

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Preface-

.

.

It's in the early hours of the morning in Winchester Hills, South of Johannesburg. The frequently quiet and peaceful Meyiwa residence is invaded by the sound of gunshots. Prepared for this day, Mthombo Meyiwa and his wife Zinzi scurry out of their bedroom with their week-old son, sleeping peacefully in his mother's arms. The woman is shaking in her boots, just when she has become a mother, a war breaks out.

Upon exiting their bedroom, the family is met by their personal body guard who is armed and alert.

"Makhosi... Makhosi open the door." Mthombo knocks loudly on one of the bedroom doors situated a few feet away from the living room.

Fear has found a place in his heart. He is not afraid

for himself nor his wife, but the son he has been praying for since he became a husband. He is well aware that his enemies have found out about the new edition in the family, his weakness.

Choosing to go into politics was a decision his wife was against, a decision his parents were against. But Mthombo is a man who follows his heart, even if it leads him to the deepest pits of hell. Somewhere along the way, he made a hand full of enemies. Enemies that would gladly picnic on his grave and vomit on it thereafter.

The door swings open and an elderly woman stands before him, eyes glinting with panic. She knows what is expected of her, hence the travel bag at the foot of the bed. She is dressed and ready to head out.

“Makhosi, you know what to do.” Mthombo hastily says.

Makhosi’s eyes move to a shuddering Zinzi, a sleeping baby and back to the head of the household Mthombowomnotho Meyiwa. It is time...

“The guard will drive you to a location, wait there until my brothers come. They will take you to a safe place...”

He sighs, it’s a sigh of a man who has no strength left in him. A man who knows he is about to lose everything.

“I hope we will meet again, Makhosi.” Mthombo says.

MaKhosi’s mouth parts in despair, tears dropping out of her eyes.

“But sir, can’t we all go together? What if something bad happens to you and ma’am? What will I tell the boy?” She asks, desperately.

It’s not as simple as Makhosi thinks, Mthombo sighs once again, turning his attention to his son who is safely tucked in his wife’s arms.

Zinzi has not stopped shedding tears. She didn’t think she would be separated from her son so soon. The boy is barely a month old but they have to bid him goodbye, a sacrifice they saw coming.

“Zinzi will go with you then,” that’s news to Zinzi.

Her tear filled eyes grow wider and wider as she looks at her husband in disbelief.

"No, that's not what we agreed on." She protests, her world is falling apart and there is nothing she can do about it.

"Think of our son, he needs his mother." He says.

"He needs his father as well, we are not going to separate, Mthombo. What if I never see you again?"

The shooting has stopped, it's not a good sign.

"Dammit!" Mthombo cusses at the sudden silence. Whoever is out there must have entered the house.

"The main priority is Sikolethu, they are here for him. My enemies want me to watch my son die, they know it will destroy me. As long as we're apart, they will never touch him. If my brothers do not make it in time, then leave that place and run. Run as fast as you can and never look back." He gives the nanny strict instructions.

"If things go our way, we'll meet in a few days, after everything has blown over." Zinzi adds and shares a

look with her husband. They are not certain they will make it out alive.

"We trust you, you have been with us since I was a little boy. My parents have trust in you. You are family, Makhosi, and I believe you will treat our son like your own." Mthombo states, looking deep into her eyes.

"I will sir, I promise." The Nanny says.

MaKhosi was his babysitter, she took care of him and his siblings while their parents were climbing the corporate ladder. Starting a company from scratch isn't an easy task, especially for a black man. She became a second mother to them. Hence Mthombo believes that she will take care of his son as if he were hers.

"And please, don't move around a lot, if my brothers don't find you then we will." He concludes, his voice is a little shaky from the flurry of emotions overtaking him.

"That's if we'll still be alive." Zinzi mutters to herself.

Although it is for the baby's own good, she can't stomach the thought of being without her son.

Mthombo heard her muffled complaint, there is no time to send out comforting words to his beloved. Their enemies are outside, if it were not for the guards swamped outside the house, the little family would be dead by now.

"Here are his papers, fake documents. Everything you will need is inside this envelope, a bank card as well. I transferred more than enough money, you'll be able to access the money until my family finds you. My son should not lack anything."

Mthombo holds out an A4 white envelope, MaKhosi takes a peek inside. Her eyes widen at the fake name written on the birth certificate.

"Why are you changing his name sir?"

"Like I said, for safety reasons. It will be easy for my enemies to track down Sikolethu Meyiwa. Remember, this will only be necessary when no one comes for you." Mthombo recaps.

His declaration is met by the sounds of gunshots

emanating into the house, causing sheer panic within the trio and wakes Sikolethu.

Mthombo is very much aware that his enemies have entered his house, they must've killed the guards.

With no time wasted, he takes a crying Sikolethu from his wife, and hands him over to Makhosi. Zinzi breaks down in painful sobs, Mthombo pulls her under his wing for comfort.

"Go MaKhosI, please take care of him and don't trust anyone." He reminds her once more and orders his body guard to grab the bags and accompany MaKhosI and baby Sikolethu to their destination.

The guard knows what to do, his boss had laid everything out to him beforehand. He is to use the back door, a car that will drive them away is waiting for them outside.

Zinzi is shaking with dread and fear, her screams are silent and suffocating her. It's a painful moment for the couple, knowing the possibility of never seeing their son is higher than the price of petrol.

A bullet misses Mthombo by an inch while comforting his hysterical wife in his arms.

“Mthombo!” Zinzi screams, ducking what she can’t see.

As Mthombo raises his head to inspect the shooter, his eyes meet an unfamiliar face, a man in black clothing, arrogantly strolling towards them. He has a gun aimed at them and a stoical expression that would kill faster than a bullet.

“Don’t look back, Zinzi.”

Mthombo grabs her by the hand and they take off running towards the direction MaKhosи took, without looking back. They are almost out the second exit when Zinzi grows impossibly tired. She can feel her body betraying her, her legs suddenly feel heavy and her vision tunnels.

There’s a foreign pain on her lower abdomen, the pain grows with each passing minute. She stops, sends her vacant hand to inspect. Something warm and wet glazes her fingers.

“Zinzi come on, we can’t afford to stop.” He pulls her

hand without looking back but Zinzi won't move.

Something is wrong, she's looking down at her stomach. Her heart stops for a second at the sight of blood.

She doesn't remember getting shot, it must've been back there when the gunned man shot at them.

"Mthombo..." his name moves past her trembling lips, she pulls him, tears running down her cheeks. Slowly, she lets go of his hand, and the second Mthombo turns his head to her, Zinzi falls to the ground.

It happens so fast that he doesn't have time to catch her.

"No, no. My love, no." He cries, kneeling before her. He's looking at the blood oozing through her pyjama top, his hands are lingering mid-air, afraid to touch her.

"G- go sthandwa sami... it's... too late... for me." Blood bubbles out of her mouth, she is right though. Life has given up on her, she can only join the land of the dead now. "Promise you will get to our baby on

time. Protect him.”

The mention of Sikolethu snaps him out of the shock he’s trapped in. He has no choice but to be strong for their son, he needs to stay alive for their son. It takes a while for him to pull his dying wife into his arms.

“I will, I promise. I will get to Sikolethu and I’ll make sure he never forgets you.” Covered in his wife’s blood, he lays a gentle soft kiss on her forehead before glancing into her teary eyes.

“I will avenge your death Zinzi, I swear on our son.” The oath is birthed from the deepest core of his soul.

His heart shatters into a million pieces when Zinzi painfully gasps as she breathes her last.

Mthombo stands and proceeds to leave, but a sudden arrogant laugh stops him on his tracks.

There is someone behind him, and he knows whoever it is has a gun.

He frowns, getting ready to face his enemy but the person shoots him on his back, releasing one single

bullet. The last thing he feels is a burning excruciating pain before he hits the floor and everything becomes dark.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

One-

.

.

All my life I had it all planned out. Get married at twenty-seven, have children, buy a house, have a Ph.D. at twenty-eight, and travel the world with my husband leaving our two kids with my parents. Did I mention a car? That was on the list as well, I'd love to say at the age of twenty-seven I tick all the boxes.

Then again, I wouldn't be running after a bus on a dusty street.

"Stop the bus, stop the bus." This is so embarrassing, didn't that driver hear me?

Today is my first interview after years of being unemployed and I'm already running late. Shiyiwe

Jele, you are indeed your name.

My parents must have known, they must've known that I will come last in everything. That's why the day they found out I was growing in my mother's womb, they agreed to name me Shiysiwe. I don't know if it means left behind, or backwards, or reverse... I hate this name. It represents everything bad that has happened in my life.

I am not even going to blame the government, no. Ramaphosa was not there when my parents decided to be God and choose my destiny, names speak and when you give your child a heavy one like this, then yes, the name will shout out for the world to hear.

The three ladies waiting for a bus are staring as I do my walk of shame back to the bus stop, maybe if I walk like Naomi Campbell they'll overlook the dust that has risen up my ankles, and my sweaty nose.

Why did I wear white pants? Nobody wears white pants anymore, even mother-nature is trying to tell me that my style belongs in the nineties.

“Why did you run? There’s another bus coming.” This girl is judging me, I’m pretty sure she’s chased a bus before.

“I’m late, my interview starts at eight. I have to be in Bryanston before 7:45am.” I don’t owe her an explanation, but since she asked.

“The next bus will be here at 8:10am, rather take a taxi.” She says.

That is a bad idea. Although taxis are faster and we always have taxis on standby in Diepkloof... but I’m not ready to sit through morning traffic while listening to Beyonce telling her potential ex-boyfriend to go to the left, or wishing she was a boy so she can dominate her cheating husband by giving him a taste of his own medicine. Taxi drivers and R ‘n B have a weird “situation-ship”

“No thanks, I have seen Noord taxi rank in the morning. It’s a jungle, the traffic will raise my blood pressure.”

Why are they looking at me like that?

“I’m twenty-seven by the way, I don’t drink, I don’t

smoke, and I eat healthy. But my BP rises up sometimes... it's... it's normal." I tell them.

I'm not as old as I look, years of using Gentle Magic on my face did not do me justice. It's not for everyone.

.

.

From this day forth, I promise to respect normal time. Black-time must fall. The bus drops me at my location forty-five minutes after nine, the sun is sizzling hot. Not good for my oily skin.

I use the sleeve of my cardigan to wipe away the oiliness, before pressing the intercom button. All the houses in this community look expensive, I wouldn't fit here even if I wanted to. High walls, heavy, remote controlled gates, and electric fences. Some people are born for greatness.

The Meyiwases are one of the most consistent names in Mzansi's most successful families' list, working for them would be a pleasure.

I speak to a woman who responds in Zulu just when I was going for my fly-by-night English accent. I spent the entire night practising how to speak like a well-educated woman, Bonang was my inspiration. Binge watching her show came with advantages and disadvantages; I can speak Sandton but the name Pinky-girl won't leave my head.

The small gate opens, a woman in a pinifa lets me in. While ushering me to the house, she introduces herself as Tumie the housekeeper. Is it okay to call her that? She looks way older than my mother.

We enter the house through the kitchen—Top Billing where are you? People know how to collect their blessings.

“Wait here, I’ll get the boss.” She leaves me alone in the spacious kitchen. It gives me a chance to practice my accent and go over the impressive words I learned.

I’m nervous about this interview. I know nothing

about being a caregiver, in life you need to take chances or you will never be or have what you want.

My heart skips a thousand beats at the sight of the man striding towards me, flaunting his preppy rich white boy outfit. I call it the “You can beat me up but my dad will sue,” starter kit. Khakhi pants, and a golf t-shirt always tucked in.

He looks better in person, better than I’ve seen him in my dreams.

“Miss Jele?” I didn’t think his voice would make my clit vibrate like this. I try not to show that he’s affecting me, my eyes give me off.

It’s the frowned brows on his features, he can tell I’m thinking about the two of us entangled in his silky bedsheets.

“Miss Jele?” Fingers are snapped to my face, I look like a peacock with how I’m blinking, only I don’t have big eyelashes. I don’t have lashes at all, there’s maybe ten strands of them.

“Yes sir, I’m yours.” That came out wrong, and I had no business breathing like I’m having a fake orgasm.

My nerves have come out to play dirty, it could be that Zinqumo stands tall and firm, or that I dream of him as my husband every single night.

“Huh?” His brows straighten out and decide to intimidate me by rising.

“I... I mean, that’s me. I’m Miss Jele, proud to be one.”

But not proud of this damn surname.

It dates back to the first woman in my family who fell in love with a man whose surname was Jele, it must’ve been an arranged marriage because no way in hell... Maybe if my name was SiphoSethu or Sphokuhle, hell I would’ve taken Gift... maybe the surname Jele wouldn’t be so bad.

Something must be wrong with me but when I hear Jele my mind shows me a prison, I blame my name. Besides, Shiyiwe Jele is not meant for the stars.

Then again, we are a great clan. I wouldn’t trade my

family for anything.

“Okay... you’re late Miss Jele.” I’m staring, mouth open, admiring his growing scowl.

“You are late.” he repeats, breaking me out of my daze.

“I know sir, the bus came too early today. My next door neighbour said I should be at the bus stop by 6:50 and that’s exactly what I did. I was right on time. But when I got there, the bus was leaving. I chased it, I swear to God. That driver saw me, but he didn’t want to stop. As if I was going to ride for free, it’s not like his father owns the bus you know...”

Now that I think about it, the Meyiwas own buses. Maybe I can report him.

“Can I ask something sir, I want to report the...” He stops me with a raised hand.

“That’s enough.” He mutters.

“I’m sorry, Zinqumo sir.” I say.

I’m not sure if he wants his name rounded off to the

nearest English, with that top notch English coming out of his private school nose.

He speaks with his nose, this one.

His rich friends probably call him Decisions not Zinqumo.

“I’m really nervous about this interview, please excuse whatever comes out of my mouth.”

He's shaking his head.

“You need to be careful with your words Miss Jele, it's not always necessary to speak.” The rumbling of his voice will send me into an early grave. I wish he'd stop calling me Miss Jele though.

“The interview will be held in the lounge, follow me.” He turns and starts walking away. I'm right behind him, following like he said when he stops, and because my head, and eyes are on his fine ass, I collide into his firm body.

It's nothing like they do in Indian movies when a girl falls, and the guy catches her. The man watches as my body tumbles to the ground.

I let out a shrill scream when my hip bone hits the black tiles.

He's looking down at me, with that permanent frown.

It must be permanent, he hasn't worn anything else.

"What's going on?" A deeper voice finds a way into the kitchen, I look up from the floor and right next to Zinqumo are his older brothers. Bhedlindaba and Bongukwanda.

They look more intimidating than their little brother, or it could be because I'm looking at them from this angle.

"Who is this?" That's Bhedlindaba asking with an innocent expression plastered on his face.

"The girl who's here for the job." I want to roll my eyes at Zinqumo's response.

I'm not a girl just to correct that, I'm a woman, born in 1995. He needs to put some respect on that.

"Why aren't you helping her up?" Bhedlindaba sounds like he cares, I like him more now.

“Why should I when I didn’t put her down there?”
Listen to this man I’m mentally married to, I want a divorce.

“I have a business meeting to get to, can we start this interview?” This one is Bongukwanda.

He bends over, places his hands on my waist and lifts me up like I’m a child who was throwing tantrums on the floor. I’m defeated, from today I will start finishing my food.

“Thank you sir,” I show my gratitude.

He gives me one good darn stare, smiles, and walks away. Bhedlindaba follows him, my fictitious husband and soon to be ex, shakes his head after giving me a stare down and follows his brothers.

That went well, the interview has not started yet and I have messed up.

I find them seated, there’s a lady sitting next to Zinqumo. She looks like the female version of the brothers. If I thought they were intimidating, this one

wears the crown.

Her eyes have a grilling gaze, enough to make me feel like I'm not worthy to appear before her just from a single glance. I drop my head which is something I never do before another woman.

"Miss Jele, you have wasted enough of our time. Are you going to sit, or you're waiting for an invitation?"
Haybo Kwanda?

I thought we were cool, is he not the one who helped me out back in the kitchen?

The chair makes a screeching noise as I pull it from the table, I should have picked it up.

Now they are looking at me like I'm here to destroy their furniture.

"I'm sorry, I'm not this clumsy. I'm just so nervous because..." I stop when I realise that they are not interested in my story.

My father does say I'm gifted with words— from birth, I couldn't stop talking... okay that's a lie.

But I... breathe Shiysiwe and shut the hell up.

"Where did you hear about us?" Bhedlindaba asks.

"Everyone knows the Meyiwas, you're on billboards, magazines and newspapers and google." Is he kidding me?

"That's not what my brother meant, where did you hear about the job?" The sister corrects.

Of course I googled them. I'm looking at Zwangendaba Meyiwa and Masabata Dlamini's children.

The old couple own streams of businesses which were built through blood, sweat and tears. I happen to think Google exaggerated a little there.

While eating cheese and bacon, they filled their house with six children, four boys and two girls.

This one who's busy on his phone is their youngest, the arrogant Zinqumo Meyiwa. Born in 1999, yeah he's my ben10, my baby daddy and my ATM. He just doesn't know it yet.

The one in the middle is Bhedlindaba, they call him

Ndaba. A 28 year old bachelor, he's the owner of the biggest soccer team in South Africa, Ndaba Royals.

Bongukwanda just got engaged at the age of 34.

Mabahlezi is the third born, she's 31 years old and has it all figured out. All I know about her is that she is married to some big shot BEE. She is very private, keeps her family affairs away from the world.

I'm yet to meet their older brother, he's the reason I'm here. 38 year-old Mthombowomnotho Meyiwa, he's confined to a wheelchair due to an accident that took place six years ago.

The family wouldn't give out more information regarding the incident.

I will be his caregiver.

I forgot to mention their other sister, Culolethu. That one moved to Europe after matric. I think she's 25 or 26 years of age. I'm not quite sure.

"Are you going to answer the question Miss Jele, or continue to waste our time?" I forgive you for

snapping at me, Zinqumo. We'll sort this out in my dreams.

"I saw the post on line," I'm lying.

My mother's friend told me about it, she went as far as giving me transport fair and borrowed me her daughter's dress, the one she wore last Christmas. I didn't wear it.

Mabahlezi flips my CV over, it's a one page document written back-to-back. That's how little to nothing, I have in experience. After Matric, I did a three week call centre course and that's about it.

"Your first and last job was in 2015 at a day care?" She asks, well I think she's asking. It sounds more like a statement though.

"Yes."

"What were you doing for the last seven years?" Bongukwanda asks.

"I was taking care of my grandmother, she's 92." I love that old woman, talking about her puts a smile on my face.

"Is your grandmother in a wheelchair?" Mabahlezi.

"No ma'am, she uses a walking stick. She struggles to stand and walk, so someone has to be there to help her whenever she needs to change a sitting position or go to the bathroom. You see she spends the whole day basking in the sun and when it shifts, she shifts with it until it sets. Only then is she brought into the house, she can't bath herself, or self-feed. That's where my family comes in, she's our living ancestor, so we try by all means to take care of her."

My father believes she's in her last days, he sent her back to Ntuzuma where she will die in peace.

"You were unemployed for seven years, what makes you think you're eligible for this position." Zinqumo.

"I was employed sir, the difference between me and the person who works at a bank is that my job didn't come with a salary. I'm good at what I do, my grandmother can vouch for me. In fact, she gave me a good reference, I can show you the video." I pull my phone out and search for the footage. She looks

crusty in it, but it's forgiven because she's old.

"There is no need for that Miss Jele," Bhedlindaba stands. "The job is yours."

God! You have done it again.

"No, she doesn't have proper experience. We need a qualified nurse, not some caregiver wannabe."

I'm offended. Why is Zinqumo this person?

"All the caregivers we had were disloyal, they were here for the money and not our brother. They ate our food, wasted time watching TV, instead of taking care of Mtho. And don't forget that they stole from us."

Zinqumo is looking at me. Every word he speaks, he utters with a sarcastic monstrosity and when he adds that arrogant smirk, it makes me feel insecure.

"My purpose is different, sir." I assure him.

I'm here for both, the money and his brother. I'm not going to work for free.

“Exactly, and Shiyiwe looks like a decent girl. What other girls take care of their grandmothers in this generation? Mthombo will be in good hands, I assure you.”

Bhedlindaba’s trust in me is sweet, it hasn’t been thirty minutes since I’ve been here and I have won hearts.

“Florence spoke well of you sisi, you come from a respected family.” Bhedlindaba says.

Florence is my neighbour.

“Yes, my father is a former military officer.” I say with pride.

He’s smiling at me now, do I smile back? I don’t want to give off the wrong impression.

“Welcome aboard.” He says.

“Thank you sir, I promise to take good care of Mr. Mthombo.” He takes my extended hand and shakes it.

“Wipe that smile off your face, the job is not yours yet.”

Google lied about Zinqumo, he's not all smiles and bubbly. He's the total opposite.

"Don't listen to him sisi, the job is yours. You can start tomorrow, Mabahlezi will fill you in on your job description." Something tells me that's Bhedlindaba's final word. Zinqumo stands and leaves, oh well.

Mabahlezi's eyes are on me, I quickly look away when they clash with mine.

"Be here at exactly 7am, if you are a minute late, don't bother coming." She says.

"I will be here at 6:30 ma'am." I'm so happy, nothing can bring me down now.

.

.

I decide to do a little eye shopping in Sandton, it's my way of passing time. I don't want to cook when I get home.

16:07 finds me in a taxi to Joburg, traffic is working in my favour and I know MTN rank will be packed, so

I will probably be home around 7pm.

I'm hit by the smell of tinned fish at my arrival, we ate that yesterday and the day before that.

MaMbuyazi. can't be serious.

But at least they cooked.

"MaMbuyazi, I'm home." I shout from the kitchen. I need to warm my food before load shedding strikes.

"Did you get the job?" That's the first thing she is going to ask me?

"Yes ma, I'm starting tomorrow." I answer while following the noises bursting through the thin walls with my pap and fish.

My mom is relaxed on the sofa, reading her bible. It's funny how she puts her reading glasses on the bridge of her nose.

Mthandeni is sitting with her feet stretched out on the couch, this child thinks she is a princess and my parents let her believe that she is one.

She's the sister that got the nice name, the baby that

was planned.

“Who’s going to wash those dishes in the sink?” I ask because this is nonsense.

I hear a tongue click, it must be coming from the tv or else I will slap this child back to her mother’s womb.

“My baby, your sister has homework. She just got home from school, she’s tired. Please think of her.”

Think of who?

“Mama, do you know how tiring it is being interviewed by rich people? They asked me about my strength and weaknesses, I had to crack my brain and that took a lot from me.”

She takes possession over a dark stare, looking at me like I’m responsible for the smell of fish in this house.

“Shiyiwe please, I know you didn’t get a chance to further your studies. There’s no reason for you to be jealous of your sister, her achievements are your achievements.” She spits, folding her feet on the

couch and lying down like the queen my father thinks she is.

“I don’t understand how you think I’m jealous of Mthandeni, of course I want what’s best for her. Washing the dishes once will take nothing away from her studies.” I mutter between yawns.

“I know my child, just... do the dishes today and Mthandeni will do them on Saturday.”

The spoiled brat seated on the couch nods reluctantly, she’s smiling at something on her phone.

There is not a single book in front of her, last born kids are demons and parents favour them.

My mother seems to forget that I opened her womb, not this 20 year-old spoiled brat.

I don’t say anything more to her, I will show her that I am MaJele once.

I leave my plate on the counter for the cockroaches to feast when we go to sleep.

The electricity box is right outside the gate, it’s connected to four houses surrounding ours. If the

switch is turned off then we'll all be in dark city.

The neighbours will have to forgive me, I have a sister I need to teach a lesson.

To my luck, the streets are empty, making it safe for me to temper with the switch.

I pull the green switch down and it becomes dark instantly.

“Yooohhh!” I hear MaMbuyazi and Mthandeni shout. Yep, the government is at it again.

“Mama, load shedding.” I shout for the neighbours to hear as well.

This is how far I am willing to go to not wash those dishes. I bump into my mother and sister at the door, looking stressed. Load shedding will kill someone one day.

“I heard people in the taxi talking about stage 6.” I lie.

“We might as well go to sleep,” MaMbuyazi says.

“Good night people, the new breadwinner needs her

beauty sleep." I sing, shut the kitchen door so they don't go out.

Life is good, I'll be asleep and dreaming about Zinqumo by the time my father gets home and realises there's no load shedding.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Two-

.

.

Mthombo-

Every day for six years he sat by the window overlooking the gate, he knows who comes in and who goes out. His family went on with their lives leaving him stuck in the past.

The days are the same for him, he never keeps track of them nor time. To him it's just the same, he doesn't care really because, why would a man who has nothing to live for live life like a man with a vision?

It all started the day he woke up in the hospital attached to a lot of machines and was told he was in a comma for six months and will never walk again. The news was devastating but not as much as the news of losing his wife.

“What about Sikolethu? Where is my son? Did you find him?” He asked his brothers. Bongukwanda and Bhedlindaba couldn’t look at him, they had failed to do a simple task, find Makhosi and the baby.

“Makhosi wasn’t where you said she would be, we looked everywhere bhuti.” Kwanda was the barrier of bad news.

When he left the hospitalised, he hired every private investigator he could find and when they came with nothing, he fired them and hired new ones.

Six years later, he’s spent bundles of money trying to find his son.

He’s never felt so useless in his life, the only memory he has of him are his baby pictures plastered on all four corners of the wall in his room.

The very same four corners have kept him prisoner

for six years, he's drowning every single day and has no intentions of ever coming up. His house in Winchester Hills remains vacant and untouched, he hasn't mustered up the courage to go back there.

"Come in," he answers to the knock at the door. It's Mabahlezi, he knew before he saw her face. Her knock is softer compared to that of Kwanda's who knocks like a police officer. Zinqumo doesn't knock, he lets himself in. Ndaba texts him while he's on his way.

"I brought you oats, you should eat and take your meds." Mabahlezi's voice startles him as if he's not the one who granted her permission to enter.

He turns the wheelchair around, and lifts his eyes to her. She's leaning against the doorframe with a tray in her hands.

"I'm not hungry." He says and begins moving the wheelchair towards the bed.

"You're not hungry everyday but you still have to eat. You can't take your vitamins on an empty stomach."

Her heels are loud on the floor, she puts the tray on the small wooden table and moves to straighten his bed sheets.

Mthombo takes a peek at the food and cringes with disgust.

“If I’m going to eat, at least let me eat like a man. Sikolethu should be eating oats not me.” He speaks of him like he’s always been here.

It’s awkward for Hlezi but not Mthombo, he wants to talk about his son like he never left.

His sister feels sorry for him, it shows in her eyes.

“Mtho...”

“I know what you’re going to say. They got to him, that’s why I haven’t found him. I don’t believe they took him, my son is still alive. I’d know if he were dead.”

“Makhosi would’ve brought him home if that were the case, he’s gone Mtho. You need...”

Mthombo exhales deeply, he’s not going to engage in this conversation.

“I’m sorry,” Mabahlezi knows when to stop. She sits on his bed. “The new caregiver will be here soon. She looks younger than the others, and very kind, so please be nice to her. Don’t be an ass for once, please.”

She’s the only one who gets away with talking to him like this.

The frown on his face is crooked, “Caregiver? How many times must I tell you that I don’t need a babysitter? I can take care of myself just fine.”

That’s hilarious, but Hlezi’s face wrinkles in disagreement.

“Nice try Mtho, if you were able to take care of yourself, you wouldn’t be looking as shabby as you do. I swear we can sell your hair and beard to a tailor and they’d make a mean jersey with it. You look like a caveman.” Hlezi teases.

So what if he hasn’t shaved in months? Looking decent is the least of his worries.

“She’s not going to last here, you know that right?”

Here's the story behind that, he's not fond of all those people who come and crowd his space, he's skilled at making them run and never turn back.

"I'm hoping this one is stronger, you're handicapped Mtho. You need a helping hand." Mabahlezi reaches out to touch his hand.

"I don't need shit, my hands work perfectly. You seem to forget that the only thing I can't use are these useless legs of Jacob Zuma." He grunts after.

"What did Zuma ever do to you?" Mabahlezi never misses a chance to laugh at his snide remarks about the government.

"Nothing, I just need someone to be at the receiving end of my anger and Zuma seems to be the perfect candidate." Mthombo.

Agreeing to have anger issues is a step closer to recovery, but Mthombo has been nursing this anger for years now.

"Rather Zuma than Shiysiwe," Mabahlezi utters.

She thinks it would be a shame for Shiysiwe. Her

brother can be a dragon when depression hits.

Mthombo pushes his wheelchair back to the window where he watches life leave him behind.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

Today came faster than I expected, it could be that I couldn't sleep last night. This job is important to me, it's my chance to show my parents that I'm not lazy and I can be independent.

The days of Mthandeni overshadowing me are over, I will be bringing bacon home and that should mean something to my parents.

The pensioners are awake, having their usual morning-prayer session in the living room. I was part of that crew once upon a time but I couldn't anymore, after life threw me down a million times and God was nowhere to be seen.

They were forcing Christianity down my throat and maybe I went to church just to please them.

Growing up meant making my own decisions, they were not happy when I stopped going to church.

I enter the living room when they close their prayer and bibles.

“Did you also hear that noise last night?” It’s how I greet by the way. My father looks up at me, a frown on his face.

“We did, it’s nothing serious, just cats playing around.” He loves being ignorant.

Nothing like that has ever happened before, the cats were on the roof making ear splitting noises. It lasted for over thirty minutes, I could swear they were fighting.

“Yeah those were cats alright, humans who transformed into cats. Cats don’t make that kind of noise baba.” I dispute his claim.

My father laughs, that’s his persona, he laughs

everything away. Nice life problems.

“Don’t be ridiculous Shiysiwe,” Listen to him calling me Shiysiwe with such pride and confidence. Must be nice hey. “Don’t over think things.”

He’s asking for too much, I’m an over thinker. I’ll over think myself out of any situation, like right now. I need to find an escape, my mother is looking at me.

“Are you going to work dressed like that?”

MaMbuyazi loves playing Judge Judy, it comes with deep set eyes and a look of disgust plastered on her face.

“Yes mama, they said I can wear anything.” You can never go wrong with an ANC t-shirt and jeans. And, it hits differently when you got the t-shirt for free.

“You are going to work for the most influential family in South Africa, you cannot represent the Jeles looking like that.”

“The Meyiwas don’t care how I look, my job is to look after their brother not be a runway model. Trust me, ma, the way I dress is the last thing they care about.”

I know I would be arrested for my fashion sense but I love the way I dress, I'm comfortable and that's all that matters.

"Those Jeans are too tight Shiyiwe, go and change." MaMbuyazi is starting to get on my last nerve.

Mthandeni would have told her where to shove her two cents opinion, that's the thing about these 2k's, they are not afraid to speak up. I'll get a slap in the face if I dare try.

"Let the child be MaMbuyazi, if her bosses have no problem with it, why should you?" My father.

Mbuyazi is my mother's maternal name, my father has always called her that. That's how I adapted the name.

She slams her bible on the table. Is God okay with this unruly act?

"Do whatever you want, it's not like you ever listen to me in this house." She says and stands to leave. I'm not going to justify her emotional blackmail with a comment.

“MaMbuyazi, that’s not what I meant.” My father calls after her.

“No, it’s fine. I’m the crazy one in this house, everything I say does not make sense. It’s not my fault that I got married young and didn’t finish high school. I’m going to bath, you two can stay here and gossip about me all you want.” She says.

We can still hear her complaints after she’s disappeared into her bedroom. I look at my father with the intent to laugh, I won’t start though. I’ll let him start, confirm if this is a laughing matter.

“Your mother can be too much,” he’s gossiping about her.

“She gave us permission to gossip but that doesn’t mean we should, baba. She is your wife.” His chuckle is deep, it instantly turns into a laugh.

He took his time with that laugh, mine expired about two seconds ago.

“Koko.” That can only be Ntebo knocking, as to why

she bothers when she's already inside. Her heels are going to break my mother's tiles.

"Those tiles were expensive, Ntebo." I tell her on behalf of my mother. If MaMbuyazi does the honours, she will shit on her head.

"Where is she?" She's whispering.

Knowing MaMbuyazi she is peeking through the crack of her bedroom door killing my friend with a look.

"How are you baba? What is your wife feeding you? You look younger every time I see you." She is loud, it's too early.

I'm embarrassed by how my father is blushing, he can't be flattered by a twenty-five year old.

I pull her outside and ask her to accompany me to the bus stop.

"Take this," she forces a small paper on to my hand.

"What am I looking at?" I ask, frowning up at her.

"Things we're going to do on your pay day." She states.

My friend woke up and chose to be funny today,
“We’re not doing anything, like we never do anything
on your pay day.”

“I’m only a bank team-leader but you work for the
Meyiwas, obviously your digits have extra zeros.”
Ntebo has concluded when I don’t even know how
much I will be earning.

“A caregiver might as well be a maid, I’ll be looking
after a man in a wheelchair. Probably bathing him
and...”

“Wiping his ass.” She finishes and breaks into loud
laughter, I should not be smiling like this.

“That’s my boss Ntebo, he’ll be paying my salary.” I
add a little push.

“I’m happy for you friend, you have waited for this
day forever. God is finally smiling down at you.” She
says.

Nah! I don’t think God has anything to with this.
Where was he for the last seven years? I don’t want
to touch on this subject.

“Did you tell Emeka?” Ntebo.

Oh no! I forgot to tell the boyfriend. Emeka hates being left out, he wants to know everything happening in my life. I’m serious about him, I don’t know if he’s serious about me. Serious meaning a shiny engagement ring, a Nigerian wedding and little Davidos that have his big head and my looks.

Ntebo’s eyes pop out when she spots the guilt dancing on my face, I can be transparent it’s not cute.

“You haven’t told him?” Mouth drop! Why does she find it shocking?

“I’ll call him during my lunch break.” That’s if I don’t forget.

“You do that and tell me how it goes,” she’s fiddling inside her bag while talking nonstop, she fishes out the scarf I borrowed her two months back.

“I’m going to Nelspruit with my team, so I thought I should return your scarf. It’s winter babe, you’ll catch a cold.”

She wraps the scarf around my neck. A pink scarf

and a yellow t-shirt? The police can put me behind bars now.

"You don't have to give it back, keep it." Now that I'm employed, I can buy myself a lot of these. She stops me from taking it off.

"Don't be silly," Ntebo huffs. "You need it more than I do. It's yours anyway."

She pulls me into a tight hug that suffocates the life out of me.

"Stop being weird, Ntebo. The bus will leave me." We don't do hugs.

"I'm happy for you Shiyiwe, I wish you all the best my friend." That's so sweet of her.

"Thank you, now let go. There won't be a job to get to if this bus leaves me."

She pulls back with a soft giggle, there is no time to wave goodbye. People are rushing to get into the bus, I'm in after pushing and grunting and giving them ugly looks.

.

I really didn't expect the Meyiwas to be so hospitable, they must think I'm going to abuse their brother when no one is looking. I mean why the special treatment?

Bhedlindaba asked that I join them for breakfast, so far he is the kindest. The devil's agent left his plate untouched and left the house. Zinqumo must hate ordinary people, you need to smell like Christian Dior for him to like you.

I knew Pink Happiness spray was a bad idea, of course it was. It was suffocating me in the bus.

It's just Ndaba and me at the table, Mabahlezi went to get the man who will be responsible for me dancing to the ATM.

"Do you want anything else sisi?" Ndaba asks.

"I'm fine sir, thank you. These pancakes are nice, you shouldn't have bothered though..."

There is nothing nice about these pancakes, how do people stomach this thing?

“Nonsense, there’s plenty more where that came from. Eat as much as you want, don’t be shy to fill your plate.” He stands. “I will leave them on the table so you can serve yourself...”

Do I look like I starve? I have meat on my bones, my parents feed me well. But Ndaba seems to think my stomach has never graced food before.

“Thank you sir,” instead of pushing the plate aside, I stuff my mouth to block the words threatening to betray my annoyance. This man would rate me rude if I let these words out.

“Mtho will be out shortly, he’ll be the one to fill you on what you’ll be doing.” He says not withholding the look of pity shining in his eyes.

“Should I be afraid sir?” I ask.

He’s giving me the impression that Mtho as he calls him, will make my life a living nightmare.

I understand the chuckle but, why is he shaking his head? Something tells me I’m going to regret taking this job.

“No, he’s a nice guy. Just don’t get into his personal space.”

Does he hear himself?

“How possible is that? I’m his caregiver, if anything, I will be in his personal space all day.”

“You will know what I mean once you start working, but relax.” He drops a hand on my shoulder. I look up to see him smiling down at me, warmly. “I think your stubbornness and his stubbornness would match perfectly. My brother needs tough love and you are just it, believe me.”

Tough love? I’m not here to give him any tough love or soft love.

“I hear you sir, you want me to mother him.” I can try, every woman has a mother in them.

Ndaba laughs and takes his leave, he’s a weird guy. No goodbye whatsoever.

Now that he’s gone, I can unloosen my jeans. I can’t breathe, I ate too much pancakes.

“Miss Jele,” Mabahlezi’s voice startles me that I pull my t-shirt down and leave my seat. There’s a bear sized man with her exhibiting a blank face, it’s Mthombo. My palms start to sweat, I’m more nervous than I thought.

Do I greet? He’s looking at me, I can’t see his mouth with all that beard. He needs a good haircut and a shave unless he’s willing to spend on Cantu products.

“This is my brother, Mthombo. You’ll be at his beck and call, he says jump, you ask how high.”

That means there will come a time when he will ask for the impossible and I’ll have to conform? I should be disputing this but I don’t want to be fired on the first day.

“Yes ma’am.” I nod.

Mthombo is staring, he hasn’t looked away since I turned to face them. There must be something on my face, he looks like he’s seen a ghost. It must be that or I have grown a pair of horns.

“Nice to meet you Mr. Meyiwa.” I’m afraid to shake

his hand with how he's staring at me.

My eyes run to the sister, she needs to do something.

"Is he okay?" I ask and that seems to bring him back to life. Thankfully.

'Man dies after seeing caregiver's face.' That's what the headlines were going to say.

"Has she signed the contract yet?" I believe he's asking Mabahlezi.

"Yes sir, I did." I can speak for myself thank you. He glares, chiding me with a dark look.

"Okay... you're fired," he says before turning his wheelchair around and striding away.

I'm shocked, stunned into silence.

"Wait, Mthombo wait." Mabahlezi is after him, I hope her persuasive skills went to Wits. I need this job.

Their backs are turned, I can't catch anything through that mumbling and muttering.

I shift a little closer, ready to fall on my knees and beg for this job. Heck I'll even jump and touch the

closest cloud if he asks me to.

“What were you thinking Hlezi? Get someone else.”
This he yells.

What did I bath with this morning?

“Sir, please.” I’m on my knees, ready to look a fool. I don’t think I can go another seven years without a job.

“I need this job sir, whatever I did I’m sorry. Is it my clothes? I can go home and change, I swear I have something better.”

His sister is looking at me, I hate the pity in her eyes. But why is Mthombo not turning around? I need him to see my desperation.

“Get up Miss Jele, you’re being unprofessional.” Can Hlezi wait?

I don’t have a black card like her, I owe Capitec R160 bank charges and the last time I ate pizza was last year Christmas.

“My family is depending on me for this job, if not

your caregiver then I can wash the dishes or be your gardener. Don't take bread from my mouth sir." My tears are here, they deserve a salary for being on time. Fake crying is hard.

"Go home sisi, we'll call you." Mabahlezi mumbles.

Go home? What will I tell my mother when I get home? She's going to be disappointed in me. I can't blame this on my name.

"You have my number right?" I ask when she turns to leave, she ignores me like I never said a word.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Three-

SHIYIWE-

I have wasted four days of my life trying to call Emeka, he hasn't been answering. I left multiple missed calls. Yes, I have become that girl.

It's sad to say, he has brought me to a point where I pushed aside my own problems, now I'm more worried about him. It is so unlike him not to answer my calls.

My focus should be on getting my job back, not on him. It's so bad that I can't do house chores without getting lost into space. As a matter of fact, I should be done with these dishes, rather they have been washing me.

My phone vibrates on the counter, it's him.

"Why were you not answering your phone?" I shoot before I change my mind about interrogating him.

"I was busy dali, are you okay? What's going on?"

That's right, he thinks the name dali makes me weak in the knees. Argh shame!

"Emeka, I thought you were dead or involved in an accident. I haven't heard from you in days. Where

have you been?" Sometimes I think he travels to Nigeria where his wife and kids live. That's just my imagination, it's his fault. He's the reason my mind takes such wild trips. He disappears like free Wi-fi.

"Hey, calm down. I'm fine babe, you haven't tried to reach out either." He's crazy.

"Do you buy me airtime to reach out?" I found love yes, but I also found a stingy boyfriend.

"You rang me, where did you get the airtime?"

This is why he has never graced the walls of a college, he was born stupid.

"My airtime that I bought with my money can never be used to call a man, not in this life time." I'm lying.

I had 50 cents airtime to buzz his phone, I will complain about girlfriend allowance when I see him.

"I'm coming over to your place, are you home?" I ask.

"I have travelled dali, I'm sorry."

"What? How do I not know this?" Emeka and his surprises will kill me one day. I hear him sigh, that better be his last breath or I will kill this man.

"I had to drive down to Cape Town for work, it was late notice." He explains.

"Emeka, you can't do this to me. I just lost my job, I need an ear and a shoulder. Ntebo is not around, who else do I cry to?"

I'm being dramatic actually, I don't need any of these. The only thing I'm in need of is an escape from reality.

"I'm sorry babe, things are bad this side. Someone has been stealing money from the company's account. It's going to take more than a week to fix this mess." He says.

Sometimes I think it's all he cares about, his stupid company. It's new and takes up all his time.

He knows my anger has sky rocketed when I go silent on him.

"Shiyiwe come on, this is my job. I expect you to understand. Don't you think you're being childish?"

"I'm being childish?" That's rich coming from a man who is never available for his girlfriend. I will show

him childish. I cut the call and push the phone in my pocket.

Today is Sunday, my parents travelled to Durban for the weekend. I need a break from them, I was tired of seeing their disappointed faces. It's not my fault I was fired on the first day.

Mthandeni left home early this morning, she hasn't made any contact.

That's what I have been telling this man walking into my mother's kitchen, he pulls a crate and sits.

"It's getting late don't you think?" He's asking me this for the umpteenth time.

I mind the question and I also mind that little leg bounce he's doing.

Mzingisi has been coming to the house a lot lately, without my father's knowledge. This one time he vented to me about how Mthandeni mistreats him and asked if I could speak to her for him.

I'm not getting involved, I wasn't present when they

agreed to love each other.

“Yes it’s getting late Mzingisi, that’s why you should go home.”

He chooses to ignore me, maybe I should call the police and report an intruder. He stands, my heart has never seen such a pleasant sight. Finally he is going home.

Or not... now I’m watching him do as he pleases in MaMbuzazi’s kitchen. He knows all the corners, surprisingly. Next thing he’ll be moving in.

“When is your sister coming back?”

How the hell am I supposed to know?

“She won’t be coming back today, you should go home and wait for her call.” I’m trying to persuade him.

He turns to face me, mouth full of bread and peanut butter not bread with peanut. He’s wasting our groceries.

“Your sister will cry the day she realizes I’m no longer in her life, she can’t use me and think I’ll stick

around.”

Yet, here you are.

They've been dating forever according to Mthandeni, my mother is fond of him. She's the reason he knows his way around her kitchen. That woman does not want to hear a word about Emeka, nor has she ever seen his face.

“Can you call her for me?” He pushes his flat ass on the kitchen counter.

“We use that counter as a cutting board, get off bhuti.”

I need a gun, so I can shoot him for being stupid and a takalani.

I want to die and never come back when he fills his mouth with yet another chunk of bread.

“I love Mthandeni so much, why is she not taking my calls?” He's crying, adding to my bad luck. “I think she'll answer when it's a different number, call her for me.”

He's not asking but telling me.

“Look Mzingisi, she’s probably with her friends. Maybe you should go home, she’ll call you the minute she gets here.”

That child owes me for this.

“I don’t know, maybe I should wait a bit longer. Waiting at home is stressful, plus, that small shack is suffocating. I can’t breathe in there.” He complains a lot I’ve noticed.

Why hasn’t Mthandeni sent him packing, I can dump him for her if she finds it hard. Not everyone is cut out to be in a relationship.

I check my phone to see if the Meyiwases have tried to contact me, it’s been four days. What are they waiting for?

Mzingisi steals my attention by jumping off the counter, he switches on the kettle. He’s making a cup of tea and using my cup.

“Please turn that off, there are five units left of electricity.” Again, he doesn’t care what I say.

I need to sit down, I'm losing my mind here. He follows me to the living room with his food.

The house is quiet, well every room except this one. This boy will not stop talking about my sister, his mother must come fetch him. I'm tired of babysitting.

"Is anyone home?" I know that voice.

He appears through the open door before I can jump up. He stops in the door way, a duffel bag on one hand and a bottle of Hansa on the other.

"M.G!" I'm more shocked than happy, it's that alcohol in his hand.

Magqubu is my first cousin, my uncle's only son, he's the only one who makes my name seem beautiful.

His mother was a bitter ass woman, she put her son in the middle of her squabbles with her baby daddy. She named him after the grudge in her heart and disappeared before his umbilical code fell.

"Sis wam." He drops the bag on the floor and throws

his skinny body on the couch.

“What happened to you?” I ask.

His visits are random and somewhat frequent, it would rain if he stays in one place for more than a week.

“You’re here?” He’s talking to Mzingisi.

“Hi to you too sbali.” Mzingisi.

This one should be given away to charity, there must be a girl out there who is desperate for love. Not my sister, I refuse.

“What brings you here?” I ask my cousin.

“I heard you’re working for the Meyiwases now.” He’s smiling but it doesn’t reach his eyes.

Who else doesn’t know this? I’m sure it will be on the front page of Daily Sun tomorrow morning.

“Was... Mthombo fired me.” I clarify.

“Take it as a blessing in disguise, the Meyiwases are not good people.” One thing I will never forget about

my cousin is that he always has something to say.

“How do you know the Meyiwas?” I ask.

“You should be asking how I know Mthombo Meyiwa.” He snorts, something tells me he resents the man.

“I’ve heard about him but our fathers know him, they were friends back in the day.” He continues.

The revelation takes me by surprise. My father said nothing when I told him I was going to work for the Meyiwas, neither did he give anything away. He probably did, I wouldn’t know because my left brain is always napping.

“Mthombo, Velakithi and Phindafuthi were the three musketeers in the AOU.” He introduces.

Velakithi is his father, Phindafuthi is the man who fathered me. He’s three years older than M.G’s dad.

The African Unity Organisation is pretty big, how was my father part of it and we’re living this mediocre life?

“Baba has never mentioned this, I knew he was into politics but not that deep.” –Me.

As far as we know in this house, my father is a retired army officer, not a retired politician.

A silly smile spreads on my cousin's lips, it's silent for a moment until he scoffs.

"There's a lot you don't know Shiyi, you're a child. The elders won't tell you everything."

I'm older than him... idiot.

I move closer, it's hard to focus with him seated across the room from me.

"Isn't Mthombo thirty-eight? Our dads are in their sixties." I ask.

"What does age have to do with friendships?" Clever boy. "Besides, in the work place we're all equal. Your father probably has a female best friend the same age as you." He says.

Eww! That would be so wrong.

"What happened to their friendship? How come uncle Vela or baba never speak of Mthombo?"

I'm gathering as much information as I can. It might help in the near now, like getting my job back. I will

use my father as leverage. Nepotism is not always a crime.

“Someone betrayed someone, they became enemies. During that time, your father and Mthombo were running for secretary general. Of course Mthombo Meyiwa was feared and powerful, he was going to win and everyone knew that. He had favours in all places, you see, money can buy you the world and hell as a side dish.” He finds some humour in his statement.

No, this can’t be true. I have to speak to my father when he gets home, hear it from the horse’ mouth.

“Why did that mampara fire you? Did you burn his eggs?” I don’t get the joke, why is he laughing?

“I don’t know, they haven’t called me yet. If I don’t hear from them by morning, I’ll go and ask for my job.”

I’m serious about this job, especially since it’s the first in years. Magqubu’s brows rise, he thinks I’m talking nonsense.

“Just be careful, you’re entering the lion’s den and you might not come out alive.” Sounds like a threat.

“I’m not afraid of the Meyiwas, in actual fact, they all seemed like nice people... well all but Zinqumo.” I spill.

Zinqumo probably knows that I’m secretly crushing on him, why else would he be such a jerk?

“Do you think baba and uncle caused the accident that left Mthombo handicapped?” I ask.

Google doesn’t say much about what happened to him, if an app can be useless and useful at the same time; it’s Google.

The look MG gives me is meant to stop me from asking and digging, he hasn’t met my alter ego. Her name is Stubbornness.

“Don’t look at me like that, I’m going for that job. I’m not letting go of my light at the end of the tunnel.” I confess, standing to check on Mzingisi who is causing a racket in the kitchen. I almost forgot about him.

“Oh my God, when are you going back to your house?” I snap, annoyed by him filling a bowl with corn flakes, to the brim. He doesn’t acknowledge my presence, instead takes milk from the fridge.

“Mthandeni is not home yet, she’s cheating on me. I just know she’s cheating on me.”

The tears again, now I am one hundred percent sure he’s here to help my enemies destroy me.

“Maybe it’s because you’re a weak ass man, you’re too clingy Mzingisi. At what age did you stop breastfeeding? Please go home and sort out your issues, let your parents hug you for a while. My sister is too young to be wiping a grown man’s tears.”

“Sisi you don’t understand...” he starts.

I don’t want to understand anything, I want him gone with his issues.

“Mthandeni is...”

There’s a car pulling in outside, I’d rather focus on

that than this man-child's problems.

"M.G they are home." I yell to my cousin while rushing toward the door.

I want to interrogate my father about Mthombo and his political days, that's what the excitement is about.

I see my father rushing to open the door for my mother, he waves when our eyes meet.

He must be happy to be home, the smile on his face is huge. A car parks behind their van, curiosity clings to me as I watch a man step out of the car. I can't see his face, it must be because of the cap and hoodie hiding his face. The gate makes a screeching noise as he opens it, he raises his hand, revealing a gun.

"Baba!" I scream, horrified.

My parents look confused a second as they turn to me, "Get in the house Shi..."

My father is gunned down before he can say my name, MaMbuzazi lets out a shrill scream and the man shuts her up with a bullet to her head. My heart

feels like it will drop out of my chest when the man empties the bullets on my father's body.

I want to do something, but dizziness has washed over me, and taken my strength and will to move.

"Shiysiwe, get down." M.G shouts behind me.

Someone roughly pushes me to the floor when the armed man turns his gaze to me.

"Don't move," it's M.G. He's on top of me and shooting at the man.

He's missing, or else that murderer wouldn't be running out of the gate like that. When he dashes into the car and drives away, M.G jumps and runs after him.

My body feels heavy as I stand. I don't understand what has happened, why my parents are lying dead in front of me.

*

*

WHEELS OF LIFE

Four-

MTHOMBO-

.

.

His bathroom is custom made for a handicapped person, still, taking a bath is not his favourite thing to do.

He wheels himself out, wrapped in a bath towel. Zinqumo is here, staring out the same window he spends most of his time on. Their relationship is that of a father and son. Zinqumo respects him the same way he respects their father.

“Thought you’d like to wear jeans and a t-shirt today,” Zinqumo says, pointing at the clothes on the bed. Mthombo acknowledges him with a nod.

This is why his siblings believe he needs a caregiver, so they won’t have to pause their lives to take care of him.

“Please pack my black suit, and toiletries. We’re

flying down to Durban today." Mthombo says, taking the clothes from the bed.

He disappears into the closet before Zinqumo can close his mouth.

What are they going to do in Durban? Mthombo has never left the province, let alone the city since the shooting six years ago.

When he comes out dressed, he asks Zinqumo to call Kwanda and Ndaba.

"Why are we going to Durban? Did something happen?" Zinqumo asks.

He's still stuck where Mthombo left him.

"Call them please," Mthombo instructs again.

When he speaks, this one listens. Confused as he is, Zinqumo walks out.

It's not like Mthombo to be nervous, he knows nothing about this Shiyiwe girl. Yet he's willing to fly to her home town to pay his final respects to her parents.

That day when he saw her, something happened to him. Till this day he can't explain what it is, but she didn't leave like he told her to. She's in his head most of the time, comes to his dreams when he closes his eyes to sleep.

It's insane and sometimes it angers him, he can't be entertaining thoughts of another woman. His wife has not been avenged yet and his son is away from him.

