Me: come closer.

Isa: this is as close as I can get.

Me: why, I want to hold you.

Isa: but I'm happy right here. You could also be happy if you stopped blocking.

Me: blocking what?

Isa: you have someone standing right in front of you but you keep seeing right through her. You shouldn't be looking at me.

Me: I'm trying to understand what you're saying bubbies, I'm confused.

Isa: stop blocking and being hard-headed. You are blocking your happiness.

Me: my happiness left with you.

Isa: I'm always here. stop blocking.

She stood up and walked towards the door.

Isa: I'm happy, I just want you to stop blocking your happiness. You'll be happy too. I love you.

Me: What about our Paloma?

Isa: I love you both.

She walked out the door and I woke up. when I sat up, Paloma also woke up and started crying. I had to take her bottle and feed her. She didn't stop crying now, I guess she also felt Isa's presence. I stood up and went to take a teddy bear from the wardrobe that was Isa's and I gave it to her. I laid her on my chest and she stopped crying.

Ntswaki

I'm sitting in a restaurant with Dumi and my wedding planner Tina.

Dumi: Love, are you okay?

Me: yeah, I'm good.

I have my phone in my hand, going through my Instagram. I'm looking at this girl Christine Zondo's page. She's Mvelo's new acquaintance. My self-esteem just dropped, I mean this person told me he loved me yet he dates a girl that is the opposite of what I am. She's so skinny, almost skin and bones, flat ass, big boobs and all. She's even light skinned.

Tina: I think we should reschedule?

Dumi: I think we should.

Me: why are we rescheduling?

Dumi: you didn't even hear what we were discussing?

Me: and who are you to tell me what to do about my wedding?

I say looking at Tina.

Tina: it was just a thought, we can carry on if we have to.

Me: there's no need, we are doing this now.

Dumi looked at me in disbelief. We talked about everything that needed to be finalized. The wedding is in December and that's not far, it's in 5 months. When we were done, we walked out the restaurant.

Dumi: why were you so rude to Tina.

Me: she has no right to tell me to plan my wedding another time.

Dumi: it wasn't a reason for you to be rude. I don't appreciate this behaviour and I suggest you stop acting this way.

I just look out the window.

Mvelo

We are back at the hospital, this time we have Paloma with us.

Lwa: good day.

Receptionist: good day, I see you came back.

Lwa: yes, I hope we'll be able to go through today.

Receptionist: if you just give me the proof.

Lwa takes Isa's ID and give it to her.

Lwa: Connie is her mother.

Receptionist: and how is she related to any of you?

Lwa: she was my best friend and Paloma's mother.

Receptionist: you're her father?

Me: yes.

I really don't understand the point behind all this admin, I mean people could easily fake identities, there isn't a way to be 100% certain that a person is telling the truth but that's not the point. They let us through and we go sit by a table. When they walk her over to us, she sits and stares at me. after a moment, she starts screaming and crying.

Connie: Where's my daughter! I want my baby!

Lwa: mah, please calm down, we just want to talk.

Connie: she haunts me! she's haunting me.

I look at Lwa and she has the same confused look I have.

Me: Connie, I think you deserve to know what's going on.

Lwa: know what?

Me: that Isa died.

Connie looked at me with her eyes widened. I thought so. They might have told her but I knew that she didn't know.

Connie: you killed my daughter?

Me: I didn't kill your daughter.

For a moment, her eyes land on Paloma.

Connie: there she is.

Me: this is her daughter.

Connie: she had a child.

Lwa turned to look at me again. This probably means she lost her memory, maybe that's why she seems crazy.

Lwa: you disowned her.

Connie: that's not true! Not my baby!

Paloma woke up and started screaming her lungs out. Lwa took her and tried calming her. She seems angry at Connie, I also was before this encounter. I had so many things I wanted to tell her but I feel tongue tied.

Me: I suddenly have nothing to say to you. You put yourself in this situation.

Connie: I want my daughter. Bring her to me!

I watched her as nurses took her away, she was starting to get physical and that wasn't going to be good. I stood up and went to look for Lwa who was now outside, trying to hush a crying Paloma.

Me: bring her here.

I took her and she calmed down as soon and she rested on my chest.

Me: I need weed.

Lwa: you're still on that thing.

Me: weed is my comfort. Can we go, I'm sick of this place already.

We take leave.

Christine

My weekend isn't looking great at the moment. My dad's girlfriend and her children are coming over. I'm not really a big fan of her, she thinks the world owes her and that's not how it works. I don't like the way my dad just accommodated them, and the bloody rude children. She barges into my room and stands by the door frame, looking at me.

Lindiwe: come and greet your siblings.

I kept quiet and looked at her.

Lindiwe: why are you looking at me. come.

Me: I'm not doing that.

Lindiwe: why are you this rude, your father wouldn't appreciate this behaviour.

Me: just like the way I don't appreciate the way that you barge into my room?

Lindiwe: you're acting like a spoilt brat...

She didn't continue because I put my hand up to stop her as my phone was ringing. She clicked her tongue and turned on her heels and left.

Me: Mvelo.

Mvelo: you home?

Me: yes but I can't leave.

Mvelo: just a few hours.

Me: I can't...

Mvelo: please.

He was begging me and I started feeling bad for him. I hate how much of a soft spot I have for him, it makes me appear weak.

Me: I can only come out later tonight.

Mvelo: I can come pick you up.

Me: okay. I'll message you.

I guess we need each other right now. although now, I feel like we are getting too dedicated and I feel like we should stop because my feelings are going to sky-rocket if we do this longer. Although he's straightforward with his words, his affection sometimes throws him off, like the time he bought me chocolate and when we actually held a conversation without it being awkward or us fighting. I love him with my heart and I don't want to devote myself to someone who doesn't care. Eish, matters of the heart can be complex. My dad knocks on the door and I let him in. He sits on the edge of the bed and looks at me.

Dad: MaZondo.

Me: yes daddy.

Dad: I want you to be nice to Lindiwe...

Me: but dad...

Dad: let me finish. I know it's always been me and you and you aren't used to this kind of setting but she's in our lives and I want her here.

Me: dad, you don't understand. She's not as nice as you see her...

Dad: I'm not asking you to like her my baby, I can't control that, everyone is entitled to their opinion but all I ask of you is that you at least be civil with her. She's here to stay. Do it for your daddy's happiness.

I go and settle in his arms and he rubs my back. There's something about this lady, that one thing I just don't like about her but I love my father more than anything in this whole wide world and I would stop time if it would make him happy. If this is what he wants then I'll give it to him. it's the least I can do for him.

Dad: I love you princess.

Me: I love you to daddy. I'm not promising you to be perfect but I'll try to be nice, just because I love you and you are my one and only.

I kiss his cheek and he stands.

Dad: come with me, dinner is ready.

Me: I don't think I'll be joining.

Dad: but Chrissy...

Me: I know, I know what I just said dad but I'm still doing some school work, I'll come now.

He chuckles and I smile.

Dad: don't take too long.

Me: I won't I promise.

He walks out and I grab my phone under my pillow. I text Mvelo and tell him to fetch me and then I go join them for dinner.

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Never in my life time I have I ever done this before, I've always seen it in movies. Here I am in the middle of the night, sneaking out my window for a boy. Ngaze ugeze kuphi uMvelwenhle. I'm just praying my dad doesn't wake up now or I'm dead. He's standing by the gate and it would be too loud to open it so I had to jump the wall.

Mvelo: (Whispering) jump, I'll catch you.

Me: I can't believe I'm doing this for you.

Mvelo: I'm too irresistible. Jump.

So the thing about me is I have a terrible fear of heights, I'm freaking terrified of them. I'm literally sitting on the edge with my feet dangling on the side. He can't even wipe the smug look off of his face, it's fascinating.

Me: I don't get what's amusing about this.

Mvelo: it's like you're about to jump off mount Everest.

Me: you know how scary this is.

Mvelo: come on, don't you trust me.

Inside I'm screaming "YES! I trust you with my whole life" but outside I just give him a "really" look.

Mvelo: Christine you're wasting time. Just jump.

Me: (Whispering) hush your lips!

He chuckles softly and holds out his arms. I close my eyes and jump into his arms. He catches me but unfortunately, we both fall to the ground and I land on top of him. at least he broke my fall. I can't help the laugh that escapes my mouth.

Mvelo: shush! You already hurt me.

Me: you said I should trust you.

Mvelo: and you actually did.

I look at him in the eyes and they are sparkling. It doesn't help that I'm in my big fluffy onesie. He kisses my nose and rolls me over and gets up.

Me: so much for being a gentleman.

Mvelo: come fluffy.

I'm glad it's dark and he can't see my face because I'm blushing like a thing that blushes! Damn he doesn't have good timing. I hold his hand and he helps me up. we race to the car all the way across the street and he gets there first, leaving me panting and huffing. In my defence, I'm not that fit and he doesn't stop mocking me about it.

Mvelo: (Laughing) it's all this chocolate you eat.

Me: we get it Mvelo, you beat me and now you won't stop mocking me.

I fold my arms across my chest and sulk.

Mvelo: you look cute when you sulk fluffy.

He pinches my cheeks and I playfully swat his hand away. I can feel my cheeks turning red, talk about mixed signals. When I see him take the turn to his house, I turn to look at him.

Me: where are you taking me.

Mvelo: where else would I take you, I'm taking you to my house.

Me: where are your parents?

Mvelo: probably in their room, in their bed, reproducing.

Me: eww why would you tell me that!

I slap his arm and he laughs.

Mvelo: (Laughing) you asked!

He's already parked the car in the driveway. There's no way in hell I'm getting out. His parents are home, no way! It doesn't help that it's in the middle of the night, what are they going to think of me.

Me: I'm not going in.

Mvelo: so you jumped a wall to sleep in a car?

Me: I didn't think you would bring me to your house.

Mvelo: Fluff, stop being dramatic.

He's making that a thing now, he's calling me fluffy. He even shortens it, how cute! He gets out the car and comes to open my door. I take his hand and we make our way to the kitchen entrance. Okay, let me just set the scenario for you; I'm currently inside the Mfusi kitchen in my onesie with their son. I can feel my skeleton shaking, I'm legit squashing his hand. You have no idea how petrified I am of his mother. Sure, she might be one of the sweetest people on the planet but this has no respect in it and I also wouldn't appreciate it, no matter how kind I am.

Mvelo: stop squishing my hand.

Me: I'm scared.

Mvelo: scared of what? Ghosts?

I keep quiet and carry on walking. We are walking up the stairs now and it's dark. I think I skipped a step because I ended up on my butt with him looking at me laughing. It really isn't funny because I hurt myself and he's making noise, noise that could potentially wake up the whole house.

Me: help me up and shush please.

He scoops me up and carries me to his room. He places me on the bed gently and I push him off with my feet.

Me: you are such a person.

Mvelo: you didn't die.

I've noticed that he's a very playful person, he likes joking around. It's things like these that make me fall for him even more and if only he knew that I don't need his silly jokes or his petty kisses because they arouse me even more.

Me: where's Phephe.

Mvelo: she's sleeping with Helo.

Me: I miss my bestie.

Mvelo: I'm supposed to be your bestie.

Me: you don't get it, you don't qualify if you don't get it.

Mvelo: get what?

Me: exactly that, she would get what she should get.

His smile is so contagious, I can't even! He takes off his shoes and climbs on the bed, sitting right across me. he pulls my leg and I laugh, there comes the playful side. When I'm under him, he pulls my zip down and looks at my face.

Mvelo: how do you sleep with so many layers.

Me: it gets cold at night, haibo.

Mvelo: you can't sleep fully clothed like this, take it off.

He gets off of me and head for the closet. When he opens it, I steal a glimpse and it's a complete mess.

Me: didn't I clean that.

Mvelo: you did, three months ago.

Me: it should still be in shape. Why are you this person?

Mvelo: I'm sorry, let's just set a date and you'll come and pack it again, I promise I'll keep it clean.

He throws me a shirt.

Me: take this back, give me the pink jersey.

Mvelo: no.

Me: you can't make me take off my clothes then give me this light thing, it's unfair.

Mvelo: why the pink one?

Me: because I love it and I'll take it home with me to keep forever and ever. maybe I'll even show it to my children and tell them about how you made me jump a wall in the middle of the night, sneaking me into your house.

Mvelo: fine, take it, keep it forever and ever.

He threw it in my face and I gave him a death stare. I took off my onesie and put on the sweater. I stood in front of the mirror and looked at myself. Damn pink suits me! he's already lying on the bed so I go and get on top of him.

Me: compliment?

Mvelo: I don't compliment stealers and hoarders.

Me: I'm the hoarder.

Mvelo: yes.

He pushes my hair back behind my ear and smiles. I place my hands on his chest and peck his lips. With every peck, he starts to deepen the kiss. Damn he's too good. His kisses are soft, warm, so passionate but for the first time, he's not initiating anything. He's not grabbing my boobs or holding my thigh, He has them locked around my waist. My first instinct is to start because he's clearly waiting for me but when I do, he flips us over, having me under him and then he breaks the kiss. His intense eye gaze bores into my soul his brown eyes piercing into mine.

Mvelo: I want to get to know you. There's non-of this today.

I bite my lip and nod. What is he doing to me?

Mvelo

Chris: it's 03:00 in the morning, aren't you sleepy?

Me: not even a little.

She's sitting on the bed with me on the floor, she's busy braiding my hair. We've been talking for 5 hours straight. I bet she's asking because she's sleepy. She loves sleeping and her being up at this time means she'll sleep until late. The reason behind me wanting her to be here started with curiosity. She seems like an interesting character and I would love to get to know her better. I'm not catching feelings, I still don't want her confusing this with me catching feelings. I stood up from the floor and I look at her, she smiles faintly.

Me: you want to sleep don't you?

Chris: maybe.

I chuckle then I go to switch off the lights. She gets in the covers and I get behind her.

Chris: how am I going to get home?

Me: you'll see in the morning.

Chris: it is in the morning.

Me: then you'll see later.

Chris: my father is going to kill me.

Me: sleep.

I kiss the side of her neck and she holds my hand.

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I woke up at 06:30 and I went to take a shower. It's kind of in my system to wake up at six. No matter how late I sleep, I'm probably going to wake up. my whole family is like this, everyone wakes up at six, breakfast at seven and the day starts at eight. When I get downstairs, mom is already in the dining room, setting the table.

Me: morning mom.

Mom: morning son. What's going with your hair.

I touch it and I remember that she was "Plaiting" it last night. I'm sure it looks a mess.

Me: I was painting.

Mom: and?

Me: I guess my hair was on the receiving end of it.

Mom: you really are a terrible liar. Sort it out.

Mom hates us looking scruffy. She makes sure we all get our hair trimmed and styled almost every month. Dad finally decided to cut his, he said it was too much admin and he wasn't an admin person. I walk to the kitchen and dish up some breakfast for Fluffy and as I'm about to walk out, mom calls me.

Mom: you not joining us?

Me: nope.

I rush upstairs and find she's still fast asleep. She seems like she's a heavy sleeper, the type that will sleep through a robbery. I place the tray on the pedestal and sit on the edge. She's breathing so softly, her lips slightly parted. I shake her lightly and she opens her eyes, scans the room then reconnects her eyes with mine. She rubs her eyes and sits up and looks at me.

Me: good morning.

Chris: it's morning already?

I nod and she rolls on the bed, in attempt to stretch herself I guess. She's now on the other side and she's looking at me with a tired, bored expression. I chuckle at her weird facial.

Me: it's morning Fluff. I have your breakfast, come.

This is by far thee cutest thing I have ever seen her do. The way her eyes are half closed when she stretches for the millionth time, or when she pouts her lips. She really won't be happy when she finds out that we have to jog to her house. See when you stick to people like Kabelo Mfusi, you learn a thing or two. Remember when he made me jog from the warehouse to here? My father is a smart man, he just shouldn't try get smart with mom, she can see right through him. she's not keen on eating her breakfast so I start to feed her. She's still ever so sleepy but she'll have to wake up.

Chris: you really had to force feed me.

Me: you didn't want to eat like a normal person, what other choice did you leave me with?

Chris: mxm.

She walks to the bathroom and I take the tray back to kitchen. By now, everyone is sitting in the dining room, having breakfast. I greet them and I go back upstairs. I start in Paloma's room and I pick her up and we go to my room. When she comes out the bathroom, she gets excited to see her Phephe.

Chris: my little bestie!

Surprisingly, Paloma extends her hands to her and jumps up and down my lap. I have a very hyperactive baby, just like her mommy. They start talking like normal people and I just stare at them feeling so dumb.

Me: we're jogging to your house.

Chris: mmh?

She turns to look at me, she clearly didn't hear what I said.

Me: I said we are jogging to your house.

Chris: are you trying to make fun of me because it's not working.

Me: do I look like I'm joking?

Chris: why?

Me: what other way are you going to explain your absence?

Silence.

Me: we jogging there, no questions asked.

Chris: you are such a meanie.

She put Paloma down and took the sweat pants from the cupboard. When she's finished getting dressed, she stands and looks at me with her hand on her hips. She looks like a hipster, the clothes are seriously baggy on her, they are mine anyways. Paloma started crawling and tugged on her ankle.

Chris: you father is making a joke out of me.

She picks her up and she moves to the door.

Chris: come.

Me: what's your problem?

Chris: you said we're jogging let's go.

Me: why do you have so much attitude.

Chris: I'm sorry for following orders. Can I go back to bed then?

Wow, this girl. Paloma is looking at me with the same face as Chris, it's kind of weird.

Chris: Sir please make up your mind, are we leaving or staying.

I hate it when she calls me this, 'Sir'. She's picked up this habit and I'm really not a fan of it. I guess she knows it gets to me so she does it to get under my skin. I swear if Paloma wasn't here, I wouldn't be responsible for what I was going to do. I grabbed my keys off the dresser and walked towards her. I saw her eyes softening up and she moved away from the door, gone is the tough face she had on. One look is all it takes.

Christine

I swear to god it feels like I'm running for my life, it's not really easy running and pulling up pants at the same time. To be honest, I'm not the fittest person, yeah sure, I dance, I'm supposed to be fit but running is not my cup of tea. Mvelo also isn't helping, he keeps on laughing at me, teasing me about my pants, like I choose to jump the wall and elope with him last night. I had a great night with him but he's a bloody arse for waking me up so early. When we approach my street, I stop to breathe and he pats my back.

Mvelo: you're so unfit.

Me: (Huffing) thank you.

He's also huffing and puffing just as I am, so that means he's also unfit. I sit on the tar and try to catch my breath. Damn did we have to jump that wall because the consequences aren't really fun.

Mvelo: don't sit down, we are almost there. come.

I pulls me up and grabs hold of my hand and starts pulling me, waze wadlala ngami umuntu! It's not enough that I had to walk past his mom and siblings and I had to greet them. Yeah sure, it wasn't my first encounter with her but still, she's Zuzile Mfusi, you are bound to feel intimidated by her presence. Some children are lucky, it's just a privilege to be born into that family, their grandfather was a powerful man. He stops when we get to my gate and he looks at me while I balance my palms on my knees, panting.

Me: (Breathing) you can go back now.

Mvelo: do this again tonight?

Me: no way in hell. bye.

I playfully push him away and he laughs, jogging away from me. time to face the music, Angazike ngoba angikwazi ukuqamba amanga. Lorrtrt be with me! I walk in the kitchen door and I find Lindiwe making coffee, the house smells like breakfast, they've already eaten.

Lindiwe: what's wrong, where were you?

Dad: (shouting) who's that?

Lindiwe: Christine.

I like how they are just discussing me as if I'm not in the room. Dad emerges from the lounge and leans against the door frame.

Dad: where were you?

Me: (breathing) I was taking a jog.

Dad: since when do you jog.

Me: accompanying a friend.

He nods, haibo I'm dying. My breathing patterns have changed completely.

Dad: go rest, you look like you're about to faint.

I slowly make my way to my room. When I was in the passage, I heard Lindiwe speak.

Lindiwe: you believe that excuse?

Dad: I have no reason not to believe her, she never lies to me.

Lindiwe: there's always a first time for everything.

It goes quiet. Nxx, she mustn't bloody get on my nerves now, I don't have time for her shenanigans. If dad expects me to like her then she should also make an effort to keep her nose out of my business. Before I can close my door, she blocks it with her foot.

Lindiwe: I don't believe this little story you are twisting, I'll get what you are hiding.

Me: go ahead.

She clicks her tongue and she walks away. I slam my door and throw myself on the bed.

Ntswaki

He's on top of me, buried deep inside of me. he's moving so passionately, his grunting in my ear drives me crazy. I grab the back of his neck and nibble of his soft ear, all the while, my eyes are shut.

Me: mmh, Andrew!

I sink my nails into his back and he goes faster, harder, takes me higher, good heavens he's got me screaming to the Lord. 3...2...1, I'm gone. That was the most mind blowing orgasm I have ever had, goodness gracious. He gets off of me and grabs his robe off the floor, storming into the bathroom, what was that about. Still trying to catch my breath, I call him.

Me: Dumi!

He comes out and walks to the door, what is wrong with him now. I jump off the bed and I go to him.

Me: babe, what's wrong.

He pushes me off of him so roughly and walks out the door, slamming it in my face. What have I done to upset him now, he's always a ticking time bomb these days, I've gotten used to it. he comes back holding my suitcases and walks to the closet. I get up as quick as lightening, rushing to him.

Me: Dumisani What is going on, Why are you packing my things?

He keeps quiet and stuffs my things in the bags. I hold his hand to try and stop him but he turns around and slaps me with his back hand, making me fall on my bum. I crawl to the door and start crying. he throws the suitcases to me.

Dumi: leave my house! Now!

Me: (Crying) Dumi, what did I do, why are you kicking me out?

Dumi: because you're a whore! Get OUT!

I've never been so clueless in my life. I crawl to him and stand on my knees, holding on to his waist crying my eyes out. My cheek is burning, damn he can hit.

Me: you can't kick me out, I don't even know what I did, Please Dumi, please sthandwa sami.

Dumi: who is Andrew? How dare you scream another man's name when I make love to you!

Holy Angel! He's mad, ooh goodness gracious what have I done.

Me: (Crying) Dumi, I'm sorry, please forgive me, please.

Dumi: who the hell is Andrew?

Me: he's no one, please, don't do this, I love you Dumisani.

He looks at me and sighs.

Dumi: I have no idea what is going on with you, you're not the Ntswaki I met and fell in love with. What's your problem uhh?

He looks like a beast, the veins on his forehead are clearly visible, you can't even hide it. here I am crying my eyes out, I don't even have an answer for my indiscretion.

Dumi: are you sleeping with him?

Me: no, no Dumi, I'm not cheating on you I promise. I don't know how it happened, I'm so sorry my love, please don't do this please.

Dumi: who is he?

Me: he's no one, I promise Dumisani, I swear on my whole life. I love you please.

He just stares at me blankly. Oh Ntswaki what have you done?

Mvelo

So I found out that today, the first of August, is Christine's birthday. She never told me though, I saw one of her posts. We've grown pretty close these months, she's a great friend and an even better fuck. My friends are in Durban and they want us to meet up before school opens so we are all going bowling and I'm taking Chris with. She comes out looking stunning in a powder blue dress and white sneakers, her face though, it reads something different. I guess it's one of her bad days.

Chris: hi.

Me: why do you sound so down?

Chris: nothing, I'm fine. Can we go, I want to know where you're taking me.

She fakes a smile and looks at me. gosh, even if she wanted to, she's a terrible liar. I pay her no mind and I start the ignition. When we get there, I take her hand into mine and she's surprised by this I guess because she looks at me quizzically. I let go off it then we walk in silence inside the theatre. I can sense from the noise that they are all already here.

Them: ANDREW!!

When was the last time I saw them, no cap, I missed them. It was Van Vyk, Lwa, Sabrina, Lisa, Funeka and Sizwe. All the while I'm greeting them, Chris is just standing on the side looking all innocent. I pull her forward and she stands next to me.

Me: Guys, this is Christine.

Sydney: die baie mooi juffrou Christine, welkom. (the very beautiful Miss Christine, welcome)

He grabs her hand and kisses it, making her blush and look down. Sabrina, Funeka and Lisa come to engulf her with hugs, introducing themselves. Lwa just stands there looking at her.

Me: Lwa, groet jy nie? (Lwa, aren't you greeting)

She stands there, arms crossed across her chest. Here goes the female drama.

Me: Chris, this is Lwandile, Paloma's Godmother.

She nods and half smiles but Lwa is just keeping a straight face.

Sydney: Lwandile kom asseblief saam. (Lwandile please come with me)

They walk away together and the girls take Chris. I walk with Sizwe towards Lwa and Van Vyck, looks like they are arguing.

Sydney: daar is geen rede om so te wees nie. (there is no reason to be like that)

Lwa: hoe durf hy 'n meisie hierheen bring, dit is nie eens 'n jaar gelede dat Isa oorlede is nie en hy het aanbeweeg. (how dare he bring a girl here, it hasn't even been a year since Isa died and he's moved on)

Me: dit is nie u saak nie Lwa. She's not here on your account, if you are angry then don't take it out on her, I brought her here. (that's non-of your business Lwa)

Lwa: you're being unfair.

Me: I'm the one that's being unfair? It's non-of your business! Can you please just behave yourself, Chris is not a terrible person.

She's acting like a child and it's not on, She walks away.

Christine

Gosh I feel so overwhelmed. Mvelo just had to put me on the spotlight like that, it doesn't help that I'm already having a bad day. It's my birthday today but I don't celebrate it. it's the same day my mom died, how do I go about celebrating. At least now it's better, I've come to understand that it wasn't my fault but I still choose not to celebrate because it brings back terrible memories. I've never told anyone about my birthday or my mom, only a few close people know. Mvelo's friends are cool but Lwandile doesn't seem to like me as much. And you should've seen the look she gave when he introduced me. this light skinned guy walked in, he was super handsome, he kinda looked like Zuzile for some reason. He was super hyper as well, very loud and lovable. He came to us and sat on the bench next to us.

Him: ladies.

Lisa: Muzi.

Funeka: Muzi.

We smiled at him, well they smiled and I just looked at them.

Muzi: we haven't met.

He gave me seductive smile, trying to hold my hand.

Mvelo: stay away.

He was behind me, this Muzi guy turned and looked at Mvelo. I hope they aren't about to speak Afrikaans because I don't understand a word. I never grew up speaking the language, I only know Zulu and English.

Muzi: bafo.

They bro hug Muzi slaps him lightly on the cheek. Gosh this Muzi dude is a snack. I'm guessing he's a Mfusi too? Without even introducing us, they walked away, rude if you ask me. I turn and look at the white girl, uhm I think she said her name is Sabrina.

Sabrina: that's Muzi, stay away from him...

Lisa: very dangerous.

For the first time, I speak.

Me: are they brothers?

Lisa: no, he's Zuzile's little brother.

That explains the resemblance, I just nod my head and sit down. All this while Lwa and Funeka are quiet. We get our bowling shoes and the convo is flowing. Funeka though, she has her eyes glued to me, I don't if it's good or bad. For a moment she

looks at me and I stare back. I think she realizes I'm uncomfortable because she breaks the contact and chuckles softly.

Funeka: I'm sorry for making you uncomfortable, you just look so familiar.

Me: it's okay.

Funeka: no it's not...wait are you Chrissy the Dancer.

I nod shyly looking down. Ohh here it goes, so I have a YouTube channel and I dance. I take songs and choreograph my own dance routines for them, it's something I do for fun. I love dancing, it's always been my passion and when I saw people like Aliyah Janell, I knew I wanted to do the same. I have like 17,5k subscribers, my goal is 100k by next year June. I know, it's a bit far-fetched but if I'm dedicated and willing, I can. Funeka looks like she just met a celebrity, gosh.

Funeka: ohh my gosh I love your choreographies, you are such a great dancer.

Me: thank you.

The disgust on Lwa's face is visible, what have I done to the girl. Funeka starts showing the others some of my videos and I just feel shy.

Lisa: you're really good.

Me: thank you.

Sabrina: I'm subscribing right now, I love it!

She does a mini-squeal, it's cute. The guys call us for sign-ups and we make our way to them. After we register, we pick our teams. Lwa teams up with the Afrikaner guy, the one that kissed my hand, yah that one. Funeka is with Sizwe, Lisa is with Muzi

and I'm with Sabrina. Now Mvelo is the odd one out. The game begins and I won't lie, I'm having the time of my life. Me and Sabrina are literally in the lead. Half way through the game, a tall dark figure enters the theatre. He makes his way to us and they all greet him, fist bumping, the works. He has an aura to him, damn he's handsome, a dark type of handsome. He has an intimidating look but when he smiles, he looks like the sweetest thing under the sun. his physique surely doesn't fit his personality, he's so soft and gentle, like a gentle giant. I see he has a thing for Sabrina because when he came, we split up and I started playing with Mvelo, great, just great now Sabrina and I have to split our points. I hold the bowling ball getting ready to bowl when I feel arms snaking around my waist. He rests his chin on my shoulder and he breathes down on me. My nipples perk up and my clit starts to jive. He whispers in my ear.

Mvelo: bowl.

I swallow hard and I look around the room, they all have dropped what they are doing and are looking at us. I close my eyes and throw the ball. Mind you, he's still holding me, Kanti what's the deal with Mvelo vele. He's just playing with my emotions now, it's not okay. I hit all the pins and I get excited, jumping up and down. I guess being turned on helped (lol)!

Mvelo

I'm standing with the guys once again after the match. You see, Chris and I won the game, surprisingly. I know nothing about bowling, I was just on the sidelines cheering her on because she damn sure can bowl. I think we should do it more often.

Sizwe: ekse Andrew.

I turn around and look at them. Sydney and Muzi high five and chuckle, guessing at my expense.

Me: wat is so snaaks? (what's so funny)

Sydney: (Laughing) dit is net dat hulle vir my gesê het dat jy geklop is, ek het nie gedink dit is waar nie. (it's just that they told me you were whipped, I didn't think it was true.)

They all join in. what is he going on about. Heck I'm not whipped.

Muzi: go ahead and deny it.

Me: I am going to deny it because it's not true. I'm definitely not in love with Chris.

Andile: (Laughing) did you cav the look?

Sizwe: thought I was the only one.

Me: you too? I mean seriously gents, ek kan nie glo dat julle dink ek is verlief op Christine nie. (I can't believe you guys think I'm in love with Christine)

Sydney: But it's fucking true chief, you are in love with the girl.

Andile: for now, we'll just make a joke of it, just until you realize it.

Me: mxm.

They carry on laughing. I know in the beginning, I swore to keep off any sort of conversation too deep or good laugh with Christine but a part of me got curious, they seriously can't take that and think it's love. We are just great friends, my feelings for her are nothing but friendly. She's honestly just good company, anyways, I'm still dealing with the demons from my past, my past being Isa and how I'm constantly reminded that she's never coming back and how it felt to be rejected by someone you hoped would comfort you, when your heart needed comfort and love. I was

going to be happy after Isa but I froze my heart after Ntswaki. I'm never falling in love ever again.

Sydney: genoeg ontken hoof, laat ons vanaand gaan jol (enough denying chief, let's go for a jol tonight)

Muzi: been a minute, someone needs to get laid.

Finally they are off my case, we all look at Andile.

Me: Bafo.

Andile: no, no, no. count me out. You guys tend to get too wild.

Muzi: look, I know my sister, she'll let us crash at her hotel.

Me: Msizi will never know.

Not because Andile is a virgin but because he's a softie. He's more like gogo, super terrified of bab' mdala, I mean who isn't vele?

Sydney: just once chief.

Andile: if anyone gets into trouble, I was never there.

Us: you were never there.

Such a baby my brother is.

Christine

So they decided after the bowling game, we are going clubbing or "Jolling" as they call it. Damn it I'm bored out of my mind right now. Yeah sure there's good music and people but all these people are in company of alcohol and I don't drink alcohol. It doesn't help being the odd one out, I'm already the new girl now I'm even more lost in their conversations. I'm sitting next to Mvelo, mind you I'm monitoring his alcohol. He's on his fourth glass now and I must say, he's good with handling himself. He still looks completely sober.

Muzi: so Chrissy, how old are you?

For some reason, Mvelo is the only one that calls me Chris. My nickname has always been Chrissy, I don't know why he chooses to be the odd one out, ohh well.

Me: I'm 19, turned 20 today.

Sabrina: it's your birthday?

Me: yeah. It's not really a big deal though.

Funeka: what do you mean it's not a big deal! Happy birthday babe!

Sabrina: no, this deserves a round of shots.

Me: no, no, no, I don't drink.

Sydney: just one shot won't hurt beautiful.

Lwa who was sitting on top of Sydney gave him a look but he just shrugged it off by kissing her. So my suspicions were confirmed earlier, apparently, they are a thing and I think they make a wonderful couple, she should just stop sulking at me, it's not cute at all. The shots arrived and Mvelo held one for me. I looked at him and shook my head in disapproval.

Muzi: just take it please.

Mvelo: please.

He gave me a look I cannot say no to, kind of like the look Paloma gives. Jeez Mvelwenhle is going to send me into an early grave I swear. I took the shot in my hand and they all cheered.

Sabrina: to new friendships, Happiest Birthday Chrissy!

Us: cheers.

They all drink theirs and I look at them, not knowing what to do. I'm seriously going through the most now. When Mvelo realizes I didn't drink, he makes me drink it and it burns my throat and chest like hell, jeez I'm never doing that again. I start coughing and they laugh at me.

Sizwe: uyakhula!

Me: mxm.

I drink my juice to try cool down the heat in my chest but nothing. I excuse myself and head to the loo. When I check the mirror, my cheeks are literally pink, alcohol is a bitch shame. I see him appear behind me in the mirror and I turn around only for him to grab me by the waist, pulling me closer to him.

Me: you shouldn't be here.

Mvelo: happy birthday Fluff.

On top of the pink on my face, another hue of red is added on, gosh he just had to be this handsome, he just had to make me this weak.

Me: thank you sir.

He chuckles and lifts me, puts me on the sink and locks the door to the toilet. Oh my goodness, he can't, he won't! he parts my legs and gets in between them, caressing my thigh. My breathing is hitching as he traces his finger around my lace bra, over my already sensitive nipples.

Me: why'd you lock the...uhhh...uhm the door Mvelo.

He's running his fingers down my tummy. He grips onto my panties and I gasp, holding onto them. He slowly peels my hands off of his and lifts my legs, putting my feet on the sink.

Me: Mvelo...

Mvelo: shh.

My heart was beating out of my chest and my legs wobbling. He held them in place and stuck his head in between my thighs, in direct contact with my cookie. He runs his tongue over my panties, driving me crazier. He locks his arms under my knees and places his thumb on my clit. He doesn't move it or apply any pressure, he just puts it there and that frustrates me. I grab his hands and direct him to take off my underwear, that's already soaking wet by the way. With no hesitation, he pulls it down, all the way to my ankles and gives me a smirk. I grab him by his shirt and pull him closer, unbuckling his belt...

Mvelo: front or back?

His voice is husky, it's seductive, it's super sexy! I get off the sink and turn around. I feel him grab my bum tightly in his hand and his breathing on my neck.

Mvelo: good choice.

Good choice indeed Chrissy!

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He looks at me in the mirror and I'm panting trying to catch my breath. He finally pulls himself out of me and he moves to the next vanity, while he fixes his pants. He looks handsome gosh! I pull my underwear down and place it on the sink, I obviously can't put it back on, it's soaking wet. Before I take it to put it in my bag, he grabs it and sniffs it. Mind you, we haven't exchanged a single word to each other! I look at him and he looks at me as well. I put my hand out in attempt to take it back but instead, he puts it in his back pocket and kissed my cheek then walked out. Weird if you ask me!

Mvelo

I ran into Lwa when I made my way out of the bathroom. She stops and looks at me weirdly. Right, I'm coming out the ladies bathroom.

Lwa: why were you in there?

Me: I was checking on Chris.

Lwa: why?

Me: because she didn't look fine.

Lwa: you're fucking this girl aren't you?

Me: and if I was, how is that any of your business.

Lwa: I thought you had stopped being a whore of a man, I thought you grew up. I can't believe you've already moved on, like really Andrew, really!

Me: Christine is nothing but my fuck buddy okay! I don't know why you feel so entitled to my life, and what if I did want to move on, I wouldn't need your approval, you aren't my mother and you definitely not Isabelle so stop being a brat and stay out of my life!

She looks at me in disbelief but I don't care, she's been like this the whole day and it's not okay anymore. She walks away and when I turn around, Chris is behind me. The look on her face is horrified, like she's seen a ghost or something.

Me: I'm sorry you had to hear that.

Chris: you didn't have to shout at her though Mvelo.

Me: I don't need her ruining my night. Come let's go.

She shakes her head and walks in front of me and I follow behind her.

Christine

I kept checking my watch and it's 23:00 now. That's what you do when you're the only one that's not drinking. The guys keep on disappearing every 10 minutes, I only realized now that they go when they want to smoke. Lwa apologized to me and I was super surprised, I guess what Mvelo said to her worked in my power, although I still think he was a bit harsh. When they come back, it's not a long time then a song comes on, mind you, it's not a dance song or anything, it's Phora. I have never heard this song before but he seems to know the lyrics, takes out his phone, starts making videos of him and his friends rapping, now I feel even more out of place, I'm the only one that doesn't know the song. Ohh well.

*Them: Yeah, last night you got wasted
Know you do it all for attention
You don't want me on your timeline
And, I don't want you in my mentions, yeah
You act like your shit smells like roses
You always put me second
Now, off the Hennessy acting a fool, realize I'll never be happy with you
I just can't be happy with you, fuck
Done with your arguments, I'm done with you selfish ways
Done trying to argue with you, that doesn't get me paid
Don't come back when you're lonely
Don't come back running to me!*

Damn who broke these people's hearts? Like ngiyababona laba abanye kodwa uyabona uMvelo bafethu! He looks broken, it's like the lyrics are directed to someone he knows. Dang that's deep. I wonder who it is.

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So it's almost 04:00 in the morning and they were still partying. Thank god the club had to close otherwise we wouldn't leave this place. So I couldn't go back home, it was already late so he told me to drive to the hotel. Yes, I'm driving, I refused to let him take the wheel when he's drunk. I don't know about the others because they all drank tonight, we'll just have to cross fingers that they make it home safely. I start the car and start driving. Mind you, I'm driving very slowly. I might have my license but I'm still a new driver and I'm not used to the road so caution is better.

Mvelo: why're you driving so slowly.

Me: because I don't want to speed.

Mvelo: uggh girls.

He turns on the radio and plays his Phora. Jeez I'm tired of this guy already. He just sounds to depressed for my liking, not that I listen to what he says though.

Mvelo: stop the car.

Me: why.

Mvelo: stop the car and you'll see.

We are in the middle of the freeway, what are people going to think. I stop and he turns on the volume to the song and holds my chin, making me face him. Okay he's really drunk but I want to see where this is going to go.

*Mvelo: look, all this pressure getting to me I feel like I'm losing touch with you
Scared to lose you,
Scared of breaking my trust with you,
But I know that you try for me
I know that you ride for me whether I'm in a Bentley or a bus with you.
Just try to understand you're everything I prayed for
Came for your smile but your heart is what I stayed for
Even though we fall apart sometime we shouldn't be so afraid to show our hearts
I mean,
Usually I ain't good with emotions
Lately I feel like I'm losing focus
Lately I feel like our love is broken
and I'm doing all I can just to fix it
I hope you notice
But no matter where we at in our lives just know I'll wait for you*

*My biggest fears drifting away from
Just know I never plan on letting you go
So right here is where I'm letting you know
All I see is you.*

He still has his hand on my chin, he's locking his eyes with mine, mine that are filled with tears that I'm so afraid to drop. I don't know what to do, why is he saying all these things to me? Is it the alcohol? Does he love me or was he just fooling around with me. All those beautiful lines, my heart is literally beating out of my chest, I'm sure it's already sunk to the pits of my stomach. I feel hot, and he's not even dropping the eye contact.

Me: (whispering) Mvelo...

Mvelo: shh, not a word. Drive.

He lets go of my face and goes back to his chair and sits back closing his eyes. Gosh Fuck him! My tears involuntarily fall and I quickly wipe them then I start the car, driving faster than I was doing before. I don't want to be close to him again, he's selfish, he's playing with my feelings. Such a bastard he is. We get to the hotel and he checks us in and we make our way to the room, not a single word is exchanged. When we get to the room, he takes off his clothes and slides into bed. How rude of him. Before I can get into bed, he starts snoring and I start to shake with annoyance. That's the one thing I cannot stand with my whole life, snoring. I won't even sleep with a person who breathes heavily, I just get mad. I take my phone and air pods then make my way to the couch. I download the song he sung to me and I put it on repeat, I want to hear what he was saying to me, why is he playing with my feelings like this.

*"you telling me I'm changing for the worst and I just don't know how to act now
Hate it when we argue coz I don't know how to back down
Staring at me lost like tryna read my expression
But I love you and that's real
It's just hard for me to express it
But listen
I'm tired of fighting
I'd rather plan out some goals with you
I'd rather grow old and share my soul with you*

*And move away from the city and build a home with you
Do anything I can do just to be alone with you
You know I'm all about you
I write these songs about you
And if I could I'd take the sun
Make it revolve around you
But I guess it doesn't work that way
Sometimes we give all we have and we get hurt that way
But no matter where we are in our lives
Just know I'll wait for you
My biggest fear is drifting away from you
Just know I never plan on letting you go
So right here is where I'm letting you know
All I see is you."*

Chapter 24

Mvelo

I sat up on the bed and realized that Christine wasn't next to me. I checked the time and it was just after 09:00. I walked to the bathroom and when I came back, I saw her sleeping on the couch. She looked so uncomfortable shame, she even had air pods on. They are blasting music, how the hell did she sleep. I carried her to the bed and she opened her eyes but as soon as she saw me, she closed them. I chuckle and put her down then I make my way to the shower. When I finished, I made my way downstairs to the restaurant and I found Andile at the bar, he looked terrible.

Me: bafo

I tap his shoulder and settle next to him.

Andile: I'm never doing this again.

Me: you're being weak, I'm fine.

Andile: phela wena it's your religion to get drunk and wake up fine the next morning. just like your father.

Me: haha very funny.

He bangs his head against his palm, yah neh, he's suffering shame. The rest of the gang waltz into the place and they join us.

Me: why am I the only one that isn't sick? I'm sure we had the same amount of alcohol.

Muzi: wena uyathakatha, finish.

Sydney: yeah, what he said.

They are all hung-over, shame I feel for them. I never really feel hung-over when I drink unless I don't get sleep and weed. When I mix the two, I wake up feeling fresher than the Prince of Bel-air.

Me: where the girls.

Sizwe: they went shopping.

Sydney: they're planning a brunch party for your girl.

Me: ohh.

That's all I can say.

.....

When the girls came back, I had to go back to the room and wake Chris up. Now I know it's going to be hell because she hates being woken up and will be grumpy the whole day, I have to tread carefully. I shake her lightly.

Me: Chris.

Chris: mhh.

Me: please wake up.

Chris: why?

Me: because I'm asking you nicely.

She rolls over and sits up and stares at me. Her eyes are blood red, like she's been crying.

Chris: firstly, you don't start a sentence with 'because', it's a conjunction. Secondly, your reason for waking me up isn't valid enough therefore I feel the need to go back to sleep.

So much cheek for someone who just woke up. I sit there in silence looking at her.

Chris: can I sleep sir?

Me: no you cannot sleep Christine because breakfast is ready and you need to eat. Go take a shower.

She rolls her eyes and gets off the bed, going to the toilet.

Christine

So I fell asleep on the couch and when he woke up, he put me in the bed. After that, I couldn't fall asleep, I remembered events from this morning and I just started crying. I don't cry easily, it takes a lot to make me cry and Mvelo did that with just a few lyrics, a fucking measly song to make me ball my eyes out for him. After he came to wake me, I went to take a shower and when I came out, there was a pair of jeans and a hoodie on the bed, I guess that's for me. I get dressed and wait for him to come back. He walks back with a bunch of flowers and he gives them to me to hold. I looked at him weirdly but he had a blank expression. I looked for a card and I found it, it read: *"happy belated birthday Chrissy. From: Muzi."* I smile, this is so sweet, goodness me.

Mvelo: let's go.

Me: where's Muzi, I want to say thank you.

He frowns so I decide to follow him, I'm not leaving my flowers behind though, they're too beautiful to be left behind. He's walking very fast, it could only mean one thing, he's angry or frustrated, now he knows how I feel. We get to the restaurant and he leads me to a private booth, fancy! I get the shock of my life when I see balloons and decorations and the girls sitting there looking at me with eyes filled with joy.

Them: surprise.

Sabrina comes to give me a tiara and a sash that's written "Birthday girl". Cute! It would be the first time in a long time that I celebrate my birthday. They start singing and they lead me to sit down. I can't help the tears that start to cascade down my face as they all sing so cheerfully.

Me: thank you guys, you really didn't have to.

Lisa: no, we wanted to. You are a great person and I see a blossoming friendship.

Sabrina: I second that.

Funeka: as long as we keep in touch and meet up more often.

Sabrina: definitely.

Lwa is still quiet...

Lwa: Christine, look I'm really sorry for being a bitch last night, it's just that it's hard seeing Andrew with another girl, it's always been Isa and I guess it's kinda hard for me to accept that he's moving on. I really think you are a great person and if you don't mind, can we start over.

I totally understand where she's coming from, it hasn't been long since Isa died, it's still fresh.

Me: it's okay, I understand but nothing is going on between me and Mvelo, well, nothing like that is going on. We're just mates.

Lwa: yeah, he told me but it's kind of hard to believe that with the way he looks at you.

And then it goes, Bamfakazela! They all agree on how they don't believe that we're just mates and blah blah blaa!

Sabrina: you two seem so cozy, are you sure you two are just mates.

Me: for the hundredth time, yes, we are just mates. He has a heart of stone, he's too mean, we wouldn't work out.

Funeka: for as long as I've known Andrew, he's always had an ego and pride.

Lwa: yeah, like the world owes him or something.

We laugh at that remark, see, even his friends see it.

Sabrina: so why won't it work, because he's mean or because he has a stone heart?

Me: I'm also mean so when we talk, we always fight and offend each other, no one ever wins. I don't have time for that.

They bring out a bottle of champagne and I eye them.

Lisa: non-alcoholic.

I sigh and they shake their heads in laughter. The waiter pours for us and we make a toast.

Lwa: to new friendships and more outings.

Us: to new friendships and outings!

We do a toast and we sit and just gossip about the guys over the brunch. When we finish, they give me gifts.

Me: guys I can't accept this.

Lwa: why?

Funeka: yes Chrissy, tell us why?

Me: (Laughing) it's too much, I mean we just met an...

Sabrina: we're friends remember?

Me: yeah.

Sabrina: then take them and run girl!

We all laugh at her weird impersonation. Gosh I feel lucky to have met these girls, it seems like we are going far. They got me some great gifts, I won't lie. When Mvelo walks in, he makes his way to us.

Mvelo: I hope you guys are done.

Lwa: no we aren't.

Mvelo: well you should be, I have to take Chris home.

Me: you speak as if I'm not here to speak for myself.

Mvelo: if I were you I'd keep quiet because you know you can't lie, you need me.

I roll my eyes while the girls turn to look at me. I told them I was mean and we would never work.

Mvelo: can we go.

Sabrina: yeah you can.

I chuckle at how in shock she looks, gosh they haven't seen anything yazi. I stand up and he grabs all the gifts for me. I hug my new friends and bid them goodbye as

Mvelo leads me out the hotel, such a drama king this one. We drive to my house in silence, I wonder why he's in a foul mood all of a sudden. He parks right by the gate and he sits back, is he waiting for me to get out? I reach for the handle but before I can open, he locks all the doors, great.

Me: Mvelo.

Mvelo: mmh.

Me: open the door.

Instead he turns on the radio and starts playing his music, abo J-Cole, jeez this dude.

Me: kodwa Mvelo.

Mvelo: yini.

Me: why won't you let me out.

Mvelo: because I want you to get one thing straight.

Me: what?

Mvelo: stay away from Muzi. He's no good for you.

Me: is this what's making you frown and cuss at me.

Mvelo: I never cussed at you.

Me: whatever you did, it's still crappy. You are here telling me to stay away from your uncle because he's bad news. How good a nephew are you?

The sarcasm in my voice is clearly evident because he turns and looks at me with a very scary look, now I've always been intimidated by this look. He always wins when he gives me this look but I'm not backing down today. When you think about this kahle kahle, he's jealous.

Mvelo: I'm telling you what I know, stay away.

Me: look Mvelo I'm not going to sit here and nurse your ego by telling you I'll jump. If I want to do something with Muzi I will, I'm more than old enough. Anyway, he isn't my type of guy, I see right through him. I don't need you telling me who and who not to be friends with. It's my life.

He looks at me like he's thinking hard, aw kodwa Mvelo. So much for my happy morning. I want to tell him I love him so bad but I know I would be wasting my energy because he doesn't feel the same way. I told you that this fucking is getting too out of hand, I think we need to stop seeing each other for a while. He unlocks the doors and gets out the car, he opens the back seat and gets out all my presents and balloons. He gives them to me and smiles faintly.

Me: thanks.

Mvelo: I didn't buy you a gift, I didn't know it was your birthday.

Me: it's fine, really.

Didn't we have an argument just seconds ago?

Mvelo: wait.

He walks to the boot of the car and comes back with a big box with a pink bow on it.

Me: (Laughing) then what is this?

Mvelo: it's not a gift but it's something you'll like.

Me: thank you.

I lean in and kiss his cheek. It's 12:00 in the township, there's obviously eyes around, looking at us.

Mvelo: we'll talk on the phone.

Me: okay.

There's never a goodbye between us, it's always I'll see you later or talk tomorrow, never goodbye. He runs to his side and I stand and watch him drive away. I take a deep breath before I make my way into the house, I'm crossing fingers that Lindiwe is gone because I don't feel like dealing with both her and dad. When I walk in, I find him in the dining room busy on his laptop, he doesn't raise his head.

Me: hi daddy.

He raises his head and looks at me then back at his screen. I don't know what to do now, he's ignoring me. I stand there for over two minutes and when the presents start getting heavy, I slowly start to walk down the passage, he then only starts to speak so I stop.

Dad: you know Christine, just because you are the only child and I spoil you, it doesn't mean you can walk all over my head like you are doing right now.

I leave the things on the floor and walk back to the dining room, his face is still buried behind the screen.

Dad: uphumaphi.

Me: uhhm, my friends...uhh, they surprised me, since it was my birthday and stuff...

Dad: a surprise that makes you sleep out? Intombazane ayikaze ingalali ekhaya.

Me: I tried to call but you didn't answer my calls.

Dad: at what time.

I kept quiet, I knew I called late.

Dad: answer my question.

Me: at 00:00.

Dad: and am I up at that time.

For the first time, he lifts his head and looks at me. I shake my head.

Dad: who are those friends I don't know of?

Me: I go to school with them.

Dad: mmh.

He goes back to the screen again and I'm left in that awkward position again.

Dad: bring that phone of yours, your laptop as well. I'm not letting you out of my sight you're grounded.

I take my phone out of my pocket and put it on the table.

Me: for how long dad?

Dad: for as long as I like.

I sigh and go to my room and take the laptop to give it to him.

Dad: remove all these passwords.

My heart starts beating out of my chest, he's probably going to check. I take the phone and go to my settings, remove the password and I quickly go to my WhatsApp, trying to hide all my chats.

Dad: and I'll know if you deleted anything.

I look at him and he's still not looking at me. I go out of the app and put the phone down, praying that he doesn't page it and find something he isn't supposed to find.

Ntswaki

Dumisani and I are driving to my brother's house for lunch. He forgave me for calling him Andrew that night. I swear to god I've never been so scared that he would leave me, I honestly felt my life flash before my eyes. But I called him Andrew. Maybe part of the reason is because I miss him so much. I haven't spoken to him nor seen him ever since the day he came and took Paloma's things and that was 3 or 4 months

ago. It seems as if he's having the time of his life with this Chrissy girl. My phone beeps and it's Instagram notifications, I'm tagged on pictures, to be specific, he tagged me. My heart beats out of my chest.

Dumi: yindaba?

Me: mmh.

Dumi: what's wrong?

Me: nothing's wrong.

He looks at me suspiciously then concentrated back on the road. I press on the video and it's just him and a bunch of people singing. I calm down a bit and I place my phone back on my lap. When we get to the house, we are welcomed by the aroma of a Sunday home cooked meal, I wonder who cooked because Gladys definitely can't cook. I haven't seen my brothers in a while, the last time we were together, I was angry at them, I didn't even want to go to visit them but Dumi convinced me. When I saw Atile, I engulfed him in a tight hug, he's always been my favourite, with him, it never felt like he raised me, he always treated me like his sister, both him and Tebello. With Nyakallo, it's always felt like he was my father, he's been a father to all of us actually.

Atile: someone missed me.

Me: (Crying) I did.

When I opened my eyes, I saw Nyakallo standing behind us. I move away from Atile and go to him.

Nyakallo: ke thabile hore ebe u khutile.

Me: ke u hlolohetsoe habeli haholo.

He kissed my forehead and gave me the tightest hug. After a few moments, I broke the hug and went to stand next to Dumi once again.

Dumi: sanibona.

Them: lumela.

They nod simultaneously, I will never understand men, I swear. We make our to the lounge and the sit down.

Me: who's cooking?

Atile: my girlfriend.

Me: girlfriend?

He smiles, like a genuine smile, my brother is in love. He stands and goes to the kitchen, I look at Nyakallo and he has a straight face.

Nyakallo: I heard you are getting married.

I bite my lip and look down embarrassed. It's not okay that my brothers don't know about my getting married, he had to hear it from other people.

Me: yes, I am.

Nyakallo: mahadi?

I turn to look at Dumi.

Dumi: I asked Ntswaki about it and she said she doesn't want anything traditional.

Nyakallo: and you agree to that?

Dumi: yes, it's what she wants.

Nyakallo: Ntswaki ha o nyala motho eo o mo tsebang hore o tlameha ho kanella ho baholo-holo ba hae hore o tsebe ho tsebahala o le mosali.

Me: since when do we believe in those ancestral things?

Nyakallo: if your husband practices them then you should do the same. Hopola hore ha se eeana ea nyalang lelapeng la hau, uena ea nyalang f ea hae.

Dumi nods along with him.

Nyakallo: you are Zulu right?

Dumi: yes.

I feel like stabbing myself. Atile and the girlfriend walk in. she looks very familiar, I feel like I've seen her before. She smiles at me.

Girl: ousi Ntswaki.

Oh yes, she's Zuzile's house help. Phelo is her name.

Me: Phelo, hi.

Atile: you two know each other?

Phelo: yes. She and my boss's son are close.

Big mouthed girl, can't keep it shut! They all turn and look at me suspiciously, especially Nyakallo, he's judging me. I can feel Dumi's hand tightening around mine, he's squishing it so hard.

Atile: close?

Me: we were friends.

They nod and sit. Great, she's just made the atmosphere tense again. Atile is now busy grilling Dumi with questions and I'm not really liking it.

Atile: what do you do for a living?

Me: okay, I think that's enough.

Dumi: no, it's okay. I'm a business man. I own the biggest logistics company in Micronesia and a few more smaller ones around the world. I'm also in the retail industry, I'm in business with the Mfusi's, the Freeways Project.

Atile: you own the hotel?

Dumi: no, Zuzile Mfusi does, she and I co-own Freeways shopping Centre. It was originally my brother's project but he passed on and I took charge.

He nods, speechless I guess. I'm sure they thought he's a nobody but in actual fact, Dumi is loaded, he's just humble about it, he doesn't splurge unnecessarily. Even his house doesn't scream money. Internally, I'm smiling because he got them! It's going to be a long day.

Mvelo

I've just dropped Christine off and I'm going home. I know for sure mom is going to give me an earful for not coming back blah blah blah but I'm not about that life. My phone rings.

Me: Lwandile.

Lwa: wangibiza ngegama ngonephi?

Me: it's your name, aren't you supposed to be called by it.

Lwa: mxm, you and your foul moods. Sabrina and I are going to fetch Paloma for the day.

Me: you ask Mrs Mfusi?

Lwa: yeah she knows.

Me: okay. Don't kill my child.

Lwa: we know better, bye Andrew.

She hangs up. So much for a godmother. When I get home, I find Dad in the dining room busy with his laptop. this man is aging, he's got grey hairs all over his face and he now wears glasses, something I never thought I would see.

Dad: ungibukani?

Me: ngibuka ububi.

Dad: you aren't old enough for me to smack you, remember that.

I chuckle.

Dad: uphumaphi?

Me: was out with friends.

Dad: umamakho ukwatile.

Me: you sound too chilled about it.

Dad: she's angry about everything these days, I'm not even going to waste my energy.

Me: where is she vele?

Dad: she took her children to church.

Me: and why did you stay behind.

Dad: because I was supposed to wait and discipline you.

Me: haha, very funny.

Dad: go upstairs, when she asks, I shouted at you.

Me: okay.

He's really getting old shame. I laugh my way upstairs.

Christine

I sat on the bed and placed the big box in front of me. When in the world did he buy this. I open it and I find the Pink Panther hoodie, the one I wanted to go home with that night. Ncooh, how sweet of him, I wish I could call and say thank you but dad took my phone, it's going to be a long week, plus, I'm going back to school on

Wednesday, I need my things. I stand up and put it on then I grab my camera and take pictures with it. Dad walks in while I'm taking them.

Dad: you need to come prepare dinner.

Me: yes dad.

He stands for a few seconds then he closes the door and leaves. I change back into my jeans and I head to the kitchen, only to find Lindiwe and her daughter Yandiswa.

Lindiwe: Yandi, I don't want you to be like this one. She sleeps out and parties with boys. Good girls don't do that.

I roll my eyes and walks past Yandiswa who looks at me up and down. She's only 15 years old but her mother is already poisoning her. Mxm.

Yandiswa: don't worry mommy, I'm a good girl.

They laugh and walk out. I wish my father was here to hear what they just said. I start with the cooking and I'm literally bored out of my mind without music, I can't even dance. I heard my phone ringing from the lounge and I sprinted but stopped mid-way when I saw my dad holding it. My heart was beating out of my chest, anyone could be calling me for goodness sake. He puts it on loud speaker.

Mvelo: do you like your gift?

Oh god take me now. Please take me now.

Dad: who are you and why are you buying my daughter gifts?

The line goes quiet, I think he hung up. I'm in deep shit.

Dad: CHRISTINE!

I walk slowly to the lounge and stand behind the couch he's sitting on.

Me: daddy.

Dad: why are boys calling your phone and buying you gifts. Is that the boy the made you sleep out?

I kept quiet, shaking inside.

Dad: I asked you a question!

Me: (Mumbling) uhh, i...uhhm.

Dad: woza uzohlala la.

He points to the couch next to his. I started crying as I made my way to the couch. When I looked up, I saw Lindiwe standing there, looking at me with a smug look on her face.

Dad: ngibuza ukuthi yini ufonelwa abafana?

Me: (crying) He's...he's my friend daddy.

Dad: since when do you have friends that are boys?

Me: I promise...he's only a friend.

Dad: you aren't answering my question Christine. You know I hate repeating myself!

Me: I've...always...since high school, I had male friends dad.

Dad: what's wrong with female friends? Girls like you?

Me: I do have them as well.

Dad: pho?

I keep quiet and sniff. I've never seen my dad this angry.

Dad: thatha locingo and call this boy. I want to meet him.

Me: but baba...

Dad: ungangilingi mntana kaRose, please!

I took the phone and attempted to stand.

Dad: hlala phansi.

I sit and Lindiwe comes to sit too. I shake as I dial his number. He answers.

Me: Mvelo.

Mvelo: Chris, what was that about.

I look at Dad and then I look at Lindiwe and she has a semi-shocked look on her face, I wonder why.

Me: my dad grounded me and took my phone.

Mvelo: ohh shit, sorry. Uhhm, I guess you are in shit now.

Me: yes, very deep.

Mvelo: so how did you get it.

Me: about that.

Mvelo: yeah.

Me: he wants to meet you.

Mvelo: who, your father?

Me: yes.

He laughs and I look down, embarrassed. I'm so glad he's not on speaker.

Me: (Whispering) I'm not joking.

Mvelo: are you sitting with him.

Me: (Whispering) yes.

Dad: speak up Christine.

Mvelo: this is serious isn't it.

Me: yes it is.

Mvelo: okay, I guess I put you in the mess, I have to pull you out. When should I come?

He's agreeing to this madness? Hell no, dad can't meet him.

Me: dad, when should he come?

Dad: he must come now.

Me: I don't think he can.

Mvelo: I can come now Chris, it's fine.

I sigh out loud.

Me: okay. Thank you.

Mvelo: see you now fluff.

I smile but I quickly remember that they are watching me so I press my lips together and put the phone down.

Me: he's going to come.

Dad: ubani isibongo salomfana.

Me: Mfusi.

Lindiwe chokes on non-existent spit and turns pale.

Dad: kwenzenjani?

Lindiwe: nothing, wrong pipe.

She's hiding something. Does she know Mvelo? But how? Mxm, I'm just being extra. I stand and go back to the kitchen and carry on with the pots, I'm not even crying anymore, I'm just scared, why does my dad want to see him, couldn't it have been Devon calling me instead. He's my gay friend, the only friend I had before I met Lwa, Sabrina, Lisa and Funeka. I see his car approaching down our street and my heart beats faster, why did he have to come so quickly, I was hoping he would take his time. I walk out the house, out the yard and stand outside the gate waiting for the car to get here. He parks and gets out the car, still looking as handsome as he was when he left. Gosh he seduces me. Look at me having dirty thoughts about him at a time like this.

Mvelo: Fluffy.

Me: no, don't start with that now, he's inside the house.

Mvelo: aibo chill. He's not going to do anything to me.

Me: but...

Mvelo: I've done this before, relax, I know how to handle parents.

So he's done it before, wow.

Me: please be nice ke, you tend to be a bit rude.

Mvelo: relax.

He gestures me to lead the way so I start walking but he has the nerve to fucking grab my ass and he laughs about it like it's a joke.

Me: Mvelo, it's not funny, please.

Mvelo: fine, I'll behave.

He puts his hands in the air with a smug look on his face. I feel like slapping him right now, dad could be looking through the window for all we know. I lead him through the kitchen and we go to the lounge. Dad stands and walks towards us. Mvelo extends his hand towards my dad.

Mvelo: good afternoon sir.

Dad: sawubona Mfana.

He doesn't shake it, he just looks at me then signals me to sit down. I push a pissed looking Mvelo to the couch and he sits. Dad also sits down and stares at the both of us.

Dad: uhlaleleni lapho?

I look down and stand to go sit next to him. Lindiwe walks in and freezes at the door when she sees Mvelo. Their eyes lock and I see fury spreading on Mvelo's face very quickly.

Mvelo: Lindiwe.

Lindiwe starts to cry, so they do know each other. Yoh and the plot thickens.

Dad: aibo kwenzakalani. Lindiwe?

Lindiwe: (Crying) please excuse me.

Mvelo: no, no come back and tell them why you are crying. They are your family.

I shoot him a death stare, so does my father. He clearly hates her, I mean who doesn't hate Lindiwe though.

Lindiwe: Mvelwenhle I'm sorry.

Dad: can any of you fill me in on what's going on.

It's like he can read my mind. My heart is doing summersaults, the focus has been shifted from me to Lindiwe.

Lindiwe: Mvelwenhle is my son.

Mvelo: no, I am not your son, I left my mother at home.

Lindiwe: please Mvelo, don't do this.

Mvelo: don't do what? You aren't my mother, am I lying? A mother raises her children, she loves them and takes care of them. She doesn't leave her child with her mother, expecting her to raise it. No, a mother asks for help if she's struggling. She doesn't choose parties and men over her own fucking child!

He looks mad, he's fuming mad, I've never seen Mvelo like this. So she has a child and that child happens to be my mate. Wow, wonders shall never cease.

Dad: so you are living under my roof and you don't tell me you have another child, that you so happened to abandon!

Lindiwe: I'm sorry okay! I had no choice.

Mvelo: lies!

Lindiwe: I tried, you know this Mvelo, I came for you and your father threatened to kill me.

Mvelo: he did good. Where were you the whole 14 years of my life when you wanted to claim me like a prize.

Lindiwe: I couldn't raise you myself.

Mvelo: so you decided to throw me to the next best thing, wow.

He stands up and I stand as well, in attempt to follow him but dad pulls me down, making me sit. I'm so confused. So is Zuzile not Mvelo's real mother?

Lindiwe: I'm sorry Mvelo, I should've tried harder.

Mvelo: it's too late, I don't need you. I have to go.

He heads towards the kitchen and I stand once again, I can't let him leave like this.

Dad: Christine come back here right now!

I chased after Mvelo instead. He was about to get into his car so I ran faster and grabbed his arm, making me crash on his chest. I wrapped my arms around him and squeezed him into a tight hug. He also hugs me back and tears fall on my shoulder, is he crying? My big giant is crying, ohh. I can't help feel emotional when he starts to sniff, I also start to cry.

Narrated

Zondo and Lindiwe are left inside the house with Lindiwe crying river Jordan.

Zondo: I don't know why you're crying. Christine was right about you.

Lindiwe: no, I'm not a terrible person. Don't you dare call me that!

Zondo: then what are you? That boy is broken because of you.

Lindiwe: you're so quick to judge, you don't even know what I went through! You weren't there when Kabelo would beat me and burn me! We were never there when I slept outside in the cold because of him, you don't know what I went through! Ahh FUCK!

She smashes the vase on the table and storms out feeling an enormous amount of pain in her heart. Meanwhile, Christine holds Mvelo in her arms and he cries. After a while, he calms down and lifts his head. He meets with Christine's eyes and they are also blood red, meaning she was also crying.

Mvelo: I'm sorry you had to see that.

Chris: don't apologize, you only human, you're also allowed to feel.

He places a long peck on her forehead. Zondo comes out the house and stands by the kitchen door looking at them. Mvelo sees him and lets go of Christine.

Mvelo: I think you should go back inside, your father is waiting.

Chris: are you going to be okay?

Mvelo: yes, I'm fine.

She turns to look at her father then gives Mvelo another hug. At this point, she doesn't care what he thinks, she's just worried about Mvelo. She makes her way back inside and stands by the door where Zondo is standing.

Zondo: go to your room.

She walks past and goes to her room. Upon his arrival at home, Mvelo makes his way to his father's study where he knows he'll find him. He lets himself in and finds him working.

Kabelo: what's the problem.

Mvelo: Lindiwe.

Kabelo's attention shifts and he pays it to his son who looks like he has a lot to say.

Kabelo: I thought I told her to stay away from you.

Mvelo: and she's been doing a good job until today.

Kabelo: what happened?

Mvelo: she's my mates stepmother.

Kabelo: the man she is married to doesn't have children.

Mvelo: they aren't married, she's just the girlfriend.

Kabelo leans back in his chair.

Kabelo: I hope you told her where to get off.

Mvelo: I did.

Kabelo: look son, I hope you understand that what I did was for your wellbeing...

Mvelo: you don't even have to explain yourself dad, I understand. I'm grown up now, I have my own child and I know I would've done the same for Paloma.

Kabelo: in that case then I'm proud of you. I know it's not easy for you to see her.

Mvelo: it's not but I have no reason to feel like my life was ruined because she wasn't here, I've had a mother all my life.

Kabelo smiles.

Mvelo: can we not tell mom about this, I don't want her worrying for nothing.

Kabelo: okay. I'll deal with Lindiwe.

Mvelo: please don't. let her be.

Kabelo: you sure?

Mvelo: yes.

Kabelo: okay son.

Chapter 25

Christine

I'm walking out campus and I see my dad's car parked on the other side of the road, great he's early again! Why can't he just miss a few minutes and I get to hang with my friends, all I've been doing is studying and going to school then coming back. He even went as far confiscating my camera this time, I have absolutely no way of communicating with people. I haven't seen or heard from Mvelo from that day he left my house which really wasn't a good way to part. I won't lie, I miss him a lot but I have to endure the consequences of my silly stupid actions. 2 whole months of being tech-free and Mvelo-free, gosh my life is just crap really. I get in the car and greet him then he drives off. So he finally broke things off with Lindiwe, it was bound to happen, she was never good enough for him, my father is too sweet of a man to deal with all of that mess. But I only know this because I was here to witness the ugly fight they had. When we got home I went straight to my room and I found my things on my table. It was my laptop, camera, phone and air-pods. My heart jumps for joy, like literally, I'm overjoyed. I run out and I find him in the kitchen making a sandwich.

Me: (Excited) thank you daddy!

Dad: don't abuse my kindness. Stay away from useless boys.

Me: yes daddy.

I kiss his cheek, I felt like I was suffocating. I didn't understand why he had to take my camera along with it I mean, who would I contact with a camera? I ran back to my room and threw myself on the bed, going through my phone. I had tons of messages from people but non from Mvelo, well that makes sense, he knows the situation but it would've made my heart smile to see his message. Ohh well. It doesn't help that I'm starting exams soon, I don't have time to be free-lancing. My life is crap, I need something to keep me busy.

Narrated

Zuzile is sleeping like a log on top of Kabelo, who is currently struggling to breathe.

Kabelo: babe.

He shakes her lightly and she groans in frustration, not moving an inch.

Kabelo: Zuzile I can't breathe.

Zuzile: what's stopping you from breathing Kabelo.

Kabelo: you're on top of me.

She rolls onto her side and sits up looking at him with a tired angry expression.

Zuzile: since when do you complain when I'm on top of you. You didn't complain when I was on top of you last night while...

He puts his hand over her mouth, shutting her up.

Kabelo: shh.

Zuzile: (muffled) are you saying I'm fat?

Kabelo: I never said your fat.

Zuzile: pho uthini.

Kabelo: I said I couldn't breathe. Come on babe, we just woke up, you Can't be fighting me about this.

Zuzile: you know it's been hard for me to lose all this weight and you just keep rubbing it in my face.

Kabelo: I never complained about your weight, in fact, I love it.

Zuzile: well I don't!

She gets off the bed and irately storms to the bathroom and Kabelo follows her shouting.

Kabelo: why do you insist on being a brat this early in the morning?

Zuzile: you are calling me a brat?

Kabelo: yes, I'm calling you a brat. Stop what you are doing to yourself, it's not pretty.

She turned around walked slowly back to the room but Kabelo grabbed her arm and made her turn to look at him. She already had tears running down her cheeks.

Kabelo: you know I hate it when you cry Ma' Mfusi but you have to stop doing this to yourself. You look extremely beautiful and I love you just the way you are.

Zuzile: (Crying) but you said I'm heavy.

Kabelo: I know what I said and I'm sorry but it doesn't mean I want you to change. If you want to do this weight loss thing then you can, we can do it together okay.

Zuzile: okay.

He pulls her into a hug and she sheds her tears silently on his chest.

Kabelo: now please stop crying.

Zuzile: I'll try.

Kabelo: want to take a bubble bath with me?

Zuzile: I'd love that.

She smiles from ear to ear and pulls her husband to the bathroom, running the bath for both of them. The weather outside is gloomy, clouds fill the sky and the rain pours with no stop. The house is vacant, all the children are at school, it's just them and Paloma who is with her nanny downstairs. The couple decides to spend the day indoors as the weather is all gloomy and sad. Zuzile tries to stand up from the tub but she slips and falls on her bum, alarming her husband in the next room. He hurries to her and picks her up, holding in a laugh. It all goes in vein because he has a smirk on his face and he can't even hide it.

Zuzile: hleka ngoba uyafuna.

Kabelo: no, I won't laugh at you never. What happened?

Zuzile: I slipped.

Kabelo: (Laughing) I'm sorry.

Zuzile: you said you won't laugh mara!

She hits his chest with her fist and he just carries on laughing. The sad part about this whole thing is that she can't help but join him.

Kabelo: now you're also laughing.

Zuzile: uwena nje. You're dumb.

He places her on the bed and she rubs her lower back as she feels a certain sting.

Kabelo: did you get hurt?

Zuzile: no not really but it's painful.

Kabelo: let me see.

She turns and gets on her knees with her back slightly arched.

Kabelo: nothing looks wrong to me.

Zuzile: I'm fine.

He slaps her bum and she chuckles and sits back down.

.....

Kabelo and Zuzile are chilling in the lounge watching movies when Mvelo and his siblings come back from school. Zuzile has been complaining about her lower back since morning and it doesn't sit well with her husband.

Zuzile: Khauhelo please bring me my water bottle!

She shouts from the lounge and Helo comes in from the kitchen. She gives her mom the water and she downs it but she soon starts to throw up vigorously, spilling last night's dinner all over her white carpet. A concerned Kabelo lifts her and carries her to the nearest toilet and helps place her head over the toilet bowl while she throws up. He instructs Mvelo to get the car ready so they can take her to hospital but she flatly refuses, stating that she is fine.

NJ: mama we have to take you to hospital

Zuzile: Ntsakisi I'm fine!

She still hasn't stopped throwing up.

Kabelo: stop being stubborn.

Her face starts turning pale.

Zuzile: I said I'm fine.

Kabelo: you aren't fine when your face starts turning pale.

She finally stops vomiting and she stands to rinse her mouth and looks at him.

Zuzile: ngiright. I'm not going to any hospital.

She walks past him and goes back to the lounge. When Mvelo runs back into the house trying to find where they are he stops when he sees his mom sitting on the couch relaxing.

Mvelo: mom let's go.

Zuzile: angiyi lapho.

Mvelo: but you're sick, come let's go.

Zuzile: WHY WON'T YOU PEOPLE UNDERSTAND IT WHEN I SAY I'M FINE. LEAVE ME ALONE!

She shouts at him and he just puts his hands in the air and goes back outside to switch off the car. Gosh Zuzile is stubborn. She starts to have terrible stomach cramps while she sits alone. They all retreated to their rooms because she demanded that she wanted to be alone. She stands and slowly makes her way to the kitchen to try make herself food but the cramps worsen and she fails to feel her legs and lands on the ground. The pain is unbearable so she sits there and cries in silence, her pride too big to call on anyone for help. Phelo walks in carrying Paloma and she's alerted when she finds her on the floor.

Phelo: mam are you okay?

Zuzile: (Crying) no, no please call my son upstairs.

Phelo: okay.

She rushes upstairs and shouts for Mvelo, that alarms the rest of the house.

Mvelo: What's wrong?

Phelo: there's something wrong with your mom, she's calling for you.

He runs downstairs and finds his mom in a grueling position on the floor.

Mvelo: can we go to the hospital now?

Zuzile: yes Mvelo!

Kabelo pushes past him and carries her while he goes to get the car. When they get to the car, Mvelo steps on it and in no time, they are running through the ER with her in tears. They wheel her away and ask Kabelo to fill in forms and wait for the doctor. Meanwhile in the ward, the doctor is trying to figure out what the problem is.

Dr: please describe your pain to me.

Zuzile: it's cramps, on my lower back, almost like period pains but more severe and painful.

He presses on the sides of her tummy and gives a concerned look.

Dr: when was your last period?

Zuzile: last month.

Dr: okay.

He calls a nurse to connect her to the machine and leave her in the room with lots of questions. He goes out to the waiting room and scans for a person that would be recognized as the husband and Kabelo quickly rushes to him.

Kabelo: Mfusi.

Dr: yes, your wife is inside the ward.

Kabelo: how is she.

Dr: I'm still trying to figure out what's wrong with her but you can go inside and be by her side.

Kabelo: thank you.

He runs in the direction he came from and finds the ward.

Zuzile: what's wrong with me?

Kabelo: he's still on it.

The cramps start again and she squeezes his hand tightly, tears running down her face. The doctor comes in and stands next to them with a file in his hand.

Dr: I found your file and it says here the last time you visited the hospital you had an appointment with your gynecologist. A scheduled ultrasound.

Zuzile: mmh, yes.

Dr: what was it for.

Kabelo: we suspected pregnancy so we decided she must be sure of it but it was a false alarm.

Dr: well, congratulations, you are pregnant.

Them: what?

Another cramp from her abdomen hit and she screamed for dear life.

Dr: you are currently in labour.

Kabelo looks at his wife in shock while she is huffing and puffing like a mad person.

Dr: I'd like to transfer you to maternity to prep you for the birth.

Zuzile: (Huffing) you aren't kidding!

Dr: yes.

Kabelo's shock is now joy as he holds her hand and kisses her forehead.

Dr: I don't know if you prefer going under the knife or natural.

She's huffing and puffing like she's running a marathon, shame poor thing. She's still in shock. Kabelo can't stop smiling as this would be the first time he would be present for the birth of his child.

Zuzile: no, I'm doing it the natural way.

Tears are rolling down her cheeks.

Zuzile: is it possible to have a water birth.

Dr: definitely, it isn't your first child right?

Zuzile: uhh yes.

Dr: okay, I'll arrange that for you. Congratulations once again. I'll leave you to change and the nurse will come and escort you to the labour ward.

Kabelo: thank you doctor.

He smiles and walks out. For the first time since he walked in, she turns and looks at him.

Zuzile: we're having a baby?

Kabelo: we're having a baby my love.

Tears glisten in his eyes and he kissed her forehead once again. Outside in the waiting room, an anxious Mvelo paces up and down clueless as to what is going on. His worry gets the best of him and he takes out his phone and calls his grandmother.

Ruth: hello my boy.

Mvelo: Hi granny. How are you?

Ruth: I'm good, how are you?

Mvelo: not so well, gogo mom is in hospital and I don't know what's wrong with her.

Ruth: what happened?

Mvelo: she was throwing up and was crying saying she had severe cramps.

Thuli: uthi kwenzenjani?

She asks Ruth who turns to look at her.

Ruth: Lethukuthula is in Hospital.

Thuli: is it time?

Ruth: time for what?

She walks away from her, leaving her with a question mark. She gets back on the phone with Mvelo.

Ruth: are you at the hospital?

Mvelo: yes.

Ruth: okay, I'll phone Ntando and tell him to drive us there, we'll be there before the end of today. Call your father uVusi and Simi to go to the house and look after the children.

Mvelo: okay gogo.

She hangs up and Mvelo slides into his chair in frustration. Back in the labour ward, a contracting Zuzile is pacing up and down while they prepare her pool.

Kabelo: don't you want to sit down my love?

Zuzile: No I don't want to sit down.

Kabelo: but you've been pacing up and...

Zuzile: I said I don't want to sit, leave me the fuck alone!

All the nurses turn to look at them and Kabelo looks away embarrassed. He decides to shut his mouth and let her throw her tantrums. Her contractions are still far apart so she's still far from giving birth and that frustrates her even more. The doctor walks in and smiles at her. She genuinely returned the smile, much to Kabelo's disappointment.

Dr: how is it?

Zuzile: it's okay, I'm just a bit scared, it's been a while.

Dr: I can imagine.

Kabelo stands up feeling jealous and comes to stand next to Zuzile.

Dr: can you please just lie down for me so I can check the centimeters.

She calmly walks to the bed and spreads her legs so he can check the dilation.

Kabelo: is that really necessary?

Zuzile: he's doing his job.