When Shiyiwe came for an interview, none of them knew who she was. Had Mthombo not dug her past out of curiosity, they would still be in the dark about who her fathers are.

Zinqumo is back with Kwanda and Ndaba.

"What's going on?" It's the seriousness on Mthombo's face that has Kwanda asking.

"We're going to Durban," answers Zinqumo.

It's clear he is not okay with this sudden trip, he has a life, places to be and people to see.

"What's in Durban?" Bhedlindaba asks.

He's the softest of the siblings, his heart can occupy a whole nation. He has a heart of gold that glows from the inside-out, he's a first-rate people person and the owner of a successful soccer team.

Of course ladies would run to him waving their panties in the air.

"The Jele funeral." Mthombo replies.

The room goes silent, even the sound of their breathing can't be heard.

"Why?" Zinqumo again, he drops his head when Mthombo's answer is a deadly glare.

He knows better than to question him, especially when he's made his mind up about a serious matter.

"Who ordered the hit on the Jeles?" The question lingers like ripe mangoes from a tree, no one brings an answer forth.

Mthombo's jaw tick is the evidence of his anger, he scans their shameful faces with his eyes. When he starts popping his knuckles, they know all hell is

about to break loose. Someone better start talking and fast.

“We had nothing to do with it, their death came as a surprise.” That’s Kwanda, he’s the other version of Mthombo. A few years younger and wiser, he’s the brains of the family, the problem solver and money maker.

Mthombo finds it hard to believe him, especially since none of them can look him in the eye. He can’t look to anyone for any answers.

“Why do you suddenly care about the Jeles? Is it because of that girl?” Zinqumo is fuming but working overtime to hide it. The question stands for a few seconds, Mthombo knows he should’ve said something a second ago. He knows the answer and it’s not so hard to say it.

“Is this about Shiyiwe Jele?” Zinqumo opens.

Mthomb’s face changes in an instant, it’s how his brother bitterly took Shiyiwe’s name.

“Yes, it is because of her.” He replies.

His brothers are shocked, he doesn't even know Shiyiwe. As far as they know, they met once. They know he fired her before she touched a strand of his hair, he never gave them a reason why he took such a drastic decision in the blink of an eye. They asked and he kept the answer to himself, maybe he would've given them something if he knew why he fired her.

"I knew it, Hlezi told me what happened. She told me how you froze when you saw that girl, you want her for yourself don't you?"

Zinqumo just never gives up, the air fist he throws has Mthombo scrutinizing him under his gaze.

"Watch your tongue Zinqumo, remember who you're talking to?" Kwanda reprimands him. It's in vain, Zinqumo is not having it.

"I know who I'm talking to, he's my brother who lost his wife and son six years ago. He's my brother who's bound to a wheelchair for the rest of his life because of the Jeles."

In his head, he's convinced that this is the truth. It's the reason he's yelling like a drunk, and throwing toddler tantrums.

"We don't know if the Jeles were involved in that shooting six years ago." Ndaba steps in, all in Mthombo's defence.

"Come on Ndaba, her father was running for Secretary General. He was competing with bhut' Mthombo."

"So?" Mthombo interjects, brows creasing upwards.

"What if he was my competitor? That means nothing. I am not about to point fingers at the wrong man because he saw me as competition. Bab'Jele and I were friends once, I knew how loyal he could be."

Zinqumo is huffing, pacing around the room and clicking his sharp tongue.

"Not even a dog knows loyalty, what more a man? Bab' Jele was never a friend of yours bhuti."
Zinqumo.

"You were a child back then? What the hell do you

know?" Mthombo shouts.

Perhaps this is the only way to get Zinqumo to understand.

"I know that I have watched you die slowly in this wheelchair for the past six years, and someone is responsible for it. I say we finish them off. The whole lot of them." Zinqumo orders like he's the king of the Meyiwa jungle. Not even Scar had a say in Pride Rock, it's delusional of him to think his word and twenty-three year old voice will stand and be heard in this patriarchal jungle.

"That's enough Zinqumo, go and prepare. We're leaving for Durban." The leader of the house speaks, his voice is known and recognised in this house.

"I'm not going," argues Zinqumo, teeth clenching down on each other.

His back is turned, he's staring outside the same window.

Mthombo looks to his brothers, not for answers but maybe he's trying to understand why their younger brother is the way he is.

He sighs, screws his pained eyes shut. In a way, Zinqumo's anger is justified.

"If we do not attend that funeral, we might as well wear the guilty sign on our foreheads. You're not the only one who thinks Jele had something to do with the shooting. There are people out there, possibly the real culprits who are looking for a way to clean their name." Mthombo.

"I agree," Kwanda says.

"Do you have a black suit that would fit me?" Ndaba is pouncing to the closet after the rhetorical question.

Mthombo's clothes fit him like a glove, their body size is the same. He can be mistaken for a beardless Mthombo, inherited his bear-size body, and his carefree personality.

While Kwanda has Mthombo's powerful stance, Zinqumo clearly takes after Mthombo's stubbornness.

All these traits are found in their father.

“I didn’t bring anything, I’ll drive home and change. I will meet you guys at the airport.”

Kwanda takes his leave, leaving Mthombo with the task of convincing Zinqumo. Doing this together would show unity in the Meyiwa household. His eyes are on Zinqumo, he sighs before pushing the wheelchair towards him. It’s not going to be easy but he always comes out a winner.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

This whole week has been filled with confusion, grief and mostly anger on my side. I can’t get the picture of my parents lying in a pool of blood out of my head.

The neighbours called the police after hearing gunshots, MG and I were taken in for questioning while Mzingisi was taken to the hospital. Nothing happened to him except that he fainted.

He wasn't in my list of people I was worried about, I didn't know where my sister was and I couldn't call her. The policemen wouldn't let me make a call, I knew I had rights, but my empty pockets wouldn't let me practice them.

Five hours in an interrogation room, accusation after accusation thrown at me.

"A young lady home alone with two men raises questions." One of the cops had said, arrogantly looking straight at me.

I knew what they were implying, that I planned and prosecuted the murder of my parents.

I didn't say anything without a lawyer present, I've watched Criminal minds, I know how the law works.

My uncle came to our rescue, we were released without so much as an apology. I wanted to fight back, report them for wrongful arrest. But I had no strength to do so, my parents were gone. I had a funeral to arrange and family to call.

.

.

We arrived in Ntuzuma on Monday, it's been one hell of a terrible long week.

"You don't look so bad, it's a good thing dresses suit you. You should wear them often."

I don't think I look good in this long dress, firstly it's black and covers my knees. Secondly, it's not my taste and thirdly, it reminds me that my parents are dead.

Never have I thought at such a young age I will have to carry such a heavy burden.

My parents have siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles. But I'm the one who had to foresee everything, arrange the funeral, and fetch the bodies from the mortuary.

People have been coming here with their heartfelt condolences and prayers, do they mean it though?

It's guaranteed that after the funeral, I will not see a single soul in this place. No one will call to check up on us, no one will lend a helping hand when we need

one.

Aunt Thobi makes me sit on the mattress and wraps a scarf around my head, there's another one that's vertically put around my shoulders.

A stubborn tear rolls down my face, I wipe it away immediately.

"Oh my child," she wraps her arms around me. I don't want to cry, I have to be strong for my little sister. I'm all she has now.

Mthandeni is not taking the deaths well, she hasn't stopped crying. I don't know how to pacify her, she won't let me near her.

"Cry all you want, it eases the pain."

I would believe aunt if I had tried to cry the pain away, but there is no time for that.

"Where is Mthandeni? Has she eaten yet? I want to talk to her."

"I will take care of your sister, you stay here. More people are coming to pay respects." She says.

I don't understand why I have been made to sit on

the mattress, in front of the caskets. I can't even describe the burden that comes with sitting on this mattress.

Tonight is the wake, I chose to have a closed casket. MaMbuyazi's face is unrecognizable, I can't put Mthandeni through the trauma of seeing her mother like that.

The funeral is tomorrow, they will be buried alongside each other. I'm not ready to send my parents away. Aunt Thobi places her hands on her waist, she's shaking her head while looking at me.

"Argh shame, MaMbuyazi's daughter." She pities me, they all do. This is why I don't say anything when they speak to me.

.

.

The following morning feels like death itself, dark clouds have taken over the skies.

I'm grateful to Ntebo and my cousins for taking care of catering, Mthandeni has not left MG's side.

It's good that she has someone looking after her. Emeka couldn't make it, I don't want to care right now.

As the caskets go down, I see darkness. Where do we go from here? How do we move on with life? They were the backbone of our family, we'll crumble without them.

Women break out into one of those depressing funeral songs.

"What is he doing here?" Ntebo mutters into my ear, I follow her trail of sight to my far left. It's the Meyiwa brothers in black suits, eyes hidden behind dark glasses.

"Did they give you your job back?" Another whisper from her.

"How did you know I lost my job?" I ask.

I don't remember telling her about it.

"Mthandeni told me this morning, I'm sorry I wasn't there for you friend." Her hand tightens around mine.

It's not a big deal that she wasn't here, so many years of friendship and I have gotten used to her going AWOL on me.

I look at Mthombo from across the grounds, he catches me staring. I should be looking away but I'm not. Schooling my eyes has become impossible, I want to know what brought him and his brothers here. His friendship with my father is null and void.

He removes his sunglasses and I catch a glimpse of the little pucker on his face, he's curious about something.

"What's he staring at?" Ntebo nudges my hand, snatching my attention from Mthombo.

I don't answer her.

The shovels are tossed aside, people start to scatter. I don't follow the crowd, my feet won't let me. My

knees wobble like overcooked noodles and throw me on the ground. The lump on my throat is forcing me to release all the emotions inside me, tears flood my eyes and stream down my face.

Leaving my parents here alone feels like I'm abandoning them, I hate death. Who came up with the concept of burying someone and leaving them in a hole? My mother was afraid of the dark, I don't want her in there.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry this happened to you."

Can they even hear me? I want to stop the tears, the wailing and show my parents that I'm strong. That I can take care of Mthandeni, but I can't. I want to cry all the pain away.

A hand steadies my convulsing shoulders, when I turn around, I'm met with remorseful eyes and a dejected face.

It's Mthombo, he looks so different from the guy I saw the other day. The beard looks clean and combed, do I tell him his lips are still hidden behind the beard?

His scent is intoxicating, it reminds me of that “it’s in the way he smells” advert.

“Shiyiwe.” My name weaves past the bush around his mouth. “I’m sorry for your loss.”

I realize I’m kneeling before him and it’s starting to look weird, so I stand and get rid of my tears.

“Why are you here?” Stupid question.

He blinks, before his eyes are scanning the graveyard.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t think I’d ever see you here.” I repent, struggling to get the words out.

It could be because of my crying session or the intensity of his presence.

“I knew your father, it’s a long story.” He clears his throat and rubs his nape. I’m not sure if I’m making him nervous.

Silence decides to invite itself, making this moment more awkward. God-knobs why.

It’s my turn to let my eyes browse the area, I shouldn’t have because I catch a glimpse of

Zinqumo leaning against a tree. He's staring right at me and looks forced to be here.

Shiyiwe, your taste in men is appalling.

Here comes Ntebo, she passes Zinqumo like he's not even there.

"Friend, friend, aunt Thobi is calling you. We're going to the river for a quick wash." Dear God, she doesn't have to shout like that.

"Are you staying? Please stay, we have Oros, and scones. There's also rice, betroot, butternut and chicken. Seven colours basically, pick your poison."

Bite my tongue and knit my mouth shut. Shiyiwe shut the hell up! I have no timing.

I hear a low chuckle from him.

"No, we're going back today." He's looking up at me with an intense stare. "The job is still available if you're still interested."

Hell yeah I'm interested.

"I've always been interested sir, thank you." I sound way too excited, someone stands next to me. It's

Ntebo, she's trying to get my attention by clearing her throat.

I've been looking at Ntebo's face all my life, I'm looking at important people now.

He looks back at Zinqumo and gestures that he comes over, I'm not going to let the silly crush I have on this fine boy control my hormones. I put on a brave face and keep my gaze on Mthombo.

"I'll take my leave now," he says when Zinqumo starts reversing the wheelchair.

"I will call you sir, thank you again." For the first time in a week, there is a smile on my face.

He smiles at me, I think he's smiling. It shows in his eyes, otherwise I can't see anything past that thick beard.

"Are you taking the job?" Ntebo asks when the brothers are far enough for us to gossip about them.

"I need it, Mthandeni has school and..."

"Friend, have you forgotten how he fired you?"

“Yes I have because he’s giving me back my job.”

Why would I complain about the past when the future looks promising?

“And you’re going to take his word for it? What if he’s lying to you?” Ntebo knows better than to ask me two questions in one go, I’m not good at multitasking.

“Then he can lie to me forever, as long as I have a job and money in the bank. Besides, I’m the one who should be untrusting of him, not you.”

She exhales, takes my hand and leads me towards the van waiting for us.

“I’m only looking out for you Shiysiwe. There’s an opening at work, they are looking for a forex teller. I can get you an interview.”

That’s kind of her, and a first. There is never an opening where she works.

“How much do forex tellers get paid?” I will have to compare salaries, which ever pays more should be the one for me.

"Enough to get yourself a comfortable life," she replies.

Yeah no! I'm not taking her word for it.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Five-

SHIYIWE-

.

.

.

The funeral is over, but my father's cousins are dispersed everywhere, and it doesn't look like they are going anywhere anytime soon. My uncle Mduduzi Jele, my father's cousin has taken over the main bedroom with his wife. Lord knows what they do in there, you can smell the filth from the passage.

Whoever gave them the right to sleep in my parent's bedroom must have been drunk.

I have a life waiting for me in Joburg, and I need these people gone before I can say "after robot."

My father's home is one to be proud of, unlike the four roomed house back in Soweto, this one is massive. He took a bus shaped house and turned into an eight-roomed farmstead, neighbouring it are commodious African-style cone huts. Two on each side of the ranch, each have an in-suit bathroom.

The ground is concreted with various broken tiles, it's a beautiful home. The only thing that needs fixing is the gate one of my cousins ran down with a car last Christmas.

"MaJele, come here my child." My grandmother's voice is frail and shaky.

I enter her bedroom, forgetting to rid of the frown on my face.

"Sit," she pats the empty space on the reed mat beside her.

"Morning granny." I place a kiss on her cheek, it brings a smile to her face. "Have you eaten?"

She usually has her porridge at 5am, her oldest

daughter lives here with her. She's unmarried, and childless. No one understands her but my grandmother, her brain is confused about a lot of things. She has a mental capacity of a child, she gets excited over sweets, new clothes and Christmas. Because of her hearing problem, she yells when she speaks and has to repeat herself.

"Yes, Lindi fed me." Her coarse hand runs down my cheek. Lindi is the daughter I mentioned, she takes good care of her.

"How are you? How is poonkie?"

Grandma refuses to let go of this name, it's what we called Mthandeni when she was young. While some of us grew out of it, she kept the name.

"It's tough, but we're going to be okay."

"Don't go back to Joburg, stay here with me. Igoli is not safe for young girls like you two."

She's right, but we have lives in Joburg. There's nothing for us here, what will we possibly do in KZN?

"Mthandeni has school grandma and I have a job,

but we'll visit you. I promise." She's disappointed.

"I'm worried about you, uncle Mdu and his family have occupied the house. His wife is a bully, I don't want them anywhere near you. I'm going to oust them out before I leave."

I have a plan, that Bonnie and Clyde couple can be vindictive. My grandmother shakes her head, of course she would.

She's a saint.

"Let them be, my days in this world are numbered. God will call me home anytime soon, someone will need to look after your father's house."

She's got to be joking.

"And that someone is aunt Lindi, granny. This is my father's house, uncle Mdu and his wife will give it to their children. What about us? We need a home to come to during holidays, I'm not about to look at their faces for the next forty years. Did you see baba and ma's bedroom? It's a pigsty, I want those people gone."

I'm more pissed than angry, and my grandmother's caresses do not help in easing the irritation.

"You complain a lot for a child, you need to stop overthinking and live my child. Life is too short, don't worry yourself about things you can't control."

Bawo! I thought this granny knew me.

"I'm throwing them out granny, and their brats. It's been three days since the funeral, what are they still doing here? Do you know uncle Mdu slaughters a chicken for his wife every evening? There's cabbage and spinach in the garden, but no, they want meat."

She's laughing, I'm talking to myself here.

"I don't mind eating chicken every day," she says.

With what teeth?

The sound of my phone ringing seeks my attention, it's an unknown number. I leave the room to answer, it could be that son of a gun Emeka. He didn't come to the funeral or call. I'm ready to dump his sorry ass, I deserve better than his seconds. The only seconds I can accept are the clothes I buy at 'kadunusa.'

“Yellow!” Don’t ask.

“Uhh!” A deep voice? Okay, that’s not my Nigerian lover. These unknown numbers can be dodgy, I’m very cautious when it comes to a lot of things.

“Shiye we it’s me.” The voice says.

I went to primary school with a Me, his brother’s name was Myself. Who would forget the Banda brothers? Tall, dark and mischievous with cartoon eyes. Their parents were very creative in the naming department.

“Hi, Me.”

“Call me Mthombo,” he says too quickly.

Well, slap me twice I’m dreaming. Mthombo Meyiwa is calling me?

“Sir Meyiwa, hi. I’m sorry I didn’t recognise your voice, and I don’t have your number saved on my phone.”

Mouth diarrhoea, there must be a cure for this. I cover my mouth lest I start shitting again. I can’t mess this up.

“Sorry sir...” I’m using my covered mouth to speak.

“What time are you leaving for Johannesburg?”

He knows I’m leaving today?

“In a few sir, is there something you need? We have a farm in Inanda, I can bring you some okra, spinach, or you prefer sugarcane? If you want sea water, I’ll bring it. Just tell me how many litres.”

These nerves are going to be the death of me, I need to breathe. My throat is closing up. What if he called to fire me again?

“Shiyiwe,” his voice reminds me of rough salt. My mother used to scrub me with it every month, she said it works as an antidote for isichitho. She was a very superstitious woman.

“Your vocabulary is too much.”

I will take that as an insult.

“It happens when I’m nervous, forgive me sir.”

The silence that follows after my apology is louder than my voice.

“I don’t need anything, I sent a car to get you. The chauffeur is a trusted employee, he will drive you from KZN to Johannesburg.” He says.

I’m not shocked at all, I’m just... what the hell is going on? I feel like Lucile from fifty shades of grey; or is it Natasha or Nandi? I’m bad with names.

“I don’t understand sir, why would you...”

“You work for me now, and I take care of my own.”

He cuts in.

He takes care of his own? So I belong to the rich and famous Mthombo Meyiwa? Nice. Where are my enemies? They need to hear this.

“Thank you sir, God will bless you with more money. I will pray for you. That you start to walk again.”

My chest rises and falls, my stomach churns violently. This is a curse, my dad said I was born with it but no, someone is behind me talking like a chipmunk.

The silence again.

I open my mouth, this time I’m able to keep my

words back.

“Make sure your battery is full, I will be in touch.” He says.

And that’s the end of our conversation.

Mthandeni will be glad that we won’t be using the bus anymore, she thinks her parents are Will and Jada Smith.

“Who was that?” The voice behind me startles every bone in my body and my heart jumps to my throat.

“Ntebo, why do you sneak up on me like that? You almost gave me a heart attack.” I have to take a second to catch my breath.

I might be observing too much, but something is wrong with Ntebo. Since yesterday, she has been carrying this sour expression on her face. I have been reluctant in asking her what the matter is, as a friend, I should bring it forward.

“Is everything okay at home?”

I know her parents are forever at daggers drawn, they have a hatchet they need to bury.

She shrugs and folds her arms over her chest, some kind of protective gesture which is odd. Why would she feel she needs protection right now? It's just us two.

"Babe, you can tell me. I'm here for you." She loathes my persistent, she's revealed that before. But I am who I am, and I am not about to change to accommodate anyone.

"Nothing is wrong, let it be." Her response is ushered by an eye roll, the biggest I've ever seen.

This is Ntebo in all her flaws, I've known her since primary school. Anger and attitude rules more than anything in her life, but I've learnt to take everything in stride.

"Are you sure? I don't want you complaining one day about my negligence and selfishness as a friend. I'm trying Ntebo, but you're not letting me in."

I know this girl did not just click her tongue at me.

She's going back into the house and I'm willing to let her go, I have too much on my plate anyway. Ntebo knows where to find me.

A honk has me spinning towards the gate, a white Porsche Cayenne Turbo Gt parks at the gate. Confusion finds me and stays for a while, I wait for the driver to show face. It must be one of my father's old friends.

A man in a suit steps out, he could be in MG's age group. Twenty-five years old if not a year older.

"Miss Jele?"

I'm the only Miss Jele standing here, I peer around to double check. Just in case and catch sight of Ntebo and my cousins by the door.

"Is everything okay?"

"I believe it is, I'm Mr. Meyiwa's chauffeur. I'll be the one driving you back to Johannesburg."

Mmkay!

"We're not ready yet sir, you're early." Actually, I'm running late. Mthandeni must be done.

"I'll wait," he says and leans against the car.

Not wanting to waste his time, I take off rushing towards the door. These people are staring, “Who’s that?”

“Mthombo’s chauffeur, he’s here to take us to Johannesburg.” I answer Ntebo’s question, her face transforms almost immediately.

I hear her gasp incredulously as I push past her to get into the house.

Mthandeni is slouched on the sofa, caught up on her phone, as usual. I will have to confiscate that, or she will fail the term.

“I found transport, get your bags.” I tell her.

I’m getting tired and fed up of her eye-roll moments, one more time and I will pluck them out of their sockets.

This child has the audacity to ignore me, “Now Mthandeni. Unless you want to take the bus back.”

I can’t be as firm as my parents, but it works.

“You’re so annoying sisi,” she snaps and flies to her

room. Good thing she called me sisi, or I would've slapped her for talking to me like I'm one of her friends.

We're ready in fifteen minutes, I've said my goodbyes and promised my grandmother to buy her all the sweets in the world with my first salary.

Ntebo is coming with us, it's going to be one long ride back. She is not talking to me. My uncle, his wife and cousins have come out to see us off, grandma too. I give her one last kiss before promising my uncle to deal with him if he ever mistreats my old woman. He laughs it off, I still don't trust him and his wife.

The chauffeur takes our luggage, places them in the back and opens the door for us. I can get used to this, scratch that... I was born for this lifestyle.

"I'll take the front seat, I don't want to be seen dead with old hags."

Mthandeni is a brat, we're not old. What the hell does she think of herself?

"I don't know about you Ntebo, but I'm ready to sell this child to the highest bidder."

I'm talking to myself, she doesn't spare me a glance nor give me a smile for my failed sarcasm.

As we take off, kids run behind the car yelling god-knows what. It gives me a déjà vu I'd like to keep. I used to be one of them, running after busses, cars and airplanes.

I wonder if they know that one day this life, free of problems will be a thing of the past. Not only were they born without their permission. But they will grow up without their permission, get a job they hate, an apartment to sleep in because they spend most of their time working to pay for the apartment they don't live in.

The real world is waiting for them, sadly I have arrived and it's a struggle.

Mthandeni has connected her phone's Bluetooth to the car, I'm so ashamed by the cussing Cardi B has subjected us to. I want to apologise to Mr. Chauffeur for my sister's rudeness but the music is so loud, and she's singing along at the top of her voice.

"Ntebo!"

She does what she's been doing since we left, which is to ignore me.

I move closer to yell into her ear, "What is wrong with you?"

She winces, covering her ear while sending a cold look my way. She's upset, but trying hard to keep the anger at bay.

"That was loud friend," she snaps.

"Okay, sorry. I was trying to get your attention, whose sour lemons did you eat?"

She shifts towards the door, folds her arms across her chest and answers. "I have a headache, let me rest for a while."

“Yeah right!”

I will not push.

Two hours into the ride, my sister has moved from Cardi B to Chris Brown. Her human battery never runs out. I swear I’m exhausted.

The chauffeur makes a stop at a petrol station, we wait for him to finish his umpteenth phone call. Whoever he’s talking to has been blowing up his phone for the last hour.

“What would you like to eat?” He asks, looking at me through the rear view mirror.

“I feel like Roco Mamas,” Ntebo’s voice rises above mine.

I was going for cheese burger pie, I’d have those every day if possible.

“What about you Miss?” He’s asking me again.

“I’m okay with anything Mr. Chauffeur.”

There’s silence, he’s staring and I’m getting

uncomfortable.

“My sister will have a cheese burger pie, I’ll have the chicken flavour.” Mthandeni says.

I didn’t think she knew me, her whole life is on that phone she’s always carrying.

“I’ll go with you, I need some fresh air.” She adds and follows the chauffeur out.

I need some air too, it’s noon. But the sun is not that hot, it’s winter after all.

I take a bathroom break, when I come back, Ntebo is standing against the car. I have made peace with her furrowed eyebrows, Jeez! She is draining the life out of me.

“Friend, I’m sorry.” She says when I’m within earshot.

What kind of an apology is this?

“You know how I feel about pretentious people, Ntebo. You’re apologising yet there’s a frown on your face.”

The smile comes, in all its glory. I know this girl and this smile is as genuine as a virgin's innocence.

"I'm on my periods, you know how I get when the red robot strikes." Her excuse.

I know she gets grumpy, but it's never been this bad.

"I hear you sisi, but your mood swings can be draining. I just buried my parents, and you're adding to my burden. What I need right now is to be around people who will put me in a good mood. My heart is broken Ntebo, I'm trying my best not to think about them lying cold in a coffin. I will never see them again, no matter how much I wish for it and those trips to heaven people want us to imagine; they don't exist. My sister and I have become orphans. Instead of being there for me as a friend, you act like a bitch."

I've been wanting to get that out of my chest.

Ntebo's frown takes its place again, I'm done with this girl.

"I said I was sorry, didn't I? You don't have to attack me like that." Ntebo cracks out, I sense violence in

the tone of her voice. A white man once said ‘There’s a first time for everything.’

“You don’t have to be vicious, we’re having an adult conversation.” I have to keep my voice down, bystanders are staring. I’m not going to be that girl trending on Facebook for all the wrong reasons.

“I wouldn’t be vicious if you weren’t being such a bitch.” She’s vomiting shit now.

Here’s the thing about me, I grew up in Soweto. I went to Zifuneleni high school, I’m a proud skotheni and I will punch woman.

Maybe I should be that girl who trends for the wrongs reasons.

“Take that back, Nteboheleng.”

Heat spreads over my body, anger is knocking. I can’t release it. I will lose it if I do.

With her face pinched in annoyance, she utters, “I’m not taking anything back.”

She weaves past me and dashes to the other side of the car.

My head urges me to follow her and teach her a lesson but my heart won't let me. It's so unfortunate that I love her.

My phone starts to ring just as I'm calling my emotions into order, it's Mthombo. I have his number saved now, Mr. M.

"Sir Mthombo!" That's my greeting.

"How far are you?" There's an indifference in his voice, it has me questioning whether he was forced to call me or it was out of his freewill.

"I'm not sure sir, I'll ask the driver when he gets back."

Come to think of it, he's been gone for too long.

"Where did he go?" He sounds bad-tampered all of a sudden.

I have to move away from the car when I catch Ntebo listening in, she's really forcing that ear to catch every word.

"He went to get food, I'll let him know you called."

He likes taking these silent moments, it will be hard working with a man of a few words. How will I train my mouth to keep shut?

“Take care of yourself, Shiyiwe.” Either I’m crazy or this man utters my name like it will crack if he takes it with roughness. I must be losing my head, why wouldn’t I, when it’s full of Ntebo?

“I will...”

I’m not done talking when someone bumps me, my body lands with a noisy thud to the ground. A theatrical scream is released from my mouth. I broke a bone, I know I broke a bone.

I’m nursing my hip when I spot Ntebo standing before me, something cold and sinister in her eyes. I have never seen anything diabolical until now.

“Sisi, move.” One of the petrol attendants yells.

The alarm comes with the sound of a car horn, my eyes whip to my left and they widen at the car speeding my way.

“Ntebo help me!”

I get on all fours and crawl like a dog, my mind is all over the place, I don't know where I'm going.

Before I can get far, two arms wrap around my waist and pull me up. He's rushing to the side, away from the danger. The car speeds off by like nothing happened.

"Are you okay?" It's a petrol attendant, I owe him my life. My heart is sitting on my throat, it won't let me utter a word, so I go for a nod.

"What is wrong with you sisi? How could you just stand there? You were close enough to have helped her."

He's talking to Ntebo.

Her eyes are wide, fear resides in them. What the hell is going on?

"Ntebo, you pushed me." My voice is shaky.

"I... I didn't." She's stuttering. "Some guy pushed me, that's when my body collided against yours." She continues.

"Then where is he?" I didn't see a guy, I felt a push

and the next person I saw was Ntebo.

“I swear Shiyiwe, I would never.” She’s panicking.

I know what I saw.

Mthandeni and the chauffeur are back, they are running. It means they saw what happened. The chauffeur gets to me first and gently pulls me away from the petrol attendant. I didn’t realise his hand was still around me.

Mthandeni suffocates me in a hug, “You can’t leave me too Shiyiwe.” She’s holding on too tight.

I’d never dream of leaving her.

“Miss Meyiwa, the boss wants to talk to you.” The chauffeur disturbs our bonding moment, I rarely get hugs from Mthandeni.

My hand is shaky when I take the phone. Mine is lying on the ground, it will cost me a lot to get the screen fixed.

“Yellow,” I answer the call.

“Was I asking for too much when I said take care of yourself?” Mthombo chides.

What is this now? I thought I buried my father the past weekend?

“No, daddy.”

My untrained mouth does it again, I’m a lost course.
There is no hope for me.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Six-

NTEBO

.

.

Their first stop is Alex, a township located next to the wealthy suburb of Sandton.

She asks to be dropped off at a local spaza shop. She’s been in this damn car for way too long, if she stays a second longer, she will throw up all the funeral food she consumed days back.

It’s not nauseating, but who does Shiysiwe think she is? How dare she climb such a lavish car?

If only that vehicle hit her back at the petrol station,

Shiyiwe would be nothing but a painful memory.

There's a next time though.

"Thank you for coming to the funeral Ntebo, greet your mother for me." Shiyiwe says.

Have these two buried the hatchet somewhere on the N3?

"You should come over some time, you know how much mme misses you. We're going to church this coming Sunday, I'm inviting you friend." Ntebo says, a smile stretching her plump lips.

Shiyiwe nods, she's not going.

As soon as the car takes a corner, the smile on Ntebo's face vanishes with the dust on the road. Her soft eyes turn cold, her fingers ball into tight fists and teeth clench.

"Ahhhhh!" She's giving in to outbursts of anger again, it's nothing new. This is how she screamed when Sechaba chose Shiyiwe to be his matric dance

partner. It wasn't fair, Shiyiwe didn't even like him. Sechaba was the only man Ntebo ever loved, for over two years she harboured her feelings for him, afraid to come out and take a chance.

What made matters worse was Shiyiwe agreeing, knowing fully well how she felt about the guy.

"Bring one of her school books, I will deal with her accordingly." These were Ntebo's mother's instructions after she cried to her about the man she loved.

"She has everything, her family is financially stable and we can't even afford a litre of Coke." Of course mme Mosheo was seething with anger, someone was messing with her daughter and she couldn't just stand back and watch.

Their plan was for Shiyiwe to fail matric, but it backfired. Shiyiwe Jele's name appeared in the newspapers alongside students who got straight A's.

Ntebo's house is just around the corner, she's dragging her suitcase with anger in her strides.

As soon as she gets to the gate, she lets out the loudest scream she can conjure up, neighbours stop and stare, then carry on with their lives.

Nothing new since the Mosheos moved in here... screaming, police visits, and ambulances. They'd swear the Moja Love crew stay in this house.

She slams the gate shut and marches down the paving that leads into the rented, one bedroom house she shares with her parents. The door also becomes a victim to her wrath as she bangs it closed. Her blood is boiling, it's not right.

"Hey uena, are you trying to break my door?"

Technically, it's the landlord's door.

The shout came from the kitchen. Ntebo takes this chance to roll her eyes, her mother is not watching.

Mme Mosheo appears, dressed in a pinafore, and carrying a dish cloth.

"I hate Shiyiwe Jele, I hate her. All I wanted was Rocco Mammas, but look what she gave me, mme." Ntebo is digging in her hand bag and reveals a blue Tupperware lunch box. "Bloody funeral scones, what

do I do with them?"

"That's a nice Tupperware, we're keeping it." Mme Mosheo grabs the box to admire it.

"Mme, I'm serious. She thinks she's better than me, I can't stand her." Ntebo yells, throwing her body on the sofa.

"Did something happen?" The mother is suddenly worried.

Ntebo's gaze is on Mme Mosheo's scowl, the look is so familiar.

It takes her back in time when this woman who gave birth to her, proved that she would do just about anything to keep her happy. She would go to the extent of selling her soul to the devil and let him keep the change.

"Our plans are in vain mme, everything Shiyiwe touches turns to gold." Every word passes through a heavy breath.

Ntebo takes another trip down memory lane, she

can't figure out how her best friend keeps winning. She slips right out of her hands like wet sunlight bar.

"You're doing it again, Ntebo. You're not breathing, that's how you're able to talk nonsense. I'm allergic to nonsense, remember?"

Mme Mosheo makes herself comfortable beside her daughter.

"Now start from the beginning and tell me what happened." Now where is that mother of the year award?

Ntebo follows the instruction, she is able to school her breathing and raging emotions within counted seconds.

"Mthombo Meyiwa was at the funeral, he offered her the job again. To think that was not enough, he sent a car to pick her up mme. Not a taxi or Tazz but a Porsche Cayanne, the latest."

That was a lot coming out of her chest, she will need time to recover. Plus a glass of water with cucumbers and mint.

Mme Mosheo is breathing fire, she opens her mouth but the syllables refuse to collaborate with her voice.

“Mme, she can’t do better than me. You can’t let her.” That’s a cry of a desperate girl. “I think he’s interested in her, I don’t get it. What do men see in her?”

“Stop being irrational, nothing good comes out of it. Bring me this Mthombo person’s shirt.”

What the hell? Does this woman hear herself?

A frown etches Ntebo’s features, she’s trying to make sense of what her mother just said.

“How will I get his shirt mme?”

“A desperate person always makes a way.”

“I don’t want Mthombo, he’s a cripple. What will I do with a man who has useless legs?” Her mother is sitting too close and it’s annoying the hell out of her, she scoots away.

“Didn’t you say he’s rich?” That should matter to her daughter, money makes the world go round.

“You are patronising me, mme, and I don’t like it.”

“You stupid child, must I teach you everything? The point here is to take every man coming into Shiysiwe’s life. Even if she dates a hobo, we will take that hobo from her. Remember, the goal is for her not to have anything in life, not even 30 cents to buy chappies. I want her roaming the streets of Soweto in her underwear, chasing people and eating off dustbins.”

What a pleasant sight that would be.

The fruits of her labour have not been established yet but the future is bright.

“That’s a bit too much, leaving her broke is enough.”

Is this the same Ntebo who is wrapped around a blanket of jealousy? Can’t be.

“Fine, don’t come crying to me when Shiysiwe is sipping champagne with Bonang and you’re still stuck in your father’s house counting cockroaches.”

“But everything we’ve tried on Shiysiwe never works, she still got the job. The scarf didn’t work.” Ntebo argues.

“That was before MaMbuyazi’s death, but she’s gone now with her by-fire, by-force prayers. We’re going to have our way with Shiyiwe Jele.”

Mme Mosheo’s upper lip curls before she gives in to laughter because it’s so funny. Not only does the future look bright, dammit, it looks promising.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

The sun has set when the driver drops us outside the gate, I’m tired, drained and hungry.

“Let me help you with the bags,” I have to reject his offer. He’s done enough.

“We’re okay sir, you can go ahead.” I release him.

It seems he’s not ready to leave, he’s standing against the car, staring.

“Is everything okay?” I mean, I have to ask or else I’ll start freaking out. A frown finds a place on his

forehead, I spot a jaw tick. He better not be expecting me to guess what's on his mind, women can't read men. It's never been proven, they are a rare breed.

"I was told to wait till you go inside," he says.

It's not record science that Mthombo is the one behind all this. He's a strange man, I have to admit.

We spoke more than two times during the road trip, both times I managed to control my mouth.

"We are going to be fine, you may go."

He's not listening to me, his dark stare is lingering over my shoulder, compelling me to take a look.

Three filled, black plastic, refuse bags lie abandoned outside the gate, it's a confusing moment for me.

"We've been gone for a few days and the neighbours dump their trash outside our gate?" Yes I'm complaining, my mother would've done the same thing had she been here.

"Oh my God, eww. Who would do such a thing?" Mthandeni is taken aback just as I am.

“Help me move them next door, I’m sure it’s Zodwa and her mother. I wouldn’t put it past them.”

My sister does not approve of my decision, her stare is judgemental, chiding and insulting.

“No thanks, you go ahead.”

This child is waving me off?

“Mthandeni, I don’t have time for your childishness, help me clear this mess.”

First salary, I’m buying a pair of pliers and plucking out those eyes she likes to roll so much.

I’m surprised though that she does my bidding, I like kids who listen.

I expect a foul smell coming from the bags, but nothing.

“What’s in here, anyway?” Mthandeni asks.

The question births curiosity within me, I have always liked things, it’s no secret.

I flip one of them open, “Clothes?”

My clothes, I realise.

“Donations?” Mthandeni asks. “The neighbours donated their clothes because we don’t have parents, this is beyond embarrassing. My friends are going to laugh at me, my life is over.”

“These are my clothes, not donations.” I correct her. I’m not supposed to panic, it’s not who I am. Why am I sweating then? My heart is going 100 miles a second.

Everything of mine is in here, my jeans, t-shirts and shoes.

“These are my clothes, Mthandeni? Who put my clothes out here?” My breathing is quickening, it happens when I’m losing control of things around me.

“That’s impossible,” I hear my sister’s distressed tone. She is going through the other bags and gasps at the sight of her belongings in there as well.

“What’s going on? I don’t understand.” Her wide-eyed gaze is fixated on me.

I avert my gaze to the gate, and beyond that. The

house lights are on, we didn't leave anyone in there.

"There is someone in the house," I force the words out—a little shocked by what I'm seeing.

Mthandeni runs to the gate, she pulls it open but it won't budge.

"Shiyiwe it's locked, the gate is locked." She panics, using whatever strength she has to pull it open.

"That's impossible," I join in on trying to open it.

My mind is going crazy, what if thieves entered the house in our absence, and took over?

I find a stone on the ground and use it to hit the gate, the clanging brings people outside. A chubby woman, beside her is a lanky man with a Cocacola belly.

Right behind them are three kids under the ages of fourteen, who differ in height, age and body size.

"Who are they?" Mthandeni.

As they move closer, uncle Samson's face comes to light. He's the middle child, younger than my father, a hooligan who; once upon an apartheid snitched on

his father for a few coins.

Their father was the daunting Crocodile, fearless and daring every white man that crossed his path. My grandmother was his Sarafina, fighting alongside each other for Nelson Mandela to be freed from prison. And like Crocodile in the movie, the old man was gunned down by white men.

Behind the Judas of the family, I see his girlfriend of twenty years Samukelisiwe.

“Ncane Samson?” It’s more of an expression of shock than a question, they gather around the gate.

“Shiyiwe, Mthandeni.” He smirks.

I remember seeing him at the funeral, he came the day before the funeral and disappeared after the burial. Samu never showed face, now I know she was busy invading our house.

“Finally you’re here, it’s a good thing you found your belongings untouched. I was tired of guarding them through the window.” He says, looking between me and Mthandeni.

“Why are our clothes outside Ncane? The gate is locked, open the gate.” I’m seething inside, but I can’t afford to show it. I don’t know what in James’ name is happening here but if this man continues to test me, I will bring us unnecessary attention.

“This is my brother’s house, you two don’t belong here.” He yells.

Shocked is not the word, but I’m feeling something. This old, pot-bellied baboon is throwing us out of my father’s house?

“No, you don’t belong here. Which hole did you crawl out of? My father had not seen your face in years, you never called or texted. Today you are standing in his territory, throwing the word ‘brother’ at his children? Don’t be a joke old man, open the gate.”

I was planning on keeping my voice calm, but the uncle has lit a spark in me and a spark is enough to burn a house down.

“I said open the gate Ncane.”

The neighbours are too close to have heard me, they scatter out of their homes to become spectators.

“She wants me to open the gate.” Samson bursts into laughter, the arrogant son of a gun.

“That is my father’s house, it belongs to us. Open the gate, or I will call the police.”

Threats usually work on black people, the gate should be opened any second from now.

He turns to Samu for assurance I presume, there’s a silent interaction between them.

“It’s us Ncane, your nieces. Don’t do this please, where will we go?”

I’m trying to be a good girl, good girls go to heaven right?

“Samson if you open that gate, I swear I will not be held responsible for what I do to these children.”

Samu has the audacity to point at us with her crooked finger.

“Shiyiwe, what’s going on? Why won’t they let us in?” Mthandeni has been brought to tears.

She has to toughen up now, it's us against the world.

I practise my breathing, acting crazy won't get me anywhere.

"Babomncane, what is this? Are you throwing us out of my father's house?" I ask, just for clarity.

He folds his arms, they come to rest on his pot belly.

"I'm not throwing you out, but kindly asking you to leave from here." He says.

Kindly? Hee!

"Why?" I ask.

"Why not Shiyiwe? You two are orphans now, Joburg will swallow you like Jonah and spit you in a coffin. Go back to Ntumuza and take care of the old lady. Her days are numbered, you know that right? You should be thanking me for wanting to take care of your father's house?"

He's crazy.

None of this will be resolved today, if I say something, we'll keep arguing like two monkeys in a zoo cage. Mthandeni is so sensitive, those tears in

her eyes will not find us a home.

“Put the bags in the car, Mthandeni.” I instruct.

Her teary eyes widen, she needs to grow thick skin. I tell her again to grab the plastic bags and place them in the car.

She’s hesitant, very emotional and shaky but gathers the bags and herself into the car.

The chauffeur has been watching without saying a word, the jaw clench is still visible and there is a cold glare directed at my uncle. Something is on his mind.

“May I borrow your keys sir?”

He shakes his head no.

“I know how to drive, I swear.” He’s not buying it.

“How will Mr. Meyiwa react when I tell him that you didn’t want me driving? He did say take care of me right after that incident at the garage, remember?”

What kind of witchcraft am I practising? I don’t know why Mthombo is showing kindness or favouritism towards me, but I am going to use it to my

advantage... for now.

The chauffeur is not pleased with me, and he's not abiding.

He already thinks I'm part of the Meyiwas, so why not let me drive our car?

"I'll be gentle with it, I promise." I tell him.

Against his will, I grab the keys dangling on his left hand and run into the driver side, completely ignoring his reprimands. Mthandeni is seated inside, I lock the doors to stop Mr. Chauffeur who is banging the windows and telling me to open the door.

"Buckle up sisi, this one is going straight to hell." I warn my sister before reversing the car.

As I do, I spot Samson and his wife carrying victorious expressions.

Bloody moerskonts!

My driving skills are not that good, but I know about the clutch and the brakes and all the "utchs" and

“akes” in a car.

“Are we stealing the car? Why aren’t we going with the driver? Where are we going to go? We have no home now.”

I don’t answer my crying sister but step on the clutch, start the car and we’re moving forward—towards the gate.

It moves with full speed, my aim is to knock it down.

Samson and family run in different directions at the incoming vehicle.

The gate crashes to the ground, it was old anyway. The noise it makes is followed by my sister’s screams.

We’re in and safe, I’ll have to draft my apology to Mthombo later.

“Mthandeni, take our belongings to our room. Whatever trash you find in there, throw it out the window. These people don’t know me, I am Shiysiwe Jele, more legendary than Debonairs pizza. No one

is throwing us out of my father's house."

We run out of the car with the bags, Samson and his wife are running behind us.

On my way in, I turn the kettle on. Seems like the water had pre-boiled, this saves me time.

"Shiyiwe!" Samson's voice booms from outside, he sounds like an angry bull.

Just as they enter the house, I grab the kettle.

"Stop! This water is hot enough to de feather a chicken." I'm nice enough to give them a warning.

Mthandeni walks back in, and stands beside me. Samson and his family are pressed up against the wall, looking like the outsiders they are.

"You're going to fix that gate young lady." Samson orders.

Over my dead body.

"Get your things and get out of my house," I tell them.

"You are a child Shiyiwe, what do you know about owning property? You ruin everything you touch, you

were born with slippery hands. Eventually, you will drag your sister down the mud.”

Samson dares me... two can play this game.

“My family is not going anywhere, I will not be controlled by a child.” He says, pointing a finger my way.

Didn’t my parents have a will? I’ll need to call MG, his father must know about it.

“Ncane, you are a certified fool if you think we will ever leave this house. Get your things and get the hell out.” I shout.

His eyes narrow, it’s not enough to get me to shrink. Men scare me, but I am not the type that gives them the satisfaction by bowing my head in fear.

“You have a smart mouth little girl. It needs to be fixed. Your father spoiled you, that’s why you vomit when talking to elders.” He’s yelling at me, in my own territory.

“You know nothing about me or my father, do not talk about him.”

"I know enough," he shouts, throwing his hands up in anger.

"You are a curse, your name says it all. You think my brother decided to name you Shiyiwe because he ran out of good names? Every name has a meaning and yours clearly states you were unwanted, unplanned. A useless sperm that escaped my brother's balls. Look at the results."

He's coming for my name? Nobody but me comes for my name.

"You know because you were there the day I was conceived, you had front row tickets Ncane?"

"This child needs to be disciplined Samson, you are wasting time talking. Beat her." Samu tosses a shoe my way, it hits me right on the face.

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but this couple will never get to me.

"Argh shame Samukelisiwe, you poor thing. How does it feel to have a man who will never see you woman enough to carry his family name? I get that some people have no problem settling, but sisi you

need to go get your dignity wherever you dropped it, you uncultured swine.”

What kind of a girlfriend tender lasts Twenty-plus years? She’s surely living on borrowed time.

“Shiyiwe watch your mouth, this is my wife you’re disrespecting.”

“Your wife? Ncane you couldn’t even pay ten cents for her, all these years you have been milking the cow for free. Maybe if you had saved the coins you spent on cigarettes and paid lobola, Samu would be a Jele by tradition. You denied your children their true identity by not paying damages, they are lost sheep scattered everywhere. And you think you have the right over my father’s house? I do not talk to uncivilised fools.”

Samson charges at me, I’m on set with the kettle. The water has probably cooled down a bit but it can still do damage.

Mthandeni stands in front of me before he can attack.

“Touch her and I am slicing amasende.”

She snaps, pointing a knife towards Samson's private parts.

I will slap her later for using strong language. Where did she get that knife?

I push her aside and throw water at him, he screams and steps back. Dammit it missed him, his kids will need counselling after all this is over.

I see the driver outside, he wants to come in. Seems like he moves with instructions from his boss.

"What is wrong with you children? Is this what my brother raised? I am ashamed to say the least." He's shouting again.

"Whoah!" I yell back. "You're still talking? Take every breath preciously Samson, the only reason you're alive is because you dodged a morning after pill, you are in this world by default. Grandma probably has sleepless nights when she thinks about you crowding her womb. You are a waste of breath, a walking carbon dioxide."

My uncle is huge, one slap from him and my obituary will be printed.

But I am not going down without a fight, I'm ready to perform miracles tonight.

His feet move, he's headed my way.

"What did you say to me?"

The look on his face screams murder, I'm ready to scream GBV.

"You useless piece of shit, you dare talk to me like that. Take that back." He roars. Yawn!

"Haibo Ncane! You're still breathing in my father's house? Such disrespect, he must be turning in his grave."

This man did not have good relations with my father. He thinks he can come and dominate us, hell will freeze over before I let that happen.

"Do you know who you're dealing with, Shiysiwe?" His voice rumbles, eyes narrowed at me.

"Yes! Do you know who you're dealing with Samson?" I return, with the same deadpan tone.

He chuckles, "You are going to pay for humiliating me in front of my wife and kids."

I nod, "Isukile!"

My answer widens his eyes.

.

.

.

I'm still busy with the pdf, that's why the inserts are coming in slowly. We'll go back to normal once I'm done.

Thank you for your patience.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Seven-

SHIYIWE

.

.

With MaMbuzazi gone, I have assigned myself my sister's human alarm. Ten minutes have come and

gone and I am ready to retire, she refuses to wake up.

“Mthandeni wake up,” I shake her awake one last time.

Speaking of time, it does not wait for anyone, I have a bus to catch. Today is my first day at work.

“I’m awake, geez. Leave me alone.” She grumbles, tossing and turning and finally pulls a blanket over her head.

“I’m going to work, you have an 8am class.”

I’m done, she will see what she does with this information. Samsom’s children are sleeping on the living room floor, in the kitchen there’s a body beneath the covers.

It must be another distant cousin or one of Samson’s illegitimate kids.

“Where are you going?” Samson’s voice startles me, I have to let go of the door handle to face him. He’s leaning against the doorpost between the kitchen

and passage, he has nothing on but boxer shorts.

The sight is revolting that I look away in the blink of an eye, I know he's about to make life uncomfortable for us.

"Work," not that I owe him an explanation.

A smile twitches on his face, he and his wife think they are Timon and Pumba. If that's the case, then I am Mufasa, the king of the jungle.

"Go then before you're late." He waves me off.

"Don't worry Ncane, I'm leaving. By the way, if you try anything stupid... if you dare touch my sister, I will burn your Identity documents and your kids' birth certificates."

It's not a threat, I'm too soft to threaten people. He's fallen into a lake of confusion.

Life can be beautiful sometimes.

"What are you talking about?" He asks.

Priceless. It's getting hot in here.

"You might want to check the last place you saw

your documents.” And with this, I exit like the king I am. I haven’t started with those monkeys.

I hurry towards the gate when I hear the door creaking open.

“Shiyiwe come back here.” He’s shouting, he’ll wake the neighbours if he continues like this. “Shiyiwe, your days are numbered in this house. Do you hear me?”

He’s standing in the doorway, pointing a finger. Loving what I’m seeing, a smile spreads across my face.

Did I say I’m the king of the jungle? I’m a snake actually, uMamlambo. I’m about to make things happen in this place.

The sun is taking its time to rise today, summer needs to hurry. These winter days are not appreciated.

Someone moved the gate, it must’ve been Samson. He should have left it there, it’s my house to fix.

As I step out, I notice a silver Citroen C3 SUV parked on the side of the road. I see the car and it's shininess but damn, driver bae has turned the heat up.

I'm drooling, and staring, and Lord forgive my dirty mind but it was you who created Adam and made him more like a god than human.

"Excuse me, sisi." He stops me just as I'm walking past with my eyes glued on him.

Close your mouth Shiyiwe and focus on your breathing.

"Y... yes." It's either he wants to ask for my number, give me a ride or the worst; ask for directions.

"Are you Shiyiwe?"

Wrong question but...

"It depends who is asking."

I owe people money, and I'm not about to give myself in.

"Thambo, your new driver, Mr. Meyiwa sent me."

Another driver? What happened to the one from yesterday?

"Oh!" It's not that I'm disappointed.

I'm just... well... it would be nice to be asked out by a nice guy for once. Emeka was the last man to have shown interest in me, I'd dress up and gallivant around the mall and go back home empty handed. Whether you're in a relationship or not, it's nice to be admired.

I'm in the car, with a man I've never met in my life, only a fool would trust a handsome stranger.

Mthombo Meyiwa must have done something in his past life to gain my trust.

Mandoza is keeping us company with his loud music, my ears are complaining.

A Toyota Camry drives past, headed towards my house and right in the back I see Ntebo. The only reason she sees me is because of the open window.

Why is she here so early in the morning?

“Stop the car,” I tell the driver.

Mandoza’s Phunyuka bamphethe seems to be louder than it was a second ago.

The driver would rather turn the volume up than listen to me, it’s okay. I forgive him because he’s hot.

My phone starts to ring, it’s the girlfriend. I can’t take this call, besides, the music is too loud. I can’t possibly dominate a space belonging to some. I will call her later.

.

.

I can get used to having a driver, I was asleep the entire ride. I have been saying, it’s nice to rub shoulders with the rich and famous. I don’t have to wait outside the gate and ring the intercom, the driver has the keys.

“If you need my services, I will be here.” He tells me as he opens the door for me.

What’s left is a dress from the royal house, Meghan

Markle; I'm seeing you sooner than I thought.

Accepting his offer is a nod from me, I find my way to the front door.

Where is the house maid?

Why is this one the one to open the door? He does things to my clit, things that would get me kicked out of heaven.

"You're too early."

Listen to him preaching time, Mr. Time keeper. Last time I was here, he was preaching how late I was.

Something wants to come out of my mouth, I know it's going to be stupid and get me into trouble with him, that's what happens when I'm in the presence of Zinqumo.

His face turns cold instantly, he's convinced I'm ignoring him.

"It's my first day, and first impressions last longer. That's why I'm early." I say, impatiently waiting to be let in.

He's not moving out of the way.

"Is Mr. Mthombo here?" Stupid question Shiysiwe, where else would he be?

Zinqumo's eyes drag my frame, he spots a jaw clench and walks back into the house.

I'm right behind him, as far as I know, he stays here with Mthombo and their parents who are hardly ever around, the other siblings have their own places.

Zinqumo takes a route I only take in my dreams, his bedroom. It must be his room, a little peek inside screams white boy. The door is shut with a loud bang, sigh!

I have to find Mthombo on my own.

"The last door on your right." I hear Zinqumo's voice yell out.

Couldn't he tell me that before shutting the door?

In a second, I'm standing in front of the mentioned room. A knock and I'm invited in, when I make my presence known, I see him. Mthombo Meyiwa

looking out the window. The curtains have been drawn, the lighting in here is beautiful.

“Good morning sir!” I project my voice to avoid repeating myself.

“You’re late,” he says without turning to look at me.

But Zinqumo said I was early. He’s waiting for an answer, I don’t have one. It’s not 7:30am yet, work begins at 8:00. He needs to ask around.

“My morning starts at 6:00, Shiyiwe.” He called me by my first name?

Should it feel this good?

“Before doing anything, I have to get a massage on both my legs. That should have been done an hour ago.”

“I didn’t know, no one told me.” I defend myself.

“Now you know, let’s not repeat the same mistake tomorrow.”

“But sir...”

“Call me Mthombo...” he cuts in.

Will you at least look at me? His side profile isn't that bad but, he's starting to annoy me.

"Mthombo, what time will I leave the house if I have to be here by six?" My biggest worry is being mugged, Soweto isn't exactly the safest place in the world.

"You have a driver at your beck and call," now he decides to grace me with his stare.

"No... you're kidding me right?" I sound shocked, don't I?

"Unless you'd rather take public transport."

There's a time to speak and a time to be quiet, now is the time to shut his mouth.

"No, I love drivers. They are good for me, but do I have to pay him?"

My question brings a frown to his face, I'm not sure if I said anything wrong.

"Don't worry about him, he's my responsibility. Just make sure you're here every day."

There goes my weekends and what a way to tell me I

will be slaving from Monday to Monday.

“Let us begin,” he adds, moving towards the bed.

My phone buzzes in my pocket, calling for my attention.

Mthandeni’s name is flashing on the screen, I ask if I can take the call and granted permission with a head nod.

“There are men fixing our gate, they said Mr. Meyiwa sent them,” is the first thing she says.

I turn to Mr. Meyiwa, I know he’s trying to intimidate me with that indifferent, standoffish appearance.

“Is that so? Mr. Meyiwa didn’t mention anything of the sort,” I tell my sister and that gets his attention.

Our eyes meet, he allows the stare for a second before he’s looking away.

“Tell them to stop, I want to speak to him first.”

My request gets his attention again, this time he keeps the stare. It’s too intense for me, dammit he

has me looking away.

Is this how it's going to be? Him staring like he wants to murder me and me shying away because he might kill me with his cold glare?

"That was my sister," I start as I place my phone in my pocket.

"You sent men to my house to fix the gate."

"Yes."

Is said so casually.

"I don't understand, why would you do that? And how did you know about the gate?"

"You mean, how did I know that you drove a brand new car through the gate and wracked it?"

Eish! It's that driver, I thought I was going to be the bearer of bad news.

"I'm sorry, I needed to act fast. It was an emergency." I say.

Wait a second, is this reverse psychology? I'm the one who's questioning him here, when did it become

about me and the car?

“Why are you getting my gate fixed?”

Men frown when they don’t like what’s coming out of your mouth, I’m a witness to it right now.

“I like doing things for my employees, if your image is bad, it will not look good on me.” That’s a lie, he’s scratching the bridge of his nose.

“But sir...”

“If you don’t like me helping you, I’ll tell them to stop.” He’s fishing for something in his pocket.

His phone, I snatch it as he presses it against his ear.

“It’s fine sir, thank you for your help.”

Only a fool would reject help, his will save me money. He’s scowling up at me, a thousand words are said in his deep set eyes. Can’t he speak now?

“What?” He’s staring, I want to know why.

“My phone,” he says.

Oh God, I should disappear like yesterday’s leftovers. Why am I holding on to his phone?

I hand it over, he locks it and pushes it back into his pocket.

"It's time for my massage," he says.

That's right!

"I'm going to help you get on the bed, it's my first time, I want to do it right." I'm on my knees removing his feet from the footplate when our eyes meet.

The look in his eyes tells me that his mind has gone to the gutter, mine must've gone there first. There's a staring competition, locked eyes... his puckered brow, my shocked expression.

"I... I didn't mean it like that. I mean I'm not a virgin..."

Shit, my mouth is doing it again. It's his fault, he's too close, staring too deep.

Get your mind straight MaJele!

"Oh God, why am I talking about that? Sir, it's just that the statement made me think about sex and I thought you were thinking..."

"Stop talking!" He demands, pressing a finger on my lips.

My heart is imitating a tsunami, it's too violent that my vision is starting to tunnel. Why am I feeling like this?

He shouldn't be affecting me like this? And why does he smell so good, I can almost taste him?

I take his wrist to move his hand away, it's big around my hand.

"Excuse me... sir." I stand, and head for his bathroom.

I'm not embarrassed but ashamed of my big mouth, I need to see someone about this mouth diarrhoea.

Splashing my face with water helps clear my head, I use his towel to pat it dry. It smells as good as he does. Manish and heady.

I find him lying, shirtless on the bed, of course he knows how to climb his bed. Lord have mercy, the man is such a cuddle bear. He's not chubby, he doesn't have a big tummy, nor chubby cheeks but he's a panda that looks after itself.

Great! The gutter keeps calling my name, it's where I

belong so it seems.

“You can come in when you’re done staring at me,” he startles me with this statement.

My feet shift closer in, suddenly I can’t seem to move a muscle. Must be shock paralysis.

“Do you have eyes at the back of your head sir?”

I’m not aware of my offensive and disrespectful question until he shifts his eyes my way, and sees me standing in the doorway of his bathroom, studying his body like a pervert. I can’t let our eyes meet. I have concluded that it is not good for my sanity.

“Are you okay?”

I’m astounded by the concern in his voice and thankful that he didn’t dwell on the insult I threw at him.

“I’m fine, can we begin?”

I grab the bottle of oil before sitting on the edge of the bed.

“You have to massage the whole leg, not just the

foot. You can't do that over the long pants." Now he tells me.

My neck is controlling my head, making me nod like a headless chicken.

"You need to undress me, Shiysiwe." His eyebrows are lifted, judging me like I should have known.

I thought I had come to the Meyiwases, but no, this is hell and this man is the devil sent to tempt me.

"Are you okay?" That question again.

No Mthombo, I am not okay. What is he doing to me? I'm a woman with a loose mind, and raging hormones.

I don't provide an answer but stand to remove his pants, as I grab the waist band, he holds my hand and that forces me to look up at him.

"Please don't look at me like that," I say.

I shouldn't be feeling like this.

"Like what?" He really doesn't know what he's doing to me?

I expect him to crack a smile or laugh at my fear of him but he's glaring... eyebrows creased, glaring.

"Please lift your hip." I plead, deciding to continue with my work.

He releases my wrist and follows my instruction. Slowly, I drag the pants down, thank God he's wearing something... tight!

Did I say thank God? I take it back. God of my mother, what are you doing to me?

I'm trying by all means not to look at the trunks and dick print but my eyes are doing their own thing.

"There's a throw over there," his eyes are pointing to his far left.

I quickly grab the throw and cover him, just as I do that a knock comes through the door.

"Yeah!" He receives the person.

The maid peeps through the door.

"Sir, someone's here to see Shiyiwe."

Who could it be?

"Thank you ma," I look to Mthombo for permission.

This will look bad, it's my first day and I've got people visiting me at work.

"This is not a mall Miss Jele, your friends can't be coming to my house to visit you."

His complaint is understandable, I don't want it to seem like I'm taking advantage of his kindness. I can do that when he's not around.

"It could be important sir, but I assure you that it will never happen again."

His stare is too long for me to maintain the contest, something about the intensity of his eyes has chills rippling down my spine. It's like drinking a slush on a sweltering day.

"If it's okay, I'll go see who it is."

This better be important, I'm already not on good terms with the boss.

The person is outside the gate, pacing up and down.
What sort of emergency is this?

I have to keep my eyeballs in their sockets when I see Ntebo, it's time I carry Doom. I swear to every living deity she's becoming a mosquito in my life.

The look in her eyes has my heart jumping in... I don't know what. Heck, I don't know what to think about what I'm seeing.

"What are you doing here?"

She shouldn't be here in the first place, she's really starting to freak me out.

"Why are you doing this to me, Shiyiwe? Do you know how you embarrassed me in front of my bosses?" Her voice is raising and I am not okay with it.

"What did I do?"

Her eyeballs do that thing Mthandeni is so accustomed to, roll to the back of her head.

"Did you forget about the interview?" Another yelling session.

I'm hungry and when I'm hungry, anger seems to engulf my being. This might be the right time to tell her to tread carefully.

"I didn't get a call from your boss, so I assumed the interview was cancelled." It's not like I was waiting for it.

She does the eye roll thing again, "I called you a million times, and you wouldn't take my calls. What am I to you Shiysiwe? I thought we were friends. I did a favour for you and this is how you thank me? You have always been selfish, you are nothing but a..."

"A good friend," I collide with her insults because my heart is taking the dramatic path. "I hope that's the word you're going for Ntebo, that I have been nothing but a good friend. If you continue with this attitude, I will forget we ever met."

"But Shiysiwe, I'm trying to help you. I don't want you here, in this place working as a maid. It's below you friend." Her loud voice trembles, red-rimmed eyes darting to the mansion behind me before they are on me once more.

“A maid?”

I’m baffled... What do I call this? An accusation? An insult? An act of jealousy? Or juju?

Energy doesn’t lie and what I’m sensing from Ntebo can’t be good.

“Yes!” She drills the word into my ears, placing her shaky hands on her waist.

Why on earth is she even trembling?

“Ntebo are you on drugs?”

She gasps and narrows her eyes in on me.

“No offence, but you’re a trembling mess. You can’t even stand still for half a second.”

“I... I’m fine friend.” She speaks as if she stole the words and doesn’t want to be found out.

“I’m just going through a lot, can we talk?”

How, when she can’t hold a word together. She’s all over the place emotionally and physically.

“I’m still busy, I don’t want to lose my job. Speaking of... Mthombo is waiting for me, I’ll call you.” I’m

evading her gaze, an attempt to read what's written in those crazed eyes. "Are you sure you're okay?"

She's not okay, her eyes have ceased to blink, her mouth has fallen open. Worry slaps me across the face, only drugs can make a person act like this.

"Ntebo!" She blinks as I snap my fingers.

"You're on first name basis with your boss?"

She continues to speak like she stole the words, the whispering is getting on my nerves only because I have to force my ears to listen and catch every syllable.

"Yes!" I reply.

She has gone quiet on me.

"Ntebo?"

She blinks and a tear escapes her eye, "I have to go."

She mutters.

It is for the best.

I'm watching her, stumbling down the street.

I need to call Mme Mosheo and tell her that her

daughter has lost one of her marbles. The next thing she will be chasing people down the street and laughing like a lunatic.

Here comes a taxi, at least it's a Quamtum, it's comfortable.

"Here's a taxi friend, don't forget to point up." I remind her, she looks confused. Poor thing.

Ntebo takes her time to get into the taxi, it looks like she'll tumble to the ground any second.

"Driver, please drop her at MTN taxi rank." I tell him as he drives past, he looks at me like I have insulted his entire generation.

I catch a glimpse of Ntebo's pale face, shame! Noord taxi rank will slap her back to her senses.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Eight

SHIYIWE-

.

.

I haven't heard from Ntebo and Emeka in a week, I haven't tried to reach out either. I can't be running after people when I have so much on my plate, if they want to be in my life, they know where to find me.

Mthombo has had his lunch and vitamins, he's given me an hour lunch break. I'm on my way to see uncle Velakithi and MG, I didn't see much of them at the funeral. Things have been hectic since the shooting, something tells me that MG is avoiding me.

He hasn't been taking my calls, nor answering my texts on WhatsApp.

"It's the corner house with the first brick wall," I inform Thambo.

Mthombo insisted I use the driver's services, you can't really complain when life favours you.

"Is there a safe place to park?"

Come on, Riverlea Ext may have dodgy looking people, but I doubt they will hijack him.

“Do you have a gun?” I don’t know why I’m asking such a personal question, and this is not a movie, not all drivers carry guns.

“As long as you’re in the car, you’re safe Thambo.”

If anything happens, he will need to put those muscles to use.

The gate is open, this never happens. My uncle is one cautious person, something must have messed him up. He’s paranoid most of the time and too aware of his surroundings.

“Hello!” I announce my arrival, as I walk down the pavement.

The door is slightly open, “MG, uncle Velo.”

I take a peek inside, nobody is in sight. It’s my uncle’s house that means I’m allowed to come and go as I please.

After processing this fact, I invite myself in. It’s too quiet in here. My cousin is a TV person, he loves deep house as well, and always plays it full blast whenever he is home.

My eyes slowly process multiple things in the living room, like the half eaten bread on the coffee table and the cup of tea.

“Hello!”

There must be someone in here, the house is not so big that they wouldn’t hear me. I hardly ever visit my uncle and I can’t say I’m familiar with the atmosphere here. But something feels different, like I’m not supposed to be here.

My palms start to sweat, it happens when I’m too nervous. I stop at the entrance connecting the corridor to the kitchen, my heart is doing a number on me.

“I have to get out of here,” I talk to myself sometimes. As I make a U-turn, something falls in the kitchen. Curse curiosity, it has me rushing there, thinking I’ll find uncle Velakithi and his son.

What I see next will remain with me for rest of my life, there is a woman lying in a pool of blood. Her eyes are wide open, but unmoving.

I scream, like anyone would. I’m about to take off

running when an armed man, dressed in black appears from behind the door, his face is covered with a balaclava.

My life flashes before my eyes when he points a gun at me, I don't want to die and if I die, this is not how I want to be sent to heaven. The next thing I hear is a loud bang.

Survival instincts kick in, I take off running. I'm barely at the door when something grabs my hair and pulls me back, my ass kisses the floor as I fall flat on it. He's dragging me by my hair, across the floor.

"Thambo, Thambo help me." I'm screaming and gripping the carpet for anchor, my head is spinning. He's going to kill me like he killed that woman back there.

"Thambo! Thambo." Lord he's in the car, he won't hear me.

The masked man tightens the grip on my hair and lifts me up, only to throw me on top of the dead body.

My insides turn, bile rises, bringing all the contents of my stomach with. I empty everything on the dead

body, logic hits me, causing me to scream and move away from her.

This is bad luck multiplied, she's going to haunt me for throwing up on her.

I'm on my feet, about to run but he cocks the gun and that forces me to lift my hands.

"Where is he?" The man grunts, startling me with his scratchy voice.

"I don't know who you're talking about." I tell him.

I'm thinking of a way out of this, the door is closed and the other one is a corridor away. He will shoot me if I dare run.

"I'm going to say this one last time, where is Velakithi?"

Oh my God, what has my uncle gotten himself into? Could this man be the one who killed my parents?

A gun goes off somewhere, it triggers past experiences. I can't help my loud screams.

The man is on the floor, holding one of his legs.

“Fuck!” He hisses, he’s been shot.

He fires multiple shots to no one in particular, and someone, somewhere is firing back just as much.

Afraid for my life, I crawl on my stomach to the nearest wall and take up a foetal position. I’m in the middle of a warzone I know nothing about, I want to get out of here. But I know better, bullets are no respecter of persons, they kill.

“Shiysiwe, get up now.” Thambo’s voice finds me traumatised and trembling, I raise my head to see him standing, with a gun in his left hand.

The masked man is gone, there are trails of blood leading towards the exit door. He might come back. He is a man on a mission and that kind always finish what they started.

“Let’s get out of here.” I jump up, alert.

Thambo is looking at the dead woman drenched in my vomit, for a second I feel bad for having puked on her.

“Who is she?”

“I don’t know, my uncle’s girlfriend perhaps.”

I can’t stand to look at the dead body, my stomach wants to excrete more waste just by the sight of it.

Thambo will find me in the car.

“Wait!” He pulls me back before I touch the door handle and checks the coast. His hand is on my back as he leads us to the car, neighbours have come out in morning robes, stockings on their heads and slippers on their feet. It’s midday for heaven’s sake.

They are yelling foul words, and pointing fingers.

Apparently we’re causing havoc in their neighbourhood, one of them threatens to call the police. I hear ‘ma se poes’ from a toothless old woman standing on the street.

We should know better than to play at coloured folks’ territory, they don’t take nonsense.

.

.

I've been trying to call MG, his phone rings unanswered. Uncle Velakithi's phone is turned off. I need answers, something is going on in this family. Could that man be the same person that killed my parents?

I'm petrified, this goes beyond mere fright. Gunshots are a trigger, I will never get over what happened to my parents.

"Ma'am, we have arrived." Thambo's voice is far from my reach, but manages to snap me out of my trance.

He opens the door for me, and my eyes meet Mthombo's.

"Shiyiwe?" He says with a deep baritone.

My frozen insides relax for a few brief seconds, the look in his eyes makes me want to crumble and let it all out. I try to look away but it's as if he's daring me to break the eye contact.

"Come on out, you're safe now." His hand is stretched out towards me, a compassionate look on his face.

I dash out and almost trip and fall when my feet hit the ground, I would most definitely have fallen if not for the car door. The driver purposely pushed it my way, as to what happened to his hands; god-knows.

“Are you hurt?” He asks.

“I’m alive, thanks to Thambo.” I would be dead had he not been there, I don’t want to think what would’ve happened to Mthandeni.

“I’ll go inside,” I walk past him to receive the call buzzing in my pocket.

“Uncle Mdu! Is grandma okay?”

The background noise of chickens trilling pour into my ears, either those chickens are laying eggs or he’s at it again.

“Uncle, why are the chickens screaming? Leave my chickens alone.”

He laughs, I give up.

“You have to come home, your father’s grave has been tempered with.”

Yeses! This is the last thing I need.

“What happened uncle?”

“Your father is missing, Shiyiwe.” His voice seems to trail off.

“Would you repeat that please? I thought you said my father is missing.”

“That’s exactly what I said...” His voice elevates.

“That’s impossible uncle Mdu, what kind of a game are you playing? My father is resting in his grave, what you’re saying to me is impossible.”

I need to sit down for this, this man wants to make my heart stop. I settle on one of the chairs in Mthombo’s room, it’s where I found myself when I walked into the house.

Perhaps it’s the most comfortable room for me, as expected because I spend most of my days in here.

“The coffin is empty Shiyiwe, someone dug my brother’s grave and took his body.”

Yeyi! Yeyi! Yeses! Who opened hell and let the devil out?

This is not my life.

“You need to come home, I’ve opened a case at the police station. They can only do so much.”

If the police can only do so much, what will I bring to the table? I have nothing to stand against, uncle Velakithi is nowhere to be found. Samson is not even a factor, he’s as useless as my small toe.

Uncle Mdu has run out of airtime, the service providers have closed the call.

Just great! I told him to switch to Telkom, clearly he can’t afford MTN.

The lump on my throat is too strong to ignore, I can’t be going through this. My life was not smooth yes, but it wasn’t this bad.

“Baba, did you think of me before taking your last breath? How am I going to carry this load?”

I need a break from the world, the closest thing is the bed. My heart is pounding in my ribcage, rendering me weak. I lie down in hopes that it will

calm down, it would be better if it stops beating all at once.

.

.

A cold hand wakes me up from a deep sleep, I didn't mean to fall asleep.

He's looking down at me, with a wounded expression on his face.

"Shiyiwe!" His voice is a muttering sound. "Are you okay?"

I don't know how to answer that, no one is ever okay.

I sit up and realise that it's dark outside, it feels like I've woken up in a different dimension. Confusion plays the dominant role, my eyes are wide and searching for my phone as I wipe drool off the corner of my mouth.

It's past 10pm, I overslept. Why didn't Mthombo wake me up?

There's plenty of messages and missed calls from Mthandeni, she wants to know if I will be coming

home tonight.

"I'm sorry sir, this shouldn't have happened." I sit up and my head pounds like a drum. It feels like I have been run over by a truck.

"Relax, you got up too fast. That explains the headache." His hand has found a way to my forehead, he's staring too deep into my eyes and I don't know if that's the reason I burst into tears. My cry is silent, I don't want to embarrass myself. But I can't help these emotions overwhelming me.

"I'm tired," I say through a flood of tears.

"You can sleep here, I don't mind."

He doesn't get it, emotions get the better of me. More tears cascade down my face, unwanted and invading my space.

"Why is life so hard Mthombo? I didn't ask for this, my parents are gone. Just the other day, the only thing I had to worry about was getting a job so I can buy my favourite dress and a few groceries at home. But now, there are so many responsibilities. I have become a parent to a twenty year-old, my father's

body is missing and I almost died today. I'm not ready to adult, it's too heavy for me."

I have ceased to care about my snort and the ugly cry.

"Your father's body is missing?" He asks.

Yeah! It's that shocking.

"That's what my uncle told me, where will I begin to look for it?"

My worries seem to pile up.

"I'll make some calls, we'll find your father." He's telling me and I'm hearing every word but it's just so hard for me to believe it.

"I don't know, I've been surrounded by bad luck all my life. It's hard to believe that it will ever be normal." He's looking at me like I'm scaring him with my ugly cry, I bury my face in my hands to hide away from his stare.

"Hey," he brings my face up. "You don't look good when you cry, wipe those years."

When someone tells you to stop crying, tears become stubborn and multiply.

“Come here,” he takes my hand and makes me sit on his lap, his arms wrap around my waist. I’ve never sat on a man’s lap, my virgin butt is shocked. So am I.

Emeka is not that kind of a guy, the only thing you get from him is a brief hug. We only kiss during sex and come to think of it, we haven’t had sex in months.

Men can’t go without sex, he must be getting it from somewhere.

“The wheelchair will break, and you’re my boss, I’ll get in trouble if we’re found in this compromising position.”

I’m breaking the rule of all rules, my social status does not permit this. If anyone walks in, I will be labelled as the poor girl taking advantage of a rich man.

“You worry too much about people’s opinions.” He says.

I don't know what to say after this.

"Shiyiwe?" His voice is a soft whisper. "Tell me what to do and I will move mountains for you."

Why is he saying this to me? I'm a stranger, yet he's ready to move mountains for me?

"Let me guess, you're a fan of Back Street Boys?" It's the only thing that makes sense, that he's reciting one of their songs.

"Who are they?"

You've got to be kidding me.

"Forget about it," I try to move from his lap but his hands are tight around me.

"Thambo is going to drive you home, get your things and hurry back."

Hurry back?

"Why am I hurrying back sir?" I ask.

"After what happened today, it's not safe for you to be out there without any protection. That man is out there somewhere, probably looking for you."

I almost forgot about today's incident, Thambo has obviously told him everything.

"Don't scare me, please. I don't know who he is, and I didn't do anything wrong. He had a gun pointed at me, I thought I was going to die."

I've been through worse in my life, this shouldn't shock me at all.

"I will never let anyone hurt you, Nonyanda." -

I have been called many things before, but not my clan names. Not by my father or uncles.

Mthombo is kind, he's never given me a reason not to trust him. I can almost feel his promise, his words give me a measure of hope, or at least a little drop of it.

I jump off his lap only because I'm starting to feel things I shouldn't be feeling for my boss, heck I shouldn't be sitting on his lap.

"What do you say?"

I assume he's talking about me coming to live here.

"There has to be another way to stop that man from

getting to me, I have a sister to look after.”

“You don’t get it do you? Your life is in danger, this is the only way I can protect you.”

He makes it sound like packing my things and moving in here is so simple, unfortunately a man is not an island. I have a duty to play and that is to protect Mthandeni.

“What do I do about my sister? I can’t leave her.” I sound very ungrateful.

“He’s after you, not her.” He says.

I’m annoying him. A frown has grown on his features.

“I’ll call my uncle first and let him know what happened, maybe he knows who that man is.”

I need to make sure that Mthandeni is safe, I know how vile Samson and his girlfriend can be, they will take advantage of my absence and make things difficult for Mthandeni.

“Why is keeping me safe so important to you? You are not indebted to me or my father, are you?”

Curses of Egypt! I need to go back to school and

learn how to speak to people.

He's pinching the bridge of his nose, probably putting a solution together in his head, or regretting ever meeting me.

If I trusted the collaboration of my mouth and brain, I'd open up my heart and tell him that he's the best man I've ever met, that whoever will capture his heart will be the luckiest woman in the world.

"Thambo will drive you home, there will be someone keeping watch of the house tonight. You can sleep peacefully, and don't come to work tomorrow. I'm granting you a few days off, go home and sort out whatever needs to be sorted regarding your father."

He says dismissively and wheels himself out.

Eh! What do I make of this now? Is he giving up on me?

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Nine

SHIYIWE-

.

.

Last night, Mthombo mentioned something about a peaceful night's sleep, but that's the last thing I had.

When the driver dropped me off at around 11:30 pm, my body shivered the second I stepped out of the car.

I could swear there was a presence behind me, whatever it was followed me into the house, and to my room. The moment my head hit the pillow, sleep paralysis attacked me. At one point, I felt someone pressed against my body from behind.

It went on till the wee hours of the morning, I had to force myself to stay awake because it wouldn't stop.

Mthombo kept to his word of appointing a bodyguard, he arrived with us last night.

He's not allowed to enter the house, unless he's doing his job.

Mthandeni sleeps too much, it worries me.

Apparently, she missed her classes yesterday only because she was sleeping the entire day.

I need to talk to her about this before it goes out of hand, fold the stick while it's still soft.

I'm leaving for KZN today, my bag is packed. I have everything, except my toothbrush. I used it this morning but when I went back for it, it wasn't in the bathroom. I'll have to pass by Boxer in town. I don't know if Thambo will drop me off at the taxi rank.

Mthandeni!" She shuffles and becomes still again, this child can't be sleeping like a log at this time.

"Yeyi, sisi wake up."

She grunts, but doesn't move. She is out like a light, I should use a belt to wake her up. That's how our grandmother used to wake me up for school.

Just as I'm about to act on my thoughts, a knock at the door interrupts me.

I swear I cannot deal with this full house, and this man-child standing in front of me, with eyes full of

dry mucus.

“What?” I snap.

He’s not saying anything, his eyes move down to my exposed legs and a smirk finds a way to his mouth.

“My face is up here, unless you want me to pluck out those ugly eyes.” I grunt.

Gezani is the worst thing that has happened to planet earth, the world should’ve ended 25 years ago when he was born.

He’s a younger version of Samson, he tries to hide his father’s side but I see through him. Like how he’s currently lusting over my body right now.

“Wow, sisi. Nice thighs, you’re so fresh. I’m in awe of how much you’ve grown.” He chuckles, and keeps the smirk.

“Strange how everything but your dick grows, don’t you think?” Yes I said it. He’s a certified pervert.

The fool is not bothered by my retort, he’s laughing heartily.

“Sweet,” I hate him. “Don’t you have Colgate? This

one is finished.”

He holds up an empty container of Aquafresh, what the hell?

“This thing was half-empty just yesterday.” I’m complaining, these people have not contributed anything around here.

“It was and now it’s empty.” He says, shoving a toothbrush into his mouth, while scratching his butt cheek.

“Is that my toothbrush?”

Please say no.

“Oh, it’s yours? I forgot mine, I hope you don’t mind.”

He's loudly chewing the brush. The slurping sounds he's making are going to send me into the ICU.

“Gezani, how long have you been using this toothbrush?” The answer will either send me into an early grave, or make me puke all the food I’ve consumed my whole life.

“A week or seven days,” he pulls the toothbrush out and starts to laugh.

“A week is seven days, idiot.”

Why am I correcting him? I have been using the same toothbrush the whole week. I gag, and he moves back. I’m going to die young, this is fate’s way of sending the message.

I want to throw up, remove my intestines and rinse them in water like tripe.

My tongue feels numb, I’ve been sharing a toothbrush with Gezani for a week?

My brain sends a message to my feet, making me push past Gezani.

“Sisi, what’s wrong?” I hear him shout behind me before I get to the toilet.

He’s in my fucking house, that’s what’s wrong.

I make it to the toilet in time, but a suffocating smell pushes me right out.

“Who was doing number two and didn’t open the window?” I yell in frustration.

It smells like twenty dead rats.

“Baba.” One of his sons answers with a giggle.

I open the window, grab a bottle of perfume in the bathroom cabinet and empty it.

In a minute, I’m on my knees, gagging, nothing is coming out. I can’t breathe.

There’s the smell Samson left behind, the dirty toilet and Gezani’s week of bacteria in my mouth.

I think of using Handy-Andy on my tongue, toothpaste won’t do it. Then I remember the bottle of Listerine mouthwash in Mthombo’s bathroom, I was curious and experimenting. It burns one’s tongue, I’m sure it will remove the bacteria.

Now I have to add Listerine to my list of things to buy at Boxer.

When I exit the toilet, having achieved nothing but a sore throat, the family has occupied the living room and are having breakfast. Gezani is amongst them, disgusting.

I'm going to admit myself into the hospital when I get to KZN, they have to put me on life support.

"Oh, Shiyiwe. Please give Gezani Colgate, he hasn't brushed his teeth yet." Samson says, mouth full of bread and eggs.

I was traumatised, now I don't know what to call this.

On the table is a week's groceries, they think this is a hotel.

Today I choose peace... wait a second.

"Is that my mother's gown?"

I must be dreaming, Samu is wearing MaMbuyazi's morning gown.

"It's not like she's going to wear it again." The audacity to say that to me.

With my busy schedule, I haven't had time to organise my parent's belongings and this woman has sunk her sticky fingers in my mother's wardrobe.

"Give it back, it's not yours."

Samukeliswe doesn't answer me, she's blatantly

ignoring me.

“Take it off now.” I command.

“You will do no such thing Samukelisiwe.” Samson says.

I want to attack her, instead tears burn my eyes.

I’m not that kind of girl who gives in to tears, but this hurts more it should. Dear God, it hurts.

A smile appears on Samson’s face, he’s having a ride at the pain reflecting in my eyes.

“What’s wrong mshana? Are those tears of joy?”
He’s mocking me.

I gaze up at the ceiling, and blink back the tears.

As I turn away from them, Samson mumbles something inarticulate. Scornful laughter comes after, the kids are laughing as well.

My feet are refusing to listen to me, but I force them to move. My heart is painfully beating against my ribcage by the time I get to the bathroom.

I don’t understand this pain.

Why is it taking all my strength? How will I survive this world with a weak heart?

The tears are knocking, demanding to be seen. I'm not letting them out, not when my enemies are still breathing.

Winter has its days, most times I hate it. But today, I'm going to worship it. I grab the 10 litre bucket we use for washing purposes and fill it with cold water, nothing says "freezing" like cold water on winter mornings.

"What's with the bucket? Aren't you leaving for KZN anymore?" Samson must shut up.

I don't answer him but head straight to Samukeliswe, she's engrossed on buttering bread.

With no time wasted, I lift the bucket above her head and empty every drop. She's gaging and breathing like it's her last.

"Shiyiwe!" That's her screaming my name.

She's on her feet, undressing. This is exactly what I

wanted.

"I told you to take it off, and you didn't listen to me. If you want to continue testing me Samu, I am not going to stop you. But I swear on my parents' graves, you will not like the person I become."

"I have had it with you." Samson jolts from his seat and bolts towards me, my mind goes completely blank when he forcefully grabs my arm.

One of his boys; Lindani jumps in our midst, he grips Samson's hand and separates it from my arm.

Okay! What is happening?

I can't see his face, his back is turned to me. The shake of his shoulders is readable though, he's quaking with anger.

"Leave her alone," he says to his father.

Lindani is their second born, he's actually fifteen. I'm dazed by his sudden protectiveness, he's never said a word to me, not even a dot.

"Yeah Samson, do not touch me." I peer over Lindani's shoulder, he's too tall for a 15-year-old.

“Move out of the way Lindani,” Samson barks, pushing the poor boy aside.

Shame, he’s not strong enough to stand up against his father. There he is, picking himself up from the floor.

“Before you touch me, Ncane, just know that I know people who know people who make bullies like you disappear.”

Lies, I don’t know anyone.

He narrows his eyes, “You’re a toothless dog Shiysiwe.”

“Please, I’m a fucking roaring lion. Don’t be fooled by my gender Ncane, you have no idea how lethal a woman can be.”

He looks speechless, this man thinks I don’t have a voice.

Cat has caught his tongue, but his eyes are a burning lava.

I snatch my mother’s drenched robe from the floor and hurry to my room, I can hear Samson and Samu

scolding the little boy as I walk away. I'd turn back and defend him but my heart is too heavy, I might just lose the battle.

Mthandeni is still fast asleep, in a way I'm glad because she won't have to see me tearing up. My back is against the door as I take a shuddering breath, it's a failed attempt to calm myself. This gown will never smell like my mother again, Samu ruined it.

What I feel is the most acute feeling of pain that anyone could possibly feel, the piercing, heart-wrenching kind.

I need to move my parent's belongings from their bedroom but I can only do it when I come back.

.

.

.

MTHOMBO

When Furious love comes, man is powerless.

Some are able to withstand its power, while others are overwhelmed by the mere thought of it that when they get a taste of it, they crumble and hide under the wings of death.

It took him six years for his heart to feel again, it could be that he's never been exposed to another woman since his wife's death.

Maybe that's how Shiyiwe has managed to slither her way into his heart.

These were Zinqumo's words and they didn't sit well with Mthombo, one would agree with the little brother and go on to say he's taking things too fast, but he's a 38-year-old. He knows what he's feeling.

Croissants are on the table for breakfast but the atmosphere is sour, Zinqumo is not talking to him. It's not every day that he gets a chance to dine with his big brother and just when Mthombo decides to leave his room and mingle with people, Zinqumo starts wondering why he's suddenly breaking the six year old walls he built the day he lost his family.

“Is the caregiver not coming in today?” Zinqumo asks, his head is dropped but his eyes are glaring up at his brother.

“Excuse me?” He heard him alright, he’s just questioning the tone he used.

“I said...” Zinqumo.

“I heard what you said,” Mthombo interjects.

He frowns at how Zinqumo is consistently playing with his food, it’s slowly ticking him off.

“So?” A shrug from Zinqumo.

“So?” Mthombo cocks his brows.

The elephant in the room needs to be addressed and Mthombo is not about to take up the task, one thing he’s not going to do is stand the disrespect he’s receiving from this little boy.

Silence settles beside the elephant, not even the slurping of a coffee dares to make a sound.

“She’s only been here for a week, a week brother and you can’t get your hands off her?”

Now, where does this one get the nerve?

“Speak clearly if you have something to say to me,” Mthombo.

He cares what his brother thinks but the tone of his voice says otherwise.

Zinqumo stirs his cup of coffee in frustration, the spoon barely touching the cup.

Mthombo rubs his temple, he has a headache from lack of sleep. That’s what happens when the heart is in turmoil.

“Will you tell me what I did wrong or keep throwing tantrums like a spoiled brat?” Mthombo asks, looking straight at Zinqumo.

A frown materialises on Zinqumo’s face, and they are fifteen years apart; such disrespect.

“I saw her sleeping on your bed the other day, I also saw her seated on your lap. I understand if you need a woman to blow off some steam, but...”

Had he been able to stand, he’d slap Zinqumo across the face.

“Is that what you do?” Mthombo snips his statement in half. “Spy on me?”

“Dad had called, he wanted to talk to you. The first place I thought of looking for you was your room.” He says, tearing his eyes away from Mthombo’s unbothered gaze.

“I’m worried about you brother, six years you never stepped out of the house, then all of a sudden you’re travelling cross provinces to attend the funeral of a man you’ve held with nothing but hate.” Zinqumo.

“I don’t have to answer you,” he’d rather fill his mouth with food than answers for this meaningless conversation.

“I’m going to call father and tell him everything. We’ll see what he says about this, maybe it’s time he comes back home.” Zinqumo lays that on the table.

“Are you threatening me?”

“We need him back, you’re more focused on that girl than the company. Are you aware that there was a shooting at Ghandi Square yesterday? One of the bus drivers died on the scene. Another driver was

hijacked on the N3 last night, the passengers were forced out of the bus and left stranded in the middle of nowhere.”

That’s news to Mthombo.

“Why didn’t anyone tell me?” This is crazy, he hasn’t been that out of touch with the real world.

“Kwanda called you, but you were busy caressing that lowlife...”

Wisdom is very important when talking to elders.

There’s a loud clanging when Mthombo bangs a fist on the table, something has ticked inside him.

“I am not your friend Zinqumo, do not mistake my paralysis for weakness. I can still beat the hell out of you.”

Zinqumo shoots up to his feet, he looks defensive but harmless.

“Sit down, we’re not done talking.” –Mthombo.

Zinqumo throws his ass back down and folds his arms.

“What’s wrong with you? Why do you hate Shiyiwe?”

“She’s a Jele, have you forgotten what they did? What about Sis’Zinzi and Siko? They deserve justice, not this betrayal.” Zinqumo is talking with his hands like he does when anger gets the best of him.

Mthombo chuckles darkly, he’s been called many things by his little brother before, a traitor is not one of them.

“Your problem is that you think you know it all, I’m surprised because your school marks say otherwise.” He wasn’t going to bring it here, but Zinqumo asked for it.

“I have said this before, you are a child. You don’t know what happened those years ago, your hate is built on hearsays. Leave Shiyiwe out of this, if you have enmity with the Jeles, do not act on it. I know you Zinqumo, you’re a walking, burning flame. If you dare start a fire at the Jeles, I will personally make sure that it’s you who ends up inside the fire.”

Mthombo has delivered this with the calmest tone he could find.

However, Zinqumo is trembling with rage. He's having a hard time hiding his anger.

He remembers Zinzi, her smile, her laugh. He remembers how she took care of him when his mother was out there climbing the corporate ladder.

The movie nights whenever he'd visit them on weekends, he remembers everything about her.

He'd just entered teenage hood when Mthombo introduced Zinzi to the family, her warmth won her his heart. He knew then that she was a keeper, that they needed her in the family.

"Did you hear what I said?" Mthombo's rumbling voice calls him back, he blinks and shrugs. "The Jeles are innocent."

Not to Zinqumo, the Jeles can never be anything else but their enemies.

"But brother, what about your wife and son? They..."

"Have you done your homework?" Mthombo interrupts, chilled as a cucumber.

He's not blind, he sees Zinqumo's irritation and clenched jaw.

"I asked you a question Zinqumo," Mthombo.

Only two people can use this tone with him, their father and Mthombo.

I'm done with my assignments." Zinqumo replies.

"What about studying?"

The answer is taking long to come, but it eventually does.

"Cross night, I slept at 4am." Zinqumo.

The two brothers engage in a staring contest, Zinqumo loses in half a second.

"My white All Stars need washing." Mthombo says, challenging him intensely.

And why not since he has nothing to do than spy on him.

"What? That's Ouse Tumie's job, I don't even know how to wash takkies." His private school, manicured, marshmallow hands will be shocked today.

“She burnt her hand while frying eggs for you.” Mthombo replies, finishing his tea. He drops the cup on the table and pats his mouth with a napkin.

“Another thing, the garden is a mess. There are leaves everywhere, you’ll find the rake and wheelbarrow in the storeroom. Brilliant will give you the key.” Mthombo says.

He’s reading every emotion written on Zinqumo’s face.

His little brother looks like he’s about to pass out, drops of sweat have come to cover his forehead.

“No way, I don’t even know how to use the stupid rake.”

Mthombo understands because this one is spoiled, but that’s not his problem.

“I suggest you get to it, the sun will set soon.”

He pushes his wheelchair back and turns to the direction of his bedroom.

“And what will Brilliant be doing while I’m doing his job? He’s the gardener, not me. This is not fair.”

Zinqumo has been subjected to stuttering.

“Brilliant is taking his girlfriend out to KFC, he’s been wanting to propose.” Mthombo tells him.

Zinqumo stands, he’s holding on to the table.

“So? What does that have to do with me?” His coconut side is shocked.

Mthombo furrows his brows, “Get rid of that negative attitude, you’re sending Brilliant bad energy. While you’re doing the garden, pray his girlfriend says yes. If she rejects him, I am sending him on a paid leave for a month and you’ll take over the garden until he comes back.”

This is one of the times when he’s dead serious, Zinqumo sees it in his eyes. Just as he wheels himself back to his room, his brother falls back on the chair and starts patting his sweaty forehead with a napkin.

He jolts up when Mthombo stops at door.

“Use a toothbrush to wash my shoes, I’ll know if you didn’t.”

And with that, he enters his room and shuts the door.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Ten

SHIYIWE-

.

.

The trip is cancelled, Mthandeni has me worried. I'm thinking the worst at the moment, yes, pregnancy. When I come back from hanging the robe on the washing line, she's sitting on the bed and trapped in her thoughts.

I shut the door a little loud to get her attention, she doesn't move. What the hell?

"Mthandeni?"

I didn't have to scream but oh well, she's staring at me.

"Umithi?" (Are you pregnant?)

I don't have to beat around the bush, if there is a bun in her oven, I am sending her to her grandmother with immediate effect.

"What?" She gasps, her eyes are hallow and detached.

"Are you pregnant?" I emphasise by shaping an invisible bump over my stomach.

"No, why would you think that?" She shouts.

Mmhh! Pregnancy red flag number one; mood swings.

"Your sleeping pattern has changed, you seem to be tired a lot lately." I inform her.

Yeah sure it's been a few days, but I have every right to worry. The ones who worried about us are long gone and never coming back.

Is it okay that she's frowning at me like that? I need to write down our age difference and paste it on the door, just in case she's starting to forget.

"I'm not pregnant, I know you think I'm a rebel but relax, I'm not stupid." She gets off the bed with a

tongue click.

“I’m going to take a bath.” She pushes me aside to get out the door.

Count from zero to ten Shiyiwe, there’s no need to slap a child.

Since my trip is cancelled, I have to call uncle Mdu and tell him I’ll be home tomorrow. Hopefully he hasn’t told grandma that her son’s corpse has been stolen, she’ll have a heart attack. I’m not going to tell Mthandeni either, she’s been through enough.

After my call with uncle Mdu, I try MG and uncle Velakithi’s phones. I wasn’t worried at first but now I’m petrified. I should be getting missed calls or call backs from them.

What if they have been killed as well? No one disappears without a trace.

I hate being in the dark, who was that woman at their house? I thought the news of her death would be on TV or papers. A woman dies and no one talks about

it?

No, something is not right.

Samson and his family are not around, they didn't say where they are going. It looked like a family outing of some sort, I have the mind to pack their things and throw them out the gate and change the locks.

There's so much to do around here and so little time to spare. The kitchen is a mess, they didn't wash their dishes.

The living room is no different, Samson's brats left their blankets on the couch, it's nothing I can't handle.

But also a once off thing, I will not be a slave in my father's house.

I'm bustling around, trying to make the house look decent when my phone whistles.

"Capitec: Payment +R80 000." I read the message out loud.

Did I enter a competition or something? There's no reference to state where the money is coming from. It must be one of my mother's pyramid schemes paying her back, she had joined a lot of those. She once bought a bed with the money she invested from MMM, she went on to invest more but they disappeared like my dream of ever getting married to Zinqumo.

"Mtha," excitement has me calling my sister. She needs to see this.

"What is it?" She comes running from the bedroom. I tilt the phone, her eyes widen and mouth drops.

"Is it yours?" An incredulous mumble from her.

I'm nodding my head and allowing a wide smile spread across my face.

"But... how? Who is it from?"

I don't care who it's from, there's money in my account.

"Who cares? We are rich, do you know what we can

do with this kind of money?" I ask.

Mthandeni screams as she locks her arms around me, the excitement is overwhelming that it has me screaming as well.

"Listen, I'm going to transfer R20 000 into your account. Use it wisely."

I'm doing the transfer before the money is claimed back, such happiness never last.

"I promise I won't," she assures me.

"Don't use it on friends, Mthandeni. I don't want to see you on I Blew It." I don't trust her.

Money drives people crazy, they forget that there is a tomorrow and use it carelessly. The transfer is successful, I have never seen her this happy.

"Thank you sisi." She's hugging me again.

My mood changes at the sound of my phone ringing, Emeka thinks I'm a spaza shop. He comes and goes whenever he feels like it.

"What do you want?" I spit.

"I'm outside," he says.

"So? How is that my problem?"

"Dali, don't do this. I came to see you, please come out."

Bloody fool! He's lost the right to call me that.
Whoever said absence makes the heart grow fonder
lied, my heart is slowly forgetting him.

I tell him I'm on my way and give my sister the phone
to charge.

I check if my face is not oily before stepping out of
the house, he's parked across the street. My eyes
search for the bodyguard's car, he's not around. I
didn't know he's off duty today, no one told me
anything.

Emeka steps out of the car, "Did you get the
money?"

This man didn't attend my parent's funeral, he didn't
call to ask how I was doing or if I needed anything,
and the first thing he does is ask me about money.

“What money?”

He frowns, why is he suddenly angry?

“R80 000 was transferred into your account, I want you to transfer it back into my account.”

“That’s your money?” Fate can’t be so cruel to test me like this, this is pure witchcraft. My enemies are working nightshifts to bring me down.

“Yes, please do the needful. I want my money.” He demands.

When a Nigerian man says he wants his money, give him his money.

Why was the devil thrown out of heaven? I wouldn’t be going through such embarrassment.

“Shiyiwe!” He snaps, his stare down has me taking a step back.

“I heard you, Emeka. My battery is low and we don’t have electricity, I’ll do it later today.” It’s not like he’s never lied to me before.

I never knew losing money that is not mine would upset me so much. I leave him standing on the

street and walk towards my gate.

I'm not going to ask where's he's been, or why he didn't come to the funeral. The money is my main concern.

"Shiyiwe, you better transfer my money."

"Yeyi, I said I will transfer it hao." I fire back.

Bloody wisdom tooth of Satan that gives me nothing but a headache, I hate him.

Did he have to shout? People are staring at me, my life will change from today. I won't be known as Shiyiwe, instead these people will point at me and say "Here comes that girl who owes Nigerians money." Yep, Nigerians or a Nigerian.

.

.

Mthandeni is not happy about the money issue, we have no choice. 80K is a lot of money, who knows what Emeka might do if we don't give it back. Men aren't human, their animalistic side overrides their human side.

Emeka thinks he can tell me what to do and I will jump? I put my phone on silent, I just want the money to stay in my account for a little while. An hour or two, then I'll transfer it back.

I spend most of my time packing my mother's clothes, I'm going to put the boxes in my room. Mthandeni does not lift a finger, she's on the couch with her phone.

"There's a cripple outside the gate," Mthandeni yells from the living room.

Eager to see who she's talking about, I rush to the window and take a peek. What is Mthombo doing here?

Just as I'm about to run out the door to investigate, my mind recollects Mthandeni's previous words.

"Yeyi wena, who did you say is outside?" I ask, throwing a shoe at her.

"Ouch! Why did you do that?" Whiney brat.

"Don't ever call him that, his name is Mthombo."

She doesn't care, I need to educate her on how to respect people.

Mthombo is here with his brother Bhedlindaba, something must've happened for them to be gracing me with their presence.

"Hi!" The smile on my face is too much, I try to level it down. The frown on his face helps, he's angry for some reason.

"What happened?" I open the gate and stand in front of him, it always feels awkward for me so I squat. This gives me a full view of the anger in his eyes.

"What is the use of a phone if you will not answer it?" He spits.

When did I not answer my phone? And, when did he call?

"You called me?"

"Three times, and wouldn't stop panicking." Bhedlindaba says with what I assume is sarcasm. He gets a scolding look from Mthombo and shrugs his shoulders, unbothered.

“Why did you call? I thought you gave me a day off, my sister is not feeling well. I had to cancel, I was planning on going tomorrow. But if you need me to be at work, I’ll come through.”

Bhedlindaba’s eyes widen and mouth opens. He blinks and bursts into laughter, I don’t know if I added a joke to my explanation.

“Wow, you really are a peacock.” Ndaba says.

Is that an insult?

“Excuse me?” I’m confused and lost.

“Whoever is responsible for your script is a busy body, you talk in bulk sisi.” Ndaba laughs once more.

I know when I’m being indirectly insulted, I talk too much, that’s what he’s saying. I look at Mthombo, he’s staring back. He’s always staring back whenever our eyes meet and funny how I’m the one who shies away first.

“I was worried about you Shiyiwe, after what happened at your uncle’s house.” Mthombo.

“But you gave me a bodyguard.” I remind him, how

can he forget that there's a muscled man who's keeping watch over me?

"He's a stranger, I wanted to hear your voice." He says.

Eh!

This is how it starts, the next thing I'll be carrying his baby and taking him to 'Pay pap'geld'

"I mean hearing your voice would've put me at ease." Mthombo rephrases.

Silence!

I'm silent due to shock, I don't know why Mthombo has gone quiet. Ndaba tilts his sunglasses a little to look at me and his brother, then he covers his eyes again.

"Ai ke! Let me get the things in the car." Ndaba steps away with a chuckle, I have never seen this playful side to him.

"Always answer your phone when I call, even when I'm standing next to you." Mthombo.

He has airtime to play this one.

“I will.”

He’s giving me no choice with that frown laced on his face, did I mention how he’s always looking into my eyes? I’m not a child, I see these things.

Is he expecting something from me? How will I be able to give it to him?

We’re trapped in an eye staring contest when through my vantage point, I see Ndaba carrying plastic bags from Pick ‘n Pay.

“What’s going on?” I ask.

He’s dropping them in the yard.

“I’m here to cook us a storm,” he laughs as he drops more bags.

“You want to cook for us?” My question is directed to Bhedlindaba but my eyes are on Mthombo who has not blinked.

“Yes,” Ndaba again. “This is for you.”

He hands me a Spitz carrier bag.

“Open it.” Ndaba says, he looks impatient and bored.

Like a child who can't stay in one place for a minute.

"Carvela?" It's a nice gesture but I can't wear Carvela with an ANC t-shirt and stretched jeans from Mr. Price, if you're going to dress rich, go all out.

Don't be rich-lite.

"Thank you, they are nice." My toes are tingling, they'll be shocked. I wasn't privileged enough to get new clothes every month like Mthandeni, I loved my parents but they were not fair.

"Thank him," Ndaba points at Mthombo with his head.

"Thank you sir, I'm going to sleep wearing them."

"Why?" My boss, he's confused.

"It's a Christmas tradition, when I was a kid, my cousins and I would sleep in our new clothes the day before Christmas without the knowledge of our parents. Somehow, my mother would find out before morning. She used to wake me up with a belt and force me to remove them. My punishment was

sleeping with nothing but my panties on." I'm laughing at this now, it wasn't funny back then. African parents are low-key abusive.

Mthombo is dead with laughter, it's actually the first time seeing him laugh like this.

"You were a naughty child," he says.

My dad used to say so, but I disagree.

"I wasn't, I knew my rights." When it comes to this, I will always defend myself.

He's laughing again, I don't want him to stop. I'm enjoying the sight.

"What?" Him.

Darn it! He catches me staring with a creepy smile on my face, I avert my gaze and look at the shoes.

"One question, why buy me shoes? Don't you want me working for you anymore?" I ask.

I know that if you want someone out of your life, you buy shoes for them, or socks. They walk and never turn back.

“Why do you say that?” Mthombo.

“You bought me shoes, there’s a tale that when you gift shoes to someone, they leave.”

“No, it’s when you buy shoes for your significant other.” Ndaba corrects.

Isn’t he too rich to know this? Mthombo looks clueless and unsettled.

“Oh, I’m safe then.” I smile. “Let’s go inside.”

Ndaba puts some of the groceries on Mthombo’s lap and carries the rest, he rejects my help. The only thing I do is lead the way to the house.

“Take the shoes,” I hear Mthombo behind me. He’s trying so hard to keep his voice low.

“Why?” Ndaba mutters back.

“Just take the shoes.”