Dr: I'm sorry if I'm making you uncomfortable sir, I can get a nurse to do it.

Zuzile: there's no need, he'll survive.

She gives him a broad warm smile then turns to look at Kabelo with a 'behave' type of look.

Dr: it's only 5 centimeters, five more to go. They can still give you the epidural now.

Zuzile: no, I want to feel the whole thing.

Dr: okay then, we'll escort you to your pool now.

Kabelo holds out his hand for her to hold and he helps her walk to the water. She settles in and ask Kabelo to join her. He's surprised by this but doesn't hesitate. Hours pass and they are still in the labour room, no one has updated Mvelo or Vusi and Ma' Ruth and Thuli. They are all just sitting there worried sick about Zuzile. At 22:45, she had another terrible contraction that lasted longer than all the others. Kabelo who was right behind her kept squeezing her hand, reassuring her she'll be fine as they all get worse.

Dr: you're fully dilated. It's time.

She breathes in and out, in and out and tilts her head back, lying it on Kabelo's shoulder who kisses her lips and wipes the sweat off of her forehead. She gets on her knees and Kabelo kneels right behind her, grabbing her waist as she pushes and pushes. The midwife crouches next to the pool guiding them on how to deliver the baby. The head starts to pop out and Kabelo is shaking.

Zuzile: Mfusi please calm down.

Kabelo: I'll try.

He places another kiss on her neck and she arches her back and starts pushing again. Three more pushes and the midwife helps her pull out the baby and his cry fills the room. He is placed on Kabelo's chest as Zuzile flops back down and tries to catch her breath. Tears roll down his face when he sees his new baby, making the whole ward erupt at the new presence that has filled the ward. Zuzile who can't even contain her joy is given the scissors to cut the umbilical cord.

Kabelo: thank you.

She cuts the cord as she cries and they hold each other in their arms and admire their new baby boy that couldn't be more precious.

Mvelo

We've been sitting here for 8 hours straight and no one has come to update us on what's going on. My grandma came and we've been sitting here with her praying the

whole time. It's now past 11 and dad comes out wearing scrubs, he has a huge smile on his face for some reason. We make our way to him.

Grandma: Son how is she? What happened?

Dad: they're fine.

They're fine?

Me: they?

Dad: yes.

He gives a big smile once again and all of a sudden Granny engulfs him in a big hug and kisses him all over his face.

Grandma: ohh siyabonga Nkosi! Congratulations my boy.

Congratulations for what? I'm so lost right now, someone please find me.

Me: dad who is they?

Dad: your mom and brother.

Me: mom had a baby?

Dad: yes.

Me: What!

Tell me you're kidding! So I was right this whole time.

Me: how?

Dad: he was hiding himself. That's why she was so sick today, she was in labour.

Me: I can't believe this.

Grandma: where are they now?

Dad: they took him to clean him up and Zuzile is resting, it was a long 8 hours.

Gosh dad can't even wipe the smile off of his face, he looks so happy and I now have another sibling, ohh goodness!

Grandma: I have to call Thulisile, she'll be overjoyed.

Dad: mah since I can't leave the hospital...

She cuts him off before he can finish his sentence.

Grandma: why can't you leave the hospital?

Dad: my wife just had my baby, I can't leave them. I need you and Mvelo to buy all the baby things.

Me: why me?

Dad: because I said so. And can you please try not to tell the others until we leave the hospital.

Grandma: why?

Dad: we want to tell them ourselves, Lindelwa might not understand, she's still young. It was hard enough when Amo was introduced to her.

Grandma: I understand, can we go and see her?

Dad: sure.

I'm still shocked really. To think these type of things only happen in movies and it's happening to my family. I follow them and we find Mom in her ward lying on the bed with a bowl of ice. She looks super tired with her hair all over the show.

Grandma: hawu kodwa Lethu.

She hugged her tightly and mom was smiling.

Grandma: you scared us.

Mom: I'm fine now mah. We're both fine.

Grandma: I can't believe this child, he's been hiding this whole time. How cute is he?

Mom: he's the cutest thing under the sun. I never thought I would be in this position ever again and here he is.

Grandma: I'm so happy for the both of you.

She held dad's hand tightly while she squeezed mom. I was still standing by the doorway just watching. I'm just glad mom made it out alive and I didn't have to mourn anyone I love over a new life. Pregnancy and birth still doesn't sit well with after what I went through with Isa. That's why I told myself that I will never ever make another woman pregnant ever again, not even by mistake.

Mom: Mvelwenhle.

I looked up and she was smiling at me. She opened her arms for me so I walked towards her and she gave me a tight squeeze.

Mom: you were right.

Me: (Laughing) I know I was.

She kissed my cheek. She doesn't understand how worried I was about her, imagine waiting for a whole 8 hours hoping and praying that someone gets better from something you yourself don't know. The doors open and a nurse wheels in a cot bed and when I look inside, the smallest baby wrapped up in a green blanket lays inside with his eyes closed. He's so light, you'd swear he's albino. They give him to mom and the room falls into silence when she carefully holds him to her breast and starts to feed him. Dad stands over them, I'm sure he doesn't want to miss a single moment of this.

Chapter 26

So mom got discharged today and they are coming home with the baby. They still haven't named him yet, I don't know why it's taking them so long. Another thing, the others don't know that there's a baby coming today, mom and dad decided they will sit down with them and talk to them. It was the hardest secret to keep because he's just the cutest thing ever, not to mention that he's different from all of us, he's super light. I thought maybe by the time they leave the hospital he's skin would've darkened but no. I was working with Andile, busy buying clothes and baby things, again, not easy, what do we know about babies, I was hardly around for Paloma's baby days anyway. Now I'm getting ready to leave for the hospital. I'm about to walk out the door when Helo comes dashing down the stairs. She's been crying the whole week asking about her mom and how she's doing. Both her and Lindelwa actually but I think Mummy was able to convince her she was okay.

Helo: wait for me.

Mvelo: you can't come with me.

Helo: why?

Mvelo: because I said so.

Helo: but I want to see mom.

Mvelo: I'm coming back with her and dad. Just wait for a few more hours would you.

Helo: ngithe angifuni nje. I'm going with you.

Mamncane comes out the kitchen.

Mamncane: Khauhelo you can't go stay behind.

Helo: no mamncane I'm not staying, why are you guys so secretive about mom? First you didn't want me to see her now you don't want me to accompany to fetch her. I'm going and that's it.

Mamncane looks at me defeated.

Mamncane: hamba naye.

I nod and Helo is already out the door, heading to the car. Stubborn just like her mom. She gets in the front seat and looks at me and smirks.

Me: I don't know why you're happy, your father is still going to scold you.

Helo: I don't care.

She clearly doesn't know Kabelo Mfusi. The drive to the hospital is super short and when we get there, I walk towards the maternity ward, crossing fingers that they don't shout at me for bringing this child with me.

Helo: why are we going to the Maternity ward.

I ignore her and I walk faster ahead of her, I don't need her asking me questions I can't answer. We get to mom's room and dad is sitting on a chair with the baby in his arms. Mom's bags are already packed on the bed. Helo pushes past me and walks towards dad who's face changes when he sees her then redirects his eyes to my direction.

Dad: Khauhelo?

Helo: daddy who's baby is this?

Dad: why did you come here?

Helo: because I was worried about my mother and I wanted to check up on her.

Dad: but we were coming home today. Mvelo why did you bring her.

Me: I tried to stop her but she didn't want to listen.

Helo: where's my mom?

Mom: I'm here.

She emerges from the bathroom holding her things in her hands. Khauhelo turns around and runs to hug her tightly.

Helo: I'm so glad you're okay. What happened?

Mom: we'll talk when we get home. Help your brother carry my things.

She nods and takes the bags from the bed. I carry the baby bags and she looks at me quizzically. I walk out the room before she can even begin to talk to me, I don't have energy to deal with her. Luckily, Paloma's car seat is in the car so when we get to the car, mom straps the baby in. Helo still looks very confused.

Helo: mom did you have a baby?

Dad: Khauhelo, we'll speak at home, please get in the car.

Helo: but daddy...

Dad: the car, now Khauhelo.

His tone was a bit firmer now and she didn't hesitate to hop in. he joined me in the front seat then we drove off. Helo didn't dare utter another word after dad put her in her place. There's nothing more I wish to have documented than the part where the baby started crying his lungs out and Mom started breastfeeding. Helo's face at that moment made me crack up, like I literally started laughing and dad looked at me inquiringly. I just shook my head and concentrated on the road. And we finally got home, I'm looking forward to this part, I've been looking forward to it since I found out that we have a baby brother. I got inside and my princess started crawling towards me. My heart melted and I dropped everything and carried her. Her big blue eyes sparkled as she clapped her hands happily in my face, I haven't seen her in a while, I've been so busy with school and with the baby here, I've been busier. I kissed her all over her face and she giggled, I missed her so much.



So we are sitting in the study, it's Me and my Dove, the parents, the siblings, Mummy and Grandma.

Grandma: Khauhelo, NJ, Lindelwa, I'm sure you guys are wondering why there is a baby that came home today.

They nod, why am I sitting in? I already know.

Mummy: You all have a baby brother now.

Lindelwa: no, my mommy.

Grandma: but you have to share her with all your other siblings baby, just like they share with you. Just like you shared her with your niece.

NJ: so the baby is theirs? Mom was never pregnant, you have to be pregnant to have a baby.

They all keep quiet and look at him in shock.

Mummy: Ntsakisi, your mom was pregnant, she just didn't know, we all didn't know.

Lindelwa got off her seat and charged to mom who opened her arms for her.

Mummy: I don't expect the two of you not to understand, you are old enough.

She says looking at the "Twins". They nod in agreement.

Helo: what's his name?

Dad: his name is Sanele.

We all turn and look at him in shock, last time I checked, he didn't have a name.

Mom: Sanele?

Dad: Sanele'sphiwo.

Isn't he the all Sotho guy, and then the Zulu name now? It's a beautiful name, finally a sibling with a Zulu name like me.

Grandma: it's a beautiful name.

Welcome home Sanele.

Christine

I'm sitting in the cafeteria with Devon and we're eating lunch, talking about the silliest things. His face changes all of a sudden.

Me: what's wrong?

He doesn't answer, instead, I feel hands on my shoulders and when I turn around, I find Mvelo looking at me, goodness me when was the last time I saw him! He looks so different. I stand up and give him a hug but he doesn't hug me back.

Mvelo: you hug me as if you missed me.

Me: I did.

Mvelo: mxm.

I'm still holding him tightly but he's still not hugging me back.

Me: I won't let you go until you hug me back.

Mvelo: fine.

He squeezes me until he lifts me up from the ground and spins me around causing me to giggle. Jeez he still has this effect on me.

Mvelo: you don't bother to look for me when you're off the hook.

I turn to look at Devon who has a sour look on his face.

Me: I'm still not in the clear yet.

Mvelo: when's your last class?

Me: 14:00.

Mvelo: meet me at the library after that class.

Me: I can't, dad will be here.

Mvelo: then you'll skip it.

Me: you can't let me do that!

Mvelo: what's going to stop you?

I keep quiet not knowing what to say. He's crazy.

Mvelo: thought so. Library at 13:15.

He walks away after patting my shoulder, ohh wow. I turn around and sit back down.

Devon: that's the guy that got you grounded?

Me: yep.

Devon: and you carry on listening to him, didn't you learn your lesson.

Me: I did, you seriously don't think I'm going to do what he said.

He gives me a 'really' look. Even I haven't convinced myself.

Devon: you are clearly in love with this dude, I know you, you'll go to him. What does he want to do to you? In a library?

Me: I don't know Devon, I'm not even planning on finding out okay! I'm not going.

Devon: you better.

Me: mxm.

Devon is almost like a brother to me, he's gay and all but he's the first one to warn me when he see's danger. He clearly doesn't like Mvelo and he sure can see right through me.

.....

Shout me, scold me, hit me if you can but I bunked my last class and went to the library. I also cannot believe it but I got curious. It's quiet as hell in here, only my loud thumping footsteps are audible. My father always shouts at me for walking like a man, I always stomp and walk fast. It doesn't help that I never wear heels and dresses. I see him standing by the history shelf and I walk towards him. He doesn't smile or grin, he just grabs my wrist then cups my waist. He then grabs my neck and brings his face closer to his and his breath is on my face.

Mvelo: I knew you would come.

I just close my eyes as the wind leaves my lungs and my words fail me, he's so close, we are literally sharing the same breath. His other hand slides down to my coochie and I jump, definitely not here.

Me: not here.

Instead, he rubbed my clit over my leggings and sucked on my neck, making me moan.

Mvelo: uhhu, not so loud.

He was sucking and biting on my neck, I bit my lower lip as he slid his hand inside my pants, under my panties and his hand in direct contact with my lady.

Mvelo: (Whispering) I'll have you whenever I want, wherever I want. Understood.

I nod repeatedly and he slides two fingers inside of me, making me gasp for air...

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Who knew I was this spontaneous guys! I just got banged in my school's library. It wasn't the greatest, he was a little rough for my liking but the thrill of it just made it for me. I look up and I see a camera on the corner of the room.

Me: oh my goodness. Look at that.

I pointed at it and he looked unfazed.

Mvelo: relax.

He buttoned up his shirt and walked in front of me. Why is he so unfazed, we just had sex in front of a camera for crying out loud! I pick up my bag and rush towards him, he's heading towards the librarians table, the one I didn't even seem to notice when I walked in here, ihhe kodwa Christine.

Mvelo: Mrs J.

Librarian: Mfusi.

He slid something on the counter with a smile on his face then she signaled him to go and he walked into the room behind her table. Now I'm standing there feeling so

ashamed, she obviously knows about his shenanigans and she's on his pay roll, how embarrassing.

Librarian: if I were you I'd cover up my neck, as a parent I wouldn't appreciate it if my daughter came home looking like that.

I touched my neck as if I would see it then I looked down feeling even more embarrassed, I can't believe I did this.

Librarian: stay away from this boy, he's nothing but trouble. I see all the other girls he brings here but you're different. You actually look decent, don't degrade yourself by sleeping with boys like him behind bookshelves.

I feel like crying my eyes out right now, I'm so humiliated. I nod vigorously and I pull out my hoodie from my bag and put it on. The bell goes off and he comes out the room and thanks her. I don't even wait for him to follow me, I just walk ahead, I feel demeaned, I shouldn't have gone there in the first place, I just feel so dirty.

Mvelo: eyy Chris.

I wipe my tears and look back at him.

Mvelo: walk properly, you look funny.

He thinks he's funny, I can't believe him right now. I just walk out the school and I start to walk down the street, hoping my dad's car will appear soon enough, he chooses today to be late, wow. I can hear Devon's voice calling behind me but I don't

have the will or strength to turn around and face him. He finally catches up to me and he's panting.

Devon: why do I have to chase you down the street manje?

He holds my shoulder and turns me around. I quickly try and wipe my tears but he holds my hands and sees my face.

Devon: you went to that library didn't you?

I nod, a fresh batch of tears running down my face. He grabs me and gives a warm hug and I just break down in his arms.

Me: (Crying) I just feel so humiliated babe, I shouldn't have gone there, you told me and I didn't listen...it's just that...I love him so much Devon. I wish he knew how much I did.

Devon: I don't want to be that 'I told you so' friend but you know I warned you to stay away from him. I warned you that when you catch feelings for him, nothing will ever work. It's not your fault though, the heart wants what it wants. Just please stop crying, you'll be giving him the satisfaction he wants.

Me: how will I face him again?

Devon: you don't have to do it, just take time to yourself, concentrate on your studies and exams, carry on dancing, you haven't done that in a while as well.

He's making sense, I tried and tried but I just can't ignore my feelings for him and if this thing carries on for longer, I'll lose my mind and die of heartbreak, he clearly doesn't feel the same way. I'm taking a break from Mvelwenhle.

Narrated

A frustrated Mvelo gets home and goes straight to the kitchen and gets a glass of water. He stands by the sink thinking about the invitation his family received. Ntswaki is getting married and has invited the family. At some point he thought he was over her but it's still a bitter pill for him to swallow. The glass in his hand snaps from all the pressure he's applying and it cuts his hand.

Helo: aibo Mvelo.

He looks at his hand then looks back at Helo who has a shocked expression on her face. She runs upstairs in panic and calls her mother.

Helo: mah please come.

Zuzile: shh, Sanele's sleeping. What's wrong.

Helo: there's something wrong with Mvelo. Please just go and check him out. He shattered a glass in his hand.

She stands in a haste and walks out the room rushing downstairs. They find Mvelo still in the same position she had left her in.

Zuzile: get the first-aid kit.

She pulls him to the table and sits him down and Helo comes rushing with the bag and Zuzile attends to him.

Zuzile: son what's going on?

Mvelo: I'm fine mom, I was just thinking.

Zuzile: thinking to a point where you shatter a glass with your bare hands.

She says pulling out the bottle pieces out of his hand as he squirms and winces in pain.

Zuzile: last time I saw something like this was when your father had a fit.

Mvelo: you don't have to worry about me.

Zuzile: it's about Ntswaki right? I know I told you that you have to go...

Mvelo: it's just that I didn't expect it to happen so soon.

Zuzile: you don't have to go son if you don't want to.

Mvelo: no, I'll go, Dumisani is your business partner and you won't be able to be there so as the next head of this family, I basically have to suck it up and go to that wedding whether I like it or not. Don't worry about me.

She looks at him and half smiles. She genuinely feels worried about his behavior.

Zuzile: you have two months to prepare yourself, and hopefully get over her.

Mvelo: I am over her.

He says with confidence and Zuzile is more than reassured by his statement. She bandages his whole hand and kisses it.

Zuzile: I love you son and I worry about you.

Mvelo: don't worry about me mom, I'm okay. And I love you too Ma' Mfusi.

He wiped her tear and hugged her tightly. When Christine gets home, she goes to her room and throws herself on her bed and cries her eyes out. She feels like she's devoted herself to someone she knew she couldn't have in the first place. Mvelo is an asshole. Not because he fucked her in a library but because she's not the only he's fucking. It's going to be tough to get over him. She takes off her hoodie and stands in front of the full length mirror looking at her neck, touching it just so that she can feel if there's any pain there. Finger marks and teeth mark all over her pale skin, she can still smell his musk on her skin, all over her clothes. She closes her eyes for a brief moment to relive all of the times he's made her feel like a woman. She runs her fingers gently up her arms as she caresses her neck with her other hand. Eyes closed shut as she remembers his soft touch, his lips, his wet kisses all over her body. Love was definitely not in far reach, she had found it, it just so happened to be that it was one sided, not for long, she thought to herself.

Christine

Last week of November, finally, the end of the terrifying exams. Goodness I'm so happy they are over and done with, I hate stressing out. I've had a peaceful 3 weeks, no Mvelo to annoy and pester me, I see he got the memo. I've just been focusing on myself and I won't lie that has been the best thing I have done in a while, for some time, my life has literally been revolving around this guy and I won't let that happen. I cried and cried but I realized it's really not worth it so I've moved on. Last day on campus today, I'm having lunch alone in the cafeteria when I see him walk in. god

give me an invisibility cloak or something, I really don't want him coming here. The lord always has my back because not long after I see him, Devon walks straight to me and sits across me and eyes me.

Devon: why do you look like you've just seen a ghost.

Me: because I have.

Devon: what?

Me: Mvelo, he was in here not so long ago.

Devon: did he come here?

Me: nope, I think he didn't see me. Ohh good god I'm so glad I did...

Devon stands up quickly, looking at the negative space behind me with a reprimanding look in his eyes.

Me: Dev?

Devon: Mfusi, stay away.

Mvelo: who are you and what are you to tell me to stay away? Don't bullshit me, move!

My heart started beating very loudly, I could hear it in my ears, I didn't even want to turn around.

Devon: you move, invading personal space. Christine doesn't want to talk to you.

Mvelo: and she can't speak for herself? You're her spokesperson.

Devon: and if I was, why would...

Mvelo: I said move out of my way!

He pushed his way towards my back but I stood up quickly and looked at him straight in the eye with the meanest look I can pull out.

Me: he said leave, I think you should listen.

Mvelo: I want to talk to you.

Me: but I don't want to talk to you. Leave Mvelo.

Mvelo: I'm not going anywhere...

Me: AYY Fuck off, I said leave!

I'm sure that drew attention from the others but I could care less, he's an asshole and the world should know it. He gave me his signature scary look but I returned my straight face and he left after turning to look at Devon with an evil eye. He can go to hell for all I care. Fuck him.

Mvelo

So all this time I've been concentrating on exams, I've been thinking Chris was ignoring me because of them but no, it can't be it. She's mad about something I did and I wish I knew what it was. Last time we spoke we were on good terms and I hate it when she does this. Other than being great mates, I really enjoy being in her company, she's such a breath of fresh air, but I would never tell her this, it would get too complicated. I actually wanted to ask her to accompany me to Ntswaki's wedding. Yeah right she's getting married and mom asked me stand in for her as she still has Sanele and cannot make it. This child has literally become the center of her

universe, time stops for her little son and I totally understand, imagine knowing you'll never have a child again then boom, you get a child, now. I still know nothing about girls and their feelings so I might just need help with getting "forgiveness" from Chris. I go to my dad's study and he's sitting on the couch with a glass of scotch next to him, he's busy on his phone.

Dad: what do you want.

Me: I haven't even said anything.

He looks at me and shakes his head. I grab the chair and sit opposite him.

Dad: when you look this serious I know you want something and if it's money I don't have it.

Me: we both know that's a lie dad. I need advice.

Dad: what?

He takes off his glasses then grabs his scotch and sits back looking at me.

Me: what do you do for mom when she's angry at you?

Dad: I make love to her. Why you asking?

He has a straight face so I know he's not joking.

Me: a friend of mine is angry at me and I don't know what I did so I just want to apologize to her appropriately.

Dad: her? Friend?

Me: mate.

Dad: why would you care about a mates feelings?

Me: because she's also my friend.

Dad: I'd advise you not to go that route my boy, it gets messy, trust me. They tend to catch feelings when you get to cozy with them.

Me: she's too smart to catch feelings dad, plus, she knows we would never work.

He keeps quiet and looks at me for a long time, like he's thinking.

Dad: you already love this girl.

Me: are you asking me or are you telling me.

Dad: I'm telling you.

Me: that's not true.

I'm getting tired of this line now. Jeez if I loved Christine I would've acted on my feelings already but I just don't so what if we're good friends, it happens you know.

Dad: and I know for a fact that I'm not the first to tell you this. Go on and deny it.

I keep quiet.

Dad: get her roses. They almost always work, flowers and chocolate with an apology card.

Me: simple enough, if it doesn't work?

Dad: send them to her until it does.

Me: thanks dad.

Dad: there's nothing wrong with being in love you know. It happened to me.

Me: I know, I'm just not in love with Christine.

He chuckles and shakes his head. I stand and go back to my room and start researching florists around Ramsgate. Wish me luck, I'm going to need it.

Ntswaki

Who knew being a MoSotho girl was this hectic. I mean I've been locked up in a room for almost a week now, as a soon-to-be mosadi. Who knew my brothers knew so much about our culture and here I was thinking we were a Christian family. To make matters worse, I have to be covered in this big blanket and with this heat, it's not really ideal. They told me I'm going to be introduced to the Gumede ancestors soon and I'm guessing soon is today because there's a lot of commotion outside. Hell I'm not even allowed to speak yazi, I've been sitting here with people but I haven't exchanged a single word with them, they do the talking and I do the nodding. Since I don't have any friends, they asked two of my cousins to be my bridesmaids. Trust me, I didn't want them to be in my wedding but I had no choice because Dumi had a best man and groomsman, it would look weird without bridesmaids. Kananelo's mom walks in and sits next to us.

Aunt: molangoana oa hau o fihlile, hosane hoseng, re u isa ho bohoeng ba hao. (your kist has arrived, tomorrow in the morning, we are taking you to your in-laws.)

I nodded, there's nothing more I could say. They started ululating, my "Bridesmaids" and sung some wedding songs. Is it wrong for me not to even be happy about this

whole farce of a tradition, because I can't stand it. I just want to have my wedding dress, meet the man I love at the alter and say I do.

.....

The night was long, it was bound to feel long, I had nothing to do, worse, I couldn't even fall asleep, I couldn't wait to see my husband. We were woken up and we had to go to the river and wash, worst experience of my life. The water was dirty and cold, like I'm not okay.

Kana: you can pull the meanest face on the planet sisi, you have to do it.

I gave her a death stare and they both chuckled. We finished up and we went back to the car. We drove to Umbumbulu, at Dumisani's homestead where I was to parade around with nothing underneath, just a blanket. I will never understand Zulu culture. We stood at the gate and the people that were with us started singing out loud, dancing and cheering.

Uncle: Gumede! Mnguni! Qwabe!

They carried on praising, I couldn't grasp any of the other praise names, they were too complicated. I couldn't even see anything under this blanket, I could only see my feet and the feet of others. There was mumbling and whispering since they'd stopped singing. Money was thrown on the floor and I saw the gate wheels move which meant they let us in. great! The ululation started all over again and they helped me walk all around the house while they screamed at me. I was then taken to a hut and they made me sit down. As I explained earlier, I can't see anything, I can only see feet and it wasn't hard for me to spot his feet, his round yellowbone feet in brown leather sandals. Gosh he had nice toes, look at me sitting here in the middle of my wedding ceremony admiring my husband's toes. Ntswaki, you have your whole lifetime to do that.

Man1: ayikhanyi.

Man2: uqonde ukuthini muthi ayikhanyi bhuti?

Man1: shuti amadlozi akayamukeli lentombazana.

I wanted to look up and see what wasn't turning on. What do they mean when they say "Ayikhanyi" I saw Dumi stand up, I followed the direction his feet were headed, how embarrassing can this get honestly.

Man3: Dumisani hlala phansi.

Dumi: cha baba ngeke. Menihluleka ngizozikhanyisela mina.

Man1: uzozilethela amabhadi we Mfana.

Woman: Dumi hlala mfanwami, izokhanya.

It better turn on, I am marrying Dumisani come hell or high waters.

Chapter 27

Christine

I'm coming out of the library on campus, walking with Devon. A cute coloured guy dressed in Black walks in through the door carrying a big bunch of roses, white to be exact.

Devon: who is he?

Me: I don't know but he's a feast and a half.

Devon: tell me about it.

He licks his lips and pushed his hair back.

Me: he's obviously here to see someone, look at those roses.

Devon: what a lucky girl.

He goes to the librarian. Now we are standing by the door looking at him.

Me: it's rude to stare...

Devon: right.

And he's not even taking his eyes off of him. I tug on his sleeve.

Me: (Laughing) Devon let's go please

Devon: right.

He laughs this time and turns to look at me. We are now heading towards the exit, talking and laughing like always when someone pats me on the back. I turn around and I'm met by the nicest pair of brown eyes ever, the coloured guy with the roses.

Me: hi.

Guy: Christine?

Me: yess.

I say reluctantly. Does he know me?

Guy: this is for you.

He hands me the roses but I don't take them, I just stare at him blankly.

Guy: it's a delivery.

Devon: from who?

Guy: I don't know, I'm just the delivery guy, I work at the florist and I was told I would find you here.

I stare at him and when I see the logo on his shirt it registers. I take the flowers from his hand in a shocked state.

Me: do I have to sign anything?

Guy: no.

Me: ohh...

Devon: thank you...

He tilts his head and looks at his name tag.

Devon: Marlo.

He nods swiftly and walks away. Who sent me flowers, in school to be worse! What was this person thinking.

Devon: such a fine piece of man.

I'm busy looking at these flowers, they look so beautiful, white roses, they symbolize purity and peace. I wonder who's thinking of me, buying me my favorite flowers, I feel a tad bit special. Eek!

Devon: why am I talking to myself.

He's snapping his fingers in my face.

Me: sorry, what were you saying?

Devon: who are they from?

Me: I don't know.

Devon: then look for a card dummy.

Oh yes, cards, they normally put those in right? I bring them closer to my face and I look for a card. I find one with a picture of a kitten that has apology eyes, so cute I squeal, showing Devon the card.

Me: so cute, it's cute.

Devon: what does the inside say.

Me: wait.

Why am I so excited? I opened and read the words written in the fine Cursive: *“Chris, I sent you roses because I want to apologize. I don’t know exactly what for but I’m sorry and please call me. Andrew.”* I literally crushed the card and threw it in the bin along with the flowers, they suddenly looked disgusting to me.

Devon: hawu and then?

Me: Mvelo.

Devon: what was he saying.

Me: (Mimicking his voice to myself) ay nyori nyori! Nxx, sorry for something he doesn’t even know!

Devon: I asked you what he was saying Christine!

Me: HE SAID HE’S SORRY!

He moved back and looked at me in shock. Damn it I’m so fucking angry right now, I can feel my heart racing with hatred.

Mvelo

So I’ve been sending Christine flowers for the whole week now and still nothing, it stung even more when I saw her throw the first bunch in the bin, how disrespectful. It’s Saturday today and I still don’t have a date to this stupid wedding. I don’t want to ask anyone else, so I’ll have to put my pride aside and beg her to forgive me. If I want to do this properly, I’m going to have to go ask the romance guru, I don’t know

why I haven't been asking him all this time but Dad is good at this thing. He's sitting in the kitchen with Lindelwa, doing god knows what.

Me: your idea didn't work.

Dad: all my ideas work, you are clearly the problem.

Me: you don't even know what I'm talking about.

Dad: I don't and I don't want to know. Ufunani?

Lindelwa: yes Mvelo ufunani?

She sticks her tongue out at me.

Me: non-of your business.

Lindelwa: ngizokuceba.

So I hand brushed her face and she jumped off the counter running upstairs to tell on me I guess. Dad walks out the kitchen and I follow him.

Me: dad.

Dad: what, what, what!

Me: she hasn't forgiven me.

Dad: and how is that my problem Mvelwenhle.

Me: I need your help again.

Dad: I don't understand what's worrying you so much about a mate. She's not even your girlfriend.

Me: she's my friend.

He shakes his head and carries on walking upstairs, still I follow him.

Dad: ha u batle ho lula u ntatela joaloka Mvelo ea lilemo li 2 u tena (you can't keep following me around like a 2 year old Mvelo you are annoying)

I didn't quite catch what he said and I know he did it on purpose.

Me: please help me.

He ignores me and goes straight to his study. I follow him and close the door behind me then sit opposite him.

Dad: manje ufuna ngenzeni?

Me: give me another idea.

He rubs his head in frustration and looks at me. He looks so drained.

Dad: listen, girls should be the last thing on your mind Mvelwenhle. You want another Paloma. Look how tired I am, Sanele is doing a number on me.

Me: I know dad but she is nothing but a friend.

Dad: be careful and stop bugging me, I'm tired.

Me: last time.

He sighs out loud, so loud his breathe whisks on my face.

Dad: did you get the flowers.

Me: every day since Monday. All of them went in the bin.

Dad: then give up.

Me: I need a date to the wedding.

Dad: is this what this is about?

Me: yes.

Dad: you're dumber than I thought son.

Me: there's nothing wrong with wanting to go gatecrash a wedding with your friend.

He rolls his eyes and sits back on his chair and looks at me.

Dad: this "friend" of yours. What does she like?

Me: I don't know, she likes chocolates and I've sent those already.

Dad: what else does she like?

Me: music I think. All girls like music, I just don't know what type of music she likes.

Dad: what are you apologizing for again?

Me: I don't know.

He shakes his head in disbelief.

Dad: and I'm guessing you told her?

Me: yes.

Dad: now before you do anything else you need to take time to think about what you've done because you can't apologize for something you don't know. Why do you think she's still angry at your big head.

I close my eyes and exhale. Girls are so complicated, like seriously, why am I still doing this?

Me: can we skip that part.

Dad: your call, I don't care. I have my wife to love and hold every night.

Me: hook me up with your old music, those crappy "I'm sorry" songs. They always work.

Dad: your attitude towards music is stinking.

Me: your music is whack.

Dad: then use your music.

Me: I want your music.

For the hundredth time, he shakes his head. He throws me a pen and paper.

Dad: put this in chronological order: I'm sorry- 3rd Story, 6,8,12- Brian McKnight...

He's going so fast, I'm trying to stay on track. When was the last time I used a pen and paper.

Me: what was the third one?

Dad: Last Chance- Ginuwine.

Me: this is coming from the top of your head.

Dad: I have a whole list of these for your mother.

Me: old people. What are the other two?

Dad: I hate repeating myself.

Me: okay the last 3 dad then I'm out of your hair.

Dad: Please stay- Anthony Hamilton, Forgive me- Anthony Hamilton and Every time you go- Brian McKnight.

Me: thanks father.

I tear the piece of paper and leave his study.

Christine

Being home alone is the best thing ever. I'm currently in the lounge sweeping in my PJ's, blasting music through the speakers. A loud knock disturbs me from my jam session so I go to the kitchen to answer. Surprise, surprise, it's Marlo.

Me: hi Marlo.

Marlo: Chrissy, I have your delivery.

He doesn't smile a lot.

Me: (Smiling) hope it's from someone different.

Marlo: yeah.

He's still not smiling. I take the flowers from him.

Me: thanks.

He nods and walks away, he looks like a broken soul but asikho lapho. I feel like throwing these in the bin but I get satisfaction from reading the cards and how he begs and begs me to call him and accept his apology. The only reason why I won't forgive him is because he doesn't know what he's apologizing for. Unless he gets his act together and tells me something tangible like he wants me or he's going to stop being a jerk then I might just think about forgiving him and moving on because to be honest, I miss him. *"If this doesn't work I'm committing suicide. Please forgive me Chris."* That's what the card reads, if what doesn't work? I look at the flowers, pink and white roses, they look beautiful but am I supposed to find something? I throw them on the counter but before I could leave, a little USB slides out from the flowers. I look at it and it has a sticky note on it *"Play me"* I run to the lounge and insert it on the stereo. I grab my phone and turn on Shazzam so I can get the name of the song.

3rd Story- I'm sorry

"I know I said it

I know I did it

Maybe I went over board

To prove a point

But sometimes my pride gets in the way

*Maybe I need some time away
To get my head together, yeah
Maybe this was my last chance
I may never get to hold your hands again
I can say that I'm a better man (I'm sorry)
Because you made me understand
I'm so sorry that I tore your heart apart last night (And I'm sorry)
And I'm sorry if I scarred you again today
(I didn't mean to take your dreams) I didn't mean to take your dreams and make
them seem so trite
I sincerely
Completely
Apologize for doing what I did
*
I've never ever been so (Shameful for what I did)
But you made me know what thing that I never did
If you ever take me back again
I'll never hurt you this again
If I could
I would
I'd never mishandle you ever again"*

Is it wrong for me to say I've already forgiven him, he's sorry right? Track 2 and 3

Please stay and Forgive me- Anthony Hamilton

It's gotten too late

And I've exceeded the moments

To make you stay, hey baby

I must have been a fool

To run around and not once

Stop to check on you, Hey baby

Now I've lost my mind

And I'm thinking 'bout the times

That I could've shared with you

And if I had my way

I would go down on my knees and

Ask my God to make you stay

Ohh

I will make you stay baby

God make you stay

I will try everything

I'll go down on my knees baby

(To make you stay)

I will try everything.

*

Thinking about

When you with me and we were happy

Now I'm alone, been stuck on that phone

Heartbroken ashamed

I left you nights all alone didn't call on the phone to see how you have been

Now I cry why oh why didn't I realize that I was losing a friend

Oh baby (Forgive me)

(I'm sorry baby)

Honey I'm sorry

For driving you crazy

From the man in me

Here's a strong apology

Forgive me.

Mvelwenhle is such an asshole yazi! Why does he have to make me cry all the time, all the time! So today he sends me a playlist, he knows exactly that I love music, he knows I have a weakness for it and he tells me all these words through music. How shitty can he get. I've even stopped sweeping, I'm just sitting on the couch crying. What do I do now? Do I call him? Do I unblock him and tell him I forgive him? I unblocked him and as if he was waiting, his messages come flooding in.

Mvelo: Chris do you forgive me?

Bluetick.

Mvelo: Chris please answer me.

Bluetick. He decides to call this time around and I'm conflicted, should I answer. What am I going to say. I answer.

Mvelo: Christine, finally.

I just keep quiet, I have nothing to say.

Mvelo: Chris?

Me: what?

Mvelo: do you forgive me?

Me: for what?

Mvelo: what do you mean for what?

Me: did you do something wrong?

Mvelo: I don't know? You're angry at me, you blocked me and you've been avoiding and ignoring me. What should I think.

Me: whatever you want to think Mvelwenhle. It's your life and I don't give a shit about it.

Mvelo: zthini ngawe vele?

Me: azisho lutho. I just don't want you around me. I don't need your stupid flowers or your music. I don't want it Mvelo! You are complicating my life can you just leave me alone. Please.

Mvelo: no I won't leave you alone until...

I hung up and threw the phone on the other side of the couch and sighed. I don't want to cry anymore, I'm tired of this. Lord my savior be with me.

.....

I'm woken up by a loud thudding at the door and I get up in a haste, rushing to the kitchen door. I almost stumble when I find him standing there looking at me. I rub my eyes, trying to make sure it's not a dream but he pushes the door and gets inside, closing and locking it behind me.

Me: GO!

Mvelo: not today.

He grabbed my hand and pulled me close to him. I didn't know I had reflexes as quick as these but as soon as he put his arm around my waist, I lifted my hand and slapped him with my back hand so hard that he stumbled.

Mvelo: What's your problem.

Me: I told you to leave!

Mvelo: you're so fucking childish do you know that?

He was spitting blood out of his mouth, gosh did I hit him that hard. I clearly did because I'm huffing and puffing like I've been running.

Me: I'm being childish?

Mvelo: why the fuck did you hit me!

He was moving towards me and I started moving back.

Me: I told you to leave. I don't want to see or talk to you.

Mvelo: why? Isn't it enough that I've crossed the line apologizing to you, what do you want from me, you want me to go down on my knees?

Me: no! I want you to stop being as asshole and respect me Mvelo! You treat me like trash.

Mvelo: and I've been apologizing.

Me: for what?

Mvelo: again with that question. You just told me!

Me: and you still don't fucking know!

I'm now against the couch, we've been walking this whole time and we haven't broken eye contact. He pulls my top and I crash into his chest.

Mvelo: Ngiyaxolisa Ma' Zondo, uyezwa, ngiyaxolisa.

His eyes have softened and his breathe is on my face. Our eyes are locked and tears are running down my cheeks.

Mvelo: you are more than just a mate, you've become my friend. Trust me, I don't beg that should mean you are special. Please stop being mad and crying now. If you don't like something, you should tell me. I'm also human.

I nod and he wipes my tears with his thumb and hugs me. So tightly that I have hiccups and my voice is just strained but I scream out loud in pain my heart is hurting I won't lie. Ibuhlungu inhliziyoyami. He thinks I'm special, I am special to him. He rubs my back and he's making it worse because I just cry even more.

Mvelo: stop crying phela Fluff.

Me: (Crying) okay.

He let's go of me and I wipe my tears and he shakes his head laughing.

Mvelo: you are dramatic.

Me: you love making me feel guilty for something that's not my fault.

Mvelo: go clean yourself up ke. You look ugly now.

Me: fuck you.

I push him away from me and walk to the bathroom and I take the fastest shower and walk out to my bedroom. I found him sitting on my desk, looking at my laptop. I stand by the door and look at him, he's concentrating so hard he doesn't even see me.

Me: how did you open my laptop?

Mvelo: you aren't really hard to figure out Chris.

Me: okay why are you on my laptop?

I walk to him, standing right behind him. I see he's looking at my videos.

Mvelo: you dance?

Me: I have a YouTube Channel.

Mvelo: and why don't I know this?

Me: you never asked.

Mvelo: show me.

I leaned over him and moved his hand on the mouse pad. I clicked on one video and played it for him. I walked away from him and I started getting dressed. I'm so glad dad is at work otherwise I would be dead by now. I haven't even finished cleaning around the house.

Mvelo: is this your boyfriend?

I turn to the screen and I see Devon. Lol he thinks he's my boyfriend. We normally do dance videos together, some of them sensual.

Me: no, he's my bro.

Mvelo: and he touches you like this.

He raises his eyebrow, and then manje?

Me: is it a problem if he does?

Mvelo: yeah, he clearly has feelings for you.

Me: yes sisterly feelings. He's gay.

Mvelo: oh.

He presses his lips together and I laugh at him. Uyaphapha uMvelo.

Mvelo: when am I getting a dance?

Me: never.

Mvelo: hawu, but your gay bro gets one. I'm your mate for goodness sake.

Me: he dances with me, plus I only dance for my channel so unless you want to be shown on a channel with 20k subscribers, no dance for you.

Mvelo: come on, that's unfair Chris.

Me: It's not a difficult decision.

I ignore him and walk out the room, going straight to the kitchen. I pack away the dishes and mop the floor. I put everything back in place and finally the house is clean. I start making some sandwiches and I have music playing in the lounge. When I turned around, I found him staring at me.

Me: you're being creepy.

Mvelo: I have something to ask you.

Me: what?

My heart started beating very fast, what does he want to ask me.

Mvelo: I need you to be my date to this wedding next week.

Me: you like asking me these things on the last minute.

Mvelo: you were the one that wasn't talking to me, I wanted to ask you last week but no, you were ignoring me.

Me: okay, okay fine but I don't have a dress or money to buy one plus I haven't gotten off the hook with my dad as yet.

Mvelo: I'll talk to him.

Me: kanti usuyahlanya.

Mvelo: I'm not joking.

I look at him.

Mvelo: you are just accompanying me to this wedding, as my friend.

Me: if you succeed, let me know.

He chuckles and sits on the counter and looks at me. He's so comfortable and it scares me. I give him his sandwich and juice.

Mvelo: what makes you think I drink juice.

Me: what must I give you then?

Mvelo: something stronger.

Me: we don't have something stronger.

Mvelo: your dad doesn't drink?

Me: not at all.

He nods slowly takes the glass.

Mvelo: about this dance...

Me: Mvelo give it up.

Mvelo: I can't give it up, now I know you can shake it, I want to get some of that.

Me: (Laughing) you really think you are special?

Mvelo: yes. I am special. I want my dance. I want to see you throw it back.

Me: (Laughing) wow! Devon and I are going to shoot later today, if you want a dance, come through.

Mvelo: good.

He take a huge bite of his sandwich and smiles. This one is a nutcase I tell you.

Me: you are in Architecture right?

Mvelo: yep.

Me: I need your help with a plan.

Mvelo: you guys are already working on plans?

Me: yes so can you help me?

Mvelo: sure.

He gives me the plate and hops off the counter and walks towards the table, a thank you would've been nice you know! I guess we're back to normal. I washed the dishes and I went to take my books and plans and threw them on the table by where he's sitting. Before I could walk behind him, he pulled my arm and I landed on his lap. He pushes the books off his side of the table and lifts me up by the waist and puts me on the table. I'm now sitting in front of him with my legs slightly parted, with his hands gently placed on my exposed thighs. Definitely not here! I know what he wants to do.

Me: we can't.

Mvelo: we aren't doing anything.

Me: no, Mvelo stop.

He has a smirk on his face and it's making me smile. He kissed my knee not breaking eye contact with me.

Me: stop it!

Mvelo: and you stop smiling.

He trails his kisses up my thighs. He stands and towers over me. He runs his big hands in my hair and sniffs it. He plants a soft kiss on my forehead, on my cheek, down to my neck and on my chest. I tilt my head and he places his hands on my hips. He smells so good, I missed his scent on me and I never even realized it. Look at me giving in to his touch.

Mvelo: should I stop?

Me: yes, you should really stop.

Mvelo: okay.

He runs his hands up my t-shirt, isn't he supposed to be stopping? He cups my boobs and looks at me. I grab his wrists so he let them go but he shakes his head slowly. He then leans forwards and kisses my nose. I have my eyes wide open but his are shut. He goes down to my lips and gently pulls on the top lip while his hand goes to my back and he slowly unhooks my bra. He's breathing pattern has changed completely. I seal my eyes and let him take control of my body. I part my lips and he ventures down to my lower lip, taking it into his and giving me a wet slow kiss. The way he holds my breasts in his hands, the way he rubs them, it's making me sink into hypnotization. He hasn't stopped kissing me as he slides his hands to my belly button, all the way to my shorts. I want to say no, I really want to but the words

won't come out. Off come the shorts and I'm left in my t-shirt and underwear. He pulls out from the kiss and grips on my panties and pulls them down. Down all the way to my knees. It's almost a waterfall down there by now. He sits back down and I can see his hard on through his pants. That didn't take long. Again, he takes my underwear and puts it in his pocket. He has like 3 pairs now, I wonder what he does with them. He lifts my legs and puts my feet on his shoulders, don't tell me he's about to do what I think he's about to do.

Me: Mvelo...p

He plants a kiss on my inner thigh and he disappears under my shirt. He takes my hands and pushes them back then my chest, making me lie down on the table. I feel his warm lips on my opening and I gasp. He's never done this before. He softly bites on my loins and his tongue lightly brushes up and down. I arch my back and moan softly. His mouth is working some sort of magic down there and it feel like nothing I have ever felt before. I feel it go in, not too deep but deep enough for me to feel it, he swerves it around and I lose control. I grab ahold of his head and lock my legs around his neck, pushing him towards it, closer and closer. Then he does the unexplainable, he blows hot air on it and licks my clit and I'm gone, I squirt all over his face and scream out his name. I lie back down and try to catch my breath and he comes up to my face, his glistening with my juices. Did I just cum all over my dad's dinner table?

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We got over ourselves and now he's helping me with the house plans. He looks so in the zone when he explains it and it's kind of hard to concentrate with his handsomeness screaming at me. I can't get over what happened an hour ago.

Mvelo: are you even listening.

Me: yeah.

Mvelo: what did I just say?

Eish.

Mvelo: stop day dreaming and listening.

Me: yes sir.

He rolls his eyes and carries on explaining. It's not long when I hear my dad's car driving in, my eyes shoot up and I start to panic.

Me: my dad's here.

Mvelo: okay.

He carries on drawing and I give him a look. I mean it's too late for me to try and hide him, his car is outside but at least he can show some worry or panic.

Me: you need to leave.

Mvelo: are we done with these?

Me: no but my dad's here.

Mvelo: then I'm not leaving until these are done. He's not going to do anything to you. Calm down and carry on with these plans.

I stand and look out the window and he still parking the car. Mvelo is not even moving a single inch.

Mvelo: come sit.

I give up on this soul, honestly. I go and sit and grab my pencil and start drawing again. my heart is beating tremendously fast, I'm actually shitting myself. The door opens in the kitchen and I sigh loudly, Mvelo looks at me.

Dad: Chrissy.

I keep quiet but Mvelo kicks my leg and I respond.

Me: daddy.

He walks in the lounge and stops when he sees Mvelo.

Mvelo: good afternoon sir.

Dad: Christine.

I know that look, he wants an explanation and I don't have one.

Me: daddy Mvelo was here to help me with school work, he was on his way out now actually.

I step on his foot and he kicks me back. Bloody fool! He starts packing my pencils and stands up, grabbing his keys off the table. Dad hasn't moved from where he was standing and he's looking straight at Mvelo, who doesn't seem to care that he's being watched so harshly. He does the unexpected after that, he walks to me, kisses

my cheek and pats my head like some puppy, I give him a shocked look and he walks towards my dad who has the same look as I do. Kodwa Mvelwenhle!

Mvelo: sir can I please have a word.

My dad nods and walks out and he follows behind him. What the hell does he want to say to my father!

Chapter 28

Mvelo

This Zondo guy is arrogant. I'm trying my mere best to be respectful but all I get is mean looks, two can play that game. We get outside and he stands by the flower bed with his hands in his pockets. I guess that's my queue to speak.

Me: I wanted to ask you to please let Chris be my date next week.

Zondo: Chris?

Me: Christine.

Zondo: date to what?

Me: a wedding I'm going to. She felt it was best I ask on her behalf.

Zondo: awuhambi ngani wedwa?

He's seriously asking me that question, does he know I'm doing this just to be respectful, I can take Chris to this wedding with or without his permission.

Me: I need a plus one and she's the only friend I have around.

Zondo: unangaki mfana?

This is turning into an interrogation when I was the one that asked to talk to him. Old people. He might as well be a detective.

Me: I'm 20.

Zondo: it's very disrespectful to answer in English when I asked you a question in Zulu. Awukwazi yini ukusikhuluma?

Me: ngiyakwazi ukuthi angithandi.

Zondo: ubani isibongo. Angeke nigkuthembe ngingakwazi nokuthi owakabani.

Me: Mfusi.

Zondo: as long as she's home by 17:30, you can take her.

Me: the wedding starts at 16:00.

Zondo: tough.

He walks away and I shake my head and walk out the gate, some parents are difficult for no reason. It's not like I'm asking for her hand in marriage.

.....

I got a call from Christine while I was in my studio painting with my baby.

Me: yah.

Chris: you still want your dance.

Me: that's not even a question you should ask.

Chris: we are shooting soon.

Me: send the location.

I can hear her chuckle and I hang up. I pick up Paloma who is covered in paint, I pity the one who has to wash these. She tries to wiggle out of my embrace and cries.

Me: we'll come back later P.

Paloma: uhha, no!

She can say no, that's how cheeky she has gotten. I hold her tightly and walk back upstairs to change her. She's already in a bad mood, I'm not leaving her. She's crying her lungs out, making mom emerge from her office and look at us.

Mom: umenzani?

Me: she wants to paint.

Mom: I told you to stop that.

She frees from my grip and crawls to her grandmother.

Me: must I leave you?

She looks at me with her big blue eyes that are filled with crocodile tears. I turn around and walk towards the stairs but she decides to scream. I go back and take her from mom.

Me: we'll be back.

Mom: okay.

I won't even change her now, I put her in her car seat and I drive to where Chris is. She doesn't see us walk in, instead, her gay friend does. Don't get me wrong, I'm not homophobic, I just don't understand why a man would want to date another man while there are so many hot girls out here! Look at this, Chris is in split position on the floor, her whole ass popping out. She looks like she's stretching, how would you not find that attractive? She's so flexible, it's crazy. Now Paloma and I are just standing by the door, staring at her doing her stretch. When she turns around and sees us, her eyes open widely. She's definitely not happy to see me but happy to see this blue eyed child I'm carrying. Why don't I get this type of excitement?

Chris: there's my bestie!

She's clapping her hands and Paloma does the same, with the same excitement drawn on her face. My daughter is such a hypocrite. She takes her and spins her around and she giggles out loud in joy. Her loud coo's make my heart smile. The gay friend is just standing there giving me the most disgusted look ever, mxm.

Me: why don't I get the same amount of excitement.

Chris: you aren't important.

Me: clearly.

She walks away from me and goes to her friend who take Paloma. She doesn't even seem to mind his presence, she falls fond of him very quickly.

Chris: I was just doing my stretch, you still have time to back out of this. 20k is a lot of people.

Me: you are trying to make fun of me?

Chris: I'm being serious.

She climbs the pole so effortlessly and hangs upside down looking at me. She's so sexy.

Chris: can you even dance.

Me: no.

Chris: then you are hopeless. Sit.

I shake my head and I go sit in the chair. Paloma is now crawling all around the place getting herself even dirtier. It's going to be a long night.

Christine

He actually came, and here I was thinking that he was joking. I've never danced in front of anyone other than Devon and my camera, so it's a bit weird him being here to watch. First song I'm doing is an Ariana song. I love her so much, if I could sing, I'd only sing her songs! Her and Ciara are my favorites and every Thursday I post a video of a dance either recreating one of the dances from them or from Aliya Janell. Today I'm doing her new song *34+35* which is a bit too explicit to be performed for

someone like Mvelo, ohh god be with me! We start filming and I'm just looking at myself in the mirror as I try remember the dance in my head, I know if I look at this male figure sitting down with the biggest smirk on his face, I will forget my steps and lose my mind.

Devon: Chrissy, stop looking at the mirror.

I turn and look at him.

Devon: it looks ugly on the video. You have a subject in front of you.

I roll my eyes and look at Mvelo and he slides down and crosses his arms with a smirk. I say a mini prayer in my head and look at him. The music starts again and lock my eyes with him. You can tell he's having the time of his life and he starts rubbing his hands together. It's time for the dreaded part where I have to give him a lap dance. I've only ever done this for Devon, it's easy, I know he's not lusting over me but this one. I just have to put on my big girl panties and get over and done with.

.....

So my dad called me in the lounge yesterday to tell me that Mvelo asked me to be his date to a wedding. I almost fainted when I heard him say that. The mere fact that he agreed is just absurd. So today he's taking me shopping for an outfit which I really think is unnecessary, I don't know anyone at this wedding. Who will know I'm wearing something I've worn before. Ayy, if he wants to take me shopping he can, as long as he's paying. I wear my pink hoodie and shorts with sneakers. I hate dressing up, I prefer being comfortable and hoodies are my comfort, I have like a million of them. I run out the house and find him parked by the gate.

Me: hi.

Mvelo: hi Fluff.

He greets with a smile and starts the car and off we go.

Me: where are you taking me today?

Mvelo: I'd suggest you get comfortable, we are driving to Umhlanga.

Me: what! Why?

Mvelo: because it has more stores.

Me: that's almost 2 hours on the road.

Mvelo: that's why it's a road trip. I have snacks in the back.

I look at him in disbelief and he has a smile. He keeps darting his eyes towards me and it's making me smile. I can't believe him.

Mvelo

So I surprised Chris with a mini road trip to Umhlanga so she can do shopping for this wedding. I guess this is my way of really apologizing for being a jerk and being thankful she actually forgave me. So far, it's been nice, she's been making me play all these silly games with me, making me guess songs, asking me tons and tons of questions. She actually looks so free, I've never seen her so care-free. It's a beautiful sight.

Chris: okay, okay last question. If your life was a movie, what would be your soundtrack?

Me: where are you getting all these questions.

Chris: google, Duh!

I smile and shake my head.

Chris: answer!

Me: uhhm, a few Phora songs I guess. Romeo, Her, I Still love you. Ohh and Bryson Tiller exchange...

Chris: another genre please.

Me: I don't listen to another genre.

Chris: do you even know who Beyoncé is?

Me: who doesn't know who Beyoncé is?

Chris: okay sing me one of her songs.

Me: oh come on Fluff! This is my movie, why would I have Beyoncé on my soundtrack?

Chris: a female artist at least.

Me: Ariana Grande.

Her mouth hangs and she's out of words. I know her. Isa loved her.

Chris: why Ariana?

Me: that's a story for some other day.

She claps her hands and smiles.

Me: is it finally my turn?

Chris: no, you are driving.

Me: but I answered all your questions. It's my turn.

Chris: okay, one question.

Me: If you suddenly found out that your internal monologue for the last week was actually audible, how screwed would you be?

She bursts into laughter as if she's remembering something, I wonder what it is.

Chris: oh wouldn't you have a field day with me.

Me: why?

Chris: that's between me and my thoughts.

Me: so answer my question.

Chris: I'd probably be six feet under.

Me: and I would've killed you?

Chris: yep.

Me: interesting.

We are now driving into Gateway, which is such a relief. No more weird questions from Chris.

Chris: I can't believe you actually insisted on driving me all the way here for a dress and shoes.

Me: I needed the distraction. You were good company.

She rolls her eyes. What comes after that is a total disaster. I've always said I hate shopping with women, she dragged me from store to store, fitting every single thing she think looked cute. I don't know how many dresses she's picked up and left saying they don't look good when they were perfect. We are now at some boutique and she's standing by the mirror in a blue mini dress. It compliments her skin so well.

Me: I like it.

Chris: I was hoping for something more simple. It has too much going on.

She's been saying this about all the dresses, I'm over it.

Me: you aren't the one that's getting married you know.

Chris: you are the one that's making me attend this stupid wedding I don't even know the couple.

Me: just find a dress please.

Chris: fine.

She walks out to the store and comes back with a thousand more dresses.

Me: aww Christine.

Chris: you choose one. I'm over this.

She lays them in front of me and I look at them. I have no idea what I'm looking at, I just see a bunch of colours. I choose a black one.

Me: take this one. You don't even have to fit it.

Chris: fine Mvelo!

She snatches it from me and walks to the changing room and comes out in her clothes. Finally we are leaving! My heavens I was tired of it.

Christine

He chose a dress for me, a basic black dress. I was so done with him rushing me I just pulled the closest things and made him choose. I didn't even try it on, I'm hoping it fits and it looks nice on me. we are walking out the store when two girls start pointing at us.

Me: (Whispering) are they pointing at me or you.

Mvelo: (Whispering) you're the famous one.

Me: you're the rich one.

I roll my eyes and walk behind him. they are clearly crushing over him. snap, snap! They take picture of us together. He pulls me from the back and holds my waist and starts walking very fast.

Me: so they're your fans.

Mvelo: stalkers.

We went to Milky Way and he went to the counter while I stood by the door, busy trying to look for the stalker girls. Someone tapped me on the shoulder and I turned around. It was some girl, she was dark in complexion, very short with thick lips. She smiled at me.

Girl: hi, I'm sorry to bother you but is that your boyfriend?

She turned and glanced over the counter, I turned and realised she was looking at Mvelo. He turned and looked at me then winked, I shook my head. I looked back at the girl. Now I know she's asking because she wants to shoot her shot, she's probably stalked him a few times on social media, Mvelo really is a thirst trap so I have a choice, do I say yes and keep him to myself or do I say no, and probably lose him forever?

Me: yes, he's my boyfriend.

Girl: ohh, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to offend you, it's...it's just that I've seen him around a couple of times and...

Me: it's okay, you don't have to explain, everyone has a crush. Just don't step on my toes.

She nods and half smiles. How awkward can people get, honestly. I don't even stand there anymore, I just walk over to Mvelo and stand next to him.

Me: you won't believe what that girl just did.

Mvelo: what?

Me: she literally just asked me if I'm your girlfriend.

He chuckled and looked back at the girl briefly.

Mvelo: and what did you say?

Me: that's not important.

Mvelo: oh wow, really.

Me: yes!

He turned my face around and gave me a peck on the corner of my mouth.

Mvelo: whatever makes you happy Chris.

I shoved him off playfully and he laughed. We got our ice-cream and we went to the beach for a young stroll.

Narrated

It's been two months since Sanele was born. he is considered the miracle baby in the family as he hid for a whole nine months. His parents haven't told anyone about him, only close family, that being Kabelo's brothers and their wives then Zuzile's side of the family. Although everyone is in love with baby Sanele, he's a handful, an enthusiastic crier, able to cry the whole house down. He is the center of their world, literally. They are both tired and drained, having a baby at 40 is no joke. So the parents made a deal with each other that since Zuzile can't drink, Kabelo

should do the same and whatever she can't do, he also can't do it. For Kabelo this is frustrating because he can't do a lot of things. He can't even sleep peacefully because if Sanele wakes up, it means Zuzile has to wake up, including him in the equation. So after two months of not having even a glass of whiskey, he stole his cabinet key from Zuzile's drawer and went to his study to get out a bottle of Scotch and he sat on his table. Zuzile walked into their bedroom after putting Paloma to sleep and threw herself on the bed and tried taking a nap. She was breastfeeding again and she couldn't even have a glass of wine but she craved for it, even if it was a sip. She missed her life before Sanele, although she was over her depression that she went through the first few weeks of his birth, she still misses her life. She had an idea to go to get her key for the wine cellar which Kabelo hid in turn for her hiding his. She walked to the study and tried her best to sneak in. she did so successfully but when she turned around, she found Kabelo sitting there with the glass of scotch in his hand.

Zuzile: Kabelo.

He quickly put the glass down, trying to hide it and turned to look at Zuzile who was already fuming and relieved at the same time. She was glad she caught him first.

Kabelo: what are you doing here babe? Is Sanele sleeping?

He rubbed his hands together as an indication that he's nervous.

Zuzile: don't ask me what I'm doing here, why do I smell alcohol?

Kabelo: no, there is no alcohol my love. Remember we promised not to drink. Together.

Zuzile: you are lying to me Kabelo Mfusi.

Kabelo: I'm not lying my love, I promise.

She let go of the door knob and walked closer to his table. He removed the glass from the table and tried to hide it but she saw him and grabbed his arm.

Zuzile: put it on the table.

He saw it best he give up and come clean, there was no coming out of this anymore. He was caught red handed.

Kabelo: I'm sorry babe, I couldn't handle it anymore. It was just one glass.

Zuzile: it's still a lot Kabelo! You think I don't miss my alcohol.

Instead, she used her tears to make him mean his apology. She cried.

Kabelo: don't cry please.

Zuzile: how can I not cry when you are being unfair!

He started to panic. After so many years of being married to this woman, he still didn't know how to handle her tears. He stood up and engulfed her in a tight embrace.

Kabelo: I'm sure one glass won't hurt right. Should I get you just one glass and you'll stop crying?

She nodded feeling a bit happy inside. It's better than what she had in mind.

Kabelo: please don't cry like that.

Zuzile: I'm just tired.

Kabelo: you know what, I'll go get you that glass of wine and you take a nap. I'll watch Sanele and Paloma.

Zuzile: thank you Mfusi.

Kabelo: anything for you my love.

They shared a kiss, that was the end of their little squabble. She got her way as always.

Chapter 29

Ntswaki

I woke up in my brothers room and when I tried to sit up, my head was spinning. They gave me alcohol last night and I told them not to, they spiked my drinks, knowing exactly that I have to wake up today! It's my wedding day! I'm getting married, it's been my lifelong dream to do this. We stopped the traditional wedding, it was pointless, if we were to carry on with it, they wouldn't have allowed us to continue with the white wedding. Apparently, the incense didn't want to burn because they don't accept me, which is a load of crap so we scrapped it from our plans. It doesn't signify anything anyway. Nothing was going to stand in the way of me walking down the aisle. I rolled out of bed and rushed out, going downstairs. It was buzzing, my traitor bridesmaids were already up having a mimosa.

Me: you better not be drunk on my wedding day.

Kana: says someone who has a babalas!

Her big blabbing mouth, Nyakallo walked in dressed in his crisp shirt and black pants, he looked handsome!

Nyakallo: who has a babalas?

Aunt: the bride.

He looked at disappointingly.

Me: they spiked my drink last night.

Nyakallo: you better sort yourself out before 12:00.

Me: yes sir.

I slapped Ontla's shoulder and she laughed. Nyakallo walked out.

Me: I hate you guys.

Ontla: you need to live a bit more cuz.

Me: I lived a little too much, that's why I'm getting married. Where is my phone?

Kana: we thought you might ask so we hid it.

Ontla: you not allowed to speak to him. Go get ready.

I rolled my eyes. These people and their stupid rules. I went upstairs and got into the tub to soak, a perfect way to start my big day.

Christine

I can hear my phone ringing but I'm in such a state I won't even move. I'm too sleepy to move but as I drift out of dreamland more and more, the ringing gets louder, forcing me to look for it. I won't even bother myself with opening my eyes, I fish around under my pillow, on my pedestal and I take it and answer.

Mvelo: GET UP IT'S NINE!

He's legit shouting so I hung up on him and put the phone back on the pedestal. Uyangijwayela lo. It rings again and I take it and put it on loud speaker.

Mvelo: why did you hang up on me.

Me: because you are an arse.

Mvelo: fuck you! Wake up, I'll be there in an hour.

Me: you said it starts at one.

Mvelo: just get ready please.

Someone is in a bad mood and I don't have time to nurse it. I hung up on him and got out of bed, making my way to the bathroom. I took a soothing shower then I made my way to the kitchen to make myself a cup of coffee to keep me up. I love my sleep more than anything and I hate it when I'm woken up, my mood is going to be crap after this. Dad is away, he's visiting his sister, he's coming back tomorrow. It's times like these that I wish I had girlfriends, someone I can call and we could have sleepovers and just gossip but I don't. I don't understand why he wants us to leave this early when the wedding is only at 13:00, he better not think I'm gonna give it to him, not today after he's been the dickhead he's been. I went back to my room and

packed my dress and shoes then I wore my sweats. I don't understand today's weather, it's all over the place. That's why I hate December. I pity the couple, imagine getting married in the rain, what a disaster. It wasn't long before I heard a loud hoot outside, I'm sure that's him, he clearly is in a bad mood. He doesn't hoot that much, he normally calls. Let me just tick him off more, I'm not going to come out until he calls, yazi uyangijwayela ngempela lo. I go to the kitchen and place my bags on the counter then I make myself a sandwich. He hoots again and I look out the kitchen door, it really is him. Asoze ngiphume, uyoze afone. My phone rang on the counter and I let it ring a bit longer then I answered.

Mvelo: come out.

Me: no.

Mvelo: Christine I don't have time for games, come out.

Me: ask me nicely. You can't shout at me for nothing then come to my father's house and hoot like it's a joint, what happened to your manners. If you are in a mood, please don't involve me, uwena odinga mina, not the other way around.

Mvelo: okay.

Me: okay what?

Mvelo: please come out Christine, I'm at the gate.

Me: good.

I drop the call and take my things and walk out, locking the door. Respect is earned, I won't let Mvelo play with my feelings and walk all over me just because I'm kind. I got to the car and he was also in his sweats, his head laid back on the chair and his arm covering his face as if he's in distress and pain. I get in the car, throwing my bag in the back and put on my seatbelt.

Me: morning.

Mvelo: yah.

He removes his arm from his face and started the car. Silence filled the car, only the sound of the stereo, which also played some depressing music, I wonder what the problem is. He drove us to Margate, I guess that's where the wedding is going to be. We went to a certain lodge, it looked like rapture. From the landscaping on the outside to the refined décor that sits in the interior of the house. What captured me the most was the artworks that hung on the walls. I'm sure those things cost a fortune, they look exquisite. There was this one specific drawing that made me stop and admire it. Call me crazy but the person in the picture looked like Paloma, although it is a figurative drawing, the eyes and the mouth, it looks like her.

Mvelo: Christine.

I turned and looked at him. He signaled that I should come so I walked to him.

Me: that painting, it looks like Paloma.

Mvelo: those are mine.

He pointed to them and I stood there astonished, he's such a great artist

Me: they are one of a kind.

He nodded and side smiled, a side smile that quickly disappeared. This seems deeper than I thought. The last time he was this distant was the time at the library and that didn't end well. We got to the room and it was more beautiful than words could ever describe but my focus wasn't there anymore, I was worried about Mvelo. His body language was depressing no lie.

Mvelo: did you hear what I said?

Me: no, sorry.

Mvelo: your stylist will be here in an hour.

Me: stylist?

Mvelo: for your hair and make-up.

He got a stylist?

Me: oh okay.

This is a big deal I guess. I looked at the little clock on the table and read 09:57. When he woke me up, it wasn't even 08:30 yet. What am I going to do in this hour? I think Mvelo passed out and I'm just standing there looking at him. His chest is going up and down as he breathes in and out, not snoring loud but loud enough for me to notice he's in the room. He has his arm on his face and his leg slightly up. His lower lip sucked into his mouth, he looks so sexy.

Mvelo: stop staring at me.

I snapped out of it, he hadn't moved an inch. I might as well join him and sleep. I climbed on the bed and faced the other direction. There was so much space between us, just like the first time we hooked up. The bed was cold. I was woken up from my short rest by his phone ringing. I didn't turn around, I kept my eyes closed, there was a huge thunder storm outside.

Mvelo: mah.

...

Mvelo: Margate.

...

Mvelo: I didn't forget it.

...

Mvelo: okay.

I think that was the end of their convo because he rolled out of bed and went to the toilet. His phone rang again and I took it to him in the bathroom. He was leaning against the sink with his head bowed. When I walked in, he lifted his head and looked at me, his eyes were red, his expression unreadable.

Mvelo: why don't you knock.

Me: your phone is ringing.

He snatched it from my hand and looked at me as if he's saying I must leave. It's going to be a long day.

Ntswaki

Me: (Crying) how will I get married now, the wind, the thunder!

I buried my face in my hands and wailed. They've tried telling me it will be fine but nothing will be fine, there is a thunder storm outside and terrible wind, why me God? Today is supposed to be the happiest day of my life. Kana gave me my phone.

Dumi: Ntswaki.

Me: mmh

I'm still sniffing and crying.

Dumi: please stop crying Sthandwa sami. The storm will pass we still have 2 hours until the ceremony.

Me: then the garden will be soaked by then Dumisani there is no point.

Dumi: my sister called Tina, she's making a plan okay. Don't worry, everything will be fine I promise you my love.

I nod as if he can see me.

Dumi: I love you and I'll see you at the altar.

Me: I love you too.

I wiped my tears and put the phone down. What would I be without Dumisani?

Mvelo

When I walked back to the room from that stupid phone call, I found Christine sitting on the bed with her eyes on me. They had both pain and worry. I wonder who died. I don't have time for this today so I walk out and sit on the terrace and have some weed. Mxm, I thought I had accepted the fact that I had to go to this wedding but I woke up this morning feeling like shit. After finishing the joint, I went back inside and

Chris was still sitting in the same position. I laid on the bed and pulled her to come lie next to me. I cupped her little bum in my hand and kissed her. All I needed was a fix, maybe it will help me. She was moaning and squirming under me but I went on until she pushed me off.

Chris: Mvelo uyangilimaza!

I rolled over and she stood up quickly and sat by the mirror. I saw her grab a box of tissues off the dresser, indicating to me that she's crying. Ohh goodness what have I done, she probably thinks I'm a monster. I buried my face in my hands.

Me: Chris I'm sorry.

She turned and looked at me with tears running down her face. My mother would be so disappointed in me.

Chris: I understand that you're angry but please don't take it out on me.

Me: It won't happen again, I'm sorry...

She cut me off.

Chris: okay.

She stood up and walked to the terrace and I saw her ranting and shouting, I'm such an asshole. 5 minutes passed and she's still sitting on the patio stairs crying. Her Stylist called and told me she's here so I buzzed her in and walked out to Chris.

Me: Fluff your stylist is here.

She looked at me like I'm crazy. Ohkay. She stood up and walked past me, going to the bathroom. It's going to be a long day.

Narrated

There's still the silent treatment between Mvelo and Christine back at the lodge. At least she wasn't crying anymore, she was talking to her stylist who she now knows is Lea while Mvelo gets dressed. After her make-over she looked stunning, even Mvelo was shocked. She had a blonde bob weave and close to minimal nude make-up. She hadn't gotten dressed yet so she walked Lea out and when she came back she looked at her dress that hung on the hanger, steamed and ready to be worn. She then looked at Mvelo who was fixing his cufflinks. Although she was mad at him, she still thought he was the most handsome creature she had ever seen. She picked up her black one strap stilettos and sat on the bed putting them on. She then grabbed her dress and tried to put it on without smudging her make-up, which proved to be a mission. She had to ask Mvelo for help.

Chris: please help me with my dress.

She hadn't dropped her robe yet. Mvelo walked towards her and held her waist, snaking his hands to the front to undo the knot. He then put his hands on her shoulders, inside the robe making direct contact with her warm skin. He was doing all of this on purpose and he did all of it very slowly. He pushed the robe down and it fell to the ground. Christine took a deep breath and turned around, held Mvelo's face and kissed him. She kissed him until they were both breathless. After she broke the kiss, there was a silence that filled the room and he helped her into the dress. They

were both too shocked to say anything, for the first time, Mvelo had felt something different. They left the lodge at 12:49.

.....

We would normally know it's a wedding when we hear honks and see convoys of decorated cars on the road but at this wedding, it wasn't the case. The bride thought it was too old school and tacky in her words. Weddings are supposed to be jolly but Ntswaki has been crying the whole morning. the weather was doing a number, it definitely showed no mercy to the couple. She had now managed to calm down and now the bridal party is leaving the Mohau home heading to the venue. When they arrived, the bridesmaids Ontla and Kana walked down the aisle and were welcomed by the groomsmen. Then the tuned changed and everyone rose to their feet as Ntswaki stood at the door looking at only one person in the room, the one she is to be joined with for eternity. She smiled and slowly made her way down. Dumi had tears in his eyes as he watched her walk down, it was a beautiful sight. As she reached the alter, he grabbed her hands and kissed them.

Pastor: I'd like to welcome everyone into the house of the lord, you are welcome. We are gathered this morning to celebrate and bless the union of Ntswaki Mohau and Dumisani Gumede. We all know the normal Genesis 2v21-24 about how God took the man's rib and made the woman and they were to be together forever but I want to change it up a bit. But before we can start, is there anyone who feels these two shouldn't be together can you please show your face now or forever hold your peace.

He kept quiet for some time and when he was about to continue, there was a loud clicking sound of heels in the corridor of the made everyone turn to the door awaiting to see who was willing to stop the wedding. Ntswaki looked at Dumisani feeling defeated inside and he held her hand tightly and when the door opened slowly and she saw Mvelo's face at the door, she almost ran to him but her joy was short lived when Christine's face appeared behind Mvelo. She had her head bowed as she knew they had disrupted the ceremony, the eyes that were on them weren't helping. She gripped on Mvelo's hand tightly.

Pastor: are you interjecting.

Mvelo: no.

They took a seat where they were showed and Dumi looked at Ntswaki who was almost red with anger. The pastor cleared his throat and started.

Pastor: Dumisani this is some advice to you. Proverbs 5v18-19 reads: *Let your fountain, the wife of your youth be blessed; find your joy in her. A lovely doe, a graceful hind, let her be your companion; her love will satisfy you at all times and wrap you round continually*” in other words Dumisani, happy wife equals a happy life. If you keep her happy, she will make you happy, you will find your happiness in her. And to the both of you, 1 Corinthians 7v10-11: *“To the married I give this ruling which is not mine but the Lord’s: a wife must not separate herself from her husband- if she does, she must either remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband- and the husband must not divorce his wife.”*

Mvelo scoffed under his breath making Christine turn to look at him. He was bored and really knew at the back of his mind that this farce wouldn't last. They said their vows and the pastor blessed their rings.

Pastor: that's it, all that's left for me to do is pronounce you.

Ntswaki smiled, more like smirked and looked in Mvelo's direction, as if she's proving a point, this pissed him off.

Pastor: With the power vested in me, I now pronounce you as husband and wife. Dumisani, you can kiss her.

Mvelo didn't even hesitate, he stood up and left before his eyes got stained. Chris stayed there feeling embarrassed as all the crowd's eyes were on her, some even missed the kiss. After the couple walked out, Christine was the first to run out the church to look for Mvelo. The rain had stopped now but the grass was still soaked with puddles. Mvelo was standing under a tree looking at the far distance with a joint in his hand. Christine sunk her shoes in the mud and walked over to him.

Chris: what was that about?

Mvelo: I don't like these people.

Chris: but for you to leave me with a bunch of strangers and let me look like an idiot, wow I think you can do better than that Mvelo.

Mvelo: get over yourself.

He threw the bud on the floor and stepped on it then grabbed Christine's hands.

Mvelo: you want me to hold you like a five year old the whole day? Fine let's go.

His tone was very sarcastic and rude, not his normal playful self. Chris yanked her hand out of his and walked ahead, really struggling with the mud. She walked to the toilet and took out the baby wipes in her purse and cleaned her shoes and feet. She then looked in the mirror and chuckled bitterly.

Chris: how long are you going to put up with his nonsense? This is not who you are.

She caught her tear before it could smudge her make-up and looked up to prevent the others from falling then she walked back to the foyer of the reception where they would be getting their placement cards. Unfortunately, Mvelo had the invite so she had to stand by the door looking lost and stupid. Even the bridal party came from the

photos and he appeared just after the bridesmaids. He hooked his arm around her waist and they walked to the door, he smelt of weed and it was a very unpleasant smell for her. They were given the placement card and they were written Mr and Mrs Mfusi which made Chris nervous. The bridesmaid that was standing next to her looked at her and Chris noticed. The girl knew something was wrong. They walked in together and sat at the table with a few other strange people they didn't know. The reception program started and both Mvelo and Chris were bored out of their minds.

Chris: when are we leaving?

Mvelo: we have to wait until this stupid program is over. Mom sent me to the groom.

Chris: great.

She sat back in her chair and sighed. For a moment, Ntswaki and Mvelo's eyes locked and Christine caught a glimpse of them. She sensed that there was something more to that sudden eye contact, the scoff back at the church and the mood swings. They probably had a thing, she thought to herself.

Chris: can I ask.

Mvelo: yah.

Chris: do you have a thing for the bride?

Mvelo: no.

Chris: be honest.

Mvelo: I am honest.

Chris: but I don't believe you.

Mvelo: well believe what you want to believe Christine I'm telling you I don't have a things for her. Can you fuck off for a minute.

The people at table looked at both of them as he had raised his voice a bit. She felt her heart shatter so she stood up from her seat and rushed to the restroom and started crying. She didn't care that her make-up was smudging anymore, the pain was too much for her to handle. The door burst open and the bridesmaid that was looking at her at the door stood there and placed her hand on her shoulder. Chris looked up as tears ran down her cheeks.

Ontla: hey, I'm Ontla, I saw what happened back there, I'm so sorry.

She pulled her for a hug and she just broke down all over again. she let her cry her tears out and when she was steady, and ready to talk, she pulled out the hug and looked at Ontla.

Chris: I'm sorry you had to see that. He's just having a bad day.

Ontla: Mrs Mfusi right?

Chris: no, no we aren't married. Our relationship is a bit complicated.

Ontla: how ever complicated the relationship he has no right to degrade you like that in a public place. I can see you are a kind soul, I'm drawn to your energy for some reason and I can see he's putting a strain in your heart. I don't know you but judging from what I saw in that church, I realized that he's not good for you.

Chris: we aren't even together.

Ontla: but you love him.

Chris: a lot.

Ontla: then if he loves you back, he will fight for you. He won't be this asshole. Leave him.

They hugged again.

Ontla: I'm all about woman power and I hate it when men control us like we are worthless and stupid. Cut ties with him and if he cares about you, he will come for you. Nakhona umujimise wena ntombazana!

Christine chuckled in between her tears and they broke the hug.

Chris: thank you for this. It's unusual for strangers to be this kind.

Ontla: I didn't even get you name.

Chris: ohh, it's Christine.

Ontla: and I already told you mine.

Chris: Ontla right?

Ontla: yes, Ontlametse.

Chris: I guess I've made a new friend.

Ontla: I guess. Now let's go get your face fixed, ulwe Ntombo!

She playfully punched Christine's shoulder and they laughed. She walked out the toilet and they went to Ontla's car then she fixed her make up.

Ontla: how old are you?

Chris: I'm 20.

Ontla: you are so young. You shouldn't be tied up like this.

Chris: how old are you?

Ontla: I'm 25.

Chris: ohh, wow. You don't look that old.

Ontla: because I'm short. I get that all the time.

They both laughed.

Ontla: how complicated is your relationship with this dude.

Chris: I had a crush on him before he knew me and then he approached me one time and asked to be mates.

Ontla: mates?

Chris: sex buddies. We call each other mates, most people don't understand.

Ontla: smart.

They chuckled.

Chris: now I don't know what's going on, there's more talking, laughing and getting along than sex and I can't help but feel that he feels the same way. I guess that's reason why I get so hurt when he reminds me that our relationship is just sex.

Ontla: the problem started when he wanted to get to know you.