Okay, no one is taking my shoes. I turn around and hold the plastic close to my chest.

“What’s wrong?” My eyes are on Mthombo, he looks

at his brother. A mental conversation is shared between them.

"Uh! You can't wear those shoes," Ndaba says, pointing at them with his long finger.

"Mthombo bought them for me, sure I will wear them." I'm going to South Gate tomorrow, people must know I'm wearing Spitz, and the crocodile is facing the right direction.

"My mother has the same pair..." Mthombo says way too quickly.

"Yes, and her sense of fashion is terrible." Ndaba grabs the plastic and rushes to the car.

"But I love them, you bought them for me." I tell Mthombo.

He's staring, I see something in his eyes. Should he be looking at me like that? It's how Tau looked at Karabo on yesterday's episode of Generations.

"I will buy you a hat instead, you can't wear shoes gifted by me," he says.

"Why? It's not like we're dating and I'll leave you if I

wear them.”

He continues to stare, I’m getting lost by the second. Are we having sex right now? That’s how it feels, my mother needs to come back and tell me why I’m this person. I must’ve been adopted because this is not on.

“That day when you were sitting on my lap...” he starts and I think he’s waiting for me to say something in response to that, so I nod.

“It felt good, I’d like you to sit on my lap more often.”

My heart dear Lord! But why does he have to be random? I thought we were talking about shoes.

“You want me to sit on your lap?” I feel like an idiot with this repetition. Mthombo nods and takes my hand, I remove the groceries and sit although I’m a bit hesitant.

“I didn’t mean now, we’re in your father’s premises.”

I jump up, and feel even more stupid for following my head. It’s leading me to places of embarrassment.

“You held my hand, like you did that day before I sat on your lap. So I thought...”

He laughs, “Are you going to invite us in?” Mthombo asks, with a smile.

Bhedlindaba is back, his eyes are running all over my father’s premises.

“This is nice, definitely your taste bhuti.” He says or so I think that’s what he said.

“Taste?” I ask.

Ndaba nods, “My brother likes simple things, small, talkative and fierce.”

Is he referring to me?

Mthombo pinches his hip, “Ouch bhuti.” Bhedlinbada squeaks like a kid and shifts away from Mthombo’s side.

I’ve heard that men never mature, I blame their mothers.

“Show me the kitchen Shiyiwe,” Ndaba takes the

bags and leads the way.

His confidence is admirable, I hope it won't diminish in the kitchen.

I turn to Mthombo, he allows me to wheel him in the house.

The brothers are introduced to Mthandeni, I thought she'd be cold and embarrass me, but she surprises me and does the opposite.

She goes to an extent of helping Bhedlindaba in the kitchen, it's going to snow in Diepkloof tonight.

Mthandeni is as lazy as the word, she never wants to do anything around here.

.

.

.

I don't know what's on my plate, it looks like something I'd buy at a restaurant. We don't eat fancy in this house, our fancy is Streetwise and 2litres of Coca-Cola. My stomach will thank me tomorrow by fighting indigestion which is an everyday struggle.

“I’ll do the dishes,” Mthandeni takes our plates. Her eagerness to wash the dishes is alarming.

“I’ll help,” says Ndaba. He follows her to the kitchen.

“And then?” I ask Mthombo. “This is the first time she’s enthusiastic about washing the dishes.”

He thinks what I said is funny.

“It must be the company,” I hope he is not talking about his brother.

I don’t want trouble.

“She has a boyfriend.” I say.

That fool Mzingisi.

“Don’t worry about Ndaba, he knows his place.”

I will have to take Mthombo’s word for it.

We’re suddenly talking about life in general, he’s an interesting person. I have taken note of how he mentions his family but his late wife, I don’t even have the strength to ask about her. It’s not my place to pry and I respect his privacy.

We are deep in conversation when Ndaba walks back in. “One of my players has been kicked out of the hotel due to noise, I have to go and sort it out. Will you be okay?”

Mthombo nods and releases his brother, Ndaba bids us goodbye and takes his leave. Mthandeni vanishes into our bedroom, I knew she was out to impress.

“Would you like a coffee?” I break the silence that has come between us.

“Please.” He smiles.

I will never get over his smile, he needs to smile more often. When I come back with two mugs of hot coffee, he’s turned on the TV and fighting with the remote.

“Why is it stuck on channel 100? I doubt it’s the remote, I was able to switch it on with the same remote.” He says.

I’m dealing with a rich boy here.

“Our subscription expired, DStv is generous enough to give us snippets of their shows through this one

channel.” I tell him as I hand him a cup, he nods with gratitude.

“Is that a thing? How does it work? I was hoping to catch the news, but Dan Moyane appeared for a second, then he was gone. I just need 5 minutes of news eNCA.” He says.

I’m exhausted, the man looks clueless. I’m just going to conclude that his rich ass has never run out of TV subscription. Does he even know the struggles black people go through?

“They are generous, but not that generous. Five minutes is too long, don’t hold your breath.” My reply.

I’m going to give him the pap crust to have with his coffee, this one needs to taste poverty so he can get a wakeup call.

My phone rings, saving me from answering expensive questions.

“Yellow.”

Mthombo looks at me, he has forgotten about the

TV.

"Shiyiwe, thank God you answered. We are locked up at Jet, the doors are locked. I don't know how they didn't see us. Please go to the police station and tell them what happened."

Oh it's Samson, if I had checked the caller ID, I wouldn't have answered.

"Why don't you call them Ncane? You have a phone and airtime."

"I called, they think it's a prank. Please mshana wam."

Hee! When days are dark, we become family.

"Hai, Ncane. It's after 10pm and the police station is far. Plus, they won't believe me as well. Wait for tomorrow, at least you're not outside."

"Don't be stupid, how are we going to sleep here? It's cold and..."

I cut the call, I would've helped him had he not insulted me. I don't take too well to insults.

Mthombo has not removed his gaze from me, a smirk pulls at the corner of his mouth, looking like a naughty child.

“Since it is late and my brother won’t be coming back anytime soon, am I sleeping on the left or the right side of the bed?”

Huh? Why is he asking me this?

“My bed is a boat, you won’t fit. You’re too big.”

Shit! What did I just say? My stupid adulterated mind has gone to Dubai.

Mthombo lifts his brows and tilts his head with an inquisitive look on his face.

“I.. I don’t mean that you’re big—big.” Shut up Shiysiwe!
“I don’t mean you’re small either...”

I’m messing this up and making a mockery of myself.

“Sir... I wasn’t even talking about that.”

My eyes disobey me, I’m now looking at his manhood. Thank God it’s covered.

Why me though? Embarrassed, I bury my face in my

hands and rush to my bedroom.

I'm buying a long dress and pumps tomorrow, Sunday, it's me and God. He needs to fix this.

As I shut the door, I hear laughter. It's Mthandeni, she's laughing so much that she's struggling to breathe.

"You heard all that?" I ask, she nods.

It's not funny, I have a serious problem that needs to be attended to.

"Mtha..." before I can say anything more, she empties a bottle of thick liquid over my head.

"That's mah's anointing oil, she thought I needed it to pass my exams. You need it more than I do."

She's still laughing.

I'm going to kill this child. How am I going to explain my greasy hair to Mthombo?

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Eleven

MTHOMBO-

.

.

.

This is the first time he has to sleep on the couch, nothing about it says it's comfortable. He sighs as Shiysiwe places a pillow against the armrest of the three seater, she's put a clean bedsheet on it.

"These sheets were always reserved for guests, we were never allowed to use them. MaMbuyazi made sure they smelled fresh and clean." She's ironing out the wrinkly parts, using her hands.

"Perfect, I think this will do." She says, sending him a smiley face.

If that's what he gets to see every day before bed, then he'd do more stupid things for an opportunity like this one.

"Sir..."

"Mthombo," he corrects.

It will take some time for her to get used to calling him by his Home Affairs name, he is aware of this,

but still can't stop himself from growing impatient.

Shiyiwe blinks and squats to meet his height, one more thing he appreciates about her. It makes him feel like he is on top of the world, he's convinced that she doesn't want to appear higher than him.

Whatever reason she has for doing this, he appreciates it.

"Mthombo, are you going to be okay?"

The D.I.Y bed is too small for his big body and long legs, he can't complain though. He wants to be here, even if it means giving up his comfort zone.

"I will be fine," he tells her.

"Do you need help getting on the bed?"

She called it a bed, might as well be.

"No, I will need a massage though."

Damn! He didn't come prepared for this, it's so strange how he planned everything, Samson's delay, and his sleepover but forgot his medication and massage oils.

"What happened?" Shiyiwe has seen the worry on his

face, he has no choice but to explain.

“I didn’t bring the massage oils,” he bites his bottom lip.

It’s a bad habit for an old man like him, thankfully his lips are hidden behind his beard.

“You didn’t bring the oils?” Shiyiwe frowns. “You say it as if you planned to sleepover.”

Oops! Another lip bite. He needs to be careful with his words.

He laughs, “You’re funny.”

This he says nervously, then clears his throat.

Shiyiwe smiles, it’s all she’s been doing since she came out of her room with a shower cap covering her head.

“Don’t worry, we can use Vaseline.” Great substitute.

“Too greasy,” he says.

“Cooking oil?” Her.

“I don’t like the smell.” It’s not just the smell, the thought of using cooking oil as a massage oil is

crazy.

“My sister has Dark ‘n Lovey, it smells great. We can use that.”

“What is it? I’d like to see the prescription card from a doctor or clinic, I have allergies.”

Shiyiwe looks confused, she’s staring incredulously.

“I didn’t know you need a prescription to buy hair moisturiser, you can’t tell me that we’ve been buying fake ones all this time.” She says, her frown deepening.

Mthombo is not getting what she’s saying, or she’s not getting what he’s saying. Someone is not getting someone here.

“Hair moisturiser?” The frown on his face explains that his mind is tangled.

“Yes, Dark ‘n Lovely is hair moisturiser. We can use that to massage your feet, I love the smell.”

That’s a crazy idea, of course he is not shocked. Only she can come up with an idea as absurd as her.

“No, don’t worry about it. I will be okay if I take a shower.” He needs that massage and a bath won’t work in its place, one thing is he will wake up in pain or uncomfortable.

“We don’t have a shower but a bathtub, I will warm some water for you. The geyser has been off since morning, we have to switch it off to save electricity.”

“I don’t mean to inconvenience you, forgive me, Nonyanda.” His voice is low and husky, must be that it’s almost midnight. He is usually asleep around this time.

“Are you kidding me? I don’t mind at all, I love having you, you’re nice.” She’s doing it again, he knows when her eyes widen like that that she’s let go of her mind.

“I’m sorry I...”

“Don’t say anything,” Mthombo cuts in before she off-ramps, she never comes back from those.

Shiyiwe nods and exhales, “I’ll warm your water.”

She hurries to the kitchen.

A smile finds his face, he can do this every day. He's never felt more at peace than he does now, it's insane when his mind digs into it.

Something is drawing him to this crazy, loud woman. He doesn't know what it is exactly, but there is a magnetic force, a pull; one would call it.

It's too soon, but he wants to tell her that she has to be around him at all times. She'd think he's a freak if he even hints at it.

She comes back a while later and tells him his water is ready.

Getting into the bathtub is not easy but he manages, the water is not much. He makes use of the green bar and blue face towel on the edge of the bathtub. She laid aside a tub of Vaseline as well.

He's done taking a bath, now... how to get out of this thing?

"Sir..." there's a knock on the bathroom door.

"Mthombo."

He smiles, soon he will be just Mthombo to her and not sir Mthombo.

"Are you okay in there? Do you need some help?"

He does, all the help she can give him.

"Uhh! No, I'm fine." Lies.

She's gone, he thinks of calling his brother. Surely Bhedlindaba must know how he can do this thing.

He answers immediately, as if he's been waiting for the call.

"How do I get out of a bathtub?" No greeting.

Ndaba should know how it's done. But the man is dead with laughter, Mthombo sighs. This cannot be happening to him.

"Tell me when you're done and I'll ask again." He grumbles.

Ndaba didn't hear that, not with how loud he's laughing.

"Are you stuck in her bathtub?" He's still laughing.

Mthombo hates to answer this but, "Yes. I managed

to convince myself that it will be easy, now I'm stuck."

"Call Shiyiwe, you have no other choice." He won't stop with his ugly laugh, it's getting boring.

"I'm naked you stupid fool,"

"Call me fool again and I'll make a phone call to Shiyiwe and tell her you're stuck, you know how audacious she is." Ndaba.

"I will cut off your allowance," Mthombo threatens.

"I have my own money," this one always has something to say.

Mthombo is on the verge of giving up, he can't possibly sleep in here but there's no other option because there is no way he will ask Shiyiwe for help. He's naked for crying out loud.

"Don't worry, I'll drive there and rescue you."

Amusement is evident in Ndaba's voice.

"Forget it, I'll make a plan." Mthombo drops the call.

This man has no plan.

Ten minutes have gone by, the water is getting cold. He pulls the plug and sighs as the water goes down the drain. The bathroom is freezing.

“Sir Mthombo, I’m coming in okay? I thought I should tell you first just in case you’re naked...” She’s doing it yet again. “I don’t mean to disrespect you by saying you’re naked sir, but there is no other way I can put it. Maybe if I say it in English it won’t sound like a swear word.”

Lord!

Mthombo buries his face in his hands, why does she blabber without a full stop.

“Shiyiwe stop talking and breathe.” He didn’t mean to snap.

There is silence on the other side of the door, he hopes she’s not upset for the way he spoke to her, but breathing like he said.

“Okay, sir. Cover what you must, I’m coming in to get you out.”

This has Bhedlindaba written all over it, he told that boy not to say anything.

The door handle moves, Mthombo covers his sack with the face cloth. His heart has stopped for a while, he's holding his breath.

"My eyes are closed, you can relax. I have a boyfriend if that helps." Her voice comes from behind the door.

This is the time when he wishes she didn't talk so much, he doesn't remember asking her about a boyfriend.

When Shiyiwe appears from behind the door, he looks away.

"Bhedlindaba told me that you're stuck, I have a towel. I'm going to wrap it around you, okay?"

What a predicament... Sigh! That boy Bhedlindaba never listens.

Mthombo lifts his eyes, she has a towel held out. Her eyes are shut like she said.

"Give it to me," he snatches it from her and covers

himself.

"You may open your eyes now."

Shiyiwe opens her eyes and gives him an apologetic smile.

"Put your arm around my shoulder," she tells him as she wraps an arm under his armpit.

The bathtub is slippery, so is Mthombo's body but they manage to get him on the wheelchair.

Out of breath, Shiyiwe places her hands on her hips. Looks like she needs a minute.

"Wow, you're heavier than you look." Yep, this is the woman she is.

It's not shocking anymore, but her eyes are wide. She's apologetic again.

"I'm sorry this happened to you sir, I forgot that our bathroom is not wheelchair friendly. I should've made an effort to make it comfortable for you."

She's blaming herself.

Mthombo is embarrassed, "You're taking good care

of me, Shiyiwe. I have no reason to complain about anything.”

Laughing away the embarrassment is working for him, she’s laughing with him.

“Now we have a story we’ll tell our children one day.”

Can one be drunk from laughter? It seems Mthombo has let his mind collaborate with his mouth, they have made a disaster.

“I’m sorry, that slipped out of my mouth.”

No, he is not sorry. If anything, he is enjoying the shock on her face.

“Are we going to have children?” Yep, she was caught off guard there.

He smirks, “Would you ever let me put a child inside you?”

Someone call 10111, 911... All the ones in the phone book.

This man is driving past the speed limit.

Shiyiwe chokes, she starts coughing uncontrollably.
He grows worried, who knew that words could kill?

“Are you okay?” He stays calm, they can’t both panic.
She looks at him with her wide eyes.

“Do you see a wife in me, sir?”

Mthombo did not expect this, she’s definitely
matching his character.

“I see everything in you, Nonyanda.”

Everything? He wants to name this “everything” but
they might crash if he continues to speed.

Shiyiwe goes quiet, she is never quiet.

“Talk to me,” Mthombo says.

They are in the bathroom, he’s naked behind the
towel. Talk about perfect timing.

“What do I say?”

Good question.

Shiyiwe is overwhelmed, it’s clear.

“We should get some sleep, we will talk tomorrow.”

He suggests.

He's said enough for the night. Shiyiwe nods and hurries out of the bathroom.

"Dammit!" He cusses under his breath.

If he has messed this up, it won't be easy to fix it.

.

.

TSHEGOFATSO MOSHEO-

Things are not going as per her plans, matter of fact, they are slipping out of her hands. She can't help but express anger towards the girl who's brought misfortune to her family.

Tonight is the night, she has something up her sleeve and is certain she will win this time.

Midnight has found her out of her house, she can do this anytime but there can't be a more appropriate time than this one.

She walks around naked and unafraid that someone

might see her, the fools are fast asleep.

The dogs next door start barking upon her arrival, she hates the sound and one day when she's in a mood she will slaughter every four legged animal in this place.

She's been here many times before, before Shiysiwe was born and after the yard was filled with big heads and a praying woman.

The streets are quiet and dark, save for the streetlights. A frown plasters on her face when she sees the new gate. It's actually better than that old rusty thing, Jele failed to change.

She clicks her tongue but goes on to climb the gate. Everything she's ever done, is for her daughter Ntebo.

"One of these days, this gate will fall on someone and break their neck." This is an oath she takes.

Tshego makes it to the other side and kneels down on the ground, in her hand is a glass bottle of mayonnaise and in it is a paper with Shiysiwe's name and surname written with a black ink. Three eggs and charcoal.

She scoops a hand full of soil, pours it inside the bottle.

As she seals it shut, she yells; "Shiyiwe Jele!"

She calls her name two more times.

"I am locking you inside this bottle, your future, your dreams and your womb. When these eggs start to rot, so will everything in your life, nothing good will come out of you Shiyiwe Jele. This curse is irreversible, no one will be able to reverse it."

Tshegofatso uses her hands to dig a hole and buries the bottle upside down.

Now that was easier than slicing a cake.

Next step!

.

.

MTHOMBO-

He's a light sleeper, that's why the sound of keys wakes him up. The TV is on, that's how he's able to

identify the woman trying to open the door.

“Shiyiwe?” He’s confused, the time on his phone says it’s 3:03am.

“Are you okay?”

No answer.

Confusion layers his face, why is she not saying anything? This is the same woman who can’t keep her mouth shut for half a second.

Mthombo gets on his wheelchair and pushes himself to where she is. When he takes her hand, Shiyiwe looks at him. Her eyes are empty, he can’t tell though if she’s sleep walking.

“Where are you going? It’s late.”

Diepkloof can’t be safe, nowhere is safe at this time in this country.

“Home.” Shiyiwe replies. “My father is calling me, I have to go to him.”

She can’t be talking about the same man whose corpse is said to be missing.

“Your father is not here,” this is strange for him.

What are the odds of sleeping over at someone’s house and seeing unusual things at night?

“He is, can’t you hear him calling my name?” Tears start to pour out of her eyes, she yanks her hand but he won’t let go. He can’t let her go not knowing what’s really out there.

“I don’t hear anything, I swear to you. Your father is not here.” He wants to tell her that he passed away, but with the state she’s in, he’s not sure if it is the right thing to do.

“Sssh!” Shiyiwe presses a finger to his lips. “Can you hear that? He keeps calling my name, he wants me to go with him.”

She turns to leave, Mthombo grips her wrist and roughly pulls her to his lap.

She falls with a gasp, and frowns at him.

“Nonyanda listen to me,” his tone is desperate and firm. “There is no one outside.”

“No, I have to go to my father.” This she says as she

tries to get up, he cradles her cheeks, forcing eye contact. This is confusing, if she's sleepwalking, she wouldn't be responding to him the way she is.

"Okay, okay fine. I will take you to him in the morning, it's not safe at this time."

What else can he say?

He is not sure why he's telling her this, he knows though that he can't let her walk out that door. She's hearing things that he can't hear.

When Shiyiwe gives no reply, Mthombo wheels the chair towards the couch. He makes her look at him again, her eyes are alive.

"Let's go to sleep, I'm here." He tells her.

He is here, forever if she wants him to. Shiyiwe nods, she leaves his lap and offers to help him get on the couch.

He's not an invalid, he knows how. But he is not going to reject her offer.

When he's seated with his legs stretched forward, he takes her hand.

"Stay with me, Nonyanda. I want to take care of you."
His voice is a whisper and it so happens that his eyes are staring deep into hers.

Tears!

She wipes them away, her bottom lip wobbles. More tears follow, Mthombo's exhalation is deep. He didn't mean to make her cry, perhaps there is another reason why she is crying.

"No one has ever wanted to take care of me before," she says. "Not even my father, he loved me but my sister was always his top priority. I was side lined and made to grow up before I grew a pair of breasts."

This is turning out to be a therapy session, the only thing he was offering was comfort.

Mthombo lies down, leaving space for Shiysiwe, there's not enough.

She will fall at first try.

Shiysiwe turns and walks away in tears, leaving

Mthombo swallowed by confusion. He drags his body up and turns to the direction she went.

He's about to curse himself when Shiyiwe walks back with two blankets, she pushes the coffee table to the side and spreads the blanket on the floor.

"We'll fit here. You're a teddy bear, that couch is too small."

She's not lying and it's the most uncomfortable thing he's ever slept on.

Once they are both seated on the floor, Mthombo pulls her to his chest, covers them with the other blanket, wraps his arms around her and pulls her down with him.

"Relax your body, you feel like a brick." He says.

She's too stiff and tense.

Shiyiwe sighs deeply and loosens up, her arm is on her side which is an uncomfortable position to be in.

He wants her arm around him.

Mthombo's arms squeeze around her, "Your head is on my chest Nonyanda. Surely you are aware that you have a claim over me. Don't be afraid to let your hand wander."

He lays a kiss at the top of her head. Shiyiwe shuffles against him, her breathing has become audible.

This girl is doing things to him, she is the one who is in control of his emotions.

There is silence, he wants to kick himself for letting such words out of his mouth. The thought runs away when Shiyiwe puts her arm over his waist.

"Are we in a relationship now?"

The question almost knocks the breath out of his lungs, he doesn't know how to answer her. He keeps quiet.

"Only lovers cuddle like this, but you are my boss who wants me to have his children. I don't want to be forward and assume things but I think you really like me. I have a boyfriend though, his name is Emeka. He's Nigerian."

He thinks she's done when she keeps quiet.

"I have been with him for as long as I can remember. I don't know if I love him, I can count the number of times he has told me that he loves me in one hand. He's never held me like this, no one has ever held me like this. Emeka will kill me if he finds me in the arms of another man, he has a short temper... sometimes."

She blabbers on, Mthombo is nursing something, a bruised ego perhaps. This is not how he saw this playing out.

He sighs deeply and hopes she falls asleep before he takes another breath.

.

.

A/N: I'm sorry it's taken so long to update, thank you for your patience. We're back to regular posting, sponsors are now open.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Twelve-

SHIYIWE

.

.

For the first in my life, I fell asleep in the arms of a man. Luck is going to follow me this week, I'll no longer be Shiysiwe, but Mlandile. This week they are fetching me from where my parents left me.

I look around, Mthombo is not here. The living room is empty.

My stupid mind convinced me that I'd see his wheelchair next to the couch, where would he go without it?

Last night was something out of one of my dreams, what woman doesn't enjoy being cuddled to sleep?

“Why are you smiling?” That's Mthandeni, she's standing by the kitchen door with a bowl of cornflakes.

I live in my own world, I didn't realise I was smiling. Mthombo is the reason behind my smile, but it's

wrong. I'm in a relationship, Emeka is the only man that stayed for over four years. The others were never consistent, they'd just end with one date or two. What we have can't be classified as a relationship, there really is no word for it. He's distant, scarce, and living his own life.

Maybe I'm fooling myself and I'm in a relationship with Emeka the name, not Emeka the man.

"Why didn't you wake me up? What time is it?" I ask, checking my phone.

There are no messages or missed calls, just a "please call me" from Samson. He's a man, he must make a plan for his family.

I'm going to throw this scrap of a phone away. It's useless if no one makes use of it.

I miss Mthandeni's answer, my focus is on WhatsApp. Mthombo's profile is the company's logo, how boring. He's not on line.

I doubt he knows how the app works.

"Are you okay?" Mthandeni calls for my attention.

I shrug, my heart feels heavy. Why would he leave without saying anything?

“Do you think I drooled on his shirt?” I’m asking my sister nonsense, she doesn’t know what I’m talking about.

She gleams, “Your pillow is never safe from your drool. What makes you think Mthombo was?”

I could drown her in that bowl of cereal.

I have to call Mthombo and explain. I fold the blankets and tidy up, Mthanden’s gaze feels heavy on me. She’s making it hard for me to move around.

“Whatever is on your mind, say it.”

“Is he the reason you were smiling to yourself? Are you sleeping with your boss?”

She’s nosy, but yes he is the reason behind my smile.

“Aren’t you late for school?” I answer her with a question.

“You are boring, I hate you.” She whines.

I dare her with a reprimanding stare, she snorts and

walks out with her plate.

I need to get my head out of the clouds, and stop expecting a message from Mthombo.

When will he go on line though? Should I text and ask why he left without informing me?

Someone is typing, I block her before the message goes through. Ntebo thinks I smoke weed for a living, I'm going to show her that she can't come in and out of my life as she pleases.

"Sisi, please do me a favour." Mthandeni is back.

"I have a friend, she's a sports physiotherapist. She needs a job."

"We all need jobs, welcome to South Africa." She's disturbing me, I have to keep my eye on Mthombo's WhatsApp, just in case I miss it when he goes on line.

"I'm serious, I was thinking that maybe you can talk to Bhedlindaba and ask him if she can do an internship at his company. His soccer players must be stiff as fuck." She laughs.

When did we get here?

I glance at her, "I'm not sleeping with his brother."

Yet!

"It's too early for me to be asking for big favours."

She bangs her back against the wall and sighs,
"Please. I'll wash the dishes for a week."

"Six months." I debate.

"Three months," she grumbles.

"Four months, take it or leave it." Does she know what she's asking of me? I will have to use my favour bundles to convince Ndaba to hire her friend.

"Fine, her name is Athule Makhedama. I wrote her details down, the paper is on the kitchen counter."

Her details? What will Ndaba do with her details? Since when does the employer contact the employee first? She's gone and without knowing it has given me a better reason to talk to Mthombo.

I gather up the courage to text him, Athule is the subject.

Waiting...

One tick?

Yeah about that luck... someone is tempering with it.

I'm beside myself when my phones rings, my heart being forward and stuff, jumps up. It's MG, at this point, I wish I was cousin-less. What the hell is this?

"What do you want?" I can't control myself when I'm angry.

"Meet me at the spaza shop, I need to talk to you."

No greeting after going Tupac on me.

"Come to the house, I have to be somewhere." KZN is my destination. I forgot to tell Mthandeni that I will be leaving today.

"There is a bouncer outside your house, I'm not risking it."

He must be talking about the body guard, I feel better knowing Mthombo was thoughtful enough to send the bodyguard.

"Let's meet Shiysiwe, it's important." There is urgency in his voice, MG is too mysterious lately.

“I’ll be there.”

I have to brush my teeth and make sure I look human before I step out.

.

.

.

MTHOMBO-

Zinqumo came to get him around 6am, he didn’t have time or the will to wake Shiyiwe up and tell her that he was leaving. He didn’t expect to find his parents seated at the breakfast table, his father gave him one long stare and excused himself. He hasn’t seen him since, he’s not sure if he still is around.

“You look different.” His mother always sounds warm, she might be a career woman who only has time for her children on Christmas holidays but she would die for her children.

“I feel different,” he greets her with a smile.

MaDlamini sits on his bed, she looks around. Something is different about this room, when she left, it felt dark and eerie.

She was the most broken when Mthombo was shot, after the doctor told them that he will never be able to walk again,

MaDlamini fell into depression. She found comfort in a glass of wine. One glass became one too many, it took years for her to get over it.

“You sound different too,” she giggles. “Who is she?”

Mthombo is surprised, it can't be obvious that his heart has decided to love again. MaDlamini knows about the Jeles, she will never vouch for them, god-knobs how the enmity between them and the Jeles began.

“Am I that obvious mom?”

“Not really, Zinqumo told me there is a girl, that's all. Your father was given more details. Why do you think he hasn't smiled today?” She replies.

He thinks it's insane, Zwangendaba hardly ever

smiles.

“Does it matter who she is? Dad will never approve.”

He’s saying too much without actually saying much, MaDlamini suddenly looks worried.

“Mthombo, don’t do anything that will upset your father. You know how he can be.” she says.

“How can I forget? It’s his way or the highway.” He snorts.

Their relationship was made during the apartheid when fathers believed that boys should be handled roughly. A man does not belong in the kitchen. A man does not laugh out loud. A man finishes his food. A man should work under the scorching sun in order to bring food home.

When Bhedlindaba and Zinqumo were born, he had become soft. He complained and punished less.

“That is not true son and you know it.”

He knows nothing except that his father will never accept Shiyiwe, him and Zinqumo share the same big head.

"You're always defending him, he will always be perfect in your eyes." he says, a little disappointed.

Her shoulders slouch, she goes to stand in front of him.

"Mthombo, your father always wants what's best for all his children. Whatever he does, is for you all."

"Okay mom," he might as well be telling her to fuck off.

MaDlamini stands behind the wheelchair and starts massaging his shoulders.

"Tell me about the girl who has convinced my son to leave the house after six years."

It's not that deep but Mthombo has a smile on his face.

"Her name is Shiysiwe."

Why is she laughing?

"That's a ridiculous name," she says.

"Her name is irrelevant, I think I'm falling in love with her mom." It's the first time he is verbally expressing

this.

"That's good news then, invite her over. I'd like to meet her." MaDlamini.

It's not a problem, none whatsoever. It's a disaster, what will he tell Shiyiwe. She is aware of his feelings, but she has a boyfriend. He is not sure if she will ever accept him, he's wheelchair bound for heaven's sake.

"I will tell the cook to prepare a feast and..."

MaDlamini is over the moon, will she feel the same when she finds out that she is the daughter of the man they think is responsible for Zinzi's death and Siko's disappearance.

"No, I don't want Shiyiwe to meet dad. It's too soon." He sighs and scratches his beard.

"For once we agree on something," that's his father.

He's standing in the doorway, he is hopping mad and breathing fire.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

I find MG sharing a smoke with some dodgy looking guy at the spaza shop.

“Shiyiwe!” He waves, the Nyaope boy he adopted laughs. I get that a lot, people think my name is a joke, they always find humour whenever it’s mentioned.

MG tells him to leave, I hate that we had to meet here. Shady people are found here, just weeks back a few boys were arrested for selling drugs on this street.

“Where is your bodyguard?” He asks.

“Home,” I tell him.

He blows a cloud of smoke to my face.

Secondhand smoke is dangerous. I might as well be sharing that cigarette with him. “Where have you been? A woman was killed at your house, who is she? Where is Babomncane?” I attack him with questions.

“Calm down, we know about the woman. She was

my father's baby mama." He's oddly calm.

"She was your mom?" I didn't know his mother was back.

"No, my dad has a six year old kid. I found out about it after we came back from the funeral. The woman just came out of nowhere claiming he's the father."

Men and poking their penises in every hole they find.
I have my own problems.

"What you saw in Riverlea was just the beginning.
Our lives are in danger, we have to keep a low profile."

"Low profile? What's going on MG?"

"The man at our house was sent by the Meyiwas,
they want to kill us."

"No, you're joking." That can't be, not Mthombo.

"Why would I joke about our lives? They killed your parents, and had the audacity to show up at their funeral."

"MG, are you sure about this? You're not lying to

me?"

"Why would I lie to you? Ask my father, he will tell you everything."

How do I ask a man who hasn't shown his face since the funeral? He takes my hand and ushers me to a white Bakkie.

"You have a car?" This should be the least of my worries, it worries me though that my cousin is hiding things from me.

"Uhhh... I borrowed it from a friend." He's hesitant, his eyes are shifty.

"Your friend borrowed you a brand new car? The number plates haven't been screwed on yet."

He follows my line of sight, clears his throat, and opens the door for me. I'm not comfortable in here, or in his presence. I want to leave, if I do that, my questions will never be answered.

MG glances around before he gets in and shut the door.

“You are worrying about the wrong things Shiyiwe. Mthombo Meyiwa slept over at your house? Aren’t you by any chance concerned about what I told you? Those people are dangerous, stay away from them.”

Not after last night, I know it was one night, but it was the best night of my life. He made me feel wanted and seen, how do I let go of something like that?

“Mthombo would never do that, I know him.” I argue his claim.

It hasn’t been long, but I know him.

“And when did you get the time to observe him? 24 hours is not enough to know someone Shiyiwe.”

“Okay fine, let’s say you’re right. Let’s say Mthombo is behind the death of my parents, why hasn’t he made a move on me? I have been alone with that man every day of the week and not once did he show any hostility towards me. He is a good man MG, I see it in his eyes. He is gentle with his words, he’s gentle with me too.” I don’t need a year to get to know someone, those hours were enough for me.

“Let me guess, he’s shown an interest in you, right?”
MG is starting to irritate me, I’d rather be in the presence of a fly than him.

I don’t answer, he will only feed me with more lies.

“It’s how they work, it’s who the Meyiwases are, they lure their enemies in with the pretext of kindness. He will strike when you least expect it, don’t say I didn’t tell you.”

“Stop MG, I have heard enough, Mthombo is not like that. I have seen his kindness, he wasn’t faking it. I’m not an idiot.” I shout, he deserves my wrath.

“No, but you’re desperate to be seen and appreciated.” He sits back on the seat after grating my heart.

I know myself better than anyone, how come I am not aware that I’m desperate for attention?

“Take that back, MG.”

He looks back at me, his eyes are bloodshot. Is he on drugs?

“We grew up together Shiyiwe, I saw how your

parents treated you. You were just an extra mouth to feed, they tried so hard to hide it and failed dismally. That's how everyone was able to see that you were a nonfactor. You never fit in, no matter how hard you tried."

He exhales and rubs his red eyes. He is making it a point to hurt me and it's working.

"Why are you saying these things to me, MG? Is it because I refuse to stay away from Mthombo?"

It's the only sensible explanation I can conjure up, my own blood working hard to crush my spirit.

"We're cousins, I care about you."

The double standards.

"If you cared, you wouldn't be telling me this nonsense."

"The truth can never be nonsense Shiyiwe, if I am not blunt with you, you will never see reason. You're an orphan again..."

"Again?" I cut in.

He drops his mouth and cusses under his breath.

“I didn’t say again, did I?” He’s stuttering and suddenly nervous.

“You said I’m an orphan again, what did you mean by that?”

My palms are sweaty, MG looks like he’s been caught in the act. He won’t look at me.

“I have to go, my father is waiting for me.” He starts the car, I snatch the keys and throw them out the window.

“You’re not going anywhere,” I shout.

My hands are shaking, my heart is thumping against my ribcage.

“I didn’t mean what I said mzala...”

“Yes you did, now tell me the truth you asshole.” I scream.

No one is leaving this car.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Thirteen

MTHOMBO-

.

.

A visit from his father is never pleasant, Mthombo is sweating pearls. Zinqumo must have left no stone unturned when he snitched.

“What is this I hear?” Zwangendaba saunters into the bedroom, daggers drawn and ready to shoot his son.

“What did you here?” Mthombo.

He is not about to sell himself out, his father has to be clear about what he’s talking about.

“Not only did you travel all the way to KZN to attend Jele’s funeral, you spent the night at his house too?”

Mthombo scrunches his face, he would do anything to slap Zinqumo across that pampered white boy face of his. That spoiled brat!

“I had reasons,” Mthombo shrugs, clenching his jaw in a silent protest.

“What reasons?”

He didn’t expect his father to burst out in anger, he’s

always had a short fuse when it comes to him and Bongukwanda.

“I was supporting a friend baba.”

Zwangendaba raises a disapproving brow, “Who is this friend?”

Mthombo lifts his brows too, and holds a stare. Usually, his father would find it disrespectful.

“I think you know who, so why are you asking?”

Mthombo.

MaDlamini has seen the end of this, she has been a witness to many of these.

Letting out a soft sigh, she looks at Mthombo and shakes her head in disapproval. He shouldn’t be talking to his father like that.

“I want you to stay away from her.” Ngendaba orders.

Mthombo chuckles, without showing teeth or a twitch of the lips.

“I’m not doing that.” He says.

“Are you challenging me, boy?”

“I’m standing up for myself, you can’t control me baba.” Mthombo.

“Standing up for yourself?” Ngendaba snorts.

Knowing her husband and his absurd lines of attack, she places a hand on his shoulder and hopes he will calm down.

“Then stand,” Ngendaba commands.

Mthombo’s jaw clenches, he’s used to this kind of treatment. It doesn’t mean it doesn’t sting, this is his father for heaven’s sake.

“I said stand!” The only bull that can stand in the kraal howls, MaDlamini flinches

The staring contest between father and son is getting heated, Mthombo is glaring, nose flaring.

“You can’t stand, can you?”

Of course he can’t stand.

“If you cannot literally stand on your own two feet, then do not challenge me boy. Only a real man can stand head to head with another man. My house, my fucking rules. You think you got balls now? You think

you're man enough to challenge me?" This man sounds like a commanding army officer.

"Oh believe me, he's got balls." Someone says behind them.

Bhedlindaba walks in, a mischievous smile on his face.

His outfit stands out... brightly. He looks like a rich version of a pantsula boy. An orange overall, red and black checked button-up shirt. He's complimented the outfit with red and white Converse All-star, and a bright yellow spoti. It's not even supported by his head, one blow and it flies away.

Everyone frowns at what he's wearing, they feel like they have travelled back in time when Bhedlindaba was a teenager.

Nevertheless, this is not what they wear in this family. They are a reputed family, they need to look the part.

"What are you talking about?" Zwangendaba asks,

choosing to ignore the ridiculous outfit.

“My brother has balls baba, I’ve seen them. They are ugly, but they are there. Believe me.” He emphasises by shaping an invisible ball with his hand, he adds a smirk or a grin or whatever that thing is on his face.

What’s left is for him to explain where he’s seen those balls because wow.

“I told you never to interfere when I’m talking to your brother.” Zwangendaba chides, he can’t be tough on this one. He’s one of the golden sons.

“He is my brother, if I don’t stand up for him, who will?”

Good question.

Ndaba’s eyes lock with his father’s, they are having a moment... Nope there is no moment, Zwangendaba is seething mad.

“Europe didn’t change you taima, you are still a bully.”

Forget Ndaba calling his father a bully... Taima? Tha...yii...maa?

Zwangendaba has no time to process the change of language and clothing, he is angered by this boy's impudence. He lifts his hand to slap him, MaDlamini stands in front of Ndaba. The slap lands on her face.

Dense silence!

Zwangendaba looks like he just slapped Jesus, his eyes are popping out of their sockets. His lower lip is quivering.

"Mkami?" He breathes, something he shouldn't be doing after what he's done.

"I'm sorry, I wanted to hit this stupid boy. But my hand found your cheek instead."

No, she came for it.

MaDlamini is calm, although a tear escapes her eye. She wipes it away, and walks out of the room.

"MaDlamini, I'm sorry. Yobe mntakwethu." He yells after her, he is apologetic. It's loud in the tone of his voice.

Zwangendaba shoots his sons deadly glares, his

face softens when he runs after his wife, lovingly calling her by her clan names.

Ndaba is in stitches.

“What’s funny? Your father just hit your mother.” Mthombo chides him.

“The slap was meant for me, ma’oledi will be fine.” Ndaba.

This is getting weird.

“What is wrong with you? Why are you talking like that? That is not a proper way to speak and what are you wearing? I thought you got rid of those.”

Mthombo is mystified by the sudden change in his brother.

“I have kept a façade for the sake of peace, your father practically forced me to pack away who I was and become the son he can brag about to his high profile friends. Not anymore.” Ndaba, he slants to the side and rests his arm on the small of his back, as if standing straight hurts his spine.

Mthombo is looking at a tsotsi from eZola.

“I don’t understand, I thought you were done with this dress code and language.”

He’s been a good boy for years, portraying the perfect son image.

“What if I want to irritate the fuck out of your father?” Ndaba wriggles his eyebrows, he’s spotting narrowed eyes and a smirk on his face.

“I want him to swim back to Europe once I’m done with him. I know why he’s here, he came to destroy what you’re trying to build with Shiyiwe. I’m not letting that happen ntwana.”

Argh! He just said ntwana.

Mthombo appreciates the love, but it’s really not necessary.

“You don’t have to do that, I can fight my own battles.” Mthombo argues.

Ndaba grins a Cheshire cat grin, shoves his hands into the pockets of his overalls and does a dramatic spin straight from the streets of Ekasi. He winks at

his brother and bounces out of the room. Mthombo is defeated, that's the seventeen year-old Ndaba, hard-headed Ndaba. The one who is more comfortable in Jozi, speaking his people's language than in Sandton, hoping not to run out of his English bundles before the day ends.

Mthombo's attention is quickly diverted back to Shiysiwe, he needs to call her.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

"It's not my place to tell you anything."

Bullshit! He should've thought of that before he let the words slip out of his mouth.

"I don't care, I want the truth." I persist.

My morning was going okay, he started this and he better finish it.

"I don't know the entire story just that you were

found at the doorstep in the early hours of the morning.”

I feel like my soul just left my body, MG has said this with no care in his voice. Like a Shoprite cashier calling his next client.

“Who told you this?”

“My father, it slipped.” This boy needs to give details, he can’t drop a bomb and not give me anything to stand on.

“Shiyiwe, I swear I didn’t mean for it to come out this way.”

Could have fooled me.

“Stop trying to justify yourself and tell me everything.”

“I don’t have the entire truth Shiyiwe, only my father knows what happened 27 years ago. I can take you to him, he will tell you everything.”

Maybe he’s right, interrogating him will get me nowhere. I calm my breathing and wait as he dashes out of the car to get the keys.

“Is he in Riverlea?” I ask as he climbs back in.

“Yes.”

I’m beside myself with anger, these people have been here all along and not once did they bother to check up on us.

I want to ask more, but I’m upset with him.

He drives in silence, he’s probably thinking of more lies to feed me.

.

.

Like he said, uncle Velakithi is home. There’s a boy sitting on his lap, playing with a toy. I don’t greet, I want him to know that I’m livid.

“Shiyiwe?” The old man looks startled. “Wh- what are you doing here?”

He never stutters.

“She knows,” that’s all MG says.

He takes the little boy’s hand and walks away without his father’s reply. The child must be shy, not

once did he make eye contact.

“Sit!” Uncle Vela offers. I didn’t come here for tea and biscuits, I’m not going to sit down.

“MG says I was found at my parent’s doorstep, is it true?”

He looks at me, or he is searching for a connection. He holds the gaze as if confirming if I can stand what’s coming.

“Yes, Jele and MaMbuyazi were not your parents.”

My knees wobble, I should’ve accepted the offer to sit. But I have to be strong, I can’t afford to crumble. No one will hold me down, I’m alone in this. I swallow my tears and gulp.

“Where are my real parents? Who are they?”

“No one knows, whoever dropped you there didn’t leave a note or your birth certificate.” Like his son, he is emotionless.

“So my date of birth is a lie?”

My entire life actually, how can MaMbuyazi and her husband do this to me?

Velakithi stands, he's pouring himself a glass of scorch. I wish it was poison, so it kills him on the spot. He faces me while taking a sip.

"They decided to name you Shiyiwe, maybe they needed a reminder that you were abandoned at the doorstep."

What he's saying is stupid.

"Mthandeni is their only child, my brother was not as perfect as he made people believe. He couldn't have a place for you in his heart, and leaving everything to Mthandeni is proof enough."

He's talking about the will.

"I thought there is no will, Ncane Samson has occupied the house with his family." I tell him.

He smiles widely at me and drinks his liquor.

"There is a will, I was present when he made it. The house in Diepkloof, the one in KZN and all his moneys are in Mthandeni's name. He left you goats and chickens to start a farm or something like that." He says, shrugging his shoulders.

I can't do this anymore, I run out of the house, no one is calling after me. It's not like they care, I'm not their blood.

I run as fast as I can until I reach a railway, it looks like it hasn't been used in years. Not far from it is a bridge and moving cars above it. I might get a ride.

Along the way, I trip and fall, my shoes comes off. It's stuck on the railway. I told Mthombo not to take those carvelas, I'd be far by now. I go back for it and squat to pull it out.

In the meantime, it's becoming impossible to ignore the tight feeling on my chest, and the lump on my throat. So I scream and let it all out, tears refuse to show and I need them.

I don't give myself time to recover, Riverlea is not safe. I haven't seen a soul here. I leave the shoe and start walking towards the bridge.

I'm about five minutes into my walk when intuition

urges me to look back, there are two men walking behind me. My heart tumbles to the lowest pit in my stomach at how our eyes lock for a second.

Rule number one: Never make eye contact with strange men, especially if you're walking alone. They see it as an invitation to trouble you.

Breathe Shiyiwe, breathe.

It's impossible to exercise my breathing with the speed my heart is going and because of that, my body refuses to comply, it's trembling with fear. I have never struggled with schooling my features, or emotions.

"Sisters, don't you want us to accompany you?"

One of them yells, his raspy voice tells me his throat has been subjected to days if not months or years of smoking and drinking. I'm able to stop myself from responding, and continue my strides as if they are not following me.

Thoughts of being mugged and possibly raped fill my head and increase the fear that's already engulfed around me. This is South Africa and the

last I checked, it had the highest rate of rape in the world.

I hide my phone in my bra and take bigger steps.

“We’re talking to you, wena. What’s wrong with you?”

The second question comes from a different voice.

This time, I’m fast-walking while trying not to look over my shoulder. However, I know they are after me. My biggest fear is seeing how near they are, what if it weakens me further.

“You think you’re beautiful wena, we’re trying to give you a chance here.”

The tone of their voices carry nothing but aggression with hints of something sinister.

The thought and urge to run nudges me, but I know if I run they will run after me. I pick up my pace, my breathing accelerates and tears threaten my eyes.

The sound of footsteps following behind me and sounding louder with each step shake the ground under my feet, there’s an undeniable urge to look

back and see if they really are following or I'm imagining it.

But that means I would have to run after that.

Because my body never listens to me, or it is its way of calling me stupid, I grab a big stone and call on the spirits of all black athletes in the world. I'm running.

A pulsating heat covers me, as the loud sound of their footsteps quicken, confirming that they are tailing me. Somehow, I lose balance and tumbled to the ground, butt first. My ancestors never loved me, whoever they are. They must be seated back, feet up, popcorn on their laps and eyes glued to a plasma screen, watching my life crumble to pieces.

It's too late to get up and run, they are hovering over me predatory, glaring with mischievous smirks that send unsettling chills down my spine.

"Stay away from me, I will scream." I throw the stone at one of them, he ducks.

They look so young, probably around Mthandeni's age, maybe if I plead with them, they will sympathise

with me.

“Yah, s’febe.” (Bitch)

One of them tilts his head to the side and spits on the ground, disgust paints his features. Death calls me at the sight of their eyes undressing me.

“Please, take whatever you want, just don’t hurt me...” I pleaded for my life with tears streaking my face, this is not me. I’m not quick to tears.

But I’m a woman at the end of it all, men are still stronger. It’s how God made them, however I’d like to believe he made a blunder of giving them an animalistic behaviour.

It’s so bad that they have no regard for human life, like these young men. Their heads are filled with nothing but repulsive, earth shattering thoughts. They probably know where they will dump my lifeless body.

“Take my phone, it’s the only thing I have.” Literally.

I toss the phone to the side, they look at it and laugh.

“Why did you run?” My hand is grabbed with vicious force, my head spins and an ear splitting scream erupts through my lips.

“Don’t touch me!” I’m disgusted.

I didn’t know what my fate was when I took this route, I never stopped to think about it. Even if I had the chance to ponder upon it, this wouldn’t have crossed my mind.

RUN! FIGHT! SCREAM! My mind tells me, but how do I do that? These strong creatures are dragging me towards a dark alley, against my will. I can’t let that happen, I can’t let them rape me. I will die.

The one that’s dragging me, I bite his wrist. He screams like a bitch and lets me go. I take off running again, I guess I’m not that fast because someone curls an arm around my waist and throws me on the ground.

I don’t wait for anything, but stand back up and try to run once more. I’m kicked on my stomach.

“Voetsek sfebe, uzofa mgodoyi.” They swear and beat me up.

I fight back, kicking and screaming. One punch strips me of my strength, I'm lying flat on the ground not wanting to accept my fate.

They start shouting, vile words seeping from their mouths. I can't make out what they are saying through my loud vocal chords, but they are convinced they have the right to my body.

"You think you're Chuck Norris wena sfebe?"

I don't know which one shouts, nor do I know who's kicking me. I think my ancestors are stripping me of sight, there's a blurry veil blocking my vision.

My feet have not given up on me, I know because I'm still kicking with everything in me.

One of them grabs my feet, the other my hands. The one at my feet pins me down with his body, I tense when he snuggles into my neck.

His breath smells, it stirs the contents of my stomach. I gag, and throw up on his shoulder.

"Fuck!" He shouts, removes his t-shirt and spits on my face.

I can't wipe the disgusting thing away, his accomplice is holding my hands above my head. I've been screaming, why is no one coming to my rescue?

The boy who spit on me grabs my shirt, pulling me towards him only to push me back against the concrete ground.

I feel or hear a crack on my skull, I'm not sure but I can't move anymore. My limbs are weak.

"I'll start, you take pictures. Boss wants evidence."

He says, unzipping his pants.

Panic hits me like a train.

Now I'm screaming, "Help!"

It's making them angry, they are telling me to shut up while stripping my clothes off.

I'm not going to shut up or beg for my life, I refuse to let them feel powerful, to let them ride on this. They have no right, no right whatsoever. It's my body and I will fucking fight till my last breath.

.

.

A/N: Please don't pull back from commenting, you guys already know what drives me. Can we show growth from Mathonga? It feels like I'm moving backwards in terms of Facebook diaries or going nowhere slowly. I have been in this platform for over 3 years, surely something's gotta give.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Fourteen

SHIYIWE

.

.

A gun goes off, "Yeyi voetsek zinja!" Follows.

They are startled and take off running, leaving me on the ground, trembling like a leaf.

"Are you okay, sisi?" The voice that had yelled the cuss words says, I raise my gaze to see a middle aged man.

He could be well in my father's age, he's carrying a

gun and worry on his features. He's also a man, I don't know what his intentions are. Maybe he wants to have me to himself, I can't trust him.

I'm glancing up at him, afraid to utter a word. The harmless look on his face should have me trusting him, right?

I think my mouth will work well with my brain and comply when a young woman appears behind him. There's a white van parked from the direction she's coming from. The man turns to face her then he's back to scanning me with his worried gaze.

"Baba," the woman calls, heaving and panting. "How is she?"

Her eyes dart to me, "Are you okay sisi?"

At her question, my eyes open up like a broken dam and tears flow down my cheeks. I try to control the sob pushing through my lips to no avail. I burry my face in my hands, and let it all out.

I was almost raped.

"It's okay sisi, you're safe now." It's the man,

covering me with a coat. I feel him giving my head a soft pat.

The lady helps me up to my unsteady feet, I can barely stand. My stomach feels like it's been punched a million times, my head hurts and I think I lost a tooth when they punched me on the face.

She picks up my phone from the ground, dusts it and hands it to me.

"Where do you live? We'll drop you home." -her.

"I'm Mphako Makhadema," he introduces when he spots the fear lurking in my eyes. I'm not about to follow strangers to God knows where. "This is my daughter, Athule."

Athule's smile is warm, her name sounds familiar. I can't put my mind to it.

"Shiyiwe Je..." I stop, when I remember that I am not a Jele. I don't know who the fuck I am.

"My name is Shiyiwe." My voice does not disappoint through the tears.

I wait for them to pull funny faces, smirk or laugh at

my name. They don't.

"We live opposite Riverlea Primary, we were on our way home when we saw those two men..." she stops, and clenches her teeth.

"I'm sorry that happened to you, they didn't hurt you, did they?"

"Just a few beatings, nothing I can't handle." Lies, I'm in pain.

"I think we should take her to the hospital baba, she looks badly injured." Athule.

"Let's go," Mphako says.

Athule's presence makes me feel a bit safe, she is a woman too. I believe she'd fight with me if Mphako decides to turn on me.

.

.

Baragwanath Hospital is not far from Riverlea, Mphako parks the van in the parking lot. Athule helps me out, her arm is around my waist. The pain has increased.

It takes time for me to be taken into a ward, and monitored. A person will die while waiting on these bloody freezing chairs.

The doctor tells me that I have a ruptured rib and my jaw shifted a fraction. I have to be admitted, stay here until they authorise my release.

Shiyiwe Jele, look at the mess you have gotten yourself into.

“Koko!”

Athule and her father are still here, they were kind enough to wait.

“How are you feeling now?” She walks to the other side of the bed.

“Like I lost a million bucks.”

She smiles and nods.

“We have to go now sisi, is there anyone you want us to call before we leave?”

I have no one in mind, Mthandeni has classes. I don’t

know if Mthombo will take my calls.

"My sister is on the way, don't worry about me." I lie.

I'm going to be fine.

They say their goodbyes and leave.

My phone is on the small table next to the bed, I check for messages.

Where are you?

Talk to me, please. I'm worried about you.

He's been blowing up my phone with messages, Mthombo will have a fit when he finds out I instructed the bodyguard not to follow me to the spaza shop.

I reply to the message, telling him I have been admitted at Bara hospital.

A call instantly comes through, unfortunately it's not him.

I shouldn't be answering this woman's calls, but it could be about Mthandeni.

“Your father and brother were arrested for attempted theft, and shoplifting.”

I have a father and brother? The world keeps on surprising me.

“Samu, what is it?” These people don’t get that life is not about them, I have a mountain of problems.

“We were locked up at Jet, I don’t know how that happened.”

Tell me something I don’t know. Yawn!

“When the doors opened this morning, the manager was furious. They wouldn’t let us go, he thought we stole clothes. They stripped us naked saying we had layers under our clothes. Even my kids were not spared.”

She’s crying, must be nice to cry because of something so small.

“Samu, I can’t do this right now. Can you call later?”

She’s giving me a headache.

“Shiyiwe, did you hear what I said. We were humiliated in front of the staff.”

“At least their intentions were not to rape you, I was stripped naked by men who wanted to rape me.”

How am I saying this without tearing up?

Her sobs harass my ears, she’s giving me an extra headache.

“You have a job now, right? I need money to get Samson and Gezani out of jail, my husband has never spent a day in jail. How am I going to look him in the eye?”

Eh! Wow, she didn’t hear a word I said. Or she did and doesn’t give a rat’s ass.

“The money I have is for Mthandeni’s lunch, my sister works hard at school. An empty stomach would pull her back.”

I have no cent on me, I want this woman to know how it feels to be rejected.

“Shiyiwe please, I will pay you back. I promise.”

With what? Bread crumbs?

“My airtime is running out, I have to go.” I say and disconnect the call. She’s the one who called me, in

a way I'm saving her airtime. My body aches when I shuffle on the bed. I need to get those men arrested, where will I start though? The case won't even be taken seriously.

Something is stuck with me, nonetheless. One of them said the boss will want pictures. That means someone sent them to attack me, either they knew where I was or they were following me and I wasn't aware of it.

.

.

MTHOMBO-

When he left home, his destination was the hospital. He changed his mind along the way and told the driver to drive him to Bongukwanda's house. The bodyguard who was to look after Shiysiwe reported her missing ten minutes after she didn't come back from the spaza shop, he was fired.

His job was to follow her around like an annoying

mosquito. How hard was that?

His brother's fiancé opens the door, Deli smiles like she always does when she sees him.

"MaGumede," he greets.

Her smile widens, Kwanda calls her Deli or babe.

"What happened? You look terrible." She gives him a worried look.

"Life." Mthombo laughs, he's here to talk to his brother not his fiancé.

"Bhuti?" Kwanda appears behind Deli, he's carrying the same worried expression maybe because this is the first time Mthombo is gracing him with his presence.

Kwanda looks at Deli, "Why is my brother kept outside like a stranger? Move out of the way babe."

Kindly if she would. Mthombo is led to the lounge.

"Please make him a strong cup of coffee." Kwanda.

She nods and makes her way to the kitchen.

Bongukwanda sits on the couch opposite Mthombo.

“I heard Zwangendaba is back, is he the reason you’re here?” Kwanda asks.

Mthombo laughs, there is absolutely nothing to laugh about.

“Maybe, Shiyiwe brought me here.”

Kwanda looks confused, “Shiyiwe Jele?”

“I have fallen in love with her, I don’t know how or when it happened.”

Kwanda doesn’t answer, he’s not sure what to say yet. Zinqumo had mentioned it, but he thought the boy was observing too much of his brother and his caregiver.

“She’s at the hospital, I was on my way there but something keeps pulling me back. I want to see her, but the thought of seeing her face annoys me, for some reason.”

“I don’t understand,” Kwanda.

Mthombo doesn’t understand either, he’s never felt like this towards Shiyiwe.

"I'm confused too, I'm worried about her, Kwanda. I need to know if she's okay."

"Then go to her," Kwanda says.

He really doesn't understand.

"For the first time in six years, you have let your heart feel, it knows love again. I thought Zinzi was going to occupy that space forever." Kwanda.

Mthombo's face changes instantly, it always does when Zinzi is mentioned. He doesn't want to be reminded of the past, the promise he's failing to keep.

Mthombo stares at him for what seems like forever, his eyes blood shot red. He shakes his head, puts his elbows on his knees and covers the back of his head with his hands.

"Do you think Shiyiwe will ever accept a man in a wheelchair?"

Okay! He'd rather talk about Shiyiwe than his late wife.

Kwanda shrugs, he doesn't know Shiysiwe so, he wouldn't know.

Kwanda is more of a listener than a speaker, that's why he doesn't say anything.

"Do you know how it's like to feel useless? This damn thing feels like a prison sentence." Mthombo mutters.

He was never this open with his brothers, or anyone about being paralyzed. This could mean that his heart really has melted.

"It doesn't have to feel like that, this doesn't mean that your life has stopped. You can still live a normal life."

Mthombo shakes his head, tears have covered his eyes. He wipes them away.

"Forget it, forget I said anything." He smiles at Kwanda and looks up at the woman walking in with a cup of hot liquid. Kwanda stands up immediately.

"Thanks," he says smiling, she smiles back.

He takes the cup from her.

“How is he?” Deli.

She looks at Mthombo, he feigns a smile.

“I’m fine MaGumede,” Mthombo replies.

She’s not buying it, his red-rimmed eyes have her worried.

“You know I’m a good listener, I can speak to her if you like.”

Mthombo gives her a questioning look, she giggles.

“Come on, I know that look. Only a woman can be responsible for that look.”

This is awkward, Mthombo rubs his nape. He’s embarrassed.

“It’s not like that,” Mthombo.

Bongukwanda lightly pats her back, “Thank you for the coffee, babe.”

He’s dismissing her.

Deli knows it’s her turn to leave, she is extremely making Mthombo uncomfortable.

She turns to walk away but stops mid-way.

“It’s nice to see you out of the house bhuti.”

Yoh!

Mthombo nods and of course, he has to return the smile. He is able to loosen up and be comfortable again when Deli is out of sight.

“You better drink that, you need it and stop smiling at my wife.” Kwanda.

Mthombo rubs his forehead briskly before heaving a sigh, he can’t go back to what they were talking about before Deli came. He is so sure that no one understands him, they never will because they are not stuck on a wheelchair.

“You should go check on Shiyiwe, I’m sure she’s waiting for you.”

Mthombo doubts it.

However, he needs to know if she is okay. He will have to fight against this feeling that’s pulling him away from her.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

I'm woken up by a familiar scent, strange how my senses would pick it up in a place that smells of medicine.

He's here, looking down at me. An apologetic look on his face.

"Hey!" I smile while scratching my chin and cheeks.

My body is suddenly itchy.

Not fair, I should be getting a smile in return. Why is he so serious?

"Who did this to you?"

Is this the angry Mthombo? He looks scary.

"I was attacked by two men in Riverlea. Thankfully, Athule and her father were passing by. They saw what was happening and rescued me before..." I stop, not wanting to think what could have happened had Athule and Mphako not arrived.

“Before what?” He asks.

I thought he’d let it go.

“I don’t want to dwell on that anymore, I’m fine now.”

“Would you be able to identify them?”

Habe! Did he not hear what I said?

“I don’t know, everything was happening in a fast pace. The only thing stuck with me is their scents, dirty, sweaty and...”

My hands start trembling, he squeezes one.

“It’s okay.” He says.

It’s not okay. I am not okay.

“They were sent to attack me,” I tell him.

Mthombo’s gaze asks for honesty before he asks,
“Are you sure?”

I nod, “They were going to rape me and record it.
One of them said the boss will need evidence.”

Only now I realise that I can’t avoid talking about this.

Mthombo’s jaw ticks with tension, his eyes darken.

“We’ll get them, don’t worry.” He says.

That’s what I want, but I won’t keep my hopes up. He touches my itchy face.

“I promised to never let anything happen to you, my word still stands.”

I believe him, I have no reason not to. MG lied, this man would never hurt me. He makes me feel safe.

I push my painful body up and put my arms around him. He holds me back, a little tighter. He smells like sin, fornication on steroids. A forbidden fruit I shouldn’t be touching.

He smells like a real man.

This hug, his arms around me, should be a trigger. But the only thing I feel is safe. When I pull back, his eyes are wide and he’s frowning.

I don’t know if he’s looking at me or a two-headed monster.

“Are you okay?” I ask.

My face is not that badly disfigured.

Wincing in pain, I use my hand to soothe his frown.

He clears his throat, “I should be asking you if you’re okay.”

He looks uncomfortable.

“You did and I said I’m okay, you’re here.” My smile is not returned, his focus is on my face. If he could use a magnifying glass, he would.

“Mthombo, are my bruises that bad? You look petrified.”

His eyes widen further, he shifts uncomfortably.

“Mthombo stop looking at me like that, I’m going to cry.” Why would I cry? He’s scaring me though.

Mthombo clenches his eyes and rubs them, when he opens them he looks more terrified.

That’s it.

I grab my phone and check my face, I look fine.

I don’t like these withdrawal symptoms from Mthombo. Why is he suddenly behaving like this?

“I have to go,” he mumbles, reversing the wheelchair.

“Is everything okay?”

“Yeah, I just remembered I have something to do.”

He’s lying to me, his eyes are everywhere but on me.

“Wait, did I do something wrong? Do I smell or something? I will ask the nurse to give me a sponge bath tomorrow, you can come back then.”

His attention seems to have shifted, he’s not focused on me. His mind is not here, and he seems eager to leave.

“Yeah.”

I don’t trust that yeah.

“Don’t stay away for too long Mthombo, I’ve gotten used to having you around.”

Plus, I have so much to tell him. Something tells me that he’s not coming back.

He sighs.

Why is he breathing when I need an answer from him?

“I’ll send a bodyguard over,” he says.

A bodyguard? At Bara? Now this I would love to see.

“Get better soon.” He leaves me with these words.

I’m confused, that’s the same man who was worried sick about me when he got here.

The itchiness on my face intensifies, it starts to travel down my neck.

“Nurse, nurse.” I’m crying, the discomfort is unbearable.

Two of them come running, I sounded that dramatic.

“Nurse, I need a bath please. My body is itchy.”

“Haibo, you just came in today and already demanding baths? khuphuka Beyonce.” She shares a laugh with her colleague.

What is wrong with these people?

“I am going to write a complaint letter to the department of health, we will see who will have the last laugh.”

“You are not the only patient here sisi, we don’t do

special treatments.”

“Okay give me something for my skin, I can’t take the itch anymore.”

“When last did you have a bath? This is not a private hospital, you are going to be treated like everyone else. Continue scratching your body, it will stop.”

They butt heads laughing and leave.

“I’ll give you a bath!”

Ntebo? Beside her is Emeka.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Fifteen

SHIYIWE

.

.

Either these two planned this sudden visit or they met here coincidentally. Ntebo rushes to my side, her head is on my chest without warning. I get that she is a hugger but we are at daggers drawn, this girl is not allowed to be anywhere near me.

"Friend, I'm so glad you're okay." She sounds like a worried friend.

I'm not going to entertain that, I'm worried about them talking, coming to a conclusion that I've been hospitalized and deciding to visit me.

"How come you two are here together? When did this start?"

Ntebo looks back at Emeka and lifts her brows, either she's feigning innocence or she really is clueless.

"We met at the hospital entrance, what a coincidence hey?" She laughs.

I get a faint nod from Emeka who has not moved closer, he's distant and indifferent.

"How did you know I'd be here?"

Call me detective Shiyiwe, I don't trust humans.

"Friend you're on social media." Ntebo tilts her phone to my face.

I have been tagged on a post that has 300 shares and 4K reactions, the number of comments keep

increasing.

Adding a location was stupid of her, what if the men who attacked me see this post?

Rescued a girl from thugs today, Shiyiwe Jele you are not alone. Get well soon.

Athule has changed my case into an entire GBV campaign, I bet she's doing this for clout. People should ask permission before they tag us on things we might not want to be part of.

"Are you okay?" Ntebo asks, giving me another hug.

"I'm fine, I guess." I say.

Emeka is staring, he hasn't said anything. I wonder what's running through that mind of his.

Ntebo sees our eye contact moment, she clears her throat.

"Aren't you going to say anything? Your girlfriend is lying in a hospital bed." She snaps at the guy.

I don't remember them having peaceful moments.

Emeka sighs, removes his hands from his pockets and attacks me with a hug. Oddly, I flinch and my body tenses.

I try not to panic as my mind takes me back to this morning.

"You don't tell me anything anymore Shiyiwe?"

When have I told him anything? Our relationship has not reached that level, probably never will.

"You are never available Emeka, you're too busy making R80K." I'm a bitter girlfriend.

"No dali, the business is still new. I have to give it my undivided attention. I promise once everything settles down, I'll be all yours." –him.

Yeah, somehow, I don't like the idea or thought.

He takes my hand, stopping me from scratching my body and kisses it.

"What's wrong? Why are you itchy?" That's Ntebo.

"It must be this bed, I was fine before I got here."

“I can give you a sponge bath if you don’t mind.” Her offer is kind, but I will pass.

“Don’t stress about me babe, the nurse said to continue scratching.” Continue scratching I shall.

“But friend, have you seen your face?” She asks. “It’s breaking out.”

That can’t be, I was okay when Mthombo was here.

She shuffles into her bag and hands me a small mirror, my skin looks terrible.

This is more serious than I thought.

“It could be that you’re allergic to the medication they gave you,” Emeka is going to sit here and speculate. I need solutions not speculations.

“I’ll ask the nurse when she comes back,” I say.

That’s if she comes back, I’m in a public hospital after all.

“Anyway, there is something I have been meaning to tell you.” Ntebo gleams.

I don’t say anything but wait for her to continue.

“I’m pregnant and getting married.”

Whoa!

Stop, drop and breathe.

“You’re kidding right?” I’m shocked.

“Nope, you blocked me on WhatsApp. I sent you a text but it didn’t go through.”

Damn WhatsApp GB. I’m not going to explain myself.

“Lobola negotiations are this weekend, please come.”

And do what?

“I don’t think I will be out of the hospital by then.” It’s not that I don’t want to, I have so much going on to be celebrating people’s weddings.

“Please friend, it will mean so much to me. You’re my best friend, I need you by my side.”

This is emotional blackmail.

“Who is the guy?” I ask.

I don’t want to get there and find that she’s marrying

one of my uncles, Ntebo is into old men.

"You'll meet him after the negotiations." Ntebo.

Anyone can tell that she's over the moon.

"Fine, I'll come to support you."

The smile on her face.

"Thank you friend," her arms around me.

I should wear a sign that says NO HUGS!

I'm an injured somebody.

Emeka receives a call, he excuses himself and walks out of the ward. There is literally no connection between us, not once did he express any concern for me. I'm starting to feel like I have wasted years of my life.

Straight out of matric, two years later I meet this "fine" Nigerian hunk not knowing he'd be a waste of my youthful years.

"Don't worry about him, he'll come around like he said." Ntebo interrupts my thoughts.

Oho! I doubt it.

Emeka doesn't come back from his call, he sends a text saying something has come up. Should I even care?

I can tolerate bullshit to a certain extent but when I've had enough and decide to turn away from the bullshit, I don't indicate like a truck.

.

.

I haven't heard from Mthombo in three days, anyone who is anyone in my life has come to see me but him, and by anyone I mean Mthandeni.

Apparently, Samson and Gezani are still behind bars and surprisingly, Samu is on good behaviour. I don't trust that woman, she's up to something.

Mthandeni doesn't sleep like a pregnant woman anymore, I don't know how I'm going to muster up the courage to tell her the truth.

We are not sisters.

My face has gone from bad to worse, a nurse who

examined me said she sees nothing. These people can't explain why my face is breaking out and I'm starting to look like Shrek with a bad rash.

I'm going home today, I was surprised to see Thambo. Mthombo disappears on me but still sends his people, I'm not happy about this.

"Where is he?"

Seeing that Thambo is the only connection I have to Mthombo, why not ask him where the man is.

He eyes me through the rear view mirror, "He's out of town on business."

I can smell lies from a distance.

"Unless he went to the Sahari Desert, there is no excuse for him not to take my calls."

He keeps quiet.

"Thambo, I'm talking to you. Tell me where he is." I'm getting worked up.

That bastard affects me so much that it feels like I'm losing my mind, he can't come into my life, put a mark on me and leave like he was never here.

“I can’t say what’s really going on sisi, you should try his phone again. Maybe he will answer this time.”

Jeer! Men are annoying.

I do as Thambo says, it doesn’t ring. I’m met with nothing but silence.

I want to scream.

“May I borrow your phone? My sister is not home, I want to ask where she put the house keys.”

He gives it to me without hesitation.

I have mastered the man’s number, it’s stuck in my head. The phone is ringing, now I know he blocked my number.

“Thambo is she okay? Did something happen to Shiyiwe?” My heart does something illegal at the sound of his voice, I press a hand to my chest and release a long breath.

“No, Shiyiwe is not okay.” I say.

There’s silence, if Mthombo drops this call he will see a different side of me.

“Are you there?” I ask.

I hear him breathing, I’m basically on the phone with his breath not him.

“Sir...”

“It’s Mthombo!”

Gotcha! This specie thinks he’s smart.

“You’re alive Mthombo?”

My sarcasm is dry, I don’t care.

“I’m sorry I haven’t called, I’ve been busy.” Him.

That stings actually, I’m not as special as I thought. He’s been too busy to call me.

“Okay, continue being busy then. It’s not like I don’t have a life.” I make sure to borrow a tongue click from Nigeria before cutting the call.

“You said you were calling your sister?”

Thambo must not test me today.

“I did,” Mthombo might as well be. He’s acting like a sissy.

I hand him his phone, he shakes his head but takes it.
It rings as he drops it on the passenger seat,
Thambo heaves a sigh and answers.

“Sir!”

It seems Mthombo is giving him a lecture, he’s nodding endlessly. Thambo tilts his hand back to hand me the phone.

“Sir wants to speak to you.”

I don’t say anything for a good five seconds, Thambo sighs again and places the phone back on his ear.

“Yes sir,” he says.

He presses a button and Mthombo’s voice fills the car, “Nonyanda.”

He’s on speaker.

It’s my voice, I don’t have to speak if I don’t want to. I look outside the window, my arms folded on my chest. I can taste the thick tension in the car.

“Shiyiwe talk to me,” now he wants to talk. “Please.”

“Thambo drop the call.” I say.

I'm not sure I'm allowed to give him any instructions but to drive me places.

"Don't touch that button, Thambo." Mthombo snaps.

"Tell your boss I don't want to talk to him, his voice is annoying anyway." I might be stirring up something I won't be able to finish.

"Thambo tell her I'm sorry."

Mthombo pleads.

Is he sending a message through the driver? I'm the one who's not talking to him.

The driver tilts his head to look at me, "I don't want to hear it Thambo. Drop the call."

I have never snapped at him, I'll apologise when he cuts the call.

"Consider yourself fired if you dare disconnect this call." Mthombo snaps at him too.

"He won't fire you Thambo, and it's not like I have anything sensible to say to him. For the love of God, drop the call." My voice is rising, unintentionally.

"Thambo tell her to stop her childishness." Mthombo.
So now I'm childish.

"Thambo..."

Suddenly the car hurtles to the side, we're at Sasol garage. He parks, hands me the phone.

"I'm going to get an energy drink, please forget that I exist for two minutes." Thambo says. He's irritated, he gets out of the car and slams the door.

I feel bad for putting him through all that.

"See what you did? You wore Thambo out." I tell Mthombo.

Silence surrounds us, I'm contemplating on whether to speak to him or let him have the first word. He's not saying anything, then he heaves a sigh, "Nonyanda."

He calls softly, I haven't told him that I'm not Nonyanda. I don't have a father, a background, or a name.

He's quiet for a while, "Mthombo."

I mirror his calm energy.

"I miss you," he says.

We should be warned about such things, just in case something flips in my stomach like it just did.

"You haven't been taking my calls, did I do something wrong?" I could say I miss him too but I need an explanation before making this the best day of his life.

"I can never find any faults in you Nonyanda." He says, below a whisper I almost miss the words.

"Then where are you Mthombo?"

The sigh again, "I'm here. Please don't give up on me just yet."

"I'd never give up on you, at least let me feel your presence in my life. Let me come over, even if it's just for two minutes."

I don't care that I sound desperate, he's the only thing that makes sense in my life right now.

The silence is starting to annoy me.

“Not today, I’ll call you. I promise.”

Back to square one.

What is going on? You’d swear he wants to be near me but he also wants to be far from me. Something is off, I can’t place a name on it.

“I have to go, take care of yourself Shiysiwe.”

The call dies, he’s gone like the wind. I am not able to understand anything.

Thambo is back, he brought pies and Coke.

Mthombo took my appetite, I take the food anyway.
I’ll miss it at night when my appetite decides to come back.

.

.

The sun has set, Mthandeni is standing behind the stove preparing supper. We are eating poison today, the girl was never taught how to cook. I’m on my phone stalking Mthombo, unfortunately, he is not on Facebook or Instagram.

WhatsApp is my only source and it's giving me nothing.

He is not on line, the messages I'm getting are from MG who I'm purposely ignoring. He wants to know how I am.

Like he cares.

Ntebo is filling my phone with messages too, she's excited about her big day. I didn't even know she was in a relationship, the next thing she is pregnant and getting married.

Wonders shall never end.

"It's Ntebo's lobola negotiations the day after tomorrow, would you like to come with?" I ask Mthandeni.

Excitement fills her face, she nods and continues with the cooking.

"I didn't know she was in a relationship." Mthandeni.

"I'm her friend and I knew nothing of the sort," people will shock you.

Mthandeni faces me, her brows crinkled in suspicion.

“That one is a wolf in sheep’s clothing, you need to be careful with her.”

Where is this coming from?

“Prophetess Mtha, go deeper my sister.” I tease, she laughs.

“I’m serious sisi, why did she keep her boyfriend a secret from her only best friend? Doesn’t that raise an alarm?”

It does, I saw a different side to Ntebo the day she came to the Meyiwas just to scold me about missing a job interview I wasn’t scheduled for.

“I know babe, I’ve seen it. I will keep my distance, supporting her on her big day doesn’t mean I’m letting her back into my life.”

“What time is thing of hers?” Mthandeni asks as she joins me in the lounge.

She’s done with the cooking, we’re waiting for 7pm so we can eat.

“I’m not sure, we’ll find out when we get there tomorrow.” I reply.

“Tomorrow?”

“Yes, we’re sleeping over. They need help with peeling veges.”

She doesn’t look keen, I’m not either but oh well.

Samu’s kids walk in from outside, dusty feet and all. I don’t have the energy to scold them, today I’ll forgive them. Their mother gave me a remedy for the inflammation on my skin; salted water. The itch has gone down a bit, I can actually bare it.

Samu is sleeping, stress will force you to take a break from the world.

.

.

Friday has come, the first thing I do when I wake up is check my phone for any messages from Mthombo. I understand if he’s busy and can’t talk, but “hello” wouldn’t hurt.

The goodnight text I sent last night hasn’t gone through, there’s still one tick.

As the day progresses, nothing major happens on

WhatsApp. My messages has not gone through, that man seems to forget that I know where he lives.

6pm finds us in Alexander, Mthandeni does not want to be here. She looks ready to run away, it's not like this is her first sleepover.

Mme Mosheo welcomes us at the door, she looks happy to see me.

“Shiyiwe? Is this you? You’re so grown.” She pinches my rash free cheeks.

You’re so grown doesn’t mean in age, it means you’ve gained weight since they last saw you.

“Hello Mme.” I greet her with a smile.

I can’t say I’m used to her, I hardly came over to visit. When I did, Mme Mosheo would be introverted most of the time.

Ntebo put the blame on her father, the man has a loose hand.

“If tomorrow’s event wasn’t keeping me on my toes, I would have prepared a feast for you and your sister.”

She says this as she shows us into the lounge.

“Don’t worry about it Mme, I’m here to support Ntebo not to eat.” Did I just say that?

Her smile puts me at ease.

“You are a good friend, I’m glad you two are still close. Don’t ever abandon her, she’s nothing without you.” Mme Mosheo.

Ntebo rolls her eyes, there’s a smile on her face.

“Mme she’s here for me, you can go now.” Ntebo waves her away.

“Voetsek wena!” It’s funny the way she says it. “I have known Shiyiwe for as long as you have, and that means I’m her mother.”

Eish! Sensitive topic.

“Okay Mme, don’t you think you should start peeling the vegetables?” Ntebo.

Brave girl, MaMbuzazi would have slapped me across the face for asking her that.

Mme Mosheo sniggers, “Who are the in-law’s

coming for? Me or you?"

Her reply has Ntebo frowning.

"Get to the kitchen, I'm not doing anything today. Shiyiwe will help you, your cousins are on the way from Orlando." Mme Mosheo makes her way to the bedroom.

I must have heard her wrong, I think she said I'm going to help Ntebo in the kitchen.

"Babe, I'm a hospital fugitive who is nursing scars and fractured ribs." I told her I was supposed to be discharged in two weeks, lest she expects me to overwork myself.

I'm not going to be doing anything in that kitchen, I hope Mthandeni's peeling skills matriculated.

Ntebo's reply is a chuckle, the girl does not waste time, she ushers us to the kitchen. My sister gasps beside me, I would too after seeing the five bags of potatoes and carrots on the kitchen floor.

A phone call from Mzingisi becomes her saving

grace, excitedly, she excuses herself.

"We only have one potato peeler, I'm going to borrow from next door, you can start in the meantime friend." That's Ntebo after dropping a bag of potatoes on the kitchen table.

I'm left alone.

I'll pretend to be sick when she comes back, this is hard labour.

There's a sudden heavy presence behind me, it sends chills to my deepest core. I look back, Mme Mosheo is staring. She quickly covers her serious face with a bright smile.

"Look what I have." She sings.

It's my first time seeing anyone so happy to be holding isishweshwe.

"I made one for you and Ntebo, yours has your name on it. Akere we don't want you two to fight over them."

If she's the one who made this, then she must never repeat it, it's hideous.

“Mme, why do I have to wear isishweshwe? It’s Ntebo’s day not mine.”

This is one proud mother, the glow on her face at the mention of her daughter goes deep.

“You two are best friends and this is a token of my appreciation, just to say thank you for loving my baby.”

Gag! MaMbuzazi was never obsessed with me. Oh that’s right, I was extra baggage.

Her eyes are stuck on me, unbending. We maintain the battle of stares, she wins by luck. I never back out from a challenge. Somehow, I’m intimidated by her mere presence.

“Here,” she hands it to me. “You are going to look great in it.”

She laughs and leaves.

What the fuck?

.

.

This insert and the coming three have been sponsored. Many thanks to our sponsor.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Sixteen

SHIYIWE

.

.

“Mthandeni wake up!”

“Mmh, mmh!” She tosses and turns the other way.

We’re cramped up on the living room floor, the cousins are here as well.

“Mthandeni come on, I’m pressed.” I shake her awake again. My course of death can’t be a full bladder, people will laugh at my funeral.

“Sisi man, what is it?”

“I need to use the toilet.” It’s an emergency.

I don’t remember drinking a lot of liquids today, we ate before we came here. I can’t grasp why I’m so

pressed.

“Mthandeni, I need to go.”

“Then go!” She grunts.

Her sleep can't be more important than me releasing.
I pull the blanket, she grumbles and kills me with a
deadly glare.

“The toilet is outside, it's 2:30am. Please come with
me, I'm scared.”

She rubs her face in frustration and stands, really,
she didn't have to make this hard for me.

It's quiet outside and chilly, Mthandeni clings on to
my arm.

“I don't like this place, don't ever bring me here
again.” She complains.

I'm surprised by her instincts, it's not like her to
sense things out of the blue. Maybe it's always been
like this, we hardly spent time together in the past.

Mthandeni walks in with me, she stands by the door.

The urine feels like a long rope that won't end, I'm getting impatient.

"Hurry up," she snaps.

Nature is in control of this one, not me. When I'm done, she makes me walk out first. Her hand is tight on my top.

"Did you hear that?" Randomly, she mutters.

My heart stops for a minute, this child is trying to scare me.

"Don't do that," I scold her.

"I heard footsteps," her voice is shaky.

My heart sinks with fear and my entire body pulsates with heat, I can't move my feet anymore.

"Shiyiwe, there's someone out here."

"Don't say my name while we're outside at night. Who knows who is listening?" I grab her hand. "Let's walk faster."

"It's getting louder, I think they are behind us."

Mthandeni.

I hear them, there's someone in this yard. Someone we can't see.

"Run!" I shout and take off running, I don't look back but pray that my sister is right behind me.

If I'm Caster Semenya, then Mthandeni is Usain Bolt. She runs past me and is in the house before I can blink.

The hairs on my body stand, my heart races.

Seeing that I'm left behind, fear engulfs me. I'm almost at the door step when a scream escapes my mouth. My visons tunnels, everything becomes pitch black and I feel myself falling.

.

.

I'm woken up by a cold splash of water, it's taking time for me to fully open my eyes. I can hear voices though, I'm surrounded by people.

"We heard footsteps, so we ran. I guess Shiyiwe must have tripped and fell." Mthandeni's voice puts me at ease.

She's telling them what happened.

"This is not something to talk about at night, we'll talk about it in the morning." The voice belongs to Tshidi, Ntebo's cousin.

My eyes finally open, everyone is awake.

"How are you feeling?" Mthandeni asks.

My response is an assuring smile, I'll let them think I tripped and fell. They can't know I fainted.

"Don't ever scare me like that again," she pulls me into a hug. "Why do you let fear consume your heart?"

Says the girl who ran and left me behind.

Mme Mosheo tells us to go back to sleep, we're not allowed to talk about what happened at this time. Whatever that was out there, was after me. I just know it.

I can't wait to go back home, this place is creepy.

.

.

All women want to be paid lobola for, Ntebo is lucky. Waking up to ululations and wedding songs must be nice, I can't help but feel a twinge of jealousy. Abakhongi are the most important people in the lobola negotiations.

Once the other uncles find out that I am not a Jele, they will disown me.

"The groom's family must be on the way, you girls should get ready." Mme Mosheo tells us, as she appears from outside.

She's different today, aloof. No eye contact whatsoever. What a strange woman.

"Shiyiwe, I ironed your dresses. They are on the bed." She's talking to me, but her eyes are on Mthandeni beside me.

"When you're done, come and show me how you look or take pictures. I'll be next door." She adds, a forced smile on her lips.

I'm not going to parade and walk like Naomi

Campbell while dressed like Winnie Mashaba.

“Okay Mme,” that’s Ntebo agreeing to her mom’s absurdity.

Mthandeni and I exchange glances, she shakes her head. I know what it’s about, when we woke up this morning, she expressed how much she didn’t want to be here.

I don’t want to be here either, the day will be over soon.

Preparations are done and dusted, what’s left is for us to get ready. An accident happened with Ntebo’s Shweshwe dress, Mthandeni had sat on it and I being a good friend thought to iron it. The iron was too hot.

She’s going to wear mine, thankfully Mme Mosheo will be next door the entire day.

When I leave the bedroom to check on the food, I bump into Ntebo’s younger cousin carrying a plate of food.

“And then?” I ask.

“Aunty said I must give the groom food, he’s in the car. But no one should know.”

He's early!

This is my chance to meet Ntebo’s suitor, I’m too impatient to wait.

“Let me do it, you keep a watch on the pots.”

She looks happy that she won’t be going out there.

“What’s he driving and wearing?”

“Hyundai i20, black. He’s wearing an African attire.”

The girl says.

Sounds like he went all out for this one.

I make it out the gate, my eyes search for the black Hyundai i20. It’s the only big car parked out here, it looks brand new. Just as I approach, the door opens and the driver steps out.

The world did not prepare me for this, my head starts spinning giving me an instant headache.

What in God’s name is fate trying to do to me?

He's stretching himself, and looking around. I hide behind a tree when his head whips my way.

I'm hurt, even when I shouldn't feel an ounce of it because he never invested in me. Tears well up in my eyes, I blink them back. These people are not going to play with me, they think they know me. I will show them the real Shiysiwe.

I hurry back to the house with the food, Mthandeni is waiting for me outside.

"I'm sorry," she says.

She saw him too.

"I was looking for you, I wanted to tell you sisi." Her arms are around me, hugs are not okay when you're engulfed by emotions.

The lump in my throat is trying to force tears out of my eyes, I'm able to gain control over it.

"We have to stop this sisi, you can't let them do this to you." She's crying on my behalf.

"We're not stopping anything, let them go through with it." I tell her.

I'm hoping she would calm down so I can think straight and find a way out of this mess.

I enter the kitchen, there's a spice I saw here when cooking this morning.

Asafoetida powder.

MaMbuyazi made sure we always had this spice in the house. She loved it because of its burnt-oniony-garlicky flavour. I sprinkle a few in his food, my ancestors, whoever they are tell me it's not enough. So I continue adding, until a voice whispers that it's enough.

"Are you kidding me? You're worried about his food being tasteless? Are you sure you're okay?" That's Mthandeni.

How do I explain to her without sounding crazy?

I call the cousin, and tell her to take the food to the suitor. She's not happy about it.

"Shiyiwe what's going on with you? You can't

seriously be supporting that witch after what she's done to you."

Mthandeni needs to calm down, she will collapse if she carries on like a lunatic.

"Mme Mosheo trusts us to help make this day a success, please play your part." I tell her as I add more flavour to the food on the stove.

You can never have too much Asafoetida, I could kiss whoever made this spice.

Mthandeni leaves me with a tongue click, she will be okay.

Now that the food is ready and smells great...

If I remember correctly, the alcohol for the guest is kept behind the couch. If luck finds my address today, those people will drink during the negotiations like they do in Nollywood movies.

I prepare a cup of tea for my friend. I know she won't be able to stomach any solids due to nerves.

"Hey, where have you been?" Ntebo says as I enter

the bedroom. She's dressed and ready.

"You'd have a heart attack if I told you." I hand her the cup, she's thankful and... yep she's enjoying the tea.

"What do you mean?" Ntebo asks.

"Nothing, I had to check on the pots. No offence friend, but your cousin Tshidi needs to stay out of the kitchen. We don't want your in-laws to get runny tummies."

She shrugs, looks back at the mirror.

"Are you sure you don't mind me wearing your isishweshwe?"

Isishweshwe should be the least of your worries whore.

"It's your day friend," you should standout.

"I know right," she grins.

We hear voices outside, abakhongi are here.

Ntebo's face brightens, she runs to take a peek out the window.

“It’s finally happening, two years later and I’m finally going to marry the man of my dreams.”

Two years? Wow!

“I know right? Kusazo nyiwa namhlanje.” (All hell will break loose.)

“What are you talking about?” Ntebo. She’s confused.

I cover my face with a smile, “The egg and potato salad babe. I’m worried the guests will have runny stomachs because of it. Tshidi added more eggs and less potatoes, she can’t cook to keep a man.”

I contort the statement into something different.

Ntebo laughs.

“We eat it all the time, don’t worry. It’s safe.” She expresses. “Plus, they are Nigeri...” She stops, her eyes move away from me.

“I mean, they are not picky eaters. They will love the food.”

I know they will love the food, I rescued it with MaMbuyazi’s secret recipe.

Mme Mosheo sends one of the kids to tell us to get ready. We're done, we're just waiting to be called.

Tshidi has joined us in the bedroom.

"Friend, I can't breathe. They've been in there for hours. What's worse is that I can't speak to him, he's the only one who can calm me down."

He's the only one who can calm her down? This one is in heaven.

"Relax babe, I doubt that man will calm you down. He's probably as nervous as you are. You should be worried about your uncles, they are crazy." She laughs with me.

"Udali has money, a lot of money. They should charge him an arm and a leg." Ntebo.

She calls him dali, I'm not too strong for this. I think of walking out for a breather, it will give me a chance to listen in on them. But then, something Ntebo says changes my mind.

"I need the toilet," she looks constipated.

"What's wrong?" I ask.

"My stomach hurts, it must be nerves." Ntebo says and burps.

Hehehe!

Let the games begin.

"You can't go out babe, what if they call us." Tshidi agrees with me. I don't know where Mthandeni is... oh here she is walking in with a frown plastered on her face.

Ntebo starts counting her intakes and outtakes like a pregnant woman in labour.

I won't allow her to visit the toilet, I will stall until she shits herself.

Three of us are going out wearing blankets over our heads, we were four initially, Mthandeni refused.

Tshidi goes in first, I follow and then Ntebo comes after. We are seated on the floor.

"There are many girls in the Mosheo family, so we don't know which one you are talking about. The girls are here, you can tell me which one of them it

is.” Ntebo’s uncle introduces. There’s a foul smell coming from Ntebo, I can hear her breathing in and out.

“If you know the person you want, you can pin point them.” The uncle clarifies.

“Even when they are looking the other way, we know our bride.” That’s a Nigerian accent.

“Please choose the lady you want to reveal to see if they are the one. But be warned, if you get it wrong, we will fine you.

“Looking at the three ladies, I’d say she’s the last one.” The same Nigerian man says.

Yeah hey! To think this was my dream.

“Okay, uncover her. Let’s see if it is her.”

Suddenly, Ntebo digs her fingers on my thigh, a loud sound goes off. She just farted, I hear gasps.

“What was that?” The suitor’s family asks, shocked.

No one is able to answer, they are trying to figure out what just happened.

“Friend, my tummy hurts.” She’s talking through gritted teeth. More gas escape her pipes, Tshidi laughs. I can’t breathe through the smell.

Just when I think I’m having fun, Ntebo jumps out from the blanket. I have to take a look, she’s sweating and looks dehydrated.

“Ntebo, what’s going on?” Mme Mosheo materializes from nowhere.

That gas she just released should answer her question, her eyes pop out. Ntebo is embarrassed, she takes off running outside, to the toilet I guess.

The windows have been opened by Tshidi and my sister who was brought in here by the noise.

“What kind of disrespect is this?” The Nigerian uncle shouts and... ewww he just burped.

Taking a good look at him, he looks like an older version of Emeka.

No one answers him, is it shock paralysis or verbal paralysis? I don’t know.

Also I didn’t know passing gas was contagious,

someone just released a loud one. It's one of the suitor's family.

He has his hands pressed on his stomach and hey, he's not the only one.

The Mosheo family has also started to feel my wrath. More gas is passed, they are burping like izangoma. Their foreheads are riddled with pearls of sweat.

I need an oxygen mask.

"What is going on? What did you people eat?" Mme Mosheo is crying.

They haven't had anything to eat yet, just drinks. No one gives her an answer, people are groaning in pain and passing gas.

This is going to be fun, amidst the smell and chaos that has erupted, I sit on the armrest of the sofa and watch everything unfold.

My work bearing fruit.

"I need the toilet," Ntebo's uncle runs out of the house. The others follow with their hands pressed on their potbellies and flat behinds.

“Sisi, what’s going on?” Mthandeni looks terrified, she’s never seen a fart massacre happen.

“Shiyiwe Jele has been unleashed.” I say and rush out after everyone. Mthandeni is behind me, so is Tshidi.

We find the people in a queue, Ntebo is taking a dump on a 10litre bucket.

Mme Mosheo is busy filling buckets with water and giving the men to tend to nature’s call.

“Girls, help me out. There’s someone in the toilet.” She says.

I’m not touching shit. I’m traumatized as it is. Tshidi won’t stop laughing but she runs to help her.

There are not enough buckets, someone squats on the drain where they do the washing and lets it rain runny shit.

I will have to talk to Mthombo after this, I wonder if he will agree to pay for my therapy.

“Oh my God, who did this? What did they eat?”

Shame! My sister is too innocent.

One of the Nigerian men is banging on the toilet door and shouting for whoever is in there to come out. Seconds later, the door opens and the pubic hair of Satan appears, folded arms clasped on his stomach.

He looks like he just died and resurrected— Lazarus wannabe.

“Emeka, you have not tasted my wrath yet. I will make you pay for cheating on me with my best friend.” I whisper under my breath.

“Nooo, sisi! You did this?” Oops! Mthandeni heard me.

I smile victoriously, it feels good to be on the other side of victory.

“What did you give them?” She asks.

I look at her and grin. “When you add too much of Asafoetida powder, diarrhea happens.”

I need a throne where I’ll sit and watch my enemies suffer.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Seventeen

SHIYIWE

.

.

.

Emeka's uncles left in a fit of rage, I don't see a wedding taking place in the Mosheo household.

I have texted Thambo and asked him to fetch us, it's not safe for me to be here. These people will find out soon what I did, yes I'm going to spit and hiss like a poisonous mamba.

I'm having a when I catch Mme Mosheo glaring at me.

I'm not ready to reveal myself just yet.

"Did you do this?"

Why would she suspect me? I'm as innocent as a toddler.

"Mme, I don't understand. Why would I do that?
Ntebo is my friend, I even lent her my shweshwe

dress."

Can a human's eyes fall from their sockets? If not, I'm about to see it for the first time.

"What?" Her voice almost goes on strike.

She looks at Ntebo who is curled up on the floor then back at me.

"Nooooo!" That's a loud scream, what's wrong with her? "You stupid child, what have you done?"

She roars and takes off running towards Ntebo.

"Take this thing off now," she yells, gripping and trying to tear her daughter's clothes off. Ntebo is fighting her, she doesn't know what's happening.

"Mme no, what are you doing?" Ntebo pushes her but she won't budge, she is determined in getting rid of that dress.

"What's wrong with that crazy woman?" Mthandeni.

"It's not her, it's the dress."

"Do you think she did something to it?" My sister mumbles.

She definitely did something to it.

Mme Mosheo has succeeded in her task, leaving Ntebo half-naked. She instructs Tshidi to bring matches from the house. The uncles are too occupied with their runny stomachs to notice their niece has been stripped naked.

“Go get dressed wena,” Mme Mosheo yells at dear bestie.

Ntebo runs into the house crying.

“Hurry back, there’s no toilet in there.” I yell after her and get a tongue click from her mother.

She’s glaring, I hate that she has put two and two together and came out with a perfect score. I stagger back as her feet thunder on the ground heading to me, a murderous look is on her face.

I won’t lie, I don’t expect her to slap me across the face. Everyone turns at the sound.

“What did you give these people?” Screaming is not necessary, I can hear her perfectly.

The slap hurts but I can’t stop a smirk from pulling at

my lip.

“Something to remember me by.” I shrug.

All eyes are on me now, Emeka is only aware of my presence now. His eyes widen, he's looking for a place to hide.

“Do you know what you have done? She is pregnant, what if she loses the baby.” Mme Mosheo thinks I care about Ntebo and her baby, this woman is delusional.

“That's fine, Emeka has enough sperms to dish around. I'm sure he won't mind giving her more.” I reply and glance at a confused Emeka, he hasn't figured out what is really happening.

I have always suspected his brain to be slow.

“I have a question though, did my best friend swallow your sperms and got pregnant or you did it the traditional way?”

Silence.

“Shiyiwe I...” He's stuttering, fool trying to explain

himself.

“Watch your mouth Shiyiwe.” Mme Mosheo interrupts.

My nerves are all over the place, these people might turn on me and show me the mother I’ve never met.

“I’m not going to keep quiet, you are evil Mme. You, your daughter and this useless excuse of a man. You invited me here just to ridicule me.”

“Keep your voice down!” She sputters.

“I’m not going to keep my voice down.” I fire back.

The neighbours should be the least of her worries.

“So you did all of this because of a man? Is he the only man in the world?” Her eyes narrow into two lines of fury.

“Mme!!!” A scream coming from the house interrupts us. Panic washes over Mme Mosheo, she pushes me aside and runs into the house. Emeka is behind her, the uncles as well.

Not wanting to miss anything, I pull Mthandeni with me.

Ntebo hasn't dressed yet, she's standing with her hands on her belly. There's a trail of blood flowing down her thighs.

"My baby!" She's crying.

What have I done? I didn't think she would lose the baby.

"We have to get out of here," Mthandeni taps my shoulder.

She's right, I bet Thambo is waiting outside.

Everyone is too focused on Ntebo that they don't see us sneaking out. Thambo is right on time, we jump in and tell him to go.

As he reverses, Mme Mosheo walks out the gate. She stands in the middle of the street, hands on her hips and just stares.

Cold seizes my heart and freezes the blood inside my veins.

"That woman is weird," Mthandeni is right. I don't like the way she's looking at me.

“Please drive,” I instruct.

The woman does not move an inch when the car drives towards her, Thambo has to dodge her.

.

.

ATHULE-

Mthandeni hasn’t gotten back to me about the internship at Ndaba Royals, I’m losing hope by the second. Especially now that my father has arranged an interview for me at KFC in Mandela Square.

I’m not looking forward to today at all.

There’s a knock at my door, my mother’s head pops in.

“Have you forgotten that it’s your first day at work today?”

Point of correction, it’s not my first day. I haven’t gotten the job yet.

Foreseeing an interrogation, I jump up like it’s an

emergency. It works, she's gone.

My eyes land on my sister who is occupying half of the space on the queen size bed we share. The girl sleeps like she plays Jackie Chan in her dreams.

First thing on my list on pay day is a bed, I can't sleep like I'm crashing at an aunt's house.

Today is a Saturday, we usually wake up very late in this house. It's 9:47am, my interview is at 12pm.

I set a timer in the bathroom, five minutes later I'm out and getting dressed.

What does one wear to an interview? Dresses make me feel uncomfortable when I'm around strangers, formal pants and a shirt should be okay.

I adorn my feet with Tommie takkies, grab my bag and head to the kitchen.

The smell of porridge tickles my nostrils as I approach and my heart instantly melts at the sight of my mother standing behind the stove stirring what I assume is porridge. Her husband is obsessed with

reading the paper, it must be yesterday's.

"Nkosazane." He's smiling, at least I think he is.
What do you call that tiny stretch on his mouth?

"Morning," I greet in a pack, eyes running from him to the woman who makes this house feel like a home.

"Sit down and have breakfast," I do as baba says and send my mother a smile when she tells me to dish up for myself.

The way this woman takes care of her husband is something to be envious of.

One day if God wills it, I want to find this kind of love for myself and the man who will snatch my heart.

"Baba, where will I find you after the interview?" I don't want to be that woman who looks lost in public, it's always a funny sight. People assume you're crazy when you're wandering about with wide eyes and ears perked just in case you hear a voice telling you "turn left."

"I'm working overtime today, I'll be home midnight."

He says.

I hate travelling alone.

“You have my number, call me if you need anything.”

He tells me.

He's cleaned up his plate and I'm on the second spoon.

“I'm sure she will manage baba, you will be busy at work. Besides, Athule is a big girl, she will have to get used to places.”

Not Sandton Mall, I'm not familiar with the place and I hear it's massive.I

I would dispute with her but we don't talk back in this house unless you're looking for a hot clap.

“Yes, I'll manage baba.” I lie.

But really, there's nothing wrong with having someone hold my hand though and there is absolutely nothing wrong with me wanting my father to hold my hand until I'm able to walk without stumbling.

“Athule hurry.” Baba.

We are running late, I didn’t even finish my porridge.

“Why can’t we use the van baba?” We are marching to the bus stop.

“Petrol is expensive, the bus is cheaper.” Yeah, I figured he’d say that.

The seats at the bus stop are occupied by three people, baba greets before engaging in a conversation with the elderly man seated on the bench. My mind wrestles with conscious, salute these strangers or pretend they don’t exist?

I hate my day already, I know it’s going to suck.

Sigh!

The bus arrives and a small stampede emerges, everyone pushing against each other to enter a vehicle that is in no rush to leave.

“Don’t get left behind.” Baba shouts in the crowd, he too is fighting to be the first.

I’m embarrassed.

“Athule!”

“I’m right behind you baba.”

Gosh! I doubt a twenty-three year old would disappear in broad daylight.

We make it to the mall in peace, the banner says Mandela Square. It is packed in here. I cringe in crowded places. My chest tightens, panic mocks me. Baba side eyes me as I grab his hand.

“You’re a big girl now, no one is going to baby you in the work place. Remember that.”

As if I’d let anyone bully me.

“I know, it also means I need to move out of the house.”

“Don’t push it, you are not going anywhere.” He declares.

Thought as much.

He entertains my dramatics by tightening his hand around mine, a smile creeps up on my mouth. I love this, I love being daddy’s girl, at 23 yes.

At KFC, I'm introduced to a female friend who is to give me a job. Simlindile Ntlontlo, a tall light skinned Xhosa woman. If I remember correctly, my father's words yesterday were along the lines "I have a friend who will give you a job." Was he referring to her?

I'm dazed beyond my imagination, how a 62 year-old, bold head with a moustache, and a Coca-cola belly is friends with a young woman like her? If my eyes aren't deceiving me, she is well in my age group.

You can't be specific with people's ages lately. A 20 year-old might look 30 and a 40 year-old might look 20.

"Stop staring at her and don't tell your mother about this."

Hee!!!

Penny needs to know that her husband is friends with young beautiful women? Minding my own business would be best.

"I will see you later," there's a faint smile on his face. I love him too.

Simlindile doesn't interview me, but hands me a uniform and makes it clear that it will come out of my salary monthly until I pay it off.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

We make it to Diepkloof in peace.

"Uncle Vela is here," Mthandeni exclaims.

His car is parked outside the gate. What is he doing here?

These people have harassed me enough.

"Thank you Thambo, you may go home. I won't be needing your services for the rest of the night." It feels good to speak rich.

We exit and wave goodbye, Thambo drives off as we close the gate.

Mthandeni has run into the house, she reminds me of myself when the sight of Velakithi would excite

me.

Growing up is a trap, look at me today.

I enter through the kitchen, the house feels cold and empty. There are strangers in the living room, two to be precise. One in a suit and the other a police uniform. Velakithi and MG are present, my cousin is engrossed on the TV, they paid for the DSTv.

“Shiyiwe look, uncle paid for the TV.” She’s forgetting she has school.

I look around, something is different or missing rather.

“Where is Samu?” I ask.

“They are gone, this is my brother’s house not a shelter for the homeless.” Velakithi.

He threw them out? How was I not able to do that?

MG hasn’t looked at me, I find it strange because this is the same man who wouldn’t stop asking me to talk to him.

“What’s going on Ncane? Why are you here?”

He stands, “This is advocate Mdluli. He is my brother’s lawyer.”

He points at the man in a suit.

“Okay, what’s he doing here?”

He hands me a document written Will and Testament of Phindafuthi Difa Jele. It’s my father’s will.

“Like I told you the last time we spoke, Phinda left everything to his biological daughter Mthandeni.”

Dammit this man is going to reveal the truth.

Confusion has found Mthandeni’s face.

“Please don’t do this,” I plead with him.

My sister is not ready to hear this.

“The truth has to come out Shiyiwe, we can’t keep lying to Mtha.” I hate him.

I look to MG for help, he’s not bothered. His eyes are glued on the TV screen.

“What’s going on?” Mthandeni asks.

My worst nightmare is about to come true.

“Shiyiwe is not your biological sister, your parents found her at their doorstep when she was a baby.”

Velakithi has no right to do this.

“That doesn’t mean anything Mthandeni, I’m still your sister.”

I wipe her tears away, they keep coming. I didn’t want her to find out this way.

“Your parents were killed by the Meyiwases, the same people your sister works for.” Velakithi continues as if he did not just turn our lives upside-down.

“Why are you bringing this up? The Meyiwases did nothing.” I argue.

“Actually they did,” the officer steps in. “A suspect has been arrested, he’s pinned everything to the Meyiwases. We are awaiting for a search warrant from the Judge, once he grants it, there won’t be anywhere to turn for them.”

No, this can’t be happening. I have to call Mthombo

and warn him.

Something grabs my attention when I shift my eyes.

“What’s going on? Who packed my bags?” I try not to panic, it’s not working. I hate not being in control of things around me.

MG looks at me, then drops his gaze. The bastard touched my things.

“Since I’m Mtha’s legal guardian, and signatory to all her assets. I have moved in, and will be taking care of her.” Velakithi says this with pride.