Chris: even I was surprised and it stung when I found out I wasn't the only girl he had under his sheets. The pain of not even getting the satisfaction of calling him out when he wrongs me, it's painful.

Ontla: if it makes you feel any better, I've been in the same position. I was set to be in an arranged marriage and when I met my husband for the first time, we agreed to just sex but I caught feelings. It took him a hell of a long time to reciprocate those feelings and it stung when I had to watch him change girls like underwear. In the end though, he fell for me and we've been married for 5 years now.

Chris: you're married?

She showed her the ring and she didn't even see this whole time.

Chris: yeah, I guess it does make me feel a little better.

They laughed and carried on talking. When she finished touching up her make-up, they walked back to the reception.

Christine

I didn't even bother going back to Mvelo, he pissed me off earlier, I don't even have the strength to face him. Ontla on the other hand has been a sweetheart, her and her husband are just goals. They are the cutest couple and to think they didn't like each other at first. At least my day wasn't a complete waste of time. I turned and I saw Mvelo coming towards our table and I sighed.

Ontla: what's wrong.

Me: Mvelo, he's coming her...

I didn't even finish my sentence. I felt his hands on my shoulders. He greeted the table then Ontla looked at him. He looked at me.

Mvelo: please accompany me to the car.

He had a fake smile. I looked at Ontla who had a pissed look on her face. She looked at her husband and he looked at Mvelo.

Mvelo: is there a problem, Chris?

He looked at Gontse then back at me. I didn't want us to start fighting in front of them so I just stood up.

Me: I'll be back Ontla.

She nodded, the same look plastered on her face. Mvelo pulled my hand and we walked towards the exit. We got to the car and he pinned me against it.

Me: I want to leave.

Mvelo: what were you telling those people about me.

Me: nothing.

Mvelo: then why are they giving me nasty looks like I stole from them?

Me: ask them Mvelo, I don't know. You are the one that told me to fuck off, I fucked off now please take me back home.

I pushed him off and went to stand by the passenger door.

Me: please open.

He looked at me in disbelief then at long last he opened. I got inside and I took off my shoes.

Mvelo

I can't believe Christine. So she went and told that bridesmaid what happened, how stupid of her. I got the gift from the boot and walked back to the venue. After leaving the gift, the bride and groom walked towards me, great what do they want.

Dumi: Mfusi, thank you for coming.

Me: I'm sorry for being late, my date was taking her time.

I said that with my eyes on Ntswaki who looked away from me. Mxm.

Dumi: she's beautiful. And please congratulate you parents on the baby.

Me: I will. Congratulations to you too. I wish you all the best.

Dumi: thank you. Are you leaving now?

Me: yes, Christine's getting cranky.

Dumi: I understand, she's in a different environment, it must be frustrating.

Me: mmh-mmh.

I looked at Ntswaki again.

Ntswaki: thank you for coming.

Me: sure.

I shook Dumisani's hand and walked out the venue. When I got to the car, the bridesmaid was sitting in the backseat and Chris was in the front and they were chatting up a storm, I don't like their friendship at all. I opened the driver door and got inside the car. They both looked at me then the girl stood up.

Girl: baby, I'll call you. We need to meet up more often.

Baby?

Chris: thank you for today. We will make plans.

They hugged and she left without even acknowledging my presence. She didn't even greet that time at the table. Chris got back inside the car and we drove off in silence. The plan was to go back to the lodge and drive back tomorrow morning.

Chris: Mvelo take me home.

Me: we are leaving tomorrow it's late now.

Chris: Mvelo I said take me home.

She wasn't even looking at me, she was calm too, she wasn't shouting.

Me: Chris we agreed to leave tomorrow.

Chris: agreed? Agreed with who? I never agreed to anything Mvelwenhle.

There it is.

Me: I can't drive all the way to Ramsgate now it won't make sense.

Chris: well Mvelo I want to go home! I want...

Me: can you just do what I'm telling you to do, why do you always have to frustrate me Isabelle!

I've now stopped the car by the side of the road. I look at her and I the look on her face is indescribable. Wait, did I say that. Heavens I called her Isabelle. Okay.

Chris: take me home right now Mvelwenhle.

I held my forehead and looked at her. She looked distraught and hurt. I can't believe I just did that.

Chapter 30

Narrated

Things at the Mfusi household are falling apart. It's five days before Christmas and they are supposed to be in the UK already. On the last minute, they received an invite to the business awards on the 26th and that forced them to change their plans which were to stay at home and have a family Christmas. Now the problem is that Mvelo

has been isolating himself, he has locked himself in his studio for almost a week now, with no food and probably no sleep. They've tried talking to him but nothing and as a result, Paloma is crying the whole house down. They've called almost every one of Mvelo's friends that they know and non-of them were able to get through to him. Inside this room, Mvelo sits with his canvas and a paint brush. He's been trying to paint the whole time but nothing was coming to mind. Instead he's been hallucinating the whole time, it was probably the lack of food but he wouldn't leave until he got the perfect portrait.

Isa: how long are you going to stare at that blank canvas?

He knew that voice very well so her turned around and saw her angelic face. She wasn't smiling though, she looked gloomy. It was one of his hallucinations so he turned back to look at the canvas and picked up the brush.

Isa: I know you can see me, why are you ignoring me.

Mvelo: I don't talk to ghosts.

Isa: oh wow.

He saw her appear in front of him. She grabbed her own canvas and brush and sat down.

Isa: gummy bear...

Mvelo: don't call me that.

Isa: but you are my gummy bear.

Mvelo: that's the problem, you keep on pulling me back.

Isa: you are pulling yourself back Mvelwenhle.

He chuckled and shook his head

Isa: I warned you about blocking your happiness.

Mvelo: that's the problem, you can't warn me about something I don't even know.

Isa: everything you could ever want is right in front of you but you are building this wall, you are blocking it. Open your heart to receiving.

Mvelo: since when do you speak in riddles.

Isa: this is your battle, not mine. My job is to highlight, your job is to understand and receive. When you lock yourself up in here for a week you not only hurting yourself but you are hurting the people that love you. Our daughter hasn't stopped crying.

Mvelo: our daughter?

Isa: she is mine as much as she is yours Mvelo.

Mvelo: no, you have no right in the world to call her yours because you left me all alone to raise her. She doesn't know you Isabelle, she knows me and only me!

He threw the paint brush across the room and groaned in frustration, alarming Helo who has been sitting at the door trying to hear what was going on. She ran back to her parents.

Helo: Mvelo is talking to someone in there.

Zuzile: what are they saying.

Helo: I don't know, I only heard his shout then something smashing, what's going on mah.

Kabelo: there's one person we haven't tried.

Zuzile: who?

He keeps quiet as if he's thinking. Mvelo and Isa are still going back and forth.

Isa: you should go out there and face your problems like a man, stop hiding in here.

Mvelo: you don't understand how hard it's been without you, I don't know a life without you Isabelle you don't understand. You didn't prepare me for a life without you.

Isa: but you've been happy.

Mvelo: Happy? My life has never been this dark. When I actually thought I found love, they snatched it away from me, I lost my only other chance to fall in love.

Isa: that's the problem here. You were never in love with her, she was never yours to love from the beginning.

Mvelo: what do you mean Isa.

Isa: I mean that she's not the one. Stop closing your heart for the one that actually loves you with no doubts and boundaries. She's right in front of you Mvelwenhle.

There was a loud banging at the door.

Chris: Mvelo please open up, it's me Christine.

He stopped and looked at Isa, his heart beating out of his chest.

Isa: look behind you.

The banging continued but Mvelo turned and looked behind him and on his canvas was a beautiful portrait of Christine's face. He turned back to look for Isa but she wasn't there anymore.

Mvelo: you can't be serious.

He held his head in frustration.

Christine

I've just finished cleaning around the house and I'm taking a relaxing shower. There was a knock on the bathroom door.

Naomi: Chrissy your phone is ringing.

Naomi is my cousin, she's my aunt first born, she's 16. I close the water then I go open the door.

Me: who was it?

Naomi: it was an unsaved number.

I wiped my hand on my towel and I took the phone. Before I could check again, the phone rang and an unsaved number appeared. I hesitantly answered.

Me: hello.

Person: oh thank goodness you answered...

Me: who am I talking to?

Person: it's Khauhelo, Mvelo's sister.

I froze for a moment.

Helo: hello?

Me: yes, I'm here, is there something wrong.

Helo: can I ask a favor from you please. My parents would like to talk you urgently.

Isn't she young? She's what, 12. Why is she calling me? Did Mvelo send her, why do her parents want to talk to me.

Helo: Christine?

Me: uhhm yeah. When do they want to talk to me?

Helo: today if possible, we really need your help.

Me: okay. I'll be there, can you give at least 30 minutes.

Helo: okay, thank you.

I hung up and looked at my phone in disbelief. Naomi looked at me.

Naomi: what's wrong?

Me: Mvelo's parents, they want to talk to me.

I told her about Mvelo and his jerk ways.

Naomi: why?

Me: I have no clue.

Naomi: are you going to go?

Me: yes, I need to get dressed. Please request an uber for me.

I handed her my phone and rushed out the bathroom with my body soaking. Naomi followed me.

Naomi: I'm coming with you.

Me: no you aren't. you want dad to kill me.

Naomi: uncle is a sweet man, he won't mind.

Me: look, he already doesn't like Mvelo and he would flip if he would find out I'm going with him, how much more when he comes home and both of us aren't here.

I pulled up my jeans in frustration.

Me: have you requested that Uber?

Naomi: yes.

Me: you'll meet him some other time, for now, it's hectic. His parents want to talk to me. And say what.

I tied my hair into a messy ponytail.

Naomi: you look ugly.

Me: right.

I had on a baggy t-shirt and jeans.

Naomi: wear something presentable.

Me: I look fine. It's not like I'm meeting the queen.

Naomi: what lie do I tell uncle?

Me: I went to meet up with Devon at the mall. Say I ran out of something.

Naomi: which one is it?

Me: I don't know Naomi, be creative. I'll see you when I come back.

I took my phone from her hand then grabbed my sling bag from my chair. I put my lip gloss and wallet then walked out the house. As soon as I got to the gate, I saw the car approaching, that was quickest I've gotten dressed, I should be proud of myself. I got in the car and it drove me to the Mfusi mansion. When he parked in front of the gate, he looked at me in disbelief.

Driver: are you sure you are the right address.

Me: yes.

He chuckled. He's too forward. I gave him his money and got out of the car. Uber drivers are shit. I stand by the gate and the security guard comes to me. They have a security guard, wow, lovely.

Guard: hello miss.

Me: uhhm hi, I'm Christine Zondo, I received a call from Khauhelo saying the Mfusi's want to see me.

Guard: oh okay, let me check on them.

He went back to his booth and made the phone call. It wasn't long then the gate opened and I walked up the driveway after Thanking the guard. The foyer door opened and Mrs Mfusi stood there looking at me as I made my way up. She smiled at me and when I got to her, she engulfed me in a hug, which was really unexpected.

Zuzile: thank you for coming at such short notice. Please go inside.

We broke the hug and I walked in first then stood waiting for her to lead the way as if I've never been in her house before. I can't believe they called me here. She walks up the stairs and I follow her. She's so graceful and elegant, how does she do it? We get to the lounge and her husband, the intimidating Kabelo Mfusi looked at me and gave me a side smile.

Me: good afternoon sir.

My heart was beating out of my chest, I was terrified of this man and it was the first time I saw him in real life. I always saw him in pictures.

Kabelo: hey Christine, thank you for coming.

I nodded and looked down then Mrs Mfusi told me to sit down. She came to sit next to me.

Zuzile: I guess we'll have to get straight to the point, we need your help.

I nodded again.

Kabelo: when last did you talk to Mvelwenhle?

Me: on the day of the wedding, is there something wrong?

My hands started sweating, did something happen to him?

Zuzile: yes, ever since that night, he's been locked up in his studio, he hasn't come out he hasn't even eaten.

Her tears were on the verge of coming out and that broke my heart. If only he knew how much pain he's putting her through, he wouldn't be doing the shit he's doing.

Zuzile: we've tried everything, even Paloma crying didn't soften his heart.

Kabelo: you are the last person that talked to him, do you know what might have triggered this behavior of his?

Me: he was in a very bad mood, not welcoming at all. I for one was shocked. I had never seen him that angry.

She looks at her husband and her tears drop. I couldn't help it, the tears stung my eyes.

Me: we didn't end on a good note at all but I can try talking to him.

Kabelo: that would mean a lot to us thank you.

I nodded and wiped my tears before they could fall. I hate crying in front of people but seeing this woman care so much for her son, it made me wish I had my own mother to break down like this when I'm in pain. She stood up and I stood up with her and she led me to a basement looking like place. There was a bright red door on my left, it was the first one out of the others. Kanti how big is this house?

Zuzile: he's in here.

I nodded and she held my shoulder.

Zuzile: thank you for coming.

I felt a lot of pressure. I couldn't leave without getting through to him, I don't want to disappoint them, they are counting on me. I knocked.

Me: Mvelo please open up, it's me Christine.

There was silence, I knocked again.

Me: Mvelo!

I heard something breaking so I turned and looked at his mom who looked even more worried.

Me: I just want to talk, that's all. Please open for me.

Silence

Me: I'm not leaving until you open and that's going to be bad on you, dad is going to scold you.

I chuckled then wiped my tears. I knocked again.

Me: please.

I put my hand on the handle and I felt it move. My heart skipped a beat. The door opened so I let go of the handle and looked at his mom.

Zuzile: go in.

I nodded and walked in, closing the door behind me. It didn't take me long to turn and admire all the beautiful art pieces that hung on the walls, some incomplete. One that stood out to me was a portrait of Isa laughing, some just pictures of the two of them. It was his sanctuary. My eyes landed on him. He was in the middle of the room, his back against me and his back slightly arched. I walked down the mini stairs and slowly made my way towards him. I have no idea what to say to him, I've never been someone that's good with words, especially words of comfort. How will I even

look him in the eye, it's not like we ended things on a good note, I was hurt at the fact that he called me by another woman's name. after treating me like crap the whole day I would expect you to at least get my name right.

Me: thanks for letting me in.

It was awkward. I put my bag on the chair and settled next to him. He had a canvas turned upside down and he was staring at it, he looked like he had lost his mind. He turned to look at me.

Mvelo: ...

He opened his mouth to speak but stopped and looked back at his canvas. I placed my hand over his and it was warm, very warm.

Me: I know things between us are complicated, I don't know what we are but no matter how we fight, I still care about you and I get worried about you. Please talk to me.

We sat in silence for a very long time, I still had my hand on his and all that was audible was the sound of the ocean and birds chirping. He then stood up, took the canvas he was looking at, gave it to me then walked out the room. I looked at it and it was smudged. It was dry but it looked like someone ran their hand over it while it was wet and smudged it. It looks familiar. I looked closer and I saw a face, it was my face. He drew me? I ran my fingers around it and they stopped on black smudged writing. *"I think I love you"* I stained it with my tears as I read the ink.

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After a long time of sitting and crying, I picked up the picture and placed it on a table, grabbed my bag and walked out the room. I ran into Mrs Mfusi and she looked at me with joy in her eyes.

Zuzile: thank you so much, I don't know how you did it but I'm so grateful to you.

She enveloped me in a hug and I just cried, I couldn't help it.

Zuzile: hey, what's wrong sweetheart, are you okay.

I nodded continuously but she held me tightly.

Zuzile: I think you and Mvelo have some unfinished business.

I pulled out and looked at her.

Me: I have to get home, my dad is going to kill me.

Zuzile: I can't let you leave in this state, you aren't leaving until you and my son fix whatever that is going on because he knows very well that he shouldn't mistreat a woman. Give me your phone and I'll call your father.

I was a bit hesitant but who am I kidding, my dad was probably going to flip more. At least she's willing to help. I gave her his number. She dialed it while walking out the lounge. It wasn't long and she came back with a smile on her face.

Zuzile: I was able to soften him up, he agreed only if you are home tomorrow by 10:00. That you can discuss with Mvelo.

Me: thank you mah.

Zuzile: I'll get you something to sleep in and I've made some food for the both of you. We have to catch a flight at 20:30.

I nod and half smile. This woman is so perfect mara! She walks up the stairs and I take my bag and follow her. I go to Mvelo's room and I knock and enter. He's not in the room but I can hear the shower running. I'm biting my manicured tips as I sit here wondering what I'm going to say to him. I mean I haven't forgotten that painting he gave me, what does it mean? I hear the shower door open from the inside and my heart starts to race. I'm praying I don't crumble and leave with my heart broken. He walks out drying his hair and as if he wasn't expecting to see me here, he stopped at stared at me.

Mvelo: You still here?

Wow, it's the first time he's speaking me since last week and he says this, ouch!

Me: I stayed behind because your mom asked me to.

Mvelo: oh.

He sounded disappointed, what did he want me to say? Say I stayed behind for him, well I kinda did but that's not the point, the point is that he sounds disappointed. He got dressed. Here goes nothing.

Me: that painting you gave me, what does it mean?

He turned to look at me.

Mvelo: what did you see?

Me: I saw a face, if I go on a whim, I'd say it's my face.

Mvelo: it is your face.

I want him to explain to me, he keeps on going in circles.

Me: I still don't understand what it means, you locking yourself up not wanting to talk to anyone, what does it mean Mvelo I don't understand please make me understand.

Mvelo: I locked myself up because I felt confused and angry!

Me: at what!

Mvelo: at the fact that I am able to feel, at the fact that I may have feelings for you!

He turned and faced the cupboard, exhaling very loudly. He can't just throw this at me, why didn't he prepare me for such.

Me: feelings?

Mvelo: I hate having to feel anything Christine but when I'm around you, I don't know. I tried to ignore it, I really did but you just keep pushing and pushing.

He walked closer to where I was.

Mvelo: I locked myself up because I was trying to figure out what was happening to me. I wanted to learn how to block out all these feelings but I realized it was pointless.

He came and knelt next to me and held my hands in his. I don't believe this, is it really happening, he's confessing his love to me. Pinch me I'm dreaming. I shook my head.

Me: I don't understand.

Mvelo: I'm falling in love with you.

I chuckled and shook my head then the tears started falling.

Mvelo: don't cry, I understand if you don't feel the same way...

Me: I just don't understand Mvelo, I don't understand how you can treat me like crap then come and tell me you are falling in love with me. How?

Mvelo: I didn't know how to deal with it, I was fighting it Chris but I realized that there's no point because my feelings are stronger than any wall I will ever try to build I'm new to this kind of feeling.

He's still holding my hands. I sniff and close my eyes.

Me: and Isa.

He goes quiet, I shouldn't have asked that.

Mvelo: I loved her too, but the way it feels now, it's different. I don't know Christine, I just know that I don't want to lose you.

He took his thumb and wiped my tears. I love him so much. It actually feels like I'm dreaming.

Me: can I tell you something.

He nodded with a hint of disappointment in his eyes.

Me: I don't want to lose you to.

He smiled, all the disappointment faded and I saw happiness spread over his face.

Mvelo: are you serious?

I nodded and a smile formed on my face.

Mvelo: are we going to give it a try?

Me: yes, but can we please take it slow.

Mvelo: anything you want.

He stood up and helped me up. I wrapped my arms around his neck and his went around my waist. I won't lie, I was still in disbelief but my heart was jumping for joy. I

felt safe in his arms. He lifted me up a bit and I wrapped my legs around his waist and I held his cheeks in my hands, staring deep into his eyes.

Mvelo: thank you.

I brushed my thumb on his lower lip and they curved into a smile, such a beautiful sight for me to see. He leaned in and gave me a soft, slow kiss. I felt fireworks, our first kiss as boyfriend and girlfriend. Is the universe pranking me? I've kissed these lips a thousand times but today, it feels like it's the first time I've even laid my eyes on him. He laid me on the bed and smiled at me, that's my man!

Mvelo: I love you.

Me: I love you.

He bit his lower lip and kissed me again, take me to heaven my love.

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Me: I'm hungry.

He chuckled and that made me smile. Coupling does that sometimes, it fatigues you, in my case, I'm hungry.

Me: I don't know why you're laughing. You haven't eaten in days.

Mvelo: that says something about you doesn't it?

Me: (Laughing) mxm, uyaphapa.

He kissed my forehead.

Mvelo: why is the house so quiet?

Me: they left.

Mvelo: oh.

He didn't even sound fazed.

Me: on a serious note Mvelo, I'm hungry?

Mvelo: what did you just call me.

He lifted me up and made me sit on his thighs, making me giggle.

Me: I called you by your name, Mvelo.

He shook his head.

Mvelo: you aren't allowed to call me that anymore.

Me: (Smiling) what must I call you?

He flipped me and I laughed real hard. I locked my legs around his waist and covered my face with my hands and he slowly peeled them off.

Mvelo: say 'babe'

Me: no. your name is Mvelo.

He pulled my lower lip into his and kissed me.

Mvelo: 'babe'

Me: Mvelo.

Gone is the hunger I had for food.

Mvelo: say it. I'm your baby.

He tried kissing me again but I held my mouth and laughed. He pulled my leg and put it on his shoulder then entered me slowly.

Mvelo: fluff?

He moved slowly.

Me: yes baby!

Chapter 31

I'm sitting on the kitchen counter eating my sandwich with Mvelo in between my thighs looking at me. He's on the phone with his mother. He's been talking to her for too long, I also miss him. I kissed his mouth and left mayonnaise on him. He wiped it and looked at me. I mouthed: I miss you and he chuckled.

Mvelo: Ma' Mfusi, can I call you back later, I have a call coming in.

He listened then looked at me smiling.

Mvelo: yes, we're fine.

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Mvelo: I love you too.

He dropped the call and took the sandwich from me, opened it and spread the mayo all over my thighs.

Me: I was eating that!

Mvelo: and I'll eat this.

He licked it off very seductively, not breaking the eye contact.

Me: stop it.

I smacked his head playfully and he laughed. He then gave me a proper kiss, his mouth tasted like mayonnaise.

Me: what do you want to eat mama's boy?

Mvelo: I'm not hungry.

Me: don't be crazy. You haven't eaten in days.

Mvelo: and I can go for more days without food.

Me: well, I'm going to feed you.

I jumped off the counter and went to the fridge. I felt him pull me away from the fridge.

Mvelo: fluff.

Me: no, you have to eat something.

Mvelo: I ate you.

Me: I'm not joking.

He chuckled then let go of me and I went back to the fridge.

Me: I don't even know what you like.

Mvelo: anything is fine.

He settled on the bar stools and watched me. I remembered the food in the microwave so I warmed it up for him.

Me: when are your parents coming back.

Mvelo: I don't know, they're going to London for Christmas and some award ceremony.

Must be nice having money and here I am. I've never even been to Cape Town.

Me: why didn't you go with them?

Mvelo: I don't like the UK, it's too cold, especially at this time of year.

Me: mmh, rich kids.

He laughed and rolled his eyes.

Me: who are you going to spend Christmas with then?

Mvelo: I don't know. I'll probably be here alone, even my daughter ditched me.

I gave him his food and he smiled.

Mvelo: maybe my girlfriend can keep me company.

Me: we're having a family Christmas at home, maybe you can join us.

Mvelo: I don't think meeting your family is taking things slow fluff.

Me: oh.

Ouch.

Mvelo: (Laughing) I'm joking.

I threw the plastic spoon in my hand at him and he ducked.

Mvelo: (laughing) you should've seen your face.

He stood up and made him was too me while laughing. he picked me up and put me on the counter.

Mvelo: I'd love to spend Christmas with you and your family.

I pouted and he kissed me. I can't believe I'm dating this idiot.

Mvelo

I've been up since six, just staring at this beautiful woman lying next to me. Her lips slightly parted and her tiny hand covering her face. You're probably wondering why now all of a sudden but the do say there's a first time for everything. After that night at the wedding, the disappointment and hurt I saw on her face, it moved something in me and for the first time, I felt guilty. I locked myself up because I was trying my utmost best to block it all out and come out of that room feeling non of the feelings, but Isabelle happened. She actually made me realize that all the time I spent in there,

I was just grooming my feelings. She made me see that I was actually preparing my heart on how to tell her. It completely defeated the purpose of trying to forget. When she knocked on that door, I knew I had to do it so I came clean. I was so happy when she told me she felt the same way. Now I want nothing but to be with her. I don't know how my parents figured this out, I'm sure it was Kabelo's idea. I looked at the time and it was 07:55. I have to take her home otherwise my mother will slaughter me. I shook her a little.

Chris: no.

Me: it's 12:30.

Her eyes shot open and she turned to look at me.

Chris: you're lying.

Me: look outside.

She sighed and tried getting out of bed. I held her and pulled her back.

Me: I'm joking.

Chris: udlala kambi.

Me: jokes aside, I have to take you home at 10:00. It's already 08:00.

Chris: can I at least have five more minutes of sleep.

This woman and sleep.

Me: nope, we only have two hours, I want to use them wisely, with no five minutes to spare.

She groaned so I pulled her and kissed her.

Chris: (whining) but my sleep.

I dragged her out of bed and put her on my back. She rested her head on my shoulder.

Me: don't sleep.

Chris: I'm tired.

I opened the shower door and let the cold water run. If this doesn't wake her up then I don't know what will.

Chris: what are you doing.

I ignored her but she tried to jump off and I held her bum tightly.

Chris: Put me down!

She starts kicking and screaming but I won't let her get out of this one. As soon as the cold water hits both our bodies, she stops. I put her down and she turns to look at me, water running down her face, my shirt drenched in water.

Chris: I hate you, do you know that.

I smirked then gave her a kiss, she'll be fine.

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Me: if it wasn't for your dad, we'd go for a jol. Van Vyk is in town.

Chris: last time I did that with you people I was grounded so no thank you.

Me: you need to live a little babe. I'm going to take you places.

She walked over to me and took my phone. I looked at her.

Me: what's wrong.

Chris: nothing.

Me: then why are you taking my phone?

Chris: is there a problem if I take it?

Now I know that's a trick question, I've heard it before. Mom asks dad all the time.

Chris: chill, just want to take pictures.

Me: what's wrong with yours?

Chris: Android and Apple, really? Do you really have to ask.

Me: there's nothing wrong with your phone.

Chris: well, I don't care, come.

She pulled me to the terrace, oh so I have to participate in the picture taking. I don't know why girls like taking pictures this much. They plan so much when they could just capture the most unexpected moment, the ones that last for life. What moments last forever about posing. To me, pictures should have sentimental value, something to treasure for the rest of your life. After the millions of pictures we took, we drove off to breakfast then I dropped her off.

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Christmas morning came and I was all alone. To me it felt like a normal day though, the only reason I celebrate this day is because my mom encourages us to learn about God but I'm atheist. After everything that happened to me this year, I just decided to step away from religion for a bit. No matter how much I prayed and prayed, I realized it was draining me. Maybe my heart is still bound to change but for now, I'm taking a break. I called my mom while sitting in the kitchen eating cereal.

Me: morning.

Mom: hi son. Merry Christmas.

She had Sanele in her arms, she looked like she had barely slept.

Me: thank you mah. You look so tired.

Mom: you brother decided to wake up and cry. I'll be fine. How are you, what plans do you have for today?

Me: Chris invited me to her family lunch today.

Mom: what's going on between you and that girl Mvelwenhle.

Me: you really want to know Ma' Mfusi.

Mom: yes son, I wouldn't ask if I didn't.

I chuckled then I heard Dad speaking in the background.

Dad: Mvelwenhle o maratong.

Mom laughed.

Me: can I see my little Dove please before I have to explain things I don't know.

Mom: (laughing) she's still sleeping. Tell me, what's going on, I want to know.

Me: I'll tell you when you come home my love don't worry.

Mom: you better. Call us a bit later, maybe she'll be up by then.

Me: okay. Kiss Sanele for me.

Mom: bye son.

I hung up then got ready to leave for the mall.

Christine

I'm standing by the door at the lounge biting my nails, contemplating a way to tell my father that Mvelo is coming. He's outside with his friends and their wives and girlfriends are inside the kitchen. Naomi pushes me.

Naomi: hamba.

Me: awukahle.

Naomi: you have to tell him, Mvelo's going to be here soon.

Me: don't you think I know that. Stop stressing me.

It's my fault, I should've told him yesterday, at least he had had something to drink. I never thought he drinks by the way, mainly because we are never together during Christmas, I always visit my aunt. He hides it well shame. Our aunt Sindy came to us.

Sindy: what's wrong girls?

Naomi: she invited a guest but hasn't told uncle.

Uyaphapha lomntwana. I slap her shoulder.

Sindy: maybe I can tell him. When is the guest coming?

Me: round about lunch. The problem is they don't get along.

Sindy: they've met before.

Me: yep. Dad doesn't like him at all.

Sindy: it's a him?

I cover my face in my hands and she laughs.

Me: he didn't have anyone to spend Christmas with so I invited him. He's just my friend.

Luckily, I haven't told Miss big mouth (Naomi) about me and Mvelo dating so she won't jump in and expose me. We haven't even talked today, he hasn't even said Merry Christmas.

Sindy: then he shouldn't mind should he?

Me: he shouldn't.

I look at her and smile. She pats my shoulder then walks away. I look at Naomi.

Naomi: siyoke sibone.

Me: uyaphapha.

We walked back to the kitchen and we helped them with preparing. Them being aunty Denise, Naomi's mom, Aunty Sindy and sis' Gugu, my dad's friends wife. Aunty Sindy is the cool one, you know that aunt that has money and is living her best life, yeah, she's that aunt while Aunt Denise is well, the strict one. That one aunt every cousin avoids visiting. Sometimes she's fun to be around but when you are nonsense she'll tell you and will put you in line. She's nothing like my dad or Aunt Sindy, in fact, they all have different personalities. I don't understand how they could be related. We finish with the cooking and we start to set the table then my phone rings. I take it out of my pocket and it's Mvelo calling me. I look at Naomi then answer.

Mvelo: hey babe.

Me: hi.

My eyes roam around the room and they've stopped doing what they are doing and they are looking at me.

Mvelo: I'm here. Could you come out.

I nod then smile nervously.

Me: I'm coming.

I won't lie to you and say I wasn't scared, I was shitting myself. My heart beat became irregular at that same moment. I dropped the phone and put it back in my apron then asked Naomi to accompany me. Aunt Denise stopped us, amazing!

Denise: niyaphi?

Before we could answer, the fabulous Aunty Sindy came to our rescue.

Sindy: she invited her friend from school, he had no one to spend Christmas with.

Denise: he? Does your father know.

I look at Aunt Sindy for back-up.

Sindy: I told him. Plus they know each other.

She turns from Aunt Cindy back to us.

Denise: go.

She says to me and when Naomi tries to follow, she stops her.

Denise: buya wena.

Ouch. Okay that stung a bit. I put my hands in my apron and I make my way to the gate. This time he hasn't parked directly by the gate but behind the large retaining wall. He's already standing there with his hand in his pocket and the other one with a joint. This guy and weed. I'm so glad there's a wall here, maybe I can steal a kiss or two. He grabs my hand with his other hand that has now been slipped out of the pocket. He then puffs out his last puff of smoke and throws it on the floor and looks at me.

Mvelo: hi.

Me: hey.

I smiled, actually I blushed and looked down. He was so close, I could actually feel his warm weed breath on my face. For a moment, I loved it. I loved seeing him after so long, five days is a long time. I pulled him by his t-shirt and I kissed him. I think he was surprised by this gesture but I couldn't help it.

Me: I missed you.

Mvelo: I know, who wouldn't.

He smirked and I hit his torso playfully. Here I was trying to be romantic, he's such a lost cause. He pulled my hand and walked to the boot of his car and it had different types of gift bags.

Me: gifts?

Mvelo: for the women. I couldn't come empty handed, my mom would skin me alive. And I know you people love these.

He gave me the gifts. There were only 4.

Me: there's one missing.

Mvelo: who said you were getting one?

Me: hawu?

I hold my chest and look shocked.

Me: how can you buy for the girlfriends family and not the girlfriend?

Mvelo: just like this.

He kisses my cheek and closes the boot. He's not being serious right now. Nah, maybe he's joking. He locked his car then spanked my bum as we made our way up the drive way. Old habits die hard. In all this excitement, I've forgotten that I haven't told my father he's coming, which puts me in another debacle. When we walk into the kitchen, everyone is already at the table which increases my blood pressure even more. I look at him.

Mvelo: you didn't tell your dad.

I nod and he shakes his head. I put the gifts on the island and buck up the courage to walk in with him. I take off my apron and I walk into the dining room with his footsteps audible behind me. I do the unthinkable and go sit down in my place then he stood there.

Mvelo: sanbona.

Them: yebo.

Dad had his eyes on me, I could feel them, but what could he do now, nothing! Aunt Sindy pointed him to a chair that was next to mine and he put the bottle of wine in his hand and sat down.

Mvelo: thank you for welcoming me into your home.

Sindy: you're welcome and thank you for the wine.

He nods then silence falls onto the room.

Dad: Christine, please pray for us.

Eish yah neh. So, me and prayer guys, I honestly don't know how to do it. I'll stick to the normal prayer we say for food. After praying, we start dishing up. I grab Mvelo a plate.

Me: (Whispering) ngikuphakeleni?

Mvelo: anything.

I've noticed he's not a picky eater, he eats everything, and I like that. I put a bit of everything for him. I know he doesn't have a big appetite, so I'll keep it minimal, I mean this person went for a whole week without food and the way he felt, he could've gone more. After giving him his food, my dad stares at me for a long time which makes me very uncomfortable.

Denise: Christine dish up for your father.

Oh, is this what the look is about? Oh gosh my father is such a drama queen. I grab him a plate and dish up for him. after that drama, everyone starts to eat and the chatter starts with Mvelo, Naomi and I quiet.

Denise: Christine you didn't even introduce your friend to us.

I internally rolled my eyes and looked at Mvelo then half smiled, I just thought a full smile would give it away.

Me: this is Mvelo, my best friend. Mvelo this is my family, you've met my dad, that's my Aunt Denise then Aunt Sindy. This is Naomi and those are my dad's friends Sis' Gugu and Uncle Mdu.

Mvelo: (Smiling) it's a pleasure meeting you.

Sindy: it's a pleasure too best friend.

We all laugh except for my dad, who has a straight face.

Gugu: it seems like I've seen you before, what's your surname.

Mvelo: Mfusi.

Mdu: Mfusi?

Mvelo: yes.

Mdu: are you Msizi Mfusi's son?

Mvelo: no, he's my father's brother.

Mdu: which brother?

Mvelo: Kabelo.

He gasps. Kanti what is the fuss about Mfusi family, I know they are rich but that's where it ends. I see a glint of fascination on my father's face.

Dad: your grandfather was a great man.

Mvelo: thank you sir. He really was.

Mdu: your father and mother are one of the most successful couples in KZN.

He laughed.

Mvelo: I didn't know that.

Sindy: well, you obviously wouldn't know you live with them.

He wasn't even being stuck up or arrogant as he usually is, he was just being sweet and humble. I was surprised. The oaks started discussing business, logistics and we

didn't form part of it. Mvelo seemed like he knew nothing about it, it's surprising because they were talking about his family's businesses. After lunch, Naomi and I cleared the table and we moved to the lounge for exchanging gifts. So, I've been told I'm the best gift giver in the family and I've proven to be for all my life. I also bought Mvelo a gift, but I won't give it to him in front of my family. They exchanged gifts and I got mine. I got my dad a set of cufflinks, he loves suits, he says they make him feel like he's a big shot so after I heard him say that I thought why not make him feel more special and start a collection for him. trust me, my pocket got bruised in the process, but nothing makes me happier than seeing my father happy.

Dad: thank you my princess.

Me: now you can be a big shot.

We laughed, just the both of us, nobody else understood but they just sat and watched us. Then Mvelo took the stage. My dad was surprised when he took the gift bags and gave them to my aunts and Naomi.

Denise: you got us gifts?

Mvelo: I couldn't come empty handed.

Naomi just squealed and gave him a hug.

Naomi: thank you!

Probably the first thing shes said since he arrived, Aunt Denise gave her an eye.

Sindy: you didn't have to.

Mvelo: no, really. You welcomed me into your home, the least I could do is say thank you.

Them: thank you son.

There was a tad bit of arrogance in his smile but asikho lapho. Naomi was the first one to open her gift and it was diamond earrings from American Swiss. I'm sure if she wasn't so scared of her mother, she would've kissed him, that's how happy she was. Mvelo's crazy, he spent so much money on this child, I'm sure he spent more on the other ladies. I was right, he outdid himself. Swarovski Diamonds, earrings and a pendant for all of them. I was so jealous, no joke, I felt left out. I could only dream of owning a diamond and here he is buying my family my dreams. Isn't he supposed to be my boyfriend?

Denise: it's too much Mvelo.

Even my father was out of words.

Mvelo: it's Christmas.

Sindy: we didn't even get you anything and you just...

She signals her hands towards the diamonds lost for words. I literally felt like crying but I'll have to keep it in.

Denise: and what about your best friend?

Mvelo: she got her gift already.

He looks at me and half smiles, so this is a thing today, making Christine upset. I see him. Aunt Denise stood up and gave him a hug.

Denise: even my husband never gotten me diamonds, thank you son.

They all gave him hugs then I stood up and went to the kitchen to start with the dishes. I won't lie, I'm jealous. He didn't buy me anything, not even a chocolate. Ay shame umjolo. Maybe it was wrong of me to expect him to give me something this early in the relationship, but he gifted all my aunts with gifts that are over the limit. And I don't even get a chocolate. Not even a packet of Maynard's at least. Yah no, I'm heartbroken. I finished washing all the dishes and left them on the side to dry up, bazoqedelela, I'm done for the day. I went to my room and sat at my desk and edited some of my videos. My door opened and Naomi stood there looking at me.

Naomi: and then wena?

Me: hamba.

Naomi: are you sulking because Mvelo didn't get you a gift.

Me: no, go!

I looked at her, trying to give my best intimidating look. Doesn't she understand that it's painful? She must leave me alone. She closed the door and left. I sat in my room for another 30 minutes then I decided to go and give him his gift so he can leave. I bought him a personalized bracelet with his name on it, I really put it a lot of thought into this gift, and he does me like this, it's fine. When I walk into the lounge, Aunt Denise is sitting with sis' Gugu.

Denise: yini wena?

Me: nothing.

He's still outside with my dad and that bothered me. They were talking. I stood there watching them. After a few minutes, they shook hands then he walked towards the lounge. He smiled at me, but I kept a straight face. I then turned and walked towards the kitchen while he said his goodbyes. When I got to the gate, he held my hand.

Mvelo: fluff.

I looked at him and I opened the gate.

Mvelo: you're angry, why are you angry?

Me: I don't know, ask yourself.

I yanked my hand from his. He walked to the car and leaned against the bonnet and folded his arms across his chest.

Mvelo: is this because I didn't get you a gift.

He had a smirk on his face, mxm.

Mvelo: why are you fighting with me?

I folded my arms and looked away. He pulled me closer to him and wrapped his arms around my waist and tried kissing me.

Me: stop it.

Mvelo: tell me what's bugging you.

I gave him the gift bag in my hand, and he smiled.

Mvelo: so this is about the present thing.

Me: you didn't get me anything.

Mvelo: who cares about Christmas gifts Fluff?

He said it so loosely, he doesn't deserve my gift.

Me: well, you aren't getting my gift.

I took it from him, but he snatched it and opened it.

Mvelo: a gift is a gift I have to accept this, thank you babe

I rolled my eyes and he kissed me. So he's not joking?

Mvelo: jealousy doesn't suit you.

Me: you are being a jerk.

Mvelo: but you love me.

He picked me up and placed me on the bonnet, getting between my legs.

Mvelo: you saw me talking to your dad.

Me: yeah.

Mvelo: we're going to Eastern Cape on the 30th.

I looked at him.

Me: you and who?

Mvelo: me and you with the others for New Year.

Me: he agreed?

Mvelo: took a lot of convincing and begging but yes. We'll be back on the 2nd.

Me: you're joking?

Mvelo: no.

I couldn't believe my ears. Zondo agreed. I wrapped my arms around his neck and gave him multiple kisses on the face. He did the impossible.

Me: really?

Mvelo: (Laughing) yes babe really.

Gone was the anger and jealousy, I'm going to the Eastern Cape with bae!

Chapter 32

"You'll never know how damaged someone is until you try to love them."

Being born rich is truly a privilege. We literally took a road trip with a convoy of cars. I travelled with Mvelo and Andile travelled with his girlfriend and Muzi with his clique. I wasn't talking to him the first few hours of travelling though because when he came to pick me up, he was reeking alcohol which clearly means he was partying up a storm last night. I had to drive us, and he didn't stop with the vodka, I had to accept that he was going to be like this the whole trip, father help me. We stopped at a petrol station in Grahamstown and they all got out and socialized. I didn't understand this action, but I put up with it and a few minutes later we got back on the road, and we drove. He drove us to this private forest like farm place. It was literally in the middle of nowhere, but it was the most tranquil place on the planet. There were a lot of trees and animals as we drove up the long driveway. I won't even begin to describe the house that stood in the middle of the nothing. It was huge, even bigger than the one they live in, and it only had 2 stories. It was almost cabin like but in a modernised way, it's something you only see in Magazines and TV.

Me: this place is amazing.

Mvelo: my mom peaceful place.

The breeze was fresh and peaceful, the birds chirping, a lovely sight. He parked the car in the garage and when I stepped out the car the breeze was even stronger. I saw Sabrina and Lwa walking out the house looking excited. I went to them and gave them hugs.

Sabrina: the long-lost friend!

Me: oh come on.

Another white girl appeared behind them. You know that moment where you just look at yourself and evaluate your life choices and just feel your self-esteem dropping, that's what just happened to me. She was beautiful, scratch that, she was drop dead gorgeous. She had blonde hair and freckles on her cheeks, and she was wearing a bikini top and shorts just like the rest of the others. Yoh muhle lomntwana.

Her: hey beautiful.

She gave me a tight hug.

Her: I'm Chloe, I've heard so much about you.

Me: I wish I could say the same about you. I'm Christine and wow you are beautiful.

She laughs and wraps her arms around my neck.

Chloe: can we keep her? I like her already.

She says to the others, and we laugh. I feel someone pull me back.

Chloe: ay wena!

She said in a white accent and slapped Mvelo on the chest. She's so adorable, I love her energy. The guys came and greeted the girls, and we were introduced to Andile's girlfriend Ivy. She was also beautiful, her brownish tanned skin and black hair, she

was a South African version of Kylie Jenner. We walked into the house, and it was even more exquisite, I won't even go into detail.

Lwa: we're having a pool party outside come join us.

Me: let's go.

I held Sabrina's hand but when I tried to walk with them Mvelo pulled me.

Mvelo: come with me first.

Sabrina: Mvelo it's not a time to be clingy, please we know she's your girl!

Lwa: leave her alone.

Now they are all pulling me from side to side.

Me: aibo! I'm not a toy you can fight over!

They let go of me and the idiots started laughing. Stupid people.

.....

I ditched my man for my friends, yeah, I did it and now I'm sitting on a beach chair watching them drinking and we are catching up. Lisa comes out and a very handsome yellow bone follows her. This bitch, she didn't even greet me. she walks towards us and she almost stumbles when she sees me.

Lisa: I didn't know you were coming!

Lwa: ubusy wanyoba!

She pushes her in the pool, and we crack up laughing, these 2. I gave her a massive bear hug.

Lisa: you here with your mate?

Me: (Smiling) yeah.

I haven't told them, but I have suspicions that Lwa already knows.

Sabrina: and that smile?

Me: don't start with me.

The guys are nowhere in sight where are they?

Me: I'll go change and join you in the pool.

Chloe: excuses excuses love, where are you going?

Me: (Laughing) to change.

Sabrina: make it quick, I want you to teach me that 34+35 lap dance you did for Andrew!

She shouts as I make my way out the door. Sometimes I forget that my dirty laundry doesn't stay hidden for too long. I make my way upstairs to our room. I open the door and close it and he doesn't even flinch. He's lying on the bed busy on his phone with a smile plastered on his face. I stand there for another minute looking at him and the smile stays. He finally stops and looks at me.

Mvelo: what's wrong babe?

Me: nothing.

He looks at me one more time, but I shrug my shoulders and move to the closet where I stuffed my bag. I wonder what's making him smile like that. I start changing and put on my white bikini with a wrap-around see through skirt. I tie my hair in a high bun and comb my bangs neatly. I wear my sandals and as I try to make my way out, he speaks.

Mvelo: you look nice.

Why is there this jealous energy between us. There's so much tension and it's killing me.

Me: thank you.

I hold the doorknob but before I could turn it, he held my waist.

Mvelo: you going to go out like that?

Me: yes.

He kissed my neck but I didn't understand his question and he reeked of alcohol. Although I must admit, his kisses were turning me on. I turned around and looked at him. he was drunk, super drunk but someone that didn't know him would think he's sober, he wears alcohol like a normal face. He tried kissing my mouth, but I backed away.

Me: you are reeking alcohol.

Mvelo: you don't like it?

I shook my head no. he lifted me up and pinned me on the door and I heard it click. He just locked us in. he placed a kiss on my boobs.

Mvelo: I'm sorry.

I nod. He then wraps his arms around my waist, and I put my hands on his head. He places his head on the nape of my neck and gives me hickeys as his other hand runs down my inner thigh. My breathing hitched.

Mvelo: you want me to fuck you now?

Me: yes please.

Mvelo: okay.

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we still have a lot to talk about, but I'll let it slide for now, he just gave me a mind-blowing fix, I don't have time to be fighting him.

Mvelo: ucabangani?

Me: nothing.

He nods and grabs a packet of weed from the dresser. I've been staring at this thing, and I won't lie, it bothered me.

Mvelo: are you judging me?

Me: what! No. I didn't say anything.

Mvelo: come here.

He put his hand out for me to take it and he pulls me to him.

Mvelo: if there's something bothering you Chris tell me. the last time a girl treated me like this I found out she was pregnant.

I heave a sigh. I can't even begin to describe the way I feel right now.

Me: I promise you, I'm fine and I'm definitely not pregnant. Don't worry about me.

Mvelo: then stop acting weird around me.

I nod and close my eyes. I rest my head on his shoulder and squeeze him tightly. I wasn't joking when I said I don't want to lose him. if only he knew the love I have for him, I don't even think that the infatuation he claims he feels compares to the love I have for him. I'm scared I won't be enough, that some rich pretty girl will snatch him away from me. I know it's a bit too early to be feeling like this but that night he came clean, I wholeheartedly opened my life for him and now I'm scared I'll regret it. I'm scared the same thing that happened with Tshogo will happen with Mvelo and I can't go through it again, I wouldn't survive.

Mvelo: fluff you're crying, are you sure you are okay.

I nod and I just let myself feel all the emotions and I take him in, his scent and heartbeat. I wish I understood what is wrong with me. I'm not in the mood for people anymore, I'll just camp out here, maybe all these stupid feelings and emotions will disappear.

Me: I think I'll take a nap for a bit.

Mvelo: okay, as long as you wake up feeling better.

He placed his forehead on mine and looked me in the eyes.

Mvelo: (Whispering) I love you okay.

Me: me too.

He half smiled and gave me a peck then helped me get on the bed. It didn't take me long to fall asleep, but I woke up shortly after that because I was in so much pain. It felt like my abdomen was being torn up. I looked around the room and it was dark; the rain was pouring down and there was some lightening. Tears made their way down my face as I stumbled to the bathroom, I didn't even turn on the lights, I didn't have the strength. I felt light-headed so I rested my head on the sink and listened to the pain on my lower back. I knew there was something wrong when I started gagging and I spilt all of the food from earlier inside the sink. I felt so weak, and my head was burning up. Why today? I rinsed my mouth then I sat on the toilet to pee only to realize I've started my period, so the pains I have are period pains? I've never had these before. Great, my whole trip has been ruined. I strip and get in the shower and these pains are showing me no mercy. I go back to the room as quick as I can, grab my toiletry bag and run back to the bathroom and I sit on the toilet seat for another 10 minutes trying to process these pains I'm feeling. Maybe that's why my emotions were all over the place. I'm startled by a loud thudding at the door.

Mvelo: Chris, are you okay?

Me: yes.

Mvelo: why is it locked.

Me: I'm busy.

Mvelo: with what, let me in.

Me: no, wait.

I fiddled around in my bag looking for my tampons.

Mvelo: Christine open this door.

Me: can you please just wait!

He kept on banging the door and I was getting irritated. I dropped my perfume bottle and it shattered into pieces, I screamed.

Mvelo: open!

I looked at my Christmas gift in tatters, my heart broke, I hadn't even used it. screw Mvelo for this. I walked around the bottle pieces and opened the door; I don't care if I leak everywhere now.

Me: what's your problem!

Mvelo: I was worried about you. Why did you lock the door?

Me: I was taking a shower, you made me break my perfume bottle.

Instead of leaving, he closed the door and walked inside. He was looking around and I don't know what he was looking for, he's wasting my time.

Mvelo: I'll get you another one.

Me: okay, please go.

Mvelo: why.

Me: because I have stuff to do.

Mvelo: what stuff?

I feel like slapping him right now, he's so annoying.

Me: I have to put on my tampon.

He looks at me blank. He has to know what that is.

Mvelo: do you need help?

Me: no! why would I need help?

Mvelo: I don't know.

I looked at him and shook my head. I was hoping he would leave now.

Me: the door is that way.

Mvelo: no, I'm not leaving.

Me: seriously, we're doing this now!

Mvelo: why does everything with you have to be an argument. I'm not fighting with you.

Me: if you aren't fighting with me then you would give me some space!

He puts his hands in the air and slams the door on his way out. This relationship is never going to work. I wore my underwear and pajamas then walked out the bathroom. I didn't even want to go downstairs anymore. I rummaged through my bag for some painkillers, I drank 2 then I attempted to sleep. When I say attempted, I mean a barely got any because I was tossing and turning from the pain, why didn't they tell me period pains were this painful, I was never prepared. I woke up with the sun shining on my face, I don't even know when I fell asleep, but the pains have subsided. I sit up and push my hair back, rubbing my eyes, trying to remove all the morning dirt on my face. I looked up and he was staring at me, he was sitting on a chair by the window with a book in his hands.

Mvelo: good morning.

Me: hi.

He smiled and stood up, leaving the book and pencil on the chair. He picked up a tray on the ottoman and came to sit next to me.

Mvelo: I heard fruits are good for you when you're on, you know...

Me: (Giggling) periods.

Mvelo: yes, that thing.

I shook my head and smiled. He looked sober this time. To think we had a fight last night.

Me: thank you

Mvelo: eat up then get ready, we're going out for breakfast.

Me: everyone?

Mvelo: nope, everyone's already had breakfast.

I looked at the clock next to the bed and it was 11:30. Yoh.

Mvelo: I told the girls you're sick.

Me: thanks.

He tried standing up, but I held his hand and made him sit.

Me: I don't like fighting with you.

Mvelo: I don't too, but we'll talk about this later. You just have to get ready, okay?

I nod, feeling a bit disappointed he didn't want to talk but I'll be a big girl and take it as it is. He kissed my forehead and walked out. I ate my fruit salad then I got out of bed and went to take a shower. I came back, made the bed and wore my summer dress and sandals. The sun is scorching hot outside, how will I even step out. After grabbing my things, I make my way downstairs and I find the girls in the kitchen gossiping. I put my tray in the sink and turn to look at them.

Sabrina: en jy het vertrek om te verander en jy het nooit weer teruggekom nie.

Here it goes, Afrikaans, I know nothing about the language. I look at her confused and they just started laughing.

Lwa: you don't understand?

Me: and what's funny about my not understanding?

I roll my eyes and they laugh even more, these idiots.

Chloe: why are you only waking up now, what kept you up the whole night?

Sabrina: Andrew gee dit vir haar, hy lê dit neer.

Me: I don't like this.

They laughed again. bunch of fools.

Me: whatever you said, it's not true.

Lisa: I believe you okay.

Chloe: me too.

I rolled my eyes and sat down on the bar stool.

Me: I just started my periods and cramps were showing me flames.

Lwa: aggh shame man, geen seks meer vir Andrew nie.

I slapped her thigh because I understood part of that sentence.

Lwa: it's the truth.

Me: have any idea what he's planning.

Them: nope.

Lisa: I'm so pre-occupied with Tsholo that I know nothing that going on in this circle.

Chloe: oh you're such a slut.

Me: yeah what happened with Muzi.

Them: ayy, man not that one!

They all chorused at once. I looked at them shocked. The amount of disgust on their faces.

Sabrina: Muzi is not someone to be serious with.

Chloe: you smash, you go.

Lisa: we've all been there.

I opened my eyes widely and looked at them distraught. Seriously. I looked at Lwa.

Me: you too?

Lwa: oh hell no!

Me: I can't believe you people.

Chloe: you should be glad he hasn't made a move on you.

Me: he tried.

Lwa: we all know Andrew would kill him.

Mvelo: who am I killing?

We turned around and he walked towards us. He put his arms around Lisa and Sabrina.

Chloe: stop eavesdropping Mfusi.

He smirks and looks at me.

Mvelo: ready to go.

Me: yeah.

I jump off the chair and go stand next to him. he whispers something in Lisa's ear, and she cracks up laughing, I look away and hold his hand in mine.

Mvelo: bye ladies.

Them: bye Andrew.

They all chorus, he's such a ladies' man, it actually kinda gets to me.

Mvelo: you have sunscreen?

Me: no, why.

Mvelo: I wouldn't want your delicate skin being burnt by the sun my love. What am I going to caress when you're burnt?

He rubs my arm and I laugh out loud. Mxm, he's such a comedian.

Me: the sun has nothing on my man now does it.

Mvelo: it shouldn't.

He scoops me up, making me giggle and we walk up a little pathway. We are talking about the silliest things and he's just making me laugh. Why can't all our moments be like this, filled with silliness and laughter. Life with him would be so much better. We get to a shed and there are two tractors parked.

Mvelo: you want to go on an adventure?

He has a silly smile on his face.

Me: I'd love to!

He puts me down and we race to the tractor. I got there first and he picked me up and spun me around, making me dizzy.

Me: hey! You're cheating!

Mvelo: there are no rules.

I kicked his leg and he almost tripped and I quickly climbed on the tractor. I stuck my tongue out at him, but he dangled the keys in my face.

Mvelo: give up fluff.

I have to be strategic; I jump off the tractor and snatch the keys from his hand and run as fast as I can.

Mvelo: Fluff get back here right now.

He's jogging so close to me while I'm running for my life, I'd be damned if he'd start running for real.

Mvelo: fluff!

He picks up his pace and it doesn't take him long to catch me, his arms wrapping around my waist, and he picks me up.

Mvelo: I caught you!

We are in a stack of hay and he's tickling me.

Me: (Laughing) you win, please stop tickling me!

Could a girl be happier!

.....

After the whole goose chase, we actually took a ride on the tractor all around the beautiful farm and wow, I'm stunned. This place is magnificent, and it belongs to his family. I would kill to come and live in a place as peaceful as this. He did something sweet today, he set up a picnic for us under this big tree next to the lake. It's like he knew how much I love nature; it just calms me. I'm lying on his lap staring at him ramble on about how he's going to take over his family business when he graduates, I wish I was listening, but I'm lost in the moment, this moment, I just wish it could last for a lifetime. He gently sucked on my lower lip, and I brought his head closer just so I could kiss him properly, he just chuckles.

Mvelo: do I finally have your attention?

Me: yes.

I smile broadly.

Mvelo: am I boring you?

Me: no, I'm just loving this, this moment. Being with you without even fighting and bickering every second.

Mvelo: we do fight a lot, don't we?

Me: (smiling) we do.

It means we love each other but sometimes it does get out of hand.

Mvelo: you also have your days and your moods.

Me: and you don't make it nice for me.

Mvelo: then tell me what to do.

I sat up, seeing as we are about to have a serious conversation.

Mvelo: do I give you space?

Me: I never ever want you to leave me.

He gave me a heartwarming smile.

Me: I just want you to understand me, but never ever give me space.

Mvelo: no matter how angry you get?

Me: yes.

I held his t-shirt and hugged him tightly. I don't want him to leave me, not after he's given me so much to look forward to.

Mvelo: I'm in this with you Christine. I'm honestly not promising you heaven and earth because I cannot give you all of it, but I promise to be the best version of me, the version that you love and the version that loves you.

Me: we'll take it one day at a time.

Mvelo: one day at a time.

He planted a kiss on my forehead and my heart smiled. It's a journey I want to walk with him.

Chapter 33

3 years later

Ntswaki

I feel like I'm losing my mind, sitting in this house repeating the same pattern over and over again for the rest of my life, it's nonsense. Dumisani won't stop pressurizing me to fall pregnant and I just haven't told him I can't conceive. All we do is fight, sometimes I'm happy when he isn't home, I get a peace of mind, I get to do whatever I want without him trying to control and limit my every move. And they said marriage was fun, jeez I'm probably the unhappiest woman you could ever come across. I don't know what changed between us but I realized I don't love him, it dawned to me that afternoon when Andrew walked through those church doors. When I saw him walk in, my heart smiled, I thought he'd come for me but instead, that floozy came in right after him. I vibrated with anger. If I seriously had the guts, I would've ran off but the look on his face when he walked in, he didn't care, he had no ounce of care for me as he stared at me and I wanted him to see I also didn't care. So now I just sit at home hoping this husband of mine will cheat and give me a reason to leave him but no, I have access to all his gadgets, bank cards, even his bank statements. Who am I kidding, even if I wanted to leave him, I wouldn't cope. He's the only source of income I have, he funds my lavish lifestyle. The door opens and his freakishly tall son Mqhele walks in. See him and I, we don't get along anymore, he tends to disagree and disrespect me all chances he gets and I won't tolerate his nonsense so he's just the son of the man I'm married to, klaar. I don't know what changed with him but I couldn't care less. He walks past me but doesn't greet.

Me: yeyi wena.

He drags himself and looks at me.

Me: why don't you greet?

Mqhele: I saw you in the morning, I greeted you, why do I have to do it again?

Me: why are you so disrespectful boy, I'm your elder!

Mqhele: and I could care less. Are you done?

His voice is deep and husky, puberty is playing it's role.

Dumi: Mqhelewenkosi I won't say this to you again! apologize.

I turn to the door and he's standing there ready to kill. It's going to be a long evening!

Mvelo

Them: said I complete you

Do you need me like I need you

All that I want is to keep you

Here with me right by my side

By my side

Someone loves Phora already.

Chris: babe repeat it.

Me: for the hundredth time, no thank you.

Chris: but you love Phora.

Paloma: yes daddy!

She smiled, remind me never to travel with Christine and Paloma, we've played the same song over and over. These women drive me crazy all the time. We are driving to Durban for this Baby Expo Christine forced me to take Paloma to. So my 3 year old daughter is obsessed with Barney and she thought we should take her.

Chris: we'll play it for the last time then you can play your music.

Me: yeah right.

I rolled my eyes and played their song. Paloma even knew the lyrics and it just shocks me. She's too smart for her age, I'm sure she got that from her mom. Both her and Sanele drive my mom crazy. He refused coming with us, that child is as stubborn as a mule. I know mom will only ever find peace of mind when we move into our house. A lot has happened in these 3 years, I graduated 3 months ago and I've recently started working as an intern at my father's company. The inheritance I received from grandpa was given to me and I bought a house in Palm Kloof Estate. It's not far from my parents but they weren't happy about me wanting to move but I won't get my independence unless I leave. I mean I do have everything I need, I have a proper job, a source of income, a daughter and a girlfriend. Chris and I are doing better than I expected and although we fight like a cat and mouse, I still love her and wouldn't trade her for anything. I actually asked her to move in with me but she refused saying it's cohabitation and her father wouldn't allow it. she's part of the

reason why I haven't moved out. I've been thinking about asking her to be mine forever though.

Chris: (Smiling) what?

Me: you look beautiful.

Her cheeks turn pink and she turns to look at the window, seeing her reaction, it warms my heart.

Paloma: daddy say I'm beautiful too.

I chuckle and turn to look at my daughter, she was frowning with her big blue eyes staring at me.

Me: you are beautiful too my princess!

Paloma: like Chris?

Me: yes my love, just like Chris.

She imitates Chris' reaction and that has me in stitches. I love my girls.

Christine

Paloma: Chris!

Me: yes baby.

Paloma: where's Barney?

I'm holding her hand and we are making our way inside the auditorium for this baby expo. We actually were able to convince Mvelo to drive all the way here. Paloma has an obsession with Barney, literally everything she does is related to Barney the friendly purple dinosaur. He makes an appearance here every year. We stand by the ticket check and wait for Mvelo while he tries to park the car in this busy parking lot. I'm hoping this child next to me doesn't wander around because she's a curious busy body who can't stand to be in one place for too long. I feel like someone is staring at me. I won't turn around and look though, I'll just pretend to be busy on my phone. Then I feel hands gripping my waist and a scent I'm unfamiliar to whisks past my nostrils. I turn around and my heart almost stops beating when I see who it is.

Tshego: aw baby gal.

Tshego! Tshego! Tshego! I feel like puking! Like literally vomit! Tf is he doing here, at a baby expo, grabbing my waist like he owns me, asshole! After stepping on his foot, I yanked his hand away from my waist.

Tshego: still feisty I see.

Then he smirks. Mxm

Me: please walk away. Just go please.

I'm looking at him directly in the eyes. The same eyes that would look at me with lust and desire. That lust is still clearly visible but there's nothing I hate more than it. he grips on my wrist and tightens it and his face changes from smirk to serious.

Tshego: ngyk'owna baby gal, jy verstaan?

I wasn't turned on but my nipples literally hardened from the chills that ran down my spine. All the fear I once had for him came rushing back and I felt the tears burning my eyes. He then did the unthinkable and grabbed my ass and cackled as he walked away. I know I can't break down in front of Paloma so I just have to keep it together. I lift her up and hug her tightly. I can't understand why Mvelo isn't coming back. Tshego is ruining my life, what does he want from me, after breaking my heart and taking my virginity along with it, he told me he loves me, took my most treasured gift and left me high and dry, with a broken heart, how dare he.

Mvelo: Christine let's go.

I looked up at him and he had Paloma's hand in his. He had his other hand put out for mine so I took and we walked inside. The show was about to start so we went to sit and I covered my face with my hand. I feel like crying but at the same time, I don't want to draw attention to myself. I'm definitely not ready to tell Mvelo about my past with Tshego. I won't say I haven't recovered because I did but I just need time to process all of it.

Mvelo: okay, talk to me.

Me: nothing. I'm fine.

Mvelo: you aren't fine. You're even crying, look at me.

I covered my face after realizing that tears are streaming down my face. He took my hand and Paloma. He stood right in front of the door and looked at me in disbelief and shock.

Mvelo: Christine what the hell is going on?

Me: I told you, I'm fine I just...I'm just not feeling too good.

Mvelo: what's wrong, why didn't you say so all this time, I would've taken you to the doctor or something.

Me: there's no need, I swear, I'm okay, I'm just being silly.

I wipe my tears and smile, a fake forced smile that is. I look around and I don't see Paloma.

Me: where's Paloma?

His eyes widen and pushes past me and shouts for her. I hastily followed behind him after it registers that the child is wondering around probably losing her mind. We've looked everywhere but we can't seem to find her, Mvelo's even on the verge of calling the police. Then randomly, as we stand behind the car panicking, I feel a tap on my leg and when I look, it's her but with an extra set of man feet next to her. I almost faint when my eyes meet with Tshego's. he's holding her hand and she has a massive smile plastered on her face. Mvelo turns around and picks up Paloma in a haste and engulfs her in a tight hug.

Mvelo: Dove don't you ever do that again, where were you?

Tshego: I found her wandering around the shopping lot and I asked her to show me her parents.

I felt like puking all over again, he has that sly smile on his face, like he planned this.

Mvelo: are you okay?

He's not even paying attention to Tshego. After a minute of being self-absorbed in checking if his one and only daughter isn't in tatters, he then shakes his hand and thanks him for finding her. I wish I could offer the same sentiments but I'd have to erase the past we share. I'd be lying if I said I didn't hate this man because I do. And now I have to carry around the guilt of knowing that I brought him into our lives, maybe for the worst. What was his plan with Paloma?

Mvelo: Christine I don't know what the problem is with you anymore, I'm leaving.

He shuts the door and I realize he's actually been calling me. I need to act cool because I don't want to draw attention to myself. Gosh I sound like a broken record.

Ntswaki

I can complain and complain about my marriage and all the shittiness that comes with it but I can never complain about the sex, his strokes, his game, goodness me. Maybe one of the reasons I'm still with the guy. He's got me in a position I've never ever done before, I'm panting and screaming, sweat trickling down my face while he goes, in and out, in and out.

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Dumi: (Panting) if you aren't pregnant after that, there's definitely something wrong.

With three years of unprotected sex, there's obviously a problem. I roll my eyes and get out of bed. I might be unhappy but I'm satisfied.

Dumi: uyaphi?

Me: you know I hate the smell of sex on my body, I'm taking a shower.

I grab my robe from the dresser and put it on, I take a shower then go back downstairs to get his food. That's all he ever does, eat, sleep and try to impregnate me, as if I'm not already a hippo. I stop on my tracks when I hear that brat laughing in my kitchen.

Mqhele: soon enough, she'll be eating out of my palm.

...

Mqhele: she's so hot chief, the problem is her dad.

...

Mqhele: right!

They crack up again, I'm guessing he's on the phone.

I walk in and his face changes from a smile to a frown.

Mqhele: chief, I'll call you later.

He slams his phone on the counter.

Me: it's not your money that buys that phone.

Mqhele: it's also not your money. Why are you listening to my conversations?

Me: I don't care about your conversations.

Mqhele: you shouldn't care, you aren't my mother anyway.

That statement used to hurt me in the past but now, I could care less. I just pity the girl that will fall into the hands of this ruthless teenage boy. I take Dumisani's food and go back to the room and serve him.

Dumi: I'm taking you to the doctor tomorrow, I think I've given you enough time to fall pregnant, it's time you get checked out.

Me: why should I be the one that's checked out.

Mind you, my heart is bulldozing my chest. I know how ruthless this man can be, he might kill me if he finds out I can't have children and I didn't even tell him for a whole 3 years.

Me: it's clearly a sign that you're the one that can't have children, in all your years being alive, not even one living human to show for it. even your little brother died with a so...

I didn't finish my sentence because he silenced me with a slap, I don't cry anymore, I'm used to it. I turn the other way and wipe the blood that's coming from my nose.

Dumi: you don't talk to me like that Ntswaki, understood.

I nod.

Dumi: we are going to that doctor whether you like it or not.

I roll my eyes and get out of bed once again and go to put on my pajamas and prepare for bed.

.....

Doctor: Mrs Gumede, you have POI.

Dumi: what is that?

I know exactly what that is.

Doctor: Premature Ovarian Insufficiency. POI is when the menopause happens earlier than normal which is in your early fifties. When the ovaries stop releasing eggs then this also causes the periods to stop.

Dumisani looks at me and I turn away.

Doctor: This happens to all women when they go through the menopause and the ovaries stop working. Premature ovarian insufficiency (POI) is when the ovaries stop working properly before the age of 45.

Dumi: Ntswaki.

Me: Phakathwayo.

Dumi: look at me.

Now I have to put up a front, I don't have the energy to fight with Dumisani today.

Dumi: did you know about this?

Now I have a choice, do I protect myself from the fist and lie to him or do I tell the truth and set myself free? The doctor's presence has totally been disregarded now, that's how strong a presence Dumisani has.

Me: I didn't.

I can't read his face.

Doctor: there are other alternatives if you are looking to conceive...

Dumi raises his hand and stands up, gives me the look that tells me I should follow so I stand, I pity the people that work for him, he's a devil. We walk out the doctor's office and I'm trying to catch up to him but he's walking so fast. I bump into someone, and I drop my bag.

Lady: I'm so sorry.

She picks it up and hands it to me, I look at her from head to toe and she looks distraught but I could care less, she's a bitch anyway.

Chris: I'm sorry Ntswaki, I wasn't looking.

Me: okay

I step away and try run after my so called husband. What is she doing in a Gynecologist's office, I pray Andrew didn't get her pregnant because I'll lose my mind.

Narrated

A distraught Mvelo sits in his office spinning his pen in his hand staring at a picture of Paloma on his desk. He can always look past her daughters eyes and see just the person he wants to see, Isabelle. He puts the pen down, loosens his tie and goes to stand by the window over-looking the busy street below him. he puts the black velvet box on the window-sill and turns to face the door.

Andile: are you okay?

He takes the box and gives it to his brother who looks at it with one eye-brow raised. He plops himself on the couch and opens it.

Andile: ufuna ukuthrowa?

Mvelo scratches his head and sits on his office chair, being upgraded to head of Architecture in this company comes with a lot of perks.

Mvelo: I love her.

Andile: are you sure.

Mvelo: angazi bafo.

Andile: what do you mean you don't know.

He stands up and starts pacing again.

Mvelo: I was sure, I was so sure this was what I wanted but for the past 2 months, she's been acting weird.

Andile: weird how?

Mvelo: she's jumpy, she also blacks out a lot.

Andile: talk to her, ask her what the problem is. I know Chrissy loves you. Whatever it is that she's going through, I'm sure you can work through it.

He sits down again and looks at Paloma's picture.

Andile: I'm glad you found love bafo. I had honestly lost hope after Isa.

Mvelo looks at him briefly and shakes his head.

Mvelo: I hope I'm not making a mistake.

Two months before

Tshego: baby gal!

Christine walks faster, trying to reach the library door but he grabs her wrist making her turn around. How unfortunate that Devon isn't here to protect her anymore.

Chris: Tshego please, I have to go.

Tshego: so why ubaleka? Ngifuna ukuringa nawe.

Her heart rate increases, So much for running away. He walks out with her following him. he's driving a taxi, a quantum to be exact, he parked in right in from of the building, where he's not supposed to park it, but what can they say, you know the stigma behind taxi drivers. This was probably a bad idea, Chris thinks to herself when he drives off.

Chris: where are you taking me?

Tshego: siya kwami.

Chris: kwakho?

He looks at her and smiles, he's always been a dictator, she's not surprised but the last time she checked, he lived in KwaMashu, he couldn't have possibly travelled all the way here and he definitely shouldn't think he's going to drive her all the way there.

Chris: you can't take me to KwaMashu Tshego!

Tshego: who said anything about going to KwaMashu.

She pressed her lips together and looked out the window. They arrive in a suburban area, into a block of apartments. What she's doing is wrong on so many levels, she's betraying the man she loves. She leaves her school bag in the taxi and follows Tshego into the elevator.

Christine

Damnit did I have to wear a skirt today, a skimpy denim skirt that runs up every time I take a step? He has his hand on my thigh and it keeps running up and down. How far is this damn apartment of his, he's killing me. Just before he runs it up, inwards, I hold it and put it on his chest. He chuckles and the elevator opens, thank goodness. He opens the door and leads me into the lounge where he throws the keys on the table and plops himself on the run down couch. The place doesn't look too bad but it's not my kind of scenery. Just like in his back room in KwaMashu, there's an ash tray on the coffee table. I haven't been to that place in 5 years, I was 17 when he took my virginity on that run down bed. I was turned into a wife there and then and I had to endure 2 whole years of heartache with him. I don't know how I made it through matric, let alone my dad not finding out.

Me: why am I here?

Tshego: I want to marry you.

Me: uyahlanya!

I didn't mean to say that out loud but it's how I feel, he's crazy.

Tshego: don't talk to me like that Ma' Zondo.

Me: no, you are crazy Tshegofatsho! I'm not doing that.

I move back and he comes closer.

Tshego: you think that cheeseboy loves you? Huh, he doesn't care, mina baby gal, ngyk'ncanywa.

I shake my head but he pulls me by the shirt and I bump into his chest. He grips on my ass and picks me up.

Me: PUT ME DOWN!

I start kicking and screaming, what was I thinking coming here! He throws me on the bed and locks the door behind him, I have no tears but I'm so scared I can legit pee my pants right now.

Me: Tshego I'm going to scream, let me out!

Tshego: go ahead, try. No one will hear you.

These tears would come in very handy right now but dololo. He took off his shirt and threw it on the couch and closed the curtains in the room making it dark, I started trembling, I could hear my teeth rattling together. He pulled my leg, pulled up my skirt and pulled down my underwear.

Me: Tshego! Please!

It's pointless trying to shout and scream. Begging also doesn't help, it will all fall on deaf ears. He grabbed my neck roughly and looked into my eyes, I tried to turn away but his hold is too tight.

Tshego: ngak'tshela, ngykuowna. Ungowami wena!

I was so disgusted, I couldn't even look at him anymore but he kept my head in place. His eyes turned dark in an instant and now the tears were just flowing. He's done this before but today, he seems different. Oh my god, I pray he doesn't hurt me. What was I doing coming here. I closed my eyes and used my legs to push him away but instead he slapped my thighs and forced them open, I screamed.

Me: (Crying) Uyangilimaza!

He tried to kiss me but I bit his cheek and pushed him away. When he tried to grab ahold of my ankle, I used my elbow to hit him in the gut. I got to the door and banged on it hysterically, hoping that someone would come to rescue me but he picked me up and threw me back on the bed.

Me: (Crying) TSHEGO! LEAVE ME PLEASE!

Three gunshots went off and I immediately froze on the bed with my sobs getting louder and louder.

Man: Tshego phuma lapho, MANJE!

He grabbed his t-shirt on the couch, unlocked the door and left, slamming it behind him, I screamed. This idiot almost raped me.

Mvelo

Me: I'm not going to go anywhere fluff.

She holding on so tight, she's been like this for the past 2 months now, jumpy and clingy. At first I thought it was cute, she didn't want me to leave her side but now even when she goes to sleep, I have to keep the side lamp on, I don't know where this sudden fear of the dark comes from.

Me: I'll sit here and wait for you.

She nods and goes into the fitting room. It's her graduation next week and she's been super excited about it. it was a pity that I had to be the one to accompany her when she shops for her dress. She comes out in a red number, nice and tight, It compliments her skin.

Chris: how is it?

Me: it look stunning. You should wear red more often.

She laughs gives me a twirl.

Chris: I'm glad you like it.

Me: is it 'impress Andrew day'?

Chris: maybe.

She gives me a soft kiss then rushes back to the change room. I've finally decided to ask her to marry me. There's nothing stopping me anymore, I know I love her and I want nothing but to be with her and start a family, just the three of us. I'm planning on asking her on the day of her graduation, most of her family is going to be there, it's the perfect place. Before I can do all of that though, I have to go to Zondo and ask for her hand in marriage. I hope he doesn't make this hard for me, the man doesn't even know we're dating, he still thinks we're friends and Chris and I have fought about it but she did nothing about it. she put the dress on the counter and while she scratches around in her bag, I took out my card.

Chris: no, don't.

Me: I want to.

Chris: Mvelo...

Me: babe...

She sighs. She knows I'm not changing my mind. She has this habit of wanting to pay for herself, when we go out for dinners or whatever we do. She doesn't understand how happy it makes me when I spoil her and she's happy, now more than ever because I work for my money. I know she's going to sulk over this but if she's going to be my wife she has to get used to it.

.....

I walked in behind her and I sat in the dining room. I'll never forget the moment we shared on this table, like all the other naughty ones we've shared for the past 3 years. We once did it in the woods, on a hike. Talk about spontaneous. Zondo appeared with Christine behind him and she gave me a questioning look. I obviously wasn't going to tell her why I came here. I shook his hand after greeting and he patted my shoulder.

Zondo: you love showing up at my house boy.

Me: I just have something I want discuss with you sir, I'll be short.

Zondo: follow me.

I winked at Chris and she folded her arms over her chest sulking. How cute. He led me to the garden where we normally have our awkward discussions, it's either I've called the meeting or he has, yet Christine still gets jealous.

Zondo: stop calling me sir, I told you a long time ago.

I cleared my throat.

Zondo: what is the problem?

Me: there's no problem, in actual fact, I came here to put something in the clear and get your blessings.

Since he wasn't looking at me, he turned around with shock on his face.

Me: I want to marry your daughter and I would love if you'd give us your blessing.

He's trying so hard to hide his shock but he's failing dismally.

Zondo: you want to what?

Me: I want to ask Christine to be my wife. Sir, I mean Zondo, I love her and I know she hid this from you but we've been dating for 3 years now. I don't know how many times I've wanted to tell you but she been postponing and postponing but now, I

want to marry her. There's no other way for me to do this other than asking for your blessing.

Zondo: does she know this?

Me: no, I was going to ask her on the night of her graduation party, where I know all her loved ones are going to be in one place. I just thought I should come to you first.

He kept quiet and walked on. I don't know what he's thinking, he could be thinking about anything, I hope he doesn't say no.

Zondo: does she love you back?

Me: yes, I'd like to think she feels the same.

There was silence for a while then he turned around and looked at me.

Zondo: as long as you treat her right, treat her right, don't hurt her. She's my only child.

Me: I plan to do that and more.

Zondo: then you can go ahead. I give you my blessing Mfusi.

I smiled and shook his hand.

Me: thank you sir.

Zondo: yekela ukungibiza ngalelo gama.

Me: (laughing) ngyabonga Zondo.

Christine

I looked at myself in the mirror on the bathroom wall and smiled. I looked completely different, I had make-up on and although it wasn't the first time, I looked different and nice. My father insisted on buying me everything but Mvelo had already beat him to it, he had already bought me a dress, and shoes. He then decided to go all out on jewelry, and make-up. He bought me a whole make-up set, imagine. The only thing that was left for my dad to do was my hair, he bought me inches, an extremely long Brazilian weave. I feel like I'm getting married, I wasn't even treated like this on my matric dance and I thought that was a big deal. Red suits me, it compliments my light skin, I really didn't think it would.

Dad: are ready yet?

It's not every day you see Mr Zondo in a suit, he looks fresh.

Me: I'm ready daddy, let's go.

He grabbed my hand and we made our way to the car. As soon as it took off he looked at me.

Dad: I'm proud of you ndodakazi yami. You know I thought maybe you'd make the same mistake your mother and I made. I thought maybe I'd fail to raise you the right way but you proved me wrong, I'll be forever grateful for this, thank you.

I tried not to cry.

Me: you raised me the best way you could daddy and thank you for never making me feel like there's something missing. I love you.

Dad: I love you too my princess. Rose would be so proud of you.

I grabbed a tissue and wiped my tears before they could fall and I gave him a hug. I didn't want him to talk anymore, I wanted him to save something for his speech later, plus, he would ruin my make-up. We got to the venue and I escorted him to his seat and I made my way backstage to join the other graduates. I can't actually believe I'm leaving this place for good, I'm done with school and I'm going to start my life. I've been here for 4 years and I didn't even make friends. I was only friends with Devon and I spent the other 2 years in between with Mvelo because he only did 3 years. They did the whole ceremony and then started with the handing out of certificates. I knew I was still going to wait, I mean, Zondo, I'm the last one on the list. As I sat there, I saw the whole Mfusi clan walking into the hall. It was Mvelo, his mom, dad and another elderly woman I didn't know but she looked a lot like Mr Mfusi. They went and sat next to my father and I felt chills run down my spine, he and Mvelo's dad shook hands and Mvelo waved at me, as if I'm not already freaked out. He didn't tell me his parents were coming. They finally got to my name and I happily smiled as I made my way to collect what rightfully belongs to me, my hard work, four years is no joke. I felt happy, it's all I ever wanted, to get my honors, get a job and make money so I can spoil my dad. After the ceremony, I ran to my little family and gave my dad a big hug.

Dad: I'm proud of you baby girl.

I then looked at Mvelo's mom and she opened her arms and I hugged her.

Zuzile: congratulations sisi.

Me: thank you mah.

I shook Mr Mfusi's hand as they also congratulated me. Only after I saw Mvelo standing there with his arms folded across his chest, I laughed and did a mini run. I gave him a bear hug and he lifted me up.

Mvelo: congrats my love.

I giggled and he gave me a peck on the lips. Only then did I realize that my father was here. He noticed the look of distraught on my face and he put me down, not forgetting to laugh. Only to find them all looking at us with smiles.

Dad: let's go outside for pictures.

I felt my heartbeat getting normal and then we made our way outside. Mrs Mfusi put her arm around my waist.

Zuzile: you look stunning.

Me: thank you mah, you also look amazing.

Zuzile: thank you darling. Now from one woman to the other, where did you buy that red number, I think I also I want it.

She smirked, I laughed. It's like I'm talking to Mvelo, it's so hard to believe she's not even his birth mom, they are so alike.

Me: your son took me to this boutique in Margate, I don't even know the name of the store.

Zuzile: did he choose it for you?

Me: he didn't even want to stay behind for the fitting.

Zuzile: (Chuckled) just like his dad. I'll get him to tell me the name.

It wasn't long before I heard Devon's loud voice calling me. I turned around and we did a mini celebratory dance until we got together and he gave me a bear hug.

Devon: sis!

Me: bro!

Devon: I'm proud of you asswipe.

Me: thank you asswipe.

We laughed and then he greeted the others. After pictures, I was hijacked by Mvelo and he forced me to ride with him.

Mvelo: how do you feel, you've finally graduated.

Me: I feel grown, it's the first step towards starting my life. Now after finding my perfect job, I'll buy my dad everything and won't have to work anymore.

I look at him with a wide smile on my face.

Mvelo: you have this all planned out don't you.

Me: I've had this plan since I was a little kid.

He smiled and nodded as we drove in comfortable silence.

Narrated

They arrived at Christine's house and all her friends and family members were there. Salutations were exchanged and congratulations were in order for Christine who couldn't stop smiling. Mvelo was by her side the whole night, holding her hand, showing all sorts of affection. This was strange for Christine because in her head, her family doesn't know. After dinner, Zondo asks whole family to join them outside in the garden.

Chris: is it me or is my dad acting weird?

Naomi: just you sweetheart. Maybe it's because you are freaked out about the fact that Mvelo's being affectionate and he doesn't seem to mind.

Chris: that is bothering me.

She shakes her head lightly then looks at her father who's beaming.

Zondo: Chrissy, my only daughter.

He puts his hand out for her to hold.

Zondo: I've been waiting for this day to come for a long time, I'm so proud of you. MaZondo, Mthiyane kababa wakhe, I know we've had a tough relationship along the way but I appreciate that you were able to take care of yourself. Waziphatha kahle mntanami and for that, I'm grateful. So today I'm setting you free, you've done your part, now you can go and live your life.

Chris: (Crying) I'm not leaving just yet old man.

They all laugh and she gives her father a tight hug.

Chris: I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for you. I love you daddy.

Zondo: I love you too princess.

He wiped her tears then looked at Mvelo and signaled him to come close. He puts his glass on the table and makes his way past all the family members. He had his hands in his pockets because he knows they are sweating. In his left pocket, he had the ring box and he kept playing with it hoping it would calm his nerves.

Zondo: I know you wanted to say something.

Mvelo: yes, thank you baba.

Christine's heart sank to the pit of her stomach when she witnessed her father and boyfriend having such a warm moment. She started shaking. Her eyes met with Mvelo's and she gave him an unsure smile.

Mvelo: Fluff.

She nods then directs her eyes to Naomi who is just smiling.

Mvelo: I'm proud of you, your whole family is proud of you. You have made your father happy by doing what is right and I know he is super grateful to you. Now I

know that I might have posed as a threat to you Zondo, I seemed like someone who was here to disturb your daughter but I've had good intentions from the beginning.

Christine couldn't even find her voice at this moment, tears were stinging her eyes from fear.

Mvelo: Chris, I believe we've had good times in the past three years we've spent together. You've been so good to me, you've been good to my daughter and for this past year, I've been contemplating a lot of things.

Most of the people in the family realize what's going on and they start taking pictures and videos. Christine is just standing there trying to figure out where this speech is going.

Mvelo: I love you Fluff, I've loved you for a while and now I know I want to love you forever.

Tears cascade down Christine's cheeks when Mvelo pulls out the black velvet box and goes on one knee.

Chris: (Crying and Whispering) what are you doing?

Mvelo: (Chortles) I had a conversation with your father the other day and I told him I wanted to make you mine, he agreed, only on the condition that I don't hurt you. I won't hurt you Chris, I'll take care of you the same way you take of me, can you just please agree to do this with me.

Christine laughs and lightly shakes her head through the tears.

Chris: Do what with you Mvelwenhle?

Mvelo: I want you to marry me.

She wipes her tears and gives him a wide smile.

Chris: okay.

Mvelo: okay?

Chris: okay, I'll marry you.

Mvelo: are you saying yes?

Chris: Yes, stand up please.

The whole family laughs then Mvelo stands and gives her the ring. He's in a state of shock but when he sees the look of joy on his Chris' face, he smiles. He picks her up and spins her around, causing her to giggle in joy, their love is a sight for sore eyes.

Christine

What the hell! Like what the actual Fuck this man! Is he serious?

Me: daddy! I can't believe you!

Dad: (Laughs) what was I supposed to do Chrissy?

Me: you were supposed to tell me hawu!

Dad: ohh like you told me you were dating him behind my back.

Me: eish.

Dad: right, I thought so.

It wasn't long when Naomi, Aunt Sindy and Denise came to me and pulled me away from my father. I haven't seen my fiancé since he popped the question, they've been pulling left, right and center.

Naomi: let me see the ring.

Denise: eyy kahle wena.

She pushed her out of the way and grabbed my hand and looked at the ring. I laughed at Naomi.

Denise: this boy has expensive taste yerr!

Sindy: let me see.

She also pulled my hand.

Me: okay, you're going to break my hand!

Naomi: congratulations sis.

Sindy: congratulations my love.

She engulfed me in a hug.

Me: thank you aunty.

Denise: so when is the wedding?

Naomi: awo mama she just got engaged.

Denise: and what do you know, mxm.

These two fight like cat and mouse.

Me: I don't know, I'm not in a rush to get married anyway. It wasn't even part of my plans.

Sindy: has he never hinted it before?

Me: never.

Denise: he must be serious. I want my lobola, I raised you phela.

There she goes, that's my cue to leave.

Me: can I go look for him that side, it's been a while.

Sindy: okay love.

I grab a glass of champagne on the table and walk back into the house looking for my fiancé. Ihhe, I never thought I'd say those words, life can be surprising. I find him sitting in the dining room with my father and they are having a conversation. I don't know how serious this conversation could be so I stand by the door and just enjoy the view. Both the men I love the most, they're getting along. I walk up to them and I stand next to Mvelo and look at my dad.

Dad: kade vele wangilahla.

Me: hawu babana.

Dad: yes, remember when he came here and you sat next to him instead of me.

We all laughed and I crouched down to meet them since they were sitting.

Me: it seems like you're getting along so I'm happy.

Dad: I'm not a monster you know.

Me: I know daddy, I've lived with you all my life.

Mvelo: but Fluff, we might not be able to get married.

He looks at dad then looks back at me.

Me: what do you mean?

I'm worried, what does he mean we might not get married?

Mvelo: (laughs) why are you crying?

I wipe my tears.

Me: you're scaring me.

Mvelo: what are your praise names?

I sit down flat on my bum and look at him.

Me: I don't know. Just tell what the problem is.

Dad: (Laughs) Chrissy you're such a crybaby.

Me: no you can't propose then tell me we can't get married. What do you mean!

Dad: you and Mfusi have the same praise names.

I look at Mvelo feeling defeated. The mere fact that I'm already crying. Bloody Zulu tradition.

Me: so we're related?

Mvelo nods and I cry out loud.

Me: Daddy why didn't you tell me!

I'm trying to stand up but they're blocking me and they are dying with laughter and that's pissing me off. Oh how the tables turn.

Mvelo: (Laughs) Chris, calm down. We're just joking.

He's holding my hand and he's laughing his lungs out. He eventually starts choking and I fold my arms after yanking my hand.

Me: uyalunga.

Mvelo: (Coughing) jeez you're so dramatic. Mmh.

They high five with my father and I know that these two are a lost cause. Now I want to know what they mean when they say we are related.

Dad: Zondo and Mfusi have the same clan name.

Me: does that mean we are related?

Dad: no because Mfusi is not a Mthiyane Clan name.

I nod to whatever that means. I almost lost my mind.

Mvelo: but on a serious note Fluff...

I know better, when he calls me fluff, he's serious.

Mvelo: it's not a big deal. I was also as worried as you are but it's nothing to worry about.

I look at my engagement ring and smile. I then look at my dad and he's smiling. I'm still sitting on the floor

Me: thank you.

I mean to think I had to endure the suffering of the trauma I went through with what Tshego did to me and here he is to love me. I love Mvelo so much and yes I was shocked when he proposed, I could've said no because of what happened with Tshego but I know better. I know he'll never be him because Mvelo loves me. I'm grateful to both these men. My dad stands up.

Dad: Mfusi, I'm giving you 10 minutes with my daughter.

Mvelo: (Chuckles) yes sir.

He walks out then Mvelo helps me up and we walk to my room. I locked the door and leaned against it looking at his handsome face. He had a smirk on his face and he was sitting on my bed with his arms folded across his chest.

Me: what?

Mvelo: what?

He smiled, I melted.

Me: I love you.

Mvelo: I love you too.

I slowly made my way to him, I was drawing patterns on the carpet with my foot, I dumped my heels a long time ago. He unhooks his arms and puts his arm out and I sit on his lap. It feels like we're still teenagers. I looked at my ring, it was beautiful, it was a round green-ish diamond and a rose gold band with diamonds.

Mvelo: you like?

Me: I love it. why green?

Mvelo: it's your birthstone, Peridot.

Me: I didn't even know what that was.

He chuckles then kissed the side of my head. I snuggled closer.

Mvelo: I haven't told my family.

Me: why?

He caresses my thigh softly and my breathing hitches.

Mvelo: I didn't want to tell them before you agreed.

Me: so you thought I would say no.

Mvelo: no, no I didn't think that, I just wanted to be sure you know.

Me: mmh.

Silence graces the room. His breath on my neck is warm, his heartbeat against my ear, it felt right. He placed his chin on my head and sniffed it swiftly then kissed my forehead.

Mvelo: I've asked them to come to my house next week so they can meet you.

Me: why so soon?

Mvelo: I want you to be my wife. Don't you want this to happen?

Me: I do, but I just graduated, I still have a lot to do, I want my father to have all the best.

Mvelo: and we can do that together Fluff.

Me: no, you don't understand, I have to do this.

He sighs.

Me: can we not talk about this today.

Mvelo: okay.

I looked up at him and he lowered his head and kissed me. He was warm, his skin, his hands, it all just warmed me up. I had found my happy place, right here in his arms.

Chapter 35

Ntswaki

It's unpleasant hearing another woman enjoying what's rightfully yours. I took the other pillow and covered my head and screamed. Couldn't they do this in another place, why did it have to be in my house. I grabbed my phone and called Ontlametse my cousin.

Ontla: Ntswaki.

Me: lumela motsoala. (Hey Cuz)

Ontla: how are you motsoala?

Me: my husband is having sex in my house.

I sigh after uttering that statement. I can also hear her gasp on the other end.

Ontla: what do you mean your husband is having sex in your house?

Me: he's trying for a child with another woman because I can't give him children.

Ontla: wait Ntswaki, I don't understand.

This was pointless, it's not like she knows what goes on in my marriage, the last time I spoke to her was last year at Atile's wedding.

Ontla: are you okay though?

Me: maybe I shouldn't have called you.

Ontla: we ca...

I dropped the call and threw my phone against the wall and watched it smash into pieces. These stupid moans are still going on and they are just pissing me off. I walk to the bathroom and get sleeping pills. 3 will do the trick for now.

.....

I opened my eyes and Dumisani was next to me, looking at me with concerned eyes. He looks like a little boy whose been told their dog died. I hate this look. I would stand up and leave but my body feels heavy and it seems like I have an IV connected

to me. I'm definitely not in a hospital, this is my room, why would they put an IV on me.

Me: Dumisani.

Dumi: Ntswaki.

Me: why can't I move my body?

He rolled out of bed and made his way to the bathroom. He came back with a white bottle and tossed it to me. I couldn't use my limbs so it hit my face and I couldn't even duck.

Dumi: you finished a whole bottle of sleeping pills.

Me: you're lying.

Dumi: then get out of bed.

I tried lifting my head but I couldn't. I'm temporarily paralyzed, my sleeping pills are very strong and if you over-dose you may be paralyzed or even suffer a stroke. I didn't even finish this bottle, I only took 3.

Dumi: (Shouting) You know what the side effects are yet you stupidly drink all of them! How dumb are you Ntswaki huhh!

Me: I only had three.

Dumi: but here you are, paralyzed. I thought you knew better.

Me: and how wouldn't I want to kill myself huhh, when you are having sex with another woman in my house!

Dumi: not this again.

I know I'm crying and these bloody tears are irritating me, I can't even wipe them. Why am I crying for this bastard.

Me: I want a divorce Dumisani. I'm tired.

He stood there looking at me like I'm crazy, I'm so happy I can't at this moment otherwise it would be another story. Everyone has a breaking point, mine happens to be my infertility.

Christine

I hardly got any sleep, I didn't feel like sleeping, I was too scared to close my eyes. I choose not to tell anyone about what happened with Tshego because they will say I need therapy blah blah blah. I've never been one to like talking about my feelings, imagine having to blurt it all out to a stranger. I'd rather deal with it on my own. There's loud thunder outside and it also part of why I can't fall asleep. I've always feared thunder, ever since I was child. I don't mind when it's during the day and I can see people going about their day, I start minding when I'm all alone in my bedroom at 3 in the morning and the rain pours like there is no tomorrow. I would turn on the lights but getting up from this comfortable position I'm in has proved to be even harder than closing my eyes so I'll just keep them open and try make out every stain on my ceiling hoping it's not a bug that's going to fall and land on my face. Another factor contributing to my insomnia this morning is the fact that I'm having dinner with the Mfusi's. Not just Mvelo's parents, the whole clan, from grandmothers to little cats and dogs, if they have any. I've only ever met his parents, his siblings and that lady that I later found out is his grandmother, the one that's a healer. I know his grandfather passed away four years ago and his grandmother, his wife, is living with the healer. I won't lie and say I know much about his family because I don't. I know he and Andile are cousins but the way I see it, they kind of grew up being told they are brothers and that's it. they have a close relationship like that. He also told me his

family from his mother's side will be there and I'm guessing that includes Muzi, oh what a pain. I wish I could have someone accompany me but I can't, Mvelo clearly specified it's a family-only event. I don't even know what I'm going to wear, what do you wear when you go to meet your in-laws? I need to call Ontla in the morning.

.....

The loud ringing of my cellphone under my pillow woke me up. I don't even remember falling asleep but the sun is shining and the birds are chirping. I lift my pillow and grab it, putting it over my ear and plopping my head back on the pillow.

Mvelo: Let me guess, you're still sleeping.

Me: I am not.

Mvelo: what time is it?

I roll my eyes and look at the clock and my eyes almost fall out. How the hell is 12:00 pm already?

Me: Shit, baby I'm so sorry.

Mvelo: you have 30 minutes to get ready.

You're joking. After he hung up, I stumbled out of bed and ran to the bathroom, I even passed my father who was sitting in the lounge watching TV. I'll greet him when I'm not rushing to meet my boyfriend's family. No, he's my fiancé, my fiancé's family. I take a shower and rush out the bathroom, this time, my dad is in the kitchen.

Dad: ugudluka nezindonga awubingeleli nokubingelela.

Me: hawu baba, I was going to greet. I'm just running late.

Dad: manje awusho...

Oh gosh, he's wasting my time, doesn't he understand that I'm late.

Dad: uyogana kwaMfusi usavuka emini kanje. Yazi sengiphuma ngisho nasemsebenzini.

Great, my dad thinks I'm lazy. Okay, maybe I am lazy but he doesn't need to make so obvious.

Me: I just overslept dad, I had a long night.

Dad: mmh.

I stand there waiting for him to carry on but he doesn't.

Me: can I go get dressed?

Dad: hamba.

My dad is such bore sometimes. I walk in and I just get depressed beyond measure when I look at how upside down my room looks. I look at the time and it's 12:20, that leaves me with 10 minutes, lord be with me. I pull out dresses from the wardrobe and the most appropriate dress that I own is the one I wore at my graduation and that's out of the picture. The other ones are either too short or too old. That's the problem, I don't own any dresses. Also, the sun is scorching hot, I cannot and will not wear black. I pull out my olive green dress with long sleeves and throw it on. I've gained weight since the last time I put it on so its super tight. I comb my bangs and tie my hair in a bun, quick and easy. As I'm making the bed, my phone rings.

Mvelo: I'm outside, are you ready?

Me: yeah I guess.

Mvelo: come, we're already late.

He drops the call, I guess I have to leave my room like this, I'm hoping that I come back tonight. I grab my bag on the table and put all my valuables inside then I grabbed my shoes off the rack and ran out. My dearest father was in the kitchen making food.

Me: daddy, I'm leaving, I'll probably be back late.

Dad: good luck. Where's your ring.

Shit! I ran back to my room and took it out from its box.

Me: thank you, bye.

I kissed his cheek and ran out the house. This dress wasn't making things easy for me. I hopped into the car after throwing all my things in the backseat. I huffed and looked at Mvelo, he had a haircut, his long hair was gone.

Me: hi, I'm so sorry.

Mvelo: I'm not the one who had less time to prepare.

He started the car but I put my hand on his thigh. I then held his chin and made him face me.

Me: I'll do better next time I promise, okay?

Mvelo: okay.

He kissed me briefly and in no time we were on the road. I started doing the final touch-ups. I put on my sandals and wiped the droplets of sweat of my face.

Mvelo: you're such a mess.

Me: I had insomnia the whole night, I don't even remember falling asleep.

Mvelo: this insomnia thing is starting to worry me.

Me: I'm fine, I promise, my life is changing, I guess I'm still trying to adjust.

Mvelo: mmh. So where's your ring?

I looked at my finger and it was empty. It's somewhere in this car, that I know. I looked at the back and there it was, sitting on Paloma's booster seat.

Mvelo: why did you take it off?

Me: I was sleeping.

Mvelo: married women sleep with their wedding rings on, I'm sure engaged women can do the same.

Me: okay.

I put it on and leaned back on my seat and exhaled. This morning is taking a sharp curve.

Mvelo

I won't lie and say I'm not pissed at Christine when I really am. I told her about today a long time ago but she's here messing up like it's not a big deal. I felt my blood boiling when I called her 30 minutes before I was supposed to fetch her and she was sleeping. I'm starting to worry. She also has a tendency of forgetting to wear her engagement ring, her excuse being she was sleeping or she forgot to put it on after showering. We're going to Amanzimtoti for a family meet up since today marks 4 years since we buried grandpa. We do this every year, just to strengthen our bond as a family. Today, I just thought I should kill two birds with one stone and introduce Chris as my fiancé. When we arrive in Toti, the yard is filled with children running around. So absurdly, Bab' Vusi had triplets right after Paloma and Sanele. Everyone was shocked, not even twins but triplets, imagine the drama behind that. So it's Nkosenhle, Nkosenye and Uthandile. Uthandile is the last one, the baby girl. They are all running around the yard along with Sanele and Paloma who look like they've never even taken a bath. When we step out the car, Paloma runs to Christine.

Me: Paloma why don't you greet your daddy?

Paloma: I only greet Chris because I saw you in the morning.

Gosh she's so hooked on Chris. She already has her head buried on her neck. Utha also held Christine's hand and was pulling her into the main house. This is going to be interesting.

Christine

Me: P, go in, I'm waiting for your daddy.

I'm trying my best to whisper but these two little rascals keep pulling me inside the house. I can hear laughter and chatter and I know it must be a lot of people in there.

Paloma: but Chris! I want to show you my doll house come!

a very beautiful creature appeared from the passage, she was wearing a yellow maxi dress. She had short hair dyed blonde and she was rather tall, she looked like a supermodel. She smiled at me.

Her: Utha, Amo, leave the lady alone and go play outside.

Her voice doesn't match her body and face, it's deep but soft.

Her: uhhm are you part of the catering team?

I looked at my clothes then back at her.

Me: uhh, well, I'm here with...

I felt his arms snaking its way around my waist.

Mvelo: mamncane.

Her: hey son. We've been waiting for you, come along.

She turns and walks down the passage and Mvelo leads me. My legs have suddenly become wobbly and it's making it hard for me to walk. My heartbeat is changing.

Mvelo: don't be nervous.

He kissed my cheek and we walked into a room with so many eyes. I spot Mah and Mvelo's dad. Then there's 2 other specimens that look exactly like Mvelo and his father. Then next to Mah it's a dark lady with chubby cheeks and short hair, she's beautiful. I suddenly feel out of place. The dark lady stands and comes towards us.

Lady: Mvelwenhle, finally.

She gives him a hug and then engulfs me in a hug too. Then after that, all the other ladies come and greet us. Mvelo then goes to greet his father and the other men. He stops at the one with grey hair.

Mvelo: Baba.

Man: Mvelwenhle.

Mvelo: this is my fiancé, Christine.

Ohh, this is happening now? I thought maybe I would be introduced to the to the others who have held and squeezed me first.

Mvelo: I love her and I've asked for her hand in marriage.

I look down feeling scared.

Man: Ntomb'yeLanga, ubani isbongo sakho?

Me: uhm, uZondo.

He holds my hand, the one with the engagement ring. And why Ntomb'yeLanga?

Man: did this boy ask for your hand in marriage?

Me: yebo.

Man: and what did you say.

Me: I said yes.

Man: do you love him.

Me: yebo.

I'm still looking down but I know everyone has their eyes on us.

Man: ngyezwa MaZondo. You are most welcome Ntomb'yeLanga.

What do I say now? Before I can embarrass myself, the dark lady holds my shoulders and squeezes them.

Lady: come let me introduce you.

She was so warm, in all my life I'd never had a woman touch me and hold me with so much warmth. Even Mvelo's mom isn't this warm.

Lady: I'm Andisiwe, this is my husband Msizi and that's Vusi...

She points at the one whose leaning against the wall wearing black jeans and a white shirt.

Andisiwe: and I'm sure you know Kabelo.

I nod lightly.

Andisiwe: they are your fiancés fathers.

You can tell that she's been around for a while. We then walk over to the table where the 2 fairly old ladies are sitting.

Andisiwe: this is mummy.

She holds my hand and looks at me straight in the eyes and I look down. I don't know why this is so awkward.

Mummy: why are you so tense?

I let out a shaky breath and she smiles when my eyes meet hers again.

Mummy: relax my darling. Like your father said, you are welcome.

Me: thank you.

She gives me a reassuring squeeze then Andisiwe kneels next to the other lady. She looks a bit older than Mummy.

Andisiwe: mah, this is Mvelo's fiancé.

Ma' Mfusi: I know Thandiwe.

Andisiwe chuckles.

Ma' Mfusi: sawbona Ma' Zondo.

Me: sawbona gogo.

She pulls me in for a hug and she smells heavenly.

Ma' Mfusi: Mvelwenhle woza.

Gosh I had forgotten about that one. He comes closer and also kneels in front of her and holds both of her hands.

Mvelo: gogo.

Ma' Mfusi: uyiphathe kahle lengane.

Mvelo: I plan to do so gogo.

He stands and places a kiss on her cheek. He's such a different person around his family. It's something I've noticed. He's only this down to earth when he respects and is scared of someone, humble and sweet. I've seen this side of him a few times during our intimate sessions. It's surely a side of him I love seeing. Andisiwe Snaps me out of my thoughts when she grabs my hand.

Andisiwe: let's go have a conversation in the kitchen.

I follow her and as I make my way to the kitchen, I look at the portraits that line the walls, family pictures, pictures of Mvelo's fathers as children. They all looked cute. I felt soft hands touching me and it was Mvelo's mom.

Zuzile: hey sweetie.

Me: hi mah.

Zuzile: how are you feeling?

Me: I don't know, I guess I kind of feel relieved that the worst is over.

Zuzile: Msizi loves you. He's never accepted any of his sons girlfriends and he just warmed up to you like that.

My stomach was fluttering with butterflies.

Zuzile: you have absolutely nothing to worry about.

We got to the kitchen and Andisiwe was with the other lady in yellow and they were talking and laughing.

Andisiwe: I know, today I saw my husband blushing, how weird.

Zuzile: so I wasn't the only one who saw him?

She climbed on the bar stool and grabbed the mug on the table.

Lady: you really are something special.

Andisiwe: my husband never smiles for just anyone. Let alone blushing.

Me: was that blushing?

Andisiwe: definitely.

They are just pulling my leg. He wasn't blushing, he was smiling and not a wide weird smile, it was just a subtle side smile, and acknowledgement smile.

Lady: would you like a glass of wine.

Me: oh no, thank you. I don't drink.

Both her and Zuzile popped their eyes at me.

Zuzile: look Chris this is a safe space, I'm here, you don't have to pretend.

I laughed, is this really my mother-in-law.

Me: honestly mah, I don't.

Lady: you are so cute. You can help yourself to some juice in the fridge then.

I hopped off the chair and I made my way to the fridge. The fact that they are having wine in coffee mugs is very questionable, but they are in their in-law's house.

Andisiwe: where's Fatsho getting here, I'm starting to get hungry.

Zuzile: it's because after all these years you still refuse a single glass of wine.

Andisiwe: (Laughs) jeez I need to hide these bottles.

Lady: and we'll see how you'll be without your husband.

Andisiwe: I dare you Thando. I dare you.

They act like a bunch of teenagers, it's so adorable.

Andisiwe: so what do you do for a living Langa.

I'm Langa? Ohh okay.

Me: I just graduated Honors in Interior decorating.

Thando: really, I also studied Interior. I didn't get to honors though, only did my degree.

Andisiwe: have you found a job yet?

Me: no not really, I've had 2 interviews one for an internship, but they haven't gotten back to me.

Thando: how did you meet Mvelo?

Why does this feel like an interrogation?

Me: we met at the mall, MacDonald's.

Thando: and did you just hit of there or?

Me: we were mates.

Andisiwe: friends?

Me: yes.

I don't have the guts to tell them what a mate really is. What will they think of me?

Zuzile: I remember when Mvelo locked himself up in his studio for almost a week, I almost lost it.

The phone rings and Andisiwe stands up.

Andisiwe: what was that about?

She says looking at Zuzile. Before she can answer, she picks up the phone and listens.

Andisiwe: great, Fatsho is here, let's go set the table. You two go and sober up.

The queen mother has spoken. She's so hands-on and responsible, I would fully say she's the glue that holds this family together. They make their way outside while Andisiwe and I make our way to the dining room to set the table.

Andisiwe: can I give you the task of calling everyone to the table.

Yah neh, I'm scared.

Me: okay.

Andisiwe: go to the kitchen and grab a bowl and a swab then go wash their hands before they come here.

I nod and I leave to go to the kitchen. I regret wearing this dress now, it keep running up my thighs. I searched the whole kitchen and when I found an appropriate bowl and swab, I filled it with warm water and some soap then I made my way to the lounge. There was chatter and laughter, peoples spirits were high. As soon as I walked in, my eyes found Mvelo's and he had Paloma on his lap who was fast asleep. Then for a moment I felt as my eyes were deceiving me, I saw Tshego standing by the door with bab' Vusi.

Chapter 36

Mvelo

Paloma: Papa!

My blue eyed baby ran inside the house crying her lungs out rushing to my dad. She calls him papa. She climbed on his lap and cried.

Dad: what's wrong princess?

I've learned not to intervene when she cries to her Papa and not daddy.

Paloma: (Crying) Papa but Nele stepped on my dress and made it messy, look.

Dad: where is he? Did he apologize?

She shook her head vigorously and looked at him with her eyes turning green. He knows what that means so he stands up, leaving us in stitches.

Mummy: poor Nele.

A few minutes pass and Paloma comes running towards me. She cuddles herself then dad walks in with Sanele resting his head on his shoulder. I won't even ask.

Dad: he won't apologize.

I look at Paloma and she's almost half asleep.

Me: it doesn't matter because she's asleep.

They look and laugh at her. Just then, Christine makes her way in the living room. She locks eyes with mine and I just feel her energy connecting with mine. When she breaks the contact, she freezes on the spot and her face turns pale. Her eyes are glued to the door where Bab' Vusi is standing with his one of his drivers.

Me: Chris.

She glued to the spot with her eyes staring at the door and her expression on her face keeps changing from anger to fear.

Me: Christine!

They all turn to her and she looks at me then only does it dawn to her that she has to move. What the hell is going on with her?

Narrated

After having a blackout moment, Christine circulates the room, washing the elders' hands one by one then makes her way back to the kitchen with her legs wobbling and her heart beating out of her chest. With her hands shaking she grabs a glass from the sink and pours herself some water. She startles when she feels a hand on her shoulder.

Thando: are you okay Langa? I'm sorry to frighten you.

Chris: I'm fine mah, I just suffer from anxiety from time to time.

Thando: must I call Mvelo?

Chris: no, no need mah.

Thando pulls her and gives her a warm hug. They abruptly pulled apart and they made their way to dining table where the table was set and the family sat. Thando found her seat next to her husband and Christine looked at the empty chair next to Mvelo and settled down. He squeezed her thigh as he could see she was off.

Chris: I'm good.

Mvelo: okay.

He kissed her cheek and lunch commenced.

Mummy: Ntomb'yeLanga uyakwazi ukuqhutha inkukhu?

Christine cleared her throat and looked at Mvelo then Thando who was looking at her, looking very worried.

Chris: chabo gogo.

Ma' Ruth: kufanele uyenze ke le ekhona manje, khona uzofunda.

Chris: yebo.

She tried swallowing the lump in her throat along with the spoon full of couscous she had just consumed. There was chatter around the table but Christine was oblivious to it, she had way to many things going on in her head to participate in inconsequential

chatter. After they finished eating, they cleared the table and Mummy lead Christine to her hut to get the chicken. She startled when she realized that the chicken was alive.

Mummy: I know we haven't sent out cows to your family but I see it best you start practicing now if you are going to be a Mfusi wife.

She nodded and she was accompanied to the back of the house where there was a placement. She handed her the chicken that was clucking and moving about.

Mummy: ibambe lana.

She instructed and Christine grabbed the feet with the disgust and fear clearly visible on her face. She slaughtered the chicken and then told Chris to hold it so the blood could drip out. This was probably the most horrific thing she'd seen, they had never slaughtered any animals at her home, or she had never seen them doing it.

Mummy: Lethukuthula, letha amanzi sisi!

Zuzile came with boiling hot water and the chicken was put in the dish.

Mummy: show her how to pluck it.

Zuzile: okay mah.

Christine watched as her mother-in-law kneeled on the bloody sheet with Gucci slides on her feet and a Harry Winston wristwatch on her tiny wrist. Her heart clenched as she watched her watch getting feathers and blood droplets on it. it was now her turn

to pluck, and she would dip her hands in the water, and she would cringe. Zuzile laughed.

Zuzile: it's not going to come back to life Chris. Just hold it like this and pluck.

She did it so effortlessly, it shook Christine. She wasn't used to this side of Zuzile, she wasn't familiar with Zuzile the Zulu bride, only Zuzile the rich housewife. After attempting to pluck it, Christine took it back to the kitchen after rinsing it and they opened it up and showed her how to take out the insides and how to clean them. She had given up on the thought of going home, it was already after 6. After slaving off in the kitchen she was told she can go freshen up.

Christine

I'd like to think I was dreaming earlier on when I saw Tshego's face, I was just panicking. I also don't want to get married anymore, I'm sorry. It's not as fun as they make it look. I didn't know I would have to slaughter chickens and clean insides. That was probably the most disgusting part, I can still smell the waste on my fingertips. Zuzile does it so effortlessly, you would swear she's not a glamorous person in real life. I've never been this tired my whole entire life and I don't even get to go back home. They told me I could go freshen up for a night cap. Trust me, I have no idea what that is but I'll go and hopefully, I'll get the smell of blood and waste off of my skin. I walked to the lounge and asked Mvelo to show me our room so he accompanied me.

Mvelo: I haven't seen you the whole day babe.

Me: I was busy slaughtering chickens.

He laughed but I didn't, I was tired.

Mvelo: did you have fun?

Me: there's nothing fun about killing animals.

Mvelo: you speak as if you don't eat them.

Me: I might as well become a vegan then.

He laughed again then kissed the side of my head. He opened the last door on the corridor and it was a small but cozy room. It had a double bed right in the middle and a wooden headboard and furnishing.

Mvelo: this was the boy's room but because I'm getting married, they made it my room, our room.

Me: who decorated it?

Mvelo: uMa' Mfusi.

Me: she has impeccable taste.

There were two duffle bags on top of the bed. He closed the door before he threw himself on the bed.

Me: where did these come from?

Mvelo: they were in the car. I guess I knew you weren't going to be prepared.

I looked at him and smiled.

Me: what would I be without you?

Mvelo: (Smiling) you'd be incomplete my darling.

I engulfed him in a hug and snuggled closer to him, took in his scent and just let my body melt in his arms. His cold lips made contact with my neck, and he planted soft kisses going up and down.

Mvelo: I love you, Christine.

Me: I love you too Mfusi. I love you so much it scares me.

He wrapped his arms around my waist and pulled me even closer to him. I could hear his heart pounding against my chest and that was reassurance enough that he feels the same way I feel.

Mvelo: it scares me too but...

He loosened his grip and made me look at him.

Mvelo: we'll make this work. You can talk to me about anything, I'll be there for you.

My heart started beating very fast and I looked down.

Mvelo: I think you should go freshen up, there's clothes in your bag. You'll meet me downstairs for the night cap.

I nodded and got off his lap. He pecked my lips and walked out the room leaving me with my face buried in my hands. Why does love have to sting like this?

Ntswaki

I never thought I would be here but here I am, lying on concrete. Cold, hard concrete. I wish they gave me time to get dressed though, I mean lying here in only lingerie and a mere silk gown isn't helping. I won't even consider the grey blanket, it smells horrific. Government really needs to upgrade their prisons.

Warden: eyy Sdudla!

He was smacking the iron rods with his baton. How rude is this? I looked at him.

Warden: indoda yakho iyanqaba ukufonela ummeli. Uzozimela?

I barely understood what he said but I got up and tightened my robe and walked towards him.

Me: can I at least make a phone call, it's my right.

He looked at me in a lusting manner.

Me: ayy, abuti! Bula ke ea!

I said clapping my hands and he looked at me smirking.

Warden: uyahlanya wena.

He opened up and grabbed my hand and handcuffed me. My wrists already had scars from the time they brought me here and that was hours ago, so I didn't care about the pain anymore. He lead me to the phone and I dialed Atile's number but he didn't pick up, I secretly dialed Nyakallo's and it also went straight to voicemail.

Me: Fuck!

Warden: times up Sdudla.

Me: fuck off! I haven't even spoken to anyone.

He didn't speak. Good. I crossed my fingers and tried calling Andrew, hoping his number was still the same. I didn't know any other numbers, only my brothers and his.

Andrew: hello.

Me: oh my god, Andrew, uhhm hi. Look I need your...

Andrew: who's this?

Me: it's Ntswaki, I need you to get me a lawyer, Dumisani got me arrested.

Andrew: and how is that any of my concern?

Me: Andrew, come on please, I made a mistake, I love you Andrew and we can be together if you get me out pl...

He cut the call. I looked at it in disbelief, did he just hang up on me? How dare he do that to me.

Warden: times up Sdudla, aksheshwe!

He smacked the wall and pushed me towards the cell. It took everything in me not to slap that annoying smug off his face.

Mvelo

My beautiful fiancé emerged from the passage and came to sit next to me. We were having a night cap, where we just sit as a family and talk. Everyone was here and the triplets, Sanele and Paloma we are telling us about their day. Everyone is in their element, even Mummy is sipping on a glass of wine. I looked at these rascals going on and on then I look at Chris. She looks exhausted, with her head leaning on my shoulder. I kissed the side of her head.

Chris: (Whispering) I'm so sleepy.

Me: water does that, wanna go lie down?

Chris: no, I'll be fine.

I squeezed her and she snuggled closer to me.

Mummy: Ntomb'yeLanga.

Chris sat up. Expect my family to name her before I even pay lobola.

Chris: yes Mummy.

Mummy: what nationality are you?

Chris: I'm black. My father is black, but my mom is white.

I looked at her because this was new news to me.

Me: I didn't know your mom is white.

They laughed at me, but I don't understand why they're laughing. I haven't even heard her speak about her mom.

Chris: you never asked.

Me: can I ask now?

She was about to talk when my phone rang in my pocket, it was an unknown number.

Me: hello.

Person: oh my god, Andrew, uhhm hi. Look I need your...

Me: who's this?

Person: it's Ntswaki, I need you to get me a lawyer, Dumisani got me arrested.

I kept quiet and looked around the room. Everyone was minding the children talking, only Christine was looking at me.

Me: and how is that any of my concern?

Ntswaki: Andrew, come on please, I made a mistake, I love you Andrew and we can be together if you get me out pl...

I hung up. I didn't even want to let her finish her statement; it was already making me angry. My eyes met with Christine's, and we held a long gaze.

Chris: you okay?

Me: I'm good.

Mom looked at our direction and smiled.

Mom: are we boring you?

Chris: (Laughs) no mah, not at all.

Mamdala: you're naturally this quiet?

Chris: uhm, i...

Andile: no mah she's not quiet at all.

Chris: hawu Andile.

She buried her head on my shoulder and giggled.

Andile: uphaphiyosi lona.

Mom: musa ukudlala ngo Fluffy ka Mvelo weAndile.

Where did she hear that name, oh my goodness? It's going to be a long night. And Ntswaki can rot in jail for all I care, I have all I need right here.

Narrated

Aunt Gina: kodwa Dumisani! Ufuna ukungibulala wena Mfana ngiyakubona!

Dumi: (Softly) ay mah, musa ukumemeza.

He said holding on to his head. Lindo helped her sit on the little hospital chair and looked at his brother with a white bandage around his head.

Aunt Gina: Ngasho!

Dumi: aunty man musa ukurasa! Shit!

He holds his head in pain and groans. Rolling down the stairs after being beaten with a wooden bat multiple times wasn't child's play.

Aunt Gina: iphi lento yakho?

Dumi: police station.

Lindo: she almost killed you.

Dumi: don't you think I know that.

Aunt Gina: ingoba uyangana wena!

Lindo: mama, come on, he's in pain.

Aunt Gina: uyalunga! Washada ingakhanyanga imphepho. Ubulindeleni? Hee Dumisani! Ubulindeleni!

She was clapping her hands with every syllable in the word, annoying Dumisani even more.

Dumi: Lindo take me home.

He stood up and slowly made his way to the door while Aunt Gina followed behind and continued with her rants.

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Chris: what was that call about?

Mvelo: why do I feel like this has been bugging you for a while?

They were in bed spooning. They left the party a while ago, planning to fall asleep but they've have been talking since.

Chris: it has because you have been weird since that call.

Mvelo: I just wasn't expecting it.

Chris: mmh.

She kept quiet. She knew she wouldn't get anything else out of him.

Mvelo: let's talk about you. How was your day?

Chris: it was exhausting. I learnt how to slaughter a chicken.

Mvelo: and how was that.

Chris: (Chortles) it was the most disgusting thing I've ever done.

Mvelo: (laughs) weeh Fluffy ka Mvelo.

They both laughed.

Chris: your mom is hilarious. Your whole family is.

Mvelo: they're my lifeline.

A comfortable silence passed between the two of them.

Mvelo: tell me about your family.

Chris: my dad is my family.

Mvelo: yeah I know but where is your mother and her family?

Her body tensed up so Mvelo turned her around and made her look into his eyes.

Chris: I don't know my mom. They had me when they were very young. From what I know, mom was 16 when she fell pregnant with me and dad was only 18. Dad told me that his family wasn't really rich, they were just an average family so when they found out he impregnated, they said he had to fend for himself. It was the opposite for my mother though, she came from a well off family and although they were disappointed that she was going to be a teen mom, they accepted the baby. They accepted me not knowing I was mixed and not fully white like them. When they found out that my dad was black and not white, they disowned her, seeing as that it was too late for me to be aborted and they wouldn't accept the child of a black man. So dad took us in. she lived with his family until she died.

Mvelo: how did she die? Do you remember her?

Chris: no I don't remember her, she died giving birth to me.

She couldn't miss the look of shock on Mvelo's face.

Chris: she was only 16, it makes sense. But I know in my lifetime, I don't want to ever experience that.

Mvelo: I wish you told me sooner.

Chris: there's nothing you would've done about it, she's gone, she's never coming back, I'll never get to meet her.

He wipes her tear using his thumb. He pulls her closer and she snuggles in his arms.

Mvelo: isn't it ironic that God sent you to me and just let everything happen the way it has?

Chris: I guess...

Mvelo: I also don't want to have any more children.

Christine was about to talk but he hushed her.

Mvelo: Paloma wasn't planned, and although she's the best thing that's ever happened to me, although God gave me her, He took away Isa. Now how ironic that he gives me you?

She's now sobbing softly on his chest, holding him as tightly as she can.

Mvelo: I know we didn't meet on the best terms Christine but that doesn't matter anymore because here we are. I love you so much and I know I wouldn't trade you for any other woman on this planet. I have all I need right here with you.

Her sobs got louder with every word that came out of his mouth but just brushed her back.

Mvelo: now I know this wouldn't just happen by chance, God gave me you for a reason and I want us to fulfil this reason...

There was a loud knock on the door but they paid no mind, Mvelo spoke to Christine.

Mvelo: I love you Fluff, I'm in love with you and I want nothing than to feel this feeling for the rest of my life.

Zuzile: Mvelwenhle what is going on!

He ignored his mother and consoled Christine who was letting out all her pain onto the man she loves. Zuzile finally gave up and left. Mvelo held his woman in his arms and kissed her forehead repeatedly, whispering in her ear.

Mvelo: (whispering) I love you Christine. I want to love you for the end of all time, never leave me please.

He also started getting emotional but they just held each other and let the emotions flow. Christine felt all the love she never had, the love of a man who wasn't her father, the love of a man who was broken and needed love, a man who needed comfort and the man who needed a friend.

Chris: (Whispering) I'll never leave you. I love you way too much Mvelo.

They couldn't get any closer than this.

*"Today I fell in love with you all over again
Just like the very first time that you touched my skin
So caught up in this moment I don't want it to end
My lover, my friend
With you, I will
How could I love you more?
I couldn't love you more."*

Mvelo

Chris: I can't believe you just made me do that.

I sucked on her nipple and she laughed.

Me: we have to get those pills tomorrow. Who knew you felt this good. I would've ditched the plastic a long time ago.

I looked at her but she covered her face. Lord knows how much I love her.

Chris: you're making me blush.

Me: it's my job to make you blush.

She peeled her hands off her face and looked at me.

Chris: no babies.

Me: no babies.

She held out her pinkie and I hooked it with mine then I lifted her waist. She wrapped her legs around my waist and her walls clenched around me.

Me: (Whispering) these walls are thin.

One stroke, she moaned.

Me: you can't be loud.

Chris: (Slowly) why are you soo mean? Mmh.

It feels good to be home.

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I woke up and Christine was snuggled up warmly in my arms. I planted a soft kiss on her forehead and untangled myself from her hold. I know she's a deep sleeper, she's far from waking up. I put on my shorts and a tank top and made my way to the kitchen. The house was quiet, meaning everyone was still asleep which is surprising because it's already 07:00, they never sleep in. I made myself a cup of coffee and I went back to my room. I sat there looking at Christine and I think of all the things we talked about last night. Now I know that for 3 years, I've been with someone I knew nothing about. Don't get me wrong, I love her no less, in fact, I think I love her more than I did before but the things she's been through, they prove to me that life can be unfair in all ways possible. I don't want to hurt her, I know I won't hurt her intentionally. The way she broke down last night, it awoke something inside of me. I don't want to lose her and I'm willing to try be the best I can be just for her. When I think about how we met, I always question why it had to be like that, but I think again, if I didn't spill her McFizz all over her dress, she probably wouldn't have been my mate.

I walked into Mc'D with my siblings, Lindelwa holding my hand tightly in hers.

Helo: I don't understand why we didn't go to KFC.

NJ: KFC is for losers.

Helo: you're the loser.

Me: shut up. Both of you or go sit in the car.

Helo rolled her eyes, she chose the wrong day to give me attitude. I don't want to slap her in a public place but she's pushing me.

Helo: (Mumbling) you aren't my dad.

I gave her a long hard look, she folded her arms and looked down when the intensity increased.

Me: Khauhelo apologize I'm older than you.

Helo: just because you have a child doesn't mean you can act all daddy on me.

Me: Khauhelo I will beat you, I swear I will beat you in public you won't believe it. you know what, go to the car, I don't feel like doing this with you.

She stomped out of the store with everyone looking at us, I clicked my tongue and turned around, bumping into this short lady. She dropped her drink and it spilled over my white sneakers. It splashed on her star white dress, leaving red spots.

Her: oh god.

Me: jeez I'm so sorry.

She was on the verge of tears so she looked up.

Me: please don't cry.

Her: no, I'm not crying. This dress is brand new.

She stepped out of the puddle and I got a chance to see her. She was short, very short but she was bit chubby, her bust was full.

Me: were you going somewhere, we can go and replace it right now.

Her: no, I don't need it replaced, it's fine.

She picked up her empty container and walked out, throwing it in the bin on her way out.

Me: Ntsakisi, go order whatever and go back to the car, I'll meet you there.

He nodded and walked forward. I ran towards the door to find this feisty looking lady. I spotted her walking towards the exit so I grabbed her arm.

Her: are you trying to kill me today? First you spill my things, messing my dress in the process now you're scaring me. Who sent you?

She was red in the face and I felt like laughing but this wasn't a laughing matter so I kept a straight face.

Me: you refused to let me replace it. please, I feel bad. Can we just go and buy it.

Her: and what about your kids?

I laughed but she folded her arms and looked at me with a straight face.

Me: they aren't my kids, they're my siblings. Anyway, there's no need for me to explain myself. I just want to do something right.

Her: fine, but not today.

Me: okay, then give me your number, I'll contact you.

Her: this is on my terms bhuti. You give me your number, I'll call you when I have time.

She is so feisty.

Me: okay, fine it's on your terms.

She climbed on my lap with her legs on either side of my body.

Chris: you didn't wake me.

Me: you were so peaceful.

She pecked my lips and hugged me tightly.

Me: I was thinking about how we met.

Chris: (Chuckles) when you spilt McFizz all over my new white dress.

Me: yes, but in my defense, it also messed up my sneakers.

Chris: yeah but you had like 4 more pairs of the same ones, it made no difference whatsoever.

Me: then we were mates.

Chris: we still are. It's just that now, you're going to pay for it.

I laughed.

Me: we have to set a date for the wedding.

Chris: I want to get married in September.

I looked at her shocked and she laughed.

Chris: I know what I said but it was just fear. You had just proposed and I felt like we were moving too fast but we've been together for 3 years, to me, that's a lifetime and what's another lifetime if I'm not yours?

I smiled and held her cheeks.

Me: so we have 7 months to plan.

She frowned and I know I lost her.

Chris: won't that inconvenience your family? Don't we need like a year to plan a wedding.

Me: (Laughing) no, Fluff, my mom planned her whole wedding in 2 months.

Chris: seriously!

Me: yes, so you have plenty of time. I just want us to move into our home and raise our daughter.

She giggled and buried her head on the crevice on my shoulder.

Me: I love you okay?

Chris: I love you.

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Bab' Msizi: Ma' Zondo, we won't waste any more time. Next week, your father will receive a letter from us.

Chris: yebo baba.

She bowed her head, and we said our goodbyes.

Me: P, are you coming with me?

Paloma: no daddy, I'll see you tomorrow.

She didn't even give me a hug, she ran back to the house. I shook my head.

Mom: we'll see you tomorrow.

Me: okay.

We got in the car and we drove off.

Me: we have the rest of the day together, what do you want us to do?

Chris: anything.

I nodded and we drove in a comfortable silence with music playing in the background. I placed my hand on her hand and she gripped on it tightly.

Chris: I've never met a man with soft hands.

I looked at her and she laughed.

Chris: your hands are so soft and gentle.

Me: is that a good or a bad thing?

Chris: it's a good thing. It's the same hands that touch me and all the right places. The same hands that make me feel good, how could I ever complain?

She had a seductive smile and it was turning me on.

Me: we still have an hour on the road Chris, I suggest you behave yourself.

She smiled and sat comfortably in her seat, still holding my hand. I can't believe she thinks my hands are soft. It wasn't long before she sat up again and turned her body facing my direction.

Chris: baba ka Amo.

My heart melted instantly.

Me: yes my love.

Chris: (Smiling) I want to do something.

Me: do what?

She unbuckled her seatbelt and placed her hands on my thighs. She pulled the waistband of my shorts.

Me: Christine.

Chris: Mfusi.

Me: don't.

She looked at me and gave me a smirk. It was so hard trying to concentrate on the road with her looking my junk like that. I was getting hard. If I don't die today, I don't know when I will. He held my dick and I groaned.

Me: please don't do this.

Chris: Don't do what? This?

She stroked it, up and down, up and down. The car swerved on the road.

Me: Fuck!

She lowered her head and her mouth made an 'O' shape and her lips reached my tip. I stopped the car.

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Me: someone's horny.

We were entering the estate where our house is situated. She doesn't know where we were going though because I never told her about the house. Her dress was running up her thighs the whole way. She's been touching me, being all sexy. She gave me amazing head that time, but clearly that did nothing for her itch. I'll take care of it.

Chris: I am not.

Me: so I mustn't give it to you?

Chris: no, you must. I want it all tonight.

Me: can you handle it?

Chris: I'm in charge this time.

I parked in front of the house and I got out of the car. I opened her door for her then we made our way to the front door. She wasn't asking me any questions which was weird considering the fact she's a very inquisitive person. I opened the door and we stepped in. we stood in the foyer and I held her arm.

Me: welcome home Fluff.

She looked at me and I saw her face change from confusion to excitement.

Chris: this is our house?

Me: our home my love.

She jumped on me and wrapped her legs around my waist.

Chris: (Giggling) when did you get it, why didn't you wait?

Me: I didn't have to. I got it last year.

She kissed me multiple times.

Chris: I can't wait to live here omg! I love you so much! Thank you, thank you, thank you!

She was swinging her legs up and down. She was so excited and that made me so happy.

Me: do you want to see the rest of the house?

Chris: no, I want to say thank you.

She got down and pulled my hand. We walked towards the lounge that was overlooking the pond on the golf course.

Chris: this place is magnificent!

The level of happiness she was exuding was good for my ego. She pushed me to the couch and stood in front of me.

Chris: striptease or dance?

Me: oh, today is the day.

Chris: you bought me a house, you are making me your wife, of course you deserve it all.

Me: how about both.

Chris: anything for you, my love.

I love how horny she is. It's going to be a good night.

Ntswaki

Judge: your bail request has been denied. You clearly have no means of paying for it and the accuser feels threatened. Your next appearance will be on the 3rd of March, for sentencing. Court adjourned.

He banged that hammer thing and I felt my heart sink to the pit of my stomach. I looked at Dumisani and he had a smug look on his face, nx bloody bastard. To say I'm hurt would be an understatement, my brothers never came to see me and I've been here for almost a week and half now. Even after what I told them. Not even Atile came and this has Nyakallo's name written all over it. I walked out with the officer pulling roughly. He didn't take me straight to the cells though, he took me to this room and when I walked in, a woman who looked like she was in her mid-40's was sitting next to Dumisani. She looked very professional but beautiful. She was the total opposite of me though, she was lean, she was also light skinned, almost his skin color. She had silky hair and it was tied in a neat bun, it looked tight and her eyes were oval looking. Dumisani still hadn't wiped the smug off his face and that was slowly but surely making me angry.

Dumisani: I thought you were a good person but now I see you are just a psycho.

I kept quiet and looked at him.

Dumisani: I should've known better, not only are you a child that knows nothing about handling a man, you are barren. I should've stopped this charade when that incense refused to burn. I hope you burn in hell.

He gave me a cold look, that same look that always made me shiver. I know I have nothing to say to him, he already put me in jail and wasted two years of my life. I should've killed him. at least I'd have a reason to be here. The lady slid an envelope on the table and the officer took it first.

Lady: there's nothing in there, it's just documents.

She so poised, ladylike (Rolls eyes). The officer didn't even hesitate to open them anymore, he put them in front of me.

Me: give me a pen!

It was divorce paper, divorce papers that I would gladly sign.

Lady: you won't read through it?

Me: I don't have to. Pen!

I slapped the officers arm and he gave me an ugly look. He can't do anything to me.

Dumi: let her be Lola, she'll deal with the consequences.

She didn't respond but Dumisani wasn't looking for a response too. he was looking directly at me. That pissed me off so I scribbled my signature on the papers and I threw them in his face.

Me: Fuck you!

Dumi: oh I'll be gladly fucked!

I clicked my tongue and stood up, leaving him cackling behind me.

Lola: Dumisani that's not how you act.

Dumi: I'm sorry my love.

It took everything in me not to cry in that moment, what a selfish bastard he is.

Christine

I'm sitting in a café in Margate waiting for Ontla. She'll be joining me for brunch and we'll just catch up on life. Mvelo dropped me off just a few minutes ago but he's already harassing me via text.

Me: how are you typing while driving?

Mvelo: I'm not driving. I'm visiting my grandparents, my mom's parents.

Me: but what's the point of being there if you are going to be anti-social?

Mvelo: I'm not being anti-social, I'm checking on my wife.

Me: (Blushing emoji) you left me minutes ago.

Mvelo: baby a second without you drives me crazy.

I beam from ear to ear when I read his message. He's so good with words, it drives me crazy.

Me: go be with your family my love. You'll see your wife in 2 hours.

Mvelo: you're killing me. Okay, I love you baby.

Me: I love you too.

Ontla: and that smile?

I look up from my phone and she has an amused look on her face.

Me: just talking to my fiancé.

Ontla: (Smiling) fiancé huhh?

Me: (Blushing) yes, my fiancé.

Ontla: you are a lucky girl.

She sits down.

Ontla: how are you babe?

Me: I'm amazing, how are you?

Ontla: I'm amazing too, I couldn't really match your happiness but it's good enough for me.

I laugh at her silliness and she gives me a cute questioning look.

Ontla: tell me...How did you two get here?

Me: (Giggling) honestly, I don't know. I mean we were okay you know, just flowing and enjoying each other's relationship, then he proposed. He hadn't even hinted marriage before so it came as a shock to me.

Ontla: and here I was trying to recover from the fact that you two were even dating.

We both laughed.

Ontla: this is a big bomb you guys are dropping on me. Next thing you know you'll be telling me you're pregnant.

Me: oh hell no, that's not happening, not anytime soon, not ever.

Her face changed and she wore a frown.

Ontla: what do you mean not ever?

Me: we both don't want to have children.

Ontla: I don't understand.

Me: we had an agreement. We've both decided that he won't make me pregnant. We both have suffered at the hands of a pregnancy. The mother of his first child died giving birth to her and my mom died giving birth to me.

She gasped.

Ontla: oh Christine, I'm so sorry, I didn't know. It makes sense but I'm sure that shouldn't stop you.

Me: I'm too scared to even go through that Ontla and he feels the exact same way. He barely recovered with what happened with Isa, he wouldn't make it if it were happen again.

She sighed in great distress.

Me: we'll be fine. He already has a child, we'll raise her together.

Ontla: I'll tell you this my friend, having your own child is the best feeling in the world, I don't even have the words to describe how it feels. It gives you a sense of belonging, it's a magical thing.

Me: I get it but I'd rather not.

Ontla: and what will happen if you do fall pregnant?

I keep quiet. I didn't think that far.

Me: I don't know.

Ontla: well, if you don't terminate the ability to conceive, you shouldn't get too comfortable.

I don't think I want to terminate the ability completely. I mean, I don't want to have a child, but I won't alter my body. Uggh, I'm confused.

Chapter 38

Mvelo

I was upstairs in Christine's studio, cleaning up after a workout. We haven't really moved into the house, but we spend most of our time here, it's where we get our alone time. I made my way downstairs, my motive to go to the kitchen.

Chris: babe!

I enter the kitchen and sit on the highchair by the island. She's busy chopping vegetables for lunch, she looks so appealing to me.

Chris: are you busy upstairs?

Me: not anymore. I just finished tidying up.

Chris: oh, I wanted to ask.

I leaned in and looked at her with my chin resting in my hands.

Chris: how do you feel about getting an uncle v.

Me: what the hell is an uncle v?

She looks at me.

Chris: it's a vasectomy.

What a question at such a random time.

Me: I don't know how I feel about it, but I know I won't do that, if that's what you are trying to ask.

Chris: I don't want to upset you; I was just asking what your thoughts about it are.

I stood up and walked to the fridge to get water.

Me: I'm not upset babe; I just want to tell you now before you put it in your head. I might not want children, but I don't want to feel like I'm less of a man.

She kept quiet. I'm not trying to be mean but other men might understand what I'm saying. I walked towards her and wrapped my arms around her waist.

Me: I also don't want you to alter anything in your body, whether it is removing your womb or tying your tubes because I don't want you to resent me one day when you want to have children, but you terminated the ability to even conceive. You are allowed to change your mind, Chris.

She nodded. The child topic was very sensitive to the both of us and initially, we agreed not to have children, but thoughts change with time, maybe we'll want to, maybe we won't. I might have lost Isa but looking at Paloma and thinking about how she's the symbol of our love, it makes me happy, and I wouldn't mind having a symbol of love with Christine, I just don't want to lose her.

Me: I love you okay. And whatever happens will happen.

Chris: I love you too.

She turned around and gave me a kiss. Then she giggled.

Chris: you're sweating.

Me: I was working out.

She put her hand on my waist under my tank top and ran her hands on my abs.

Chris: I can feel it.

I cupped her breast in my hand and I kissed her. Then the house phone rang, as the kiss was getting deeper.

Me: this better be good.

Muzi: let me in wena mbuzi. Ngoba senahlala kwamaEstate, kufanele sifone mesifuna ukunibona.

Me: that's what you are supposed to do Muzi. Give the security the phone.

Chris was sulking and I know it's because Muzi is here. I don't know why they don't get along.

Me: don't sulk.

Chris: I'm not sulking.

Me: says the lady with a frown on her face.

I pulled her arm, and she ironed her frown and pouted her tiny lips. As I was planting a wet kiss on her lips Muzi walked in.

Muzi: you leave your gate open; you aren't afraid that they will steal your baby. Niyabathemba bo labelungu. Aww Koti.

The frown was back. Poor Fluff.

Christine

The small meal was planning to make for my fiancé, and I turned into a feast for all these people in my house. Yes, it's my house and my fiancé. Muzi came with a whole brood of people, and they are now sitting in my lounge drinking and making noise. After clearing the kitchen I made my way outside. There were number of bodies outside, most of them I didn't know and some of them were girls, women with long claws and eyelashes. Muzi's type.

Me: (Whispering) Mfusi, I'm going to bed. I put your lunchbox in the fridge for tomorrow.

Mvelo: thank you Fluff.

Lady: sisi, bring us more dash.

The one with the longest claws started snapping her fingers at me, I looked at her.

Lady: more dash sweetie.

Me: I don't work for you, go get your own dash, haibo.

I feel disrespected.

Lady: Andrew your helper is very rude.

Muzi was up in a second, and so was Mvelo.

Mvelo: Palesa, please...

Palesa: what's wrong with her, is she slow. You need to get a new helper.

Muzi: Palesa you are crossing the line and I won't hesitate to put you back.

I didn't even want to hear the rest of the conversation, I was already on my way out.
As for dear Andrew, wow.

Mvelo: fluff.

Me: no Mvelo, leave me alone.

Mvelo: Chris I'm sorry on her behalf.

Me: sorry on her behalf? Are you hearing yourself Andrew!

As for being someone servant, do I really look that poor.

Me: do I embarrass you? You didn't even have to guts to correct her, is it because I'm not like them?

Mvelo: Christine...

Me: no Mvelo, nothing can justify what you just did to me.

I was walking into the bedroom and as soon as I made my way to the closet, he grabbed my arm and pinned me against the wall.

Mvelo: just listen to me, will you?

Silence.

Mvelo: I love you, Christine.

Me: is that all you have to say?

Mvelo: yes, because you are everything to me.

Me: but I'm not like them, I never will be, if I'm not what you are looking for then please leave me...

Mvelo: Christine you are the first girl I've ever introduced to my Mummy, I took you home, you are the only one for me.

Me: but I don't have a big butt or hips and extremely long claws...

Mvelo: and I love you just the way you are.

Me: I'm broken Mvelwenhle.

He wiped my tear and engulfed me in a tight hug.

Me: a man like you doesn't deserve a broken person like me.

Mvelo: you are mine Christine. I love you and everything about you. I know I wouldn't trade you for anything in this world. I love you and your small butt, with your short structure and your tiny feet and hands. I love to kiss this forehead, no matter how shiny they say it looks. I don't care how much you complain about your breasts, they are my home, they protect my heart, this one. Most of all, Fluff, I love your soul, your pure white soul that accepted me with my flaws and loved me through brokenness. You healed me. I don't even want you to think your place in my life is determined by physical things, it's not. I love you, you Christine, not what you look like or what people think about you. I love you just the way you are.

I love him as much as he loves me and I'm happy he accepts me as broken as I am.

Ntswaki

I've been here for 2 weeks straight, I'm sick of this place. I've watched people coming and going and I've just been sitting here, no one comes to visiting, nothing! The warden brings in another convict.

Warden: ayy Sdudla, you have a visitor.

He says that and cackles, mxm. This boy, he looks highly intoxicated, probably why they arrested him. He looks like a typical taxi driver, white vest, beach shorts and run-

down flip flops. He places himself in the far corner of the cell and starts crying and sniffing, much to my annoyance.

Me: abuti we!

He continues to cry so I stand and go to the prison bars and call for the warden.

Me: warden this man in here is crying!

As I turned to look at him, he had his head raised and he was looking at me directly in the eyes.

Him: what's your problem?

Me: u tla mona 'me u khethe ho nkholefisa, ke tšoarehile ka ho lla mona joalo ka moshanyana ea lilemo li 12. (you come here and choose to annoy me, busy crying here like a 12 year old boy)

I went and sat down, this warden wasn't coming anyway. He drags me through his teeth and keeps quiet. This place drives one crazy I swear. You end up thinking about the most stupid things. And clearly this man was sent here to annoy me, it's annoy Ntswaki day today.

Me: ka kopo kopa ho emisa molumo oo. (would you please stop that tapping sound,)

Him: hobaneng u tšoenngoa ke boteng ba ka, ha ho tšoane le ha ke tlatsa sebaka sa hau. (why are you so bothered by my presence, it's not like I'm crowding your space)

Me: hobane o nkoatisa (because you are annoying me.)

Him: I don't like you.

Me: me too. I also don't like you.

Idiot.

Christine

Last week, after our trip to Amanzimtoti to meet his family, my dad received a letter from Bab'Msizi asking to come and negotiate Lobola. I was shocked because I wasn't expecting it but today is the day of the butternut. Today I might be taken as a part of the Mfusi clan and I'm super excited. I was up and down the whole of yesterday, cleaning and preparing for today. Now I'm sitting in my father's room with Naomi keeping me company with Aunt Denise checking up on us every once in a while. The Mfusi's arrived a while ago and they are still standing outside in the cold waiting for my family to open. They were very early, non-of us were expecting them before 12:00 and they arrived at 10:00. They've been reciting clan names for 30 minutes now and no one is attending to them, which breaks my heart but it's culture. Aunt Denise walked in and sat on the chair.

Denise: they have entered the yard, you have to keep quiet and change into something decent please.

I looked at my pink skirt, what's wrong with it?

Denise: put on something longer and less bright, uzobaxhophu. Umuhle kodwa.

I don't understand but I stand nonetheless and go get my bag from the floor and rummage through it. I find a denim wrap skirt and pull out a black top. I know these aren't mine, but I'll wear it because I don't have clothes. After another 30 minutes of us sitting in this room, Aunt Denise comes back.

Denise: are you a virgin.

My mouth dried up, not because I was scared but because she caught me off guard.

Denise: eyy Mbovana, I'm asking you a question.

Me: aunty don't call me that.

Denise: answer my question.

Me: no, I'm not.

Denise: does Nhlonipho know?

Me: no.

She dramatically claps her hands. Naomi is looking like a rained-on cat.

Denise: do you know that these people now have to pay damages for you?

Me: chabo.

Denise: ayy shame nikhona bo.

She clapped again and walked out. I grabbed my phone off the dresser and called Mvelo.

Mvelo: Fluff.

Me: babe I think we have a problem.

Mvelo: what is wrong?

Me: my aunt just walked in here and she's asking me...

Mvelo: Fluff, can I call you back, Bab' Msizi is calling.

He didn't even give me time to respond, he dropped the call. I'm hoping he's informing him.

Naomi: Chrissy.

Me: yes Naomi.

Naomi: can I tell you something.

I turned my body to face her. She looked distraught.

Naomi: I'm not a virgin anymore. I slept with my boyfriend, but it was the worst thing I have ever done.

Me: you know you can never get that back right?

Naomi: I know, that's why I regret it.

I won't judge her because I was way younger when I lost mine, problem is, she regrets it.

Me: who is your boyfriend?

Naomi: his name is Yise.

Me: how old is he?

She kept quiet.

Me: Naomi?

Naomi: he's 26.

Me: 26 Naomi!

Before I could say anything else, the door opened, and dad walked in.

Dad: cover your head and come to the lounge.

He didn't look happy at all and that traumatized me.

Me: I'll be back, I want to hear this.

I said as I walked out the room leaving her to rethink her answer, I'm not happy with 26. I got in the lounge and I put my eyes to the ground immediately. I saw Mvelo though, he's sitting in the corner with Andile next to him. It looked like they were squished in one chair, I didn't understand that. I took a seat next to Aunt Denise and someone cleared their throat.

Dad: usayi ntombi?

Me: Chabo.

I didn't understand why they had to ask me that question so publicly. You could cut the tension with a knife in here.

Mvelo: I take full responsibility for it Zondo.

Everyone's head turned to him, including mine. He didn't have to do that; he doesn't even know about Tshego.

Dad: ungiphoxile Mfusi.

Mvelo: shwele Zondo.

He bowed his head slightly and I felt my heart break.

Bab' Msizi: boZondo, siyamxolisela. Umfana uzokhipha inhlawulo yokugeza ikhaya nemali yenkomo kaMa.

Andile took out a stack of money and placed it on the table. Zulu culture is such a scam shame. I stood up as soon as they dismissed me, and I went back to dad's room. Naomi was sitting against the headboard. She seemed like she was deep in thought. I wasn't going to bother asking anymore so I just sat down and started typing on my phone.

Naomi: do you think I should tell mom?

Me: no. let them find out on the day you get married if you do get married.

Naomi: what if I'm pregnant?

Me: haibo Naomi, kahle wena.

I turned and looked at her, shocked doesn't even begin to describe how I'm feeling right now.

Naomi: no, I'm not saying I'm pregnant. I'm saying what happens if I do fall pregnant.

Me: you don't have a reason to fall pregnant if you don't enjoy sex and you've done it once. It means you'll never do it again anytime soon. Right?

She nodded unsure. I sighed.

Me: Naomi, nobody ever enjoys their first time, I know I didn't. it was pain all the way but as you get used to it, trust me, it gets better and you enjoy it, especially with someone you love. All I can tell you sis is don't do something just because you feel pressured. This 26-year-old man shouldn't force you.

Naomi: Yise isn't like that.

He better be.

Ntswaki

Me: what are you in for?

Tshego: drunk driving and unlicensed gun possession.

He's been here for 2 days, surprisingly, he's a good lad.

Me: that's nothing, why haven't they released you?

Tshego: I don't want to be released, I'd rather be here because if they release me, my boss will kill me. His Taxi was repossessed because of me. I didn't want to work for him anymore though.

Me: why? Is he a bad person.

Tshego: no, he's a good man, it's just that I know I'll betray him. I hate his son. He stole my girl, just because he has money, he thinks he's better than me. Nxx.

He looks away.

Tshego: Christine is mine.

I think I have earwax in my ear, I've been here for too long, I haven't had ear buds in a long time.

Me: say again?

Tshego: what?

Me: the name of your girl.

Tshego: Christine.

Me: do you work for the Mfusi's?

Tshego: yes, why?

Fuck!!

Christine

We've been sitting here for almost 25 minutes after I came back from the lounge and it's been really quiet in the house.

Me: I'm starting to get worried.

Naomi: don't worry, these things tend to take time.

She gave me a bottle of water that's been sitting here with us the whole day. I thank her and drink the ugly water. Not even two minutes passed when Aunt Denise and Sindy walked in ululating and singing.

Them: (Singing) Gabi gabi

Mfaz'ongazalanga

Uyothi wabonani

(uyothi wabonani mfaz'ongazalanga)

I'm guessing that everything went well. They made me stand and lead me outside while singing and ululating. The Mfusi's were here as well, I don't know when they got here. They were also singing their own song and the competition was loud enough. Neighbors were standing outside the gate watching as well. I looked at

Mvelo and my heart smiled. Mamdala came and grabbed my arm and wrapped a cloth around my head, squeezing my arm and giving me the tightest warmest hug. Then the one that owns my heart stepped to me and grabbed my hand and looked right into my eyes.

Mvelo: sawbona ntokazi.

Me: (Giggling) hi.

Mvelo: waze wamuhle, wakhanyisa okwelanga lasekuseni.

Me: ngyabonga.

Mvelo: ubani isibongo sakho Ntombi'Yelanga?

Me: uZondo.

Mvelo: aww Ma'Zondo, Mthiyane omuhle, Nqoboka, Skhangane esakhanga amadoda. Ngakuthanda ngiqala ukuk'bona ntombenhle.

My heart is fluttering, I didn't know being courted made your heart flutter and here they are keeping all zulu men in the rural areas.

Mvelo: ngikucela ukuthi ube ngowami, uyangifaka noma uyangikhipha?

I grabbed his hand and placed it on my chest, where my heart is located, not peeling my eyes off his.

Me: ngiyakufaka enhlizweni yami.

Mvelo: ngempela?

I nodded and he scooped me up in joy and excitement. At this point I felt nothing but joy. Kuthiwani kombe ngesiZulu, Inhliziyo ibigiya nesibindi!

Chapter 39

It's the 3rd of March today, my husband's birthday. Exactly a month after he paid my lobola and we tied the knot. Okay we didn't do it traditionally, but we went to the courthouse and got it done. To be honest, we didn't want to do it, we were in no rush, the problem came when I found my dream job. It was closer to our house in Palm Kloof, and it made more sense for me to move in with him than living at home and travelling for almost 30 minutes just to get to work. So, moving in with him meant we had to at least get married legally so it doesn't look like vat'n'sat. it's been the best month ever though, living with him has proven to be the best decision I've ever taken. We are happier than we've ever been in this relationship. I've made plans for the both of us tonight so I've taken half day from work so I can prepare. As soon as I left the office, I went to buy him lunch and fetched his balloons then drove straight to Mthiyane Construction. As I was walking into the lobby I was mesmerized. Deep down in my heart, I wished I had gotten a job here. Not because my husband works here but because it's a prestigious company and the contracts that they receive are always the best. Yeah, sure I didn't know much about this place until I started dating Mvelo, but I've been fantasizing about it since. I got to the floor where his office is and as I was heading to the PA's desk, I ran into my handsome brother-in-law.

Andile: mkami.

He squished my bones when he hugged me, creasing my shirt in the process.

Me: I'm here to see my husband.

Andile: you can't see him.

PA: (Laughing) he's in Mam, you can go in.

Me: thank you.

Andile and this PA had a thing going on, the stolen glances and smiles. I pat him on the shoulder and strut my way to the office. My newfound love for stiletto heels is out of this world. All I need now is a red bottom and I'll be a Mfusi wife. He didn't notice me when I walked in. He was busy concentrating on whatever he was looking at on his computer. I silently closed the door and walked towards him. When his eyes met mine, my heart smiled and I'm sure that reflected on my face because the tired smile on his face meant so much to me. Although we've been living together and having the time of our lives, for the past 2 weeks, I haven't been seeing him that much. Work is straining him terribly and he's always tired, coming home late.

Mvelo: Ntombye'langa.

Me: hello Mfusi.

I carefully placed the things on the table and walked to meet him halfway and gave him a warm hug. I won't lie, in those 30 seconds in his arms, I melted and froze all over again. He gave me a soft peck on the lips then locked eyes with mine.

Me: happy birthday.

Mvelo: thank you my love.

Me: I brought you lunch.

Mvelo: I love you.

I wasn't given the time to respond because he kissed me slowly, softly, sensually, evoking feelings from deep within. I missed him.

Ntswaki

Tshego: I told you stop calling my girl a slut.

Me: she took my man Tshego! She stole him from me! She's a fucking Slut, Whore!

I screamed loud enough for it to register in his brain, he has to understand that this girl ruined my life. He got up as quick as lightening and chased me. He caught up to me and almost slapped the living day lights out of me.

Me: Tshego man!

Warden: Ay ziboshwa, Phansi!

He banged his rod against the steel bars and Tshego let go of me instantly. I was breathing heavily looking at him, he looked extremely irate. The warden opened the gate and came to me.

Me: where are you taking me?

He blatantly ignored me and started handcuffing me. He pulled me out the cell and I looked at Tshego and stuck my tongue out at him, mouthing "Slut." It looked like he was about to explode. When we got outside, I asked the warden again where he was taking me.

Warden: you are going to court.

He pushed me into the back of a police van and closed the door. The odor inside was unbearable, I was lucky I didn't vomit. The blankets smelt of pee and they were wet. The air was moist and filled with different types of smells. They really need to start considering making these places a bit more bearable, prisoners are also people. After being knocked into every corner of this stinky van, it finally came to a stop. They opened up for me and I was led inside the courthouse. The first thing my eyes landed on was Dumisani's stupid smug face sitting in the jury box, or whatever it's called in South Africa. His supposed girlfriend was sitting next to him, and they were holding hands. I felt like throwing up instantly. I took my seat and waited for the judge to start. She rambled on about my charges and called different people to the stands to testify. I didn't know any of these people here, and really, I was uninterested about what they had to say. I only started paying attention when they made me stand up.

Judge: Ntswaki Mohau, you have been charged with attempted murder and assault. The court finds you guilty.

I turned and looked at Dumisani and he still had that smug look.

Judge: but you were assessed, and the court has found that you are mentally unstable and are not fit for prison so you will be taken to a mental hospital for a period of 6 months. If no improvements are shown, you will be moved to prison to serve the remainder of 7 years. Court adjourned.

Me, mentally unstable? They have to be kidding. This is actually a joke.

Judge: Miss Mohau, please meet me in my office.

The warden came and walked with me to the judge's office. She was sitting there signing some papers.

Judge: warden, uncuff her. Have a seat Ntswaki.

The warden uncuffed me and I shook my wrists, trying to get the to adjust to being free again before I sat down in the chair.

Me: what do you mean I am mentally unstable? I'm perfectly fine.

Judge: you have suffered a lot Ntswaki, losing your parents at a young age is not easy.

Me: what does losing my parents have to do with this?

Judge: calm down, take a deep breath.

She took a deep breath then exhaled; I did the same.

Judge: please sign these forms for me.

She handed me a pen and I put my signature on them.

Judge: you will get the correct treatment and if you behave, you won't have to serve 7 years in prison.

This was a trap. I'm not going to a mental institution, no way in hell. I'm not crazy. I tried to stand up but the warden held my arms and made me sit. I started kicking and screaming and for a moment it seemed like I was defeating him but two nurses entered and held me down in the chair and injected me with something. They put me in a straight jacket and picked me up. I couldn't move my arms and I was getting

drowsier by the second. They sat with me in the car, another one holding my upper body and the other holding my legs.

Me: (slurring) I'm not crazy.

Nurse: that's what they all say.

He was rubbing my head and that was making me even sleepier. It wasn't long before I gave in and passed out.

Mvelo

When Christine walked into my office carrying those balloons and lunch, my heart fluttered. I was so stressed with work that I had forgotten that it was my birthday. Nobody ever remembers these days though, so I was extremely ecstatic that my wife remembered. We were sitting on the carpet just talking after lunch when my phone rang.

Erin: sir, sorry to disturb you but your mother is here.

I looked at Christine and she was paying me no mind.

Me: you can let her in Erin.

Erin: yes sir.

I went back to the carpet.

Me: Ma'Mfusi is here.

Chris: seriously?

Me: yeah.

She stood up and fixed her jeans and wore her shoes.

Me: relax.

Chris: I am relaxed.

As if on cue, Paloma and Sanele came running into the office. She excitedly jumped on Chris. It wasn't long before my mom walked in. she was ageing, both physically and mentally.

Mom: ohh good, both of you are here. How are you guys?

She hugged Christine then onto me.

Mom: happy birthday son.

Me: thanks mom.

Mom: how old are you now?

Me: 24.

Mom: no, my job is done. Christine it's your time to shine my girl.

We laughed then we took a seat on the couch.

Mom: ihhe weMvelo. Uzwile ukuthi uNtswaki uboshiwe?

I looked at Chris and she looked right back at me with a slight frown on her face.

Me: yes, I knew.

Mom: hawu, awusasho. I told you to stay away from that girl. Wenza kahle nje wahlukana naye. Yazi cishe wabulala uDumisani. Ayy bandla.

With every sentence my mom said, Christine's frown grew wider. My mother is extra sometimes. Chris cleared her throat.

Chris: mah I need to go back to work, it's getting late.

Great, she feels uncomfortable. I should've told her about my relationship with Ntswaki.

Mom: no, wait Christine, I'm here to speak about something important. I won't take much time. I wanted to discuss the wedding.

Chris adjusted herself in her seat and cleared her throat for the umpteenth time.

Mom: I was speaking to your Aunt Denise, and we all agree that the wedding is essential at this point.

Me: Chris wanted a wedding in September so you can start planning around that.

Mom: oh no, September is not a reliable month. There's a lot of rain in September, you don't want your wedding to be a disaster. July is perfect.

Chris: that's in 4 months.

Mom: it's more than enough time to plan your dream wedding.