“She’s 20, she doesn’t need a legal guardian.” I tell him.

He can’t be serious.

“She’s still a scholar, the will states that she will only be able access the funds and take possession of the properties when she has graduated.” Velakithi points at the paper in my hand with his head.

“Read the Will if you don’t believe me, everything is there in black and white.”

“But daddy didn’t have anything,” Mthandeni states.

She is right, my father had no money.

“Your father had investments my child, of course he wasn’t going to tell you about them.” Velakithi says.

I swallow hard, trying to make sense of everything that’s happening. Velakithi studies me with a stern gaze.

“I hold nothing against you Shiyiwe, I love you. Family is important to me, you know that. That’s why I’m giving you an option. Either you stay away from Mthombo or leave this house.”

He must be joking.

“I am not going anywhere, you can’t make me.”

He smirks, “Then the lovely gentleman will escort you out.” He points at the officer.

“I know you’re a fighter and please be my guest, I’d like to see you fight him. Jail is not a nice place for a young lady.”

“This is my father’s house.” I argue.

“You are not a Jele, my brother didn’t consider you in his will. You are an outsider Shiyiwe, if you want us

to take you in, forget you ever met the Meyiwas.”

Must he always rub it in my face?

Mthombo’s words ring in my head. He asked me not to give up on him, and I promised. I can’t go back on my word.

“Mtha?” I turn to the only person who can save me from these people. “You don’t believe him, do you?”

“There is evidence Shiyiwe and a witness.”

They’ve gotten to her, I don’t blame her. She’s just a child, she’ll believe anything said to her.

“It’s all lies, they are lying babe. Ncane doesn’t care about you. He’s after your inheritance.”

“Stop trying to blackmail my niece,” he snaps. “Why is it so hard for you to stop seeing Mthombo? Are you their accomplice?”

“That’s insane Ncane and you know it, I loved my parents.” I bite back, worried that I might lose my sister and a home I grew up in.

“Then prove it, don’t engage with the Meyiwases anymore. Choose us sisi, choose me.” She’s crying.

I pull her into a hug, her body is trembling against mine.

“I’m sorry Mtha, I can’t do that.”

She pushes me back and watches me in fear, “You’re choosing him over me?”

I doubt she realises that this is emotional blackmail.

“I’m choosing the truth.” I have more words on my tongue, that confuse me even as I hear them loud in my thoughts.

“Shiyiwe don’t go please.”

I don’t want to see her cry, it breaks my heart.

Turning my back to her is the only thing I can do, if I hold her in my arms, I will break down too.

I grab my bag and head out, Mthombo has to hear about this. I can’t stand the thought of him behind bars. I don’t have airtime, so I send him a voice note on the green app.

Why does he have the app if he never uses it?

All the messages I have sent from the past three days have one tick. I can't do this, I need my grandmother. I'm sure I have enough money to catch a taxi to KZN.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Eighteen

ATHULE-

.

.

Work has been going okay, four days and I've got it, from making fried chicken to ice cream.

"Athule, you are working at the front today. Trevor called in sick, you are covering his shift." Simi doesn't play when it comes to work, she's a nice person, but can be a bitch when provoked.

"I don't think I'm ready Simi, can I start next week?" I tell her.

Maybe I should've kept my mouth shut, she's looking at me like I stole her favourite toy.

“Get to work, now.” She says and scurries away, someone didn’t get it all this morning.

Suddenly.

I’m a nervous wreck, I had trained at the front before but working with no supervision is a different story.

I can’t escape this one, the boss has spoken. I need to stay calm.

The doors open, I’m on my own. Breakfast orders are slow, but things start getting hectic around 10am. Who knew people loved KFC this much? This place is packed.

“Can we get assistance in this place?”

Okay, who is this loser?

I guess I’m a bit slow, but patience is part of humanity. Silly clumsy me, mixed up orders and I have customers complaining and deciding my fate... Replace this woman, we’re working with time here.

“Sorry sisi, with the course hair. We also have jobs to get to.”

My hair is not course, well maybe it is, but there is no

reason to say it out loud.

I know for a fact he's talking to me because the two ladies I work with have braided hair.

"I'm still busy." I tell him, returning the same amount of arrogance he used on me.

Confused and stressed as I am, I slow down my pace and that pisses him off because the next thing the man is over the counter grabbing my wrist.

"Where is the manager?" He grunts, shooting me with a glare from Iraq.

Okay, let's calm down. Baba would kill me if I lose this job.

"What are you doing?" I ask.

The fool's threat forces me to give him the attention he seeks, first I am taken aback by the brightness of his attire.

Panstula style and different shades of yellow is the theme.

"You know, I hate being ignored. It drives me crazy and right now, you're driving me crazy." He states

through gritted teeth, his face so calm, confusing the hell out of me.

“I’m not the only one working here bhuti, I can’t ignore other customers because you seek attention. It is not part of my job description, wait your turn and you will be served.”

A cold chuckle evades his mouth when I yank my hand, his eyes are piercing through mine. This man has anger issues, how is he vexed over such a dull matter?

“I am not your brother,” he hisses. “And watch it.” I believe that’s a warning.

Gosh, let Sonto or Nandipha assist this fool. I can’t stand him.

“I will take your order sir?” Nandipha says.

A sigh of relief heaves out of my chest, I’m already pissed and confused, I don’t do well with confusion. My mind overreacts and I tend to lose my cool.

“No, she will.” Bruce Lee wannabe replies, rudely so. His cool and calm demeanour playing at me like a

tennis ball.

I swear I have never seen a man more intimidating yet annoying, he stands tall like he's so sure of himself. It forces you to overlook the stupid outfit he has on.

His mother must slap him twice for being born stupid.

"Why me?" I ask.

The plan is to be as rude as possible, but I find myself stammering as his eyes hypnotize me, searching for something in my soul.

"Every time I come here, she will be the one to help me." He says.

Judging from the tone of his voice, that is definitely an order. Nandipha grabs my arm just as I'm about to argue, my stubbornness knows no bounds.

Am I the only one noticing the arrogance and rudeness of the pantsula freak?

"Don't say anything, just help him." Nandipha

mutters.

“I’ll explain later.”

She eases my worries, forcing a nod out of me.

Here comes a pissed Simi, she scrutinizes me under her gaze. The look would pin a mosquito to the wall. My heart warns or prepares me rather for the worst.

I observe her exchanging a few words with the man, I can’t hear what they are saying, but I can tell he’s not pleased at all. Am I going to lose my job?

Great!!! Just what I need.

“Athule from today you will be helping Mr. Meyiwa whenever he comes here.” Simi orders.

Could he be Bhedlindaba Meyiwa?

I turn to Mr. Meyiwa who’s now scrolling on his phone. The insolence as he orders without looking at me, the man reeks of rudeness.

It’s his rudeness that’s stopping me from confirming if he is the man I wanted to work for.

His order is enough to feed a class of twenty.

“Anything else sir?” My attitude screams on his face and that’s enough to get him to raise his dark piercing eyes, one stern look forces me to look away.

“Carry these and follow me,” another command from the ‘great’ Mr. Meyiwa.

“It’s not...”

“Part of your job description?” He interjects. “Yes, you mentioned that, tell me-” His eyes chase my face down to my chest.

At first I think he’s lustng after my breasts until they relay back up to my eyes.

He was checking my name badge.

“Athule, do you always repeat yourself? You look like a smart girl, there has to be more in that brain of yours.” I know an insult when I hear one and this is definitely it.

“Are you insulting me, Mr. Meyiwa?” I don’t know where I get the courage, I must have a death wish.

“Take it however you want, I just said what I see.”

He’s rude.

“The bags.” He narrows his eyes before throwing a pair of sunglasses over them, grabs two bags and ambles out the door. I follow pursuit.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

I've been home for four days and counting, I have completely disconnected myself from the world and any negative feelings that might put me in a bad space.

My phone is off, and I have no plans of switching it back on.

Life is better this side of the world, grandma keeps asking when am I going back to Joburg. I haven't told her that I don't have a home anymore, the details will kill her.

“Shiyiwe, you've burnt the porridge.” Grandma shouts from outside. She can actually smell it from there?

Wow!

“Sorry grandma,” I make a mistake of heaving a sigh. She’s calling me. I find her seated on the veranda.

Panic when old women scan your body, it can only mean that something is wrong with you.

“Are you pregnant?” She asks.

Yhu! Jeer, it can never be me.

“Why would you ask me that? I’m never having kids.”

“It’s the ones who don’t want kids who end up pregnant.” She says.

Her eyes are deceiving her, she’s that old. Why would she think that I’m pregnant?

“I did want kids once grandma, I was ready to give the man I was seeing Nigerian kids who sing like Davido, but he didn’t appreciate me. It’s okay, I know my worth now. No man will ever play me again. I’m done with them.”

“Don’t be stupid, a woman needs a man in her life.”

“Says who?”

“It’s the way things are, we found them like this and it will continue till the end of time.”

Her brain is 100 years old, it’s rusty. I’m not going to blame her.

“I learnt about needs and wants at school, and a man is definitely a want.”

I will never need a man in my life, not again.

Grandma does not look pleased with my response.

“You are still a child, you will understand one day.”

Her husband was perfect, it’s understandable that she speaks like Juliet. But since the 1900s men have become trash.

I want to finish up in the kitchen but she stops me as I take a step.

“Sit with me.” She says.

I’m looking at her hand that’s patting the empty space beside her, then I look at her looking at me.

“I have waited for days for you to tell me what

happened.”

She knows, you can never hide anything from elders.
I have to tell her without shedding tears, heaven
knows how I will manage that.

I narrate the entire story, the tears in her eyes have
put me in a shadow of regret.

“Did you know about this grandma?”

I don’t want to put her through this, but she is the
only one who can clear things up.

She buries her face in her shaky hands, and
continuously shakes her head.

“What have you done Phindafuthi? How can you
leave me with such a burden?”

A burden?

“Grandma?” I don’t understand. “Do you also see me
as a burden?”

She looks up at me with tears in her eyes, “No
Nonyanda. You are not a burden.”

She cradles my cheeks, places a wet kiss on my

forehead and maintains eye contact.

"You are a Jele to the bone, Phindafuthi's blood runs in your veins."

Either this is old age talking or she is telling the truth.

"But Ncane Velakithi said I am not my father's child."

"That is a lie, Shiyiwe."

I believe her, she has no reason to lie to me. What the fuck is going on?

"Before MaMbuyazi came into your father's life, he was seeing a woman in Johannesburg. He never spoke about her, or showed me pictures. He told me that it was nothing serious because the woman was married."

Shut the front door!

"He was having an affair with a married woman?" I ask.

My entire life is a lie.

"Yes and he was ashamed of it, one day he came home drunk and in that drunken state revealed that

the woman was pregnant. He gave her money to abort the baby and cut all ties with her and moved on with his life. That's when he met MaMbuyazi."

I don't like where this is going.

"She was a woman who knew what she wanted, she wore the pants in the house." Grandma.

I had seen that side of her, she'd say jump and my father would ask if it's high enough. They loved each other though, I was a witness to it.

"What does MaMbuyazi wearing the pants in the house have to do with me?"

"When you were found, he knew you were his at first glance. MaMbuyazi could see it as well, she didn't want you in her house. You were going to be sent to an orphanage, it was her idea. But your father fought to keep you. She left and came back a week later with the name Shiyiwe and a list full of rules."

I want to laugh at this revelation because really, it can't be true. MaMbuyazi wasn't the best mother in the world, but she cared about me.

“Your father was desperate for her to stay, it’s not like he had a choice. Not all men are able to singlehandedly take care of a baby.” She continues.

“Who is my mother then? Do you know her name?”

“Like I said, she was a married woman and your father’s secret. Phindafuthi should’ve told you the truth.”

Damn right he should’ve told me everything, I wouldn’t be going through this shit had he done that.

“Grandma, I wasn’t mentioned in the will. He left everything to my sister, if I am a Jele then, why would he leave me in the dark with nothing?”

She looks at me surprised, “MaMbuyazi.”

That’s all she says, we’re not done talking. Where is she going?

“I’m tired, wake me up when the sun is up in the sky.”

The sun is always up in the sky, she can’t leave me like this. I have more questions that need answers.

MaMbuyazi was a praying woman, she wouldn’t do that to me.

“What are we going to do about your father’s corpse, it hasn’t been found.” Uncle Mdu says behind me.

Phindafuthi must find his way back to the grave, I’m not getting involved.

“Pray until something happens,” I don’t show an ounce of worry for the man who has managed to destroy my life from beyond the grave, or wherever the hell he is.

Uncle Mdu is staring, no matter how hard he tries he will never read me.

“Something happened in Joburg, that’s why you’re here and it doesn’t look like you will be going back.”

Ugh! People and prophesying over me.

I don’t say anything, it will be a waste of time.

“What do you want?” I ask.

He only talks to me when he wants something, otherwise I don’t exist to him.

“One of the chickens is sick, it can barely walk. We

should eat it before it dies, or it will be a waste.”

I knew it. I’m surprised he hasn’t grown chicken feathers with how much of it he eats.

“Then let it die, we are not slaughtering it.” Me.

“Okay, let’s slaughter Velakithi. You said you were reserving him for a special occasion, today is my birthday.” He is lying.

Velakithi is not going anywhere.

I picked that chicken out of anger and named it Velakithi, I’m still doing push-ups for the day I will chop its head off.

Therapy comes in different ways.

“Forget it, he’s not going anywhere.” I reject his offer.

Uncle Mdu looks really desperate, what is with him and chicken?

“What about Mthombo?”

Now he’s pushing it.

I click my tongue and threaten him with a glare.

“Come on Mshana, don’t be greedy.”

He doesn’t know how much I have invested in those chickens.

This place can get lonely, so I picked out chickens and named them after the people that have hurt me.

I talk to Mthombo and tell him how angry he’s made me. He never talks back but it helps.

I haven’t heard from Mthombo the man, maybe it’s time I cut him off and accept that he is part of my past.

“You can take Mthombo, I have plans for Velakithi.”

I’m going to regret making this decision.

Uncle Mdu takes off running to the henhouse, he is not going to thank me.

Noise erupts, the chickens sound terrified. I think of going to check but here he comes running after a white chicken. That’s Mthombo, I recognise him by the red thread on his left leg.

“Catch him, Shiyiwe.” He yells.

Too late, Mthombo is fast.

“Mthombo come back here!”

This is not how I pictured my life, chasing after a chicken named after the man who is slowly stealing my heart.

My uncle and I look like idiots scattered all over the yard.

“You named a chicken after me?”

That voice! I stop and turn, he’s here looking confused.

I don’t know whether to fall on my knees and thank God he’s alive, or run and hide.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Nineteen

ATHULE-

.

.

My size four feet cannot keep up with those long legs, I feel like I'm running a marathon. Mr. Meyiwa is actually tall, probably 6'5 if I'm good in measuring in the height department.

I swear I can see his muscles move with every stroke he takes, I bite my lip fighting the hot flashes that threaten to expose my nastiness in public.

If my mother could see me right now, lusting over a stranger, she would send me back to where babies are made. Disciplining my stubborn eyes proves to be futile.

We get to the car, pack the food in the backseat and without a word, I turn to walk away. I'm not far with my strolls when an outsized hand grips my wrist.

This tendency has to stop, I don't like being touched. His sun glasses are now hooked on his shirt.

He does what he did back there, look into my eyes with an intense gaze. This time I get a chance to look at his face carefully, he is a looker. 7 stars out of 10 if I were to score him.

His skin is cinnamon brown, looks like it actually

tastes of chocolate if I were to lick it. Yep, I'm letting my mind go.

Somebody shoot me and save the world.

Deep in my world of imagination, I hear a low deep chuckle.

"Is there something on my face? You are staring."

His voice snaps me back to reality to meet the sly grin on his face. Realizing that he's still holding my arm, I pull it back and quickly give my other hand a mission to rub away the discomfort.

"What about you? You keep grabbing my wrist, are you planning to buy me a watch?" Okay, I didn't think much about my clap back.

I'm usually shy but weirdly my shyness has taken a back seat. He goes quiet while drilling my eyes with his, failing to keep up with the staring contest, I cast them down.

"I was wrong, there is more in that brain of yours. You are quite a chatterbox, you've got a mouth Athule." He says.

Big man is annoyed by my mouth. Join the queue buddy.

“I need to go back to work sir.” My plan is to give him an attitude and I am winning.

“Get in the car.” There is that voice again demanding to be heard. This pantsula outfit he has on does not suit his persona.

“What?” I ask because such things do not happen in real life, so this has to be a dream.

Women don’t randomly follow men they don’t know.

“I asked that you help me with the bags and we are not done.” More like demanded. Fool!!!

He rams his hands into the pockets of his pants. A smirk pulls at his mouth. I wish I could say it’s devious.

“I... don’t remember you asking.” Don’t stammer Athule. “You ordered me and I’m not going anywhere with you. I don’t even know you, for all I know you might be a...”

“Murderer?” He cuts in and with a curved brow takes

daunting steps towards me, I stagger backward.

His head tilts to the side, his eyes chase mine.

“Athule, I have better things to do with my time than picking up innocent women and killing them. If I were a murderer, you wouldn’t be standing here right now.”

His belittling tone births shivers that ripple through me. As if I’m wasting his time, he looks at his wristwatch which definitely does not compliment the outfit he’s wearing.

He exhales heavily, “I really do not have time for this, call your manager.”

I smell a complaint coming, so I carry my tail between my legs and jump in the backseat.

On the real though, I am wasting his time, between day dreaming about his looks and debating with him. My gaze traces him as he enters the car and buckles up before glaring at me through the rear view mirror.

“This is not an Uber, again you continue to waste my

time Tholakele.”

Tholakele? I have the simplest name in the world,
where did he get to Tholakele?

“Sisiwe!” He says.

The irritation in his voice is enough to throw me in
the passenger seat.

“My name is Athule.” I correct him as I fasten my
seatbelt. He doesn’t reply.

The drive is awkwardly quiet, my stupid curious eyes
are just being disobedient. They insist on stealing
looks at the man next to me.

“Is there something you want to say?” He asks
without taking a glimpse my way.

“No.” I can be defensive for no reason.

“How is work?”

Did he just ask me about work?

“Mr. Meyiwa?” I have to double check, no one cares
about us ordinary workers.

“Call me Ndaba, you’re new right?”

Yeah, almost every customer could tell.

I'm not sure having a conversation with him is wise, his rudeness might come out to play and his menacing voice makes it so hard for me to put a sentence together.

"Work is fine, nothing I can't handle." I lie, I hate it.

"Customers like me must be making it hard for you."

Gee! You think?

"Like I said, nothing I can't handle." I insist.

He takes one glance at me before looking back ahead. He decides to keep to himself, I think he finds me rude. I find me rude sometimes and it's not cute.

We get to a building in Sandown, must be Ndaba Royals headquarters. I follow him to the kitchen where we find the team impatiently waiting.

Everyone goes quiet.

I'm hoping they are staring at this guy dressed like he's going to a pantsula dance competition, but they are actually staring at the woman in a KFC work

uniform.

“Thank you ntwana.” Says some tall guy as he begins to fiddle in the bags.

They all crowd the table, this is one hungry bunch. It’s almost a joy to watch how they pass the food to one another, each person calling out their order.

“Who is this?” Asks a woman wearing a sour face.

Her short dress looks like it’s bandaged around her, can she even breathe in that? I wouldn’t be seen dead in that long ass weave, my mother would mop the floor with it.

The look I get from her is unpleasant, and because I went to an all girl’s school where we retaliate as fast as we’re attacked, I return the nasty stare.

We’re women, we love to hate each other.

“I needed help with the food, I couldn’t carry it by myself.”

Mr. Meyiwa explains like he owes her one, she gives me the look again before shoving me aside. My hungry ass loses balance.

But I grab on to something, the nearest thing at this point is her weave.

I'm left with the hair in my hand and a tight grip on my arm. It's Mr. Meyiwa, holding me tight like he knew I was going to fall.

He's looking back at me, anger in his eyes yet a calm face. I didn't do anything, that bitch pushed me.

"You idiot." The lady yells, covering her head with her hands.

There is nothing to be ashamed of, every girl has messy cornrows under an expensive weave.

"Sorry, I didn't think it was going to come off." Really, my focus was on not falling.

"Shut up!" The yelling again, as she yanks the hair from me. The lady is livid, it must be because of the laughter that has erupted in the kitchen.

"I swear, I thought it was glued to your skull." I protest, lies rolling out of my tongue.

"Are you okay?" Mr. Meyiwa is standing too close, and why is he asking me?

I'm perfect, in fact, my day has been made. He should be asking sister Bettina over here.

My reply is a nod, I'm ready to go back now.

"I have to go back to work." I tell him, his reply is a nod as well. But he is staring, intensely.

The moment is crushed by the weave lady, dismissing me with a R10 tip. This won't even buy a packet of Tennis biscuits. Maybe I should snatch that weave again.

"What's this for?" I ask.

My eyes react to the offense, I may not have a cent in my pocket, but I am not a pauper.

"Tip darling." She waves her hand, dismissively. Her eyes are judging me, making me feel out of place.

This is what happens when you follow men you don't know, they lead you to places where beautiful women will put you under their six inch heels with just one glare.

Feeling insulted and pissed off by this Beyonce, I drop the crumpled note on the table.

“Keep it darling, I’m sure you’ll need it one day.” I have more to say, but keeping my mouth shut would be ideal considering I am in a foreign land so to speak and these people might gang up on me.

“Thank you Athule, there’s a car outside that will take you back.” Mr Meyiwa announces.

I figure ‘there’s a car outside’ means I should go.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

This is awkward, there is no way out for me. He keeps looking at me, the chicken running around and back at me. His crinkled eyebrows tell me that he is not okay with having a chicken named after him.

“What’s going on Nonyanda?”

I bite my lip, giving myself time to put a lie together. Or maybe I should just lay the truth on the table.

“Why are you naming a chicken after me?”

Is he about to cry? Let me put him out of his misery.

“You should be honoured, it means I have been thinking about you.” It’s the best I can do, why is he still frowning?

“Shiyiwe, that man is chasing a chicken and calling it by my name.” His eyes run to uncle Mdu, he’s shouting Mthombo’s name while chasing our meal.

“It’s not what it looks like, I was upset that you ghosted me. I needed to let off some steam and find peace.”

“So naming a chicken after me was the best you could do?” He’s a man, he will never understand.

“It’s nothing serious, you don’t have to be upset about it,” I’m close to ironing out that wrinkle on his face. But I am too mad to touch.

He narrows his eyes, “I’m not upset.”

“You’re snapping at me, you are upset sir.”

“It’s Mthombo,” he snaps yet again.

This is nothing, I want him to explode.

"The only Mthombo I know is that chicken," I point at it.

Uncle Mdu has caught the chicken, and... Lord, he's coming this way, a victorious smile on his face.

I'm embarrassed before he gets here, he glances at the visitor. His grin disappears and comes back when he looks at me.

My uncle makes me feel like those rich aunts who are always traveling and are seen once a year, all of this because he wants to eat chicken.

"Are you going to slaughter Mthombo like you've always wanted, or should I do it?"

Yeah neh! This uncle is a joke.

I look at Mthombo, he's hurt. Like he has a right to be—you know what?

"Prepare the sharpest knife babomncane, Mthombo will be slaughtered by me," I say, locking eyes with Mthombo the man.

His eyebrows lift.

"Azishe," uncle Mdu bounces away without giving

Mthombo a second look. I don't blame him, he gets too excited at the thought of a chicken.

"What are you doing here?" I'm talking to this man who has no idea what cell-phones are for. He seems offended by my question.

"I came to see you Nonyanda."

Now he wants to see me.

"Okay, here I am. Ufunani?"

"Can I at least get a glass of water? Thambo and I have travelled a long distance." He looks over his shoulder, Thambo is sitting in the car. He sees me staring, rolls down the window and waves.

"Tell Thambo to come in, I made porridge." I say and leave for the kitchen.

It's a good thing uncle Mdu's wife and the kids aren't home, I didn't make enough porridge to feed an army.

Grandma is fast asleep in her room, she will eat when she wakes up.

I take my time in the kitchen before serving the men outside.

“It’s too hot in the house, you can have your breakfast out here.”

I want him to bake some more under the sun.

I have always wanted to do spring cleaning, the windows are dirty. The curtains need changing and the yard is covered by dead leaves. I get to it, starting with the curtains.

Mthombo and Thambo are chasing the shade outside, today, they will follow it until the sunsets. .

Hours later, when I feel he’s had enough, I join them. Shame! He looks like a puppy that’s been rained on, I feel sorry for him but I won’t show it. He doesn’t deserve it for what he’s put me through.

I give him that glass of water he asked for when he got here, and stand in front of him with my arms folded.

“Thank you,” he says.

Thambo excuses himself, he gets in the car and

drives off.

“You could’ve gone to the nearest store and bought something to drink, you know?” Confusion finds my address sometimes.

Mthombo empties the glass then answers, “You are punishing me for ghosting you. I didn’t want to take this away from you.”

Sweet! He knows what to say to melt me into a puddle.

“Do you know what I have been through Mthombo? You made a place for yourself in my life and disappeared.”

“I wanted to come and meet you but something kept me away, a strange feeling I couldn’t understand.” He explains, scratch that... this is not an explanation, I don’t know what to call it.

I sit down on Thambo’s chair, “Talk, I’m listening.”

He looks into my eyes for quite a while, too long to have me squirming on the seat.

“The day I came to see you at the hospital,

everything was fine until I held you in my arms.”

Don’t jump into conclusions Shiysiwe, listen for once.

“I can’t explain what I was seeing when I looked at you, it felt as if I was trespassing on someone’s property. Like I wasn’t supposed to be touching you or be anywhere near you, whenever I heard your voice, fear would fill my heart and I’d get irritated. I stayed away because the thought of seeing you annoyed me. The feeling diminished last night. ”

Mthombo’s talking and I’m listening but I can’t understand a thing he’s saying.

“Why would you feel that way? I don’t belong to anyone.” I tell him and I’ve got to say, the man wears his grin quite well.

“What if I said I want you to belong to me?” He’s starting.

He thinks we’re at crèche; this man.

“A woman’s biggest mistake would be to allow herself to belong to a man.” I don’t know where this is coming from.

He looks offended.

“I’m not asking you to be my property Nonyanda, I’m asking you to walk this life with me. To give me a sense of belonging.” He sounds firm, his profound voice sends shivers down my spine.

I’ve suddenly forgotten how to breathe.

“You give me goosebumps in ways that are unimaginable, I can’t hide my feelings from you Shiysiwe. I knew there was something about you from the first moment I saw you, I don’t want to hide my feelings for you anymore.”

This moment takes me back to the night he slept over in Diepkloof, he’s bolder this time and more sure of himself.

In all honesty, I don’t know how to respond to all of this.

Mthombo leans in and holds my hand.

“Nonyanda, I have fallen so deep for you. I love you, I can’t stay away from you anymore.”

I’m overwhelmed, my life will never be the same

again. I'm not in love with him, but there is something. A strong liking, a neediness and urge to want to be around him.

"I don't know if I'm ready for love." I say.

My experience with Emeka has made me insecure about this feeling.

"I can wait, I'll wait for you." Hey! Men and waiting can never be on the same WhatsApp group.

"What if that feeling comes back? What if you feel like you don't want to see me, or my presence starts annoying you?"

I'm trying to secure my future here.

Mthombo exhales before he kisses the palm of my hand, "I don't know what that is but we can fight it together. Just like we'll fight anyone who stands in the way of our happiness." He says.

Now I must fight my family, these unknown feelings of his and everyone who doesn't want to see us happy.

I am not the warrior he thinks I am.

“Who is this man holding your hand?” I didn’t see my grandmother coming, how did her walking stick and wobbly legs get her here so fast?

I pull my hand as if his burns and stand.

“He’s my friend grandma.” I’m going to hell for lying to my living ancestor.

She zooms her small eyes at him, she is judging him. In her head she has made up her mind about who he is and what he wants.

“Is this the man you are having sex with?” Her.

What the fuck?

I look at Mthombo, he’s choking on his saliva and gets a scolding look from grandma.

“I want you to go to my bedroom, in the left drawer you will see a green dress. Wash it and iron it, you will wear it to church on Sunday.”

“I don’t understand grandma.”

“You will understand when the pastor prays for you,”

she says.

Dammit! She is confusing me.

The only thing I got is that she wants me to wear one of her dresses; never happening. What I don't understand is why I need prayers.

"Jesus will make you a virgin again." And with that she turns and walks away with the pace of a snail.

I want to die, cremated and have my ashes scattered in the Nile River.

"She's cute." Mthombo randomly says.

Maybe I should kill him instead.

"Let me show you to the room you'll be sleeping in." I tell him.

He clears his throat and rubs his nape, I've seen this habit before. I don't have to say anything but give him a questioning look.

"We booked into a BnB" he answers in words.

"Oh, okay." I am a little disappointed, I would love for him to stay here for a while longer.

“Thambo will sleep at the BnB, I’ll stay.” He changes his mind, there is no expression on his face.

I send him a smile and wheel him to one of the rooms outside.

“Will I be sleeping alone?” Typical man, I should’ve known.

“You are a grown man, you don’t need a bodyguard.” I reply.

“But I need a body warmer,” he pulls my hand and I fall on his lap with a gasp.

His arms circulate my waist and he snuggles into my neck, he smells clean and expensive.

I could eat sushi on his body... then again, I don’t eat Sushi. Maybe fish and chips.

The atmosphere is suddenly filled with tension, the sexual kind.

“We are going to have many moments like this one,” he says, joining my fingers with his.

The gentle stroking of his thumb on my palm is sending the wrong message to my clit. I level my

breathing and press my thighs together.

“St... stop stroking me,” I’m stuttering.

He looks at me surprised, “What?”

Stroking me? My stupid-self said stroking me.

Panic washes over me, I look away as
embarrassment joins in.

“M... my hand. I mean stop stroking my hand.”

His thumb stops moving.

He tilts my head to face him, I meet his eyes and
when I see what rests in them, something dances in
my stomach.

“Can I kiss you?” Why is he asking?

Do I say yes, no or I don’t know?

I realise he wasn’t asking when our lips lock in a soft,
barely there kiss. His hand starts to move with
curiosity, softly touching me and making my skin
tingle. It feels as if he wants to get under my skin.

“Koko,” that’s uncle Mdu standing at the door.

We forgot to shut the door.

My eyes chase the poor chicken he’s holding upside down and a butcher knife on the other hand.

“Mshana the knife is ready, I’ve boiled the water. It’s time to slaughter Mthombo.”

Uncle Mdu will never make it to heaven, he looks like he wants to murder the Mthombo next to me not the one he’s holding.

I stand and tell him I’m coming, he shoots an ugly look at the man I’m with and walks away after a tongue click.

“Are you serious?” Mthombo asks.

“It’s just a chicken.” I justify my cruelty.

“That you named after me,” he’s pleading with his eyes.

Men never grow up, what kind of nonsense is this?
It’s just a chicken.

“I promised my uncle, and he’s so happy.” I don’t

explain further but do my walk of shame out of the room.

I know he's hungry, he'll have no choice but to feast with us tonight.

.

.

This chapter was sponsored, many thanks to the sponsor

.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Twenty-

SHIYIWE

.

.

Relationships can be exhausting and I'm not in one yet, I need to take a nice long breather and think positive.

The man refused to eat, uncle Mdu was more than

happy to take his share.

He says he's taking me out for dinner, he called it a dinner. I'm not sure if it will be our first date, or we're just going out because he wants to fill his stomach with something that's not named after him.

Most of my clothes are dirty, the only trendy thing I can wear from this damn wardrobe is a camouflage jump suit.

I'm not even a fan, I wore this thing once. It was on Christmas day, the year when the entire South Africa had army fever, we were all walking around looking like underpaid soldiers.

It was a perfect fit now it feels like it wants to suck all the breath in my lungs. I have practically forced a size 28 suit on a size 30 tomboy body, it's a good thing it stretches.

Unemployment causes stress, stress causes weight loss. Pressure from the parents to get a job didn't make it easy for me.

I think of wearing a hat to cover my three month-old braids, or brush the hairline and tie the hair. The

latter is the better option.

I haven't found my way through heels, make up is too expensive. I mix baby bum crème with ponds and apply it on my face, it helps with the itching.

Aunt Lindi told me to do this, if it helps babies with inflammation and rash, why not my skin?

It's an on and off thing, one day I'm okay like my skin never itched to begin with and the next I'm praying for nails longer than a wolf's.

Once done, I pack a tissue and a small bottle of Vaseline for my lips, wet wipes and hand lotion.

Mthombo is waiting outside, heaven knows why. I told him to wait in the car, uncle Mdu will want to bring his family along if he sees us.

"I'm ready."

His eyes follow me as I walk past him while praying to all living gods that this outfit does not rip, it's bad enough that it has flattened my already flat ass.

Thambo pops the door open for me, it's his job but

it's still sweet.

What's not sweet is him driving like we're going to a funeral, I'm nervous about this trip, oddly.

"Please ask him to drive faster." I tell Mthombo.

He gives me a strange look and remains silent,
Thambo has never driven like this before.

"Have you reported your father's corpse missing?"

Wooooh! Where is this coming from?

I look at him, he's looking out the window.

"Uncle Mdu did, the police are on it. I don't have confidence in them really, justice is just a word in this country."

"Would you like me to pull some strings?" Mthombo.

A man that pulls strings...nice. If I wanted him found, then I'd accept his offer, Phindafuthi did me dirty. I couldn't care less what happens to his body, his ancestors must make a way for him.

"I don't know Mthombo and I don't want to care, that

man has hurt me in ways I will never understand.”
It’s my turn to look out the window, I feel his burning gaze on me. It’s not enough to make me look at him.

“You’re angry?” Mthombo.

Now this is enough to turn me around, he’s looking straight into my eyes.

“I’m bitter and homeless,” the first thought to visit my mind comes out of my mouth.

I told him about what Velakithi did, and that I don’t have a home anymore. He knows about the police watching their every move, and it’s strange how he didn’t react nor give an answer.

“You can come live with me.”

I am insulted, what does he take me for? Move in with me and live with me are defined differently and considering that he is looking to be in a relationship with me, my conclusion is that he wants us to cohabit.

“How far are we?” I’m talking to Thambo now, Mthombo will converse with his shadow.

“Almost there sisi.” Thambo.

Almost there is not enough.

“Did I say something wrong?” Mthombo asks.

You’re a man, everything you say is wrong. I have every right to remain silent.

I feel his hand crawling to my lap, turns out I am not that upset to push him away. I need him to stop with the gentle strokes, my eyes widen as I look at him. He sees it, my mind is about to throw a sexual tantrum. He lets out a low laugh, then stops his hand. It’s now resting in between my thighs, doing absolutely nothing.

I will try not to sweat in the meantime, I can be a whore when pushed.

“Why did you fire me the first time you saw me?” Striking a conversation is way better than thinking about his hand on my thigh. Confusion hits him at first, a second later he’s laughing like an idiot. It’s not loud, nor is it a whisper. It’s calm and soothing and I love it.

“You did something to me and I didn’t like it.”

If that’s his answer, he needs to go back to school and get his school fees back. I have not been answered.

“Elaborate Mr. Mthombo.”

The crinkled brow, the scrutiny and flaring nose.

Haibo! Am I not allowed to call him Mr? I think I have been fired again, no way am I dating my boss and by the looks of it, he won’t let me date my boss.

“For the first time in six years, my heart started beating.” He squeezes my thigh and shoots me a faint smile.

I won’t ask anymore, I think I know what he means. I find myself lacing his hand with mine, if this is peace, I want it every second.

The restaurant is too extravagant for my liking, my stupid left brain convinced me we were going to Spur, Wimpy or somewhere familiar. I’m under dressed, the look the waitress gives me is enough

assurance.

I'm wearing Moses' sandals to a posh restaurant, heaven intervene.

"What are they doing here?" Mthombo asks on our way to the table.

I follow his eyes, and lo and behold. Mr and Mrs. Meyiwa.

"What are they doing here?" I repeat his question.

They are looking at us, I'm ready to run out of here.

"Do we greet?" I ask because it will be rude if we don't.

"No, I will call them later. Let's go." He moves, I follow.

"Son, come and join us."

Rich people yell in quiet restaurants? Masabata is brave.

Mthombo is frustrated, he doesn't want us to join them. I don't want us to join them.

That huge smile on his mother's face must be his

weakness, we are going over there.

I'm more nervous than I was when I went to their house for an interview.

"My baby," she's suffocating him with a hug and talking at the top of her voice.

I wish people would stare, so the manager tells us to leave because we are disrupting the peace. But nope, no one is bothered.

"Who is this?" Masabata, looking at me now.

"Shiyiwe Jele," I go for a hand shake.

The smile on her face quickly dissipates, she's looking at my outfit. His father clears his throat. I'm afraid to look at him.

"What are you doing in Durban?" Mthombo.

"We had a business meeting with one of our biggest client, and decided to have a quick snack after." His mom.

Quick snack? Wow, must be nice having millions. MacDonald's is a quick snack, King Pie is a quick snack.

“Please have a sit,” she wants me to sit where she was seated. Her smile is back.

“We’re not staying mom.” Mthombo to the rescue, I don’t see myself dining with Zwangendaba and Masabata.

She laughs nervously, “Don’t be silly. We are family we can’t dine in the same restaurant and sit on different tables.”

I beg to differ.

“I once dined at Chicken Licken and when I was half way through the meal, my cousin walked in and sat at a different table. We didn’t greet each other, we ate and went our separate ways like strangers.”

I come from a family of foodies, no one shows teeth when it’s time to eat.

My statement has caused tension making me the centre of attention.

“You’re a cute little thing,” she just called me a thing and that smile on her face is so fake.

Mrs. Meyiwa is insisting on us joining them,

Mthombo reluctantly agrees. What a night this is going to be.

Dinner is awkward, the only people holding a conversation are Zwangendaba and his wife, Mthombo would jump in when needed to. He keeps stealing glances at me, maybe checking if I'm still here.

"Stop playing with your food and eat." Zwangendaba. I don't like the way he's looking at Mthombo, why tell a grown man to eat?

Mthombo frowns.

"Don't give me that look, we are paying for this food." I am dumfounded by this father, I want to butt in. He can't talk to his son like that.

"I am not a child." His frown grows, he's ticked off.

"You're my child, I don't care how old you are."

I am getting uncomfortable, Zwangendaba takes fatherhood pretty serious. They are staring at each

other, murderously. Mthombo is not backing down but I want him to because at this point, Zwangendaba looks like a violent man.

“How are you son?”

His mother beats me to it, by the looks of it, this is normal for her.

No answer comes from Mthombo, his body language shows that he doesn’t want to be here.

“Your mother is talking to you.” Zwangendaba and his intimidating voice.

“I’m fine.” Mthombo speaks as he moves his deadly glare from his father.

“Shiyiwe is fine too, since no one bothered to ask.”

Why is Mthombo involving me in their quarrel? Is this how it’s going to be like when we’re official?

Zwangendaba doesn’t like me much, the looks I’m getting from him are undermining.

A few bites later, the awkwardness subsides.

Mthombo has loosened up a bit, he's eating while I can't stomach a bite, not with those looks from Zwangendaba.

The man that brought me here receives a call and excuses himself.

I want to excuse myself with the pretext of helping him push the wheelchair, but it seems he's doing okay without me.

"Great, we can't have a peaceful gathering without any interruptions."

I can't imagine what it must be like to live under this man's roof, to think he still tells a 38 year-old what to do is beyond shocking.

"You forget that your son is a big businessman who runs one of the most successful companies in this country." That's the mom talking with pride. I would too if my child was that successful.

"I'm the president of that company," Zwangendaba argues. "But you don't see me running around with my phone during family time."

Initially, this was “umjolo” time, they just had to ambush us. I’m bored, when is Mthombo coming back.

His wife laughs nervously, “It’s a business call, it’s probably important. Mthombo always puts family first. I’m sure he won’t be long.”

I hope he won’t be long or he won’t find me here when he gets back. Do people bite? Zwangendaba looks like he bites.

“What do you want with my son?”

I saw this coming. How do I answer Zwangendaba’s question?

I shift my gaze to the direction Mthombo took hoping to spot him coming back, as I turn back, I meet Zwangendaba’s stern gaze.

The table has become quiet, they are both looking at me.

“I’m okay sir.” I stutter, about to combust from the shock of this unexpected turn of events.

Had I known this would happen, I wouldn’t have

agreed to tag along. Lord, I'm not even hungry to begin with.

He's looking at me with anger in his eyes, I close my eyes to calm my racing heart.

It's okay Shiyiwe, breathe in... breathe out.

A loud tongue click has me opening my eyes, it's Mr. Meyiwa. He stands up, palpitating and fuming.

"I'm going to look for my son." He walks away.

I'm left with the madam, she's not as intimidating. Who am I kidding? Rich people are intimidating.

"Is he going to be okay?" I mean Mthombo, I'm worried about him.

"He fathered him, he'd never hurt him."

Sheesh! I didn't mean to offend her, she heaves a good long one and downs a glass of... whatever she's having.

I don't have an appetite, this is a not to be repeated situation.

We are silently waiting for the return of the men, they have been gone for a while. I sincerely hope Mthombo is still alive, his father has a short fuse.

Oh! Here comes Thambo, I'm too impatient for that slow walk and blank expression.

Fuck! I can't take this shit anymore, I stand and rush to him.

"Is he okay?" There shouldn't be a lump on my throat, why do I suddenly want to cry?

"He said to get you, we're going home." Thambo delivers.

That means he is okay.

"Where is my husband?"

Come on Masabata, your husband is a beast. She should be worried about Mthombo.

I don't wait for Thambo to reply, but rush out. The car is parked in front of the entrance, my heart relaxes when I see Mthombo in it. My feet lead me to him but a voice stops my quick steps.

"Enjoy him, this is not going anywhere."

Where did he come from? He's standing behind me, hands in his pockets and a look of the devil in his eyes.

It's too much to grasp.

Right now, Mthombo is my worry. I ignore his father and hurry to the car.

"You're here," I'm trying to tell him that I was worried. I'm not good with expressing myself.

His smile is not genuine.

"What did you talk about with your father?"

He looks at me with different eyes before they roam, as if looking for something.

"Business."

He's lying to me.

I won't push, he's been through enough bullying for the night.

It's my turn to lay a hand in between his thighs, I hope he appreciates the gesture. This is how far I'm willing to go with him for now. His aura feels heavy, I

don't want this for him.

Anytime now tears will fall, my tears. I don't want him to see me cry, so I look out the window.

Thambo is back, as he starts the car I feel Mthombo's hand on mine.

I have questions for this man, maybe some I don't want to utter out loud, afraid of what the answers might be. My mind can't understand the chaos that's hammering my heart, there is so much to take in.

.

.

Thambo leaves after dropping us, I have fixed Mthombo's sleeping place, now I have to get him a jug of water lest he wakes up thirsty at night. The main house is silent, they went to bed early. 9pm has not claimed its spot yet.

I'm about to walk out when I see a short figure coming from the dark corridor, my heart almost leaves my chest.

“Shiyiwe!”

Shit!

Old people should be asleep by now, what is this one doing awake at this time?

“Grandma, you scared me. Don’t ever do that.”

She sits on one the chairs and scrutinizes me under her gaze.

“Who is that man?” She asks.

To be honest, old people confuse the hell out of me. What is up with this one?

“He’s my friend,” I say.

I want to ask if that’s the reason she stayed awake, she’d beat me with her walking stick.

“A friend of the opposite gender will not visit you this late, tell him to go home.”

I can’t do that, it will be rude and uncalled for. Besides, I want Mthombo to stay.

“He’s our guest grandma, we can’t send him away.”

How will I persuade this stubborn woman?

"He needs to leave... if he wants a relationship with you, then he will write a letter to your family. A date will be set for the lobola negotiations, then he can come and go as he pleases after he's paid off everything."

Paid off everything? I feel like a bag of meat from MTN butchery.

Lobola though? I haven't even told the man how I feel about him, she wants him to leave and never come back.

My grandmother is taking things way too fast, lobola is a huge step and I doubt his father would agree to it. I saw the hatred he has for me in his eyes, I'm not the daughter in-law he is looking for.

"Go take care of the guest, make sure he's warm. It's a cold night." She says, stands and finds her way out.

I'm caught between a rock and a hard place.

.

.

Sponsored...

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Twenty-one

ATHULE-

.

.

Whoever said humans should work in exchange for money was possessed, working is for the devil. We should have trees that produce money in our backyards. My feet are throbbing when I enter the house through the kitchen, just in time to find my mother dishing up for supper. It's past 9pm, Ayanda should've cooked and not waited for mom to come home from work and cook.

When has a fifteen year-old ever died from cooking?
She would be the first.

"Mama." I'd greet her with a kiss, but there's something about the way she looks at me that has me withdrawing.

Something is wrong, maybe she had a terrible day at work. She works for white people, I don't know how they treat her but I'm sure it's not good.

"How are you?" Is asked coldly, she doesn't spare me a glance of any sort. Everyone in this house knows never to approach her when she's moody, my father says it is how she is. I say she's bipolar.

"Tired." I tell her, timidly.

It doesn't look like she cares. She's back to dishing up, we're forever eating pap in this house.

I greet my brothers and Ayanda who are crowding her in this small kitchen. Sizwile has his head dipped inside the fridge, Sbonelo is leaning against the door post, hands crossed over his chest and Ayanda is engrossed on her phone taking up most of the space near the stove. I get nothing from Sbonelo, a nod from Sizwile and a small smile from the little sister.

Needing to quench a thirst, I weave my way to the fridge.

"Haibo Athule. It's not the end of the month yet and you already smell expensive."

And then this one? What is he talking about?

“What do you mean?”

Sbonelo is forward, I wonder why he hasn’t moved out. Most 30 year-olds are independent and living on their own.

“What he means is that you smell expensive madam and it’s not just an expensive perfume, it’s a man’s scent.” Sizwile has a big mouth for a 17 year-old, he is too much for me.

“I think our sister has hit the jackpot, you found yourself a sugar daddy, Athule?” Sbonelo smirks.

I’m not okay with how his eyes are sweeping through my body, and I can’t help but show my eye rolling skills because what he just said is stupid.

I haven’t even rested my feet and I’m being attacked.

“Don’t be ridiculous, I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Defence knocks and I let it out. What do they take me for?

“I don’t see anything wrong with dating a blesser, it’s how most black women rise in this poverty stricken

country.” Clap hands for Ayanda, she’s actually realised there is life outside that phone in her hand.

“Wena Ayanda!!! Are you dating old men?” Mother shouts, I think her high blood just went up.

Ayanda ripostes by mumbling words no one is able to make out, she wiggles herself out of the kitchen, carrying an attitude loud enough for my mother to notice.

The spoiled brat will not even get a slap on the wrist. If it were me, I would be fighting for my life under my mother’s foot.

“Go freshen up before your food gets cold sisi,” mom pats my back.

I’m glad she doesn’t ask about this scent these monkeys speak of.

“Ma, why does Sbonelo get three pieces of meat and I get two?”

That’s Sizwile sulking, I don’t wait to hear mom’s reply. I know though that he’d end up with an extra piece from her plate.

She is that mother.

It's been a long day and I need a bath, though the last thing I want is to boil water, it's another load of work.

My mother keeps the geyser off during the day, she claims it consumes a lot of electricity. We switch it on around 7pm an hour before baba comes home, if he's not working the night shift.

The man has to find the water boiling hot so he can take his usual evening bath. The rest of us will pat our bodies with what's left of it.

The smell my brothers were raving about hits me as I remove my top, I don't know anything about expensive fragrances but this scent is definitely not mine, Dawn is what I normally smell of.

This world never loved me, my own body has mingled with the likes of Bhedlindaba Meyiwa without my permission.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

I decide to freshen up before going to Mthombo's room, I take a quick bath and change into a night dress. I don't own a morning gown, to keep warm I wrap a throw around my body and make sure it's tight enough.

The smell of Camphor cream and shield roll on follows me to his room, I smell fresh and feel clean.

I find Mthombo lying on top of the covers, Mary mother of God, he is topless. It's suddenly hot in here. There's a cool breeze outside, I should go back just to cool off. Something stops me from moving, he hasn't heard me come in. He is staring up at the ceiling, arm resting behind his head and the other on his stomach.

He is troubled, I don't like this one bit.

"Mthombo," I place the jug on the bedside table and sit on the edge. He looks at me then back at the ceiling without uttering a word.

Should I intrude and ask, or leave him alone? Some people prefer silence when going through something.

“Would you stay with me?” He asks when I’m about to walk out, still not sparing me a single look.

I can’t believe this is me, but yes I want to stay with him. I can’t possibly leave him alone when he’s down like this.

“Do you want me to stay?” I’m playing games, right?

“Yes, I don’t want to be alone.” He says.

There is suddenly a question of where I will sleep, I can fetch a blanket from the main house and sleep on the floor. Mthombo growls lowly as he faces me.

“I want you next to me, I won’t bite, I promise.”

He grins as he scoots aside to make space.

Not with those teeth, he won’t.

“You want me to lie on this small thing.” I ask after a couple of eye rolls.

We bought the bed yes, but it’s still small.

“I want you in my arms,” he clears.

God created them with smart mouths, quick answers and manipulating techniques.

I put away the throw and lie down next to him, as far away as I could. The bed shifts, before I can look back, he's breathing down my neck, his arms are around me.

"Come closer, I don't bite." He's asking for too much, but I do it anyway. My head is on his chest and my arm over his torso.

If my grandmother finds out that I am sharing a bed with a man I'm not married to, in her son's premises, she will bury me alive.

He's still as cuddly and warm, his heart is strangely beating fast.

"Are you okay?" I ask.

"Mmmh!"

Mmmh does not qualify as a solid answer, it's left me confused.

"Just so you know, I'm doing you a favour. I have my own bed that's more comfortable." I'm trying to

chase away the elephant in the room, why is he suddenly tense? He wanted me in his arms.

Everything is going well until his hand wanders across my chest, I hold my breath. His other hand finds its way to my inner thighs, my body shudders as he lightly brushes his fingers on that spot. I whimper when I remember that I'm not wearing any panties.

What he's doing has left me wet and wanting sexual healing.

I raise my eyes to look at him, a smirk plays on his mouth. I know what he's thinking.

"What are you doing?" I ask.

"What do you mean?"

"You are getting carried away. Cuddling is not a ticket to my panties."

I'm actually teasing him while trying to act like a good girl which I'm not.

"Don't you like what I'm doing Nonyanda?" He

whispers into my ear.

"I want to pray and thank God for your hands, they are blessing me." That was my clit talking, not me.

Fuck I haven't had sex in months, could be years or centuries. That's how it feels down there, there must be a spider web and a family of spiders.

"What?" He laughs.

I'm not repeating my shame. I'm a terrible tease, the next thing I will be winking at the man.

The sly grin on his face is sending me straight to the world of lust, why is it so beautiful? Beard and all, he's a ten.

Most black men are winning in the beauty department, and failing in the love department. I have met a lot of waste-of-beauty, you can't be handsome for nothing. Be a lover and bless somebody's daughter.

"Are you okay?" He's asking because I won't stop shuffling.

"Never been better," it's all lies.

Men should be able to tell when you're horny right? I mean my body is on fire, and the stupid clit has taken a life of its own.

This one is not saying anything, he's holding me in his arms as if that's enough.

It doesn't take long for him to fall asleep, something must be wrong. Either I don't turn him on or I'm just too skin and bones for his teddy bear body.

"What is wrong with you Shiysiwe?" I grunt under my breath.

This has never happened before, and this feeling should have subsided already.

I have to place a pillow in between my thighs, it takes time for the tickle on my clit to cool down.

I eventually fall asleep after counting sheep for a whole thirty minutes.

.

.

It's around 2am when my eyes flick open, I feel empty and realise that I'm no longer in the man's

arms. He's not sleeping next to me, but seated on the edge of the bed with his back turned to me.

"Mthombo!" I call out to him, he doesn't turn.

"Why are you sitting in the dark?"

He is giving me serial killer vibes, we're black, we don't do well with the dark.

Seeing that he is not answering me, I get off the bed to turn the light on.

"Why did you turn on the light?" He asks, his face cast down. As much as I want him to look at me, he doesn't. He's been drowning in sorrow, while I was dreaming about having sex with him.

What else says possessed than this? I'm ironing that dress grandma said to iron, how can I be such an idiot?

"I'm worried about you, Mthombo." I keep my voice soft and hope that he would open up and not be mysterious. "I'm here."

He looks at my hand on his lap and exhales, I don't know what to make of it. Zwangendaba said or did

something to him, he was different after their encounter.