Me: mah, Chris just started working, I don't think she wants to strain herself; I know I don't want her strained.

Mom: Denise and I will handle everything. It's fine.

I looked at Christine for reassurance, but her expression was unreadable.

Mom: so, the dates for Umembeso nezibizo must come out. And we still have your Memulo and Mhlonyane.

Chris: I'll discuss all of it with my father and I'll tell them to let you know as soon as possible. Mah, I really need to go now.

Mom: okay sisi. It's okay.

She said her goodbyes and came and kissed me on the cheek.

Chris: I'll see you at home.

Me: okay love.

I walked her out and proceeded to listen to my mother's endless stories. I love my mother with everything in me but uguga kambi shame. Her old age is getting to her.

Christine

I left Mvelo's office in a rush. I used work as an excuse because wow, I was suffocating, no lie. I love Mrs Mfusi, she is a wonderful woman but sometimes she is a bit too much. I went to the shops and bought all the necessary things I needed to prepare for our dinner then I made my way home. I still had ample time to kill so I prepped everything then called Devon and asked him to come and help me edit some videos.

Devon: it smells divine in here! Where are you Mrs Mfusi?

I rushed out the studio and ran downstairs and engulfed him in a hug. I haven't seen him in so long, the last I saw him after graduation. He couldn't come to my Lobola negotiations because of his job. We talk everyday on the phone but its not the same.

Me: I miss you so much.

He kissed my cheeks before he let me down.

Devon: you've gained weight huh, you're getting heavy.

I slapped his arm and he laughed, I pulled him to the lounge so we could sit and catch up.

Devon: won't you give me a tour of you beautiful home?

Me: I will, I just missed you, I want us to catch up.

Devon: you are such a cry baby, we talk everyday.

Me: yes but we didn't talk yesterday.

He laughed again and looked at me.

Devon: you called me this morning! Bitch, I'm going for a tour.

He got up and started walking around the house, admiring. I was following him around. He was looking at the art on the walls, my husband's art, portraits of Paloma and the smudged one of me, the one he used to confess his love to me. Its right by our bedroom, so every time I walk in, I look at it and remember how we got where we are.

Devon: these are absolutely stunning.

Me: I know.

We continued walking down the hall then we got to my studio. He opened the door and walked in, gasping.

Devon: your husband is a star.

Me: (giggling) I know right, he is.

Devon: you should really thank him properly tonight, don't be lazy.

Me: I'm all prepared, don't worry about me.

Devon: I have an idea.

He said turning around looking excited.

Devon: how about we send him a sexy video right now, tease him you know, give him a hint of what he'll find when he gets home.

I looked at him and reviewed the idea in my head, it wasn't bad.

Devon: improvise on the pole sweetie. I know you haven't danced in a long time.

I absent-mindedly looked at my tummy and my thighs and realized I really was gaining weight, but it was a happiness weight gain, I'm fine with that. He helped me edit a few videos that I had already shot and then we started working on the sexy video. It took out a lot for me to get on the pole, but I did and oh boy was it sexy. By the time Devon left, the whole house was lit with candles, roses on the floor and the food was ready. All I needed was my husband to come home and enjoy his first night as a 24 year old.

Mvelo

Its been a long day, I want nothing but to go home and relax my mind, and be with my wife. I was sitting through my last interview. The interior design department was yet again short of staff and I was the one who was told to conduct the interviews, why? I don't know. This lady sitting in front of me could be in her late thirties but

she's giving me sexy eyes, making sexual comments, forgetting that this is a work interview.

Linda: how old are you Mr Mfusi?

Me: Miss Jacobs this is a professional work interview, we are not here to discuss my age.

Linda: why are you being so stuck up. Come on. Do you want to join me for dinner maybe, or drinks later on?

I realized that the big shot boss attitude was not working so I had to turn her down like she was the normal girl asking me out.

Me: my wife is waiting for me at home. And I think we are done here, Miss Jacobs?

Linda: wife?

I showed her my wedding band, the one she surprisingly didn't see and I saw her face fall. I'm glad she feels embarrassed. She packed up her things and stood up.

Me: we will call you..

Linda: don't bother, I don't want the job.

She walked out after slamming the door of the boardroom and I just laughed. I opened my emails and saw one from Christine. The subject read: when you get home...

There was a video attached to it and I opened it and there she was, looking all sexy, on a pole, doing her thing. I felt the temperature rising and I loosened my tie immediately. She was so beautiful, and in that moment I felt blessed to have such a

beautiful woman to call my own. I was still caught up in my own Rapture when the door opened and the receptionist walked in. I immediately closed the laptop and focused all my attention to her.

Receptionist: that was the last candidate sir.

Me: thank you. Can you please lock up my office. I'm going home now.

Receptionist: yes sir.

She walked out the room and I mouthed a low fuck. I was rock hard. Christine was driving me insane.

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I took off my tie, blazer and shoes and left them by the door where they stay. The house was dimly lit, and the smell coming from the kitchen was welcoming. I don't normally use the foyer entrance but I didn't park in the garage and that's why I entered this side. I placed my bag in the lounge and walked to the dinner table and the candles on the table, the roses, the balloons, it looked beautiful.

Me: Chris?

I heard her heels clicking as if she was descending the stairs. I walked out the kitchen and met her halfway. She looked absolutely gorgeous, its not everyday that you see her wearing make-up and although she looks stunning with out it, she's just as beautiful wearing it too.

Me: you look stunning.

Chris: thank you. Can you go get ready, dinner is almost ready.

Me: sure.

She gave me a smile and kissed my lips briefly. I couldn't get over how beautiful she looked. She led me upstairs and I went to take a shower. When I was done, she had laid out my clothes for me. There was also a gift bag on the bed and before I started getting dressed, I sat down and opened it. It was a watch and a bottle of my favorite cologne. We haven't been living together for long but she already knows so much about me. I smiled to myself and dressed before I made my way downstairs. I carried the gift in my hand and when I found her standing at the bottom of the stairs, she started taking pictures of me walking, that made me laugh.

Chris: you like?

Me: I do.

The smile on her face was priceless, it gave me joy. We made our way to the table and sat down. I admired the set up and no matter how small it is, I appreciate it so much. My whole life, no one has ever considered me like this.

Me: this is beautiful. No one has ever done something like this for me.

She placed her hand over mine.

Chris: I'm glad I can do something to make you happy. You constantly keep me happy and you also deserve someone to do that for you. I am that someone and I want it to be that way for the rest of eternity.

I kissed her hand.

Chris: I wrote you a letter. Can I read it to you?

Me: please.

She cleared her throat and picked up a card from her side of the table.

Chris: Mvelwenhle, my love, I am truly blessed and highly favored to be able to sit here with you in front of me and look at you in the eyes and be proud to say I love you. You are a wonderful person, you are special and being around you is such a privilege. Not many get to experience such a love, it is uncommon that women find such a love and I am one of the lucky ones. I love you so much and I will tell you everyday of my life if need be because I need you to know that you are my whole world. You make me happy.

She looked up and she had tears glistening in her eyes, so did I.

Chris: happiest birthday my husband. It is one of the many that we will spend together and I will be there for every one of them, to sit with you, have fun with you and love you. From your darling Christine.

She caught her tear before it ran down her cheek. I stood up and walked over to her and helped her stand. I held on to her waist and gave her kisses all over her face making her giggle.

Me: I love you Fluff.

Chris: I love you too Mvelo.

If you asked me how I was four years ago, it doesn't even come close to what I feel in this exact moment. I haven't been this happy in a while.

Chapter 40

Christine

I never knew my culture was this interesting. The up and down here at home this whole week has been so fulfilling. I've been locked up in a room with my bridesmaids. As per tradition, we have to sit in the house, practice songs and get ready for the weekend. Its my Memulo and Membeso, the Mfusi's are coming to bring gifts to my family. I had my mhlonyane yesterday but it wasn't a huge deal, they slaughtered the goat, burned the incense and we did some traditional dancing. Today is Friday and we have to go fetch the spear at the Mfusi's. I'm with Naomi, Chloe and Ontla because they are my bridesmaids and Lwa along with Lisa and Funeka decided to come with us. I haven't seen my husband since Sunday night. I had to take leave at work and I've been at home ever since. They took our phones so I couldn't contact him. Our faces were covered in clay and I was wearing a rag dress. We were leaving the yard for the first time since Sunday. Aunt Denise came to our room while we were getting ready to leave.

Denise: your uncle is driving you there. The aim here is to get the spear but if you see anything outside, take it, whether it be a bucket, or a shovel, take it. The more things you take, the more money you get because if they want them back, they pay.

Chloe: seriously?

Denise: yes.

Chloe: damn I love this culture.

I was also surprised that we could do that but we got ready and we left the house. We got into the car and we drove to the Mfusi residence. Uncle dropped us off a few houses away and we walked the rest of the way, trying to be as quiet as possible.

Ontla: how are we going to enter without them knowing. The security in that house is probably high.

Me: it is, but I'll ask bab' Moses to let us in.

We got to the house and before we walked to the gate, we stood by the retaining wall and watched for the coast. Anyone who would walk past here would think we are planning a heist, oh goodness I hope we don't get arrested for trespassing.

Lwa: wait, there is a small gate. Its never locked. Come guys.

Sometimes I forget that Lwa knew Mvelo long before I did. We followed her and we went to the other side of the house and boom, there was a gate. I have never in my life seen this.

Lisa: ohhh, this gate. Ayy Andrew was a boss shame.

They all laughed except Chloe, Naomi, Ontla and I.

Funeka: he used to throw parties when his parents were home and would make us come through here because by the main gate, there are cameras.

Ontla: Ndoda yakho munu. (You man babes.)

She said that looking at me and laughing. Ya ne, I loved him nonetheless. We slowly opened the gate and we snuck in. I was hoping Mvelo isn't home because his bedroom window is directly facing this gate. We went our separate ways and I made my way to the pool area with Lwa and we started looking there. I'm surprised the security hasn't picked us up.

Me: its not here.

Lwa: take the cushions so we can fine them.

She carried two cushions and we walked up the stairs and made our way to the other side of the mansion, going to the garage. We had to stand by the wall because if we didn't, Moses was going to catch us. Chloe had a broom in her hand and Naomi was carrying some pot plants. I just started laughing.

Chloe: I want this money haibo.

Me: we have to find this spear before they catch us because if they do, we are the ones who are going to pay the fine.

Lisa: do you think they hid it in the house?

Me: I don't think so.

Naomi: where does this door lead to?

Me: inside the garage.

Funeka: let's go in.

Ontla slowly pulled down the handle and the door opened but we all almost had a heart attack when we saw Bab' Mfusi standing there with a smile on his face. What a shame.

Kabelo: fancy seeing you here girls. How are you guys?

You could see that he wanted to laugh.

Kabelo: are you stealing?

Chloe: no sir, uhhm.

I pinched her because we weren't allowed to speak to him. That's why he kept asking us questions.

Kabelo: mkami, come see this.

It wasn't long before the whole brood appeared at the small door and looked at us.

Zuzile: hi girls.

I was dying inside, and I could feel the other next to me dying too.

Zuzile: nizofuna umkhonto? Khululeka, niyabanda, qhubekani nibheke. (You are here for the spear? You are far from getting it, continue looking.)

She said and we continued to look around the yard with them following us. The kids were having so much fun, especially Lindelwa. She kept shouting hot or cold if we were close to finding it or far.

Lwa: baze badla ngathi wemame.

She said that whispering next to me. This was a joke.

Zuzile: anisahlabeli nengoma nje kodwa bosisi?

I saw Ontla looking at me with a questioning look and I wanted to burst out laughing. This was comedy gold, but I was implicating myself because this was about me, I had to find this spear otherwise there is no wedding. Although we had spent the whole wee locked up in a room practicing songs, none of us was willing to start.

Me: (singing) sebesiphathele imikhonto!

Omalume basiphathele imikhonto!

They all started joining in and as if they were all waiting for us to start, more family members emerged from the house and the atmosphere changed completely. The women were ululating and we were singing. But we still couldn't find the spear. I called Helo to come to me.

Me: where is the spear?

Helo: you aren't allowed to talk to me.

She said that placing her hands on her waist.

Me: come one, please. Where is it?

Helo: pay me first.

Me: how much?

Helo: R50.

Me: okay. I'll give it to you tomorrow.

Helo: and I'll give you the answer tomorrow.

Me: hawu Helo!

This child. I saw Lwa sniffing around the kitchen and I went to her quickly.

Me: still nothing?

Lwa: no and if we don't find it we are going to get fined.

Me: check the coast, I'll go look in Mvelo's room.

Lwa: okay.

I ran upstairs while she stood guard at the kitchen door. I got to his room and as I was opening the door, he stood there with a smirk on his face as of he was waiting for me, holding the spear in his hand. I laughed and grabbed it out of his hand and ran down the stairs.

Me: I found it! I found it! Let's go!

They all flooded the kitchen and we rejoiced at the spear I was holding in my hand. Wow that was so much fun!

•••

Me: wake up guys.

I barely got in any sleep, excitement was hovering over my head. Its 04:00 in the morning and we have to go to the waterfall to remove the clay on our bodies. I was already waiting for them to wake up. Aunt Denise was here a few minutes ago to tell us to get ready, only for her to find me awake. We weren't supposed to sleep, that's not allowed. We were supposed to stay up, singing and practicing until now, but they all decided to get drunk and they were already floored by midnight. I shook them awake one by one until they go up and we were led outside.

Chloe: its freezing out here.

Ontla: wait until we have to get in the water.

They all turned and looked at me.

Me: I never wanted to get married in winter. You can't blame me.

We started singing and walking to the waterfall. It wasn't far from my house, it was in the bushes, unpopular but very beautiful. They ruled out the virginity testing because they know and damages have been paid, therefore all the people that re my bridesmaids are not virgins.

Chloe: the Mfusi's must pay my hospital bill when I get bronchitis after this.

She has been complaining the whole way.

Me: I wasn't the one who said drink like its your last day last night.

Lwa: after all that embarrassment at the Mfusi's, we needed that.

I shook my head and dipped my feet in the water before I walked in. It was extremely cold but I had to toughen up. We started singing again and when we finished bathing, we walked back home. I was starving so we got there and we had some meat and bread.

Denise: you guys can sleep for a little. I'll wake you up when you have to get ready.

The didn't hesitate to climb on the sponge and sleep, all of them. I wasn't tired so I grabbed my phone and called my husband.

Mvelo: Chris?

He was still sleeping, I could hear it in his voice.

Me: usalele? I just came back from the waterfall and I had to bath with cold water and you are sleeping.

He chuckled and then I heard shuffling.

Mvelo: I just fell asleep. Paloma decided she would sleep with me and had been suffocating me the whole night.

Me: you signed up for it. Now you have to get up.

Mvelo: I'm up Fluff. I'm going to take a shower.

Me: okay babe.

Mvelo: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

I hung up before going to rest my head a bit. When I woke up, everyone was already up, and Ontla and Lwa had already done their make up.

Me: why didn't you wake me?

Naomi: uncle said we must leave you.

Gosh, dad, I hadn't seen him in so long, it felt like a lifetime. I got up from the sponge and headed to the bathroom and caught a quick shower before I walked out. I had my hair braided into simple cornrows, I didn't want anything complicated. They started helping me get dressed and I wore isidwaba, made of cow hide. It was so heavy and that fact that my tiny little waist had to carry it the whole day didn't sit well with me. I didn't have my boobs out because I wasn't a virgin anymore and so I had to cover up. They started doing my light make up and when I was almost done, my father walked in, looking all sorts of yummy.

Me: hi daddy. I haven't seen you in so long.

He came to my side and gave me a hug.

Dad: you look beautiful princess.

Me: thank you. How is everything coming along?

Dad: don't worry about that, everything is going well. The Mfusi's are here. You need to come and get umhlwehlwe.

They stopped doing my make up and I was taken to the ancestral house where they burn the incense and I saw the cow fat. The incense was lit and dad started speaking to the ancestors, telling them what was happening in their yard and all the other things. The dressed me and then we walked out with the rest of my girls, singing, dancing and then the ceremony began. I didn't see Mvelo, I could only see his family members, the ones I had met. I couldn't see him and his parents.

Me: (singing) ngiyamuthanda ngazikhethela.

We mama nobaba wami

Ake ningiyekeleni

Ngoba ngiyamuthanda (ngiyamuthanda ngazikhethela)

I can't sing to save my life, but anyone knows that in the Zulu culture, whether you can sing or not, you have to start a song if its your function. I specifically sang this one because I love my man, I chose him myself and I want to be with him. My parents must let me be. My head was filled with notes, from R50, all the way to R200. Everyone was coming to me and giving me money. I made my way to Bab' Msizi and left my spear by him. It is customary for him to come and put money on my head. He came accompanied by his brothers and the amount of money they splashed on me was enough to at least get to R2000. As soon as they walked off, Chloe came to my head to take out some money so there could be space for more. The rest would be put in a bag.

Lwa: look over there.

She whispered over to me and I turned my head to the direction she was pointing me to. Mvelo was standing there with Andile and Muzi. Naomi was the first one to hold my hand and drag me towards them. She gave her stick to Muzi and I went to stab the spear by Mvelo's feet. Without looking up, I walked back to where we were and I started my song again and we dancing.

Me: (singing) ngitelebhele, ake ningiyekeleni

Ngiyamuthanda ngazikhethela.

He had a white crown in his hands, isicholo to be specific and it was covered with money. Andile was carrying an umbrella and it was also filled with money. They walked towards us and I got on my knees when my husband came towards me. They helped him remove the covering on my head and he placed my crown on head. Ululations erupted from all angles and in that moment I felt like I was floating. He helped me up and he gave me the umbrella with a smile on his face. He mouthed "you look gorgeous," before walking away.

Mvelo

I was sitting there holding her hand tightly. I didn't want her to run away from me, I don't want her to leave me. I keep stealing glances at her, with a smile on my face. She has her head bowed but green looks good on her skin.

Me: Mama.

She looks up and smiles at me. I wink at her and she giggles. The ceremony is beautiful, my mothers went all out with the gifts for the Zondo's. Its all so beautiful. They also got gifts for Chris' late mom. She asked Chloe to sit in her place, and although they are not related, she cares about her that much to ask. They all looked beautiful, especially when they were dancing. Although some of them have two left feet, it was such a beautiful thing. I never thought I would be here in life. I would have never imagined being here after all that has happened to me. From losing Isa, to falling in love with a complete lunatic, I didn't think I would find someone who actually loves me for me, someone I love just as much as they do me, someone I share the same values and sentiments with, someone who accepts and understands who I am and why I am the way I am. Its very rare to find this in one lifetime and I am highly blessed to be favored like this. After the festivities of gifting, we went to the tent where the engagement part was going to be. There was no need for one but my mom wanted to go all out on this wedding and that's exactly what she is doing. People were served food and the vibes were immaculate.

Chris: your mother is something else.

Me: a matriarch of stature neh?

Chris: she is a phenomenal woman. To think that she had to plan this and two weddings plus a rehearsal dinner, its all too much.

Me: she likes fancy things.

Chris: I never thought I'd have such a huge wedding. I actually love the attention.

She said blushing. I laughed at her.

Chris: no honestly. I always said that if I were go get married, I'd have a small wedding, close friends and family but clearly that won't happen.

Me: we've never had a small wedding at the Mfusi's. All of them were over the top, that's what we do. We have a big family and culture is something that is extremely important to us. That's what grandpa taught us.

Chris: I feel extremely special to be a part of a family like this one.

Me: and I am blessed to have a wife as special as you.

I kissed her cheek before going to her lips to steal a quick kiss. We were in the center of attention, I didn't want anymore attention drawn to us.

Narrated

The party had begun, the elders had left and the alcohol was flowing, the music was pumping, young people were getting married, it had to be obvious. Muzi had a cider in his hand and he was leaning against a brick wall looking at Naomi who was standing in front of him with a throw wrapped around her shoulders. The weather was starting to change, the sun had set and the evening drizzle had already started, bringing the cold with it.

Naomi: I didn't know you were related to Mvelo.

Muzi: neither did I know that you were related to Christine. Look Naomi, it doesn't matter okay.

Naomi: Chrissy already hates the idea of me dating you, and she doesn't even know that she knows you. How much more when she finds out it's you.

Muzi: come here.

He opens his arms for her and she snuggles up in them, embracing him.

Muzi: Christine is a grown woman. She is getting married, she shouldn't worry about you anymore. What we have is on our terms.

She nodded, waiting to hear those words but they never came.

Naomi: I love you Yise.

Muzi: love you too.

He said before bringing her face up so he could look at her and kiss her. As his tongue slipped into her mouth, she could taste the alcohol in his saliva. He firmly grabbed her butt and deepened the kiss. His hand was traveling up her dress when someone exclaimed.

Chris: Naomi! What are you doing!

It was dark, but Christine could see exactly who she was standing with.

Chris: Muzi! Why are you touching my baby sister.

Her voice was rising along with her anger, much to Muzi's annoyance.

Naomi: Chrissy, please.

Chris: uthi uyajola kanti ujola nalo! Are you insane Naomi. Come!

She grabbed her wrist, dragging her away from Muzi who just stood there wiping his lips. They didn't get along, him and Christine, they never fought or anything, they just don't like each other and that has been clear from the get go, or better yet, Christine didn't like Muzi. Whatever it is that he had done to her, today has given her a reason to hate him for real. She closed the door and locked it and looked at Naomi, her chest going up and down from the heavy breathing.

Chris: what are you doing with Muzi?

She tried sounding calm, but her heart was racing.

Naomi: I love him Christine. He loves me too.

Chris: you know nothing about Muzi! Don't you dare tell me that nonsense! He's 26 years old Naomi and he's a player of note. He will dump you like a hot potato.

Naomi kept quiet, she wanted to cry but she knew that her tears wouldn't work with Christine.

Chris: I'm giving you a choice, its either you break up with him or I'm telling Denise.

Naomi: you can't do that to me Chrissy, please don't. I love him.

Chris: I'm protecting you Naomi. I know Muzi. He's going to hurt you, I don't want to see you hurt, so its either that or I'm telling Denise everything.

She unlocked the door and walked out, leaving Naomi sitting there with her heart bulldozing her chest. How unfair Christine was.

Three days before the wedding, everything is set, all they need to do is arrive at the wedding. Oh well maybe not everything is ready because Devon and Christine have been trying to get everyone together so they could perfect the wedding step. Having to sit with people that are drinking and having to try make them cooperate is not easy.

Chris: Andrew do you know the dance?

Mvelo: since when am I Andrew to you?

He said that laughing at the expression on her face.

Chris: you don't want to listen to me. We have been trying to get you guys to participate but nothing.

Mvelo: babe, its just a dance, its not that important.

Chris: to me it is, it's the only thing I can do in this wedding, I haven't planned anything or had a say in anything. Can you please just do this for me.

She wasn't lying when she said she didn't have a say in many things, but she was part of planning the wedding, it is about her, there is no way she wouldn't be involved. But Mvelo saw the look of sadness on her face and got everyone else to start participating. It was a mission getting them to dance, only Muzi and Ontla were getting it right.

Chloe: I'm sorry Chrissy, I love you but this is not working. I want to get drunk now.

She said patting her shoulder. All the other seconded that and they made their way inside. Mvelo walked up to his wife and lifted her up, so she could wrap her legs around his waist.

Mvelo: I know the dance babe, I'll get it I promise.

Christine sulked.

Mvelo: let's go get you a drink.

He started walking and she wanted to get down but he held her tightly and they made their way inside. They were in their house in Palm Kloof, enjoying the perks of being house owners. Lwa and Sabrina who finally decided to join the party came to the two of them.

Sabrina: come miss sulky face, we have to get ready.

Chris: ready for what?

Lwa: we are having a bachelor and Bachelorette party for the both of you.

Chris: ohh goodness.

That was all she said before they pulled her away from Mvelo who stood there laughing. She got into the room they were all occupying and the girls were dolling themselves up.

Ontla: hurry up and get ready! The boys are waiting.

She spoke as if she was not married. Chris chuckled before she went into the bathroom to shower. She had last taken one in the morning and she felt sticky from

the dancing and sweating and although it was winter, she felt the need. When she came out, she was given a lingerie set and was told to put it on.

Chris: I feel like a bad bitch!

She shouted after looking at herself in the mirror. She wasn't wearing any make up, she didn't want any. They started popping bottles of champagne and the party begun.

Christine

Guys: lap dance! Lap dance! Lap dance!

They were chanting as I walked into the room. I've never drunk alcohol before, but right now, I'm intoxicated. Had a few shots and a glass or two of champagne before we came up here to join the boys. We have been playing a few games and it has gotten dirty. Everyone is losing their morals. My husband was sitting in a chair in the middle of the room and I was on his lap, looking into his eyes, as if there was no one else in the room. His eyes were thin, looking like mere slits from all the things he had been doing that night. So unholy. I slowly ran my hands on his bare chest, down to his stomach and my nails slowly grazed his skin. My nookie in direct contact with his crotch, the heat in the room had increased. I moved my waist slowly, grinding to the music, carefully and sexually, just to tease him. The screams were deafening behind me. This was definitely my Forte, it is my profession.

Mvelo: stop Christine.

I felt his fingers digging deep into my waist, trying to stop me from moving. I placed my hands on his face and lifted him up.

Me: I'm all yours.

He moaned before biting my neck and gripping my waist tightly and standing up quickly. I wrapped my legs around his waist and giggled before burying my face on the crevice of his shoulder as he walked out the studio to our bedroom leaving our guests behind.

•••

I don't want to fall pregnant and my man's pull out game is weak, but we've been at it for hours, skin to skin and it is the best thing I have ever experienced.

Me: (panting) I'm going to fall pregnant if we continue to do this.

Mvelo: do you want a baby?

He was stroking my hair, his warm juices were flowing out of me and I could feel it.

Me: I will kill you Mvelwenhle.

He gave me a lazy chuckle before he rolled out of bed and came back from the bathroom with a towel. No babies for this baby. Paloma is enough for me. I love her

like she is my own, I don't need another child to make my life difficult for no reason. He wiped me clean before helping me sit up and look at him.

Me: we left our guests alone for hours.

Mvelo: they are grown, they will find their way out, or in.

I smacked his shoulder before attempting to stand up but he stopped me. My head was spinning and that is why he stopped me from standing.

Mvelo: take it easy.

My knees were shaking. I'm never drinking alcohol ever again.

Me: I want to go check on them.

Mvelo: get dressed.

He handed me my dress and I threw it on before standing up again. He had his shorts on and he accompanied me back downstairs. The house was quiet, all that could be heard was moans, they were faint, but you could hear them.

Me: who's having sex in my house.

Mvelo: shh.

He put his hand over my mouth and turned me around and gave me a sloppy kiss on the lips. I was giving in to it and my knees were slowly buckling but Naomi popped into my head.

Mvelo: why did you bite me Chris!

Me: where is Naomi?

Mvelo: I don't know. I've been locked up with you the whole night.

I grabbed his hand and we walked to the studio. There was no one in there, just the trace of alcohol bottles and drugs on the table. Our friends are super wild. We carried on walking around, looking for them but I couldn't find them, we only walked into Andile and Chloe fucking in the guest bedroom. The rest of the house was empty and that seemed to make my head pound.

Mvelo: calm down Christine. We will find her.

Me: she better show up! Call your slut of a brother, he has her.

Mvelo: haibo! Who is that?

Me: Muzi mahn! Bayajola.

Mvelo: what!

I felt like screaming at the top of my lungs. I was panicking, Naomi was missing and I knew for a fact that she was with Muzi, no doubt about that.

Me: call Muzi!

I got up hastily and stormed upstairs to start cleaning up.

Narrated

The heat radiating between the two of them as he had her pressed against the wall was enough to burn anyone who tried to get in between. You could feel it from a mile away, they both knew it, but Muzi didn't want to realize it. Naomi was hypnotized by his thick, soft lips, that always seemed to have a different flavor lingering on them every single time she tasted them. Today she could taste the smell of nicotine and mint on his tongue and she loved it just as much as all the other smells and flavors she encounters. His hand is stroking and rubbing her over her underwear. Her moans cannot be contained and Muzi is loving every single minute of it.

Muzi: let's move it to my house.

Naomi: Christine is going to shout at me.

Muzi: she won't do anything to you babe. She's also having sex with her man. She won't even notice that you are gone.

Reluctantly, Naomi looked at him and nodded before agreeing to going home with him. She climbed into his car and tolerated a whole ride inside the car, with her heart bulldozing her chest. What she was doing was wrong, she should've left this man a long time ago but the amount of love she has for him doesn't allow her to. He has her heart in the palm of his hands. What she doesn't know is that Muzi is not all he appears to be. She was not even given a chance to breathe, as soon as they got to the door of his flat, she was already pressed against the wall, her dress already running up her thighs.

Naomi: Muzi.

She spoke, muffled by his mouth, she pushed him off slowly and pulled down her dress.

Naomi: do you love me Muzi?

He tried to hide his frustration but he was failing dismally. He rubbed his face.

Muzi: what kind of question is that Naomi?

Naomi: we never talk, its always about sex to you. You don't know me that well, you haven't taken the time to get to know me, all you do is sleep with me. Do I matter to you?

He had to think thoroughly about his answer. He knew exactly how he felt, but he wouldn't tell her that, he is a man, he has needs and the only person that can take of those needs right now is this girl standing in front of him, he can give any lie he has to give for his needs to be satisfied.

Muzi: Naomi I wouldn't be with you if I didn't love you. Come on, please, just give me some.

He begged, his voice going hoarse and all. His eyes were dark, she could never read or understand anything he ever says, or how true it is, all she has to believe is words. He has been in the game for a long time, he knows the ins and outs. He has mastered the saying actions speak louder than words and has become that. It's a pity Naomi is not smart enough to see that he has graduated as a player and that she is being played. Christines attempt to try stop her from falling deeper into the trap of his twisted ways have fallen on deaf ears. But everyone has a story, Muzi also has a story, one that Naomi will never be subjected to hear. His attempt to pin her against the wall failed with Naomi stiffening her body and going behind him.

Naomi: if you love me, you won't have sex with me tonight. You will sit with me and we will actually get to know each other.

His boner wasn't giving him the option to say no, in order for her to soften up, he had to do what she wanted. He looked down at his member before heaving a sigh and going to sit down on the couch.

...

It wasn't as bad as he thought it would be, just sitting and talking, they actually had fun, more fun than he had anticipated to have. The fact that he was still seeing her for this long meant something, now he was getting to know her, this is how Christine's love story worked out. It was almost 04:00 in the morning and Naomi was finally giving in. She had finally let Muzi kiss her and touch her. He was on top of her, igniting the fire before they could begin when Muzi's phone rang. He groaned in frustration before he rolled over and picked it up.

Chris: buyisa ingane wena!

Her sharp voice came through, straight into his ear, causing him to pull it away from his ear. He could hear the havoc in the background, Mvelo and Chris fighting over the phone.

Mvelo: Christine give me the bloody phone!

Chris: Muzi, bring back Naomi otherwise I'll be there and I...

He cut the call before he heard the rest of the threat. The look of concern on Naomi's face told Muzi that he had to explain what was going on.

Muzi: let's go.

He switched off his phone before he stood up and fixed himself. Naomi now felt bad for depriving him the whole night.

Naomi: but...

Muzi: asambe, your sister is a lunatic, tell her to stop doing drugs.

He said that grabbing his keys off the pedestal and walked out the room leaving Naomi there with her heart beating out of chest. She followed shortly after and found him sitting in the car, with a hard look on his face. She tried placing her hand on his thigh but he removed it and started driving to Christine's house to drop her off. The silence was deafening, it was the worst thing ever. When they arrived, she sat in the car and looked at him.

Naomi: I'm sorry Yise.

Muzi: okay.

Naomi: I'll see you later today?

Muzi: sure.

Naomi: I love you.

She said that lowly but Muzi just nodded and kept quiet. She climbed out the car and did the walk of shame all the way inside the house.

Christine

I could feel a breeze coming in under the covers and my feet were extremely cold. I tried to pull the duvet but Mvelo was sleeping on it.

Me: Mvelo.

I shook him awake but he didn't budge. I tried to open my eyes but they were heavy and my head was pounding.

Me: Mvelwenhle man, vuka.

I pushed him a little harder then he groaned before standing up on his feet.

Mvelo: (sleepy voice) I just fell asleep why are you waking me up.

I would say he looked handsome but he wasn't, his eyes had bags and they were red, as a sign that he barely got any sleep, I wonder what I look like.

Me: you were sleeping on the cover.

I pulled the duvet up and turned and slept comfortably. He got in behind me and held me.

Mvelo: when are we getting up?

Me: in the morning.

Mvelo: its way past morning now.

Me: what?

I turned and faced him. He had on a serious face.

Mvelo: it almost past 12:00 now.

Me: why didn't you say so.

I'm in deep shit. I sat up and looked for my phone but I couldn't find it anywhere.

Mvelo: what's the problem, Naomi came home, the wedding is only tomorrow, im sure we can sleep in.

Me: no, we have a rehearsal dinner tonight, remember?

He slapped his forehead in frustration before rolling out of bed. He came back with his phone in hand.

Mvelo: 11 missed calls from mom.

Me: call her back.

He dialed the number and put it on loudspeaker. As soon as she picked up, Ma's loud voice came through.

Zuzile: you children are going to drive me insane! Where are you? You should have been here 2 hours ago!

Mvelo: mom don't shout, please.

He was holding his head.

Zuzile: don't you dare Mvelwenhle, not today. Where is Christine, why is she not answering her phone?

Mvelo: she's right here.

He gave me the phone and walked out to the bathroom, leaving me alone to face the wrath of Mrs Mfusi.

Zuzile: Christine.

Me: hi ma.

Zuzile: I've been calling all of you and none of you have been answering. Your bridesmaids have fittings and you and your husband have to be here. What is the problem?

Me: we are so sorry. We got a bit too wild last night. We will get ready and come there right now.

Zuzile: you better.

She said that before she cut the call. I shook my head and stood up, going to the bathroom to join Mvelo. He was already in the shower. I opened the shower door and got in.

Me: I'm sick. I actually want to jump off a bridge.

Mvelo: (chuckling) I'm so sorry my love. That's what happens when you drink alcohol too much.

Me: how do you do this every weekend?

He held my waist and pinned me against the wall.

Mvelo: I'm an ancestor. Ungaphiki nami.

We really don't have time to waste but I'm horny and hungover, at least let me take care of one of these things.

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After getting dressed we left for Ramsgate. My head was still pounding and my eyes looked horrible. I needed a miracle if I wanted to look beautiful tomorrow. When we arrived at the house, I put on my big sunglasses and Mvelo grabbed my bag and we made our way into the house. Ma was standing at the door waiting to greet us. She came and gave me a hug.

Zuzile: I thought you didn't drink.

She said that taking off the shades I had on. The look on her face told me that I looked like death, and why was she hugging me? Wasn't she mad just a few hours ago?

Me: your son is a bad influence.

She shook her head and grabbed my hand, totally ignoring Mvelo's presence behind me. We walked into the lounge and there was a spa set up. So this is why she was rushing me to come over?

Zuzile: I wanted to take today so we could just relax, we've been running around the whole week, we need to look good for tomorrow.

Me: that's so sweet ma, thank you.

I gave her a tired smile before I went to get changed into something more comfortable. Helo was sitting in with us while we did our hands and feet. Ma had a glass of champagne and she offered me but I kindly declined.

Zuzile: this will help, trust me.

Me: I'd rather pass shame. I thought you were angry at us.

Zuzile: I was, oh trust me, I was fuming, you children don't listen.

Me: it was only one time.

Zuzile: what were you doing last night, you all look like Satan was sleeping in your beds with you.

Me: the guys planned a bachelor and Bachelorette party for me and Mvelo. They forced me to drink. The others were worse because they were doing drugs.

Zuzile: you people are too wild. I never partied like this in my youth.

The look of shock on Helos face sent me into a fit of laughter.

Me: why do you look so distraught?

Helo: drugs?

Zuzile: these kids are wild I'm telling you.

Me: count me out Ma.

Zuzile: you and your husband are one. That one was a wild one, I hope he grows out of it. He thinks we didn't know about all the parties him and Muzi threw here.

I looked at her and laughed. Conversations from that day we came to fetch umkhonto came back to mind.

Zuzile: its like he was making up for the two years he was at home.

I didn't know what that meant but I just laughed. She was telling me all about his shenanigans and I know now how messed up he is.

Zuzile: I actually didn't think he would settle down so soon, especially after Isabelle. The way he derailed, I didn't think he would find a love like this one, he really loves you Christine.

I smiled as I felt my heart beating faster.

Me: I love him too Ma, a lot.

Zuzile: love is a beautiful thing. I for one fall in love every single day.

She says with a big grin on her face. This made me laugh a little.

Zuzile: that's what it should feel like. You should fall in love with him everyday. But he should also give you a reason to fall in love.

Me: he does, everyday. Sometimes it feels like my heart is going to burst from beating so fast on a daily.

Zuzile: reminds me of our relationship with Kabelo. You guys are just adorable.

Me: he is an amazing person. Inside and out.

I think she interpreted that the wrong way because she went into a fit of laughter.

Zuzile: woza sihlebe.

She had a naughty smile on her face and that tempted me to come closer so I could hear what she had to say.

Zuzile: Helo close your ears.

She pretended to press them closed but I could see she wanted to hear this.

Zuzile: is he good in bed?

Now it was my turn to crack up.

Helo: eww mom! Sies!

Zuzile: I told you to cover your ears.

Although I was red with laughter and a tad bit of embarrassment, I replied.

Me: he is amazing. The best I've ever had.

Helo: okay that's my cue.

She got up, leaving the glass of champagne on the table and walked out, leaving us in a fit of laughter.

Zuzile: I guess it's a family thing. Kabelo seems to be getting hornier by the years, its interesting to watch.

I'm one of the lucky few who get to have such conversations with their mother in law, how appetizing.

Zuzile: gone is my innocent Mvelwenhle, he is now a man and gives orgasms.

Me: some real good orgasms at that, real good ones.

I felt bad for the nail technician who had to sit in and listen to this conversation. But I was still drunk, that's why I was talking so much shit.

...

I Love my in-laws, I will say this for as long as I can breathe. They are the best thing that has ever happened in my life. I didn't think that the rehearsal dinner would be a big deal but it is, from the décor to my lovely outfit that I didn't know I owned until today. We are sitting at the table after having rehearsed tomorrow's programme for the morning ceremony. We are due to drive down to Amanzimtoti right after the white wedding because on Saturday is the traditional wedding, where most of the other extended family will be invited to. The white wedding is for close family and friends. I don't have many friends, so I didn't invite any, all my friends are part of my bridal party. Any other friend that will be there will be Mvelo's friends.

Devon: thank you to everyone for cooperating and keeping the time. We have two more people who are to speak and I'd like to call Muzi up to speak on behalf of Mvelo's brothers.

We have been having speeches the whole night, mostly people who wouldn't be at the wedding or people who were not part of the wedding program. I don't know why Muzi is being called up. Mxm his presence annoys me.

Muzi: good evening to the Zondo's and the Mfusi Family. I also want to greet our friends and the lovely bride and groom. They are only going to be the bride and groom officially tomorrow but they are already husband and wife, they've skipped a lot of steps.

Everyone laughed, I wanted to roll my eyes but I'm not rude, so I will listen and try not to be disgusted by anything he says.

Muzi: Mvelo is actually my nephew, by law, but we grew up together. He is only a few years younger than me. He is the brother I never had, my parents gave me two sisters and one of my sisters is his mother. My brother, for as long as I have known

him, is a loving person, very generous and caring. I never doubted for one that he would be here, I always knew he would get married before me.

His hand squeezed mine under the table and I stole a quick glance his way. He was tearing up.

Muzi: bafo, you are a wonderful person and I am so glad that you found such a lovely woman, who matches your personality, someone who compliments you. Sis' Chris, thank you for being such a good woman to my brother. I wish you the best years in your marriage.

In that exact moment, I felt like a witch for being so unreasonably mean to him. Yeah he did rub me the wrong way and he did smash my baby sister but he's not a terrible person. Mvelo stood up and went to give him a bro hug. I also stood up and gave him a hug.

Me: I'm sorry Muzi.

I whispered into his ear before we pulled apart. He nodded.

Muzi: we will talk after this.

I moved away and took my seat. So much for being an ass whole.

Ntswaki

I'm a big woman, I've never been thin. From childhood, I've always been that girl with the thick thighs that always outgrows her uniform because of her ever changing body. But ever since I've been in this hell hole, I've been getting thinner and thinner. My bottle legs have now turned skinny and my hips look like have never existed. We don't even have mirrors in this place to look ourselves in. I can feel that I'm not the thick, chubby woman I used to be.

Nurse: come Ntswaki, you have a visitor.

I turned and looked at her. I didn't know her, she wasn't my specific caretaker.

Nurse: come, I won't hurt you.

I stood up and made my way to her. She walked with me out to the visiting area and it was empty. I never get visitors, it hurts seeing all these lunatics that surround me getting love from the people that love them and me, the sane woman doesn't even get a mere phone call from her brothers. In the far corner, there sat Tshego. He was looking very suspicious with a beanie and army boots, the full heist outfit. I slowly sat down and looked at him with a confused look.

Tshego: you've lost weight.

Me: don't be rude Tshego. Greet me.

Tshego: hi Ntswaki.

Me: hello Tshegofatso.

I gave him a fake smile before rolling my eyes.

Tshego: this is not a casual visit...

Me: you say as if you've been here everyday.

Tshego: I'm sorry I couldn't come see you. I've been in and out of jail and now I want to spill some blood.

I raised my eyebrow.

Tshego: you need to get out of this place as in yesterday.

Me: hobaneng? (Why?)

Tshego: leoatla leo Mvelo o nyala ngoanana oa ka hosane. (That idiot Mvelo is marrying my girl tomorrow.)

I felt the room temperature increase rapidly.

Tshego: you need to leave this place so we can stop this wedding.

Me: I'm not doing that Tshego.

Tshego: I can help you escape.

Me: I'm not crazy!

I shout-whispered because I couldn't risk the nurses hearing me say that, apparently, it's a trigger word.

Tshego: says someone in a looney bin.

Me: look Tshego, I don't want to serve 7 years in prison, so I will do anything to prove that I'm not crazy like they say I am.

Tshego: I'm giving you a choice, its either you come and help me stop this farce of a wedding or I'm killing your precious boy.

Me: (shouting) no! Don't you dare Tshego!

It didn't even take them 30 seconds, they were already restraining me.

Me: let me go! I'm not crazy! Just let me go!

They injected me and before I passed out, I saw Tshego making the slit throat sign. My poor Andrew.

Christine

I had a good night's rest and although we slept a little later than anticipated, I slept like a baby. Aunt Cindy burnt her incense all around the house before we slept, I think maybe that's why we slept so peacefully. Its my wedding day! I'm getting married to the love of my life. I rolled out of bed, pulling the covers along with me, much to Naomi's annoyance.

Me: I'm getting married! Wake up!

This day was blessed by the heavens. I went out my room, running into every room, waking everyone up, it was my day.

Dad: what have we done! Its so early in the morning.

Me: you have to get ready so you can walk your one and only daughter down the aisle.

I was sitting on his bed and he was still rubbing his eyes, just like I do every morning when I wake up. He gave me a weak smile.

Me: wake up daddy!

Dad: I'm up my love.

He opened his arms for me to hug him and I gladly went into them.

Dad: usukhulile mntanami, I'm very proud of you. Thank you for making me proud.

I knew he was devastated, I saw it the day I moved out the house, I could see it in his eyes.

Me: thank you for everything baba.

Dad: I wish Rose was here to see her beautiful flower, oh how you've grown my baby.

He tightened the hold and I felt my tears falling on my face.

Dad: you are the best thing that has ever happened to me mntanami, I love you so much.

Me: I love you too baba.

He looked at me and wiped my tears.

Dad: don't cry now, its your wedding day!

He did hand gestures and that made me laugh.

Dad: go get ready, we don't want to be late.

I nodded before standing up and going back to my room.

•••

All my bridesmaids had arrived, make-up was done, hair and nails were done, all they needed to do was get dressed. They were drinking like fishes though.

Me: by the time we get to the venue, all of you will be hungover with the way you are drinking.

Ontla: as long as I'm not the bride.

She said and raised her champagne glass. I never knew she was such a party animal, she's always ever so reserved but this weekend, I saw a whole different side to her.

Chloe: I need liquid courage to do that ridiculous dance step that you want us to do.

Devon: it's not ridiculous. You are.

These two are always fighting.

Me: okay stop it you two. Anyone has my phone please, I want to call my husband.

Devon: Denise took all our phones so we can't call or text.

I felt like my world was coming to an end, for what!

Devon: relax, everything is under control, Mvelo is at his home getting ready with his groomsmen just like you are. They called me before I arrived.

What would I be without my bestie. I gave him a side hug. My dress was brought in and I was so excited to finally put it on. Weirdly enough, I only wore it once, right after it was altered to fit me when we picked it. I bought my dress, and I love it so much, it was one of the things that I actually choose myself. It was a mermaid fit in an ivory color and a lace top. I wanted to wear no make up but they said no, and by they I mean everyone! It's not a big dress and that's what I love about it, it's lovely and simple, my style. Daddy walked in right after they finished tying up my corset and

he stopped at the door and looked at me, tears glistening in his eyes and a smile plastered on his face. I wish we had mirrors so I could see what I look like.

Me: Daddy?

Dad: you have 5 minutes to finish up so we can leave.

I gave him a smile back because I knew he wanted to say something else.

Dad: you look stunning.

Me: thank you dad.

Everyone was finished getting dressed, I had my sneakers on and we were ready to go. I was going to change into heels once we got to the venue. I had a new found love for heels, yes but I wasn't used to them as much. I didn't want to be the bride with aching feet.

Narrated

The rays of the sun peep through the clouds after a little drizzle of rain. This is seen as blessings falling upon the couple to be wedded today. It's extremely cold outside, it is winter after all. There is only 50 guests seated at the venue, the beautiful white décor with beautiful flowers everywhere. It looks like a winter wonderland. Mvelwenhle stands at the alter with his groomsmen, not a hint of nervousness on his face, he knows his wife, she'll be here. When the music starts to play, he calms down, and fixes himself. The guests rise as the bride appears with her father at her side. The likes of Freshly Grounds serenading them with lovely music. She looks at her father, gives a smile and they start walking; slowly, graciously. She looks

gorgeous. Mvelo cannot believe his eyes, his heart is fluttering. His eyes meet hers under the veil and she is smiling. Tears are forming in his eyes, unraveling the beauty before him. It is so hard for him to hold himself.

Andile: bafo.

He said so reassuringly, tapping his shoulder after giving him a tissue, he was crying. It was a sight for sore eyes. Christine couldn't help it but cry to, and by the time she reached him, they embraced each other. Zondo acknowledged Mvelo and took his seat. Finally, the ceremony could begin.

Pastor: dearly beloved, we are joined here today to witness the wedding ceremony of Mvelwenhle Mfusi and Christine Zondo. These two have come together and decided that they want to spend the rest of their lives together. Together, with you as witnesses, and before God, we will join them in holy matrimony.

Chris squeezed Mvelo's hand tightly and they shared a quick look.

Pastor: love is the reason we are all here. It is a beautiful thing, and what is joined by the Lord, no one can separate. The couple has prepared their own vows; Mvelo.

He turned and faced her, and she did the same. He lifted her veil so he could uncover her face. She smiled and loud ululations erupted. She was beautiful.

Mvelo: you are beautiful.

Chris: thank you.

It was like nobody else existed in that exact moment, it was just the two of them.

Mvelo: I could go on forever if I were to begin to explain how and why I love you so much. In the dark times and in the light you were there. You rescued me from myself and helped me become who I should be; who I want to be, and that is Mvelwenhle, a father, a son and a husband. You are my breath of fresh air, you are the reason I smile. You make me happy, you keep me happy Christine. You love me unconditionally and it has never changed. I promise to keep you happy, at all times, to be there for you, through thick and thin, to hold you and love you for every hour of every day. I promise to love you for the rest of my life, never to change the person I am because I am who I am because of you, and I love who I have become. I love you Fluff.

He took the tissue and wiped his eyes and cleared his throat.

Chris: healing is a journey, not a destination; Love is a journey, not a destination; life is a journey, not a destination. You taught me this. You taught me that life is to be lived, because it is not guaranteed. That is why I stand here, right I'm front of you and give myself to you, the whole of me. You are my heaven sent, my miracle. A love so rare, so beautiful and I found it in you. I love you today, I love you yesterday and I love you for the rest of my life. I never want to leave you, being far from you would mean I've lost me. I dedicate my life to keeping you happy, always. To being there for you, to be anything and everything to you, to take this life journey with you. I love you Eternally Mvelwenhle.

The silence was loud, only the sound of her soft voice audible. Their vows were coming from the depths of their hearts. It was a beautiful sight to behold.

****Christine****

I never thought I would walk down the aisle. I never thought I would watch the man I love crying because of me. It wasn't even in my future plans to have a wedding as beautiful as this one has been. I feel extremely lucky to have been getting married to a family like this one. We just finished taking our wedding pictures and my husband was helping me tie my sneakers. Yes, it was that time, the one I have been waiting for.

Me: I hope you learnt the dance.

Mvelo: relax muntu wami, I have it in the bag. Angihlulwa into engakhulumi.

He said that with a smirk on his face. I brushed his head at the fascination of his waves, he looked handsome.

Me: thank you.

Mvelo: you're welcome.

I playfully shoved him off, he knew exactly what I was saying thank you for. He laughed and stood up before helping me up. The music had already started inside which meant the bridal party had started. He carried me bridal style and he ran with me. I couldn't stop laughing. When we got there, they were already half way through and they weren't as bad as I thought they would be. Muzi and Ontla were having the time of their lives though, them being the ones that could actually dance, them and Devon who was at the front reminding them of the steps. It was a funny sight to watch. The guest were on their feet and it turned into a whole party.

Me: you better get it right Mvelwenhle otherwise I'll be a runaway bride.

Mvelo: you wouldn't dare.

Me: try me.

As were whispering among ourselves, our song started. I looked at him.

Mvelo: let's go.

I laughed and we walked in. I started counting out loud for him.

Me: 1...2...3 left...

We danced. He didn't know the steps as he said he did, but he improvised. At some point I even left him behind and did my own thing. Amapiano got to my head sometimes. The ululations were insane. He held my waist from behind and turned me around and did something I didn't expect him to do. I laughed at him so badly but he was doing it so well...so I joined him and we zekethe'd together. I've never had so much fun in my life. When we finally took our seats, I looked at him and smiled.

Mvelo: I told you I could dance.

Me: I'll never doubt you again.

We sat through the speeches, people advising us about marriage and how to treat each other etc. The next person that was asked to speak was my dad.

Dad: I'd like to take this opportunity to greet everyone who has joined us today. I am Nhlonipho Zondo. UMthiyane, uSokhulu, uNqoboka.

Ululations again. Trust my dad to flex about his culture.

Dad: I am this beautiful lady's father. Today I am proud to stand up here and look at my beautiful flower and say I did it. I raised a lady. Thank you Christine for being such an amazing child, for making my job as a parent easy. Mfusi, I thought you were here to turn my daughters life upside down but you did the total opposite. You have made her happier than I have ever seen her. I trust you with her life, I trust that you two will keep each other happy as you have promised to do to each other. Ubaba uyakuthanda Ntombikayise. I wish you all the best in your marriage.

I wiped my tears and walked up to give him a hug.

Me: I love you too baba.

Mvelo who was behind me put out his hand for a handshake but instead, dad gave him a hug.

Dad: thank you son.

It was a sight for sore eyes. We took our seats and my husband wiped my tears. I will call him my husband all the time because that's what he is, he is MY husband. The next to come and speak was Ma.

Zuzile: I greet you all and thank you for taking your time to come and celebrate with us today. I am Zuzile Mfusi, I am also a Mfusi wife like our bride today but I don't stand here as one, I stand here as Mvelwenhle's mother. Just like uBaba uZondo, I stand here with Pride, knowing that we've done a good job as a parents, both my husband and I, and my brothers in law and their wives. In our family, we are one unit, we help each other and I can fully say that Mvelo wasn't raised just by me and my husband, but the whole family. Son, you have made us proud by showing us that you are a man. You made your mistakes while growing up but you have grown and

proved to us that your mistakes don't define you. Siyabonga ngokusilethela imbali enhle kangaka. Christine, you are a star! Thank you for loving our son, and helping him through his dark times, nothing makes us happier than seeing him happy and that is all because of you. I know you two will be a great example to your brothers and sisters of how real love is like. Welcome to our Family Chris.

I also went to give her a hug and Mvelo did the same. The reception continued and food was served, music was played and the vibes were immaculate. Then our song came on. Stars in the Sky by Phora. I surely didn't choose this song, and it looked like Mvelo wasn't responsible for it either. I saw Ma looking at us and we smiled. How sweet. We found our way to the dance floor and we took our first dance. The lights in the room dimmed and stars lit up the room. We moved slowly, my head on his chest, hands intertwined. I could hear him whispering the lyrics to me, I whispered back. I didn't want this moment to end, it was the most beautiful thing we had ever done. I have never felt this connected to him.

"I shine like the stars in the sky
You're the one that makes me feel alive
I just want to be the reason why
Reason why you smile all the time
I just want to be the one you need
Butterflies every time I breathe
Late at night when I go to sleep
You're the one that's always in my dreams, yeah
Full moon
Late night
Conversations
Taught me true love

Taught me patience

Your lips, your smile

Perfect painting

Need me, tell me

I'll be waiting."

I felt hands on the side of my leg and I looked down to see Paloma. Mvelo lifted her up and we danced together.

Mvelo: I love you.

Me: I love you too.

Narrated

As the trouble maker he is, he stole his bosses guns and slept with them packed up and ready for the next day. After his visit to Ntswaki, he knew that he had to do this. His love for Christine couldn't let him watch her marry another man while he loved her the way he did. Maybe he also had to join Ntswaki at the center. He got into his taxi at midday and drove to Ramsgate, where the wedding was going to be. It wasn't hard for him to find out because he worked for the Mfusi's. He arrived right after the couples first dance. The sun was starting to set.

Security: sorry sir I can't let you in.

Tshego: I work for Vusumuzi Mfusi. I know the groom.

Security: I was given strict instructions not to let anyone who is not on the guest list. Please leave.

He was here to cause havoc. He tried to force himself in but the Security pushed him hard that he stumbled. This angered him and he charged towards his and punched him. He punched him hard. Other Security detail arrived and got ahold of him. He was escorted to a room and Vusi was called to come deal with his employee.

Vusi: Tshegofatso, what is your problem.

Tshego: I want my girl! Your stupid son stole my girl.

He was tied up to a chair and was fighting to get free. Vusi stood there with his arms folded across his chest.

Tshego: that motherfucker took my girl!

Vusi was a calm person. He nodded and grabbed a chair and sat down in front of him.

Vusi: and what do you want me to do?

Tshego: bring Christine.

He said with anger covering his face. Vusi laughed before he stood up and walked out. He wasn't threatened, but he knew it wasn't his fight. He had nothing to do with this. He left Tshego feeling even more frustrated, with all the security watching him. He didn't think things out properly. Vusi went back to the reception, heading straight for Andile, who was starting to get drunk.

Vusi: lalela, there is a boy, he works for me. He claims that Mvelo stole his girl.

Andile: where is he?

Vusi: storeroom. Take care of it.

Vusi walked away and Andile stood there dumbstruck. He walked over to Mvelo who was sitting, chatting to his wife.

Andile: bafo.

He signaled with his eyes that they have a problem so he stood up.

Chris: where are you going?

Mvelo: I'll be back now.

He gave her a kiss and followed Andile where they could talk.

Andile: Bab' Vusi just told me that Chrissy's ex is here and he wanted to stop the wedding.

Mvelo: and how is that my problem? I've already married Chris.

Andile: I don't know bafo. Baba said we must deal with it.

He sighed and rubbed his forehead in frustration. This is not what he wanted to do on his wedding day but he followed Andile nonetheless. When they arrived at the storeroom, two of the security were lying on the floor in a pool of blood. Tshego was

carrying a gun with a silencer and was pointing it at the one security that was still alive, that also had a gun.

Tshego: look who decided to join the party, the woman stealer! Are you happy!

He turned his gun and pointed it at Mvelo. He slowly put his hands up in the air.

Mvelo: put the gun down, I'm not armed.

Tshego: o lekoala. (You are a coward.)

Mvelo' heart was bulldozing his chest, he hates guns, they have ruined his life.

Mvelo: what do you want? You want Chris?

Tshego: you stole her from me, she loves me! Not you!

He was an angry man, swinging the gun in all directions. The security the was still alive still had a gun in his hand. Andile was frozen behind Mvelo who still had his hands in the air. All the alcohol left his system in a jiffy. Andile scanned the area and saw a gun lying on the floor. Tshego was still babbling about how much he loved Christine and he used that opportunity to grab it off the floor and point it at Tshego. Panic covered his eyes and he turned to look at the security who was also pointing a gun at him.

Mvelo: you are outnumbered. Put the gun down and if you want Christine you will fight me like a real man.

His fear slowly faded because he knew that he had back up. This was happening. He loosened his tie and threw it on the floor. He took off his cufflinks and folded his shirt. Tshego surrendered and also got ready to fight. The other two put their guns down and Tshego threw the first punch in Mvelos gut. He almost fell over but he used his arm and leg to trip him and he fell on his back.

Mvelo: fuck!

He was in pain but he moved toward his body and put his red bottom shoe on his face. Tshego was losing dismally. Mvelo had his foot on his throat and he couldn't breathe.

Mvelo: you asshole.

Andile stood there dumbstruck once again. Tshego tried to force his foot off his throat but it was hard. He finally succeeded and Mvelo almost fell on his face but Andile fired a shot and it landed on Tshego's shoulder.

Mvelo: what the fuck bafo!

The shock on his face could not be missed. Tshego was groaning in pain but he was trying to reach for his gun on the floor, Mvelo saw this and also crawled towards it. They fought for the gun, Tshego throwing punches at Mvelo. Mvelo kneed him in the balls, applied pressure on his wound and grabbed the gun.

Tshego: (groaning) you son of a bitch!

Mvelo: don't you dare drag my mother into this, piece of shit!

He fired two shots and one landed between his eyes. No one speaks about his mother like that and gets away with it.

Chapter 43

Mvelo

Andile: are you crazy bafo!

He was panicking, so was I, but I couldn't show it on the outside. It was only the three of us with 3 dead bodies.

Me: no one calls my mother a bitch Andile, no one.

Andile: and what happens now?

Me: I don't know. I need to change, get rid of these bodies, call your team to help you.

I told the security and he called them. I stepped over the idiots body and walked out the storeroom. As I was walking out, Bab' Vusi and Dad were standing outside the door.

Dad: are you okay?

Me: yes, we are fine, he is dead.

Vusi: go upstairs and get a clean shirt to put on.

I wiped my bloody hands on my shirt and walked upstairs with Andile following me.

Andile: what are you going to say to Chrissy?

Me: nothing, no one can find out about what just happened, do you understand me?

Andile: this family is crazy.

I was just as distraught as he felt, but I had to keep it together because I couldn't risk Chris realizing I'm not okay. I changed my shirt wiped my shoes and fixed myself, I realized I left my tie in that storeroom.

Me: my tie.

Andile: say you messed it with something, that's why you changed.

I nodded and we made our way back to the reception. Christine was looking extremely concerned.

Chris: where were you and why did you change your shirt?

Me: Andile spilled whiskey on it, we were going to get something in the storeroom.

Chris: couldn't you have sent someone else, its our wedding day?

I pulled her close to me and gave her a kiss on the forehead.

Me: I'm sorry. I'm not going to leave anymore, I'm right here okay.

She nodded and rested her head on my shoulder. The fact that I could've lost my life just a few minutes ago destroys me. I pray to God Christine never finds out about this otherwise I'm good as dead.

Christine

After Andile and Mvelo came back from their disappearance, I calmed down and we did the rest of the things on the wedding program. I threw my wedding bouquet and Lwa caught it. Sydney should really marry her now. When Mvelo threw the garter, Muzi caught it. We partied until late but we still had to drive to Amanzimtoti because our traditional wedding was tomorrow. Our bags were packed and our driver was ready. When we left the reception, Mvelo carried me Bridal style into the vehicle and we were off.

Mvelo: you looked beautiful tonight.

Me: thank you Mr Mfusi.

My legs were on his lap so I placed my finger on his face and traced his lips before kissing him softly.

Mvelo: I can't believe I get to have you for the rest of my life.

He said in between the kiss. I giggled and kissed his neck, making bite marks, making him moan softly. His hands were roaming all over my body and the heat between us was too much.

Mvelo: this dress is in my way. I want you now.

He said in his husky voice, whispering as I planted my kisses on his neck. I placed my hand on his groin and I rubbed him through his pants, I felt him grow hard.

Mvelo: Christine...

He said that warningly. The driver looked at us through the rear view mirror before the partition slowly went up. Good boy.

Mvelo: stop being naughty.

Me: I'm only naughty for you.

I slowly unbuttoned his shirt and ran my hands on his chest down his abs, he flinched.

Me: what's wrong?

Mvelo: nothing.

He was lying to me. I placed my hands on his stomach and pressed a bit, he winced in pain.

Me: ayy Mvelwenhle, I don't want to fight on our wedding night, what's going on?

I removed my legs from his thighs and turned on the lights, I looked at his stomach and he had bruise.

Me: what the hell happened?

Mvelo: I hurt myself when I was carrying boxes in the storeroom, that time when we "disappeared"

I Gave him an "are you sure" look. I didn't believe it for one second.

Mvelo: I promise my love.

It looked like someone punched or kicked him hard, but I won't question him.

Me: are you okay though?

Mvelo: yes, I'm fine baby. Don't worry about me.

...

We arrived in Toti and we were booked into The View Hotel and Spa. It was a beautiful place and that is where we were going to spend our wedding night.

Me: you know if you don't carry me through the door in my white dress, we might have bad luck.

Mvelo: and where did you hear that nonsense.

He said that laughing. He knew I was mocking him because of his bruise. But he carried me before I knew he was hurt, he can surely do it again.

Me: well it's true.

Mvelo: you are such a big baby.

He picked me up and we walked to our room. He carefully placed me on the bed and stood with his arms folded across his chest.

Mvelo: don't get used to it.

Me: (laughing) what do you mean, you are my husband, you have to do it all the time.

He shook his head and started undoing the buttons of his shirt. It swiftly came off and exposed his bare chest. The bruises were not pleasing to look at.

Me: you really hurt yourself.

Mvelo: yeah, but that's not what I'm showing you.

I stood up and walked towards him. I ran my hands on his torso but as I was tracing them, my fingers stopped on the inked writing on the left. "21-07-Christine" "12-01-Paloma" "I love you eternally."

Me: what!

It was our wedding date and Paloma's birthday, and my Vows. It's something we always said to each other, because our love is eternal. I love this tattoo, it was beautiful.

Mvelo: all the people that I love close to my heart.

It was his first tattoo, it was surprising that someone like him never had one. I kissed it before I went up and kissed his lips.

Me: I love it.

Mvelo: and I love you.

Me: Eternally?

Mvelo: forever my love.

Our hands intertwined and we kissed. His hands started working on my corset, not breaking our kiss, I could feel my dress loosening up, this man has skills. He rolled down my straps and my dress fell to the ground, leaving me exposed. He carried me to the bed and helped me removed my sneakers.

Mvelo: you can take a girl out of the township but you can't take the township out of the girl.

He laughed and I playfully shoved him off. He removed my bra and, then my underwear, leaving me bare.

Mvelo: thank you.

That came from the depth of his heart, the look in his eyes told me all his words couldn't. He dimmed the lights in the room and it set a romantic scene, he also stripped naked and got in next to me. The feel of his warm skin on mine made my heart beat faster. He kissed me slowly and laid me down. He lifted my leg up and I felt him at my entrance. No foreplay?

Me: ba-

Mvelo: shh.

His hands were running down my arm and it made me shiver. He placed my leg on his shoulder and he entered me slowly. I gasped, he wasn't filling me up yet. He started flexing his hip and I screamed. He chuckled and slowly pulled out. Now I was really wet.

Me: baby, please.

I ran my hands on his torso and pulled him in. I dug my nails into his butt and he groaned. How sexy. He entered me again, this time, I felt it in my core. It took everything in me not to lose my shit right there and then.

Mvelo: you are so warm.

He started grinding slowly and I curled my toes, screaming his name at the pleasure. I love this man so much.

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I was so happy I woke up before him, he always wakes up before me. It fills me up and gives me pleasure just sitting here watching him sleep, in his purest form, where he is not being annoying or lying to me. He is a beautiful man. His brown skin, his brown lips, that are close to turning into a blackish color because of all the weed he continues to smoke on a daily, the cleanliness of his haircut, how neat he is, how he takes care of himself. His small ears, no he's gorgeous. I'm sure I look ridiculous next to him.

Mvelo: you've been staring at me for over an hour now, I've been thinking you are going to stop.

Am I ever going to wake up before him?

Me: do you even sleep? I'm starting to doubt it.

He sat up and gave me a neck kiss before kissing my lips softly.

Mvelo: I'm human, of course I sleep. I just don't sleep later than 06:00, my body has gotten used to it.

Me: well at least I got to stare at you while you sleep like you always do.

Mvelo: I let you...

He didn't finish his sentence because his phone rang.

Mvelo: baba.

He cleared his throat before standing up and walking out to the balcony. It was clear that he was speaking to Bab' Msizi. I got out of bed and got ready. I made the bed and I started sorting out our suitcases. We weren't going to be coming back here because we were going to stay at Gogo's house for the next two weeks for my Makoti period. I woke up this early because I had a goodnight's rest because we made slow, sweet love and then we slept, it was magical. As I was thinking about that, I felt his arms snake around my waist.

Mvelo: what are you thinking about?

Me: you, and how happy you make me.

He smiled and kissed my cheek.

Mvelo: let's hit the shower.

Me: I was thinking more of a bubble bath.

Mvelo: even better.

He turned me around and kissed me one more time. I prepared our bathing things then we went and had a playful bubble bath. I felt like a teenager all over again. When we came out the bath, we got dressed in some comfortable clothes and we drove to the where my family and Bridesmaids were booked in and Mvelo dropped me there so we could get ready for the wedding. Things were done a little different in this family. It was going to be a big wedding and all the little details mattered. Everyone was up and running when I arrived at the guest house, which means I only had to sit and wait for them so we could go. The girls were hungover, which meant they came back and continued to drink. Dad came in and asked us to wrap up because if we were late, the Mfusi's would make us pay. Everything was ready so we got in our cars and we were off. They had to strip me naked and cover me with a

blanket so when I got there, they could dress me up as their Makoti. They were singing and when we got to the gate, it was our turn to stand in the sun and call out to them.

Uncle: Mfusi! Mthiyane! Linda! Vundisa! Sikhulekile Kuni bo Madanyana. Sivuleleleni boMthiyane abahle.

I was shivering under the blanket. It was cold and I wasn't dressed. I saw the gate opening and ululations from behind me erupted. My girls were carrying my kist and the idea of me having one scared the shit out of me. I honestly didn't want to have one for my wedding, I don't want to feel like I'm being sent out of my home and I'm not allowed back, that's the vibe I'm getting from this whole shenanigan. What if I do want to come home one day? But I love Mvelo too much to leave him. We were escorted to Esgcawini and I was made to sit on my kist. I couldn't see anything because of the blanket but I heard Bab' Msizi speaking.

Bab' Msizi: siyanamukela bakwaZondo, siyabonga ngokusilethela imbali enhle kangaka. Sesticela ukuba nisivumele ukuthi simuthathe, simuphe igama lakwaMfusi, simufake emagcekeni ethu, simazise kwabadala.

Ululations went on and I stood up from the kist that was a symbol that I would die in this family. My following them into Mummy's hut to be smeared with bile and inhaling the incense meant that I was fully in. I was sitting on the floor still covered in the blanket. The smoke in the room, the smell of incense was so calming. It felt like all my worries faded in that exact moment, I've never felt like this before.

Bab'Msizi: boMfusi, Mthiyane, Vundisa, ngibiza wena Kennedy Mfusi, yimi indodana yakho uMsiziwamafusi Mfusi. Ngilapha nomzukulu wakho wesithathu uMvelwenhle Mfusi, usethathe unkosikazi. Nayi intokazi yakwa Zondo, uNtombikayise, uChristine. Simupha igama elithi uNtombiyelanga, ngoba uyaqhakaza, ukhanya njengelanga lasehlobo.

I felt Mvelo's hand tighten around mine, I knew it was his hand, I know my man's hand. I loved my new name.

Bab'Msizi: nimamukele badala, useyilunga lalomndeni, indodakazi yalapha ekhaya, umakoti wokuqala kubazukulu.

He helped me up and still covered with the huge ass blanket, I was led out the roundavel. My bridesmaids were waking besides me and my in-laws were also there. We were taken to another house and that's where I was to get dressed. I wore isidwaba, like a real makoti. My white beaded crown was put on my head by Ma, since she was dressing me.

Zuzile: umfazi wakwaMfusi uyazihlonipha sisi, aphinde ahloniphe abasemzini nomyeni wakhe. Sikunikeza lesisicholo njengophawu elikukhumbuzayo ukuthi awungeni emagcekeni ungathwele. Usungumama manje.

I nodded. The beads around my head and on my wrists and ankles were absolutely beautiful. My whole outfit was perfect, I felt like a real Zulu bride.

Andisiwe: njengomama, kukhona izinto ongeke usazenza. Uyawuhlonipha umuzi wababntu basekhweni lakho, awugqoki noma yini, awuwavezi futhi namahlombe. Njengoba sikumbathisa nje, fanele kuhlale kunje.

They continued to give me advice as they were dressing me. Then when we were done, they led me out, with my bridesmaids behind me. I was paired with my husband and we walked all around the yard, they put me into every room and place in the yard. After that, we went to the open veld and we had our traditional ceremony.

Chief: ngumsebenzi wami ukuthi ngimubuze uMaZondo, uNtombikayise ukuthi akekho yini okuphoqile ukuthi ugane nangu uMfusi?

Me: cha, akekho.

Ululations went off. I was officially a Mfusi Wife, nothing was ever going to separate Mvelo and I. Our families were now one and I was part of his ancestors, a part of him. To seal the deal, my family gave his family gifts and from there, it was a wedding party.

Mvelo

Our day was a success. It went extremely well, my bride looked beautiful and I loved her very much. I was sitting with Paloma on my lap, she was playing with my plate that was in front of her. Christine was chatting up a storm with one of the guests. I didn't know who they are, I'm sure she also doesn't, but she's being polite.

Me: Paloma, stop it.

She was messing her dress so I picked her up. I stood up and I saw my Aunt Lihle. She came and gave us a big hug.

Me: you came?

Lihle: I wouldn't miss it for the world! You've grown so much, look at you.

She had a strong British accent. I couldn't believe she was here, I hadn't seen her in over 13 years. She hadn't changed in one bit.

Lihle: look at this little one, she looks beautiful, just like her mommy.

She pinched Paloma's cheeks, and she giggled in my arms. Chris stood up from her seat and came towards me. She greeted.

Chris: hello mah.

Lihle: mah? Oh no, don't you dare!

She said that laughing, throwing her head back.

Me: Chris this is my lovely aunt, Lihle. She's my moms younger sister, Muzi's older sister.

Chris: its lovely to meet you aunt Lihle.

Lihle: it is a pleasure babe. I have been hearing wonderful things about you Christine. My brother doesn't shut about you and how much you love his brother.

She looked down and smiled subtly.

Lihle: I want you guys to stay together always. Treat each other well please.

Us: yes, we will.

Lihle: and this little baba! Come here.

She carried Paloma and she laughed. They eventually walked away from us and Christine looked at me with sadness on her face.

Me: I feel like I haven't done my job if you are sulking on our wedding day, what's wrong fluff?

Chris: I feel bad for the way I've been treating Muzikayise. I've been mean to him all this time but he's always saying nice things about me and to me.

I held her shoulders and kissed her forehead. Her body was cold and I wanted to warm her up.

Me: whatever it is that you have against Muzi, you will deal with on another day my love. Today I want you to be happy, okay? It's our day today.

Chris: but I've been such a bitch.

Me: no, you were protecting your sister, you did something any older sister would do. We both know what Muzi is like. But if you feel strongly about it, then you will apologize to him, okay?

Chris: okay.

I gave her a kiss on the lips this time and we slowly moved to the music that was playing. Sondela, by Ringo. Who ever was responsible for putting together the Playlist for today, really did a stellar job, I don't want to lie. I fell in love all over again.

•••

After all was done, the guests had cleared and we stayed behind as a family, a meeting was held.

Bab'Msizi: Makoti, as per Mfusi tradition, you have to serve your wisely duties for a period of 2 months, but because of work constraints, you will only be able to do it for 2 weeks. As this is the main home, you will stay here with Ma'Mfusi and Mummy. You and your husband's room has been fixed and you are starting tomorrow. Your mother's will be here to guide you and help you. Bakuyalile, okwakho ukuthi uwazi imigomo yokuba umakoti kwaMfusi. But you aren't just a wife, you are a daughter, to all of us.

She was sitting on a mat looking all beautiful. I'm glad we didn't have to go to Ulundi like my mom did when she got married. I remember the drama that came with it, I wouldn't want that for Christine, she's too precious to be sent to go be a slave in the Bundus.

Bab'Msizi: from the family Mvelwenhle, congratulations son, everyone in here is proud of the man that you have become and we wish you two nothing but happiness.

Dad: there is no such thing as divorce in this family. We walked you into every room in every house, even the alter, the ancestors know you Ntombiyelanga, you are part of this family.

She nodded lowly. Nothing could match the happiness I was feeling at this moment.

Narrated

Everyone was running around, no one was paying attention to the children, especially the older ones. This was the perfect opportunity for them to fool around, it was the only time that they didn't have their parents in their faces all the time. Ntsakisi was locked up in the boys room for the bulk of the late afternoon. No one was going to

come looking for him, the parents were outside, dancing, having a fun time, celebrating their sons wedding. His siblings, well, they were also preoccupied with their own tasks. The last time they had a big function at the Mfusi's before Mvelo's wedding was Zuzile and Kabelo's anniversary wedding, and that also ended in tears. It was the event that left Mvelo in a wheelchair, paralyzed for a whole year and a half. He paid for his father's sins and got the bullet that was not meant for him, but was meant for his mother, because of Kabelo. That's why it meant so much to this family to see Mvelo this happy, being paralyzed at 16 and losing the woman you love at 19 is not easy and the fact that he found love again shows that there is a God. But Ntsakisi was also a boy in the Mfusi family who was dealing with his own demons and skeletons. He was dealing with a feeling that was foreign to him. The thin walls of this home couldn't allow him to scream as he desired as he reached his climax. His hand in his pants, stroking himself as he looked at the picture of a man he never prolonged feeling this way about. His semen covered his hand and he sighed in relief before raising his eyes to look at himself in the mirror. He felt dirty instantly and the anger rose from the pit of his stomach as he quickly drew his hands from his pants and grabbed a towel and wiped himself.

Ntsakisi: Ntsakisi what are you doing.

He whispered those words to himself and deleted the picture of the man. It was agonizing, he felt sad but his conscience couldn't let him keep it on his cellphone, otherwise, it would cause him to do this again, and that is a disgrace; to both himself and his family. If his father's were to ever find out, they would kill him, literally. He was still caught up in his bubble when he door burst open and Mvelwenhle walked in. Ntsakisi quickly grabbed the towel with semen of the bed and put it behind him. He dropped his phone on the bed.

Mvelo: bafo, Bab'Vusi is calling us. Come.

Ntsakisi: I'll be there...I'm coming.

If it wasn't for his happiness at that very moment, Mvelo would've noticed that something was fishy about his brother, but he was blinded by his love for his newly wedded wife. Ntsakisi got away scot free.

...

After the meeting was adjourned, the boys of the family were called for their own meeting by Vusi. Ntsakisi was the last one to walk in the study where all his brothers were sitting. He was curious about what this was about. The last time they were called to sit like this was when his grandfather was still alive and that was when they would sit and listen to stories about their family history. Today is Mvelos wedding night, what is this for? Nkosenhle, Nkosenye and Sanele were not here, so clearly, it was serious business. Mvelo sat cross-legged on the chair, with a glass of whiskey with ice inside, his wedding ring shining. He looked like a photocopy of Kabelo.

Vusi: Ntsakisi sit.

He took a seat next to Melisizwe who was looking just as confused as everyone else in the room.

Vusi: I know, Mvelo you just got married and it is your happy day but business calls and right now, I need to make a very important decision and I want you boys to be involved.

A relieved Melisizwe sits back, heaving a low sigh. At least he's not in trouble.

Vusi: you do know that I have been in charge of the taxi business and although it brings in a lot of income for this family, my love for it has slowly depreciated. I want to sell it; sell all the taxis and open another business, but you are the future of this family and you will be in charge of overseeing that everything is taken care of; Mvelo is already taken one position of power. This is your legacy and I wanted to find out from you boys that do you agree that I should sell it or must I keep it.

The boys exchanged looks. Vusi was testing them, it was a test of intelligence.

Melisizwe: baba I don't think you should sell it. I mean you have been overseeing it but you have someone who does everything for you.

Vusi: yes I do, but I want a business that I'll be hands in on.

Andile: then you can start your own. Do something that you love and not Taxis.

Vusi: and if I stop overseeing them, who will?

Andile: I will.

He was shocked to see his sons interacting. Ntsakisi was just quiet.

Vusi: and what about your job at Mthiyane Construction?

Andile: I can do both.

Andile worked as an accountant at the company, probably a major role.

Vusi: I'm here to remind you as well that your grandfather left you money for a reason, not for you to just live off of it. Do something with that money. Mvelwenhle, Andile, set an example for your brothers. Tell me, do you have any future plans.

He looked at Mvelo.

Mvelo: I've already started investing in property around the world. I'm planning on branching out, but I haven't put much thought into it. After this wedding spell wears off, I'll sit down with my wife and we will discuss business.

Even as he mentioned Chris, his whole face lit up, like a little child. That put a smile on Vusi's face. Ntsakisi was still quiet.

Vusi: NJ you are quiet. What is your plan?

Ntsakisi: I don't have one baba. I'm only 15.

Vusi's eyes widened I'm shock but he quickly recovered and breathed in. Moving on swiftly. Ntsakisi was not as happy about being here. He had bigger things to deal with, not future plans.

Chapter 44

"A good woman will be a man's peace, and a good man will be a woman's protection."

Christine

My family was gone, my bridesmaids, everyone who I came with was gone. I was left with people who I was to consider my family for the rest of my life. I don't want to lie, this was shit scary, having to adjust to being with people who you aren't familiar with, and call them your family, it's hard. I just finished taking a shower and I was moisturizing. Mvelo was still at the boys meeting with Bab'Vusi. After I finished putting on my pajamas and fluffy gown, there was a knock on the door. I stood up and went to open and I found Ma'mdala standing there with a smile on her face.

Me: hi mah.

Andisiwe: is your husband in yet?

Me: no, not yet.

Andisiwe: okay, then we can talk for a bit.

I opened the door for her a bit wider and she walked in. She sat in the chair next to the bed and I sat on the edge of it.

Andisiwe: did you enjoy your day? You looked absolutely beautiful.

Me: I did mah, thank you. I'm just glad it all went well, now I can concentrate on my work and my family.

Andisiwe: I'm glad you had fun. I'm pretty sure you are sick and tired of hearing people advice you on marriage so I'm not here to do that.

I chuckled and looked down. She was right, I was sick and tired.

Andisiwe: Mvelo is just as much my son as he is Lethukuthula's son. In this family, we are one, my child is everyone's child and I have the right over everyone's child like they do. We are equal. I raised Mvelo, and he was a happy boy, he grew up with a lot of love to give, especially the women in his family. He has always been a gentleman. But life hasn't been easy on him. He has endured a lot, especially in his teen years. He saw and experienced things no child should experience therefore I am here to say please be easy on him.

I kept quiet and continued to look down.

Andisiwe: I don't doubt for a moment that you are more than capable of taking care of him, but as his mother, as someone who loves him very dearly, I feel like I have to protect him. You have brought our son joy in his life, something that had been missing and it feels good to see him like this, full of life, with a smile that reaches his eyes. He's a good boy, but he has his flaws and I'm not saying excuse his every wrong but can you please just go easy on him. He will fumble, its what a man does, they make mistakes but whatever you do my love, please, never leave him. It would be the end of him.

Sitting here listening to this woman go on about Mvelwenhle like this brings me tears. I have never in my life, met someone who is loved like Mvelo is. The amount of love he is given is a reflection of the love that he gives. It is unconditional, infinite.

Andisiwe: can you do that for me Christine?

Me: I will mah.

She have me a hug and kissed my cheek.

Andisiwe: welcome to the family my love.

The door opened and Mvelo walked in and stopped on his tracks. He had a smile on his face.

Andisiwe: good, you are back, I was just leaving.

He kissed her cheek before smiling at her.

Mvelo: goodnight mah.

Andisiwe: good night guys. I'll see you in the morning Ntombiyelanga.

Me: goodnight mah.

She walked out and I walked to my husband and gave him a tight hug. I just wanted to be in his arms in that moment and never let go.

Mvelo: are you okay my love, what was Ma'Mdala saying?

Me: no, everything is fine, we were just having a girl talk.

He nodded before I walked away from so I could prepare his clothes for his shower.

Mvelo: no, leave that, I'll do it myself.

Me: no, I will do it.

He gave me a tired smile before sitting on the chair that Ma'Mdala was sitting on. I fixed his pajamas and toiletries and all that was left was for him to go and take a bath.

Mvelo: come sit here Fluff.

He patted his lap and I walked over to him, hooking my arm around his neck and giving him a kiss on the lips. He untied the belt to my gown and slowly took it off.

Mvelo: so many layers, you can't sleep like this.

Me: its cold baby.

He laughed and threw the gown on the bed before running his hands on the side of my body.

Mvelo: I'm not trying to ruin our wedding night...

I interjected.

Me: then don't.

Mvelo: wait, shh.

He placed a finger on my lips. Nothing good is going to come from this.

Mvelo: I don't want to start our marriage on secrets and lies.

I didn't understand what he meant by that but I nodded and looked down at his shoes.

Mvelo: who is Tshego?

My heart got stuck in my throat immediately and I tried to stand up from his lap but he held me down and held me in place.

Me: Mvelo let me go.

Mvelo: no Christine, we are talking about this now, I don't want to have any lies and secrets in this marriage. There are so many people who are already expecting this marriage to fail and I want to prove them wrong. I want to prove to them that our love is real and the only way we can do that is to work on ourselves and be good to each other. The only way we can be true to each other is by having a healthy foundation.

Me: I'm not ready to talk about Tshego fatso.

Mvelo: we've been together for over 3 years Chris, it has never dawned on you to tell me about him?

I wiped my tears and sniffed. He wasn't budging, he wanted to hear the truth and it was now or never.

Mvelo

She was hesitant. She kept sighing but I couldn't see her face so I couldn't read her expression.

Me: Christine I'm not saying this to pick a fight with you, that's not my intention, we aren't fighting, I just want you to be honest and tell me who this man is.

Chris: fine! What do you want to know?

Me: everything.

She took a deep breath in, put her hands to her face and I assumed she wiped what I would think is tears, before she turned to look at me. I didn't like seeing her cry, but I practically killed that man for her; I deserve to know why I did it and who he is.

Chris: Tshegofatso is my ex-boyfriend.

She sighs heavily again and her hands are shaking. I keep a straight face throughout.

Chris: he was the first man that hurt me. Even my father, the one that raised me, had never ever laid a hand on me, but he did. He was my first love.

She turned her whole body and looked at me dead in the eyes. They were bloodshot red and tears were streaming down her chubby cheeks. I felt the same rage I felt that night surface from the pit of my stomach when I looked at her red swollen eyes. She continued, her breathing hitching.

Chris: I was only 17 Mvelo, 17 and he turned me into a wife, against my own will. He tortured me both physically and emotionally. He fucking forced himself on me

multiple times but you know what the saddest part about it is? It's that I loved him and the thought of leaving him hurt me more than the many times he would beat me, kick me, slap me, rape me or call me names.

Her eyes were dark, hollow looking, like her soul was dead, her spirit in general, destroyed.

Chris: Tshegofatso was my worst nightmare, and so talking about him takes me back to that dark place, a place I promised myself I would never ever visit ever again. I'm sorry if I was too afraid to go back there again.

She attempted to stand up from my lap but I pulled her back and she crashed into my arms, her knees wobbling, she fell into my embrace and her whole body weight fell into me. Her loud sobs filled the room and the stabbing in my heart persistently throbbed.

Me: Christine, I'm sorry. I know this means nothing to you but you don't deserve any of this. I'm so sorry my love.

I couldn't afford to cry in that moment but my love for her was too much; way too strong, stronger than any feeling I tried to ignore, overcoming every emotion I had ever felt my whole entire life. I loved this woman with every fiber of my being and the mere thought of her hurting drives me into a frenzy. I'm glad I killed that bastard, but death was a way too easy route for him. He deserved more than what he got.

...

I hated this with my whole heart. I had to stay up the whole night, enduring the pain of watching the woman I love suffer. I had to stay up and make sure that she was okay. She had two nightmares, and was tossing and turning throughout the night. I even had to strip her naked because she would wake up drenched in sweat as if it were a million degrees outside. I ended up having her sleep close to me, her head laid on my chest, with my arms wrapped around her. That's when she actually fell asleep and it made me happy that I gave her a sense of security, relief if you may. I, on the other hand, couldn't sleep a wink. I was too afraid to close my eyes because I wanted to make sure she was okay, so I stayed up until I saw the winter sun rising. She stirred and it didn't take long before she fluttered open her puffy eyes and gave me a tired smile.

Chris: what time is it?

Me: no good morning for your husband?

She giggled ever so beautifully and that was all I needed to see; to make me feel better. To see her beautiful smile and her giggles, it felt whimsical, like music to my ears. She gave me a soft morning kiss on the lips before looking at me, the smile not leaving her face, even for a second.

Chris: good morning husband.

Me: good morning wifey.

That giggle again. I feel like this is going to be my favorite part of this marriage; waking up next to her every morning. I couldn't wait to do this for the rest of my life with her.

Chris: what time is it?

Me: its almost 07:00.

Chris: hawu, why didn't you wake me?

She didn't even sit to wait for my response, she rolled out of bed and rushed to the bathroom. I didn't try to stop her, I knew it would be futile so I just rolled over, snuggled the pillow and dozed off immediately.

Christine

I know he stayed up the whole night making sure that I was okay, so I wasn't surprised when I found him knocked out when I came out of the shower. I was having nightmares and they were not giving me any peace, taking me back to that dark place, a place that always brought me trauma and PTSD. I remember that day that he almost raped me a few months ago, it still remains the freshest memory I have of him, amongst the many times he hurt me, that one stood out for me. I couldn't bring myself to telling him about it though, because I know it would kill him. It would ruin a lot of things between us because all of this happened while I was with him. The way he cried with me last night proved to me that we are in sync, and whatever I feel, he feels; same applies to me. After I finished getting dressed, I wrapped a doek around my head and shoulders and wore my sandals. I gently placed a kiss on his cheek and lips before walking out the room. The whole house was up and that scared me. It had just 07:00, why were they up so early? When I got to the kitchen, Ma'Mdala, Ma and Mamncane were preparing breakfast. They were halfway done actually and I felt very guilty. This was supposed to be my job.

Me: good morning.

Zuzile: hey Fluff.

I laughed a little and went to wash my hands in the sink.

Me: I'm so sorry I woke up late.

Ma'Mdala: it's okay, we all woke up late.

Me: how can I help?

Ma'Mdala: we've just finished making breakfast so you can just clean the living room and dining room before we serve breakfast.

I nodded and grabbed the broom and made my way to the dining room. I swept, did the dusting and helped set the table before going to the lounge. I found Gogo sitting watching the news, having a cup of tea.

Me: Good morning Gogo.

Gogo: Good morning Ntombiyelanga. How are you? Did you have a good night?

Me: I did Gogo, thank you. How about you?

Gogo: ngilale kahle mntanami. Come sit with me.

She patted the space next to her and I was conflicted. I didn't know whether to sit with her or kindly reject and continue to clean.

Gogo: don't look so shocked, come sit. You'll tidy up after breakfast.

I chuckled lowly before I went to sit next to her. She held my hands. Hers were soft and wrinkly, as if she had never done any act of manual labor in her youth days.

Gogo: I never really got to talk to you. I only met you once. I'm so glad Mvelo married you. Not only are you a beautiful girl but you come from a wonderful family and you are respectful and well taught.

I smiled and she smiled back. I loved this family so much already.

Gogo: I had a conversation with Nhlonipho and he is such a lovely man. He did a good job with you and I'm sure my husband would be proud of him. Did you know that your father used to work for him?

Me: no, I didn't.

Gogo: he did. He was young back then, had just finished high school and had you. The situation at home wasn't ideal for the both of you and he wanted to get you as far away from his family as possible. Kennedy had just bought this house, and was planning on opening a business this side, but moreover, he wanted us to live here. That's when they met.

This was all new information to me. I knew my father knew Mr Mfusi but I didn't know that it was this personal.

Gogo: that house in KwaMashu was the first thing he got himself after enduring suffering at his home, and after he started working, he was able to be stable enough to support the both of you.

Me: so why did he stop working for him?

Gogo: he didn't. Your father has shares in Mthiyane Construction, the one in Ramsgate.

What! Daddy never told me this. That is why he always spoke highly of Mr Mfusi.

Gogo: but Nhlonipho worked hard to buy those shares and that's why I say Kennedy would be proud of him. He would've been ecstatic to know that Mvelwenhle has chosen you to be his wife.

Small world we live in.

Gogo: thank you Ntombiyelanga. Umfana wethu ujabulile ngenxa yakho.

Me: nami uyangijabulisa gogo.

She pulled me a little closer and gave me a kiss on the head. After that, I cleared her tea set and took it to the kitchen.

Mamncane: Ma is done with tea?

Me: yes. Shes already sitting in the dining room waiting for breakfast.

They all laugh at her and then I prepare a bowl of water to wash hands. I go to the dining room and Mummy is also there. I greet and wash their hands before going back to the kitchen. I find Ma feeding Paloma who is sulking.

Me: Dove? What's wrong.

Ma turned and looked at me with a smile on her face. I walked towards them and Paloma opened her arms for me to take her.

Me: you have to finish eating first baby.

Paloma: mama is being mean. I don't want her to feed me.

Zuzile: ayy, I give up on this child. You take over.

She handed me the bowl and I laughed taking it and standing in front of Paloma who's face lit up when she realized I was the one to feed her.

Zuzile: where is Mvelwenhle? Is he not coming for breakfast?

Me: I don't think so. He was fast asleep when I left the room.

Zuzile: maybe he's tired.

I nodded in agreement then finished feeding Paloma.

...

Yah no, its only midday and I'm already dog tired. Kuyafukuzwa kulomuzi. I think it's because it's a full house, which means more people messing up the house and more dishes to wash. After breakfast, we sat down and opened our gifts, well some of them. There were too many for us to get through and plus, Mvelo wasn't there. I also slaughtered more chickens and I'm still not getting used to it. The yard was full of men who were here to finish the Zulu beer and the meat, so we also got that going for us. I also haven't seen any of the men in this family. I believe they all left even before I woke up. My husband only woke up after breakfast, ate, got dressed and left. I miss him just a little but I know I wouldn't be able to focus with him around.

Paloma: Chris!

There is another one who is distracting me. I had been trying to put her to sleep because she is angry at her mama.

Me: yes baby.

Paloma: I'm hungry.

I looked at her giving me her puppy eyes. I washed my hands before I picked her up. She is heavy but she expects everyone to carry her because her papa and daddy carry her all the time.

Me: what do you want to eat?

Paloma: chicken and mayo.

I love this child to bits and she is teaching me to be a mom, but I still need to learn how to navigate through this properly; thus motherhood thing, I mean. I made her the sandwich and sat with her while she ate I felt hands snaking around my waist and a kiss on my cheek. Paloma giggled.

Paloma: hey daddy.

Mvelo: hey Dove. Hey mommy.

I wasn't lying when I said I missed him. He picked up his daughter and spun her around, kissing her all over her face. Such a beautiful sight to behold.

Mvelo: ngilambile MaZondo. Please make us food.

Me: us?

Mvelo: yes, Andile, Muzi and I.

I cleared my throat and looked at him.

Me: where were you?

Mvelo: we were working I site. Baba forced us to go.

Me: and why is Muzi still here?

Mvelo: he didn't leave, he booked himself into a BNB for the night and came here this morning.

Me: ohh.

I still wanted to apologize to him for the way I reacted that night and for all the other times I treated him like shit. It was uncalled for and rude.

Me: there is chicken and dumpling, but it's still cooking. Do you want that?

When I actually turned around, I realized that he was in blue overalls, looking like a sexy mess.

Mvelo: we will wait for the dumplings.

Me: okay.

He put Paloma back on the counter and kissed my lips briefly before he walked out.

Paloma: can I go play now?

Me: yes baby, you can go.

She was out the door as soon as I helped her down. I made juice for the guys and I went outside where they were sitting to serve them.

Me: sanibona.

Andile: sawbona Koti, wamuhle.

A charmer as always. I looked down and laughed. Muzi was quiet though, he had a small smile on his face but he was quiet.

Me: your dumplings are almost ready.

Andile: you make sure of that, we have to rush back to work otherwise uBaba is going to kill us.

I nodded, my eyes glued to the one who had not said even a single hello since I walked up to them. I walked away from them and went back to the kitchen. I don't know when I was going to apologize, but I wanted to do it. The food was ready so I started dishing up. I startled when I felt a presence behind me. I turned around and it was Muzi.

Muzi: I'm sorry if I scared you.

He was holding the tray with the huge and empty glasses. They finished all the juice I made.

Me: its okay.

I cleared my throat and took the tray from him, heading to the sink to plop them there.

Muzi: Christine I would like to apologize to you and Naomi. I'm sorry for stringing your sister along and I understand why you reacted the way you did, because you know the kind of person I am.

Me: I should be apologizing, not you. That is no way to treat someone and it was wrong of me to do. I'm sorry Muzi.

Muzi: thank you. And please, just apologize to Naomi for me. She is a good girl, but I'm a messed up guy, I don't deserve her.

In that moment I felt for him more than anything. They always say behind every action is a past. He definitely had a past.

Me: I think you have to do that. I shouldn't have inserted myself like that.

He nodded and silence passed between the two of us. I finished dishing up and food and he offered to take it to them for me. I thanked him and he walked out.

Paloma and I were sitting in the room and I was doing her hair. Sanele was sleeping with his parents tonight and she didn't want to sleep alone so she asked me to sleep with her. Everyone had retired to bed, clocking in early because of the long day that was had and the long day ahead. The whole family was going back to their lives and Mvelo and I would remain behind. I didn't have a problem with staying behind anymore, after that conversation with gogo, I felt okay. Mvelo and his brothers went out for a night cap, and yes, he called me and told me where he is and that he would be back by 22:00 latest.

Paloma: Chris are you my mommy?

That question caught me off guard and I had no flippen clue how to answer that.

Me: why do you ask baby?

Paloma: everyone has a mommy but I only have a daddy. Uthandile said that you are my mommy because you kiss my daddy and mommies and daddies kiss.

I laughed a little, this was the cutest thing I have ever heard, but I still didn't have an answer for her, I wish Mvelo were here to help me.

Me: yes my love, I am. I am your mommy and you are my baby and I love you so much.

I was being honest, I loved Paloma very much and if she wanted me to be her mommy, I would rise to the occasion.

Paloma: can I call you mommy?

Me: definitely.

She gave me a tight squeeze and I kissed her forehead. As we were hugging, Mvelo walked into the room. He was intoxicated, not drunk but you could see he was drinking, still wearing overalls.

Paloma: Daddy! Chris said she is my mommy! Can I call her mommy?

She was already running to jump into his arms. He opened them up for her and he gave me an inquiring look but with a smile on his face. I mouthed yes to him and he looked at his daughter before whispering something into her little ear. Whatever it is that he said, made her really happy because she started jumping up and down with joy. That warmed up my heart.

Mvelo

They always told me that children are the best thing any human being could ever wish for, and being a parent is an amazing feeling. I have finally experienced that full force. My two favorite people in the while wide world love each other so much and that's all a man wants, is for his girls to get along. I knew this day would come, where Paloma would ask about Isa, but I didn't think it would be this soon. Nonetheless, she doesn't know her, she asked about her mommy. I obviously wasn't there when this happened and I'm glad she asked Chris, not me, because I wouldn't have known how to handle it. The look of joy and excitement I saw on her little face, the glimmer in her little blue eyes when she stood there waiting for me to answer her, its all I needed to see to feel more than sure about what Chris and I have. All doubt that could've been lingering is now gone. I went to shower and when I walked back to the room, she was already fast asleep, and Christine was folding my dirty clothes.

Me: I could've done that myself you know.

I'm not getting used to this. This everything being done for me, it's unusual.

Chris: I was just clearing up, don't stress.

With the towel still wrapped around my body, I went towards her and wrapped my arms around her waist, hers around my neck. Our eyes met and she smiled.

Me: I love you.

Chris: I love you too.

The sincerity I hear in her voice every time she says those words to me are enough to keep me breathing for the rest of my life. She gave me my toiletries and sat and watched me get dressed.

Me: is Dove sleeping with us?

Chris: yes, she was angry that Sanele left her to go sleep with his parents.

She said that smiling. Paloma and Sanele fight all the time, I wonder what happened this time.

Me: sometimes I worry that maybe she feels out of place, like where does she go when Sanele wants his parents. We are never around.

Her face changed, she turned and looked at her sleeping face briefly before she focused on me again.

Chris: Ma is not like that.

Me: yeah, I know, but there is a difference between her grandparents and her parents. I don't know.

Chris: I understand what you are saying and I know why you would think like that, but I think her staying with your parents is the best bet for now.

I loved how easy it was for us to have these deep conversations.

Chris: Paloma came at a time where you weren't emotionally fit and that's why your parents took her, but you still need to find your feet, so do I. We still need to figure out a lot of things after this and we just aren't ready to take care of her the way your parents do.

She has a valid point, I just hope we will be able to take her soon, my daughter also deserves to be raised by both parents.

Me: thank you for letting her into your life.

Chris: don't thank me. I love this child like my own and although I'll never have my own, she is mine and I will do all I can to be the best mother I can be.

Me: and from now on, I want to be the best father to her, and an even better husband for you.

I engulfed her in a hug and kissed her forehead. Yeses I love her so much.

Christine

We were sitting in bed, he was stroking Paloma's silky hair. I tried braiding it but it was too silky, they were all becoming undone. Even my hair isn't this silky, she's borderline white, more than I am. We are just sitting and talking, there is no love making for the next two weeks, I personally won't allow it. I've had sex in this house before and I won't do it even again, the walls are basically non-existent.

Me: I tried braiding her hair but its too silky.

Mvelo: (chuckling) mom called me once and I think it was when she was pregnant with Sanele, she was angry that she couldn't do her hair the way she used to do with Helo.

I laughed.

Mvelo: she was like "yazi Mvelo, lelikhaladi lakho. I will cut all this hair because I don't have time to maintain an afro." I have never protested like that my whole life. Imagine my baby girl with no hair.

He shook his head and joined me in laughing.

Me: even my hair is not this silky and I'm half white.

Mvelo: Isabelle's hair was also like this. Now that you mention it, this child looks nothing like me.

Just as I thought it was getting awkward, he says something as stupid as this.

Me: oh come on! She's like a lighter version of you with blue eyes.

Mvelo: yeah right.

Me: she has your button nose, and the shape of your lazy eyes. She also has your little ears and unfortunately, your big ass head.

He rolled his eyes and that killed me even more.

Me: even if you wanted to deny paternity, you wouldn't get away with it. Even a blind man can see that she is your daughter.

He shook his head and looked down. Was he blushing?

Mvelo: you know I used to sit and wonder what it would be like if Isa was here...

Used to?

Mvelo: I haven't thought about that in a long time. Not once in the three years that we have been together has it ever crossed my mind.

Me: but you love her.

Mvelo: yes, I did love her. I loved her in her own way, but I have never felt like this before, like the way you make me feel.

Now it was my turn to blush.

Mvelo: Isa died angry at me, she didn't even want to look at me, the sight of me repulsed her and I didn't blame her, I was wrong.

I wonder what he did, but I'm not going to ask, I'm just going to sit here and listen to him. I think this is where he opens up to me.

Mvelo: I think all the hurt I was feeling was more guilt than it was hurt because if she wasn't angry at me, I would've had something less to feel guilty about. But then I wonder if I would've felt hurt like I did if I wasn't guilty.

Me: you loved her, hurting was inevitable.

Mvelo: I don't know, I really doubt that I loved her. If this is what it feels like to love someone then I have never been in love, even Ntswaki never stood a chance.

Ntswaki?? Isn't she Ontla's cousin?

Mvelo: we never dated.

He's reading my mind now.

Mvelo: I met her at Isabelle's funeral, apparently they were good friends. What I didn't know then was that they were plotting to kill Paloma before I found out Isa was pregnant and she was the one who prevailed.

Me: and how do you know that?

Mvelo: Lwandile told me everything. I felt like a fool Christine, you have no idea. I couldn't do anything about it, Isa was dead. The same child she wanted to kill, killed her.

He was still stroking Paloma' hair. His expression and his words were not linking up. He didn't wear hate on his face like his statement could suggest he should. He really is over it.

Mvelo: I thought Ntswaki was helping me deal with Isa's death but all she did was turn me into this vile person. Even so that every time anyone mentioned her name or anything that has to do with her, I would get angry.

That explains why he was so hostile at the wedding. I haven't seen that Mvelwenhle in a long time. That Mvelwenhle died in that studio along with all the other things inside of it. He hasn't been in there for years. He still paints though.

Mvelo: she played with my emotions and now that I look at it, it really wasn't love. I was fooled into thinking it was, but it wasn't. Thank goodness she chose Dumisani over me. I would have never met you. I'd probably be the one with a severe concussion and divorce papers if she didn't.

He's right. I think back to our first time having sex, oh it was terrible compared to what we have now. He was detached person.

Mvelo: all those times I hurt you and put you through. Those thoughts haunt me sometimes and I think maybe you will crucify me for them one day.

Me: I know that the person you were then and the person you are now are two different people. That Mvelwenhle who was hollow and empty died a long time ago, he's never coming back. Yes you made mistakes but they don't define you.

I can't believe I've been with him for 4 years now. It's crazy.

Me: I will never crucify you for your past mistakes. I know better than to do that. Everyone has a past, ours is to learn to forgive and forget our mistakes so we can move on from them. The past should never hinder us from moving forth.

He nodded and looked up at me. I was leaning on the headboard of the bed and he was resting on his elbow, still playing with his daughters hair. I should probably start referring to her as my daughter as well.

Mvelo: you know I'm thankful for everything that I have today, I almost didn't live to see my 18th birthday.

I breathed in at the sudden stab that just plunged through my heart. What does he mean.

Mvelo: I was paralyzed for a year and a half.

How come I never knew about this.

Mvelo: you see that scar on my back that you always trace your finger on every time we make love, it's the reminder of how I almost lost my life.

I looked down at my hands feeling like all my floodgates would just open. I don't know why, it happened a long time ago.

Mvelo: I was shot at my parents anniversary wedding when I was 16. I saw that man, I still remember his face. He was aiming for my mother and I jumped in to save her.

Talk about "I'd take a bullet for you," type of love.

Mvelo: my father didn't hesitate to shoot him between the eyes. He died on the spot.

I wonder how he remembers that, wasn't he also shot and wounded. He had a cold, dead look on his face. I have never see him like this.

Mvelo: that was the hardest year of my life Chris.

That's the thing, I don't feel sorry for him, because he doesn't feel sorry for himself. I just sympathize with that 16 year old boy who missed out on so much. I was still living my carefree life, before Tshegofatso, when life was still simple.

Mvelo: I hated my life and I tired to kill myself more than once.

That stabbing pain in my heart again.

Mvelo: I tried to drown myself in the bathtub whenever mom would leave me alone, I tried it once and after that, they monitored me every time I was around water. I didn't give up though, I overdosed on medicine and tried cutting myself. All of these attempts did not work, now I know that I was not meant to die just yet.

He gave me a smile but my heart was hurting. The mere thought of him being dead pains my heart, how much more the reality. I never want to find out. I don't know if I should be glad he is telling me all of this of be freaked out by how much he's opening up.

Mvelo: God wouldn't let me take my life before he put you in it. And damn he had to take so long to do it.

I giggled and looked at him. He was playing with his wedding band. It looked good on him, it made sense to look at.

Mvelo: I'm someone's husband.

I think the reality of being married and having to be with one person for the rest of your life is finally kicking in and I think this is his way of processing it.

Me: you're my husband.

He gave me his best smile before moving over, squashing Paloma in the process and laying his big head on my thigh. I brushed it gently and gave him a head kiss. My big baby.

Paloma: Daddy.

Great, he woke her up! Imagine three people sleeping on a double bed, I never thought I would say this but I miss my house.

Mvelo: sorry princess.

He picked her up and placed her on my lap where she laid her head on my bosom and fell back asleep. I wonder how I'm going to sleep with two people on top of me.

•••

I set the alarm to wake me up at 05:00 and I'm glad it didn't wake Mvelo and Paloma in the process. I wasn't going to wake her up just as yet, I'll wake her when I've finished cleaning and making breakfast. I'm glad I'm the first one up, I can do everything quickly and hope they don't wake up. I get dressed as quickly and quietly as possible and make my way to the kitchen. As I'm walking down the passage, I can hear voices in the dining room. It was too late for me to turn around, they had already seen me.

Bab' Msizi: hawu, Ntombiyelanga.

I greeted all three of them and then I excused myself. They were having breakfast! At 05:30 in the morning! I spoke too soon! The kitchen looks like a pigsty, didn't I clean last night before I went to sleep!?

Bab'Msizi: I've learnt to love her bafo.

No, I wasn't eavesdropping, but the kitchen and the dining room are almost connected, its not hard to hear what's going on in the next room from here. And they aren't exactly whispering.

Bab'Vusi: what are you planning on doing.

Bab'Msizi: she's here to stay. She makes me happy and as long as she gives me that happiness then I will stay with her.

Kabelo: and what about...

Okay so I know this is not about Ma'Mdala. I feel guilty but I have to be in this kitchen and clear up because they made a mess.

Bab'Msizi: she's my wife and the mother of my children...

Bab'Vusi: and so is Nozipho.

Bab'Msizi: I want to make her my second wife.

I stopped wiping the counters and took a second to process everything I just heard.

Andisiwe: Ntombiyelanga, you're up already?

My heart was stuck in my throat. All conversations seized in the dining as soon as she entered the kitchen.

Me: good morning Ma.

Andisiwe: how are you?

Me: I'm good Ma, you?

Andisiwe: good. What happened here?

The silence in the dining room was deafening. Now I was faced with a dilemma. Clearly, all these men didn't sleep here at home, that's why they are having breakfast in the main house and not in their own. Do I cover for them? They didn't ask me to. I can't cover for them if they didn't ask, but I'm sure as hell their wives don't know where they were.

Andisiwe: Langa?

Me: uhhm, Baba was making breakfast.

Wrong answer, she's not happy.

Andisiwe: which one? There's three of them.

Before I could answer, Bab'Msizi walked in and freed me from my misery, but I couldn't even look at him because of what I had just heard.

Bab'Msizi: we all made breakfast.

Come to think of it, I've never seen them being affectionate. Never!

Bab'Msizi: sorry we made such a big mess in your kitchen Ntombiyelanga.

He's apologizing to me!? I feel lucky. The intense look on Ma'Mdala's face told me it was time to leave them and go do something else, so I excused them as quick as I could, taking the broom along with me. I went outside and started sweeping the yard. I have never in my life done this, even at home, but the tension in that house is too much, I'd rather do this. By the time I'm done, my ankles feel ashy and the sun is already starting to seep through the clouds. I go back inside and the house is clear of people so I start clearing up the kitchen and make porridge. When I'm done, I clean the lounge, dining room and bathroom before I make my way back to the kitchen to officially start on breakfast. These people insist on having a full breakfast every morning. So I make everything, from eggs to bacon, the works.

Zuzile: hawu! You're up?

Why is everyone surprised that I'm up. Even Mamncane who was following behind her exclaims. I know I'm lazy but they don't know that, why are they surprised?

Thando: did your father's come here this morning?

Again, they never asked me to cover for them, so I guess they have nothing to hide.

Me: yeah, they were having breakfast.

Ma shook her head before making her way to the cupboard to take the broom.

Me: Ma I've already cleaned the dining room and lounge.

Zuzile: kanti uvuke nini?

Me: at half 5.

I lied, I didn't want it to seem like I was trying too hard. She looked at her watch before she looked at me. She looked impressed, that means I'm doing something right.

Mamncane: so that means we can sit and relax.

She dumped herself on the bar stools and she looked like she barely slept. That confirms my suspicions from earlier, these men didn't come home.

Zuzile: uphi uMvelwenhle. Did he come home?

Me: yes, he did. He's still sleeping.

Zuzile: and where is Paloma?

Me: she's sleeping with him.

Zuzile: you all slept on that small bed?

The way she asked killed me, but yes, we did and that was the worst decision I have ever made.

Me: Paloma is such a terrible sleeper.

Zuzile: Mvelo will wake up with a foot in his mouth. Angazike ngoba ekhamisa nje melele.

I burst out laughing because what she was saying was nothing short of the truth. He does sleep with his mouth open, I always tease him about it.

Me: imagine having to listen to him snoring and Paloma on top of me the whole night.

They both laughed. Ma'Mdala walked in and she didn't look friendly at all. Everyone could see it, so Ma and Mamncane greeted her and she went out. The energy in this house was very negative today.

...

After breakfast, which was full of pretending, mostly from the women in the family, Mvelo helped me clear the table and we took a young stroll down the hill. This yard was massive, one wouldn't believe it's situated in the middle of a suburb.

Me: I heard something I wasn't supposed to hear this morning.

Mvelo: why, what happened now?

We sat down by the stairs near Mummy's hut.

Me: Bab'Msizi is having an affair.

Mvelo: oh, that.

He shrugged his shoulders and dismissed me like it was nothing.

Me: so you also know about it?

Mvelo: yes, Andile and I found out about her and the child like 2 years ago.

Me: do oMa know?

Mvelo: no! And don't you dare tell them.

I nodded quickly and looked away at the view of the cars driving down the hill in the far distance.

Mvelo: it's more than an affair now. They've been together for as long as we have been together.

Me: four years!?

Mvelo: yes.

Me: I heard him say he wants to make her a second wife.

Bab'Msizi is well into his 50s, I don't understand why he's messing around, he's been married to Ma'Mdala for years.

Mvelo: that would be the worst mistake of his life. Ma'Mdala won't hesitate to pack her bags and go.

But they told me they don't do that here, were they lying?

Me: I doubt it would be that easy babe. They've been together for years, they've accumulated so much together. It would take another 3-4 years for them to finally get divorced.

Mvelo: true, and if she did walk away, she'd leave with 50% of everything that he owns.

Damn!

Mvelo: it's a family thing, all the wives of this family get 50% of everything their husband's own, that is why there is no divorce.

That statement right there just scared the hell out of me. Why wasn't I told this, am I not a Mfusi wife.

Mvelo: you also own 50% of all my assets, same with yours.

Why didn't I read that marriage contract...

Mummy: stop gossiping and come say goodbye to your parents.

We both hastily turned around, startled by her voice. I hope and pray she didn't hear our conversation because if she did, we are good as dead.

...

Mvelo was relaxed as we walked to the main house, I was panicking. How can he relax at a time like this!?

Me: (whispering) why are you so relaxed, she might have heard everything.

Mvelo: she didn't, if she did, she would've asked. I know Mummy.

Yeah right, I don't really trust his word right now. We got inside the main house and everyone was ready to leave. Reality then struck that it would just be Mummy, Gogo, Mvelo and myself left in the house. Probably less drama. I wonder where Andile is...

Zuzile: Mvelo, Paloma said she is staying behind with her mother.

Involuntarily, my lips stretched into a smile and in that moment, every one in the room turned and looked at me. Mvelo held my waist and pulled me closer.

Mvelo: that's perfect. Right babe?

Me: yeah, it's perfect.

They all said their goodbyes before they got in their cars and left.

Chapter 46

Narrated

Kabelo and Vusi were forced to drive with the kids, in that way, they couldn't take any detours. They made sure that Ntsakisi, Sanele, Nkosenhle and Nkosenye ride with them. Uthandile refused to get into a car with men with high testosterone levels. On the other hand, the girls were having a fun filled road trip with lots of singing and games.

But Melisizwe was stuck on a plane with two angry people. He didn't care though, he was buried in his music the whole way. The tension between Msizi and Andisiwe could be cut with a knife. They didn't come home last night, his brothers had to cover for him because he wanted to see his daughter. Yes, she lives in Durban, he has to use every chance he gets to see her. And the mother of course. Such a sweet woman she is, she has a heart of gold, just like Andisiwe. That's why she has put up with his nonsense for four years now. She's not a side chick, he has made that clear from day one, he's just not ready to introduce her to his wife. But he loves her, and she gave him the one thing Andisiwe didn't, a daughter. He's precious princess. As much as his brothers have daughters, that he loves like his own, there is something about having your own child, and that's what he wanted to feel, having a daughter. Andisiwe shut that thought down right after they had Melisizwe, she made it clear that she was not going to pop any more babies. She wasn't joking.

Andisiwe: what must I cook?

After hours on a miserable flight, they finally got home and now he's being bombarded with stupid questions.

Msizi: I don't know, anything.

He's never been the same since his father died. That's the only thought that consoled her every time she saw a different side of him, but she's been saying this for 4 years now and nothing has changed. He was sitting on his favorite chair in the lounge, looking at the pictures he took of his daughter before he left. She's everything he has ever wanted and since she was born, he has turned into this softie who does anything and everything to make her daughter happy. His brothers know about it. They know about Nozipho and Nkosazana, they've known about her since the day she was born and they also love her to bits. But they are keeping secrets from their wives, and that's a dangerous game.

Andisiwe: she's cute.

Msizi: who?

He didn't realize she was behind him, but he didn't want to panic.

Andisiwe: that child you are staring at, she adorable.

Shes really tried to make the rest of their marriage tolerable until at least one of them dies but Msizi is just not putting in the same effort anymore. She grabs the foot stool and sits down by his feet.

Andisiwe: I know you always wanted to have a daughter, and I didn't give you one. I'm sorry.

It's too late to say that now. They are both in their 50s, her ovaries stopped producing eggs a long time ago.

Msizi: I have daughters Thandiwe.

Andisiwe: but it's not the same.

The guilt is what was forcing her to speak like this, but Msizi didn't care, not at all. In actual fact, he wanted her to stop.

Msizi: stop it! Just stop!

He didn't mean to raise his voice, but it happened and now she's startled. Staring at him with her eyes bulging out, trying to stop tears from falling. She knows tears don't move him, that's why she won't cry in front of him but what he just did is foreign to her.

Msizi: I'm sorry for shouting. It's just that you took this decision and I accepted it. It's fine.

He wouldn't be saying this if he didn't have Nkosazana. His everything.

Msizi: I'm going to go to the study and make some calls. You'll find me there when dinner is ready.

That's him running away from her and having this conversation. He stood up before he finished his sentence and when he was done speaking, he walked off, leaving her still sitting on the foot stool. She buried her head in her hands and sobbed softly, lowly, so he couldn't hear her.

•••

She knew she could always call her son, she knows how much she can trust him and rely on him, when times are tough. It's such a pity that he decided to move away from home and leave her. Will Melisizwe do the same? Maybe she should've had more children. Look at Zuzile, she has two teenagers, a tween and a toddler. She even has a grandchild. But she's here, lonely, even her husband isn't paying enough attention to her.

Melisizwe: Ma something is burning!

She was staring into space for so long, she forgot she had dinner in the oven. All of it is burnt.

Andisiwe: go tell your father I burned dinner. I'm going to bed.

She said so absent-mindedly, plopped the tray on the counter and made her way upstairs to the bedroom. She was too lazy to shower, it had been a long day, she just wanted her bed and pillow. As she was falling into the trance called sleep, her bedroom door violently flew open, startling her, causing her to sit up.

Msizi: yabo lento oyenzayo angiyithandi.

He wasn't angry, but you could tell he wasn't happy too.

Andisiwe: I'm not feeling well Mfusi.

She wasn't lying, she wasn't feeling well, both emotionally and now all of a sudden, physically.

Msizi: what's going on?

Andisiwe: just a headache.

Msizi: take some medication. It will be okay.

For a slight moment, she saw her loving husband. He came and gave her a forehead kiss and walked out the room. Some things will never change.

Christine

It's been two days and Mummy is not here. I don't know if I should be happy or not, but I'm glad I don't have to look at her after she might have heard what Mvelo and I were talking about. Its just Gogo, Paloma, Mvelo and I in the house and I won't lie,

it's so much fun. I was sitting outside watching Paloma playing with her toys on the grass. It was cold as always, but today the sun was shining, so I thought maybe I should let her out. It's been raining for the past two days. I love the weather this side, I love and miss Durban in general. I was distracted by my phone vibrating in my pocket and I got excited as soon as I saw who was calling.

Me: Daddy!

I miss him so much.

Dad: Wagana umuntu akasafoni.

Me: oh come on daddy, I've been so busy, I've been meaning to call you.

Dad: I understand. How are you my baby girl?

Me: I'm good, how are you? How is living alone treating you?

Dad: I wonder who told you I'm living alone.

I laughed, old man has jokes. He can't replace me that quickly.

Me: manje uhleli nobani.

Dad: ngihleli nomuntu wami.

Me: hayibo, Baba!

He laughed and that made me smile, I really miss him.

Dad: ubuya nini KwaMfusi?

Me: next week Sunday, I have work on Tuesday.

Dad: utshele uMkhwenyana ukuthi nidlule la when you come back.

Me: okay, I will tell him.

Dad: okay my baby, I'll see you then.

Me: I'll see you then, bye daddy.

I hung up and called Paloma in. The clouds were gathering up in the sky and it wanted to rain again. I got the washing off the line before going inside and putting on cartoons for my cartoon because she was sulking that I stopped her princess tea party in the garden. But it doesn't take a lot to make Paloma happy. As soon as she settled on the couch when I put on Barbie for her, she forgot all about tea parties with stuffed animals and stick toys. I took the laundry to the laundry room and started folding it. From there on, I made tea and scones for Gogo and took them to her bedroom. She wasn't sleeping, she was sitting on her favorite chair reading a book.

Me: Gogo I hope I'm not disturbing.

Gogo: not at all. Thank you sweetheart. Where is Paloma?

I set the tray in front of her and she started mixing her tea.

Me: I left her in the lounge watching TV. She was mad that I told her to come inside.

Gogo: I'm glad you are here Ntombiyelanga. When was the last time someone made me tea without me asking.

She gave me a smile. This woman was really aging now. If I'm not mistaken, she is 75 years old this year. I feel like she is lonely living here, even though Mummy is here.

Me: I love it here gogo. I miss Durban in general.

Gogo: then you should come live here with me.

I chuckled lightly. I loved the offer but my life is in Ramsgate. Plus, I don't think Mvelo would ever allow that. Yes he loves his grandmother with everything in him but he's already frustrated because of living here. He's been complaining about not making love since our wedding night. But he has to be strong. I can't do that here again.

Me: maybe I should find a job here.

She also laughed, this woman is such an angel.

Gogo: Mvelo would never let you leave him that side.

Shes right, she knows him very well.

Gogo: he's just like his father. Kabelo was a such a troublesome young man.

I sat down and got comfortable because I know Gogo, she loves telling stories and I'm here for all of them.

•••

Mvelo called and said he would bring food so I shouldn't cook. I don't know where he went, last time I checked, his job was in Ramsgate, not here, so I don't understand why he wakes up every morning. I just finished bathing this little rascal and now I'm trying to dress her up for bedtime, but it seems like her power nap recharged her. She is bouncing all over the place.

Me: Paloma sit still.

She thought this was a game, and I really wasn't complaining, I have nothing better to do so I will chase her around the room until she cooperates. My phone rang while I was chasing her and it was her Mama.

Me: hello Ma.

It was a video call. She was sitting with a glass of wine in her hand, relaxing like the world is her oyster.

Zuzile: you look exhausted, what's going on.

Me: (laughing) Paloma is making me chase her around the room, doesn't want to get dressed.

Zuzile: (chuckles) motherhood looks good on you babes.

I was trying hard not to blush but I was failing. I picked up Paloma and placed her on the bed and started dressing her by force.

Zuzile: I was calling to check how you guys are, seems like everything is going good.

Me: yeah, we're fine. It's just that Mummy is not here.

Zuzile: oh, sometimes she leaves to go help people, don't worry about her, she'll be back in a few days.

Me: and what happens when she leaves, uGogo usala nobani?

Zuzile: if we aren't busy, sometimes we come down and stay with her or the helper stays with her.

Helper? There's a helper in this house. Obviously! What did you think Christine, of course there is a helper, how can two elderly people take care of a house alone. But I'm seriously worried about Gogo staying so far from everyone.

Zuzile: don't worry about Ma'Ruth, she was the one who wanted to stay there. We offered to come stay with her or her move in with us more than once but she refuses. She loves her own space and that's her husband's house, she doesn't want to leave.

That is not hard to believe, Gogo is a little stubborn.

Zuzile: I got your father to take the kids out for dinner as punishment for leaving that night, now its just me and my wine.

That's the wine starting to talk, I will say this again, I love my in-laws.

...

Mvelo came back with dinner and after eating, we all went to bed. Gogo wanted to sleep with her great-granddaughter and Paloma happily left us for her. The rain is pouring outside and it's bringing in a cold front. I was changing into my jammies but Mvelo was all over my neck.

Me: stop.

Mvelo: I don't want to.

He was turning me on but I couldn't afford to be weak at this time, I made a promise to myself.

Me: Paloma and Gogo are in the house, we can't do it.

Mvelo: we are married. Gogo knows what married people do.

He was speaking in a horny voice, I know this voice all too well. His hands were caressing my thighs from behind. His groin rubbing on my bum. His body was warm but mine was cold.

Me: I'm cold.

He turned me around and picked me up, making me wrap my legs around his waist. He wasn't even speaking anymore, only his breathing was audible, his breath on my neck, down my boobs, I could feel the goosebumps marking themselves on my skin, my nipples were perking up. He laid me on the bed and took off the pajama pants that I had already put on, followed by my underwear and threw it all on the floor. He was being gentle tonight, leaving tender butterfly kisses on my chest and my most sensitive part, the stomach. His hand kept tracing my cookie jar, he had me whimpering, I even forgot that I didn't want this a few minutes ago. I don't know when he took off his clothes but he was on top of me in a second and his warm body

made contact with mine. Before he dipped, he locked my lips in a kiss and that stopped me from moaning out loud. But it was difficult, he was doing me so good.

Me: Mfusi stop! I'm going to scream!

Whispering was not easy, I tried but with every stroke, the more pleasure I felt. At some point he had to cover my mouth. He didn't last long the first time, but when I finally got my orgasms, I couldn't stop shaking. The look of satisfaction on his face was all I remember before we were at it for the rest of the night.

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I fluttered open my eye lids and it was as bright at day outside. I sat up in a haste, I woke up late!

Mvelo: relax, sit back down.

He walked in just as I was about to start getting ready to go take a shower. He has a tray of breakfast in his hands.

Me: why didn't you wake me?

Mvelo: sit down first.

I did, but only on the edge of the bed.

Mvelo: I needed you to rest.

Me: and what about cleaning the house. Gogo's tea and breakfast? Did you give her her medication? What time is it?

Mvelo: so many questions. Sit down Christine.

I was on my feet again, but he held my shoulders and made me sit. He kissed my forehead.

Mvelo: I called the helper to come in today, relax. You, me and Paloma are going out today.

Me: and what about Gogo?

Mvelo: Mummy came back and there is some church meeting she is attending today. Andile is coming later to fetch her. Stop worrying. Gogo is fine.

I don't know why I feel like I do right now but that woman has grown on me so much.

Mvelo: I appreciate what you do for uMa'Mfusi, thank you mkami.

He held my face in his hands and gave me a soft kiss. That seemed to calm me down a little and my heart rate was back to normal. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that I never had a granny, and that's always been my dream. My father's family was very evil, and that's why him and his sisters distanced themselves from them. I don't even remember what my father's mother looks like. I don't even want to talk about my mother's side of the family. I didn't even get to meet them, they didn't want me. But it's okay because I had an amazing childhood, my father did his best to raise me and now I'm married into an amazing family.

Mvelo: what are you thinking about.

Me: I'm thinking about how much Gogo has had an impact on my life in just a short space of time. I don't know, maybe its because I never had my own grandmother and I just want to spend all my time with her.

Mvelo: you have such a big heart my love. You are kind and caring and you have so much love to give. Gogo loves you too, she can't stop speaking about you. She told me you made her tea yesterday.

Me: you should've seen how happy she was when I walked into her room with it, it was like I had just given her the world on a platter.

Mvelo: it's because she's not used to this kind of treatment, so am I. You just care for everyone so much. It's the little gestures that make people happy and you making her tea or randomly massaging her feet makes her happy because she doesn't get that all the time.

I'm not a cry baby, I wasn't going to cry right now.

Mvelo: don't cry Fluff.

I'm right where I'm supposed to be, surely.

Narrated

He spoke to Nozipho and after lots of begging and pleading, something Msiziwamafusi Mfusi doesn't do, she finally agreed to fly to Cape Town with Nkosazana for a long weekend. Flights have been booked and houses have been prepared, all that is left is for the to arrive and start the weekend.

Msizi: Sizwe, please accompany me.

He knew that Andile and Mvelo found about Nkosazana, he really wasn't trying to hide it from everyone, just the wives. Plus, he needed the boys to do him favors when Nozipho was pregnant and he couldn't be with her, that's how they found out. Andile was furious, his mother was being made a clown, but it was none of his business, he knew better than to try and dictate Msizi's life. But he wanted Melisizwe to meet his younger sister. He wanted him to be in on the secret. The boy was sitting in his room playing games on his Playstation.

Msizi: let's go Mfana.

He really didn't want to go, but this is his father, he respects him so he will comply with whatever he has to say. He grabbed a jacket and shoes before following his father to the car. He didn't even tell his mother that he was leaving and that rang in the back of his mind the whole way to god knows where his father is taking him. The drive was quiet, as always, only sounds of the radio were audible. He couldn't even play his music, Msizi always said his music is nonsense. When they arrived at the airport, Melisizwe got even more confused, but he shut his mouth and followed his father who was walking towards the arrivals. Everything seemed normal until he saw an exact photocopy of himself as a child with two pom-poms and a pink dress. He turned to look at his father, then back at the child.

Nkosazana: Daddy!

Her shrill voice rang in his ears and he felt the room shrinking, as if to close in on him. He engulfed the child in his arms and started kissing her little face, the joy on his face was not hard to miss. The woman stood there, looking at them with love in her eyes.

Melisizwe: what fuckery is this!?

He didn't mean to say that out loud, and was only able to notice that after his father gave him a death summoning look. But it's how he felt.

Msizi: don't you dare swear in my daughters presence.

And then it escalates!

Msizi: I won't hesitate to slap you in public my boy, remember your place.

He nodded, but he didn't want to, his heart was racing and his body was heating up as if he had just jumped into a pool of hot water. His head was pounding.

Msizi: this is your sister Nkosazana. I wanted you to meet her before we tell your mother.

Melisizwe: we?

Msizi: yes, you and Andile will help me tell your mother.

Melisizwe: with all due respect baba, that is bullshit and I am not going to be part of it.

He grabbed the car keys from his hand and walked out the airport, not even greeting the lady who was accompanying the so called daughter.

Msizi: this boy is getting out of hand and I won't hesitate to put him back.

Nozipho: no, you are the one that's wrong. Why do you want to drag the children into your problems?

Even the way she speaks is poised, Msizi just seemed to be taken every time she opened her mouth to speak.

Msizi: I'm not dragging them into problems, this isn't a problem. I know they can calm her down...

Nozipho: it's not their job, akukho ngane ezokhuluma nomkakho ngami Lana.

That should've been a warning but he just smiled and walked towards her and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

Msizi: I missed you MaFakude.

She rolled her eyes and carried her daughters bags before dragging her suitcase.

Nozipho: let's, I want to go and rest.

If it was any other day, Msizi would be holding his breath hoping no journalists run into him and photograph him, or he doesn't run into anyone that knows Andisiwe because news could spread like wildfire, but today he doesn't care, he is so happy to see his daughter. When they got to the car, Melisizwe was sitting in the front seat, with air-pods stuck in his ears.

Msizi: Sizwe move to the back.

He ignored him, he could hear him clearly, but he chose to ignore him.

Msizi: Melisizwe!

Nozipho: leave him, he can't hear you. I'll sit at the back with Zana.

Msizi: uyadelela lomfana, useyindoda yena.

The only thing stopping him from grabbing him from that chair and beating him is his precious daughter, he would never do anything to harm her.

Nozipho: calm down.

She strapped her daughter in her booster seat before she climbed in the car. He did the same and they were off. Awkward silence prevailed and only Melisizwe's humming could be heard. This was irritating the shit out of Msizi. He opened the window, grabbed one pod and threw it out the window.

Melisizwe: baba!?

Msizi: ithi nywe, uzobona amabele inyoka. Awuhloniphi wena.

Nozipho sat in the back, quiet, afraid to even peep. What an insane morning this has been.

...

He asked Kabelo to give him the keys to his house in Eastgate, and reluctantly so, he agreed. That's where Nozipho will be staying with Nkosazana for the weekend. Melisizwe is sitting in the lounge sulking, Nozipho is in the kitchen trying to make

them food and Msizi is sitting watching her. He just put his daughter to sleep as soon as they arrived.

Nozipho: ufuna uMelisizwe athi ngikudlisile manje?

Msizi: even if you did bewitch me, I wouldn't mind.

She laughed. She tried to play hard to get, all the time, even after she's mothered his child, she's still playing that game, but she loves him, a lot. She can't even hide it. If she didn't love him, she wouldn't have stuck around for this long, even though he knew all about him. They met at a business seminar, it was that same year his father died. He was captured by her beauty, and her poise. She was so elegant. He knew he wanted her when she offered to dish up for him when it was time to eat. So he made his move. He hadn't made a move on anyone in over 20 years, but he was trying his luck. He was surprised that she agreed to coffee with him. The rest is history.

Nozipho: Mfusi, please don't involve the kids in this. This is our problem to fix. You specifically.

Msizi: these boys aren't kids.

Nozipho: they are your children Msizi.

No one calls him Msizi, only her. He finds it sexy.

Msizi: I will think about it.

She sighed and rolled her eyes, and she should be glad he didn't see that. She finished cooking and she served lunch. She called Melisizwe to the table to come eat.

Melisizwe: I'll eat at home.

Msizi: don't be ridiculous boy. Come eat.

Melisizwe: I said, I will eat at home.

Msizi was about to go off when Nozipho held him back.

Nozipho: leave him. It's okay.

One would really think that he is bewitched. Even Melisizwe looked at the both of them in awe after that. No one controls Msiziwamafusi, not even his own mother. Who is this woman!?

Chapter 47

"But he, that dares not grasp the thorn, should never crave the rose."

Mvelo

Back to reality we go. Chris goes back to work tomorrow, we were supposed to leave yesterday but she wanted to spend more time with Gogo and so, we ended up leaving today. It's been a lovely two weeks, it's always nice being at Gogo's place, but I missed being in my own space. We were approaching Ramsgate now and Chris was sleeping like a log. I hate it when people sleep while I'm driving, especially since

she in the front seat, but she stayed up all night talking to Gogo, she's bound to be tired. She fluttered her eyelids open and sat up.

Chris: where are we?

Me: almost home.

Chris: oh shit. I forgot to tell you. Dad said we should pass by his house.

I looked at her and she looked ugly, red eyes, swollen cheeks.

Me: waze wamumbi.

Chris: fana nawe.

She gave me the middle finger and I laughed. She drank a bottle of water and fixed herself before adjusting her seat.

Me: what is this about, your father calling us?

Chris: I don't know, he didn't say.

I might be an official son in-law to Zondo but I still fear him like I did the first day I met him. Yes, I did fear him, its just that I was arrogant then, I didn't want to show him. When we arrived, I parked my car behind a red Audi Q3 parked in the yard.

Me: he has a new car?

Chris: clearly.

She was sulking.

Me: you also want a car? I can get it for you.

Chris: no. How can daddy buy a car now?

She got out of the car and went to the backseat to unstrap a sleeping Paloma. I also got out and helped her carry her. She was walking in front of me, and she was walking very quickly. You could tell she wasn't happy at all.

Chris: Daddy!

She shouted as soon as she pushed the kitchen door open. This house has so many memories. Some good, some terrible.

Zondo: ayibo, mkaMfusi, so much noise in my house.

He appeared and Christine walked up to him to give him a tight hug. I love how he called her, mkaMfusi.

Zondo: hello son.

Me: sawubona baba.

He didn't even care about me, he wanted this child that I was carrying. We made our way to the lounge and settled. He started asking us about life and how we were, just general life questions.

Zondo: Christine go and make your husband something to eat.

I knew better than to protest so I shut my mouth and let her stand and go to the kitchen.

Zondo: son, I need your help.

He still had Paloma sleeping on his lap. I didn't know Dove could sleep like this.

Me: what's going on baba?

Zondo: I recently found out that my girlfriend is pregnant and I don't know how to tell Christine. How does she feel about having siblings?

I wasn't expecting this, not at all, especially not from my father in-law.

Me: she's always wanted a big family, she's always hinting it, but currently, I don't know how she would feel. It could really go either way.

What's with these men and pension babies!?

Zondo: do you think I should tell her now, or wait to introduce the mother first?

Me: maybe you should tell her about it first, to diffuse the situation.

Zondo: good decision, thank you Mfusi.

Wow, everyone is popping babies, who's next?

Christine

I didn't know what to make Mvelo, he honestly eats anything, but I also know that he's probably not hungry, but he won't decline the offer, he's just sweet like that. I made him and dad sandwiches and when I walked into the lounge they were talking and laughing like old friends. I sat down next to him and when I look at my dad's face, I remember that first day they met.

Dad: I knew from that day that you'd choose him over anything any day.

I laughed lightly and looked at Mvelo, he held my hand tightly and smiled at my father.

Dad: but thank you Mfusi for keeping your promises and making my daughter your wife.

Mvelo: I'm lucky to have such a lovely young woman to call my wife.

I was blushing.

Dad: I trust you son, I trust that you will protect her from harm. This is my princess.

Mvelo: and she is my queen. I love her and I will protect her.

They are speaking about me as if I'm not in the room. It's so romantic, the two men that I love the most are getting along. But...

Me: Daddy, you bought a new car?

Dad: yes.

Me: why didn't you tell me?

Just then, Mvelo's phone rang.

Mvelo: please excuse me, I have to take this.

He stood up and walked outside. This was my opportunity. I shifted my whole body and faced him.

Me: why did you have to wait for me to go before you bought such a lovely car? And why didn't you tell me you have shares KwaMthiyane Construction? We've been living this life kanti you are rich?

Dad: woah! Young lady, I'm still your father.

Me: I'm sorry dad but I just want to understand.

Dad: yes, I do have shares in that company, but it's none of your business and it doesn't mean we are rich. And I bought this car because that was one that was old and I wanted a new one.

There is no such, his car was in perfect condition.

Dad: and it's the beginning of a new chapter in my life, which calls for adjustments in my life.

The way he said it made it clear to me that I wasn't part of his life anymore. He's starting a new chapter without me.

Dad: I don't mean it like that, you are still my baby, but now you are going to have to share me with someone else.

Me: share you? With who?

Dad: I've been seeing someone for a few months and she's pregnant.

Me: hayike.

I don't know how I feel about what he just told me. And why is Mvelo taking so long outside, I need his support right now.

Dad: what do you have to say?

Me: I don't know. I have nothing to say.

Dad: well Christine, no matter what you say or decide, the child is already on its way, there is nothing you can do. You are having a sibling.

Me: angisemdala.

He gave me a little smile. He was excited, he looked really happy. That's all I've ever wanted for my father, for him to be happy.

Me: and the mother? What about her?

Dad: she's in the picture.

Me: is she here to stay?

Dad: I don't know, time will tell.

Me: I hope it's a boy.

His smile grew wider, and so I stood up and went to give him a big hug.

Me: congratulations Dad. I don't know why you waited for so long, now my sibling is going to be the same age as my child.

He pushed me off very quickly and gave me a face I couldn't decipher. I laughed.

Dad: you're pregnant?

Me: (laughing) no daddy, I'm not pregnant and I'm not planning on falling pregnant any time soon.

Dad: good, I'm not ready to be a grandfather anytime soon.

I shook my head and looked at Paloma sleeping peacefully on his lap.

Me: she calls me mom now.

Dad: really?

Me: yes, and it feels amazing.

Dad: it feels even better when they come from you.

I smiled. All this baby talk was making me want to change my mind about having a baby. Is this what they call baby fever? Because it's really strong.

•••

We were just sitting in the lounge watching Paloma playing and singing. She has a very loud voice, and you can tell that when she grows up, she will be a singer, just like Isa. Mvelo occasionally sits on the floor and joins her in playing, but she shouts as says he's disrupting. Who would've thought I would be here, with a family of my own. Never in my wildest dream did I imagine being married with a child, especially at age 24.

Me: my father is having a baby.

Mvelo: really?

He tried to act surprised. I say try because I could see right through him. My dad is such a hypocrite.

Me: you knew?

Mvelo: hawu baby?

Me: no, Mvelo, did he tell you?

Mvelo: I'm sorry.

I shook my head. This relationship they have with my dad is very weird. Since when are they this close?

Me: but I feel like everyone is having children, is this what baby fever feels like?

Mvelo: I thought I was the only one.

Silence passed between us. Now for the most sensitive topic in this marriage. Kids.

Me: I don't know how I feel about having children anymore. I'm confused.

Mvelo: what's confusing you baby?

Me: I thought I would never want to have my own...

I couldn't even say it out loud.

Mvelo: you want one?

Me: I think so.

He smiled and lay his head on my bosom. He loves doing that.

Mvelo: and what about your fears?

Me: I don't know about my fears anymore, it's like they don't matter.

I think about the many times we promised each other that we would not have children. Now that seems like a distorted dream.

Mvelo: then let's have one.

Me: seriously?

Mvelo: yeah, but not now. Now it's just about me, you and Paloma. Let's focus on building our empire then we can start our family.

I won't lie, I felt at ease.

Me: sounds like a plan husband.

He raised his head and gave me a lingering kiss.

Paloma: ewe! Daddy stop kissing my mommy.

Mvelo: what do you know about kissing, huh!

He scooped her up and she giggled and squealed loudly. I looked at them adoringly and it wasn't hard to picture him being a father to our children. He's an amazing father. When he sat down, he put his hand on my stomach and looked at me in the eyes.

Mvelo: are we doing this?

Me: yeah, we are.

The butterflies I was feeling, immaculate.

Ntswaki

I realized that the best way to survive in this hell hole is to mind your own business and just keep quiet. They consider me the good patient because I behave, they don't have to restrain or drug me like these lunatics. I did say from the beginning that I'm not crazy, they just assume I'm crazy because of all the traumatic things I went through as a child. I got over that a long time ago, I'm as sane as they come. It just so happened that I got to angry and smacked Dumisani with a bat on the head, it's not an abomination, he deserved it, how dare he think he can sleep with another woman in my house. They should be grateful for me, I'm really not crazy. These people here are insane. There is a woman who murdered her newborn son for stealing her husband's attention, now that is down right mad! There's also a man that's convinced that he can time travel, I try and avoid him by all costs, I don't want him to drag me into his craziness.

Nurse: Ntswaki, its time for your appointment.

And then it is these dreaded psychology evaluations every week. Mine is every Tuesday. The nurses compile a report and send it to the psychologist and they are the ones in charge of saying whether you are fit enough to leave or change your medication. One thing I have also figured out, it's the medication that makes us crazy. Not that I am crazy, no, I'm definitely not one of them, but I strongly believe that the medication is the reason why people are going crazier than they already are. They say I have schizophrenia and bipolar, I don't believe that for one second. I'm a qualified nurse, I went to nursing school and passed with flying colors. I studied all of this, I know what it is. I definitely don't have it.

James: Ntswaki, come in, sit down.

The nurse closed the door behind me and I made my way to the vacant chair and sat down.

James: how have you been, how are you today?

Me: I'm good doctor. I've been good.

Lies, I want to get out of this place. I regret not escaping when Tshego gave me the chance to.

James: your files say you've been keeping to yourself a lot lately, you aren't interacting with the nurses or the other patients, are you okay?

Me: I'm perfectly fine. I'm trying to prove to all of you that I'm not crazy.

James: no one said you are crazy.

Me: yet I'm in a looney bin filled with crazy people.

She cleared her throat and looked back at my file. I really felt like strangling her right there and then.

James: I'm seeing improvements and the treatment is working in favour of you. If you keep this up, we might even release you earlier so you can continue your sentence at home.

Oh sweet freedom. So close yet so far.

James: I'll keep you under observation for another 2 weeks and if I see improvements, I'll speak to the judge.

Me: really?

James: yes. But you have to interact with others, speak to the nurses, they are here to make you feel comfortable. Your wellbeing comes first and that is why we hire staff that we know will put you first in everything.

She's right, the staff here is very kind, very unusual for nurses, all the people I've worked with were nonsense.

James: we still have 30 minutes, tell me about your family.

Me: I don't have family. My brother's disowned me after I married Him.

James: why won't you say his name?

Me: my mouth is too holy to utter such words.

She's not supposed to be laughing, but she is.

James: sorry. Why do you say they disowned you?

Me: after I got married, they distanced themselves from me. They stopped calling.

James: did you ever call?

Me: no, it's not my job. I'm their younger sister, it's their job to call and check on me at all times. So when they weren't doing it, I assumed they didn't want me in their lives anymore.

James: that's a very big word, "assumed". Why do you use that word?

Me: because I never got a clear explanation for their actions.

James: and so you believe that they didn't want you in their lives, but they never told you that.

Me: yes.

She wrote down something before she looked up again.

James: and your parents, what about them?

Me: I don't know them, they died while I was very young. They say it was a tragic car accident.

James: so you don't remember anything about them?

Me: no, I didn't even have pictures of them in my house, or any of the houses we ever lived in. Actually, now that I think about it, I have never seen their faces before.

This is very suspicious. To think my whole life, I never realized that I have never seen a picture of either of my parents. She continued to write down.

James: not even in your dreams, like a distant memory?

Me: never.

James: strange.

It's very strange.

James: thank you for coming Ntswaki, I will see you next week.

Finally, that's was too much. I stood up and walked out the office. I was strolling in the hallway, I was in no rush to go to that dull boring room with bland walls. They should at least consider putting art pieces so we can look at them, not that I plan on staying here for long.

Cleaner 1: I didn't like her dress, her flat ass didn't look nice in that dress, it needed someone with a fat ass like mine.

Cleaner 2: oh shut up, Mvelwenhle Mfusi would never even give you the time of day.

Cleaner 1: says who? Oh babes, you don't know the half of it.

I stopped in my tracks and listened, I was fuming mad, I could feel my ears burning up, but I stopped and listened.

Cleaner 1: talk to me nice my girl. I, Yolanda Motaung, have had Andrew in my bed. Or better, me in his.

Cleaner 2: lies lies lies!

Yolanda: struu God. When that colored girl was pregnant, they were having constant problems, he came running to me. Oh but he was so good in bed.

Cleaner 2: you aren't joking?

Yolanda: yes, my sister works for the Mfusi's and I was also staying with them during Holidays so I could make extra money, but they kicked me out because of his baby mama.

Cleaner 2: serves you right.

Yolanda: what matters is, I've held that dick in my hands, felt it inside of me and I'm probably the best he'll ever have. Plus, I'm way prettier than that slut he's married, she's just yellow bone, that's why they say she's beautiful. Flat ass.

I don't remember anything after that, I saw red. I had blood all over me and my head was spinning.

Nurse: she's dead.

That's all I remember hearing before I blacked out.

Chapter 48

"She has love in her words, and pain in her silence."

Christine

I haven't seen my friends since the traditional wedding, we've only been in contact through the phone and I miss them. The plan was to leave the office early so I could go back home and get ready, but I'm late, it's already 17:30 and dinner is at 18:00, I won't make it. My best bet at this point is to just drive to the restaurant like this. But I had to call Mvelo first, I'm sure he's at home already.

Me: baby.

Mvelo: yes my love, where are you?

It sounded like he was moving around, it actually sounded like he was in the kitchen.

Me: yazi baby it totally slipped my mind to tell you, I was going to do it when I come there but now I'm late.

Mvelo: late to what?

Me: Ontla, Devon and I are going to dinner and I was supposed to come there but I got delayed at the office.

Mvelo: oh okay. So you'll be home late?

Me: not too late my love I promise.

Mvelo: alright. Have fun and I love you okay?

Me: I love you too Mfusi.

He hung up as I parked in front of the restaurant. I could see Ontla's car already parked, which meant she was early. Im glad it's winter, at least I'm not sweaty and sticky. I brushed my hair properly and straightened my dress before climbing out the car and walking inside the place.

Ontla: here comes the Mfusi Wife!

She's drinking, that's the only reason why she would shout that in public. I get to the table and give her a big hug.

Ontla: you look stunning.

Me: thank you babe, you too.

I sat down and before I could even speak, the waiter was already by my side. I ordered a glass of cranberry juice but Ontla was very quick to object.

Ontla: please bring us a bottle of white wine. No cranberry juice.

Waiter: yes mam.

He left and I looked at her inquisitively.

Me: since when are you such an alcoholic?

Ontla: I'm not an alcoholic, I just don't get to drink when Gontse is around.

She said that tipping her glass. She might smile and laugh with me but she looks stressed out.

Me: how are you babes?

Ontla: I'm okay, just dealing with a lot.

Me: what's going on?

Ontla: my cousin, the one in the mental hospital, she killed a cleaner.

Me: haibo!

I covered my mouth in shock. The only cousin in a mental institution is Ntswaki. Oh damn.

Ontla: now her sentence has been increased. And they were going to release her for good behavior until this happened. The family pressed charges and they want to sue

her. Nyakallo and Atile want nothing to do with it. I don't know why they are so heartless towards their sister.

I can't believe my ears. I wonder what Mvelo will think about this.

Me: oh my goodness that is hectic. Why would she kill her though?

Ontla: the witness says that they were talking about some man and Ntswaki attacked her.

This makes no sense at all. Everyday it's a new story, what a life we are living. Now I really needed this glass of wine.

•••

Two bottles of wine later, I was steadily driving back home after a very lovely dinner with my friends. It wasn't too late at night, but I don't know how Mvelo will feel about me being this late and drunk at the same time. He called me when I was about to leave the restaurant to check on me and I told him I was fine. I arrived safely at home and I found him sitting in the lounge watching TV, something he never does.

Mvelo: oh, you're back.

I walked up to him slowly, trying to balance. Call me weak or whatever else you believe I am, I'm not used to drinking alcohol.

Mvelo: are you drunk?

Me: no, I'm not drunk, I just had a little glass of wine.

He squinted his eyes at me before standing up.

Mvelo: Christine how the hell did you drive home in this state? Why didn't you call me?

Me: I told you, I'm fine!

My head was spinning, but I had to keep composure. I walked around him and went to sit on the couch, he stood there and looked at me with his arms folded across his chest.

Me: I got home safely, I'm fine. Relax.

I could tell he was angry, but I didn't care, I was trying to figure out what was going on in my head and in my mind.

Me: ihhe, Ontla told me Ntswaki killed someone last week.

He just stood there looking at me like I'm crazy, like I'm not his wife that he loves so much.

Me: with her bare hands, imagine. That woman is an animal I swear.

Nothing from Mvelwenhle Mfusi.

Me: so now you are going to ignore me? Until when, uhhu?

He left me sitting there and went upstairs. I dragged him through my teeth before I put my legs up on the coffee table and laid my head back. It was still spinning and closing my eyes felt so good. It felt like I was floating in the air, with soft hands handling me. I could hear the sound of a waterfall coming closer and closer to my ears. SPLASH! Cold water all over my body. I shot open my eyes and I was in the shower, fully clothed with cold ass water falling on me. Mvelwenhle was standing there looking at me with his arms folded across his chest.

Me: Mvelo get me out of here.

Mvelo: you are drunk Christine, since when do you drink.

Me: it was a one time thing, I promise, never again.

He was holding the shower door from outside and I couldn't close the tap, he locked it. I was starting to shiver.

Me: please baby, I'll do anything, please let me out.

I got on my knees and I saw the remorse flash across his eyes. He opened the shower door and unlocked the tap. He gave me a towel and I took off my wet dress and underwear. I wrapped the towel around my body and when I stepped out the shower, I felt something rising from the pit of my stomach. Before I could make it to the toilet, I puked out everything on the bathroom floor. Heaven only knows.

Mvelo

Now I'm not about to start being controlling and dictating how Chris should live her life. We are both young, there is still so much more that we need to explore and do together, but what she did tonight was very reckless. I know her as someone who doesn't drink, and so I wasn't expecting her to come home drunk, especially like this. The mere fact that she drove all the way here frightens me, anything could have happened. She just vomited on the bathroom floor, and now she's sitting on the toilet seat crying. This is very entertaining to watch, but she needs to learn her lesson.

Chris: (crying) Mvelo please, I will never drink again, please my husband.

Me: I'm not going to clean your vomit Chris.

Chris: okay! Okay! Give me cleaning supplies.

She stood up and almost lost her balance but held on to the sink. This ought to teach her a lesson. I gave her the bucket and a swab. It had water inside. I knew she was going to vomit, so I kept it close just in case. She didn't stop crying, I really wanted to take a video of her so she could see herself tomorrow.

Chris: (crying) why do you hate me so much!?

Me: I don't hate you, I'm teaching you a lesson. Alcohol is not your friend.

She kept gagging as she cleaned up, and there was a severe chance of her throwing up again.

Chris: but I apologized.

Me: and this is your punishment. Clean up, I want to go to bed, it's late, I have work tomorrow.

She continued to mumble and cry, it was comedy gold. When she finished wiping all of it, she got up and threw the dirty water in the toilet and stumbled all the way to the bedroom, threw herself on the bed, with a towel still wrapped with around her body and fell asleep right there. Her hair was wet and it was freezing cold outside, she would catch the flu if she slept like this. I covered her hair with a towel and dressed her up with warm clothes before tucking her in properly. I love this woman with all her flaws, she is mine. I wouldn't trade her for anything.

Christine

It felt like I was hit by a bus. I could feel my whole body aching, but I was still in bed with my eyes closed. My head was pounding and my stomach was growling. Thing is, I was too embarrassed to open my eyes, or better yet, wake up and face Mvelo after last night. I don't remember everything clearly, but I remember vomiting on the bathroom floor.

Mvelo: I know you're awake.

Shit! Okay so now I have to open my eyes. I rolled to my side and opened my eyes and stared at him. He wasn't angry, but he had a smirk on his face. He also looked ready for work.

Mvelo: morning drunkard.

Me: come on, please.

My head was pounding! I was in so much pain.

Mvelo: breakfast is downstairs. I called your office and told them you are sick, mina I'm off to work, I'll see you later.

He kissed my forehead before he walked out, leaving me contemplating a lot of things. One of them being I will never ever drink alcohol like that ever again. Mvelo was punishing me by telling me breakfast is downstairs, normally, he would bring it up to me, but he knows my whole body is in pain, he wants me to suffer like this. I rolled out of bed and I immediately regretted that because I almost fell flat on my face. But I soldiered on and slowly made my way downstairs. My food was on the table covered with a note stuck on it: "hope this teaches you a lesson." I rolled my eyes. It was oats, seriously! He said he made breakfast, this isn't breakfast. This is a joke. I took my phone and called him.

Mvelo: what's wrong Fluff, I'm in a meeting.

Me: you said you made breakfast, this is oats.

Mvelo: is that not breakfast?

Me: why are you being so mean to me?

Mvelo: I'm not being mean, I'm just trying to make you understand how far recklessness can take you.

Me: I apologized.

Mvelo: we will talk about this when I get home.

He didn't even wait for me to finish speaking, he hung up. I felt like screaming, but I knew better, my headache was going to kill me. I warmed up the stupid oats and sat

down and ate. All in all, if it wasn't Mvelwenhle throwing me in a shower of cold water and making me clean my own vomit, last night was fun. I sure have learnt my lesson, Ontla and Devon are terrible influences, but I love them nonetheless. I went back upstairs to make the bed and take a shower. My pajamas were stained with blood, great! I still have periods, I hadn't seen them in a long time. I should be worried, but I'm not, they are here now.

Andile: mkami!

He was shouting from downstairs, I wrapped a towel around my body and made my way downstairs. He was in the kitchen and he was dishing up from takeaways. Yay! Breakfast.

Me: ubafo wakho made me eat oats for breakfast.

Andile: (laughing) serves you right. But he said I must bring you this.

Me: thank you Andile.

He made himself comfortable while I went back upstairs to take my shower. It's going to be a long ass day!

Narrated

He made an effort to make it a habit for his baby mama and daughter to visit every two weeks, especially after the first time. They had a lovely time together, well besides Melisizwe almost ruining everything by threatening to tell Andisiwe everything. Msizi wanted to beat him to the pulp, but Nozipho intervened, as per

usual. He spent the night out last night, and he's spent it with his other little family. He purchased an apartment for Nozipho to live in whenever they visit, and after lots of fighting and bickering, she finally agreed to coming down every 2 weeks. She's only doing this for her daughter though, that girl loves her father so much. He was upstairs taking a shower, he left his phone on the table and it's been ringing non stop. She wasn't going to answer it, it's non of her business.

Nozipho: Msizi your phone is ringing.

Msizi: answer it.

Shes not doing that, she'd rather be caught dead than to answer his phone. She picked it up and walked to the room where he was.

Msizi: you know at some point you have to stop calling me by name, you are going to influence Zana and she will do the same.

She rolled her eyes and gave him the phone. She stood there and watched him, he had a white towel wrapped around his waist, the round potbelly that she loved so much was sticking out, that firm chest she loved lying on every night, water droplets on his arms, he looked sexy.

Msizi: I feel violated.

She looked up and met his eyes, he was smiling like a little boy. She cheeks heated up and she looked down. She was a beautiful woman, caramel smooth skin, with the body of a real African woman. No one could deny that Msizi had a type. He liked them thick.

Msizi: come here.

She slowly walked to him and when she reached him, he wrapped his arms around her waist and stole a kiss on the lips.

Msizi: I love you.

Nozipho: I love you too. Baba ka Nkosazana.

Msizi: I love the sound of that.

He was blushing, even a blind man could see that this man was happy, happier than he had ever been in a long time. His phone was still ringing.

Nozipho: aren't you going to answer that?

Msizi: it's Andisiwe. She wants to know where I am.

She forcefully freed herself from his grip.

Msizi: not this again.

Nozipho: we have a daughter together Msizi, she deserves to know her family, the least you can do is introduce her to your family. Don't worry about me, I don't care about you not telling your wife about me, just introduce your daughter, please.

Msizi: you can't tell me you don't care Nozipho because I love you, and I want you to be my wife. You and my daughter are a package.

She kept quiet.

Msizi: fine, I'll get dressed so we can go. We will go now and I will tell Andisiwe about you, the two of you.

Her mouth suddenly went dry, but she knew better than to argue with him when he uses that tone, so she shut her mouth, hoping he would say he's joking later.

...

He told Nkosazana that they are going out and she was excited. Now she was forced to go with them.

Msizi: this is what you wanted, so I'll do it.

She choose to keep quiet once again. The ride was sour for her, but daddy and daughter were having the time of their lives. As soon as the car parked in the massive yard in front of the gigantic house, reality struck. She was about to meet her lovers wife, the one who really owns his heart. There is no going back.

Nkosazana: Daddy, who lives here?

Msizi: I do my baby.

Nkosazana: wow.

On another day, Nozipho would also marvel at the beauty of this property, but she can't, she's too scared of what awaits her on the inside. Andisiwe is sitting in her bedroom, reading a book. She heard his car pull up on the driveway, but she didn't bother to even take a peep outside, she's going to play hard to get. She hears the car doors banging, more than once, that alarms her, he's not alone. She gets up from the bed and fixes herself before walking out the room. She can hear a little voice, talking and asking several questions, referring to someone as "Daddy". It can't be Paloma, she's with Zuzile in this present moment. It also can't be Uthandile, she doesn't call her father Daddy. Plus, the voice, the little one, their vocabulary isn't advanced. When she arrives downstairs, she is finally able to put a face to the little voice talking her whole house down. But it's a familiar face, it looks exactly like her son's little face, when he was about this age.

Andisiwe: Mfusi?

It comes out as a question and a warning at the same time.

Msizi: Andisiwe, can we please go sit down in the lounge.

Her eyes traveled from the little face to the thick lady with the short braids standing next to her husband.

Andisiwe: who are you?

She moved back and stood behind Msizi, this angered Andisiwe.

Msizi: the lounge, now Thandiwe.

She knows once she's been called Thandiwe not to argue. She moves to the lounge with the three of them behind her. She sits on the two seater couch, the lady on the three seat and Msizi on his "throne".

Msizi: this has been long overdue and keeping this a secret is not serving me any good.

Her nostrils were flaring with anger.

Msizi: Andisiwe this is my daughter Nkosazana and this is her mother Nozipho. I love her and I want to make her my second wife.

The tears forming in her eyes slowly cascaded down her chocolate face. But it wasn't tears of sadness, it was anger. He knew this all too well. Nozipho on the other hand was shaking in her boots.