“Turn it off.” He repeats softly, his face still cast down.

“Mthombo I’m here, talk to me...”

He doesn’t say anything for a while, I don’t know how to get past the wall he’s built around him.

“I said turn it off.” He says, finally looking up. His teary eyes smack me into a whirlwind of worry. He’s been crying or is on the verge of crying.

I’m quiet because I don’t know what to say with regards to the tears in his eyes, I don’t know how to comfort him.

“Turn the light off and go back to bed Shiyiwe.” He turns his eyes away from mine.

“No, you’re not okay.”

It’s a good thing I was born stubborn, no way am I going to sleep while he falls into depression overnight.

“I’m fine, don’t let me keep you from your sleep.”

“No.” My voice rises a little louder, I bite my lower lip and scold myself. He is not a child to be yelled at in order for him to understand something.

“I will not let you shut me out Mthombo. You can’t keep things in, it’s not good for you.”

“Are you a doctor now?”

I can’t shake off the twinge of pain in his voice, it’s all I hear when he opens his mouth to speak. It’s one of the reasons I keep insisting.

“No but if you want me to be one for you, I don’t mind. I can be your nurse, I can even be a porn star.”

Okay, shut up stupid clit.

It’s time I give it a name.

I’m happy to see a smile creeping up on his face.

“So if I get a pole, would you dance for me, naked?” He asks.

I thought he was the serious one between us.

“Maybe, I would.” He deserves a strip tease for being

the man he is.

It's worth a shot straddling him and wrapping my arms around his neck, maybe an embrace would make him feel secure and forget his troubles for a bit.

"You are hurting Mthombo, it is okay to cry. You are allowed to." I mutter against his neck.

He's not holding me back, but nuzzles my neck. Someone has damaged this man.

Something wet touches my shoulder, I hear a sniffle next. He's breaking down, his sobs aren't so loud but I hear them.

He holds me, tighter than I anticipated. I have never comforted a crying man before, however, I'd do it for him whenever he needs me.

After a while, he sighs and kisses the curve of my neck.

I'm on the man's lap, straddling him. Of course I will think about sex, I feel so bad for being this bitchy.

Sex is not what he wants but a shoulder to lean on.

“Don’t think I’m pushing you away Nonyanda, I need you to know that there are times when a person wants to be left alone, it’s not that I don’t want to talk to you. There are things that hurt more when you talk about them.” Mthombo.

At the end of the day, he is a black man. They bottle their feelings and believe that speaking out means you are not man enough.

I’m caught between lust and the affection for wanting to comfort him.

“What’s next then?” I ask, since he doesn’t want to talk about what’s eating him.

I can offer him a coffee and hold his hand till he falls asleep or get what I’ve been craving. Maybe I will regret this after or let him love me like he wants.

“What do you mean?” He asks, his hands are moving up and down my back.

I cup his cheeks, “I was thinking that maybe... you’d like us to have sex.”

He’s amused by the suggestion, I think I didn’t word

it properly.

"I know you're stressed, you really don't have to do anything. You can lie on your back while I marinate the..."

Someone lock me up and throw away the key. What the fuck Shiyiwe?!

Mthombo shuts me up with a quick kiss, he looks into my eyes and shakes his head.

"If you say chicken, I swear I will die." He laughs.

"I was going to say beef."

He laughs a bit louder at my reply.

"I'm sorry, I'm a bad flirt..." I say.

I'm terrible at this.

"Maybe you're good at other things that don't require you to speak." Mthombo Meyiwa is flirting with me?

The eye wink, Lord.

He's kissing me and I'm getting soaked.

My nightdress is removed with just one pull leaving

me naked. He cups my breasts and meets my eyes. His eyes are half lidded, it looks he's struggling to breathe.

I'm suddenly nervous, I've never been on top before. How will I do this?

"What's wrong?" He's seen my discomfort.

"I don't know how I'm going to drive, what if I get a cramp on my hips before I cum?"

The whole point is to cum, otherwise it's pointless. Mthombo looks confused.

I have to explain it to him.

"I'm not into fitness, my limbs are stiff and I've heard that cramps during sex are common. Let me stretch my body first and do ten squats."

I try to get off but he holds me down and crashes his lips against mine.

"No more talking from you," he kisses me again. His hands glide to my ass, he fumbles the flesh. I'm moaning into his mouth and actually sound like a starved cow.

Why did he stop kissing me? I was enjoying that.

“Stop mooing Nonyanda, don’t let nerves take over you. Relax and let me lead you.”

He's right, I need to stop thinking a lot and breathe.

.

.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Twenty-two

NTEBO-

.

.

She’s lying on her back on the floor, it’s another sleepless night. How can she sleep when each time she closes her eyes, sleep paralysis attacks her? If not, then she’s having nightmares.

It all started the day she had a miscarriage, how did fate turn on her?

Everything was going smoothly, she had managed to

take Emeka from her best friend. They were expecting and going to get married. The day of the lobola negotiations was the perfect chance to show Shiyiwe that she doesn't always win in life. She didn't think this through, how she would explain snatching the boyfriend from her.

Inviting Shiyiwe to the lobola negotiations, knowing who her suitor is, was a low blow even for a child of a witch, but Ntebo didn't care. It didn't matter at that time, the only thing she cared about was rising above Shiyiwe. A dream she'd been chasing since the days of hipsters and boob-tube tops.

Whoever said dreams come true is a damn liar.

The day ended with runny shit, a miscarriage and broken hearts.

She gets up and goes to the kitchen for a glass of cold water, the light is on and there is someone occupying the room.

"Mme, what are you doing awake?" She asks.

Her mother eyes her, shrugs and continues to pour water into the kettle.

"I can't sleep," Mme Mosheo answers after a heavy sigh. "Would you like some tea?"

Ntebo doesn't speak, she's suddenly lost in space. She's been carrying a heavy heart for days on end.

"Nteboheleng?" Mme puts the cup in her hand on the table and rushes to hug her child.

"It's okay my baby, that girl will pay for what she did to you." Now when Tshegofatso Mosheo makes a promise, dig a hole and hide.

"I lost my baby mme, Emeka broke up with me and I was fired from work." She's a sobbing little thing. Mme Mosheo's body tenses, she steps back and exhales briefly.

"There's something you need to know," sounds like a confession. Ntebo lifts her brows in wonder, she folds her arms as if comforting herself. Poor thing looks like a wounded puppy.

"I had made two dresses for you and Shiyiwe, hers

had her name on it. I worked on that dress, it was going to destroy her. Bad luck was going to come in her like a hurricane.”

It’s not the first time she’s heard something like this, her mother knows her way through African plants. She’s able to combine them and come up with a mass destruction.

This time around it’s hard to swallow everything, Ntebo’s eyes are wide with shock.

“What have you done?” Ntebo shouts, grabbing her braids in pent up frustrations.

It’s Mme Mosheo’s turn to pop her eyes wide open, she’s been meaning to tell her this but didn’t know where to start.

“I’m sorry,” she says.

That’s all she’s got, a lousy apology.

“You have ruined my life Mme!”

“The dress wasn’t meant for you, you shouldn’t have worn it.”

The blaming game! Really?

Maybe she shouldn't have worn it, maybe she shouldn't have dated Emeka, maybe... argh! Nothing justifies what this mother has done. Such carelessness cannot be justified.

"But where were you Mme? You were supposed to be there to make sure I don't wear the dress, look what you've done to me. I lost my job, the man I love and my baby." If she continues yelling like a crazy person, she will lose her voice.

Mme rushes to her side and tries to comfort her, "We can fix this baby. I will fix this."

Ntebo staggers past her and heads to the kitchen counter, she pulls the drawer open and fiddles with the spoons.

"Ntebo please, I'm sorry."

Her child looks hysterical, must be a mental breakdown. Mme charges at her again but stops when Ntebo spins back around, she has a knife in her hand.

“Nteboheleng?” She’s that dramatic mother that never seems to keep her voice down or shut her mouth, now the neighbours must know that Nteboheleng is up to her shenanigans again. Tough luck, it’s in the early hours of the morning.

“Is there more? What other curse did you put on that dress?” There must be more, she knows her mother either goes hard or goes home.

“Baby please,” her voice is shaky.

A witch never reveals her secrets and this one is not about to be the first.

“Give me the knife Ntebo,” Mme pleads.

The doctor did mention something about self-harm, depression and hysterical moments.

Ntebo breaks down, she’s crying like it’s a funeral and she’s about to trend for the loudest crier.

“Dammit Mme! What else?” Ntebo.

Mme Flinches and almost spills the beans. Her widened eyes run to the knife then back to Ntebo’s tear drenched face.

“Please, don’t make me say it.” Mme Mosheo.

She thinks she’s a lioness, untouchable. That’s why she has the courage to near an armed, deranged woman.

Mme Mosheo is trying to take the knife from her daughter but Ntebo won’t let go, they struggle in the kitchen.

Ntebo is screaming profanities and her mother begging her to let go.

The last thing Mme Mosheo wants is to lose her baby. Somehow, Ntebo overpowers her mother, she pushes her with enough force for the old hag to stagger backwards.

The knife is no longer in her hand, it’s plunged in Mme Mosheo’s stomach.

Her mother is lying on the floor, groaning in pain. She thinks of calling her father for help, he came home two nights back and has been drinking like a pipe. He won’t even blink if she tries to wake him up.

Time is not on her side, run or call for help?

.

.

SHIYIWE

“Did you come here prepared for me?” I’m caught in confusion by his question, until I follow his line of sight down to the one thing that manages to take full control of me, my vagina.

The smirk on his face has me shying away.

“No underwear!”

Dammit, my clit just vibrated at the sound of his seductive voice. His erection is poking my inner thighs, he’s growing by the second.

“Ouch, I’m hurt that you’re only seeing it now? No more Christmas for you sir?”

Big mouth Shiysiwe, you said sir... he hates that word. I’m about to apologise when he grins up at me.

“No more Christmas? Does that mean this is going

to happen again?" He asks.

I gasp when he buries my nipple inside his mouth and sucks it. I should be answering him not heaving like Jezebel, he probably knows that I'm thirsty.

My hands are on the back of his head, willing him to continue. He raises his eyes and... holy cow, if this man smiles at me like that again, I will cum before he even penetrates me.

"Tell me, Nonyanda. Are we going to have many more of these? I would really like that."

Well... at least speak like a normal human being so I can answer you. Who bloody whispers like a sex freak when talking?

My hormones are on steroids, I can't control them.

"Yes." Like I said, my hormones are on steroids. I just agreed to more sex dates with him.

The next breast is not spared, he's sucking me like I deserve it. This is heaven making up for the times I have been starved.

God created sex and it's cruel for grownups to be

deprived of such a sacred thing with the one person who makes them feel wanted and whole.

I don't realise I'm grinding my hips against his hard shaft when he grips them tight, stopping me from moving.

"This power that you have over me will kill me one day," he says, panting and cupping my cheek.

Our lips meet, the kiss is slow and screams everything sexual.

"I love you Nonyanda, it will always be you. No one will ever take your place."

I'm not sure I know what love is yet, I can't rob him and tell him something that confuses me.

There is hesitation in my eyes, he sees it and covers it with a kiss.

I'm flipped over the bed like a pancake, unexpectedly and let out a small scream.

"What are you doing? I'm supposed to be riding you."
That can't be my voice, who knew I'd lose myself in the arms of my boss?

“I want to look at you first, relish the moment.” He mutters.

Yep, he is looking at me, every inch of me. This man thinks we have time, my father’s corpse might even walk in here before I get my orgasm.

“You will look at me another time,” I get off the bed.
“I’m too horny to pose for your eyes.”

Okay! That actually sounded better in my head. I go for his trousers, he must take this time to look at me because when he’s fully naked, I’m riding him to Dubai.

I throw his pants to the ground, his boxers follow. My birthday should feel like this, his penis is out in the open and pointing skyward.

“Please fire me,” I say with my hands on my hips.

His eyebrows rise in confusion.

“I’m not going to sleep with my boss, please fire me now.”

Confusion visits his face, but he laughs in the midst

of it and says, "Shiyiwe Jele, you are fired effective immediately."

I smile, I have never been so happy to be unemployed. I'm on his lap in a second, his shaft touches my stomach.

"Can you move your hips?" I ask, stroking his erect penis. He hisses as he tilts his back.

"Yes!"

I didn't think he'd snap, my mouth is a hellhound. I need to watch what I say.

He stops my hand from stroking him, "I'm in pain. I want to be inside you already."

His fingers are on my clit, rubbing and fondling.

My body shudders appreciatively, I squirm and twist my hips. His name has become familiar with my voice and mouth.

"Mthombo... sir."

He puts his cheek on mine and murmurs, "I want you wetter than this, Shiyiwe."

The fuck! He's biting my ear as he's saying this.
There are words on my tongue, words like I was
ready for him before he fell asleep.

I can't speak though, he's doing justice to my clit.

"Look into my eyes, I want you to focus on the love
in my eyes when you cum not on the feeling you're
chasing."

Why does he have to talk so much? I can't keep my
eyes open, I'm close to climaxing.

"Shiyiwe!"

He's stopped, "Continue, I was enjoying that."

He should lend me his fingers, so I finish this myself.

"Mthombo you are an enemy of progress, I was
close. Why..."

"I want your eyes on me when you reach an orgasm,
I want you to manifest our love and future." He says.

"Okay, I will manifest anything. Just continue...
please" Porn stars don't even sound like this.

Our eyes lock, he spreads my thighs and pushes two

fingers deep inside me catching me off guard.

When he goes back to rubbing my clit, my vision blurs, my heartbeat escalates and I start seeing stars.

It's coming, it's... my thighs tighten around his hips. I want to open them wide, but I also want to close them. I'm a bloody confused mess and this feeling is phenomenal.

There's a satisfied smile on his face, he loves seeing me weak, I have concluded.

"Now that the engine is up and running, let's run this race Nonyanda."

So my clit is an engine now? I don't care, he can call it a bus if he wants. Matter of the fact is that I am ridding this bull tonight.

"Are you comfortable?" I have to make sure before we start.

Mthombo nods, "I can move my hips but I will need to put pressure on my legs and that's something I can't do."

How can I forget that he has limited mobility?

“Bring that chair, I’ll need to place my ankles on it to be comfortable.”

He points at a chair at the foot of the bed, I’m wearing a blanket of shame as I turn my back to him and head for the chair.

I have never felt so dumb in my life, this is the perfect time to stop all this and go back to sleep but no; Shiyiwe Jele still wants sex. Plus, my clit; the engine as he called it is vibrating, throbbing, buzzing... whatever. I just know that it’s alive.

When I lift the chair and turn back, my eyes land on his shaft. Did it grow while I wasn’t looking? It’s black, darker than his thighs. I hear you find cucumbers with different shapes that look like penises, maybe we have one that looks like his in the fridge. I will check in the morning.

“What?” He’s caught me staring, damn my undisciplined eyes. I can’t help it, something is eating me up and I need to know.

“Do you think when God made a man’s penis he said let there be penises, let them be different shapes and sizes... Let them give men pleasure and women multiple orgasms... Women will call them Joysticks, magic wands or Stumbo Jumbo...”

“Shiyiwe, shut up and come here.” He’s laughing his heart out, really I’m shocked by his laugh.

“Sorry.” I say, placing the chair down.

I put his feet up on it, making sure his ankles are on the edge of it.

“Is this comfortable?” I’m asking a serious question but he’s dead with laughter. I guess he is comfortable.

I take my place on his lap, and cancel his laugh with a deep kiss. His hands explore my body, he’s touching me like I’m worth the country’s billions.

“Are you ready?” He asks, I shiver.

He taps his shaft on the source of my sexual stimulation, driving me insane. He’s looking for consent.

“Do it,” I say.

I lift my hips, and almost go crazy when I lower myself on him. Just what I ordered, he’s inside me and expanding with each push.

I don’t know how to twerk but when a man that drives you crazy is inside you, your ancestors come through for you.

He lies down on his back, I lean over for a kiss but he catches my nipple with his mouth. My moaning is out of control, I try to keep it at bay though not wanting to be indirectly called a cow.

“Give me more Shiysiwe, give me... give me...” he repeats, out of breath.

My very own cheer leader, I twerk, hump, spin my hips. Whatever it takes to give us both a good time.

The expressions he’s making assure me that I’m doing this right, he’s enjoying me.

God forgot to mention that we’ll look like clowns when having sex, right now I look like I’m having a stroke. But I don’t care, it’s all about getting that

orgasm.

His breathing is quickening, I'm screaming and repeating his name. We're both close, I press my hands on his chest and pick up my pace.

"Fuck! Shiyiwe you're killing me." He says louder than I think he anticipated.

No, he's killing me.

A tingling feeling is running inside me, "I'm going to cum Mthombo, I'm coming."

I gasp loud and scream out his name, "Mthombo... I'm... almost there."

He pulls me closer to his chest and attacks me with a greedy kiss before making me look at him.

"Don't stop." He says, massaging my ass with his rough hands.

"I love you, I love you Shiyiwe," He confesses just when a tsunami orgasm hits me and my body shudders uncontrollably. I almost fall off his lap from squirming too much but he holds me in place and helps me move faster, we are chasing his

orgasm now and if I'm lucky, I will get another one.

"Baba, sis' Shiyiwe is killing her friend."

Dammit uncle Mdu! How did this brat get in here?

I jump off Mthombo and find my night dress, he's covered half of his body with a blanket by the time I turn to face him.

What time is it? Other kids are sleeping at this time.

He must be going to the toilet or coming from there.

Uncle Mdu comes running. He really believed I was killing my friend like his brat of a son said. His eyes are about to leave his head, I don't like the way he's looking at Mthombo. He's going to kill him if I don't chase him out.

"Ncane vala iscabha." (Close the door.)

It seems I didn't yell loud enough, I chase his eyes to find Mthombo hiding under the blanket. I'd bring down the ceiling and cover him if I could, embarrassed can't even begin to describe how I feel.

Uncle drags his son away from the door and bangs the door closed.

“Are they gone?” Mthombo asks, taking a peek through the blanket. He better come out of there before he faints.

“Please call Thambo, I want to go back to Joburg.” I tell him.

How will I ever face my uncle? I feel so ashamed.

.

.

A/N: I've seen the spelling mistakes and errors on previous chapters, I'll have that fixed.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Twenty-three

ATHULE

.

.

Like every other day, I am not looking forward to

work, I wish I could tell my father that I don't want this job. My old man has this side to him that makes you fear him, so I will have to suffer in silence. It's not that I don't want to work, it's having to fry chicken the entire day and shouting, next!

"The day would actually go faster if you looked enthusiastic." That's Sonto, walking into the staff kitchen.

"Excuse me?" I heard what she said, I want to see if she has the audacity to repeat it.

This one has a mouth and it runs the whole day, whatever comes out of it is never signed by the gods of sanity, but she delivers it with such confidence.

I need to take lessons on how to slap a human, my skills are embarrassing.

"I'm just saying dade!"

Did she dade me?

Everything about this girl screams rudeness, like how she's hovering above me like those "after school is after school" bullies. I would stand, but my

father is not Bruce Lee.

“Anyone can tell that you don’t want to be here, we all don’t want to be here, but you don’t see us walking around with long faces.”

Ohho!

“Are you saying my face is long?” I know what she meant, I’m trying to make her look stupid like she’s doing to me.

“You’re draining Athule, a smile wouldn’t hurt. At least do it for some of us who are going through shit and work is our only escape from the real world.”

She spews.

Why is her name Nomasono again? I need to have a talk with her mother, she should’ve named her NomaRussia.

“Yes boss, I hear you.” I clap back, making sure she spots the irritation searing through me.

Sonto does not seem fazed by my comeback, she’s cackling her way out of the kitchen.

I need to get to work, before Simi comes to finish what Sonto started.

As I slide out of the chair, my attention is gripped by someone humming.

“Good morning.” It’s Nandipha and her cheery-self. I wonder what she eats for breakfast.

“Hey.” It’s so easy to return her smile, her energy is refreshing.

“Do you want some fat cakes? I’ve got six, I won’t finish them all.” She offers, holding up a plastic bag with steamy fat cakes.

“I’m okay, thank you.” The breakfast I ate is still finding a comfortable place in my stomach.

I don’t know why I’m waiting for Nandipha, but I am. Watching her bustling around the small kitchen, making tea. She’s telling me a taxi story I’m not interested in.

She loses me along the way, only because she can talk for the whole of Africa. Nothing wrong with it, I’m not complaining.

“Bhedlindaba Meyiwa.”

My heart does a flip at the mention of that name. I realise that I had drifted off when I blink, and see Nandipha standing before me with a cup of tea, and a half eaten fat cake in her hand.

“I asked what you think of Bhedlindaba Meyiwa.” She’s talking with her mouth full.

“Am I supposed to be thinking of him?” I ask.

Her smile broadens, I don’t think she should be smiling with food in her mouth.

“After he gave you a hard time yesterday, you must hate him.” She says.

I don’t know him enough to hate him.

“Hate is a strong word, don’t you think?” I want to laugh at her statement, but I might come across as rude.

“Well, yes.” Nandipha says, before taking a loud sip of tea. This is how we end up with burnt tongues, it’s the liquid punishing us for treating it with such disrespect. What the heck was that?

“I don’t think you would want to be in his bad books if you’re going to be riding him one day.”

What the hell did she just say? I choke on my saliva, dazed by her choice of words or whatever you call it.

“Nandipha!”

She’s laughing like it is actually funny, why would I ride Bhedlindaba? I would never, if pigs could fly.

“Sorry, don’t mind me, I watch too much television.”
She justifies her redundant statement.

We’re about to open, I leave her behind and find my way to my work station. She’s right behind me.

The smell of fried chicken instantly tickles my nostrils. It’s a nice smell, has you salivating, but once you take a bite, it’s a whole different story.

The morning goes on as usual, we’re basically waiting around for lunch break. Something I’m not looking forward to.

“I want to run to Mr. Price, please accompany me.”
That’s Sonto, she’s looking at me, unless her eyes

are confused right now.

I thought I was the girl who eats lemons for breakfast.

Why is she asking me?

"You can't take Athule with, we don't know what time Mr. Meyiwa will be here today. Remember what Simi said? She'll be the one to help him whenever he's here."

Did I ever say Nandipha talks for the whole of Africa?

"Why do I have to do what he says? Ndaba is not my boss," the words fly out of my mouth involuntarily.

Truthfully, the man has been running through my mind since morning. He's like that terrible song that keeps replaying in your head and you'd do anything to get rid of it.

"Since when are you on first name basis with Mr. Meyiwa?" Sonto asks with a frown, while Nandipha looks like she just hit the jackpot.

"I'm not." I lie, he did give me permission to address him by his first name. Not that I needed it.

“But why can’t I call him Ndaba? He’s not my boss, there really is no reason for me to be formal with him.”

His bank balance and high status mean nothing.

“It must be nice, isn’t it?” We’re all startled by the dominating voice that forces us to lift our heads.

The pantsula freak is standing at the door way with folded arms, the blank expression on his face confuses even my ancestors. Did he hear what we were saying? My ancestors and I need to know so they can decide on when I should join them.

.

.

SHIYIWE

My periods are irregular, that means I don’t know when my next cycle is, that also means I don’t know the cause of the sharp pain in my lower abdomen.

Peeing is a struggle as well, I tried and screamed before anything could come out.

Mthombo left in the early hours of the morning, he wasn't going to face my family after what happened.

We couldn't continue with our freak show, I thought we were a team, he left me to face my uncle alone.

I'm meeting up with him at the guest house, Thambo will be here any minute from now.

We were careless last night, we didn't think of using a condom. I don't know if the thought crossed his mind and he chose to keep quiet. At this point I am thinking the worst, a transmitted disease.

The first thing I should've done when I woke up and felt this pain was Google the symptoms, but I'm too much of a coward.

Grandma is somewhere around here, I'm purposely avoiding her.

Elders have this thing of asking where you are headed to when they see you cleaned up and I know that she will ask.

The other person I'm trying to avoid is uncle Mdu, the man has been giving me looks.I

I have to school myself and walk like I'm not in pain, just in case he thinks I was having sex with Mthombo the entire night.

He is convinced that Mthombo will come back and he'll get a chance to behead him, not happening. I will protect that man like he's my heart.

I swallow two capsules of pain killers and flush it down with a glass of warm water, it works faster, so I've heard.

"When am I expecting a letter from the Meyiwas?"
My uncle.

His voice annoys me today, it could be because of the pain I'm in.

I face him, he's standing in the middle of the kitchen. I'm not going to give this man a playground to play on.

"Did the Meyiwas promise you a letter?" I ask.

My uncle is unemployed but, why is he here?

"Mshana you had sex with a stranger in your father's

house, he has to pay a fine.”

“Mthombo is not a stranger ncane, he’s my... we are in a relationship.”

“That means nothing, until he pays something for you, he has no right over you. I feel disrespected Mshana, what you two did is wrong.”

Why is he throwing me in the mouth of guilt? I drop my gaze when a blanket of shame covers me.

“I’m sorry, I will talk to him.” I mumble.

Uncle’s smile is too bright for someone who was complaining just now.

“How much are we talking?”

I should have known, he wants money.

“Can we talk later please? And don’t tell grandma about this, she will be disappointed.”

“Give me R50 and I’ll keep my mouth shut.”

“Ncane I’m broke,” do I look like a walking ATM?

When he raises one eyebrow then I know he’s about to challenge me.

"Yet you were rolling in bed with money," he says.

He refers to Mthombo as money, I'm losing my strength. I dig into my bag and hand him a R20 note.

"This is the only money I have, and I wasn't selling my body. I would explain but you wouldn't understand." I retort because when it comes to my uncle, I refuse to let him bully me. This one will lead me astray if I abide by his rules.

He's biting his lower lip, seemingly ashamed.

Pretending to be angry with him is my only way out of here without an interrogation.

He doesn't say anything when I walk past him and out of the house. I'll wait for Thambo outside the gate.

.

.

The ride to the guest house is taking longer than expected, my nerves are the ones slowing down everything around me.

Eventually we arrive, I ask Thambo to help me out of the car. It hurts when I move, something is terribly wrong. The pain is worsening.

“What happened?” I knew he would ask.

It’s obvious now that I’m in agony, I can’t keep my back straight or school my facial expression.

“Pain,” I reply.

I can’t tell him the entire truth, it’s really not his business. He ushers me to Mthombo’s room and tells me that he’s at a meeting but won’t be long.

I sit on the bed, enclose my arms around my legs. Pressing my knees to stomach helps keep the pain at a level I can bear.

Many things begin to run through my mind, somehow this feels like a life or death situation. I can’t see anything beyond the pain, only this moment exists.

All of a sudden I’m breathing too loud, there are tears gliding down my face. I can’t sit here and wait, I decide to call Thambo and ask him to take me to the

clinic.

Before I dial, voices sound on the other side of the door and my heart starts to beat like a hammer, too relentless inside my chest.

It's Mthombo.

Why is he opening the door in slow motion?

With a click, the door opens and reveals his face. He's shaved off his beard, if he wasn't in a wheelchair, I would say this is Bhedlindaba.

"We forgot to use a condom," I say as my eyes travel to his.

He looks awkward, I'm waiting for a reaction while he's scratching his beardless chin and clearing his throat.

"Did you hear what I said?" I ask, worried as to why he is looking at me like I should keep my mouth shut.

"Mthombo!"

Has he gone deaf after shaving off his beard? I open

my mouth to throw another question when Zinqumo and Zwangendaba walk in.

There must be a cemetery where the living are buried. Where do I hide?

Their eyes are judging me, someone should've warned me about this.

Embarrassed, I push my abused body out of bed and stand with arms fencing my belly.

A frown crosses Mthombo's face, he's worried. My body has shown him that I'm in pain. There is a way Zinqumo is looking at me, like I'm some cheap prostitute.

"You got in her panties already? That was fast, how much did you pay her?" The fool is insulting me, I'm about to retort when Mthombo pulls him down by his shirt and punches him across the face.

"Mthombo, are you insane" His father roars but Mthombo is not there.

"This is your little brother, how dare you put your hands on my son?"

“Did you hear what he said dad? I’m going to kill him.” Mthombo roars back, pointing a finger at Zinqumo.

The little brother is struggling to get back up.

“What wrong did he say? Is she not a...”

“She is the woman I love.” Mthombo cuts in. “No one will say anything about her, not even this spoiled brat.”

He’s seething with rage, a vein has popped up on his forehead. If I didn’t know him like I think I do, I’d say he has anger issues.

“This woman has changed you son, I can’t even recognize you.” His dad shakes his head in disappointment.

Mthombo wants to say something but our eyes meet, he must see the tears in mine, maybe that’s why he stops and regards me with a questioning gaze.

I’m in pain, is what I want to tell him but not in front of these people who think I’m taking advantage of him.

He wheels himself closer as a fuming Zwangendaba helps Zinqumo up.

“Nonyanda?” Is muttered and has me shivering under the weight of his rough voice. I kneel in front of him, it also gives me a chance to hide from his family deadly glares.

“Can we talk, alone?” I ask.

“Are you okay?”

Haibo! I said alone, why is he asking me questions in front of them?

My eyes travel above his head, they are still standing by the door and I am certain with how they are glaring at me that had Mthombo not been here, they would kill me.

When I start to think Mthombo is slow, he tells his brother and father to leave. Zinqumo storms out like a 5-year-old, Zwangendaba is the last to walk out.

When the door shuts behind him, my hands start to tremble and a lump forms in my throat.

“What’s wrong?” Worry has glazed his eyes.

“We forgot to use a condom last night.” I introduce, wincing in pain.

“You’re not going to fall pregnant, we were interrupted remember?” He says.

Damn! Pregnancy did not cross my mind, why am I so careless?

“There’s this sharp pain on my lower abdomen, it’s unbearably painful. I thought it would subside but it seems to be getting worse. I can’t stand up straight and Mthombo... I haven’t passed urine since I woke up. When I try it feels like I’m about to give birth to a heavy stone. I need to know the cause. When last were you sexually active?”

Too personal of a question but this is the only way I will find answers. Mthombo’s face is suddenly too blank for me to read but he doesn’t remove his eyes from mine.

With a heavy sigh he says, “The last woman I was with was my wife.”

It's the first time that he's bringing her up in my presence, I suppress the need to ask more about her.

It's too soon.

"We should go to the hospital and get tested," he says, searching my eyes.

Does he think I have been sexually active?

"Last night was my first time in a long time, and we always used protection." I explain even though he never asked.

Mthombo takes a deep sigh and I feel him withdrawing from me, Emeka is off topic I see.

The pain reminds me that it still has control over my body, fear settles into my heart, I can't have STD.

"Mthombo... are you sure that..."

Loud breathing, he takes my hand.

"Why would I lie to you? I would never hurt you Nonyanda, at least not deliberately."

There was absolutely no need for that last part, he shouldn't hurt me at all.

“I believe you,” my reply puts a faint smile on his face. He smiles mostly with his eyes.

Having that special person means trusting them, I could be falling into a trap and setting myself up for a terrible heartbreak. However, I am willing to take the risk, his eyes can never lie to me.

“I’ll call Thambo, he’s running errands.” He says as he pulls out his phone.

As I stand, an unbearable sharp pain shoots through my lower abdomen, it sends me tumbling to the floor and screaming in pain. My body curls defensively.

“Shiyiwe!” Mthombo panics.

I see him through the veil of tears in my eyes, he doesn’t know what to do. He’s continuously calling my name and trying to get off the wheelchair. He’ll fall if he continues like that.

“Mthombo!” A louder scream falls of my mouth, it feels like someone is slicing my insides with a sharp razor.

“Baby hang on, I’m here, hang in there.”

I want to do what he's telling me but I can't hold on anymore. The pain is unbearable.

I'm on the floor rolling like a sausage in hot oil.

Mthombo is on the phone, talking to... Thambo I think.

He throws the phone on the bed, "Nonyanda!"

He falls off the Wheelchair and drags his body towards me.

"Does this lessen the pain?" He asks, as he presses a hand on my tummy. I shake my head no and curl my body like a pretzel while digging my nails into his wrist.

"Hang in there, Thambo is on the way."

I don't need Thambo, I need an ambulance.

"When I die, I want to be cremated. I don't want my corpse to be stolen like my father's." I fight every word out.

Mthombo wipes the tears that have come to express my pain, a frown changes the shape of his eyebrows.

"You are not going to die Shiyiwe." I sense anger in his fading voice.

How do I believe him when my vision is failing me, and I feel like I'm passing out?

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Twenty-four

ATHULE

.

.

"Mr. Meyiwa, I'm sorry we didn't see you there."

Sonto feels a need to apologise. I change my mind, I like her.

He fixes his piercing gaze on me, he must be thinking of ways to torture me some more.

Yesterday was not fun.

"It's really hard to notice anything when you are occupied with gossip, is this what you ladies are paid to do?"

Like he pays us, I'm sure I'm not the only one who's

fighting the urge to roll their eyes.

“No sir, we were just talking.” Sonto again, the smile on her face deserves an Oscar.

“Is my order ready?” He strides in with this question, eyes hooked on me. There is nothing attractive about arrogance, Ndaba needs to be told.

It’s a good thing it’s not busy this morning, there is enough to pack and send him away. The faster I work, the faster we get rid of MaTrompies.

“Should we help you carry the food to the car sir?” Sonto asks.

She’s trying too hard to impress, it shows. Ndaba spares her no glance, it’s rude.

“No, Athule let’s go.” His voice is cold and the glare he shoots me makes it impossible for me to protest.

I should be telling him off, that was the plan. How am I betraying myself?

Here I am doing what I know, following him to his car. I can’t say I’m okay with these trips I am forced to take, I should get a raise for this.

He's driving a different car today, a BMW 7 series.
Look at this man living my dream.

He packs the parcels in the backseat, today I know I
should sit in the front.

He taught me well. I'm a disappointment.

"Wait." He yells when I grab the door, I'm
flabbergasted watching him run to my side.

Oh! Okay! He's a door opener, nice. I will not be
complaining about this kind gesture. I like being
treated.

We're caught in silence from the time he starts the
car to two minutes into the drive. I can't grasp why
the radio is off, I steal a look to find him staring, a
smile visits his lips before he focuses back on the
road.

"Are you a dancer?" I don't know where that came
from, but I can't ignore the outfit anymore. He's quiet,
probably processing my words.

"Is it the clothes?" Quick thinking, a ghost of a smile

pulls at his lips.

"This is more comfortable than being in suit and tight jeans and my father likes it." He says, giving me a brief look again. That's it, he is not going to explain further.

"You can ask anything about me and I will try not to lie."

Where is this coming from? What makes him think I want to know about him?

"I'm okay." I articulate and send my eyes out the window.

"Curiosity killed the cat you know?" Ndaba expresses after a millisecond of what feels like a lifetime. I'm not the quiet type but this man has me biting my tongue.

"Thank God, I'm not one."

Okay, he finds my comeback funny. A chuckle is a laugh, right?

Second day in his presence and rides with him seem so short. I reach for the door, but...this hand

grabbing business has to stop.

He's making a phone call, mind you his hand is encircled on my wrist. Jehovah! Why am I allowing this?

"Mikhulu, I'm outside." He says and frowns when I yank my hand away, I don't appreciate being touched. I should wear a tag that says so.

I'm sitting here like a child waiting to be told whether to walk or ride my bicycle back home. During this moment of stillness, the guy I think is Mikhulu arrives.

He's in the company of a petite Indian woman who takes some of the food and heads back into the tall building.

Ndaba and Mikhulu are caught up in a conversation, clearly wasting my time. He is looking at me; the Mikhulu guy. I feel like those high school girls who occupy front seats belonging to stay at home moms.

Mikhulu leaves with the rest of the food, I can finally breathe without him staring at me. You know how your breathing falters when someone is staring? You

start thinking if you're breathing normally, or you look like an alien.

Ndaba is staring again, I don't know if my heart should be tap dancing. There should be an option of whether to leave your heart at home or take it with.

"Have you had breakfast yet?" He asks.

It's a simple question, but I'm feeling strange things, things I can't explain. Must be the way he's staring into my eyes, like he's searching for something only he knows is there.

The stubbornness in me refuses that I blink away.

"I did, now I'm waiting for my lunch hour at 3." I tell him.

He pulls out of the parking lot, and joins the main road.

"Why so late?"

Not that it's an important topic but, "We take turns, 3pm was the only available slot, I had no choice really." The perks of not being your own boss.

“Mmmhhh.” That’s all I get from him, a hum plus an awkward silence.

I’m not familiar with the route he’s taking, I know this is not the way to work. Where is this man taking me? Curious, I send him a questioning look. I know he can feel my eyes on him, but he doesn’t let me taste his gaze.

“I haven’t had breakfast, I want to grab something here if you don’t mind.” He parks in front of a restaurant, the banner says Potato Shed.

I can’t complain, if I were in a taxi maybe I would have. Also, Simi knows I’m with him. She seems to trust him.

My KFC uniform and I will just wait in the car. Seeing no movement from me, he regards me with a heavy glare. This man is strange.

“What?”

“Will you wait in the car? I might take long.” He questions.

A ghost of a smile pulls at his lips and I don’t know

what he's smiling about because I don't want to be here.

Why is my clitoris whispering to me at the sight of his smile? This can't be good, to avoid the funny feeling I jump out and follow him into the restaurant. It's too classy, my work uniform doesn't allow me to be in here.

.

.

MTHOMBO-

Shiyiwe is passed out when they arrive at City health hospital, Thambo rushes her inside before coming back to help Mthombo out of the car.

When they walk into the reception, they are told she's with a gynaecologist. They have to wait in the waiting area.

Mthombo is growing anxious by the second, he knows he can handle this. He just needs to cut himself some slack and breathe.

He's lost in thought, eyes staring into thin air when a firm hand grabs his shoulder.

"She's going to be okay," Thambo.

He's not a doctor but it won't hurt to assure him.

Maybe assurance is not what Mthombo needs, maybe he is doubting Thomas. He will believe it when he sees it. Life can be unpredictable, the death of his wife six years ago attests to it, they were happy one minute and dodging bullets the next.

The wait is killing him, he's growing impatient. Not that he was patient to begin with.

He's denied an opportunity to complain when he sees a lady in blue scrubs waltzing towards them, she introduces herself as a gynaecologist. She reassures Mthombo that Shiyiwe is fine, but there is an issue.

"We are not able to determine the cause, according to our test results, there is nothing wrong with her." She says.

This is unheard of, this doctor is talking nonsense.

Mthombo and Thambo are lost in confusion.

"How is it that you can't tell what the problem is? What are you doing wearing those scrubs if you can't do your job?" Mthombo cracks at the doctor.

"Like I said, we managed to control the problem. The medication will help her release, if the problem arises again, bring her back. There is really nothing more we can do for her." The doctor says and walks away, she's got other patients who need her attention.

"Let her go sir, barking at her won't help." Thambo stops him from yelling after the doctor.

Mthombo sighs, he's depleted and out of options.

"What is going on Thambo? How are they not able to detect anything?" Mthombo asks.

"I have never heard of a case like this one, could it be that she's bewitched?" Thambo introduces.

This is a bone to chew on for Mthombo, growing up rich and out of touch with black culture and traditions, he's never really sat down and entertained

the word witchcraft.

“You think so?” Mthombo.

“There is a high possibility. If doctors can’t see anything wrong with her, maybe a traditional healer will.” Thambo articulates. When he sees a frown mixed with confusion on Mthombo’s face, he sits on the silver chair and taps his boss on the shoulder.

“Worrying about her will not help sir, you have to consider all options.” He’s starting to overstep his boundaries, they are not friends.

“I have seen your insecurities, you think that your limited mobility will hinder you from loving her.”

Thambo.

When did he turn the wheel? Was he not talking about a traditional healer just now?

“Thambo...”

“I know it’s not my place to say, if you want to fire me after this, I’m okay with it.” He doesn’t look okay with it.

“No you’re not,” Mthombo argues.

“Okay, I’m not. I hope you don’t fire me, sir. I’m only trying to help. I saw how she struggled, no one deserves to be in that kind of pain. You don’t have to have full function of your legs for you to be useful, you can do so much while seated on that thing.”

That thing?

“I have heard you Thambo, I will talk to her. In the meantime, find someone who can help.” A sangoma, he means.

“I’m going in, don’t go anywhere. We might need a ride back.” He says and finds his way to Shiyiwe’s room.

He’s not sure how she will take the news, if at all she believes in these kind of things.

He finds her seated on the bed, wincing as if she’s being prickled by needles. She is on a drip, she needs it to gain her strength.

She’s allowed to take it home with her until the doctor says otherwise.

“Mthombo,” she calls his name with a smile on her face.

Mthombo removes his eyes from her, that feeling of failure has attacked him again.

“I’m okay Panda, the pain is bearable now. I can even smile, see?” She says, cheerfully.

Mthombo steals a glance to ask what she just called him, but words fail when he sees the wide smile on her face. Too wide that it shows how dry her lips are, she’s dehydrated. It’s hardly been hours but she looks like she has lost weight, her eyes have sunk into their sockets.

“Panda?” He asks, she nods.

He could dig more and deny the pet name, but there are more pressing matters to be tackled.

“The doctors can’t explain your condition,” he starts and braces himself for any outcome.

“I think you should see a sangoma.” That wasn’t hard, was it?

Shiyiwe is too blank for an overly expressive

someone, she's blankly staring at him.

"Say something," he holds her hand and swipes his thumb over hers.

"I trust you," that's all she says and lies down on the bed.

Yeah! He still has to tell her that they have to clear the room. This is a hospital, not a hotel room.

"Nonyanda!"

Her face is readable now, worry has covered her brown skin.

"I have a house in Winchester Hills, I'd like you to come live with me there." His heart is sitting in his throat, he's not one to make such hasty decisions. This is what happens when the heart decides to take over, mankind becomes weak.

The man has not been to that house in six years.

Shiyiwe raises her eyes once and sighs, "Is it because I don't have a place to stay or we are taking the next step in this relationship?"

Her voice is down, he can't tell how she really feels about this.

"Maybe both." That's not specific. "You said you trust me right?" He asks.

Maybe Shiyiwe would say something if he wasn't coming on to her this fast, regret visits and settles in. He could take it all back and say "April fools!" But this is a serious matter, he can't keep her safe if she's not with him.

"Let me take the wheel for now, if you feel that I'm driving too fast I'll stop. You're allowed to get off. I promise I won't question or force you to ride with me. Let me lead you Nonyanda, just give me a chance to make life comfortable for you."

Back in the day, he was known as a man with a few words. It's shocking how expressive he's become. Shiyiwe is silently ogling at him, worry wants to live in her. It refuses to depart from her.

Mthombo is on the verge of giving up when a sigh from her gives him hope, she nods. It's dim but it's there.

“When are we seeing the healer?” She asks.

That’s a question Thambo can answer.

Her phone buzzes on the table, she extends her hand to grab it but Mthombo beats her to it and hands it to her.

“What does Ntebo want?” Shiyiwe mumbles to herself, not a single word misses Mthombo.

“What’s wrong?” He’s always worried.

“It’s a message from a former friend, she says her mother needs my help urgently.” She delivers with a confused tone.

.

.

ATHULE

Ndaba’s pantsula outfit is not as colourful as yesterday’s, thankfully, although he’s dressed like he’s about to ask these white people to give him their phones and wallets because of that yellow

bucket hat hanging on the side of his head.

He still looks better than me.

Gosh... Somehow I wish he'd keep it on because people would wonder about it, than the girl who looks like she scored herself a jackpot.

Who the hell am I kidding? Anyone would look past that stupid yellow hat, he's Bhedlindaba Meyiwa.

I flinch when I feel his hand on the small of my back, my heart does something. I need to keep it on a leash because I will perish.

“Don’t over think Athule, no one is looking at you.” He says, squeezing the flash on my back.

“I’m not,” my voice shakes. Dammit.

I hear a chuckle, he pulls me closer, eliminating any space between us.

We look like a couple. Sigh!

A waiter meets us halfway, and leads us to a table for two. He promises to send someone who will take our orders.

Plural, orders. I am not participating in this.

“Are you okay?” Ndaba is asking by the way.

To answer his question, I am not okay. I am uncomfortable.

“Relax Athule.” This man seated opposite me says, his face is buried in the menu. I want to relax and pretend like everything is okay, but my insecurities are dancing on top of the table.

Why did he bring me here anyway? Romans Pizza would have been okay.

The waitress approaches, makes small talk like he’s a regular and completely ignores me like I’m not even here.

The giggles get to me though, I want to get up and leave, if only I knew the way.

Clearly Ndaba is a smooth talker because Ms. Waitress won’t stop blushing.

“What are you having?” His question is directed to me. So now he sees me?

“Nothing.” I make it a point to show him that I’m

annoyed, a waste of time because he does not care. I'm broke anyway, my job alone does not allow me to dine at places like this one. He places an order before the waitress judges me with a look and pounces off.

I'm not okay with being stared at and this man stares a lot.

"You look constipated." He says, which is stupid really. How do I look constipated when I'm not constipated?

"Maybe it's because you're staring too much and my body is telling you to stop." I tell him.

A slight smile forms on his lips, giving me a short-lived glimpse of his white teeth. I release a sigh as I check the time on my phone, we've been here for too long. What's taking them so long?

"Are you in a hurry?" Ndaba asks.

Sure I'm in a hurry... to get out of here.

"I am still at work and I don't want to be late." I

should have stayed in the car.

“Don’t worry, I’ll make sure you get there on time. Besides, Simi is okay.”

“And married.”

I don’t know where that came from, my big mouth will get me into trouble one day. I’m not sure of what to make of that crinkle on his face.

“I’m sorry.” I wince at my stupidity. “Maybe I should wait in the car, I’m not comfortable here and...”

Ahh!!! Saved by the flirtatious waitress bearing food. A plate of food is placed before me.

“Sorry, I didn’t order anything.” Okay. She’s going to ignore me... nice.

“Thank you Zandi, you may go.” Oh so he’s this type, the ‘awuyilapho’ type. I said I am not hungry, yet here lies a dish of food before me.

“It’s not lunch time yet Ndaba and Simi will kill me if she finds out.” Why is he smiling at me? Heaven come down and witness this predicament.

“I like the way you just said my name.”

Oh Jesus!!! I am not okay with this, a charmer and smooth talker who gets his way and doesn't understand the word 'no.' The last thing I want is for a man thinking I can't take care of myself.

Okay, financially I can't but... Rhaaaa!

"Please take me back." Yey, the icy Athule is ready to storm out of here.

"What about my food? It will be cold by the time I drop you off." Is he serious?

"Fine, take me to the taxi rank." I have a few coins in my pockets, it could be enough to take me back to work.

"The rank is 15 minutes away, same distance. Eat, you can't possibly sit there and watch me eat." He says.

"I didn't bring my wallet." I tell him.

"Then you'll owe me lunch, I'll hold you to it." Typical.

The only reason I haven't walked out of this place is because... Why haven't I walked out of here?

He digs in, I can't help but stare.

“Is there something on my face?” An undertone pulls me out of my probing, my eyes widen as I notice that my gaze is on him. I’m shaking my head like Moshe from *Takalani Sesami*, now I have to shove food into my mouth to distract him and myself.

“Nothing.” I articulate with my mouth full, there’s that smirk again. Lord tell me why I’m here.

“You have something there.” He points at my face, eyes glued on my mouth.

I am not okay with people observing me while I eat because I’m a messy eater, he’s still pointing at the corner of my mouth. I wipe it off.

“Is it gone?” I ask, unable to keep my eyes in one place.

Ndaba smiles and shakes his head.

My eyes widen at his thumb flying to my mouth to wipe away the threat.

Darn it!

“You’re good.” He declares after touching me without permission.

He'll look away any second now... he doesn't. What will I do with this heat mocking my cheeks?

"Stop doing that." Bashfully, I send him a warning.

"What?" He throws a question my way.

"Staring." I say.

A smirk is all I get from him, like he doesn't know what he's doing to me. The man is well aware of his charming ways and the effects they have on girls like me. Since when am I 'girls like me?' Yep, this is Joburg, a place that swallows you whole. You lose yourself either in a man, money or friends.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Twenty-five

NTEBO-

.

.

The night of the stabbing, she had it all planned out, make it look like a robbery. She turned everything in the house upside down, before screaming for help.

When no one came out to check what the commotion was about, she stood in the street and performed a great show. Her screams and cries finally brought the neighbours out, they were not surprised when they saw the Mosheo girl. Drama lives in that house, this side of Alex would actually be boring without them.

“Vimba, vimba.” Like a crazy woman, she screamed to no one, as she paced up and down the street, hands on her head and clothes unkempt.

Curious eyes were on her, the neighbours questioned each other before they turned the questions to her.

“Four men broke into our house while we were sleeping, they stabbed my mother after she tried to fight them.” She said.

Mme Mosheo is known to be a coward in these streets, Ntebo must have been talking about someone else because no way would Mme fight off

robbers.

“She’s inside the house,” she proceeded to tell them when they asked where she was.

Someone took it upon them to call an ambulance.

“Where is your father?” One of the neighbours asked.

Nothing passes anyone in this neighbourhood, they know who comes and goes.

Her father was snoring his life away even when the ambulance and police came, he woke up the next day to a legendary story, courtesy of the neighbours.

.

.

She’s sitting in a chair, watching her mother fighting for every breath given to her by God. Tears of regret are streaming down her face, her biggest fear is Mme Mosheo turning her in to the police. But now is not the time to think about that, she needs to correct her mistakes and do right by this woman.

“She’s not taking my calls Mme, I’ve tried everything.”

Mme Mosheo is on the brink of death but is able to shoot her a killer glare.

"Try again, I need her blood." She struggles to get the words out but pushes anyway.

"But, why do you need Shiyiwe's blood?"

The blood bank can't find her type, and because Ntebo just went through a miscarriage, she needs to wait at least six months for her body to replenish its iron before having blood sucked out of her. She can't donate blood.

"Just get her here!" Mme Mosheo.

It's taking every strength in her to speak.

She's on death row, talking sends her closer to the edge of death.

Ntebo sighs heavily, getting Shiyiwe to come here won't be easy but she has to do it, beg if she has to. This is the price she has to pay for stabbing her mother.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

He tucks me in bed and blesses my forehead with a kiss.

"Get some sleep, I will wake you up when Thambo comes back." He says, caressing my hand.

If Thambo finds a good sangoma, we'll go see them today. I am nervous about it, my parents didn't believe in these things.

We arrived not so long ago, thankfully grandmother is not home. I don't like her gallivanting around town but today I'm okay with it, she can even travel to Thohoyandou by foot and have tea with Azwindini if she likes. I don't want her worrying about me, and I don't have the energy to be answering her questions.

"I don't feel like sleeping," I don't know what look I'm giving him that has put a smile on his face.

"Why are you smiling?" I ask, he shakes his head and lifts my hand to give it a kiss.

“You scared me today,” he says.

I scared myself.

“I thought I was going to die unmarried and childless, I was going to put up a strike in heaven.” I tell him.

Mthombo’s eyes flicker from my hand to my eyes, he’s looking at me like I’m the only thing in his world. I should be shying away from his gaze, but it’s too intent that breaking the contact is next to nothing.

“You want to be a mother?”

“I want to be married first, I’m not going to go through labour pains without a ring on my finger.”

He reaches for my eyebrows and starts ironing them out with his thumb, I have never paid attention to how Mthombo touches me, it’s crazy how well my body is responding to his touch. This kind of feeling cannot be real.

“I think you would make a good mother.” He utters, observing me with a content gaze.

This man is going to make a great partner, one day when I’m ready to give him all of me. If only

circumstances were different right now, and if I were a better person, I'd fight for this... whatever this is between us. Right now, I need to fix my life. I can only give a smidgeon of myself.

A smile knows my face too well, I'm grinning from ear to ear. It's nice to be praised once in a blue moon.

"Thank you, you too." I return.

He chooses to chuckle instead of questioning my stupidity, I don't deserve a tongue. God should take it back.

"Not a good mother but father..." I correct myself. "I mean you would make a great father."

The smile on his face is as genuine as this tingle I feel in my stomach whenever he smiles at me. I was enjoying his smile, where has it gone now?

I sit up, to make proper eye contact. He doesn't have to say anything but I know something is on his mind.

He sighs deeply, I'm starting to worry about these sighing trips of his. If only I could get him to open up

and tell me what's eating him.

"I have a son."

He's removed his eyes from me, this is a heavy topic to tackle. I'm not certain if he's choosing to open up or this is all I'm getting from him.

I don't provide an answer but wait for more.

"His name is Sikolethu, the day men broke into my house, I gave him to his nanny and asked her to look after him until my brothers come for him." His voice is quivering, he stops and takes a deep breath.