Andisiwe: what didn't I give you? Why am I not enough for you Mfusi?

Msizi: it's not like that, I love you Andisiwe.

Andisiwe: sure doesn't feel like it.

She stood up and attempted to walk away. But he stopped her.

Msizi: you can't walk away, I'm still talking to you.

Andisiwe: watch me do it.

She yanked her hand from his and she stormed out. Not the reaction he was hoping for. Nozipho was still nervous, still playing with her hands and shaking like a leaf. Msizi didn't try hard enough to make this easier for the both of them.

Nozipho: I can't do this Msizi.

That came out as a whisper, but he heard her clearly.

Msizi: you can't give up on us, what about our love, our daughter?

Nozipho: I'm not the woman you should be begging right now, your wife just walked out on you and you are sitting here, begging me. I can't do it.

She stood up and found her way out the house, leaving Msizi in dispute with his feelings.

Christine

I felt guilty, so after taking a well deserved nap during the day, I woke up fresh and started preparing an apology dinner for my husband. At least Paloma was with her grandparents so I had that off my hands. There was no love making tonight, I'm in Japan. That's more of a disadvantage on my side because I can't soften him up.

Andile: hawu, nginonyawo oluhle bo! Bafo!

Voices filled the lounge and I knew that it won't be a dinner for two anymore. I'm glad I cooked enough for more than two. I usually do this so we can warm it up for supper the following night.

Andile: mkami, you've recovered?

He said that walking into the kitchen, opening the pots.

Andile: it smells Devine in here.

Behind him followed Sydney, Muzi and Mvelwenhle.

Sydney: ayy Chris!

He came to give me a bear hug, Mvelo should have given me a heads-up.

Mvelo: babe, I hope you don't mind, we're here to watch the game.

I don't even know what game he's talking about, I also don't care. I know he's testing me.

Me: no, its fine.

Mvelo: you cooked?

Me: yeah.

Mvelo: thank you, we'll be in the studio.

He kissed my cheek and walked out, following his friends. It's going to be a long night.

Chapter 49

"Detachment is an art of enjoying something while being open to the possibility of losing it one day."

3 months into a marriage and it feels like I don't know what I'm doing. We are both ever frustrated, work is more than hectic, and we never spend time together. I didn't expect this to happen, especially this early in our marriage. I really try to make it work, but the situation just doesn't allow it to happen. Yesterday, I drove to the Mfusi's and I fetched Paloma for the weekend, I can't stand being alone for too long, I've been doing that for two consecutive weeks. At this point, I'm even considering not falling pregnant, not anytime soon, there is so much that we need to talk about.

Paloma: mommy.

Me: yes baby.

Paloma: where is daddy, I miss him.

I miss him too my love.

Me: he's at work my baby. He's going to come back a little later.

She fell asleep before he came back last night, and she woke up when he was gone. I don't work on weekends, neither does he, but lately, he's been extremely busy, and I understand, I've seen how hectic it gets with architects at my office and how stressed out they get.

Me: I'll give you a bath and then we'll go to the office to give him lunch, how does that sound?

Paloma: that's great!

It sucks having to have her over, but she doesn't even get to spend proper time with him. But I will try my best to be strong for both Paloma and I. I prepared a picnic basket for lunch like I did on his birthday, and I set it aside before I went to get Paloma ready. I'm not going to call him; I'm just going to surprise him. I also got ready and wore my summer dress, the one he got me on my birthday. At least winter is finally over, I can wear it. We climbed into the car, and we were on the way by midday. The PA was not at the front desk, so I let myself in. I stood at the door when I saw her sitting there, eating, talking like they are old friends. Paloma didn't hesitate to run into her father's arms.

Mvelo: love, you didn't say you're coming.

Me: we wanted to surprise you.

Erin: Mrs Mfusi.

Me: I told you, call me Christine.

She nodded and stood up from the chair, fixing her bloody short skirt. I don't know how they allow her to wear such a short skirt, what is she trying to do.

Mvelo: we can continue after lunch Erin.

Erin: yes sir.

She walked out the office, bumping my shoulder in the process. If I was hostile person, I would drag her by her fake hair and beat her to the pulp, but I'm a lady, I don't do those things.

Paloma: mommy made you lunch, and we came to see you because we miss you daddy!

He was beaming, I hadn't seen him smile like that in a while.

Mvelo: I missed you too my little Dove, I came home, and you were sleeping already.

Paloma: did you give me my forehead kiss?

Mvelo: yes, I did my love, and I'll give you another one now.

He pecked her forehead and she giggled softly, she was so happy, I wanted to burst into tears in that exact moment.

Mvelo: Fluff, thank you for this.

Me: she really missed you.

Paloma was lying on his chest, looking all content.

Mvelo: come here.

He held out his hand and I went over to sit on his lap. I felt like a little child as well. He kissed my cheek before pecking my lips and giving me a little squeeze.

Mvelo: I love you.

Me: I love you too Mfusi.

I know it wasn't the right time to address all the other pending issues we had, so I'm just going to sit here and melt into his arms, enjoy this moment while it lasts, which won't be for long.

...

We had finished having lunch, now we were just sitting talking, Paloma was sleeping on the couch. It felt good to actually sit like this, we hadn't talked like normal people in a while. His office phone rang, disturbing our peace.

Mvelo: can't it wait for another hour, I'm still with my family.

...

Mvelo: okay, fine. Give me 10 minutes.

I knew there and then that there was no hope of us spending any more time together. I think he read the disappointment on my face because he started apologizing.

Me: it's fine. You'll find me at home.

Mvelo: I promise I'll try being home early today, I want to spend time with my family.

Me: don't make promises you can't keep.

He looked away feeling guilty, I struck a nerve. He's been saying this for 4 weeks now.

Me: I can take your making empty promises to me, but don't put Paloma under all this stress, she's just a child. The least you could do is make time for her, you only ever see her once or twice a week.

I was already done packing the basket and all I needed to do was pick up Paloma, but he offered, so I let him. He was awfully quiet though, now I know I seriously hit a nerve. He walked us to the car, and he helped strap a sleeping Paloma in her seat. He closed the door and pinned me against the car, his arms on either side on my shoulders.

Mvelo: I'll try to do better Chris, please just give me a little time.

I nodded and looked down. He used his fingers to lift my face and then he kissed me, passionately. My clit started twitching when his hand ran down my back, I'm not lying when I say I miss him. Involuntarily, I moaned in his mouth when I felt his erection press against my stomach. It was getting steamier, but his phone vibrated in his pocket.

Mvelo: fuck!

He banged his fist on the car before he moved away and answered.

Mvelo: I'm coming, I'm coming!

He looked frustrated.

Mvelo: I have to rush back to the office Fluff; I'll see you at home okay?

I nodded and got in the car, what other choice did I have, he wasn't going to leave his job for me.

• • •

I Decided to go visit my father and maybe I would be lucky to find my brother there too. Yes, brother. She gave birth early last month. Turns out my father only told me about the pregnancy when she was 6 months pregnant. I felt betrayed.

Dad: wafika kahle.

He was standing on the doorstep in the kitchen watching me help Paloma get out the car. My father was really getting old now, imagine having a child at age 44. Paloma ran to her grandfather and left me standing there. I carried out some of the gifts I bought for Sinikiwe.

Me: hi daddy.

Dad: Chrissy.

He could see I wasn't 100%, but I'm going to ignore him.

Me: is my baby brother here?

Dad: yes.

He was looking at me suspiciously. I walked past him and washed my hands before I made my way to the bedroom where he was with his mother. I'm not used to her, we only met once or twice, and it was when she was still pregnant.

Me: sanbona.

Julie: say hello big sister.

She's colored, curly hair and all. I figured my father has a type. And this little boy, oh my goodness.

Me: he's so tiny.

I was afraid to hold him. Paloma was by my side, staring at him, asking questions nonstop.

Me: hello baby boy, you are so beautiful.

Paloma: mommy you must also have your own baby.

I laughed and looked at little Sinikiwe. He was so adorable.

Me: you must ask your daddy to give you a baby, my daddy also gave me one.

She blushed before covering her whole face.

Julie: how are you, Chrissy?

Me: I'm good, how are you? How is motherhood?

From what I've gathered, she's a first-time mom.

Julie: I'm having so much fun, but I wish I did this when I was younger. I'm so tired. I'm glad Nhlonipho is here, I don't know what I'd be if he wasn't.

She's starting to scare me.

Julie: having a child is not easy, it's not all roses like they make it seem.

I looked at the little cute baby sleeping in my arms, he looks like an angel.

Me: he doesn't look troublesome.

Julie: he isn't, he just cries, a lot. Whoo, ayy babies.

Me: (chuckles) I don't believe that for one second.

He looks exactly like dad, even with his eyes closed shut, you can see that he is Nhlonipho's son. He's a very handsome young man. And he's so tiny. I held his little hand and he wrapped it around my finger. That tugged on my heart strings.

Julie: he can sense you.

I laughed lowly and wiped my tears. I hate crying, but it's becoming my life, slowly but surely.

Paloma: don't cry mommy. Daddy will give me a baby and I will give it to you, okay?

She was rubbing my shoulder, consoling me, wiping my tears. I laughed a little and kissed her forehead.

Me: thank you baby.

Narrated

She sat in bed brushing Paloma's head gently, while she snored lightly on her lap. She finally gave in and fell asleep, after waiting hours and hours for her father to come back. He once again failed to keep his promise. She almost called him, but decided against at the last minute, she wasn't about to start nagging him. She was frustrated, angry and horny. She rolled out of bed after placing Paloma in a comfortable position and made her way to the bathroom. She slightly closed the door and opened her drawer and took out her vibrator. She leaned against the vanity, spread her legs wide enough and positioned it on her entrance. She was wet and ready, after teasing herself a few times, she slid it in. She wasn't trying to suppress her moans, she was all alone in the house and Paloma was a heavy sleeper, she wouldn't wake up. Her orgasm came faster than she expected, and she had to sit down on the toilet seat after creaming up the dildo. Her legs were shaking as she tried to recover from that wave of pleasure she just experienced. After recovering, she wiped herself and placed the dildo on the sink before walking back to the bedroom to sleep. It was futile waiting up for Mvelwenhle.

Mvelo: Fluff.

He was kissing her all over her face, but she was deep in sleep. This was irritating the shit out of her.

Chris: stop it Mvelwenhle.

He reeked alcohol; didn't he say he was at the office.

Mvelo: I'm sorry Fluff. I was stuck at the office...

Me: I don't want to hear it. Leave, my daughter and I are sleeping.

She turned around and tried to pat the bed, but Paloma wasn't there.

Mvelo: I took her to her room; please can we talk.

She turned on her side lamp and sat up, leaving against the headboard of bed, with her arms folded across her chest.

Chris: you can do it all Mvelo, but don't make me a fool.

Mvelo: I'm not baby, I promise.

Chris: you are reeking of alcohol and its after midnight, you mean to tell you were at the office? Seriously.

Mvelo: I'm not lying to you Christine; you have to believe me. I just had a bit too much to drink, but that's only because I was frustrated and tired. I keep a bottle of whiskey in my office.

She got out of bed and went to the bathroom, but he was following.

Mvelo: I don't want to fight, please.

She ignored him and went to pee in the bathroom. She was still very sleepy; she wasn't paying attention to anything else.

Mvelo: why is there a vibrator covered in cum in my bathroom?

She looked up and he was holding it in his hand, his face was not very welcoming at that very moment.

Chris: I was horny, my husband wasn't home because his job matters more than his family, so I had to do something.

She said that wiping herself and flushing the toilet.

Mvelo: Don't you dare walk out while I'm talking to you.

Chris: what will you do to me? Yes, I have a dildo, what does it change.

Mvelo: Christine by having this you are disregarding my presence and my role as a man and a husband in your life. How do you think I'm supposed to feel looking at this plastic thing covered in your cum, I'm supposed to be doing this, not this.

He threw it on the ground and that seemed to fuel Christine's anger.

Chris: and what do you expect me to do, sit around and wait for you to come home, I'm not going to do that, I'm too young to be trapped in a marriage where I put in all the effort, and you give zero in.

Mvelo: but I'm trying Christine! I'm doing this for our family, so we can be secure!

Chris: you are so greedy; are you not already secure enough?

Mvelo: oh, so now you want me to quit my job and just sit here and do nothing?

Chris: its better than this shitty life we are living.

They were having a full-on argument and it was getting heated.

Mvelo: I don't want this Christine; I don't want to fight with you.

Chris: and you could avoid it by being true to me and keeping your promises. I understand that you are working but I'm sure its not impossible to make time, prioritize your family.

He rubbed his nasal bridge and walked closer to his wife and gave her an embrace.

Mvelo: I also need a break from everything...

Chris: don't make promises you can't keep. Stop hurting Paloma. She was really disappointed that you didn't come home.

Mvelo: I'm sorry Christine, I'm so sorry.

She broke the hug and pushed him to the shower.

Chris: remember when you put me in a shower with cold water when I came home drunk, I think I should do the same.

Mvelo: I'm not drunk. And you aren't off the hook with this thing.

He kicked the dildo that was lying on the floor, and it slid all the way to the door. He closed the shower door behind him and pushed Christine against it.

Mvelo: you and I have some unfinished business.

He was kissing her neck and she was moaning like crazy. His erection was pressing on her mound and her pajama shorts were as good as invisible. He grabbed her butt and lifted her up, walking with her to the bedroom, where he threw her on the bed and took off his clothes. She was already playing with herself, her hand slowly teasing her loins.

Mvelo: mmh, you look so good, do that again.

There was no denying that they had an amazing sex life, no matter how much they fight, the sex and the love making was always perfect and spontaneous. Watching her play with herself like this gave him so much satisfaction. He got on top of her, and she was moaning like crazy, her fingers stuck between her folds.

Mvelo: you want the real thing?

Chris: mmh, yes Mfusi.

He helped her out of her top and exposed her beautiful round breasts. He pulled down the shorts and made her wrap her legs around his waist. She didn't waste anymore time, she grabbed him and inserted it herself. He slid right in, and his groans and her moans filled the entire room.

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For the first time in a long time, she woke up wrapped in his arms. He was already up, staring at her, kissing her forehead every now and then, maybe that's what woke her up.

Mvelo: good morning my love.

Chris: good morning hubby.

He held her closer and squeezed her, embracing, and taking the time to appreciate her presence.

Mvelo: did you sleep well?

Chris: like a baby. You?

Mvelo: I had a good night.

Chris: where is Paloma?

Mvelo: she's in her room watching cartoons.

Chris: and breakfast. I need to feed her.

Mvelo: don't worry about Paloma, she's a happy baby.

Seems like he woke up a long time ago. She's not complaining though, he has a lot to compensate for.

Mvelo: I've applied for leave, 2 months. Technically we didn't have our honeymoon and what better time to go than now.

Chris: sounds amazing, but what about my job? I already used up all my leave days for the wedding.

Mvelo: can't you pull a sick?

Chris: I can't.

Mvelo: then you should quit.

She quickly sat up and gave him a death summoning stare.

Chris: that's unfair of you to ask.

Mvelo: I'm not fighting with you.

She took a deep breath and look down.

Mvelo: there is no use you working for a company that does the exact same thing we do at ours. Your family company. They could be our rival and you are on their side.

As if the Mfusi's would have rivals in this business. They are the biggest construction company in the region, the company Chris works for doesn't even come close to them.

Chris: I love my job Mvelo. I don't want handouts. I worked hard for that job, and I plan on keeping it.

Her salary is decorating the bank, she hardly uses it for anything. This is not the life she thought she would live. Even her father doesn't want anything from her.

Mvelo: it's not a handout. You own almost 30% of Mthiyane Construction, it's basically yours. The best bet would be for you to work there, as a Mfusi wife of course.

Chris: I'll need to think about it.

Mvelo: and the trip?

Chris: I'll try applying for sick leave.

Mvelo: please.

He kissed her neck and cheek.

Mvelo: when is your period?

She looked up and chuckled a little.

Chris: why are you asking?

Mvelo: I don't want any distractions on our honeymoon.

She rolled her eyes and laid it on his chest. They weren't at their happiest, and it wasn't going to be easy going back to that place, where they were unconditionally happy, but it wouldn't be hard, they loved each other, love is the conqueror of any evil.

Christine

I was happy that Mvelo was planning on going on leave, at least now he would be able to be with me and we could try mend our relationship because it was slowly starting to crack. We spent the whole morning and half the afternoon together, as a family today, and Paloma was really happy. She was laughing and playing the whole day, that's why she was knocked out as soon as the car started moving. I'm taking her back to her grandparent's house, baby girl has school tomorrow and I also have work. Mvelwenhle stayed behind to catch up on some work before he closes on Tuesday, so I didn't fight him about it. When I arrived, Ma was with Khauhelo and Sanele by the pool area, relaxing.

Zuzile: hawu, this baby is sleeping.

As heavy as she was, I had to carry her out the car.

Me: she was playing all day, she's extremely tired.

Helo led me into the house and into Paloma's room where I put her down and gave her a forehead kiss. She would freak if she woke up and found out I didn't. I made my way back to the pool area and sat down with Ma.

Zuzile: how are you? How is Mvelo, he doesn't love me anymore.

Me: I'm good Ma. I can't say the same about Mvelo though, he's always at work.

Zuzile: what do you mean always.

I didn't mean it to come out like that, but she can already see there is a problem, convincing her otherwise is another story.

Me: I think he was just having some hectic contracts and he's been coming home late. But we talked about it, he's going on leave.

Zuzile: you aren't being honest with me.

Okay, I am being honest, I'm just summarizing it.

Me: I am Ma, I promise, we are going to be good.

She shook her head in disapproval, looking at me like I have just committed the biggest sin on earth.

Zuzile: listen my baby, I've told you this before, and I'll tell you again; marriage is not easy. It's not just about love, it's also about sacrifices and honesty, infact, there is so much more to it. If one of these things are not present, the marriage won't work. You are young, I am pretty sure you never had marriage in your plans, especially this soon, but you choose to go into it, and now you have to be ready to deal with all of it, head on.

I rubbed my forehead.

Zuzile: don't be ashamed or embarrassed to ask for help. You can always come and talk to me, I'm here for you. Now start from the beginning, tell me what is going on.

Me: he's just been so occupied; he's always working late.

Zuzile: do you believe him when he says that?

Me: sometimes I do, but sometimes he makes me question it. Last night he came home reeking alcohol. I want to believe the story he spun because in the afternoon, Paloma and I went to see him, but I also don't want to believe it because when I got there, he was sitting and talking with his PA like old friends.

Zuzile: has he ever given you a reason to doubt him?

Me: never Ma.

Zuzile: then I feel like you should trust his word. I mean it's all you have. And I'm not saying this because he's my son, but I'm saying this because you yourself just told me he has never given you a reason not to trust him.

I nodded, making sense of what she is saying. I have no reason at all to doubt his word.

Zuzile: but I know that's not the main problem.

Me: it's about Paloma. She was so disappointed on Friday when she went to sleep, and he wasn't home. Yesterday was even worse, she woke up without him and even went to sleep without him. Its not only that Ma, but it's the constant empty promises that he makes to her. I know he has a lot on his plate, I'm old enough to take whatever it is that he throws at me, but Paloma is a baby, she looks up to her father, why does he want to paint a bad picture in her brain for the rest of her life.

She was shaking her head, making those clicking sound.

Me: but we talked, and he promised to do better, that's why he's taking leave. He wants us to go on honeymoon.

Zuzile: I'm glad, and I hope he understands that raising a girl is not easy. That he shouldn't break that little girl's heart because when se grows up, she will look for a father in every man she meets, and that will be on him.

That is true. My father was present in my life, that is why I never looked for a father in a man. Tshego was no exception, I wasn't searching for a father figure in him because I had one, I had nothing missing, I had my father's love, I still do.

Zuzile: I'm not going to say anything to him, because you two have resolved things, and that's what I want, for you guys to sit and resolve thing. Only when you feel it's getting too much for you then you can come and give me your burdens.

Me: thank you Ma.

It was starting to get dark.

Me: I have to get going Ma, it's getting late, thank you for the talk.

Zuzile: anytime my love. Travel safely.

I said my goodbyes and I was off. I hope we stay like this, this happy, tackling this marriage like we are supposed to be doing.

Chapter 50

“the worst feeling unwanted by the person you want the most.”

Christine

The past two weeks have been good for us, my husband and I. We did a lot of introspection on our relationship, talked through things that bothered us and now I can fully say that we are back to that space of happiness again, and it's all because he's on leave. He's spending more time with our daughter and he's making time for everyone else, moreover his family. I'm still working, I can't bring myself to leave my job, no matter how tempting his offer for me to join Mthiyane Construction may be. I

didn't get leave, and that forced him to push me to quit. He really wants to go on this holiday, he's looking at places like Barbados and Costa Rica. He's looking at these fancy places and here I was thinking that maybe we might go to Cape Town. At my big age, I've never been there, such a disgrace if you ask me.

Hope: Chrissy, your husband is here to fetch you.

Oh yes, that's how it has been. He takes me to work every morning and fetches me every afternoon. I thanked her started packing up my desk and bags. I walked out and when I got to reception, he was standing there chatting up a storm with one of my colleagues. But this sight I was seeing, I liked it. It's that sight that every woman fantasizes about, looking at your man and feeling nothing but love for him. Yes he was wearing shorts and slops and a vest, but he was pulling it off very well. I don't know if it's just me, but I feel like I've been extra clingy these days, I've been wanting to be around him more than usual and sometimes being away from his is hard. I went to be by his side as quickly as I could.

Mvelo: are you ready to go.

Me: mmh.

I nodded, while clinging onto him arm. He laughed at me before saying his goodbye to this guy. I know him but I forgot his name, I don't have to know everyone I work with.

Mvelo: missed me?

Me: yeah, just a little.

He was carrying all my bags for me and I was still clinging onto his arm.

Me: what did you get up to today?

Mvelo: I was just sitting at home enjoying the benefits. Now I understand why so many people are unemployed, staying at home is nice.

This man is crazy.

Me: (Laughing) they don't choose to be unemployed babe.

Mvelo: well, I still get it.

I shook my head.

Me: you smell nice.

Mvelo: really?

That's him being stupid again. He opened the car door for me and I settled in the front seat before he also got in and we were off. He always smells nice, but today, I don't know, its like I'm smelling him for the first time.

Me: ungidlisile yini Mfusi?

Mvelo: where is that coming from?

No I really needed to know, why was I going crazy like this over him. It's like I'm seeing him for the first time, butterflies and all.

Me: it feels like I'm looking at you for the first time, like I've never even met you before. I just love you more than usual today.

He laughed as if I was telling a joke.

Me: I'm being serious.

Mvelo: I don't know Fluff, but it's not a bad thing, is it?

Me: no, it isn't.

I leaned over and put my head on his shoulder.

Mvelo: must we go get ice-cream?

Me: yes, please.

I was excited, like a little girl, and it looked like he liked seeing me like this.

Lwa called me and told me she and Sydney were in town, they want us to go out. It's a freaken weekday, I have work tomorrow but Mvelo is going, and I don't want to stay alone in the house. So as lazy as I was, I got ready, and we left the house. He promised that we wouldn't stay for long, I sure as hell was going to remind him about that.

Me: where did they say we were meeting up?

Mvelo: some club in town, I've never been there though.

Me: club? Aint no freaken way. It's a weekday Mvelo.

Mvelo: you've been saying that the whole evening, yet you refused to stay at home.

Me: you want me to stay alone in the house?

Mvelo: if you didn't want to go, you would've had no problem with staying alone.

I sulked at him before lying back on my seat. He was being unreasonable for no reason. We arrived at the so called club and it was not extremely busy like you'd see in a club, but I'd assume that's because it's during the week. But it's a classy establishment, very sophisticated.

Lwa: hey guys.

She was the first one to stand up and give both of us a tight squeeze, she looked so excited.

Lwa: Chrissy you look beautiful.

Me: oh, thank you. You do as well.

I don't understand why she was being so extra, she's never like this. Lwandile, for as long as I've known her, is a no-nonsense taking girl that is not afraid to call a spade a spade. That tends to make her look very quiet and shady. She's never hyper and over the top like now, even when she is drunk. I wonder what the occasion is.

Sydney: Chrissy, hello.

Me: hello Van Vyk.

He laughed, I loved calling him that. It sounded like he was a powerful Afrikaner man with a farm, money and a potbelly. He's actually the exact opposite of that, buff with broad shoulders and strong arms. From what I've heard, he's grown into himself, he used to be super skinny.

Mvelo: we last saw you guys at the wedding.

Lwa: oh, Chrissy, your guys wedding was beautiful.

Me: all thanks to Mrs Mfusi.

Sydney: yes, Mrs Lover of fine things.

I don't like them teasing my mother-in-law. They were laughing.

Me: but I wouldn't have pulled it off without her.

Lwa: well then that means that I'm going to ask her to help me with mine.

I raised my eyes, and yes, it's been there, staring at me the whole time, stupid me didn't notice.

Me: oh my goodness, congratulations guys.

Finally! We have been sitting, waiting, praying for this day to come. Lwa has been wanting this ring all her life. Imagine I came after and still got married before her. She deserves it.

Mvelo: Van Vyck is finally ready to commit, it's been long overdue my brother. Congratulations. Thank you Lwa.

We shared hugs and we ordered a round of drinks for a toast. Her diamond ring was out of this world gorgeous. She couldn't stop staring at it. Love was written all over her face the whole night. I was genuinely happy for her.

She asked me to accompany her to the bathroom. We were both drunk now. Yes, I've sunk into the dark world of alcohol and partying. It's late now, but we are having so much fun, I don't even care about work at this very moment. We got to the restrooms, and she went into the cubicle. I waited for her outside and I looked in the mirror, touching up my face.

Lwa: Chrissy.

Me: yeah?

She came out the cubicle. Her nose had white powder on the tip. I knew exactly what that was, but I'm not going to pry or ask, it's none of my business. It's her life, her choices, and I've seen them doing it before, I'm not surprised.

Lwa: I know we didn't start off on the right foot all those years ago, but you've grown on me and I consider you a friend.

Me: it's all forgiven, it's the past.

Lwa: I want you to be my maid of honour.

Is she joking! Is she trying to make me feel bad. She wasn't even on my bridal party as a bridesmaid, how can she ask me to be her maid of honour.

Lwa: you know, I always thought that when I get married, Isa would be my maid of honour, and I would be hers. She was my best friend, I never had another. I never anticipated that this day would come, and she wouldn't be here to be happy for me.

Why do I feel like I'm a replacement? A substitute maybe.

Lwa: I know we aren't as close as I was with Isa, but I trust you, and you are an amazing human being and I can't find anyone else who would best fit this role. Would you please do me the honours of being my maid of honour.

I didn't want to disappoint her, she was already so happy about it.

Me: I'd be honoured babe.

She gave me a tight hug.

Lwa: thank you.

I thought she had friends. And why is she picking out the bridal party already, she only got engaged last night. But who am I to judge, it's not my life. we went back to the guys and they had already settled the bill and it looked like they were ready to leave.

Mvelo: you have work tomorrow.

Me: I'm not going.

Mvelo: that's the alcohol talking.

He must watch and see. We bid our farewells to each other and we got into our car and we were going back home. He still the Mvelo I know, as if he didn't touch a single drop of alcohol. He really knows how to handle his stuff. We got home and he wanted to go upstairs.

Me: come here.

I pulled him to the lounge and made him sit on the couch.

Mvelo: are we doing this now?

Me: yes.

He laughed. I took off my dress and threw it on the floor before climbing on his lap and I started kiss him, grinding on him slowly. His hands were caressing my whole body and although we weren't the most romantic people, our sexual connection was out of this world.

Mvelo: you should've probably let me get undressed first.

I was struggling with his belt buckle, my underwear was long gone, and he was still fully dressed. I got off him and he undressed. He got on top of me and slowly started dipping his stick, but the amount of pain I was feeling was unusual.

Me: stop.

Mvelo: why?

Me: I'm in pain.

He had a confused look on his face.

Mvelo: should we go to the bedroom?

Me: yes.

Leaving our clothes scattered on the floor like that, he carried me to the bedroom and got between my legs.

Mvelo: must I try again?

I nodded and let him in. It was painful, more painful than the day I broke my virginity, and that was a real disaster.

Mvelo: Fluff, do you want me to stop?

Me: no, its okay really.

I was lying, there was no pleasure for me at all, but seeing him feeling all of it brought me satisfaction. I wonder what the problem is.

•••

Mvelo: are you going to work?

Me: I'm not feeling well.

My eyes were closed shut, I was in so much pain, especially in my vagina. But I wasn't going to tell him that. My head was also pounding.

Mvelo: here is your breakfast, mom asked me to accompany her somewhere, I'll be back in no time.

Me: okay.

Mvelo: are you going to be okay?

Me: yeah, I'll be fine babe, go.

He kissed my forehead before he left. I still had my eyes closed shut, but I needed to open them so I could get out bed and go to the bathroom to see what the problem was. I sat up and opened the plate cover of breakfast next to the bed. It was eggs and bacon. As soon as it hit my nostrils, I felt like puking. I forced myself up to the bathroom and I ended up with my head in the toilet bowl, vomit coming out of my mouth and nose.

Me: (crying) God why me!

I Wasn't joking when I said I was in pain, it was excruciating. I must stop drinking alcohol, it really isn't anyone's friend. After the painful vomiting, I washed my mouth and took a pee. I was bleeding, a lot. I don't have a heavy period, and I got my period

like 3 weeks ago, I'm still good. Other than having this serious hangover, that could be cured with minor painkillers, I needed to understand why my vagina was in so much pain. Without even having the breakfast, as weak as I was, I took a shower and got ready to go to the doctor's office. I'll clean up around the house when I come back, for now, I'm seriously worried about what is going on with me. I'm not going to call Mvelo, he's going to panic. I got myself a bottle of water and I was off. I went to a GP around my area and I was lucky to find it empty.

Me: good morning. I don't have an appointment but I would like to see Doctor is she is not busy.

Receptionist: she is available. Can you please give me your name and surname.

Me: Christine Mfusi.

She typed away on her computer and after a few minutes, she asked for my medical aid card and all those other things. It wasn't long before I was in the doctors office. I switched off my phone.

Dr: Mrs Mfusi, how can I help you today?

Me: I'm here because I think I have an infection down there.

I'm glad this is a female doctor.

Dr: do you have any thrush or rash or discomfort?

Me: I don't have any of those but I feel excruciating pain when I go to the toilet or when I have sex. I was also bleeding.

She nodded and told me to take off my skirt and lie down. She put on her gloves and started inspecting me.

Dr: it doesn't look like an infection, but I'll run some further test to be sure.

She got a swab and took a sample from my vagina. She also gave me a cup and asked me to pee in it. Getting that pee was a mission and a half, my vagina was in serious pain, but I got it and gave it to her.

Dr: I'm going to run some tests on these and when the results come back, I will call you.

Me: how long is it going to take?

Dr: not longer than 2 hours.

Me: I'll wait doctor.

She nodded and walked out. To kill time, I went out to buy myself something to eat. I was still shitting myself, and my headache seemed to get worse with every passing second. I wasn't going to turn on my phone, I know Mvelo is going to start calling me and I don't want to talk right now. I want to get this over and done with and if it's that serious, which I'm hoping it isn't, then I'll tell him. It seemed like time was slowing down instead of going faster, I was sitting outside on a bench eating a pie from Woolworths, the only thing that actually looked and smelled good enough for me to eat. On a normal day, I hate pies, but today it seems like it's the only thing I can keep down. It's only been 30 minutes since I left the doctors office and it feels like it's been two days already. I finished eating and I was left with no other choice but to go back, so I did.

Receptionist: Mrs Mfusi, your results are ready.

That was quicker than I anticipated. Now that I'm here, I'm not ready to hear what is wrong with me. She told me I could go in and when I got there, the doctor was reviewing some documents. I started trembling.

Dr: please sit mam.

I took a seat and I folded my hands on my lap, to try and stop me from fidgeting.

Dr: I have good news and bad news for you.

I breathed in, making sure to take in a well deserved amount of breath to sustain my lungs for what is next.

Dr: congratulations, you are two weeks pregnant.

Instead of feeling happy that I've finally gotten what I wanted, my heart sunk to the pit of my stomach. What about all the bleeding from this morning? I was kak drunk last night.

Me: I was bleeding this morning. Did I lose the baby?

Dr: fortunately, no you haven't, and that is a very rare case. But that's where the bad news comes in.

I wanted to scream my lungs out, or maybe rip out my heart from my chest.

Dr: you have Chlamydia.

I have no freaking clue what that is..

Dr: it's a sexually transmitted disease.

I felt the room getting smaller and the temperature rising. This has to be a joke, no way, it can't happen.

Dr: it is not usually harmful to pregnancy if it is detected at an early stage and if we treat it quickly, your baby will not get affected.

Wait, she lost me at sexually transmitted disease.

Dr: I'll get you on treatment as soon as today and I can refer you to a gynecologist friend of mine who can handle your pregnancy. You also need to bring in your husband or your sexual partner so they can also start treatment.

My whole body was numb, from the tip of my toe to the top of my head. My insides were heating up as if I had just swallowed fire and I could feel my skeleton shaking from the inside. She started giving me cards and papers that I'm assuming are prescriptions, I couldn't hear a word she was saying, my ears were ringing.

...

I don't know how the hell I got home, I couldn't even move my body in the doctors office, they had to help me up. I didn't go to the pharmacy because if I did, I probably would have died on the way. The cheater is not home yet and I don't know I feel about that, especially now that I know he can't be trusted. Out there spreading Chlamydia to everyone. I didn't think the day I found out I was pregnant would be the same day I find out I have a STD and that my husband is cheating on me. What other valid explanation is there to give? I haven't slept with anyone except him in the last 4 years. The exception was when Tshego almost raped me, but that is not the same, that was against my will and it was before we had committed to each other to be faithful forever. I don't know how I feel, I don't know what to do with myself, I don't know what I will do or say to him when he gets here. At this point I don't even know what my feelings for him are. The doctor said I'm two weeks into this pregnancy, which could mean I fell pregnant that night when he came home drunk, that night he convinced me he was at the office the whole night. How dumb of me to believe that. Maybe that's when he caught it, this stupid disease. And my thing is, its not because he cheated, it because he cheated and infected me, and now our unborn child. Now I have to live with the thought that I might lose this child and there is nothing I can do about it, all because of him. Of all people, he knows my fears, my insecurities. He knew how hard it was for me to open up to the idea of children and he goes and does this. Where was I not enough? I thought we had something like no other, what is it that she gave him that I couldn't, an STD? I hope he's happy.

Mvelo: Fluff.

Hearing his voice made my body go cold like a corpse in a mortuary. Who is he calling Fluff, he's disrespecting me.

Mvelo: why aren't you in bed, are you feeling better?

He tried to touch me, and I really tried to let him, but I was disgusted by his mere presence.

Mvelo: Christine.

He was standing behind me, I was sitting at the dinner table, with the envelope with my results staring at me.

Mvelo: what is this?

He tried to take it but I snatched it and threw it across the table.

Me: sit.

He obliged and found his seat across me. The envelope further than the both of us.

Me: I thought you had changed, that you grew up...

Mvelo: what is in that envelope Christine?

Me: shut up, don't interrupt me.

He was shocked by what I just said, but he obliged once again.

Me: you made me put all my trust in you and you do me like this.

Mvelo: wh...

Me: shut it! Keep quiet! I don't want to hear your voice, looking at you is hard enough.

The lump in my throat was making it hard for me to continue speaking.

Me: tell me the truth, and I know of you are lying. Where were you that night, that Saturday night?

He knows exactly what Saturday I'm talking about, it written all over his face.

Mvelo: I was at Mthiyane Construction. I'm not lying to you Christine.

He's such a good liar, if I didn't know what I know, I would believe every word he just said, but how do you explain having Chlamydia, a sexually transmitted disease while you are only sleeping with one man, it makes no sense.

Me: well, congratulations Mfusi, you are going to be a father.

His face didn't light up like it should be when you tell a man such wonderful words. Good, he can see that I'm not happy, at all.

Me: smile, why aren't you happy? This is what you wanted.

Mvelo: Christine...

Me: don't say my name with your dirty mouth.

He should know by now that he has nowhere to run to.

Me: I'm glad you aren't happy, it's not here to stay. Your dirty ways are going to kill my child Mvelwenhle, congratulations.

I saw his pupils dilate and remorse flash across his eyes, he knows I know his indiscretion. I sat up, reached for the envelope and threw it in his face, stood up and left him there. He can go to hell for all I care.

Chapter 51

“how do you go back to being strangers with someone who's seem your soul?”

I went upstairs because I could feel my tears forming in my eyes. I didn't want him to see me crying, but I had been holding it in from this morning, now that I've told him, its sinking in. I was cheated on, infected with a disease and now my baby is in danger. This is not what I signed up for when I got married, it was never part of the deal. I need to talk to someone.

Dad: my baby.

He sounded so happy, I could hear Sinikiwe cooing and playing in the background, that seemed to trigger me and I couldn't suppress the loud cry and erupted from the pit of my stomach.

Dad: Christine, what's going on, are you okay?

Me: I'm fine daddy, sorry. I just...

Dad: where are you?

Me: I'm at home. Don't worry dad. I'm just overwhelmed, I'll be okay.

Dad: are you sure, I can come there.

Me: no, its okay. Mvelo is here.

Saying his name made me want to pull out my pubic hair with my bare hands.

Dad: okay. I'll call you later my love.

Me: thank you daddy.

I regret making that call, I don't want him to worry over nothing. But I'm not okay, and I won't be okay until I speak to someone, anyone. I went to the bathroom and washed my face before grabbing my jacket and car keys and walking out the room. It wasn't late yet, so I was hoping I would find her home alone. When I walked past the dining room, he stood up quickly, his hands on his head, his eyes were red, tears glistening, as if they would fall.

Mvelo: it was a mistake Christine I promise you. Please believe me.

He got on his knees and held my hand, tears cascading down his face. I felt no remorse for him, he could cry a river for all I care.

Me: (whispering) let go of my hand.

Mvelo: (crying) please Christine. I'm so sorry, I'll do better, please, don't leave me.

In all this chaos and mayhem, that's the thought that didn't cross my mind, leaving him, for good. Strange.

Me: I said let go of my hand.

He got the message and let go, but instead of standing up, he wrapped his arms around my waist, his scent filled my nostrils.

Mvelo: please. Forgive me.

He was crying like a little baby, a baby I had no interest and intention of hushing. I untangled his arms from my waist and walked out. He tried to follow me.

Me: give me space! You are suffocating me Mvelwenhle, let me leave! Please! I just need to think.

He let me leave, and I was grateful for that. I was still disoriented by everything and I wasn't sane, but I got there safely and made my way inside the house and she was sitting in the lounge. As soon as I saw her, I broke down. I felt my knees giving in and a consistent stabbing pain did not leave my heart. The pain had started again. She

caught me before I fell and with her worried face, she dragged me to the couch and made me lay my head on her lap.

Zuzile: cry my baby, let it out.

I haven't told her anything, but the way she is holding me and consoling me, it's like she knows all my secrets. It wasn't hard for me to just let it all out because she wasn't judging me, she just let me be. I knew coming here was the best bet. My stomach was in pain from all the crying, but at this moment, the physical pain was way better than the pain I was feeling inside my heart, a pain I cannot cure, no matter how hard I try. It's only been a few hours since I found out but it's been such a Rollercoaster.

Zuzile: let's go upstairs.

She helped me up and we walked up to what used to be Mvelo's room. I hated being in here, but what other choice do I have.

Me: I don't want Paloma to see me like this.

Zuzile: talk to me my baby. What's going on?

I got comfortable and laid my head in my hands.

Me: its all getting too much for me to handle Ma, I'm in so much pain.

Zuzile: is everything between you and Mvelwenhle okay?

Me: nothing is okay. Ma he lied to me. He lied, he cheated and decieved me.

She drew in a heavy breath before turning to look at me. She still wasn't judging me, she was listening.

Me: he promised and swore to me that he hadn't done anything that night but now I'm sitting here with a baby in my stomach and a STD that might harm me and this child.

The shock on her face could not even be disguised. There was also a look of disappointment in his eyes.

Me: Ma can we please keep this between us. The doctor told me that there is a chance of this baby not surviving.

Zuzile: did you tell him?

Me: I did.

Zuzile: and what do you want to do?

I don't know, I'm confused.

Me: if this is what hate feels like, than I hate that I love him like this. That I love him so much that not even the thought of leaving him has crossed my mind.

Zuzile: I'm not going to tell you how to feel, or how to deal with this, because that's a choice that you have to make on your own.

Me: kuyasinda Ma. I didn't sign up for this. It's too early in my marriage to be dealing with so much.

I had started crying all over again.

Zuzile: no one deserves to feel pain, but we can't run away from it. The reason why I say I will let you make your own decision is it's your life, you know what makes you happy, I don't. But you are a strong woman, you will fight and you will get through all of this. You will be okay, I believe in you. And I want you to know that I support you in any decision that you take.

She was being genuine. No hidden agenda, I am so blessed to have her in my life. She stood up and came to give me a hug.

Zuzile: uqine edolweni sthandwa Sami, there is nothing God can't do for you. He loves you, he will move mountains for you, don't hesitate to draw close to him.

I nodded, my head resting on her bosom. I was tired of crying. She pulled out of the hug. She held my hands in hers and made me place them on my stomach. Before I could resist or protest, she started praying over my stomach. That alone got me emotional all over again. When she had finished praying, she was also crying. She was hurt too, you could see it in her eyes. She had not mentioned a single thing about Mvelo, and I appreciate her for being here for me like she promised to, not as a mother in law, but as a mother. I'm sure if it was another woman, she would've told me that "kuyabekezelwa. Indoda iyawenza amaphutha." All the things I don't want to hear right now.

Zuzile: okay, go clean up your face, I'll go find Paloma and distract her.

Me: thank you Ma.

She nodded and walked out the room, leaving me alone with my thoughts.

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I left without Paloma and anyone else in the house seeing me. My car was in the driveway, but they were all indoors, they didn't know I was here. And that's good, that talk will remain between Ma and I and if I don't lose this baby, we will tell the rest of the family together. I don't know about my so called husband, thinking about him causes me unnecessary heartache. I'm barely holding on, its like I'm dangling from a thread. Today has been too long, I just want to get home and sleep, and never wake up ever again.

Mvelo: Fluff, thank you, thank you for coming back.

He was annoying me. On top of angering me, he was getting on my last nerve.

Me: get away from me.

Mvelo: no, we need to talk.

Me: I don't want to talk to you. I have nothing to say to you. Leave me alone, I'm tired, I want to go and rest.

Yes, my body still feels like I've been run over by a bus. And my head is still pounding, like someone was beating the back of my head with a hammer. And he's here asking to talk, he's joking.

Mvelo: I'll run you a bath and make you something to eat, is that okay?

Me: I don't want anything from you.

I closed the bedroom door behind me and locked it. He was annoying. I stripped naked and when I turned around, I was met by my reflection in the full length mirror. My body still looked exactly like it does on a normal day. No sign of STD or pregnancy. I feel like my life is over, and I'm sitting back, watching it collapse right in front of my eyes. It's a comedy. I stepped into the shower, and let the water wash away all the sorrow for the day. I wish it could cleanse my heart the same way my body has just been cleansed. The worst part about this whole thing is that I still love him, despite all the things that have transpired today. To think just yesterday we were happy and in love. I couldn't keep my hands of him, and now, I don't even want to see him. I climbed into the bed and I fell asleep immediately, with only a towel wrapped around my body.

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I woke up feeling a bit better than I did the previous day, but that was only my physical being. My heart was still hurting. I rolled out of bed and the towel was stained with blood. I didn't want to panic, it could be either of two things, my worst nightmare or this Chlamydia. I made the bed and went to shower. When I was done, I went to open the door, and I found him sleeping on the floor, like a bridge by the door. I walked over him and made my way downstairs. As if I cared where he slept last night. I found the envelope still sitting on the table and I took it and walked out the house. I had to go to the pharmacy now to get the medication that I need for my many diseases that needed curing. And the doctor Said I should start as soon as possible so I don't get affected by it in the long run. After a collected my medication, I went to the doctors office. Only when I sat down, I realized that I hadn't eaten anything.

Dr: Mrs Mfusi, I'm glad you are back, buy where is your husband?

Me: he's at home.

Dr: you have to bring him in as well so we can get him on treatment.

Me: he's a grown ass man, if he's feeling sick, he will find his way to the hospital.

She cleared her throat at my sudden outburst of emotions.

Me: how do I differentiate between a miscarriage and this implantation bleeding?

Dr: you will feel cramps when you are suffering a miscarriage. But if you start your treatment, and you eat healthy and practice good energy, chances of a miscarriage will be low. But you need to be carefully monitored, especially for the next 3 months which is your first trimester.

She gave me a thorough breakdown of how to take my antibiotics and she told me that I would be okay in 2 to 3 weeks. She also referred me to an OB/GYN, made an appointment for the following day and told me I would be getting my medication for the pregnancy. I left the office feeling as if I would collapse from hunger so I went to get myself some McDonald's. When I got home, he was sitting in the lounge, still wearing yesterday's clothes, looking like a homeless person. He had bags under his eyes and his skin tone seemed to be darker than normal.

Mvelo: how long are we going to ignore each other.

He was testing my patience, and I wasn't going to fall for it. I went to the kitchen and sat there eating my food. It wasn't appetizing, I didn't enjoy it at all, but I needed to fill my stomach. Not long after I left him in the lounge, he follows me into the kitchen.

Mvelo: when are we going to talk about this Christine? I just want you to hear my side of the story.

Me: oh because you are the victim in all of this?

He kept quiet.

Me: no, you said you wanted to talk, khuluma phela! Are you the victim?

Mvelo: no. But would you give me a chance.

Me: nothing you say or do will change the way I feel about you right now Mvelwenhle. You have lost my trust. I have a reason to not believe anything that comes out of your mouth because you have proven to me that you cannot be trusted.

Silence from Mvelwenhle Mfusi.

Me: khuluma phela.

Mvelo: it wasn't my intention to hurt you, or putting our baby in danger. It was a mistake Fluff, it shouldn't have happened, I was drunk and she led me on. But it meant nothing.

I was so disappointed in him, more than anything, it was disappointment that I was feeling. And that's why I still loved him, because I wasn't angry, I was disappointed.

Me: talking to you is giving me high blood pressure and that's not good for my baby.

Call me childish or whatever, but all I'm hearing is "I wasn't wrong!" once he accepts that he is at fault and starts apologizing for the right reasons, and stops lying, then maybe I might consider forgiving him. I've lost all trust in him though, he has broken that.

Mvelo: so when can we talk about it?

Is he really asking.

Me: when I feel like it.

I went to the sink to wash my hands and I drank my medication. He just stood there watching me, looking like a ghost. Nothing like the man I married. That was only 3 months ago by the way, and we are already experiencing hell bent situations like these. Wow, life is a scam.

Narrated

Zuzile was worried about the situation in Palm Kloof, it occupied her mind the whole day. Kabelo could see that something was off with her.

Kabelo: okay, I've been trying to ignore you but your silence is starting to bother me now, what's going on?

Zuzile: nothing, I'm okay.

She shrugged him off, but she knew better than to do that, he knows her like the back of his hand. He can read right through her. But she promised Christine not to tell anyone, and that is what she was going to do, keep quiet about it. She was also tired of fighting for Mvelwenhle, or getting involved in his messes. She knew that if she tells Kabelo, he won't hesitate to get in the car and drive straight to their house and beat him like a little boy.

Kabelo: I don't like lies. Don't lie to me.

Zuzile: I'm just concerned about something. It's not a big deal, I'll be okay.

He was curious and he was shocked too. Zuzile never keeps anything from him, they talk about everything, EVERYTHING! Why is this particular thing being kept a secret.

Zuzile: don't push me to tell you, I won't.

She could read his facial expression and she could see that he wanted to ask. He was determined to find out what it is that was worrying her so much. His phone rang while he was about to fight what she had said. He answered and when he listened to what was being said on the other side, it was like he had seen a ghost.

Zuzile: kwenzenjani?

Kabelo: Msizi is in hospital. He had a heart attack.

Zuzile: hawu smakade.

She could feel tears stinging the back of her eyes.

Kabelo: we have to go to Cape Town. Everyone.

Zuzile: okay.

She said that already rolling out of bed. She was working on packing some clothes for the both of them. She also had to prepare for the kids, but something caught her off guard.

Kabelo: MaFakude, kubi.

...

Kabelo: he's hospitalized. We have to go to Cape Town.

She was very confused, staring at him, trying to understand who the hell this man is talking to.

Kabelo: we will be there first thing in the morning.

He hung up the call and by then, Zuzile eyes were piercing through him.

Zuzile: who is that?

Kabelo: don't worry about that. Let me help you.

Zuzile: I hope none of you are cheating again.

Kabelo: why do you say again?

She raises her eyebrow at him, as if they don't have enough cheating scandals, moreover him.

Kabelo: I was bewitched.

That's always his defense, and it's valid enough, but now Mvelwenhle. He has joined the team.

Kabelo: none of us are cheating on you guys, whatever you find out in the next coming days shouldn't come between us.

That statement alone was a red flag.

...

This was Christine's first time going to Cape Town, and it wasn't on good terms. The trip was sour for everybody. Everyone was going through something and so, silence was the best bet. They flew, it was the quickest way to get there, especially because Andisiwe was alone. But they were traveling with Nozipho, a foreigner to Zuzile and Thando. They also met Nkosazana, and the uncanny resemblance to Melisizwe, they had been whispering amongst themselves the whole way. They finally arrived, and Mvelo was trying to help Chris with her bags but she refused, almost drawing attention to them. Yes, they still weren't on speaking terms, and they both were miserable. When Andisiwe saw Zuzile, she broke down, and she cried in her arms.

Zuzile: ncese sisi, he's going to be better, he's strong.

At this moment, the so called homewrecker Nozipho hadn't appeared. But when their eyes locked as she stood at the door, she felt rage rising from the pit of her stomach.

Andisiwe: what is this witch doing here.

Vusi: kahle sisi, calm down.

Andisiwe: no Vusi, she's the reason why my husband is lying on that hospital bed.

At least the children had cleared the scene, they didn't have to worry about that. But it looked like a battle zone, with the wives on Andisiwe's side and Kabelo and Vusi in front of Nozipho.

Andisiwe: why are you two protecting her, is it because she gave your brother the daughter I denied him, is that why? After everything I've done for this family?

Zuzile was fuming mad, and Kabelo was looking at her with that guilty face.

Andisiwe: I want her out of my house. She must take her offspring and go.

Nozipho was sobbing softly behind the two men. This hurt her too, she loved Msizi, a lot. And it wasn't about the money or whatever else people may accuse her off whenever she is spotted with him. She genuinely loves him, and she wouldn't have given him his greatest gift if she didn't.

Andisiwe: phuma! Manje!

She was getting violent, so they held her back. Kabelo and Vusi walked her out and they sat with her in the car.

Vusi: we can book a hotel room for you.

Nozipho: no, Msizi bought us an apartment in town, I'll go there.

Kabelo: will you be okay?

Nozipho: yes, I will. Where is my daughter?

Kabelo: she is going to stay here with her siblings.

Nozipho: but you heard her, I don't want anything to happen to her.

Vusi: nothing is going to happen to Nkosazana, she is home where she is. Thandiwe won't hurt a little child. She's not a monster.

Reluctantly so, she agreed to leave her daughter with her siblings and she was driven back to her apartment. Meanwhile, inside the house, Zuzile and Thando were trying to find the missing pieces of the puzzle.

Andisiwe: seems like we're the only people that didn't know about this affair baby.

Zuzile: but how dare they disrespect you like that, bringing her here like she belongs.

Andisiwe: I don't want to do this anymore Lethukuthula, I can't.

Zuzile: what do you mean you can't?

Andisiwe: he loves her. I saw it in his eyes that day he brought her here.

Zuzile: no, I know what this is. She's just another Sthokozo, she's is bewitching ubhuti.

That was trauma taking over her. The mere thought of having to deal with such again gave her chills.

Zuzile: that's why he had a hear attack, it's her muthi.

Andisiwe: stop it Lethukuthula.

Her tears were cascading down her face, and she wasn't bothered about wiping them.

Andisiwe: uyamuthanda. I don't want to stand in his way. If she makes him happy then that's what I will give him because I love him that much.

What these ladies don't know is that one of the main reason why he's in hospital is because of the constant bickering between him and Andisiwe, and what she is feeling right now is more guilt than anything. The thought that she could have lost him to death sounds worse than losing him to another woman. She's holding on to all that they used to have, it's good enough to keep her going. Her mind was made up, no one could change it. And so, Zuzile and Thando sat there and watched her cry. That's all they could do.

Chapter 52

Christine

He's sleeping on the couch. That's where he belongs. Even the way he breaths angers me, imagine having him touching me the whole night. I didn't imagine my first time in Cape Town to be this sour. Everyone is just unhappy, especially with Bab'Msizi in hospital. They said he suffered a heart attack and we were all forced to fly here, don't ask me why. Mummy and Gogo didn't come though, I don't think they told Gogo, I'm sure she would have a heart attack of her own. She loves her sons way too much. Because of all the things going on, I can't even marvel at the beauty of this estate. The room we are sleeping in, has a view of a Vineyard and from what I've gathered, it's Mfusi land. It is a wonderful house, I won't even start to talk about the interior. I only got a glimpse but I love what I saw. It's hard to believe that this is the South Africa I know. I was up before him, and I went to take a bath, got ready to go and do my wifely duties. I found all the women were up and they were starting on breakfast.

Thando: Ntombiyelanga.

She was sitting down, she patted the chair next to hers for me to come and sit next to her. I greeted Ma'Mdala and Ma before joining her on the seat. Mamncane looked concerned about something.

Thando: are you okay?

I don't know where that question was coming from so I lifted my head and looked at Ma for clarity. I hope she didn't tell them.

Me: I'm fine Ma.

Thando: and how is marriage treating you?

This reminded me of the first day I met all of them back in Amanzimtoti when we sat in the kitchen and they interrogated me.

Me: its good, better than I expected.

I was lying through my teeth, but how does one begin to explain such. Ma was looking at me, and she also looked concerned, but I understand why, she knows. What about this woman. I won't count Ma'Mdala because she may be here physically but spiritually, she's far away.

Thando: that's good.

Zuzile: can you please come and help me with the kids so we can get ready to go to the hospital.

I'm glad she rescued me from the kitchen because if I stayed any longer, I was going to vomit this baby out.

Zuzile: I didn't tell her anything.

That's the first thing she said to me as soon as we were far enough from the kitchen. I believe her.

Zuzile: but Christine you are losing weight, are you not eating?

Me: I do Ma.

I'm lying, sometimes I have no appetite and can go the whole day on water.

Zuzile: that's not good for the baby. You losing so much weight.

Me: I can't keep anything down Ma, it's hard.

Zuzile: maybe I should come stay with you.

Me: oh no, there's no need Ma, I'm okay, I promise.

Zuzile: I'll monitor you closely. If you don't gain weight, I'll be forced to move in with you.

She's somewhat heaven sent if you ask me. Paloma was wide awake and playing games on her tablet when I walked into her room. She was sharing it with Uthandile but there was another child sleeping with them. I'm guessing that is Nkosazana, Bab'Msizi's daughter.

Paloma: mommy!

She came and jumped at me, but I didn't have the strength to pick her up, I was basically paper weight at this point.

Me: morning baby. Did you sleep well?

Paloma: yes, I did. Where is daddy?

Me: he's sleeping. Come, let's go take a bath so you can eat.

She was excited, as always. I shut down the idea to go Mvelo, I'm not ready to pretend to be happy with him yet. I woke up the other girls and Nkosazana started crying for her mommy. I was trying to calm her down but nothing was working.

Zuzile: ubani okhalayo?

Me: she wants her mom.

Now I know Ma is a kind woman, I expected her to do this. She took Nkosazana and hushed her, talked to her and said whatever she said and she was quiet. I liked that, that she didn't outcast the child because of her mother. I on the other hand have no idea what I'm doing. I was freaking out, didn't have a single clue how to handle that. Paloma isn't a cry baby, it's easy to convince her. What will I do when this baby is born and I have to nurture him or her. I finished bathing them, got them dressed and we all went downstairs for breakfast. Paloma and Uthandile insisted on feeding themselves so I was Zana's designated mother for the day. Andile came to us at the kiddies table and she was very happy to see him.

Nkosazana: Bhuti!

She was lifting her arms up for him to take her, so he did.

Andile: mkami, have you eaten?

Come to think of it, no.

Me: no, not yet.

Andile: why, do you want to die on us now. Come.

He helped me up and we walked to the kitchen. I still had Zana's food in my hands and he was carrying her. He placed her on the counter and I continued to feed her while he fixed me something to eat. I think I married the wrong brother.

Andile: mkami, ubafo uphambukile.

So he told him, I'm not surprised, but this action of his, sending his brother to come and speak to me, it shows weakness.

Me: no Andile, ayikho leyonto.

Andile: he made a terrible mistake, it wasn't his intention to put you and the baby in danger.

Me: well, it doesn't change anything. And if anything happens to my child, that's on him. Stop fighting his battles, its not going to work.

He shrugged his shoulders and came closer to where I standing. He gave me the plate of food and the smell of bacon made me nauseous.

Me: I don't eat bacon.

Andile: since when.

I started gagging at that was a sign for him to remove the plate away from my sight. I ran to the nearest bathroom and I vomited so badly, it felt as if my whole stomach would come out of my mouth. There was a knock on the door.

Mvelo: Fluff are you okay?

I was still vomiting, he came and held my hair back and he was rubbing my back. I wouldn't protest at this moment, I was in too much pain. Yes, vomiting is painful. When I was done, he tried to help me up.

Me: don't touch me.

Mvelo: come on Christine, I'm just trying to help.

Me: I don't need your help. Leave me alone.

I rinsed my mouth and walked out, leaving him there to pick up his jaw from the floor. Mxm.

...

I just believe this was an opportunity for the family to spend time together. We hadn't been together since the wedding at that was 3 months ago. After we came back from the hospital, which almost turned into a war zone, it was decided that we would go for lunch. I wasn't looking forward to it, I was exhausted and I wanted nothing but to be in bed catching z's. All this pretending to be happy with Mvelo was sucking the life out of me. And I think the family, especially Mamncane was suspicious about my behavior. I don't want them to find out that I'm pregnant. I want to at least finish my medication and get over and done with the first trimester so I can be out the danger zone. They all heard me vomiting this morning because the closest bathroom was right by the lounge.

Bab'Vusi: they said they are discharging him tomorrow if he remains stable. If they do, then we can all be able to go back home on Wednesday.

Today is Monday! I want to hang myself right now. There is indistinct chatter around the table, people talking to the people closest to them. I was sitting next to Mvelo and Andile on the other side. I has nothing to say to neither of them.

Kabelo: ukahle Ntombiyelanga?

I raised my head and looked at him, he had a warm look on his face, one that told me that I could confide in him. That look right there reminded me of my father and it made me want to break down and cry, but I knew better than to do that here, so I pushed back my tears.

Me: yes baba, I'm okay.

I gave him a weak smile, and you could see he was not buying it, but he didn't pry. I hate feeling like this, I don't want to be trapped in these feelings anymore. It hurts so much.

Mvelo

Not only do I have to carry around all this guilt, I have to sit and watch the woman I love suffering, dying inside and it's all my fault. I don't blame her for not wanting me to be around her, I betrayed her in the worst possible way. The one thing I promised I would never do, and worse, I put both her and my baby's life in danger. She didn't hesitate to tell me that if anything happens to this baby, it's on me, and I totally understand where she is coming from. I'm slowly falling into a cycle of depression, I can feel myself going back to that dark place that I hadn't visited in years. Slowly but surely, I was falling.

Dad: son, come here.

Christine turned and looked at me, her eyes hollow and dark. The dark bags under her eyes told a story of sleepless nights. It's not hard to point out that she is not okay. She thinks she's hiding it well, but she isn't. And now I know Kabelo wants to ask me about that exactly. I followed him out to the garden where he was going. He was still calm, but his bipolar ass could change up on me at any given second.

Dad: sit.

He patted the spot next to him and anyone knows that you don't sit next to him when he could hurt you when you piss him off. What he wants to hear will piss him off and that might cost me my life.

Dad: don't think just because we are here worried about Msizi that we don't see that Ntombiyelanga is not okay.

A lump steadily formed itself on my throat.

Dad: she may lie but we see her tears, no matter how hard she tries to push them back. We see the bags under her eyes and the weight loss. We see it all Mvelwenhle.

He was too calm, way too calm for my liking. Anything could happen when he is this calm. Anything from a beating to me ending up in a hospital or worse, a mortuary.

Dad: what have you done?

That question sent shivers down my spine, that and the cold look on his face.

Dad: and don't you dare lie to me because if I find out that you did my boy, I won't hesitate to take you back where you come from.

This is the part where I should start talking to save my life, but the lump stuck in my throat won't let me.

Me: I made a mistake Dad.

Dad: you took her away from her home to mistreat her? Is that what you promised her?

Me: no.

Dad: what did you do?

Me: I slept with another woman.

He went dead still, only his heavy breathing was audible. This was my chance.

Me: I didn't mean to hurt her like that, I just slipped up baba. I didn't mean to put her life and our baby's life in danger.

He slowly turned and looked at me, his eyes were dark. It looked like he would break my neck right there and then.

Me: I gave her an STD.

I was probably making matters worse by telling him such information, but I needed all of this off my chest. It was getting heavy. I buried my head in my hands when I felt tears trickle down my face. I hated the man I had become, weak and emotional. Since I met Christine, ever since I let her into my heart, every single feeling is so real, I can feel and everything I feel is raw. Something I wasn't expecting happened, as I sobbed in my hands, he placed his hand on my back, reassuringly.

Dad: she's going to forgive you. If you try hard enough and show her how much you regret it, she will forgive you.

Me: (sobbing) She doesn't even want to talk to me Dad.

I want to stop but I can't. I hate feeling this weak. Only Christine can make me weep like a little child. After a few minutes, I raised my head and when I looked at the window above the garden, she was standing there, staring at me, not a single emotion painted on her face.

Dad: it's time you man up to your mistakes and take your life back. You can't lose your family over something as stupid as a hoe. Fix yourself boy.

He patted my shoulder a little too hard before standing up and leaving me sitting there covered in tears. Oh the things women make us go through.

...

I wanted nothing but to be by myself after that talk with dad. I can't say it helped, because he didn't advise me on how to handle a situation like this, but it was good for me, at least I spoke to someone about it, that helped a little. For November weather, it was very cold here and I didn't bring any warm pajamas because my wife is angry at me so I had to pack my own suitcase. She had spoiled me so much that I had forgotten how to do things on my own. I'm so dependent on her. So now I have to get two blankets so I can at least be warm tonight. I fixed my couch so I could sleep on it and wrapped myself in the blanket.

Chris: Mvelwenhle.

I could hear her voice distantly, but I was in a deep sleep, and I was very warm, opening my eyes would be very hard. She started shaking me and that woke me up almost immediately. I even almost fell off the couch.

Chris: come to bed.

All this trouble to move me from my now new accustomed sleeping place to the bed she kicked me out of. She left me there and made her way to bed. As soon as I uncovered the blanket that I was covered in, a severe cold front hit me. I put on my shoes and slowly dragged myself to the bed. On my side, there folded neatly, were my pajamas. I looked up at her but she was facing the other way, sleeping, or maybe pretending.

Me: thank you Fluff.

Nothing, not even a movement. I got dressed and slid into the duvet. There was a fort of pillows dividing the bed, closing the gap between us. She really didn't want me to touch her. Just when I was about to shut my eyes and sleep, her voice spoke.

Chris: who is she?

I don't want to annoy her more than she already is.

Me: it was Erin.

If this talk is what it takes to fix things between us then I will tell her everything she wants to know.

Chris: how long has it been going on?

Me: it only happened once, it was a mistake.

Chris: did you enjoy it?

Me: it meant nothing to me. It was a moment of weakness, she took advantage of me being drunk.

Chris: you didn't answer my question.

Me: no, I didn't.

Silence passed between us, how does one begin to answer such a question.

Chris: so what now? How do we move past this?

Me: I will do anything and everything for you to forgive me Christine. I love you and I don't want to lose you. You are my family, my life.

Chris: I forgave you a long time ago. I accepted your apology, I just don't know how I'm going to trust you again.

Me: I'll gain your trust back. Baby steps.

She was breathing heavily, but she was still facing the other way.

Chris: and what about our baby?

That's the one thing that broke me the most about my indiscretion, that I put my baby's life in danger.

Me: whatever happens, I'm here for you. If we lose him, we lose him together.

I hated this with my whole life. But who could I blame, I set myself up for this. It's all my fault.

Me: I'm sorry for putting you through this Christine. I know my sorry will never take away the hurt but I hope it tells you how much I regret it.

Chris: okay.

Me: I love you, and our son.

Chris: who said it's a boy?

Me: I want it to be a boy.

Chris: so he can be like you? No, thank you.

I know she's joking, but that hit a nerve. Too soon for her dark humor.

Chris: I love you too Mvelwenhle.

Me: can I hold you?

Chris: you are pushing it.

Me: I'm sorry.

I turned and faced the other way. What's a relationship without awkward conversation and dark humor between each other? I wouldn't trade what I have with this woman for anything in the world.

Chapter 53

Narrated

She wasn't allowed any visitors since that day of the accident. But is accident the right word to use for what she did? Someone lost their life because of her. And so, after getting another 6 months to serve, she's been denied visitors. But today, is different, someone is here to see her, they've never met in real life, and she's never met him at all, but he knows all about her, and he is here to probably change her life.

Ntswaki: who are you?

Que: sit down.

She reluctantly lowered herself on the chair and stared at him dead in the eyes.

Que: how are you Ntswaki?

Ntswaki: I'm in a looney bin, people think I'm crazy, if I get angry that you aren't telling me who you are, they might just want to lock me up for another 6 months. So you tell me who you are now.

He chuckled, throwing his head back, irritating Ntswaki more. But she knew better than to snap, otherwise they will lock her up again.

Que: Qiniso, but you can call me Que. I'm here to take you out of this misery.

Ntswaki: who sent you? Is it Nyakallo?

Que: Tshego told me about you.

Ntswaki: Tshego?

Not because she didn't remember who he is, but she was curious about what he had to do with this. And he hadn't come to see her since that day of Mvelwenhle's wedding to Christine. That was in July, it is November now.

Que: Tshegofatso. He was my brother in life, we did everything together. He told me he met you in a jail cell.

Ntswaki: where is he?

Que: they murdered him. Like an animal.

His eyes went dark, but that wasn't the scary part. Ntswaki was slowly going crazy.

Que: you have to calm down.

Ntswaki: who did it?

Que: it was the Godfathers son. I don't know his name because he's not in the game.

Ntswaki: why would they kill him? What did he do?

Her hands were shaking, and it was hard to stop them. They were slowly becoming visible and Que had to put his over hers so the nurses wouldn't notice what was happening.

Que: he tried to stop his wedding but they shot him and sent his body to his apartment.

Ntswaki had tears rolling down her face, but it wasn't sadness, it was the anger that was slowly but surely building up from the pit of her stomach. The anger she had to suppress because if she dare do anything to jeopardies her good record from the past 3 months, she might just spend the rest of her life in here.

Que: I need you to help me. We need to wipe them out. They killed him, they deserve to die.

Ntswaki: and that slut.

She emphasized on the word so hard that Que shifted uncomfortably in his seat. He realized he was dealing with a real psychopath. Exactly what he needed to avenge the death of his best friend.

Que: I'll get to pulling some strings and you will be out of this dump by tomorrow morning. We need to teach some people a lesson.

They sit here plotting murder like it's a normal thing to do on a daily, Lord save them.

Christine

No matter how bad things are between us, he's still my husband and I still love him more than anything and seeing him suffer hurts me. I know he didn't pack any pajamas, so I did it for him. Seeing him all wrapped up in a blanket on the couch made me feel bad and the best bet was for me to let him back into bed. It didn't change the way I felt about him. It's still going to be hard for me to trust him, but I'm open to giving it a second try, that's good enough for the both of us. Everyone woke up this morning and went to the hospital, but I wasn't feeling well so I stayed behind. My whole body was aching and my head was pounding. Sitting up was difficult on its own, as soon as I would raise my head, everything would flash before my eyes. I'm hungry and frustrated but I know getting up is going to be harder so I'm going to sit here and pray for a miracle.

Mvelo: are you okay?

I lifted my head and looked at him. It looked like he came from a jog, thank God.

Me: you didn't go to the hospital?

Mvelo: no. Do you need anything?

I could choose to be prideful and say no, but I need help, lots of it.

Me: I can't get out of bed.

Mvelo: what?

He was by my side in an instant, but I don't think I should've used those words, he's thinking about something else now.

Me: no, I'm not paralyzed. My body is in pain and I'm dizzy.

Mvelo: where do you want to go?

Me: I'm hungry.

Mvelo: I'll get aunty to make you something to eat.

He was feeling my temperature as if he was a doctor, looking at my eyes and all the other things. I won't lie, I was uncomfortable with him touching me, but what other choice did I have, I needed help.

Mvelo: are you allowed to drink medicine for pain?

Me: I don't think so.

He really was trying to help. He got me my food, went as far as feeding me and ran me a bubble bath. He was trying, and that's all that mattered, his efforts.

Mvelo: when are we telling the family about the baby?

He was helping me get dressed. Who would say no to being spoiled, no one, so I'm grabbing the opportunity with both hands. But is he trying to piss me off with this question of his.

Me: not now because I'm still in the danger zone. The first month of the first trimester is not even over yet and you are already talking about telling the family. It's too soon. What if we lose it?

Mvelo: I'm sorry I didn't mean to upset you.

Yes, he changed my mood drastically. I know he told his father, and I told Ma as well. But I know that I can trust them not to tell anyone before we decide to come out about it. I know Mamncane suspects something about me being pregnant, the extra questions, the "are you okays?" they make it obvious that she suspects something. Especially after I vomited yesterday.

Me: if they suspect something, let them keep suspecting.

Mvelo: does mom know?

Me: yes, she does.

His face went pale immediately. I know he respects his mother and he loves her more than anything and disappointing her is something he doesn't want to do. Ma has pointed it out more than once since I told her that she is disappointed in him, just like I am with him. I'm not angry, I'm just disappointed and I think that hurts more.

Mvelo: that's why she's not talking to me.

He said that to himself, but I heard him. He looked devastated, and comforting didn't seem like a good idea, he put this unto himself.

Me: are you taking your medication?

He rubbed his head, its guilt that's written all over his face.

Mvelo: yes, I am.

I nodded and sat properly on the bed, I was still feeling dizzy, so I don't see myself leaving this bed anytime soon. He left me to take a nap.

•••

Zuzile: ngizwile ukuthi awukho right.

She was rubbing my arm, and I was still in a deep sleep. I don't remember falling asleep though, I remember thinking about things. I opened my heavy eyes and stared at her beautiful face.

Me: hey Ma.

Zuzile: how are you feeling?

Her voice was so soft and soothing. She helped me sit up and I got a chance to stretch myself. It was almost dark outside. How long have I been sleeping?

Me: I was feeling dizzy in the morning.

Zuzile: you slept the whole day?

Clearly, it was barely 12:00 midday when I slept, and it looks like it's late in the afternoon.

Me: Mvelwenhle didn't wake me up.

Zuzile: wazini loyo. I'll make you something to eat, you need to go stretch your legs.

Shes right, being immobile for too long is going to get me into a bad habit of being lazy and I don't want that, I'm already lazy as it is. I got up and followed her downstairs. Bab'Msizi was back, he looked fresh, not like someone who had a heart attack.

Me: sawbona baba.

Bab'Msizi: Ntombiyelanga, kunjani sisi.

Me: I'm good.

I continued to chit chat with everyone else in the room. Mvelo was not here though and I kept searching for him with my eyes.

Andisiwe: Makoti, kwenzenjani?

I looked at her confused, only then did I notice that I was probably being awkward.

Me: nothing Ma.

Ma called me to the kitchen as she was sitting there with Mvelwenhle who had his head in his hands.

Zuzile: here's your food. Sit down and eat.

As weird as it was, I sat down next to Mvelo, who didn't even raise his head to acknowledge my presence. Ma was standing over the counter with her arms folded across her chest, staring at the both of us. I won't lie, she's making me a little uncomfortable and this food tastes like metal.

Zuzile: Mvelwenhle sit up.

Now I know that shit is about to go down, she has her No nonsense face on, that never means anything good. He lifted his big head and looked at his mother.

Zuzile: I didn't want to intervene in this, but you constantly are hurting this child and that's not what she is here for. Awuzange umlande Kubo umlandela ukumhlukumeza umzwise ubuhlungu. I asked you if you were ready for marriage and you said yes, pho lento oyenzayo uyenzelani. Yini kanti le angakuniki yona umkakho ekhaya?

I was playing with the food on my plate, I was too scared to look at her, her words were clear enough evidence of her anger, her face must be hell then.

Zuzile: I know I raised you better my boy, I know I didn't raise you to mistreat women and play around with their feelings. Now tell me, what are your intentions with what you did.

He kept quiet, dead as a mouse, as if he wasn't even in the room.

Zuzile: ngiyakhuluma phela.

Mvelo: it was a mistake. It was not supposed to happen.

His tone was of embarrassment and hurt all at once. I don't understand why I have to be here though, this is a conversation they should have together.

Zuzile: do you know what a mistake is Mvelwenhle? What you did was not a mistake. You deliberately slept with that woman, no one pointed a gun to your head. Therefore it was not a mistake.

He looked down feeling ashamed of himself.

Zuzile: Lalelake mfanawami, this is the last time I will ever sit the both of you down like this and discuss your marriage problems. It's none of my business, as it is anyone else's. Everything that happens should be between the both of you, and God.

I'm glad I didn't expect her to do this for me, it was her choice, but I believe it was him that came to her asking her to beg me to forgive him. I don't know. The only reason I told her is because I was confiding in her.

Zuzile: whatever it is that is going on, fix it. You two are now starting a family, sacrifices need to be made and now you need to learn to have a forgiving heart because love does not keep track of any wrongdoings.

The only reason I know that is from the Bible is because the preacher at our wedding used it. Ma may be a lot of things, but she is a woman of God, I've noticed that a lot since I started spending time with her.

Zuzile: Paloma and this baby deserve a warm home so putting your differences aside and fixing what's left of this family is what you need to do. Both of you.

I nodded and continue to play with my food.

Zuzile: Mvelwenhle?

Mvelo: yes mom.

Zuzile: Christine eat your food.

She never calls me Christine, wow. She walked out the kitchen and left us in our own awkward bubble. We had gotten past this stage, the awkward stage. We talked about

it and we were seemingly okay, civilized with each other, we were making progress actually, I was letting him touch me. But now here we are, he can't even look at me.

Me: Mvelo we are okay. I told you, I forgive you.

I coldly put my hand on his shoulder. He looked up and removed my hand, holding it in his. I wanted to jump out of my skin, but I'm not going to show him that.

Mvelo: I'm not forcing you to forgive me Christine. You don't even want me to touch you. I understand if you are uncomfortable, I'll give you your space.

So he can see it, or maybe he can feel it. I thought we were making progress, seems we are only going backwards.

Me: touch me.

I want this to work. And I'll cringe until I can't anymore, as long as we are back to that place where I could lie in his arms and not think about anything else.

Mvelo: don't force it Chris, please.

Me: touch me Mvelwenhle.

He reluctantly put his hands on my forearms and they were warm. Goosebumps erected all over my body and I went cold. He quickly removed his hands off me but I climbed of the chair and threw myself in his arms. My insides were turning, it felt like I

would vomit, but if I didn't do this now, I would never do it again. He hugged me back and I could feel his heart bulldozing his chest. I hate feeling like this. It hurts so bad. Before I could do anything, I felt all the food I was consuming come out and I messed his pants and the kitchen floor. He doesn't disgust me, I refuse to believe that the man I love so much makes me feel so disgusted, it's this baby, that's what it is.

Chapter 54

Mvelo

She can't even touch me. I disgust her and that hurts me. I didn't think it was this serious, last night I wanted to hold her, she turned me down. I didn't think it was a big deal, this morning I was helping her get dressed, whenever my hand made contact with her skin, she would cringe. I tried to ignore it but I can see that she is struggling with this thing. It really is going to take a while for her to trust me again. It's worse now, I disgust her.

Me: sit, I'll clean it up.

She threw up all over me and the kitchen floor. If that's not a sign of her disgust towards me, then I don't know what is. She couldn't even hug me for 10 seconds, she had to vomit all over me. I stood up from the chair and went to the sink to get a cloth.

Mamncane: kwenzakaleni la?

She was standing in the doorway of the kitchen with her hands rested on her hips.

Chris: I vomited Ma, I think I have bile.

Mamncane: mmmh.

She was not convinced, but she walked out the kitchen and I came back to help Christine to drink some water.

Chris: I can't let you clean this up. Go upstairs and change, I'll do it.

I could fight and resist, but I don't want to anger her so I'll follow her orders. I want to leave this place now, I'm already over it. I hated the fact the I had to pass the lounge to make my way upstairs and everyone was sitting in the lounge. Without even looking at any of them, I rushed upstairs and locked the door behind me. I wanted to scream and break something but I know better than to let my anger control me so I sat down on the bed and tried to calm what was left of my heart.

Andile: Bafo, open up, are you okay?

He was knocking softly on the door. I didn't want to draw any attention to myself, and Andile knows me like the back of his hand, same thing with me. We could easily have been twins. I dragged myself to the door and when he walked in, he closed and locked behind him.

Andile: zthini?

Me: I disgust her Bafo, she can't even touch me...

I still had her vomit on my pants, I need to change.

Andile: what do you mean you disgust her?

Me: like the literal meaning. Ngiyamunyanyisa. She vomited all over me because she couldn't touch me for longer than 10 seconds. I've ruined everything.

I threw the pants in the washing basket, but he stood there staring at me with arms folded across his chest. He doesn't understand a single word I'm saying, you can tell by the raised eyebrow, painting a confused look on his face.

Andile: did she say that?

Me: she doesn't need to say it Bafo.

He went to plop his body on the bed and folded his arms across his chest once again.

Andile: I don't understand.

Me: we talked about things, we kinda fixed it and she told me she forgives me, but it's going to take a while for her to trust me the same again, and I totally understand why she says that. She trusted me with her whole life and I broke that trust.

Andile: and what does disgust have anything to do with this?

Me: she won't let me touch her. And not touch as in have sex, no. Touch her as putting my hand over hers. She can't even stand that, she flinches. Just now, in the

kitchen, she forced herself to hug me but she couldn't even make contact with my skin without her whole body going cold like a corpse. And as if it can't get worse, she vomited all over me.

Andile: Hectic!

Yah, that. What was I thinking sleeping with the bitch. I should have fired her right after this happened.

Andile: so she hasn't forgiven you?

Me: I'm starting to doubt that she did Bafo.

He was about to ask a question but a knock on the door silenced him. He got up and went to answer.

Andile: mkami.

I felt the air leave my lungs as soon as he said that. He made way for her and she walked in, her face pale like the winter snow. She really was losing weight, she was thinner than normal and that was a cause for concern, pregnant people don't lose weight, they gain weight.

Chris: Mvelo can we talk.

I nodded and Andile walked out after acknowledging her and he closed the door behind him. She stood on the other side of the room while I was leaning on the wall of the wardrobe. The distance between us was too much, but its what we need.

Chris: I want to go home.

Me: we are leaving tomorrow Fluff.

Chris: no, I want to go to my home. I want my dad.

It felt like a thousand daggers have just been stabbed into my heart. She can't say such to me, how dare she begin to say such atrocities to me.

Chris: I just feel like he can make me feel better...

Me: no Christine, we can't go to your dad. Not while you are in this state.

Chris: why? Because you are afraid that he will see you for the man you are?

Me: Christine I thought we were passed this?

Chris: we are, that's why I want to go home to my father.

She was not joking, and the tears I'm her eyes were threatening to fall, this is my worst nightmare coming to life right before my very eyes.

Me: are you leaving me?

She kept quiet, closed her eyes for a while and I saw her tears cascade down her face. She shook her head gently, this hurt, not only for me, but for the both of us.

Chris: I will never leave you. I just need my dad. That's all I ask of you.

I wanted to touch her, to hold her, maybe even try to change her mind. Make her realize just how much this could mean to the relationship I have with Zondo. He will

never forgive me for hurting her. That's the one thing I promised I will never do. I put her through pain and I can't even fix it. I can't take it away and bare it all for her. If I could I would do it in a Heartbeat.

Chris: I want to go home Mvelwenhle.

I'm never going to forgive myself if I don't let her have what she wants. She will never ever be happy if I don't give her what she wants. This, this is the littlest thing I could do just so I can keep her happy. Even if it spares me my life and the relationship I have with Zondo.

Christine

I can hear him sniffing as the wheels of my suitcase mark themselves on the marble tiles. I'm not going to spare his feelings this time, I'm not going to put him first, I'm going to put myself first. I still feel the same way though, I still love him more than any other man and I forgive him for hurting me and my baby, but if I don't leave, we may never be back to that place of love that we once lived in before. I don't know how long I'm going to stay at my father's place, I don't even know if I'm going to tell him everything that happened, but there's no way I will be able to stay without him finding out. I loaded my suitcase in the boot and I took an extra minute to prepare myself for the trip. I am physically drained and I am tired of crying. No more tears for me. When I got to the gate of the house, the house I thought I would never leave, the house that had so many memories of my late childhood, regret and fear washed over me instantly. Reluctantly, I stepped out of the car and slid the gate open before

climbing back in the car and driving up the driveway. I could hear my dad's voice shouting from all the way in the house, he was curious about who was in his yard. And that showed on his face when he appeared.

Dad: hawu, mntanami?

I still hadn't switched off the car engine and I was still sitting in the car seat, afraid to even look at him in the eyes. He would see right away that I am not okay. I closed the window, switched off the car and drew in a deep breath before stepping out of the car.

Dad: uphi umzukulu wami.

He asked that before he saw the frame of my body, and when he did, I saw his whole face go pale. I expected him to say something, but he didn't.

Me: she's with Ma.

Dad: uphi umkhwenyana?

Me: he's at home.

He was staring at me, from top to bottom, looking distraught.

Dad: what's going on?

That's all he said as I stood before him. Yes I was most probably looking dead on the outside, but I was already dead on the inside.

Me: I need to stay here a few days.

Dad: why? What happened?

Me: I'll explain it you daddy, I just need to lie down for now, I'm feeling dizzy.

I wasn't lying, I was always dizzy, it has become my daily life.

Dad: I'm not letting you inside this house until you tell me what's going on. Why would you leave your house and come here.

Me: isn't this my home daddy?

Dad: your home is with your husband at the Mfusi's, remember?

Me: daddy please, I might just faint or throw up right here, I need to sit down.

I held on to the wall as I felt my head spinning. He held me up and helped me walk inside the house. He was concerned but he's also very curious to find out what the hell is going on. I plopped my body on the couch and took in a few deep breaths. I needed them, it felt as if I would collapse at any moment.

Dad: do you want water?

Me: yes.

I hate this pregnancy with every fiber of my existence. I am not a sickly person, but since I found out about this pregnancy, I'm always feeling like shit.

Dad: tell me why you are here.

Me: I just need some space baba.

He sighed and rubbed his temples before staring at me for a long time.

Dad: you know I love you my daughter...

I'm not happy about the way he's starting this conversation.

Dad: but when you told me you wanted to get married, I asked you were you ready for the hardships and the tough times ahead, you said yes my baby.

His voice was laced with so much concern.

Dad: this is one of the things you can't do.

Me: but daddy, I just want to come home.

Dad: I'm not denying it, this is your home and I still am your father, but this is your childhood home, your girlhood home. You are not a girl anymore, you are someone's wife

This is his way of telling me I'm not welcome here anymore and that hurts my heart so badly.

Dad: I don't want to know what happened between you and your husband or why you are running away from your home because that is between the two of you, and no third person is allowed to enter.

I wiped my tears quickly, using the back of my palm and he looked remorseful.

Dad: you can come visit me any time, on any day you wish, but don't come here and expect to live here again. I will let you spend the night here but next time, you need to understand that you can't always run away from your problems Christine. Especially now that you have devoted yourself to a man.

More than anything, I think my father doesn't want to hate Mvelwenhle for whatever reason it is that I am here for. It's more denial than anything. He fails to understand or comprehend why his precious son would make me cry.

Dad: if you really feel it's getting tough, you can always go to your mother and father, they are the rightful people, not me my girl.

Rejection is such a painful thing to accept. And I have just been rejected by my own father. What a life I'm living.

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Since he let me stay the night, I've been locked up in my room the whole day, crying and sobbing into my pillow, trying to think what my next move is. I don't want to go home and face him, not after I had to look at his face filled with pain from not being able to hold him for longer than 10 seconds without my whole body going cold. Does he blame me though. He touched her like he touches me. He gave her what he gives to me. I can't help but think and wonder that maybe he kissed her the same

way he kisses me, and caressed her skin the same way he does with me. The way he looks at me, or the way his heart beats whenever he is near me, skin to skin. To think that he was in that state with someone else, with her, takes away the special bond that him and I share. Our bond has lost significance because he has let someone else in and given them something that was meant to be mine and mine only.

Dad: Christine come and eat.

It was already dark outside, and I heard that he wasn't alone anymore, I'm guessing Sinikiwe and his mother are here.

Me: I'm coming dad.

I sniffed and wiped my tears before I got off the bed and looked at my reflection in the mirror. I look terrible. I look like I haven't eaten in years and the bags under my eyes don't make it any more appetizing for me to look at. I look at my diamond ring through the mirror and it is shining. I miss him, a lot, but being around him hurts, and that's not what I want to feel when I look at him. I want to look at him and only see love, nothing else. And I was tired of crying, I'm surprised I haven't lost this baby. The amount of stress I'm under is not healthy at all.

Julie: hey Chrissy.

She had pity written all over her face, it was screaming at me. But I tried my best to ignore it and concentrate on my baby brother on her lap, who looked like such a happy baby. I greeted back to avoid being rude and I shifted all my attention to him. There was chatter between the two of them at the table, my dad and Julie, and no jokes, they looked happy and in love. I don't really know the status of their relationship, my father doesn't tell me these kinds of things, but what I'm seeing is enough to tell me that I am unwelcome here. They are a perfect family, just the three of them. I barely ate anything at the table, my appetite is as good as non-existent. I'm

just glad they don't know I'm pregnant yet, otherwise they would force food down my throat and I'm not about that life.

Dad: when was the last time you went to work?

Oh, that. I guess Mvelwenhle finally got what he wanted.

Me: I resigned.

Dad: why? Don't tell me you also want to be a housewife.

I could tell him I own 50% of whatever assets and money Mvelwenhle owns, which basically makes me a billionaire, but Julie is here, and this is not something you can just splash around, the Mfusi's are kind of celebrities.

Me: no, I got a better offer at Mthiyane Construction.

I wasn't lying about the better offer, I got a contract and everything, all I need to do is sign, but I haven't read through it. The real reason why I resigned from my job though is because of everything that's going on in my life.

Dad: really?

Me: yeah, I'm going to get a lawyer to review the contract before we sign it.

Dad: congratulations sweetheart.

He doesn't need to congratulate me, I didn't work for it, it was handed to me on a silver platter. It would be better if I had worked hard for it, but I didn't. It's just perks.

They both could see I wasn't exactly happy about anything I was saying, but what I loved about it was they weren't prying. Now I wish I never left my house.

Me: I think I'm just going to drive back to Palm Kloof.

Dad: it's late now Christine, you can't just leave.

Me: I'll be okay dad, it's only 15 minutes away. I'll ask Mvelwenhle to open the gate for me. Thank you for dinner Julie.

I stood up from the table and gave her Sinikiwe who was sleeping peacefully in my arms. I went to what used to be my room, grabbed my handbag and shoes and walked out, said my goodbyes and got on my way. Sometimes the decisions we make put of anger and emotion are really not the best. When I packed my suitcase, after telling Mvelwenhle that I wanted to go to my father's house, I was sure that I would get my closure from that, being home. But all I got from it was guilt and I felt so out of place. I didn't belong there. When I got out of the car, he was standing in the foyer, in front of the door, staring at me. I walked barefoot, all the way, until I reach him and threw my arms around his body and melted into his body. He didn't hug me back for a while, but my tears were staining his shirt and he knew this is where I wanted to be, where I belonged. So he held me back.

Christine

I Asked him to accompany me. We are still trying to mend things, trying to find our way back to each other and I feel like this will be the perfect way to do it, to bring us together. Ma suggested counseling but we both declined. It's way too early in the marriage to be attending counseling. What will they think of us? I'm glad we both got to that same conclusion because there is no way that I will let people judge us for failing at this marriage. After a dreaded 4 weeks of uncomfortable silence passing between the two of us, unknown sicknesses between us, and awkward encounters, we are both finally Chlamydia free. When I say sicknesses, I mean I was the one being sick most of the time, but I finished my treatment, and he also finished his and now we can finally begin on a clean slate. I didn't tell him that he's taking me to my first OB/GYN appointment, I want it to be a surprise. He thinks we are going Christmas shopping, which we still need to do because it's around the corner and we don't even have plans.

Mvelo: I'm not trying to annoy you, but what are we doing here?

Yes, he threads very carefully, and he chooses his words very wisely because I can be a ticking time bomb sometimes. Sometimes it's amusing, sometimes it's annoying.

Me: it's my first doctor's appointment.

He couldn't even hide the excitement on his face. He beamed immediately.

Mvelo: thank you for letting me come.

Me: it's our baby.

He put his hand on my stomach before kissing me on the cheek. See, we've made some progress, slowly but surely getting there. He helped me out of the car and held my hand as we walked to the doctor's office.

Receptionist: Mrs Mfusi, great to see you.

Me: it's good to be back.

Receptionist: I see you have an appointment; you can go in; doctor is waiting for you.

Me: thank you.

And Mvelo stood there like a statue, not even a greeting. My gynecologist and the GP are in the same building, that's why they share a receptionist. But trick is, the gynecologist is a male, I don't know how this big head I call a husband will feel about that.

Me: good morning.

Dr: good morning Mrs Mfusi. I'm Dr. Maharaj, your gynecologist.

Me: thank you doctor, this is my husband.

Dr: Mr Mfusi, lovely to meet you.

They shook hands and we took a seat across him. He had a file in his hand and was paging through it.

Dr: I stand to be corrected but this is the sixth week of your pregnancy?

Me: yes doctor.

Dr: and you had been on treatment for Chlamydia?

Me: yes, but I have completed it and I'm Chlamydia free.

Dr: okay, lovely. Okay so now we can do an ultrasound. But I need a transvaginal ultrasound so I can check up on the state of your womb, just to be sure.

I myself don't know what that is, but this man next to me is tensed up, maybe he knows what it is.

Dr: I'll need you to undress for me and put on this and lie on the bed for me.

Oh okay, makes so much sense now that he explains. I look at Mvelo and he looks like he might just burst.

Me: are you okay?

Mvelo: I'm fine.

He was too quick to answer, which suggests to me that he is not, but he has to deal with it. I'm a mother now, I have to deal with such for the wellbeing of my children. The doctor closed the curtain and gave us space.

Me: are you sure you're okay?

Mvelo: couldn't you get a female doctor?

Me: what's wrong with a male doctor?

Mvelo: it's just that, it makes me uncomfortable, having another man touch you.

Me: it's his job. He's helping me. You'll be fine.

I gave him my pants for him to fold and he did so unwillingly. He still looked very unhappy, but he has to deal with it. I could remind him about his cheating scandals but I'm not because I'm not a terrible person. I told the doctor I was ready, and I sat on the bed.

Dr: and how is the morning sickness?

He was trying to make small talk so I could relax. I love his hospitality.

Me: it's been horrible. I'm always sick doctor. Is there anything I can take for dizziness and the vomiting.

Dr: unfortunately, they haven't invented such yet. But different woman try different remedies and they say they work for them. But trust me, when your baby is here, all of that won't matter.

I'm hoping that he's right because I don't want to hate my baby for putting me through so much.

Dr: this is your first pregnancy, yes?

Me: yes, it is. I'm so excited.

I am, I truly am, although it didn't come about at the right time, I'm glad I finally got what I wanted. I don't care whether it was short term longing or what, it's what I wanted. Mvelo's hand tightened around mine and he gave me a smile.

Dr: oh well, let's check on this little one.

Here comes the dreaded part. It's dreaded for Mvelo though, not me. The doctor tells me that I am going to feel a little discomfort before he inserts the transducer in my body. Mvelo looks like he's just seen a ghost. A loud thudding sound filled the room, and it was coming from the monitor.

Dr: oh, that's a lovely Heartbeat.

I raised my head and looked at the screen. I don't even know what I'm looking at though, all I see is black spots.

Dr: your uterus looks okay. Everything seems good to me, no complications, looks like we are in for a healthy pregnancy.

Mvelo: and what about the baby?

What a stupid question. Shame, he looks so scared.

Dr: the baby has a strong heartbeat. There they are over there.

It still looked very small but it's my baby. I can't believe that this is finally happening to me. He printed a picture for us and removed the transducer. He asked me to get dressed and to meet him in his office.

Mvelo: thank you Christine. Thank you for allowing me to do this with you.

I held his hand tightly and locked his hand with mine.

Me: it's our baby.

He held my waist and pulled me closer and gave me a little kiss on the lips.

Mvelo: I love you, my wife.

Me: I love you too.

This surely is the beginning of our healing.

Narrated

Que: oh yes baby, right there.

Ntswaki was bouncing up and down on his member. The look of disinterest on her face was enough to tell him that she wasn't enjoying it at all, but he was too caught up in his own ecstasy to notice that she wasn't. oh, and she hated every single

minute of it. She could barely feel it, it didn't even reach her g-spot. This was more of a service for Qiniso, and he didn't need it, he wasn't the one who had been locked up for almost 12 months without sex. His dick was small, not too good for his ego, and his looks. He boasted too much for someone who couldn't satisfy a woman. He got his orgasm, and Ntswaki was more than happy to get off him.

Ntswaki: it's days like these that I miss Dumisani.

Yes, she hated every single minute of the 3 years she spent with him, but the sex with him was always good. She had never come across a man who could handle her curves and toss her around like she weighed nothing. That's all he was good for.

Que: what do you mean.

Ntswaki: you ain't doing shit.

She got up and went to the bathroom. Sure, his ego was bruised, but he wasn't about to show that to her. The record of women he had slept with that praised him about his skills wouldn't let him take what Ntswaki said to heart.

Que: I talked to the guys this morning and they are bringing him in the afternoon.

Ntswaki: what!? No, they can't. I haven't briefed them.

She stormed out the bathroom and stood by the doorway, staring at him.

Ntswaki: this is not just a sack of potatoes that they are bringing here, it's my man. He is very precious cargo.

Que: did you understand anything I have said to you since I met you?

Ntswaki: yes, we are avenging Tshego's death. He wouldn't have died if it wasn't for that slut that stole my man.

Que: this isn't about Christine!

Ntswaki: don't say her name! don't you dare!

She was fuming mad now, he wasn't understanding what she was saying.

Que: yazi you are crazier than I thought, you are a lunatic.

She screamed, loudly. So loud that he had to cover his ears.

Ntswaki: I'm not crazy!

She charged towards him and started when she reached him, she tried to hit him with her fists, but he grabbed her wrists tightly. He realized that he was dealing with a psychopath.

Que: fine! I'll call them back. I'll tell them to come back. Just relax please!

Ntswaki: bring them back.

She pointed a finger in his face and gave her best threatening face. What a trap he has set for himself.

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They were surprised when they were told to abort the mission and come back. They were so close to catching him. It would've been easier because his wife was also there, but they had to be stopped. And now they arrive to the lunatic. For as long as they have known, Qiniso is the boss, he is the one that pays them. Who is this woman suddenly calling all the shots?

Ntswaki: the job is to get Andrew Mfusi and bring him here, right?

The men nodded.

Ntswaki: okay. Now I want you to understand one thing. He is not just a random person; he is my man and so you have to handle with care. I am paying you a lot of money to bring him here, I expect him to be here without a single scratch or dent.

She speaks as if he is a non-living object.

Ntswaki: if I dare find something on his body, I won't hesitate to show you my true colours.

Que stood there in silence. One could swear he wasn't in the room. He's been Ntswaki for a short while, but he understands that for peace to reign, they have to do as she wishes. Oh, how he regrets bringing her here. He could've easily done this on his own, but he thought they would both want to avenge Tshego's death. She clearly has ulterior motives. After that unnecessary brief, the guys were off to finish off what they were supposed to start.

Que: where is he?

Erin: he's on his way to the office.

Que: good girl. Leave that place and come here.

Erin: yes daddy.

They had a million-dollar plan. Erin's job was to call Mvelo and tell him there is an emergency at the office that needed his attention, but that didn't go as planned. She messed it up by seducing him and sleeping with him. It was not part of the plan, it should have never happened and if Qiniso dare find out about it, they are both as good as dead. Well, Mvelwenhle's death has already been planned, but if this comes out, it will be ten times worse than planned. She should be glad he hadn't fired her yet, but that was his mission, that's why he left his wife at home alone, to go fetch some paperwork and fire the slut that seduced him, gave him an STD and almost ruined his marriage. He promised to be back home in 30 minutes. He never made it to the office. They targeted him as he was on his way. It wasn't hard to do it. It was staged to look like a hijacking, one where the body is more important than the vehicle. Erin and Qiniso were fucking in the lounge, Erin screaming at the top of her lungs, much to Ntswaki's annoyance. She walked out the room, right into the lounge.

Ntswaki: would you keep it down you too.

Que: don't be jealous baby girl, come join in the fun.

Ntswaki: fun? You call that little thing fun. I've been fucked by a finger bigger than that thing.

He couldn't pick up his ego this time, even Erin was laughing at him. She laughed as if she wasn't screaming just now. But who was she kidding? She herself had been pretending because his pockets are deep and money matters more. He was fuming mad though, so he pushed her off and got dressed and followed Ntswaki to the kitchen where he came and strangled her.

Que: wena sfebe! What were you saying?

Although his hands were getting tight around her neck, she started cackling, much to his annoyance.

Ntswaki: you can't kill me. You need me!

He wanted to scream. He let go of her neck and she looked at him and laughed.

Ntswaki: bastard.

He clicked his tongue and walked out the kitchen. As Ntswaki was getting herself a glass of water to soothe her throat, a knock on the door disturbed her. It was one of the hitmen they hired.

Ntswaki: what do you want?

Man: he's here. We've put him in the basement.

Ntswaki: oh, good. Go.

He scurried away and Ntswaki started waltzing back to the lounge.

Ntswaki: Oh Ciniso! Come now! My boo is here.

Erin started at her in confusion.

Ntswaki: it's showtime.

Chapter 56

Christine

I gave up and went to bed last night. I'm not going to set myself up for heartbreak again and put all my heart in the hands of a man that has proven to me that they don't care. My doctor told me I have high blood pressure and that is due to stress, which is not good for my daughter, so I will choose peace. He left in the afternoon yesterday, claiming to go visit the office to collect documents so he could do some work. I had a bad feeling about it, not only was he still on leave, but he hadn't fired that STD spreading personal assistant. Maybe that's why he didn't come home, he's with her. He better not come back here if he has Chlamydia again.

Zuzile: knock knock!

Her shrill loud voice filled the whole house. What is she doing here so early in the morning? How am I going to explain Mvelwenhle's absence?

Paloma: mommy!

She ran and hugged my legs when I met her in the passage.

Me: how are you baby?

Paloma: I'm good.

Sanele came running behind her and he also threw himself at me.

Sanele: hello Langa.

I don't know where he got that name, but he calls me by it and I find it adorable.

Me: where's mama.

We were already making our way downstairs.

Zuzile: I'm in the kitchen!

I'm assuming she heard me asking. These rascals ran somewhere in the house while I made my way to the kitchen.

Zuzile: hawu, usalele? I wanted us to go do some Christmas shopping.

She was taking out ingredients for breakfast. She looked beautiful as always, but it's still so early in the morning, why does she look so good.

Zuzile: I normally go with Helo and Ntsakisi but they refused so who better than you, my daughter.

Me: I would love that Ma.

Zuzile: I've made a list of all the things we will need at the house, apparently, I'm hosting this year. I don't know what you guys need, seems like you don't even use the grocery.

I mean, it is just the two of us here. I only cook twice or three times a week depending on my mood and that food sustains us the whole week. Sometimes we do takeouts.

Me: we don't need a lot of things, just clothes for Paloma and I.

Zuzile: uphi uMvelwenhle?

Now I don't want her to get worked up over this, so my best bet is to lie.

Me: he went to the office.

Zuzile: is he not on leave?

Me: he is, he said he had an important meeting to attend.

Zuzile: oh okay.

The fact that I'm lying for him doesn't sit well with me, it means I'm condoning this behavior and he will do it next time without learning his lesson. He better not think that when he comes back I will welcome him with open arms. I'm too young to be having these many problems, especially over a man.

Mvelo

My eyes feel heavy and it's hard to open them. My head is pounding as if I had been banging it against a wall for hours. I won't compare it to a hangover, I never get a hangover. But I'm hearing something as I gain consciousness, I realize that maybe I'm kidnapped. I have something covering my face and my hands and feet are restrained. This song has been playing on repeat, and now that I'm back to the land of the living, I know it's a Phora song. Stars in the Sky, my wedding song. This is a personal vendetta.

Me: who are you!?

For some reason, I'm not scared or intimidated by what I am going to see when they uncover my face. I mean my father is the Butcher.

Me: show yourself!

There was laughter from a distance but I heard it coming closer. It was more than one person, several footsteps could be heard. Violently so, the bag was pulled off my face and I was met with an unfamiliar face.

Man: the rich pretty boy is up! Uvukule boyboy?

He was slapping my face lightly and that was pissing me off.

Me: what do you want? Do you want money?

There were three of them surrounding me, they were all wearing masks except for the one standing right in front of me, covered in tattoos all over his arms. He doesn't look scary, even his tattoos aren't intimidating. The frown on his face just makes him uglier than he already is.

Man: bitch! That's what you are! Throwing money at everyone!

He threw a punch in my face, almost breaking my nose, luckily, it didn't bleed. I don't have the hands to wipe blood.

Me: you punch like a bitch! Tell me what you want from me!

He threw another punch, this one harder than the first. I felt it more than the first one. But I wasn't going to show him I was in pain; I'm not going to give him that satisfaction of seeing me hurting.

Man: I want you to pay for both your father's sins and yours too.

I spoke too soon. I'm dying for Kabelo's wrong doings. He better find me before anything happens to me because I have a family and a baby on the way. There was suddenly a loud banging audible by the door, and the shrill voice shouting could not be missed. In actual fact, I know this voice all too well, that accent too.

Ntswaki: Ciniso open this door! Don't touch him!

So is this what it's about. She on her madness again! How did she escape the looney bin, why is she not in jail?

Ntswaki: Ciniso marn!

Man: open up for her,

He looked irritated as shit. I gave a nasty chuckle and that seemed to piss him off even more. So much more that he raised a fist at me. I didn't flinch but he was the one who did because Ntswaki was behind him looking deadly.

Ntswaki: I see blood on his face. I see a bruise. What did I say to you?

His face started going pale.

Man: remove the gun from my back.

Ntswaki: what the fuck did I say to you!?

Man: you said I mustn't hurt him.

Ntswaki: and what did you do?

Man: I hurt him.

Ntswaki: so there isn't anything stopping me from hurting you.

There was a clicking sound and you could see the soul coming out of him. Nigga almost lost his life.

Ntswaki: you will bring me that bitch here by the end of tomorrow.

Man: you are going out of hand now Ntswaki, this was not part of the plan.

Ntswaki: Tshegofatso would not have died if it wasn't for her! She is to blame, what don't you understand.

Oh they wouldn't dare. This is about that child molester.

Me: leave my wife out of this Ntswaki. I was the one that killed him, not her!

This Ciniso guy was quick to snatch the bullet less gun and point at my forehead. Ntswaki screamed, a piercing cry.

Ciniso: He is the enemy, not Christine!

Hearing him say my wife's name made my blood boil immensely, in that moment I wished I could free myself from these ropes and strangle him dead.

Me: don't say her name!

Ciniso: why? Just because you paid for her cookie doesn't mean you had it first.

He was doing it on purpose. He was angering me on purpose, and it was working.

Ciniso: she will never love you, that's why she slept with him even after you started dating her.

This motherfucker!

Ntswaki: get the girl! Now! Get her here now!

I wanted to scream, cry and kill someone all at once. Not my Fluff.

Christine

Ma took me to every single shop in Gateway I swear! I'm so tired, all I want is to climb on the bed and sleep. I wanted to go home with Paloma earlier but now I'm too tired to take care of her, especially since her dad has gone AWOL. His phone is now going straight to voicemail, which could mean he switched it off. When we got to the house, Ma helped me with the shopping bags and then she made us some tea; Chamomile. Paloma and Sanele were probably playing somewhere in the house.

Zuzile: why is Mvelo not back yet?

Me: I don't know Ma, his phone is off.

Zuzile: he better not start his nonsense again.

She handed me the tea and sat next to me. Looks like we are about to have a serious conversation.

Zuzile: how are you though my girl? How is the baby?

Me: the baby is okay, healthy. We were at the doctors yesterday for a check-up.

Zuzile: and how about you? Have you finished your treatment?

Me: yes Ma, we both did. My BP was high because of stress and my appetite is not the same but the doctor gave me multivitamins for that and I'm hoping I'll be better soon.

Zuzile: I'm glad my sweetheart. There is something I want to tell you and I don't know how Mvelo will take it so I want to tell you first.

I nodded and got comfortable in my seat.

Zuzile: so you know Kabelo retired last year and we've been living in Ramsgate for all our lives, now that we are both at home and Ntsakisi and Helo want to go to boarding school, we are thinking about relocating.

Me: that's a nice idea Ma. Which places do you have in mind?

Zuzile: the farm in Eastern Cape.

Oh, that's far.

Zuzile: yeah, I know it's far, but we've been living and working for these children and now they are grown. Mvelo has you and the twins are going to be leaving soon too. All we have is Sanele and Paloma.

Paloma?

Zuzile: we just want the calm and peace, raise our child and grandchild.

Me: Ma, Mvelo loves you two a lot, and he will do all he can to see you happy because you have sacrificed so much for him, but I don't think he will be happy about Paloma going with you.

Zuzile: I know. I've tried to convince Kabelo to trust you two with Paloma, especially now that you are about to be parents. But this is his dream, and Paloma is like his last-born daughter. I don't know what to do now.

Me: I'll talk to Mvelwenhle. But most importantly, we must talk to Paloma about it.

Zuzile: definitely. Thank you, Chris.

• • •

Something was pressing over my nose and it was suffocating me. It was a hand and it was wearing a glove. Someone held my legs and they picked me up. I couldn't scream, my mouth was also covered.

Voice: we don't want to hurt you so shut up. Stop moving and don't you dare scream.

They slowly removed the hand from my face and I opened my eyes. One took me and threw me over their shoulder. The smell of nicotine made me want to vomit, but I held it in.

Me: I'm pregnant, please. I want to vomit.

I was whispering but my voice was breaking. Where is Mvelwenhle when I need him. They ignored me and they threw me in the backseat of the car. It was Mvelo's car. What in the world is going on here!

Man: take a water bottle, drink up and wipe those tears. Tell the security guard that you are going to your husband.

His voice was hard and it scared the shit out of me. It forced me to cooperate.

Me: sawbona bhut'Cosmo.

Cosmo: Mrs Mfusi? Who are these men?

Me: its okay, they are taking me to my husband.

I choked. Not on the water but the lump in my throat.

Cosmo: are you okay?

Me: yes, I'm fine, wrong pipe. I'll be back tomorrow morning.

He nodded suspiciously and opened the gate. I wanted to cry, scream maybe. Now I regret taking drama as a subject.

Chapter 57

Finale

Narrated

She cried until she passed out in the car. They couldn't touch her or harm her because Qiniso gave strict instructions that she arrive unharmed, much to Ntswaki's annoyance. They have been bickering the whole night about what to do with Mvelo, Ntswaki obviously not wanting to hear a single peep about Mvelo being killed. Erin took her money and left a few hours ago, but she just rocked up and found the cat and mouse arguing in the lounge.

Que: why are you back here?

Erin: am I not allowed to come here whenever I want?

Que: no!

She knew he wouldn't do anything to her now, he's afraid of Ntswaki, he wouldn't dare upset her. But her real reason for coming back is because she heard Mvelo is here, and she wants him. That one drunk night was not enough for her satisfaction. She got a taste of him and now she's back for more.

Ntswaki: listen to me piglet, Andrew is not the one losing his life. I'm done having this conversation.

He can take all the disrespect, but he can't take these constant jabs at his manhood. He pulled out his gun, pulled her by the arm and locked her under his arm.

Que: I am fucking tired of being controlled by you. I am the man in this house do you understand me! You will do as I sa...

He didn't finish his sentence, she kneed him in the balls, and she squirmed like a little girl. She then grabbed the gun and shot him twice, one in the leg and another in the heart. The barbie girl behind her started screaming, causing the men in the yard to come running in the house armed.

Ntswaki: you dare come closer, I will kill you, all of you.

The surrendered and they stood there watching Que take his last breath, blood coming out of his mouth and nose. Ntswaki is a deadly woman, that we now know.

Ntswaki: where is the girl?

Man: she is in the basement.

Ntswaki: make sure she doesn't see Andrew.

Man: yes ma'am.

They all walked out, and she immediately turned the gun to the whimpering barbie behind her.

Ntswaki: what do you want here?

Erin: (Shaking) I'll go.

Ntswaki: how sure am I that you won't snitch on me?

Erin: you can be one hundred percent sure.

She raised her eyebrow staring at her from top to bottom.

Ntswaki: come with me.

She jumped over Que's cold body and walked towards Ntswaki, who slowly lowered the gun. She dropped it on the couch and walked out to where Mvelo was. His head was bowed, and it seemed like he was in pain. He saw Christine being brought in and she was unconscious.

Ntswaki: baby! Wake up.

His heart was pounding against his chest and his whole body was heating up from the inside. He slowly lifted his head and his bloodshot eyes met with Ntswaki's. she frowned.

Ntswaki: are you okay my love?

Mvelo: Ntswaki stop this. Let Christine go. I'll do anything.

Ntswaki: oh, so this is how it is now?

He heaved a sigh, and, in that moment, his eyes met with Erin.

Mvelo: so, this was all your plan? You wanted me to fight with my wife for this?

She had tried to shake her head as a signal for him to stop talking but he didn't. Ntswaki quickly focused her attention on her.

Ntswaki: who are you?

Erin: (Shaking) Qiniso paid me to call him and ask him to come to the office.

Mvelo: tell her you also seduced me and gave me a STD.

Ntswaki looked deadly. Mvelo caught the drift now, Ntswaki had a short fuse and anything that had to do with Mvelo being mistreated and unhappy, Ntswaki made sure it was fixed. She was pressed against the wall immediately; her neck being squished in her hand, and she tried by all means to fight but Ntswaki is strong and cannot be defeated. Mvelo sat there and watched, he felt no emotion whatsoever, he sat there and watched her take her last breath as if it's an everyday thing to kill someone with your bare hands. Like father like son.

Ntswaki: two down, one more to go and then we can be happy together.

A cold chill ran down his spine as he saw his whole life flashing before his eyes. Even the feeling he had the day he was shot doesn't amount to how he feels right now. Fear has come knocking on his door.

Christine

It's dark where I am and I'm all alone. I'm not tied up, nor am I hurt in any way. I'm perfectly fine just hungry and thirsty. This mattress I'm lying on is smelly and unhygienic, who knows how dirty this place I'm in could be?

Chris: someone please bring me water.

I've watched too many crime dramas and one thing you have to know about being kidnapped is that they either want a ransom or it's a personal vendetta. Most of the time, kidnappers that want a ransom don't hurt you, that's what I'm thinking this is. I hope Mvelwenhle is okay wherever he may be. I hope they find me. I know they will be able to pay whatever ransom that these people may want. The door violently opened and soft footsteps made their way towards me. Then a bright light was shone on my face, I turned away.

Woman: look up!

I got even more frightened when I heard a woman's voice. What has become of South Africa? Why would this woman kidnap me and why did they bring me here in Mvelo's car? I lifted my face, and I almost had a heart attack when my eyes met her cold stare.

Me: Ntswaki?

Ntswaki: don't say my name!

Me: please don't hurt me.

Ntswaki: so, when you see me, you see a monster? You think I'm going to hurt you?

Me: no, I didn't say that. I know you won't.

Now we all know that's a lie. She killed someone for crying out loud! She has a criminal record and is a diagnosed Schizophrenia and Bipolar patient. I can feel my skeleton shaking from the inside.

Ntswaki: I want you to watch the man you love leave you for me, the woman that he loves.

What in the fucking world is she talking about? I screamed when she grabbed my wrist and pulled me.

Me: wait! Please don't hurt me!

Ntswaki: shut up bitch!

Me: I can walk on my own, please.

She was dragging me on the cold floor, and it hurt. I wasn't crying but she was hurting, and I needed to scream as loud as I can, just maybe someone will hear me. Two men appeared and she dumped me on the ground. Oh, my poor baby!

Ntswaki: carry her to the basement and tie her up, far from Andrew.

Now the tears were flowing. I locked eyes with the man, and he felt pity for me, so when he picked me up and was gentle. What have I done to deserve all of this? He set on the chair, and I turned my head, my eyes met with Mvelo's. he looked defeated, stressed, and in that moment, I wanted to rip my heart out.

Mvelo: Christine, I'm sorry.

I didn't have the strength to answer him, so I just gave in and let this man tie me up. The knots were not hard and I'm grateful for that. Ntswaki walked in carrying two guns and she placed them on top of the table in front of her. I've been exposed to guns before, Tshego carried one all the time and didn't hesitate to take it out in front of me.

Ntswaki: now that we are all here, the party can begin.

Mvelwenhle looked terrified. She picked up one gun and cocked it, then placed it back on the table.

Ntswaki: now one thing we need to understand is that the reason why we are all here is because of Tshegofatso. That bastard let you steal my man...

Mvelo: Ntswaki shut up!

He has the nerve to speak to a psychopath like that. And what the hell does Tshego have to do with this?

Ntswaki: ohh, oh I see what's going on here!

She was giving a devilish chuckle and moving towards Mvelo, holding the cocked gun in hand.

Ntswaki: you didn't tell her?

Mvelo: Chris, please, don't listen to her.

So she knows something I don't. I thought this marriage was supposed to start on a clean slate with no secrets and lies. I could already feel the tears building up.

Ntswaki: tell her! Tell her that you are responsible for Tshego's death. Tell her that you left her on your wedding day and had the nerve to point a gun to his head and kill him in broad day light.

It felt like my head was going to explode and my heart was bulldozing my chest.

Mvelo: Fluff please, don't believe her.

She pointed a gun to his head, and she made him rest his head on his bosom.

Ntswaki: it was a mistake my baby, I understand. But now this slut is getting in the way of you and me.

He was trying to fight her off, but he was also tied up. Bloody bastard.

Mvelo: there is no us Ntswaki, I don't love you. I never did. I don't want you.

Ntswaki: What do you mean? You and me are a perfect match. Dumisani was a mistake, I should've chosen you. You are the one I love.

Mvelo: I have a wife and children. I don't want you. I love my family.

Tears were streaming down her face as she pressed his head on her bosom. He looked irritated and angry.

Ntswaki: then the only thing that will let us be happy together is killing her.

I felt my whole body getting cold when she pointed the gun in my direction.

Mvelo: no! Ntswaki! No.

He was fighting to stand up and he did, but his hands were still tied. I was shaking and crying.

Mvelo: kill me instead.

She held him down and pointed the gun back to him, right on the head.

Ntswaki: if I can't have you, no one will. I love you, Andrew.

Me: Mvelwenhle, please!

Ntswaki: shut up bitch!

Me: (Crying) no, you can't die and leave me with these children. What will I tell them?

He's being selfish right now. How can you do this to me.

Me: kill me too Ntswaki, kill me, take my life.

Mvelo: Christine! NO!

She fired a shot at him, and I saw blood splashing all over. His body toppled over in the chair, and I went numb.

Ntswaki: he's mine now.

She turned the gun to her head and pulled the trigger. Oh Lord, you have forsaken me.

Chapter 58

Finale

I sat there with two dead bodies for at least twenty minutes, listening to my heart beating and my temperature rising and falling, not in a good way. I untied myself a while ago but I'm still numb. I'm sitting here with a baby in my stomach, staring at my husband's dead body. I'm a widow, a 23-year-old widow.

Man: Christine you need to get out of here.

He walked in hastily and rushed towards me. I sat there not even able to move. How does he know my name?

Man: stand up! Go!

He pulled me out and dragged me. I didn't react, I didn't care. Nothing matters right now; nothing makes sense to me. He left me outside on the doorstep and closed the door. In that moment, it all felt too real for me, and everything just came crashing down. Did I have the strength to get up and find my way home, no. what is home? I have no home without Mvelwenhle. Screaming was also not helping so I crawled out the yard until I reached the road. Not because I couldn't walk, but because I'm too weak to do it. There are no cars passing by here, I don't even know where I am. There is no sign of life around here too. The only house I can see is in the distance and looks vacant. I'm hungry and thirsty and my heart is broken. I might just collapse and die here, and it wouldn't matter. My knees hurt from the crawling, so I found the inner strength to stand, and my legs carried me to what looked like a main road. A White Datsun stopped at the stop sign I was standing at, and I flagged it down hoping it was a saving grace. I look like a prostitute right now, I'm only wearing a nightie, nothing else, I mean they did kidnap me while I was sleeping.

Woman: are you okay?

She immediately climbed out the car when she saw my face. She opened the passenger door for me and helped me in. I didn't think it would be that easy and as soon as she drove off, I started bawling my eyeballs out.

Woman: did someone rape you?

Me: (Crying) no, I just-

She looked genuinely concerned.

Woman: okay, I'll pass by the garage, get you some food and something to eat then you can tell me what's going on.

If I was in her shoes and I saw a strange woman on the street looking like me, I wouldn't be this generous. Who knows what ulterior motives I might have? I may be a serial killer. She's dressed in a policewoman uniform though, so she doesn't seem threatened. How do I even begin to describe the nature of what happened back there?

Woman: tell me what happened.

Me: my husband went missing a few days ago, but I didn't get concerned because he has history of cheating, I thought he was out doing that. Last night while I was asleep, I felt people carrying me out of my bed and they were driving his car. I knew it was a kidnapping because they forced me to tell the guards at my estate that they are taking me to my husband.

Woman: did you see who was holding you hostage?

Me: it was his ex-girlfriend.

The types of questions she's asking make it obvious that she's a cop.

Woman: what happened when you got there.

Me: I was asleep but when I woke up, I was not tied up. She came in and dragged me to this room where my husband was and she started talking, telling us that she will kill me so she can be with him.

I stopped and looked down, replaying the painful events in my head all over again.

Woman: take your time.

Me: he fought her about it and in the end, she decided it was best for her to kill the both of them, so after shooting him, she turned the gun and shot herself in the head.

I started trembling and something in my stomach moved. The lump in my throat rose and tears ran down my face.

Woman: where is home?

Me: Shelly Beach.

Judging from her reaction, I don't think it's far from where we are. She shifted in her seat and started the car. I don't even know what to do with myself, I'm too scared to close my eyes and the pie she bought me is not appetizing at all, and I love pies, ever since I took this pregnancy, it's been the only thing I can keep down. I gave her directions to my house as soon as we arrived and when we got to the gate, she had to go to the visitor's gate. She rolled down the window and Bhut' Cosmo was standing there.

Cosmo: Mrs Mfusi?

Me: please let me in. I don't have my tag.

He was staring at my swollen eyes and the policewoman driving me.

Cosmo: are you sure you are okay?

Me: yes, I told you I'd be back.

I forced to smile, just so I could try and cover up what I was feeling. Again, hesitantly so, he opened the gate for us, and we drove up to my house. I could see Thembi's mouth agape as we drove into my driveway. That's the name on her name badge, Thembi.

Thembi: is there anyone home, anyone who can stay with you? I feel uneasy leaving you alone.

Me: I'll call my mother-in-law.

Did I mention that I'm numb? How the hell will I look at Zuzile and tell her her son is dead?

Thembi: okay. I'm going to get my team to go and find your husband's body.

Me: no! please don't.

She gave me an inquisitive look. Oh she must not.

Me: my father-in-law was police commissioner.

Thembi: Vusumuzi Mfusi?

Me: yes. I just want the family to find out first. Please.

She looked very suspicious of something, but she also looked she wouldn't fight with me. I'm glad I know this family's history.

Thembi: I'm going to trust your word. But call me if you need the police to investigate anything.

Me: thank you Thembi.

She gave me a weak smile and climbed into her car. I looked at her Datsun reverse out my yard and reality struck once again. I'm a widow.

...

I've been sitting in the lounge for two hours, just staring into space, not knowing what to do with myself. I haven't called Mrs Mfusi, what will I say to her? "oh Ma, Ntswaki shot and killed Mvelo in front of me and I didn't fight." What's worse is I left him back there. I didn't do anything; I didn't check if he was really dead or fighting for his life. I failed him.

Zuzile: namanje akekho uMvelwenhle?

Her voice was coming from the kitchen, which means she entered by the kitchen. I hastily stood up and she walked in. I saw her face and I started trembling.

Zuzile: Christine?

She dropped her bag and ran towards me. My legs almost failed me, but she caught me and placed my body on the couch. I wailed.

Me: he's gone Ma. I'm so sorry. I failed him.

Now it felt all too real.

Zuzile: wait Christine, slow down, what are you talking about? Who's gone? Is it the baby?

She already had tears in her eyes. I felt a constant stabbing pain in my stomach.

Me: Mvelwenhle.

She pushed me away from her body and she stood up, started pacing around the room.

Me: (Crying) they kidnapped him and shot him.

Zuzile: (Screaming) NO! NOO!

She sunk on the floor and slammed her fist against her thighs crying her eyes out. My heart broke into a million pieces all over again. I felt guilty, like I was responsible for his death. It should've been me, not him. Her wails and screams were heart wrenching and listening to them was unbearable. I can't even begin to think what it feels like to lose a child.

Zuzile: give me my bag.

Her whole face was red, and tears covered her face. If she looks like this, I wonder what I look like. I stood up and went to take her bag. She took it and took out her phone.

Zuzile: come to Palm Kloof now, leave the kids.

She didn't say anything more, she hung up and dialed another number and said the exact same thing. Her face went hard after that.

Zuzile: go change. You have to take us to where his body is and tell us who did this.

I shriveled up and a cold chill ran down my spine. I nodded my head fast and got up and walked upstairs. My bed was still a mess, just like it was when they carried me out of bed last night. I should've been worried when he didn't come home, I could've found something earlier, maybe he wouldn't have died if I did. But now I'm a widow, a pregnant widow. I lost the man that I love, it doesn't matter that he killed Tshego, or he cheated on me and gave me a STD, all of that doesn't matter now because I don't have him. I went to the bathroom and ran a shower, did a one-two and went back to the bedroom to get dressed. I could hear voices downstairs, and I hurried and made my way there. Baba and Bab' Vusi were there, Ma still looked dead inside. It feels like I'm looking at my reflection.

Vusi: Ntombiyelanga, ukephi umzimba.

Oh, but I didn't see the look on Baba's face. My whole body went cold when my eyes locked with his, and I've never looked him in the eyes like that, why did today have to be the first day.

Me: uhm...a tow-place outside-outside Ramsgate.

Vusi: can you take us there?

Me: yes.

Baba looks like he's ready for blood and that's all he wants. Lord knows how scary he looks; I might just shit my pants. No way in hell I'm climbing in the same car with him.

Vusi: asambeni ke.

I held the scarf around my shoulders a bit tighter and followed behind them. It looked like Ma was staying behind. I'm too young to be this emotionally tested. The trip was quiet, I was only giving them directions here and there. I was glad that I saw it when Thembi came to drop me off.

Vusi: what happened Ntombiyelanga?

Me: it was Ntswaki.

Baba's cold red eyes glared at me from the rear-view mirror, and I swear I felt a drop of pee come out.

Vusi: the ex-girlfriend?

I nodded, he couldn't see my nod, but Baba hadn't teared his eyes off the mirror, and he looked mad. It was like he would turn into a beast, veins popping on his forehead, jaws clenched, eyes bloodshot red. When we were by the main road, I started getting confused. It all just started getting foggy and it was as if I hadn't walked this distance.

Kabelo: get out of the car.

He said that to me. I trembled. He sounded rough and aggressive. I climbed out the car and we walked by foot. As we were walking, I saw the old, abandoned house and as soon as I saw it, I remembered where it was, the dreaded house. We were fast approaching it but we were welcomed by clouds of smoke. He started running, leaving me behind. I followed him and when we reached the yard, the house was on

fire. It's that man, he burnt the house. He was running into the yard, taking off his jacket. He threw it on the floor and attempted to run into the burning house.

Me: Baba! Please! Baba!

He didn't stop. I was so angry at him for doing that, is it not enough that we've lost Mvelwenhle, now we have to lose him too. I slid down on the ground and cried, feeling defeated.

Vusi: where is Kabelo.

He was trying to pull me up, but my body was jelly, and I was crying. He pulled me to his chest and caressed me. His heart was racing too, and that didn't make what I was feeling any better.

Kabelo: Vusi!

I lifted my head and looked around. Bab' Vusi let me go and ran to the other side of the house and that's where he was. His wrists were burnt.

Vusi: Kabelo are you crazy!

Kabelo: he's not here. He might be alive.

Vusi: bhuti, he probably burnt...

He couldn't finish his sentence without choking.

Kabelo: there were three bodies in there, none of them were his.

My heart skipped a beat.

Vusi: get the team to look for him.

Kabelo: I'll do it myself. They don't call me the Butcher for anything. Whoever did this and all their family will pay for this.

The Butcher? As in serial killer the Butcher? I'm hoping that I'm hearing things.

Vusi: lets go.

He grabbed my arm and pulled me to the car. What have I gotten myself into with this family?

Chapter 59

Finale

We are officially in mourning. It's been three days. Three! Baba told the family to give him two days to look but it's been three and everyone has lost hope. I don't know how I'm still alive, I don't know how this baby is still alive. The best bet at this point is for both of us to die. They moved all the furniture from the lounge and I'm finally sitting on the mattress with Ma. Paloma is also here, asking me many questions, questions I have to answers to, questions that make it hard for me to continue breathing. How do I even begin to describe to four year old that her father is dead?

Lwa: Chrissy I'm so sorry.

She was in tears and she threw her body on the mattress and she cried in my arms. It's safe to say my tears have dried up, completely. i haven't cried the past two days, speaking is a mission too, I don't want to do anything, I just was to die too. Sydney was behind her, he looked like he hadn't slept too, bags under his eyes and pale skin. He also lost his best friend.

Lwa: how are you coping?

Me: I'm okay.

She held me into another tight hug. The worst part about this whole thing is that we don't even have a corpse. What will we bury when it's the day of the funeral? Who am I kidding, it's only been a few hours since they told us that there is going to be a funeral, nothing else has been discussed. I doubt they will discuss it in my presence too, I haven't even been married to this family for a year, who am I to make

decisions? She and Sydney spent almost the whole morning keeping me company because everyone else was up and down around the house. Ma was resting, or I hope she is. She hasn't stopped crying. Dad also came to see me and he also looked shocked, confused and somewhat angry. He didn't want to leave but I convinced him that I was okay and I was going to stay. The only person who knows I'm pregnant is not in the right state of mind to take care of me and I honestly don't care enough to do so myself so I've been sitting on this mattress the whole day.

Thando: are you ready to eat?

I shook my head and instead of walking out, she walked to sit next to me. She placed the plate on my lap and it was chicken curry. First of all, I hated chicken, this baby made me hate my favourite meat, secondly, I don't have the appetite to eat any of the things on this plate.

Thando: you are hungry. You can't not be hungry, you haven't eaten since yesterday. You have to eat something.

I hung my head and she saw that I really was uninterested.

Thando: okay, what do you want to eat?

Honestly, I don't want anything, but to keep her off my case, I'll say this.

Me: porridge.

She looked happy that I was open to the idea so she stood up and went back to the kitchen. Just as she disappeared, Bab' Mdala and Bab' Vusi walked into the lounge.

Sis' Nozipho was also here, as Baba official fiancé, yeah tough. They sat on the bench and they looked at me, they looked terrified. Oh goodness.

Msizi: Ntombiyelanga, your father is losing his mind and you are the only one who can tell him to stop.

I know he's not talking about Nhlonipho so this is about Kabelo. What the hell do I know about helping Kabelo Mfusi? Especially not after he confessed to being the butcher, oh hell no.

Msizi: he's convinced that Mvelwenhle is still alive but there is no trace of him. You need to tell him that you saw him take his last breath.

So he can kill me? No thank you. And to be fair, I didn't see him die. In actual fact, he might be right.

Vusi: I know this is a lot to ask of you, but Zuzile is also not doing well herself...

This is very selfish of them to ask.

Me: so baba, when we have a funeral, what are we going to bury? An empty casket?

They were shocked by my question, but I was being genuine.

Msizi: we are going to go to the house with the police to identify the ashes.

I think it's a bit too late to do that. I felt myself getting angry so I just laid back on my pillow and closed my eyes.

•••

Andile: Mkami.

I fluttered open my eyelids. I fell asleep? I actually had a sleep, a peaceful one? Oh wow. The whole house is dark, he's standing in complete darkness, his body is towering over me.

Andile: let's go.

Me: go where.

I sat up, sleep filled in my voice. What is he talking about?

Andile: to find Mvelo.

Me: don't tell me you believe the bullshit that he's alive.

Andile: lalela la Makoti, ubafo lo esikhuluma ngaye la, I grew up with him, I know him like I know myself, I would feel it if he wasn't alive anymore and I don't feel that now. If we don't find him, it might as well be that we killed him with our bare hands.

I wished to see his face in all of this. This man is crazy. He grabbed my hand and helped me up.

Me: where are we going to start?

Andile: the forest around the house.

Me: a forest at night?

He ignored me and we got in the car. He looked frustrated and he reminded me of my Mvelo. Maybe his instincts are right, maybe he's not dead, and if we don't find him, it will be like we failed him. But why me? Why am I expected to be strong? I'm not strong.

Andile: Ntswaki is lucky she was a coward enough to kill herself. She doesn't know Kabelo Mfusi.

He said so absentmindedly, his fingers tapping the steering wheel. He was scaring me. The look he had was dark, it almost resembled the one Baba had that morning when we went to the burning house. It haunts me in my dreams.

Me: why don't you get the police to look for him?

Andile: thina singaMaFusi, siyazibambela.

The lump got stuck in my throat, hectic. He pulled over on the road and there was a Maserati parked there. A tall figure emerged from the car and walked to ours. Only when the window was rolled down I realized it was my father in law. Jesus.

Kabelo: I found the idiot who burned the house. Follow me to the warehouse.

As if I was invisible, he walked back to his Maserati and the engine roared to life and the car was off in high speed. What a beast.

Me: where are we going?

He also ignored me, but we were driving in a forest like place and I was very uneasy about this. What I saw next shocked me to the core, in the middle of the woods was a beautiful cabin like house, massive too. Wtf.

Me: Andile?

He kept quiet and helped me out the car. I was skeptical about coming out, first of all, this place is very shady and it's in the middle of the night. What if this is a cult? I slowly followed behind Andile, making sure I tighten the shawl around my shoulders. We climbed up a flight of stairs and when we reached the door, it was an office, it had no windows and the smell of cigars and whiskey was strong. There was another smell though, it wasn't dominant, but apparently, pregnancy comes with heightened senses and I can smell blood.

Me: Andile where is this place?

Andile: sit down here.

He made me sit at the desk and walked out. I tried calling out to him but he didn't respond and when I tried to open the door, it was heavy. It was a steel door.

Me: Baba! Andile!

The silence was deafening, and I felt like screaming. This place made me uneasy and I felt like I would vomit. Banging on the door was useless, there was no sound travelling to them. I stood there, trying to catch my breath once more and then after a while, I tried pulling again. The door finally opened and when it did, there was a

man screaming and the sound of a saw cutting through something. What I saw next is something no woman, or human being should ever be subject to seeing. I felt my blood flow slowing down and I hit my head on the ground.

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The smell of human flesh is still lingering and I feel vomit rising from the pit of my stomach. He grabbed the bucket and I puked out in it.

Kabelo: we found him, he's in hospital.

He was rubbing my back. I wanted to jump out of my skin. The same hands that killed a harmless, innocent man are the same hands that are caressing me now. Even the news of my husbands life are not good enough to erase what I was subjected to earlier. I grew up seeing people going missing on the news, some getting body parts of family members and they would be from the Butcher, now the same man is my father-in-law.

Me: don't touch me!

He removed his hand and stood up from the bed.

Kabelo: we have to get going.

Is he not going to apologize for what I saw back there? Is he really that much of a monster, that he can't even take time to at least try and explain what I saw back there, or at least lie. I'm not stupid.

Me: I'm not going anywhere; I want my dad.

Petty, I know, but I regret ever stepping into Mvelwenhle's life at this point

Kabelo: what happened back there was meant to happen. Nobody crosses my family and gets away with it. What you saw here, stays here because if it ever gets out, I will murder you and your whole family. I will forget that my son loves you.

This is not the loving family man I am used to seeing, he looks different, even his eyes are different.

Kabelo: asambe.

I'm married into a family of serial killers, and I have no way of escaping now. I wanted to cry, and maybe try run away but I know that can never happen, this is in the middle of nowhere. I also don't want to die. I gathered the courage to stand and he wanted to help me up, I didn't want him to, but I needed help. I felt weak, it shows that I haven't eaten in almost two days. It seemed as if Andile was not here anymore, so I was forced to drive with him in the car. It was silent. Imagine not being close with your father in law, and being afraid of him in general and then finding out that he's the face behind the most famous serial killer in KZN. We first drove to Ramsgate, and we had to change cars. I don't know why, I had my mouth shut the whole way. I was too scared to speak anyway. We drove to a hospital, it was in a very shady area, but I'm not surprised, what I learned today is way more shadier than this hospital. I don't know if I was excited to see him or not, but the state he was in made my excitement go down. He was hooked on pipes and his skin was bruised.

Kabelo: he's in a coma. They found him in the woods, luckily, he still had a pulse. They said he lost a lot of blood too.

I brushed his head, feeling a bit relieved that he's alive, that's all I was praying for because I still love him. But am I still sure about this family? I don't think so.

Chapter 60

Finale

7 months later

I'm feeling hot and I don't feel like going anywhere but I promised to meet up with Mthlane and if I don't do it today, I might never. And I'm praying he has good news for me.

Paloma: Mommy, are we going to visit daddy?

Me: no baby, we are going to my work.

I hate lying to her but trying to explain my exact whereabouts will be harder, so I won't even bother. I was about to walk out the house when Muzi's car parked at the end of the driveway. Great! I can't leave without being supervised; I'm not paralyzed.

Me: if Mvelo sent you, please tell him to stop stalking me.

He looked confused, but he quickly recovered and walked up to the gate. Paloma was so excited to see her uncle.

Muzi: yes, he did send me, but before we go, we need to talk.

I was angry but opened the gate for him and he walked up to me. Paloma met him halfway and she was happy to see him.

Muzi: it's cold outside, why are you wearing a vest?

Me: I'm feeling hot.

He looked at me sideways.

Me: what do you want to talk about, I'm rushing to a meeting.

Muzi: are you ever going to forgive Mvelo?

Me: honestly, I don't have time for this, and I don't want to talk about this in front of my daughter.

The same daughter that wasn't even paying attention to what I'm saying. Oh dear lord will I ever catch a break?

Muzi: okay. Let's go.

I thought he was going to pry, but he didn't. I'm glad he didn't because he should understand that Mvelo and I are not fighting. Asibange lutho, I just refuse to be part of a family of murders. Cold blooded murders. I don't even want to mention Baba. What I experienced that night is something I could never unsee.

Mvelo: Christine.

I raised my head and looked at him. I thought I would be excited when he woke up, I had been waiting for him, but I feel terrible.

Mvelo: come here Fluff.

I stood up and walked over to his bed. He tried to touch my hand but my whole body went cold, and I removed it.

Me: I'm glad you are awake.

They finally moved him to a private hospital, by they, I mean the Butcher.

Mvelo: you don't look okay.

Me: how do I be okay with my lying husband in hospital.

He laughed thinking I was being funny, oh but I'm not.

Me: we won't do this now. You will leave this hospital and you will get better.

He went sour. That's what I wanted. I went back to my chair, and we sat in complete silence. He did exactly what I told him to do, he recovered and in a week tops, he was out of hospital and he was one hundred percent better. The day we fetched him from hospital, it was the reality of my life.

Kabelo: Ntombiyelanga.

I nodded lowly and helped my husband with his bags. Ma was happy to see that Mvelo was finally out of hospital and not dead like we had presumed. They hadn't come to visit him. None of the family members were allowed, it was only Baba and I. I don't know for what reason, and it's really none of my business, as long as I was by his side, and he knew. Although I feel the way I feel right now, I still love him, and he's still my husband. I don't know for how long, but he's mine. We got to our home, and it was empty, like it wasn't flooded with guests the last time I left. They were a happy family as usual; Ma went to prepare food for everyone, and we sat down at the table like a normal family. I felt out of place, nothing felt normal about them anymore. Everything I looked at looked like blood. Every smell smelt like blood. Every taste tasted like blood. Now I know that life is not that.

Zuzile: Christine, come with me baby.

She held my hand when I was going to the kitchen to do the dishes. I knew what to expect, I certainly was going to get a breakdown of life in this family and another lecture of adaptation. Trust me, I've prepared for this day several time, as I sat in that ward, watching him breathing through those pipes, I prepared for the day I told them.

Zuzile: I know that the past few days have been terrible on you, they have been horrible on everyone. Mvelwenhle is not only a son but a husband and a father too, a lot of people would lose out if he left. What you saw and what you experienced; no human being should ever see.

She took a deep breath. They told her.

Zuzile: this family has secrets, and that is why we are so close knit. Whatever happens here, stays here, and the sooner you understand that the better we will live together.

How can she be married to a serial killer and be sitting here preaching to me about loyalty? Heck, she acts like Mother Theresa all the time, giving bible verses and praying for me all the while she goes to bed with a serial killer every night.

Zuzile: yes, Kabelo is the Butcher, but not by choice.

Shut the fuck up! This has to be a joke.

Zuzile: Kabelo was diagnosed with bipolar disorder from a young age. He has lived with it for all his life, and it took so much time for me as his wife and the woman that loves him to accept it. There were times where I wanted out because he would be cold hearted and turn into a man I don't know. He has serious anger issues, and he's working on them, from the boy I knew when I was young, to the man I married years ago, he's really evolved, he's trying. He suffers from multiple personality disorder too. This is not diagnosed by a doctor, because no one can find out about his identity, but as someone who studied medicine and did a bit of psychology, its not hard to see such.

I always thought it was a joke when Mvelo said his father was bipolar.

Zuzile: he has three personalities: Kabelo the husband, father, and son. He is loving and cares for his family. He is fun to be around, and he just loves unconditionally. Then there is the Godfather, the borderline between Kabelo and the Butcher. He's smart, resilient, and quick to get angry. But him, he's way better than the butcher.

She was crying, not weeping as such, but tears were streaming down her face.

Zuzile: the butcher is a psychopath; some consider him as inhumane. I also do, and I'm lucky to still be alive today because he could have killed me any day, with no hesitation.

I recall those words he said to me. Shivers ran down my spine and tears started stinging my eyes.

Zuzile: this monster only comes alive if he's pushed to the edge, only if he is tested, over and over to the point of no return. He was born when he lost his daughter. To this day, he cannot remember a single thing that took place that day, and all the other times he has gone into that state. One thing I have learned to accept is that it's not him, it's a part of him, this monster is a part of him that he can't get rid of. No medication or therapy will ever get rid of it.

I had goosebumps on my skin.

Zuzile: he is a bloodhound; he thrives on other people's pain. He can't stand the thought of having to experience pain all by himself, so he makes sure that someone feels the same pain he is feeling. And I know that is very selfish, he himself can't explain what goes through his brain and his mind when he goes into that state. After

16 long years of marriage, he still can't give me, or any of the people around him an explanation. I wanted to leave. I contemplated leaving so many times, and at some point, I got the strength to do it. I left, filed for divorce and thought I was done with him. It didn't work. Other than the insane love I have for him, he'd probably die without me, him and a bunch of other innocent souls, and I don't want that for people.

Me: and Mvelwenhle? Is he also part of it?

I couldn't speak, I was shaking, both internally and externally. I might just collapse right here; this is too much information for one person.

Zuzile: they run a drug ring. Well, they used to, and that's how Kabelo got the name Godfather, and for the longest, he tried to bring Mvelo into it. I didn't want him exposed to that life, it's too dangerous. By then I had long accepted the criminal ways of this family, my job was to protect my children. When Mvelo refused to step up into his position, they made an executive decision to shut it down. It was purely selfish of them to want to continue making illegal money on top of all the money they have.

I nodded and looked down.

Zuzile: it is legally impossible for you to leave this family. Trust me, I've tried, several times, even after the secrets were revealed. It is made sure that any woman who marries a Mfusi man, automatically gets 50% of all they own. Why do you think Andisiwe stayed? She has no choice, other than loving that man so much, and not being able to walk away with half of his fortunes, it will take decades to happen. These men have assets, lots of them, and equally splitting them will be the most difficult thing to do. Even Mvelo, at his age already has millions to his name. All the children, even the one in your belly. I'm not going to force you to stay with him, because I'm also a wife here, and when you got married, I promised to be your mother, not your mother-in-law. I will support any decision you make. But be wise, think about your children, and the reputation of this family.

That talk made me certain about the decision I wanted to take, I was sure about it.

Muzi: ucabangani?

Me: nothing important.

He had his hand on the gear, but he swiftly moved it and put it on top of mine. His was warm. I looked up at him.

Muzi: everything will be okay, yezwa?

I nodded. He doesn't even know the core or root of the problem, he just cares. When we got to the firm, he said he would take Paloma out for ice-cream while I go to my meeting. I was starting to feel a little cold, so he gave me the jacket that was in his car and I pushed my big self all the way to the third floor, to Mthalane's office.

Mthalane: Mrs Mfusi.

Me: sorry I'm late.

Mthalane: it's okay. Grab a seat.

He opened the chair for me, and I sat down. There were different types of files and papers on his table, and they gave me heart palpitations.

Mthalande: unfortunately, I don't have good news for you.

Me: bring it on.

Mthalande: a divorce will take you years to finalize. You can file for Annulment and claim fraud, but if you do, you walk away with nothing. He keeps all his fortunes. The house is in your daughter's name and although you own fifty percent, that's only for a divorce.

Ma was right. Leaving this family is impossible.

Mthalande: you can file for divorce, but I guarantee that you will still be going in and out of court in the next ten years, and most of your funds will be exhausted. I really do not recommend a divorce.

I nodded, feeling defeated.

Me: thank you for trying. I really appreciate it.

I shook his hand and he walked me out. I called Muzi and told him to come back for me. I was fed up and I wanted nothing but to go home and be in my own space. Paloma was so energetic; she was bouncing off the walls with a sugar rush.

Me: I leave her for a few minutes and she's already going mad.

Muzi: it's the ice-cream.

I shook my head and we drove home. When we got there, Paloma went to her playroom and busied herself with her toys. I told Muzi I would make him something to eat so he sat in the kitchen watching me.

Me: when last did you speak to Ma?

Muzi: she's living her best life in EC. She messaged me a few days ago, asking me if I wanted to take Sanele for the weekend. I said no obviously, maybe she might ask you next.

Me: I'm already struggling with Paloma, imagine if Sanele was here.

Muzi: why doesn't Mvelo take her?

I don't trust him with a four-year-old. I just won't say it out loud.

Muzi: you don't trust him?

Me: is it that obvious?

Muzi: yes, it's all over your face.

I really don't have control over my emotions these days. And at this point, my brain is the size of a pea. Nothing makes sense. He stood up and came to where I was standing.

Muzi: it's okay not to trust him. It's a motherly instinct. Every woman has it.

He touched my face, tracing his fingers gently. Why is he being so touch feely?

Muzi: you are doing a great job with Paloma. She's a happy child, and I have no doubt that the one in your belly will also be as happy as she is.

I smiled and looked down. What happened next was totally out of my control and I don't know how I let it happen. He placed his index finger under my chin, lifted it up and lowered his lips on mine. They were soft and it felt good to be touched. Only after a while did I start realizing my mistake.

Muzi: I'm sorry.

He moved away from me, wiping his lips and hitting his head on his palm.

Muzi: I thought I did a good job trying to hide my feelings but now, I don't know.

Wait, pause, hold up! What!?

Me: what are you talking about?

Muzi: I can't love another woman Chrissy because you stole my heart. From the first day I saw you, the day at the bowling alley. I knew that day that I could never have you, but I loved you anyway.

This is the same person that dated my baby cousin. Hold up, wait a minute.

Me: and what about Naomi? Was she a substitute?

Muzi: I didn't know she was your cousin; I had no clue. And I did like her a lot, she challenged me but as soon as I found out she was your cousin, I suddenly lost all interest in her, because she's not you.

I breathed out and disbelief.

Me: please leave my house.

I'm living a nightmare.

Andile: Mkami, I'm having a braai here at my place. Can you come over.

I'm fast asleep, I answered by chance. Normally, I put my phone on silence when I sleep, I don't know what happened this time.

Me: mmh Andile man. Now I have to wake up?

Andile: it's 13:00 in the afternoon.

Me: I don't care.

My sleep has evaporated, I had no choice but to wake up. Paloma was still fast asleep next to me. We were taking our midday nap because that's the boring life we live.

Andile: Mvelo is going to come fetch you.

Me: no! I can drive myself.

Andile: you know that won't happen. Don't push it.

Am I married to him or Mvelwenhle? I don't really know anymore.

Me: fine. I'll get ready.

I dropped the phone and walked out the room, going to mine. We normally nap in her room because it's cooler during the day, and I have a temperature problem ever since I fell pregnant. Its winter but I always wake up drenched in sweat. I went to my room and prepared to take a shower. I had a towel wrapped around my body and I was fixing my clothes when I saw Mvelo's car drive up the driveway. Well damn, he's here. Believe it or not, I haven't seen him in 3 months. I would let him come with me to doctor's appointments, while we were still living in the same house, but when he moved out, he decided to give me the space I asked for. Andile accompanied me for the last three months, but he would document everything for him. I know, I'm selfish for depriving him of this opportunity, but I don't feel comfortable around him anymore, I don't see him the same way I used to see him. What I see when I look at him is a cold-blooded killer. I stood there frozen in my spot when I heard silence after he got into the house. I walked out the room and went to the lounge. He was sitting there, facing the pool area, typing away on his phone. He didn't hear me creep up behind him.

Me: Mvelwenhle.

He hastily turned his head and stared at me, eyes bulging out as if they would fall out. I know I'm fat, he doesn't need to look so surprised. He cleared his throat and stood up.

Mvelo: uh, I'm sorry for just barging in.

Me: its your house too.

He looked guilty.

Me: I'm going to take a shower. Paloma is asleep.

He nodded and stood there like a statue. He was making it awkward for me. I turned on my heels and attempted to walk away.

Mvelo: wait, Chris.

I stopped and turned. He looked scared. This is not my Mvelwenhle.

Mvelo: can I say hi to my daughter.

His eyes darted to my baby bump and his facial expression told me he was crossing fingers that I say yes.

Me: yes, you can.

He looked elated, and he didn't hesitate to walk closer and place his hands on my big bump. I felt electric waves pulsing through my veins as soon as his bare hands made contact with my skin under the towel.

Mvelo: Mfusi, Mthiyane, Linda, Vundisa. Thumbu wami. Daddy loves you okay princess. I can't wait to meet you and I love you very much my angel.

I didn't want to cry but tears were already flowing like a river out of my eyes. He got on his knees and gave my bump a soft little kiss. For the first time ever, she kicked. Hypocrite. She kicked about 5 or 6 times and it was the most fulfilling, satisfying feeling ever.

Mvelo: yes Ntombi ka baba.

He was doing it on purpose, he wanted to soften my heart. It's working. He got up and looked at me, his eyes were moist, and he gave me a small smile.

Mvelo: thank you Christine. I know I let you down and I didn't keep my promise to protect you, but I love you and I appreciate all that you have done for me.

I wrapped my arms around his neck, and he tried to pull me closer, but unfortunately, baby Mthiyane was in the way. I rested my head on his shoulder though, and I finally got that feeling of wholeness once again. The smell of his perfume overpowered the permanent smell of blood I had attached to him and when I was with him, I felt nothing but love for him. I love Mvelwenhle Mfusi. I cupped his face and gave him a kiss, the kiss I had been long awaiting. I've been awaiting it, I just didn't know.

Me: let's go upstairs.

He didn't fight me, he did as I said. We got there and he went to close the water in the shower that I left running. He came back and I was sitting on the ottoman,

waiting for him. He stared at me, as if he didn't know what to do, as if he's not a well renowned sex god.

Me: don't stand there. I'm horny.

He chuckled and started taking off his t-shirt. He looked more shredded than he was when he left. The Mvelo that left this house had started getting a potbelly, and I loved it more than I did the abs. took off his shorts and was left in underwear. He walked closer to where I was, and he slowly lifted me up and placed me on the bed. This is going to be a whole different experience for me. I've never done it while pregnant, heck, I haven't had sex since that STD. that was 8 months ago. He removed the towel from my body, and I was left stark naked. He lifted my legs and separated the, going in headfirst in between my thighs. He did things to me, licked it, and made me feel so damn good, but I didn't get my happy ending. He wanted me nice a wet and when I was, he had me on my side and entered me slowly.

Mvelo: oh, Fluff. So warm.

I don't whether it's the position I'm in or the way he strokes, but he kept hitting that spot, over and over and over again. It didn't take long for me to crumble. He fucked me through my orgasm like it didn't matter. He would take slow, then go fast all over again, and I was seeing the gates of heaven. When his body tensed up on top of me, he gave a squeaky moan.

Mvelo: weeh Mfusi!

I felt his body weight on top of me, and I could handle it for a while but when he got too heavy for me, I rolled him over. That was amazing!

THE END

A lot transpired between Mvelwenhle and I. from our untimely encounter to the hardship we went through as friends, to the lovely three years we spent together as boyfriend and girlfriend. When I met him for the first time at that McD', and he spilt red juice all over my brand-new white dress, I seriously didn't think we would be here today. He kept up that bad boy attitude that I knew him for, that "I don't give a fuck" persona was always a part of him, but today I know it's not him, it's not who he is. He is actually a soft teddy bear with a big heart, with a lot of love to give. I am lucky to have had the chance to spend all this time with him. I consider him my first love, because he was the man that taught me what love is and what it feels like. Not the bullshit I went through with that man. Now I know love doesn't hurt, love isn't conditional, and it comes to you, you don't go searching for it. If he was not meant to be mine, I wouldn't be here in his arms once again like a mad woman who cannot make up her mind. The secrets and the darkness of this family can't and don't overpower the love I have for him. He is the only man I'll ever love and if I dare lose him, (and that would only happen in death,) I will never find another because no one will ever match up to my Mvelwenhle. He set the bar too high. I won't say my life was purposeless before him, but I can stand here now and say that if he ever leaves me again, I'd probably die. It's borderline an obsession.

"What are you thinking about?" he stroked my arm gently and his other hand went to my stomach.

"You really want to know?" I giggled lightly.

"Yes, I do. I want to know every little thing that goes through your little head." He's making fun of me and it's not sexy at all.

"I'm thinking about the past year." He nodded.

"It was better before we got married, don't you think?" I make the observation.

"Yeah, it really was. Maybe we weren't ready for all this commitment and the independence." He replies. Its funny how we feel exactly the same.

"I know. But then at the same time, I don't regret going through all of this with you. The thought of watching die in front of me killed me inside and that night I slept with an aching heart. Knowing I would never see you again. I was angry at you, fuck I hated you for keeping so many things away from me and putting us in danger, but when that bullet hit you, and I realized I had to live a life without you in it, it pained like hell." He held me tighter.

"Trust me, it's going to take a while for things to be better. I won't say go back to normal because this marriage has been everything but normal, but we will find our way back to loving each other the same way we did, with no resentment and anger to hinder us."

"Nothing and no one will ever come between us ever again, right?" I reassured.

"I promise you Fluff." He kissed my shoulder, and then my cheek.

"When I was young, I used to hear my parents telling each other how much they love each other, and I would always say I want that. I always wanted to have that for myself and you gave it to me. You gave me the love I always desired. And whenever they would fight, or not get along, Dad would always remind Mom that they aren't broken, they are just bent."

"Just give me a reason, just a little bit's enough, just a second we're not broken just bent and we can learn to love again." I recited the lyrics to him. He looked at me confused.

"By P!nk. you don't know it?" I laughed.

"Never heard." My baby is so uncultured.

"Oh well, whatever my parents said, and whatever that Pink of yours said, we aren't broken, we are just bent and we can learn to love each other like before." And that's why I love him so much.

My due date is here! Today I'm going to theatre! Finally. I've been waiting for this day for nine months. Everyone left their busy lives to come be with us, and that's the Mfusi family for you. I'm excited to finally meet my baby, I've been bonding with her for so long, but the thought of going into a hospital and having to go through labor, it's scary. Mvelo and I decided to have a c-section, to avoid unnecessary labor pains and most importantly, losing a life like my mother and Isabelle did.

"When are you scheduled to come in?"-Zuzile

"At 13:00." Mvelo answered before I could.

He is excited just as I am. He didn't let me sleep peacefully last night because all his sleep was non-existent. So he stayed up and talked to me, even though I was drifting in and out of sleep most of the time.

"I asked Christine."-Zuzile. She was teasing him, they've been doing it all morning.

"That means we have to be out the house by 12:00."-Thando.

I had all my bags packed and everything was ready. Just before we started eating, Ma' Mdala and sis' Nozipho arrived together. All the men were not here except for Mvelwenhle obviously. They don't look like best friends but they do look like they get along. I'm glad because for so long, everyone thought this arrangement wouldn't work. I think maybe it's because both ladies are matured and they understand the terms of the relationship they have put themselves in.

"Are you ready?"-Andisiwe

"Yes Ma, I'm so excited."

"I can't wait to do this again. It was the best experience."-Nozipho.

Everyone turned to look at her. Ma' Mdala had a big smile plastered on her face. They all started screaming like teenagers.

"Oh my gosh, congratulations!"

Great, now my baby will be the same age as their uncle or aunt. We had food and everyone was fussing over me and Sis' Nozipho's news. Mvelwenhle excused himself.

"Chrissy, what do you plan on doing when you come back from hospital? Are you going to go back home to your stepmom or you are going to stay here?"-Zuzile.

I don't know Julie that well to have her help me with my baby, and Dad made it clear that I don't stay at the Zondo house unless I'm visiting. And the way she's asking me, she's insinuating that she wants to help me. I don't mind.

"Well, I was going to ask you, if you don't mind. This is my first child and I have no idea how to take care of a newborn."

"I'd love to my baby. I thought you'd never ask." We all laughed. I know her like the back of my hand now. I love this woman.

They gave me the epidural and I can't feel my legs. Ma and Mvelo are scrubbing in with me and they are on either side of my bed. Mvelo is holding my hand and talking to me non-stop. They already started cutting me and I can

"You shouldn't fall asleep."-Zuzile.

"I'm so sleepy, you don't understand."

"If you don't fall asleep now, we will take a vacation/honeymoon to anywhere you want."-Mvelo.

"Don't bribe me with things you can't do." Ma laughed.

"I promise you, once baby girl turns 3 months, we are going."-Mvelo.

"That's too soon. I won't leave my baby." He's mad.

I felt something blobby in my stomach.

"She's here."-Zuzile.

She left my side quickly and went to stand next to the doctors. A loud, sharp cry filled the theatre and the atmosphere changed completely.

"It's a girl!"-Maharaj.

They all left me in suspense, they left me wondering and wishing I could also see my baby. All the sleepiness I was feeling evaporated. I'm a mother!

"Daddy come cut the umbilical cord."-Maharaj.

I think they did all of that and they prepared her. Mvelo came back to me and he was crying. He rested his head on my bosom and he cried like a little baby. Ma came to our side and rubbed his head.

"Thank you, Christine."-Mvelo

I've never seen him this happy. Even on our wedding day, he wasn't this happy.

"She's so beautiful."-Zuzile.

Now I couldn't wait to see her and hold her. When the nurse came closer with a white blanket wrapped around her tiny body, Mvelo removed his big head and the nurse helped me carry her. She had big eyes, I could tell from the eyelids. Her skin was pale white and she has hair that almost looked red. Just like my mom's red hair. She had chubby cheeks and they explain why I was fat.

"She's a big baby, 3kgs."-Zuzile.

"She really is beautiful. I can't believe I'm a mom." I could feel the heavens smiling down on me.

"And what are you naming her?"-Zuzile.

I hadn't thought of any names, and Mvelo and I haven't talked about anything, so I have no idea.

"Zita. She is the little hope that I had that would bring us back together, and she did. She's my little hope, our little hope."

It's a beautiful name, baby Zita. Very unique.

"I love it, its precious, like her."-Zuzile.

"Ma can you please give her a second name."-Me.

Her whole face lit up. She looked happy and I wanted her to be the one to do it.

"Ziphozenkosi Mfusi."-Zuzile.

"Ziphozenkosi Zita Mfusi. Uthumbu wami."-Mvelo.

He looked so happy, and I loved the name so much for her, it sounded right, it was perfect for her. She is a gift from God.

“I love you Ziphozenkosi...”

This...this is the beginning of my happily ever after.

FIN!