"She was given a location where she was supposed to take him, and strict instructions to wait there, but when my brothers got there she was gone. I have been looking for them for six years."

I am flabbergasted, the media lied and said his son died with his wife. My trust issues are in ICU.

"I can never be a good father, I gave my son away. I failed him, he was just a baby and I entrusted a nanny with the task of keeping him safe." His voice

is breaking, this is the second time that he's crying in my presence.

I want to bring him to my chest and hug the pain away, heck he can cry like a baby and I will hold him tighter till he feels like he can breathe again.

"You trusted her Mthombo, you wouldn't have done it if you didn't."

It's not enough assurance because he doesn't believe me, he's shaking his head and wiping away the stubborn tears that have the audacity to taint his face.

Feeling the urge to comfort him, I cradle his cheeks with my hands.

"Mthombo!"

He drops his head on my lap, and weeps. Brushing his head is not enough, but it assures him that I'm here. I love how he doesn't hide his tears or pain from me.

"I should've known better, I should've kept him with me. I don't even know if he's still alive." Regret has

taken over his voice, it has come to torment him. But I believe it's always been here, inflicting nothing but severe mental suffering.

"Mthombo look at me," I cup both his cheeks and bring his face up.

The hand with the needle hurts, it's not important though, he is all that matters.

He drops his gaze but I got a look at his eyes, they are flooded with tears, and bursting with pain.

"Your son is out there and fate will unite you two."

I have ceased to believe in fate, but this is about him not me.

"How? When I'm stuck on this stupid chair?"

"But that doesn't limit you from doing anything, you are capable Mthombo. Just like you were capable yesterday of giving me an orgasm."

Fuck!

He looks at me without a smile.

Stupid Shiyiwe, one day you are going to offend this

man. I need to watch my words.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t...”

His sigh cuts my apology, “How do you manage to cheer me up every time?”

But you are not smiling babawe.

I keep my mouth shut, I know my mind has prepared another lame statement.

“Believe it or not, if I could walk I’d have found my son. Sometimes you get things done when you do them yourself.” He says.

He’s done crying, but his voice remains scratchy.

“I thought money buys you everything,” my stupid mouth again. I should start depriving it of nice things as punishment.

“My situation is a bit complicated.” He says.

“Uncomplicate it...”

“You mean remove the complication.” Mthombo.

I get him cutting in but, does he have to look at me like I’m losing my mind?

“I don’t have enough resources to buy English bundles,” I defend my kasi English.

His eyes light up before he’s cracking with laughter, it comes to a stop when he holds my hand.

“I am so in love with you Shiysiwe Jele, where have you been all my life?”

“You mean when you were having your fun and kissing all the frogs out there? I was here, waiting for you.”

He’s back to laughing, I should make a song and have it as my ringtone. Yes, my dramatics are over the roof.

“Mthombo,” my tone changes. We are serious now. “I’m not going to go through another heartbreak.”

I admit, that son of a cow Emeka broke my heart. I’m not done with him.

“If we are going to do this life thing together, then I’m your last. There won’t be any other women, we will fight till the end.” I express, serious as a dead rat.

He seems uncomfortable, he clears a throat and I

know that no... something is off here.

“Life is unpredictable, Nonyanda.”

“Then we will predict it.”

He laughs with a headshake that tells me that I’m not saying the right things.

“How can I ever let you go? You are the oxygen I breathe.” He tilts his head back laughing like he just cracked the world’s funniest joke, Trevor Noah is unmatched. Here I am laughing like a monkey as well.

“That was scripted, too theatrical.” I say between giggles. “Don’t ever say that again, you’ll be locked up for being cliché.”

“I’m taking you to jail with me, then.” He says. Funny man.

His eyes linger, we’re trapped in pin-drop silence. We have dropped from the height of humour down to the lowest pit of soberness.

“There were chances for me to undergo surgery,” he

introduces, taking a route I was not expecting.

"I wasn't keen at first because I had lost the will to live, I had nothing to live for after losing my wife and son. My mother was the one who convinced me, she said I had to do it for Siko. The first surgery was a failure, two years later I did the second one, it failed as well."

"But there is hope that you might walk again?"

The problem with me is that I talk too much and can be insensitive when doing so. I sounded like I have a problem with him in a wheelchair.

"There is, I just don't think I can face another disappointment. My mother found a doctor in Europe, all I need to do is agree and an appointment will be set."

"Why haven't you agreed?" I'd even fly to Europe with a broom for an opportunity like this.

"All the wealth you see belongs to my father, my brothers and I are under him. Ndaba grew wings and went solo, the rest of us are still at my father's mercy. Zwangendaba doesn't just give you

something without expecting anything back.”

“What is he asking for?” I ask.

His phone rings, disturbing us. The devil comes in many ways, what kind of nonsense is this?

“It’s my sister, it might be important.” He kisses my hand and leaves the room. Zwangendaba is going to be an obstacle in this relationship, how do I go against him? He’s a powerful man.

I need to use the bathroom, it’s going to hurt like hell but I have to force it out.

As my feet hit the ground, I’m startled by a hissing sound and freeze. My eyes scan every inch in this room, it doesn’t take long before I see a green snake at the corner of the room.

“Ncane!” I scream, making a turn with the drip dragging behind me. The door won’t open, it couldn’t have locked from outside. Our doors don’t do that.

“Ncane! Mthombo! Inyoka!” (Snake.)

Lord it's coming this way.

Humans aren't immune to snake venom, are they?
I'm going to die pressed, unmarried and broke. What will they say at my funeral? I can just hear uncle Mdu, "At least she finished grade 12, ak'fani."

I pull the door handle, it's not opening.

Haibo! Did Joshua Door put this door up himself?

The snake is slithering this way, I'm not ready to lie in a coffin. I still have to fall in love with Mthombo, have fifty shades of Grey sex until I gain relationship weight.

"Voestek! Voetsek! Mthombo, Ncane... Voetsek!"

Dogs respond to this language, they take it as a warning and run. I've never dealt with a snake before.

"Shiyiwe!" Someone is banging the door. "Nonyanda vula, what's going on in there?"

It's Mthombo, I wish I could say I'm glad to hear his voice. But I'm locked up with a snake.

"I have a sjambok, open the door mshana." Uncle Mdu doesn't take my life seriously.

"There's a snake in here Ncane, what are you going to do with the sjambok? Whoop its ass?" I'm so frustrated but mostly frightened.

The snake stops, it doesn't look like it cares about my existence anymore, unless it's planning to attack when I least expect it.

"Stand aside, your uncle is going to break down the door." Mthombo yells.

He's insane, this door was expensive.

"No, tell him to get the key. Someone locked me in here." It's too late, someone is trying to knock the door down.

I stand aside, making sure to keep my eyes on the snake.

I don't know what he's using to destroy the door, but by the time he kicks it open it's in pieces.

Mthombo's eyes find me, he scans my body, he sighs in relief and holds my hand.

"Are you okay?" I'm too shaken to speak, a nod is

about as far as I can go.

"Welele!" That's uncle Mdu, looking at the snake like it's his long lost cousin. "This one is family, he won't demand a lot from us."

He won't demand a lot from us? I knew he was crazy.

"What do you mean Ncane? How are we related to reptiles?" I ask.

"That's your father Shiysiwe, can't you see him? It's bafoza." Uncle Mdu.

Where is Thambo? He needs to take Mthombo out of here before he starts thinking we are not normal in this family.

"My father's reincarnation?" I ask, sounding as stupid as him.

"No, idlozi mshana. How much do you think izangoma will charge if you bring your own snake for ukuthwala?"

I'm not hearing this.

"Everyone is doing it, why not us? At least we'll be using a family snake." He's justifying his craziness.

“Ukuthwala?” Mthombo is lost, let me find him.

“It’s certain ways that help you accumulate money or wealth in a very short amount of time, you basically partake in an agreement with evil spirits to attain your heart’s desires. But it comes at a price as you are bonded with the spirits, some use a snake. It wants human blood as a sacrifice.”

“But this one is different,” uncle Mdu jumps in.

“I don’t know if I should ask why?” Mthombo.

He’s adorable with his ‘private school, I grew up rich’ brain.

“My father had given his life to Jesus, he was a prayer warrior. Instead of asking for blood, I guess he’ll ask for prayers.” I explain.

If my uncle is right, then this is what will happen.

“Shiyiwe, you know that’s not real, right?” Mthombo.

Where has this man been living?

“Welele cheese boy,” uncle Mdu shakes his head, he’s disappointed. I will deal with him later for calling a grown man a cheese boy and if he says welele

again, I will let that snake bite me.

“Actually it is, people thwala with snakes for riches and in return, sacrifice their loved ones.” Uncle Mdu says.

He’s scaring my potential roommate, I don’t like how terrified he is.

“It’s okay Mthombo sir, your father-in-law won’t ask for human blood. You just need to know how to pray, these snakes can be very demanding. You might even spend the whole night praying until God mutes you.” I rub his shoulder to comfort him.

“I’ll go get a box, we have to put bafoza in it before he slithers away.” Uncle Mdu says and runs out of the room.

“I think we should wait outside the door.” I push Mthombo out before he gets a heart attack, he’s sweating golf balls.

“That is not my father in-law,” he mumbles, eyes glued on the snake. Shit! My love life is over before it has even begun.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Twenty-six

SHIYIWE-

.

.

There's something about a man that makes you want to sell your father's house and give him all the profit then convince your family that you will live under the goodness of God.

Look at me, entering a sangoma's premises.
Mthombo is in the car, I asked him to stay behind.
He's not used to these things, I don't want him changing himself just to accommodate me.

I'm here out of desperation, MaMbuyazi must be turning in her grave.

The woman in front of me has not stopped bursting burps since I walked in here, also there's something funny that she's seeing in me.

Luckily, I came prepared, I watched Izangoma Zodumo. I know when to say Thokoza and Makhosi.

“What’s your father’s name?”

Argh shame, I never expected this. This is not what I saw on Izangoma Zodumo. Gogo Maweni called that guy by name without him telling her.

“Shiyiwe,” I tell her still.

“Surname sisi?” She’s annoyed.

I breathe in and out without showing how annoyed I’m becoming.

Like I said, my trust issues are on life support. She looks at me, and shakes her head. She noticed.

“My name is Shiyiwe Jele.” I’m done with this before she has started.

“Sisiwe, why are you here?”

See! This is exactly what I’m talking about.

“Gog’ Sangoma, I just paid R600 for consultation. Shouldn’t you be telling me everything, starting with my name to why I’m here? Otherwise, what’s the point of this consultation?”

The smile on her face creeps me out, I have regrets

now. Mthombo owes me for dragging me here. She holds a bag and asks me to blow into it, I'm sceptical but I do it anyway. Bones scatter on the reed mat as she tosses them, the look on her face makes me nervous. There's something that she's seeing and it doesn't look good.

"There's a man following you, he is responsible for the darkness in your life." She says.

"Do I know him?" I ask, a little too quickly.

"Yes, you called him baba."

No way.

"My father died a month ago, there is no way that..."

"This is what the bones are showing me sisi, this man hovers around you like a dark cloud. I hear him calling out your name loudly in the middle of the night, he's bent on having you fail in everything you do."

I'm confused, my father would never do that.

"Gog' Sangoma, my father died. Someone dug up his grave and stole his corpse. We don't know where he

is and we found a snake in my bedroom, my uncle kept it.”

She didn’t know any of this.

She’s groaning, eyes closed and shoulders convulsing. The head shake is giving me heart palpitations.

“That snake was there for you, you have escaped death so many times and you continue to do so. Your enemies are not happy with you.” She says.

I have enemies, yet I have nothing to my name.

“I can’t see your father’s corpse, it’s blank. I can’t see his spirit as well, the elders in your family have to intervene. Find the corpse, do a ceremony and bury him.”

Not in my grandmother’s land, unless the uncles come together and convince her. She loves Jesus too much, that one.

“What about the itchiness and pain in my womb? The hospital couldn’t see anything.” I have to mention this.

I should've brought the drip just to be dramatic, the thing was uncomfortable I had to leave it behind.

"There's a man you were involved with, where is he?"
She must be talking about Emeka.

"We broke up not so long ago, I don't know where he is." I don't care either.

Life is going okay without him, I don't want more stress in my life.

"This man is married to you, are you aware of that?"

Heee! Hayi! Thambo must come and explain this woman to me, where did he find her?

"I'm not married, I think I would know if I were married to that womanising pig."

"Sisi, he married you spiritually. Uthwele ngawe, for his business to flourish he bound you to him. You might date every man in the world but you will always belong to him. Your relationships will never go right, no matter how much the man loves you."

Does that mean Mthombo will leave me too?

"But... I've never wronged him, why would Emeka do

this to me?"

"It's not you, he doesn't hate you. You were just the right person at the wrong place. A sacrifice that went right. Everyone is looking for a short cut in life and some use people to get there."

Who knew I'd be meeting a motivational speaker? I don't care about Emeka's shortcuts, how dare he use me?

"Gog' Sangoma..."

"Nomvula..." she interrupts.

"Gog' Nomvula, I have met a man and he loves me. He wants a life with me, I'm talking marriage, children and church on Sundays and Sundays kos. The whole seven colours— He wants it all, I don't want to lose that. I can't lose him, he's the only one I have. Please, how do I fix this?"

Yes I'm desperate, love comes once in a lifetime. For once in my life, I have been counted amongst the lucky ones. I have found something that could only belong to me, something I can call my own and that's him, Mthombo Meyiwa. I'm not losing that, I

refuse.

“There’s so much that’s been done to you sisi, isichitho being one of them. Your enemies are many, I can’t see them all. The journey is long, what I can do first is cleanse you. I will need about R5000.”

Yesis! I bet Thambo told her I’m related to Tito Mboweni.

“I don’t have that kind of money right now,” Will I ever have it?

“Come back when you have it, my ancestors don’t work without payment.”

Your ancestors cater for the rich. Habe!

I’m not even sure how my feet carry me out of these premises but I make it to the car, dazed and more confused than I was when I arrived.

“That took forever,” Mthombo says as I enter the car. His eyes are observing me, probably checking for any change in my mood.

“What did she say?” Mthombo asks.

“My father is behind every bad thing that’s happening in my life.”

I look at Thambo, thinking he’d chip in. He never says much when Mthombo is around, I’d appreciate his view on this since he recommended the woman.

“Bab’ Jele?” Mthombo.

“The one and only,” I’m just as shocked.

“Didn’t you say his corpse is missing?” Thambo finally has a voice.

“It is, we haven’t heard anything from the police.” I reply.

“Could it be that someone is using him to cover their tracks?” Thambo.

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“When my sister’s husband died in a car accident, his family went to consult. The sangoma was shown their children’s toys, a doll placed on a toy car, tied with a barb wire. There was a knife plunged on the doll’s heart. The car symbolised an accident, the knife death.” Thambo narrates.

I am beside myself with shock.

"How did they come to a conclusion that your sister was behind it?" I ask.

He starts the car, making me wait for an answer. I feel a hand caressing mine, it's Mthombo. Our eyes meet, he's worried and is showing me through his eyes how much he is concerned.

"You okay?" He words his concerns in a whisper.

I smile, faintly because I am far from being okay.

"The toys belonged their daughter, they were a cover up for whoever was involved. Till this day, her in-laws believe she killed their son. She's estranged from them, her daughter has no relationship with her father's family because of that." Thambo continues.

"Do you think my father is being used as well?" It's the worst case scenario but there is a possibility.

"Yes, they might have turned him into umkhovu."

Thambo replies.

"Mgijimi?" The word slips out of my tongue.

My father can't be a zombie.

“It’s possible.” Thambo says with a heavy sigh.

“But the sangoma was supposed to see that, is she fake? Where did you find her anyway?” I’m ready to tell him that she asked me what my name was.

“Some witches are stronger than we anticipate, they are able to hide their identity. As for Nomvula, I asked around and word on the street said she’s one of the best.”

Where have I been living all this while? So much is happening in this world and I am not aware of it.

My father’s news is nothing, wait till they hear what Emeka did, I narrate the entire story while Mthombo’s hand has become tight around mine, his jaw keeps ticking. I don’t know if he’s upset with me or Emeka.

“Then you have to do the cleansing.” Of course he’d be quick to say this, it’s knowing that I’m married to Emeka that’s ticking him off.

“I don’t think Nomvula is the right one, I will have to find someone else. If she can’t see the face controlling your father, then she won’t be able to

help.”

Thokoza Mkhulu Thambo. He knows a lot about these things.

“What do we do in the meantime? We can’t be apart.” Mthombo says, he needs to stop and breathe.

“Please don’t get worked up, I’m not going anywhere.” I tell him.

Where can I go when he’s the most important person in my life? I lay my head on his shoulder, he relaxes his tense body and sits back.

.

.

My bags are in the trunk Johannesburg is our destination. I said my goodbyes to the family. My grandmother wasn’t happy about me leaving, moreover when I mentioned the possibility of looking for my mother.

At this point, I’m not sure which is left or right. I’m just letting the wind blow me wherever, so much is happening. There’s Mthombo and his sudden love

for me, Mthandeni and our separation plus uncle Velakithi. Argh yes, Emeka and his witching ways.

I cannot for the life of me grasp how I got caught up in such a whirlwind.

“Nonyanda.” I must have faded away with my thoughts, the car has stopped. This one is invading me with his heavy presence, too close that I’m struggling to control my breathing.

“Mtho...”

Thambo is here, he can see us through the rear view mirror. What’s this one trying to prove?

“Relax, you know I don’t bite, right?” He says, his expression turning into something I’ve never seen. A flirtatious Mthombo? I need to keep a level head, they change when they are up to something.

“Do you need anything from the garage?” Mthombo says, I think he should move away first before Thambo starts feeling uneasy.

I’m going to be specific and name everything my taste buds whisper to me.

When I see a petrol station, my mind shows me pies.

As Thambo scurries out of the car and shuts the door behind him, Mthombo dives into my mouth, driving me backwards until my back hits the door.

What's he doing? There are cars and people around here, this car does not have tinted windows.

His hands won't stop exploring my body, his kiss feels like a first and last. It's intoxicating and clears my mind of all toxic things. I get the kiss and its intensity, but his crotch pressed against me is showing me a cliff and a tombstone with my name on it.

I am not dying in the arms of a man.

"Mthombo... wait!" I press my palms on his chest and push him back. I shouldn't be feeling anything down there, not with the pain I'm in. Every time my clit vibrates, the pain intensifies. It's as if I shouldn't be having or thinking about sex.

"Sorry, I've been wanting to do that since we left." He says.

Men are quick, can he see me through that half-awake gaze?

"We're in public and we're black, we don't do that here." I warn him.

Maybe he was raised different, maybe that's why his hand is under my top squeezing my breast.

The door clicks open, I hit his hand.

"Ouch!" He cries, pulling his hand back. He's not really in pain, if he were, he wouldn't be showing me that lopsided smile.

"Everything okay sir?" Thambo.

He looks back and something he sees has him widening his eyes. He whips his head back to the front so fast, Mthombo and I share a confused gaze.

"Tuck in your boob." Mthombo whispers then clears his throat in embarrassment.

My nipple is popping out of my bra and it's showing through my unbuttoned shirt. It's his fault, then he has the audacity to say 'tuck in your boob.'

What the hell does that even mean?

I send him a warning with just a look, the way my grandmother does it.

A full plastic bag is passed to the back, “I got chips and cold drinks.”

Thambo says, nervously. He’ll be strong.

I grab the bag and search for something that tickles my appetite, Mthombo won’t have anything. I should have prepared homemade food for him before we left.

A female petrol attendant arrives with a speed point, Thambo hands him a card.

“Can we finish what we started when we get home?” Mthombo murmurs suggestively, he looks ready to eat me alive.

We are not finishing anything.

“Sir, the card is declining.” The attendant’s words catch his attention.

“Try again,” says Thambo.

“I did that three times already.” She sounds annoyed.

I look at Mthombo, he's worried.

"Give her another card Thambo." That's Mthombo, scrolling through his phone.

The attendant is given two more cards, they decline as well.

Mens broke?

"I can't access my funds," Mthombo says over the phone. He's probably talking to his banker.

"Damn it! You can't do this, how do you expect me to move around without money?" Mthombo.

That doesn't sound like his banker at all.

I feel useless, I should be chipping in but I gave my last cent to uncle Mdu. Maybe he should keep that snake, it looks like we are going to need it.

.

.

Many thanks to our sponsor.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Twenty-seven

ATHULE-

.

.

I've heard Sizwile and Sbonelo talk about crime in Riverlea, how people are mugged on a daily basis. This is why I'm marching to the bus stop, running basically. It's almost dark and way after office hours, the path I take is always empty. Just fancy restaurants, and hotels.

I'm barely close to the bus stop when I spot a black G-Wagon driving towards me. I mean there is nothing wrong with a car driving on government road, it's how slow they are driving that bothers me.

My mind shows me the worst, kidnapping, human trafficking, rape, murder. My heart sinks to the core of my stomach. I'm the only one on the street.

Brave it up Athule, this is no time to show off your

cowardice.

What will be, will be. What on earth am I saying?

I want my father.

The car stops in front of me, I turn towards one of the restaurants and start running. I'm about to scream for help when I hear an ugly voice shouting my name.

"Ekse, Athule!"

It's enough to stop me in my tracks, I turn and... dear Lord. Why did you bring me into this world of fools?

"Ndaba?"

He's standing next to the car. He waves, the other hand is shoved into the pocket of his pants. There is no smile on his face. If my hands were not trembling, I would slap that seriousness out of him.

In a way, I'm relieved that it's him, but mostly creeped out. Why is he here?

"I hope I didn't scare you," he says, stepping closer

than he should. This is the part where I move back, to avoid him and his intoxicating scent that's invading my personal space.

"What are you doing here?" My question causes him to clear his throat for whatever reason, my eyes can't look into his anymore, so I shift them.

"This is my way home, let me drop you off." Call me naïve but I can't say no to a free ride. Life is not a movie but let's just pretend my life is one.

Without permission, Ndaba takes my hand and ushers me to his car. I keep letting this man touch me.

Lord help me, now I'm following him. There's just something about him that says follow me and you forget everything and let him lead you.

The door is opened for me, I hope he's not taking me to a secluded place to steal my life.

"You're not going to kill me, are you? My ghost is evil in case you're thinking of killing me." I'm trying to scare him, he's not fazed.

“I would never hurt you Athule.”

Ehh! Was there a need to use that tone? Now my heart is doing funny things. Judas!

His reply has shut me up.

It's so warm in this car that I sit back and close my eyes after telling him where I live. He will wake me up when we arrive.

“Are you hungry?” Maybe not.

“I’ll eat when I get home.” I say.

“KFC?” Why would he think that?

He gives me a look that makes me feel like he’s judging me for not eating my vegies. My father is at work, so I don’t know who this one thinks he is.

“No.” I protest, defensively.

“Can I buy you supper then? I know this place that serves the best samp and tripe, I promise you’ll love it.”

Is he asking me out on a date? I’ve seen this scene on TV. The pair ends up in bed together... naked and

smelling like sex.

“My mother is expecting me.” I say.

“Let me buy you breakfast then... again.” He steals a look before he’s focusing on driving again.

This morning ended too quickly for me, I was starting to enjoy his company. Simi wasn’t happy about me missing a few hours at work, I don’t know what that woman wants from me anymore.

He stops at a traffic light and gives me his attention, he’s expecting a reply and silently digging it out of me.

“I don’t want to be late for work, I have a very strict manager.” I remind him, he knows Simi.

“Are you afraid of Simi?” His eyebrows take a slow stand above blank eyes, he’s digging for facts.

“No.” How can I be afraid of... argh, the woman pays my bills, of course I’m afraid of her.

“Then come with me, I’ll speak to her don’t worry.” He articulates.

This part right here, this is the part that has me

questioning his closeness with my manager. The day he held my wrist and told me to watch it, they had a mutual understanding. Simi letting him harass her employee and giving me away to him as if I were hers to give.

“Are you sleeping with Simi?”

What did I just say? Trust my stupid mouth to betray me.

That's it, I'm giving myself up for adoption.

Ndaba frowns and I know I messed up. I'm now trying to avoid his ugly frown.

“You are very blunt, ntwana.” Would you look at that? He doesn't sound offended, he should smoothen that frown on his face, so this terrible feeling swirling inside me dissipates.

“I'm sorry, I don't know why I said that. I'm not insinuating anything. We can do lunch.”

It's my way of apologizing for being an idiot. It's a good thing he's laughing, it means he didn't take offence or he's happy about the lunch date. I deserve

a day off tomorrow, I will call in sick.

"I'm off tomorrow," I tell him, he looks at me with a smile.

"You are an interesting woman Athule." The tone he uses leaves me pulling together my eyebrows.

"Are you indirectly calling me crazy?" I make him laugh again, and find it quite fascinating how he's suddenly blushing. Do men blush?

"My kind of crazy." He says.

I don't know where he is going with this.

I keep my mouth tightly shut, I already messed up by insulting the poor guy, I don't want to insult him any further.

My phone vibrates in my pocket. No one sends me messages but my parents, that's why the phone is in my hands before the third buzz. There's a message from my mother.

I have to attend a prayer meeting. I soaked beans, cook that when you get home. Your father is home, make sure you give him something to eat before you start with supper. The dustbin needs to be cleaned, Sbonelo left it on the lawn.

How, am I suddenly allocated chores in that house? I'm a working girl, I also bring home the bacon. It's Sizwile and Sbonelo's job to clean the bin, why does she want me to do it?

"Everything okay?" Ndaba's voice snaps me out of the shock my mother put me in, the frown on his face is still visible.

I don't get the chance to reply, his phone is ringing.

"Bafo!" He says, after accepting the call. "Consider it done... I'll talk to the taima... No he can't do this to you, is he insane?... Are you sure?... We'll talk later... Sho sho."

He drops the call, his mood has changed. I could ask what the problem is but that would be too forward of me.

.

.

MTHOMBO-

He knows that Bhedlindaba is reliable, he can always count on him. The petrol has been paid for, they are on their way home.

The banks are closed, he can't access Safe Custody where most of his funds are kept. Zwangendaba can't cut him off because he's not getting his way.

Mr. Meyiwa senior is an influential man, one word to the right people and he'll have you unemployed before you can draft an apology.

His word stands in the business world, he knows which buttons to press and which hands to shake in order to get what he wants. Mthombo is the CEO but he is below his father, the president of the company.

Years sitting in a wheelchair took a lot from him, life left him behind, six years is too long a time to not be

doing anything. Among the brothers, Bhedlindaba was the one who spread his wings and went solo. He started a soccer team, the rest work under Zwangendaba. He calls the shots and signs their cheques.

The days of Mthombo calling the shots are over, he's gone from being a successor to a rivalry all because his heart wants what it wants.

They have arrived in Johannesburg, en route to Winchester Hills.

"Thambo!"

"Yes sir."

He keeps quiet for a while, not sure if what he's about to say will make sense or he's acting impulsively.

"If we get married, do you think the curse will still affect us?" Mthombo asks, Thambo steals a look through the rear view mirror only to find his boss's eyes looking back.

"I doubt it sir."

“The sangoma said her relationships will never last, I can’t let that happen. She is mine, and I want us to get married tomorrow.” That’s a bit hasty.

“You will find help sir, I suggest you wait. Marriage is a huge step, it shouldn’t be taken lightly.”

“There are so many sangomas out there Thambo, most of them are chasing fame. It’s hard to tell who is real and who is not, what if the next one we find will be pretentious? That’s time and money wasted, from what I have heard, our relationship is in trouble.” It sounds like he is trying to convince his driver, but it’s himself that he is trying to convince. Marriage at this early stage in their relationship is crazy, he knows but there is no other way.

“Are you sure about this sir? What if she doesn’t agree to it?” Thambo needs to be optimistic, of course Shiyiwe will agree.

“It is a risk but I have to take this chance, it’s the only way I can keep Shiyiwe with me, and safe. Once she is my wife, no one will tear us apart. I will fight anything that has breath to keep my wife with me.”

His voice is low as a whisper lest he wakes Shiysiwe up.

Mthombo looks at Shiysiwe, there really is something about the way he looks at her. She is worth the risk, the millions and comfortable life.

There was Zinzi, he loved her beyond words. But now there is Shiysiwe, they are two different people. He loves her too, whether more or less than he loved Zinzi, he's not sure yet.

He can't compare though, what he knows is that he is not about to live without her. Not that he would die without her, but she simply completes that which is missing in his life.

He takes a deep breath and shakes her awake.

"Are we there yet?" She's stretching her arms and rubbing her eyes, when she wipes off drool from her mouth, her eyes bulge. She drooled on him, the sleeve of his top is wet.

"Sorry," she says, and finds a tissue in her bag. It's not really a big deal but she's wiping him dry.

“Nonyanda,” Mthombo intertwines his fingers with hers. “Marry me.”

He whispers a random request.

Shiyiwa looks completely shocked. Did he just propose?

“I know we’re just starting out, but you are the only one for me Shiyiwe. I love you.” He says it as if there is ever any doubt, as if she would wake up with memory loss the next day.

“Nonyanda.” His eyes are pleading, there’s a glow in her eyes. He sees it whenever he calls her by her clan name, he cherishes this name like he gave it to her at birth. “Please say yes.”

“Mthombo, what are you saying?” A breathless question. “It’s too soon, I’m unemployed, my life is a mess and...”

“I will take care of us, money is not an issue.” His eyes bulge as if he said something he shouldn’t have, he’s suddenly caught in the heat of embarrassment.

Just a while ago, he couldn't pay for petrol. Shiyiwe must be thinking he won't be able to pay the bills and put food on the table. He'll explain later.

"I am not going to live off your father's money, that's just wrong."

Of course it's wrong and Zwangendaba would never allow it.

"It's my money too," dammit, he's worked for it. "I'm not getting stipend from my father, I have a position at the company. He just has a way to control things, my banker will have it sorted. We won't ever lack anything, I promise."

There's this thing that he does unknowingly, touching her. It's his love language, right now he is caressing her thigh.

"What's the rush?" She's frowning at him.

"What do you mean? I love you and I want to be with you, I don't want to wait anymore."

"But you are with me, so I don't understand."

"That's not what I mean Shiyiwe."

He's desperate but more than that, he has grown insecure after finding out what the sangoma said about Emeka. Shiyiwe is searching his eyes and he is hiding them from her, knowing that he has become transparent.

"Then what? What is it Mthombo?"

"I said I love you. Why are you doubting my reasons?" He snaps.

"That is not what I'm doing, you aren't giving me a good enough reason why we should get married so soon."

"I want us together all the time, I want to go to bed with you in my arms, and wake up next to you. Shouldn't that be enough reason?" Mthombo.

Her silence is like a punch in the gut, he's starting to regret the proposal.

"We'll talk tomorrow Mthombo, when you're thinking clearer."

"You think I'm not in my right state of mind?"

"That's not what I said, why are you putting words in

my mouth? What's going on with you Mthombo?"
Her eyes speak of confusion and hesitation.
Mthombo looks at Thambo, he's become
uncomfortable. Maybe he shouldn't have started this
conversation in the car.

The silence has taken center stage again, Shiyiwe is
looking out the window with her arms folded. She is
upset.

Mthombo sighs and caresses her thigh.

"I want you to be my bride, I hate that you once
belonged to someone else. I hate what he did to you,
the curse and spiritual marriage. How dare he lay a
claim on you? I hate what he did, Nonyanda. You can
only belong to me, and no one else."

The revelation creates tension, she's looking into his
eyes. There is something on her mind. He can only
hope it's not bad.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Twenty-eight

ATHULE-

.

.

It's 7:19pm when we arrive, I tell him to drop me a few houses away from mine. The streets are buzzing, people in this neighbourhood don't sleep. He rolls down the window after I have jumped off with a thank you and offers to walk me to my house, but that is not necessary. People will talk, and that is the last thing I need. I wave goodbye and take my leave.

There is a quantum parked outside Riverlea secondary, I recognise the number plates. It's the same quantum that transported me from Botswana to Johannesburg. Botswana is where I spent most of my childhood and teenage years.

I was 7 years old when my mother put me in a bus without a guardian and sent me to live with my grandmother in Serowe.

It was hard for me to adjust to life in a foreign country, I hated being in Botswana without my siblings and parents. They let me visit once a year,

during Christmas holidays. My father is the only one who travelled to Botswana to see me, he stopped after the birth of Ayanda. I saw less of all of them, my grandmother would make excuses about how busy they were.

Mphako Makhedama, my father was born and raised in Nqolothi in KwaZulu-Natal. He's lawfully and traditionally married to Penny Phiri, the mother of his four children. Her fate started in Serowe Botswana, she's part Tswana and part Zulu.

How their paths met, I never cared to ask and they never cared to tell us, I guess. Maybe my siblings know since I was sent off to Botswana like a China bag full of Christmas groceries.

That's where I met Xolani, a Zulu taxi driver. I was seventeen, a village girl and naïve to say the least.

I'm not sure how I feel about him, I don't even remember agreeing to be his girlfriend. I think he bullied me into it, maybe I needed a companion to fill in the empty hole in my heart.

My grandmother died when I was doing grade 12, my parents didn't come to the funeral. The day I wrote my final exam, I packed my bags and got into Xolani's quantum.

My destination was South Africa.

They didn't know I was coming, I had asked for money to buy a bus ticket but they gave me excuses. I knew they were excuses because back then my father worked two jobs, and my mother worked for white people somewhere in the suburbs.

I managed to get a scholarship at Rhodes University, I left that very same year to study.

Xolani exits the taxi and smiles when he sees me.

"So it's true, you're a working woman now."

The last time I saw him was five months ago at Bree, he happened to be my driver then. The only thing he said to me was , "You're gaining complexion."

"What are you doing here?" My gaze shifts from him

to my father's gate, the neighbours are staring. This is a coloured community, anything that is out of place, we become guarded. Right now there are two women standing at their gates, looking at us.

Xolani scowls at me as I grab his wrist and pull him behind the quantum.

"My father is home, Xolani. Why are you here?" My voice doesn't leave our vicinity, I have to keep it low.

"I haven't heard from you in months, and this is the welcome I get?" He can't be serious, I fight the urge to flip my eyes skyward at the hurt emanating in his eyes. Since when is he so detectable?

"I waited for you to call me, but you never did." I'm lying, with how fast my life has been, my mind found a way to push Xolani to the back of my head. Probably a defence mechanism.

"I was busy," he mumbles, his eyes finding my lips.

Lord don't let him steal a kiss, this man can be unpredictable.

"I had to transport people to KwaMashu, Ngudwini

and Mbongolwane. I've been working hard for us Athule, I want us to move in together."

What? I must be hearing things.

"I don't mean soon," the way he blinks his eyes tells me he's not sure about this decision. I'm not sure as well, I'm not for it in point of fact. My mother would send me back to Botswana, consequences be dammed.

"You hate cohabiting." I remind him, he once told me this.

Maybe it was cohabiting with me he had issues with.

Now he's erect in front of me, telling me he wants to live with me? I call it bullshit.

A sigh fills his mouth, sashays past his lips and whiffs me on the face. His hands find mine, I allow the soft touch.

"I didn't mean it, we were young then. You were naïve and I was stupid." This man...

"I was never naïve," I will not accept this title, I refuse to.

Men can be strange creatures, they have the ability to lower you to the nearest zero. They would find you a butterfly and turn you back into a caterpillar. I snatch my hands back, but the stubbornness in him pushes him to grab them again.

“Okay, I didn’t mean it like that.” He looks nervous, which I find strange. “Can we meet tomorrow? I want us to talk about us, our future.”

We have a future? This I did not know.

Xolani has always been detached, and that made it hard for me to give him every pinch of my heart, maybe he has a twinge of it. I won’t lie and say he doesn’t have a soft spot in my heart.

“Athule.” That’s Ndaba’s voice, I turn around. He’s sanding in plain sight. His car is parked behind the quantum, how did I not see him coming?

“Bhedlindaba?” My voice trembles, this should not be happening. “I thought you left.”

“You forgot your phone in the car.” He shows me the

phone in his hand. He looks at Xolani then at me, why is he consumed by anger?

Now I have to explain why I'm standing this close with another man, the only thing I have promised Ndaba is lunch.

"Ubani lenyoni?" (Who is this?)

Jeer, Xolani.

"What's going on Athule?" Ndaba queries.

His eyes are piercing through me, demanding an explanation. Do I even owe him one?

"This is Xolani." I stutter while failing to meet his sharp gaze.

"Her boyfriend." Xolani and his big mouth.

"You have a boyfriend Athule?" Ndaba questions, his tone is convicting.

My gaze drops as a wave of shame engulfs me, making me feel guilty for something I didn't do.

Xolani 'was' my boyfriend, past tense. My heart has grown fond of someone else and is preparing a

home for him.

I have it all planned out in my head and it all makes sense. I open my mouth to let the words or explanation roll out of my tongue, but nothing comes out. I'm frozen.

I'm an award winning public speaker for crying out loud, it matters not that I won it in grade 03.

"Yes, Athule has a boyfriend. Who are you?" Xolani answers.

He puts his arm over my shoulder and I swear Ndaba's face changes. His jaw ticks, and nostrils flare. For a moment I think he will attack Xolani.

"I asked you a question Athule? Is this fool your boyfriend?" Ndaba fixes the yellow spoti, I'm guessing is his signature attire.

He's glaring at me, still keeping his voice stern.

.

.

MTHOMBO-

Fucking hell! He is frustrated, he wants to slam his head against the car window. Since he can't do that, he has resorted to popping his knuckles. Twenty more minutes and they'll be home.

Shiyiwe has reached a new level of irritation, she hasn't said a word to him. However, Mthombo is a hundred percent sure that she feels the same. At this point, he is so sure without a doubt that she loves him just as much. He doesn't know why she's refusing to marry him, it's not like he is not planning on marrying her one day.

"Who said people should get married years after dating?" He mumbles under his breath.

"Did you say something?" Shiyiwe wants him to repeat his words, he looks at her and shrugs.

"Nothing," is his answer. Shiyiwe rolls her eyes. She does it so badly that it almost leaves him shocked.

She's never portrayed an attitude before.

He grips her hand and pulls her to him, she bumps

into a hard chest. He wraps an arm around her to stop her from moving away from him, he's looking at her with a harsh glare.

"I have the mind to ask Thambo to pull over and leave us alone," he spits out in a whisper.

"W... why?" She stutters, her breathing is quickening because of the way he's looking at her.

"I want to fuck you back to your senses," wrong word choice but he's not about to take it back.

"I'm not a porn star, don't talk to me like that."

Shiyiwe answers, her voice erotically low. She's having a hard time controlling her breathing, it's because he is touching her in all the right places.

"What happened Nonyanda? A while back you wanted to be my porn star, have you grown cold because I mentioned marriage?" He is hurt by the rejection and that's something he's not about to show.

"I was horny and thinking with my clit, you can't hold that against me." She couldn't have thought about this answer, it just came.

He wets his long fingers and pushes them into her panties, she makes a loud sound when he rubs her clit. She grabs his wrist, probably for anchor.

“Do you mean this clit?” He whispers into her ear, gently rubbing her clitoris.

“Mth... Mthombo.”

“Don’t be so loud baby, Thambo is unaware of what happening back here.” He’s whispering to her.

She hasn’t reached an orgasm yet but she is trembling, her breath is quickening and she’s struggling to keep her moans down.

“Mthombo... please...” Her grip tightens on his wrist, she’s pushing it away but also pulling it closer. Her hips are moving, she’s chasing that toe curling feeling.

“Tell me what you want Nonyanda.” Just as he whispers, the radio goes up. Thambo has increased the volume, Mthombo would care if he didn’t want to finish what he started.

Shiyiwe can’t speak, she throws her back and

focuses on the feeling he's giving her. Rubbing her clitoris is not enough, he sees it on her face.

"Mthombo..." she takes his name again.

"I won't be able to give you want you want if you don't tell me," he picks the pace. She's moaning loudly, who cares about Thambo right now?

"Shhh, keep it down." He says, and by now he knows that screaming is what she wants to do, so he joins his lips with hers in an intimate kiss.

He's completely forgotten about Thambo, he spreads her thighs apart and plunges a finger inside her, he thrusts it in and out before he's pushing in the second finger. Shiyiwe spreads her legs wider, she is losing control of herself.

This is what Mthombo wants to see, her drained of all strength, tearing up and just weak in his arms.

Thambo ups the volume louder, the poor man has seen what is happening. This is his chance to resign and look for greener pastures.

Shiyiwe's hand tightens on Mthombo's wrist, nails

digging and teeth clenched. Her orgasm is around the corner, Mthombo presses a kiss on her cheek and keeps his lips there as he alternates to rubbing her clit again. This is where he gains all the power, where all the danger is.

“I love you,” he says and holds her close when she trembles and leans into him.

When she’s back to her senses, he removes his hand with a smirk on his face and sits back like nothing happened. Shiyiwe is looking at him, mouth open and teary eyes in shock.

Their windows slide down, it’s Thambo letting fresh air in. No one comments about the cold wind gushing into the vehicle.

.

.

When they take a turn in President HoerSkool, Mthombo notices a black car slowly driving behind them. He noticed it when they were passing Goldreef

City and didn't think much of it, the driver is obviously tailing them.

"There's a black car behind us, we are being followed." He says.

"I noticed it sir," Thambo replies.

Shiyiwe looks back, "Why are they following us?"

"Keep your head down Shiyiwe, we don't know what they want from us." Mthombo instructs, pulling her hand. She slides down the seat and folds her arms. Thambo retrieves a gun from the glove compartment, it's loaded.

A truck suddenly stops in front of their car, compelling Thambo to stop. The black car behind them has stopped as well.

"Mthombo, what's going on?" Shiyiwe.

He's about to answer when out of the blue the door is opened, and a gun is pressed on Thambo's head.

"Drop it." Demands a deep voice.

Thambo drops the gun and lifts up his hands in surrender.

“Mthombo lock the door,” That’s Shiyiwe instructing him.

It’s too late, his side of the door opens. He can’t recognise the man sneering at him.

“Mthombo Meyiwa?” The man asks, pressing a gun to his temple. Mthombo is too shocked to answer, he raises his hands.

In a way he is glad these people are not here for Shiyiwe, the last thing he wants is for her to be involved in problems stemming from his past.

“No... he’s not.” Shiyiwe answers for him, grabbing a hold of his arm. She’s clinging on to him for dear life.

“Don’t say anything,” Mthombo almost bites her head off.

Anything to keep her safe, he’s dealt with this kind before. They are the ‘shoot to kill’ kind, they don’t ask questions but get on to work when tested.

“I’m Mthombo,” he’s basically giving himself away.

Shiyiwe grips his arm tightly, Mthombo looks at her, she shakes her head with tears streaming down her

face. She's terrified, it's a rare sight. This is the strongest woman he knows.

"I'll be fine..." He says, just to put her at ease. It's not working, she's shaking her head, her nails digging deep into his arm.

"Please..." that's all she says, he has to guess what she means by that.

Mthombo leans in to place a kiss on her cheek perhaps, but he's pulled back before he gets to crowd her space. He lands on the ground with a loud bang, and immediately tries to block out Shiyiwe's loud screams from his ears.

"Mthombo!" She jumps out of the car, and tries to help him up to a sitting position.

"Shiyiwe go back into the car," this time he yells at her.

What is she doing? Her stubbornness will get her killed.

"No, they are going to kill you." She screams, locking her arms around his neck when one of the men

grabs her by the arm.

“Shoot her now!” It’s an instruction from the man pointing a gun at Thambo.

Mthombo can’t make out how many of them are there, but they are more than three.

“Please, I’ll go with you. Just let her go.” He pleads for Shiyiwe’s life while pushing her off him and because he’s a teddy bear and Shiyiwe might as well be a coat hanger, she loses the grip and falls on her butt.

“Call Bhedlindaba!” Mthombo yells to Shiyiwe as the strange men drag him across the road towards the black car.

.

.

A big thank you to Zamangwane for the sponsors.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Twenty-nine

ATHULE-

.

.

“Athule?” Ndaba is waiting for an answer.

I know he is going to handle the situation very well, I would like to believe that he is mature. Xolani is my only worry, he can be very defensive and gets angry at the drop of a hat.

“He’s not my boyfr...”

Cold lips smash against mine, I’m taken aback by the attack that my body pauses a second. When I eventually push Xolani off me, Ndaba is long gone.

The neighbours have doubled, watching my life play out, as if I jumped out of a Daily Sun Newspaper.

“Baby.” Xolani says.

Why does he have to be this person?

“Why did you kiss me?” I’m mad, I want him gone.

“You’re my girlfriend Athule, you never had a problem with me kissing you.”

“Yeah but that was when we were dating. Xolani I

haven't seen you in months, you can't just come back and start throwing boyfriend titles to my face."

"I am your boyfriend, I told you I was busy angisho. Baby you know I sometimes travel from country to country..." He thinks I care.

In fact, let me walk away. I have beans to cook, and my father is waiting for me.

He grabs my hand when I turn to leave, "What do you say? Lunch tomorrow?"

People are watching, my mother will know by morning that there was a man holding my hand on the streets. One of these bitches will go as far as taking a picture as proof.

"Please leave Xolani." I snap, not hiding my annoyance.

"I'm not going until you agree to meet up with me, I miss you Athule please. I'm not expecting anything from you, we'll talk and maybe come up with a mutual agreement."

"I don't know about tomorrow, my mother will be

home.”

“Okay, be ready at 12pm.” He says.

I don’t recall agreeing to meeting up with him.

“It’s not a promise Xolani, you have to call first. I live with my parents now, it won’t be easy.”

I plan on officially breaking things off when we meet, he needs to know that we are completely over. I have to reschedule the date with Ndaba for an hour later... shit! I don’t have his numbers.

My cheeks feel the warmth of Xolani’s hands. His eyes tell a tale of desire. I move away from his touch.

“Thank you, sthandwa sami.”

Rha! Standwa sami! The first and last time I heard these words was the night I lost my innocence to a Zulu taxi driver who didn’t love me as much as I liked him to.

I walk past him, these nosy people don’t have a life. They are staring and whispering gibberish as I rush to my father’s house. They probably call me “daardie meisie.” (that girl.)

MTHANDENI

This morning she woke up to a video of her having sex with an unrecognizable man, the act took place in her bedroom. She couldn't see the man's face, only his bare back and how he was moving on top of her. She hasn't told anyone about it, where will she even begin? Who will she tell? Shiyiwe is not around, they haven't spoken at all. Velakithi is not a present uncle, he's hardly at home.

Samson hasn't stopped blowing up her phone with threatening messages and phones calls. The video was sent by him, his explanation is that he got it from a trusted source.

When he threatened to splash the sex video all over social media, she didn't waste any time jumping into her shoes and leaving the house.

He said to meet at South Gate at the food court, the place is buzzing with people. Her palms start sweating when she spots him in the midst of the crowd, there's a large box of Roman's pizza and 1 litre Coke in front of him, he's eating like the world is ending today.

"Babomncane!" He looks up with his mouth full and tries to force a smile.

"Mshana, hlala phansi." He's on his feet pulling a chair for her.

Mthandeni flinches when his arm brushes against hers, tears instantly fill her eyes.

"Relax mshana, you look like you're about to faint." It's not out of concern that he's saying this, that's why he's laughing in mockery.

"You finally got my message?" The smile on his face is shifty, Mthandeni sits and folds her arms across her chest.

She's uncomfortable in his presence, Samson has never given her a reason to feel this way before, nor has he looked at her in way that would make her

want to shield her body.

“Would you like some Pizza?” He asks, taking a huge bite from a slice.

Mthandeni shakes her head, she’s not here for a feast.

“I paid R150 for this, I have to pay back my friend.” He stretches out a hand.

Mthandeni is hesitant at first, she opens her bag and pulls out a R200 note and places it on the table.

“Asbonge mshana,” (Thank you.)

He’s smiling and chewing loud like a cow. Samson’s lack of table manners is the least of her worries.

“Ncane I’m innocent, I have never slept with anyone in my life. I don’t know who that man is, that video is fake.” Mthandeni explains herself, tears do not waste time painting her face.

“Hayi mshana, I don’t know anything. All I know is that there is a sex tape of you having sex with a strange man in my brother’s house.” Samson shrugs his shoulders, he really doesn’t give a damn about

her tears.

“You said you will delete the video if I meet up with you.” Mthandeni reminds him.

“I lied.” Samson’s reply has her widening her eyes.

More tears fill her eyes, “Babomncane please, delete the video.”

“How could you be so cruel Mshana, to ask me to delete my investment?”

Mthandeni doesn’t answer, probably because she’s confused and doesn’t understand where Samson is taking this.

“Let me make it clear, seeing that you are slow.” He laughs and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.

“You will tell that fool Velakithi that my wife and I are moving back into the house and I want an allowance of R3000 every month.” Samson says.

“I don’t have money ncane.”

“I know about the will, MG told me that your parents left a big fat investment for you mshana. I’m your

uncle, you can't let me rot on the streets." He's smiling, having a blast and enjoying the tears on her face.

"But I don't have access to the money, uncle Velakithi is the signatory." She is finding it hard to put her words together, there are tears in her trembling voice.

"I'm sure he will give you if you ask," Samson retorts.

"I'll talk to him then, you can move in tomorrow. Please delete the video now." Mthandeni pleads, wiping away her tears with her hand.

Like the son of a bitch he is, Samson sits back unzips his pants to let his potbelly breathe and briefly smiles at Mthandeni.

"Let's talk tomorrow, after we have moved in. Right now, go home and tell Velakithi that we are moving back in. If you dare mention the video, I will post it. Samu has a copy, Gezani too. Don't double cross me, Mshana. I don't want to be a bad uncle." He continues and starts picking at his teeth with his pinkie nail, it's longer than the others.

He never uses a toothpick, not when he has this tool.

Mthandeni is disgusted and frightened, how is it that this man has a video of her having sex with a man she doesn't know? A moment she can't remember.

.

.

BHEDLINDABA-

He's driving beyond the speed limit, he's on the phone trying to get a hold of his friends. If his brother has been taken then he has to go through the dark corners of Bree and Noord, someone must know something.

He's respected in that world, it's not just the Meyiwa name but taking young men off the streets and giving them a better life. Men older than his father respect him, women younger than his sisters wish to have him as a husband. He's used to the fame, people fussing over him and shouting his name in awe.

He received a call from Shiyiwe after walking away from Athule and that frog who called himself her boyfriend, he was irked but instantly forgot about them when Shiyiwe told him what happened.

“Ntwana.” The phone is answered.

“Mikhulu, my brother has been abducted, I need you to snoop around the ranks.” He goes straight to the point.

“Consider it done,” says Mikhulu.

He drops the call and dials Shiyiwe’s number, she’s not answering. Strange because he spoke to her not so long ago, he dials Thambo’s, it sends him straight to voice mail.

“Damn it!” He cusses.

Normally, he’d know what to do in a situation similar to this one. But his head is not in the right space, it is spinning. Someone took his brother.

His phone rings just as he tosses it on the passenger seat, it’s Thambo

“The house in Winchester Hills has caught fire.

Where should I take Miss Jele?"

He slows down, unable to believe what Thambo just told him.

"The house is on fire?" He mumbles, maybe trapped in shock.

"We arrived to neighbours watching the house burn down to ashes, nothing can be saved in it." Thambo says.

There is no time to dwell in the presence of shock, Ndaba exhales in despair.

"Bring her to my house, there's a pot outside, a few feet away from the door. You'll find the keys there. He instructs Thambo and hangs up.

Things are taking a terrible turn, whoever took Mthombo is playing dirty and they are not showing any mercy.

He finds himself driving to his father's house, they need to know what happened. He can't sit around while waiting for Mikhulu.

Five minutes into the drive, his phone flashes with a

text message. It's Thambo.

Your father and brothers are at your house.

The message reads.

Bhedlindaba makes a U-turn, he knows by now that his father hates Shiyiwe. He's passing anything that is a red robot, the mission is to get to his house before Zwangendaba braais Shiyiwe alive.

There are two cars parked outside, he recognises his father's. The second one belongs to Mthombo.

He grabs his belongings and hurries inside the house, he hears sniffles and loud voices coming from the living room. There are men dressed in black, three to be precise. They are hovering over Shiyiwe, Zinqumo is in the middle. He has Shiyiwe pinned to the sofa, interrogating her. All she keeps saying is, "I don't know."

"Let her go Zinqumo." Ndaba barks at his brother.

Zinqumo raises his head, he seems to be high from the power trip he's on. He laughs, like the idiot he is.

"Dad said to interrogate her," daddy-can-I replies with a sly grin playing on his face.

"She didn't do anything wrong, let her go." Ndaba says, authoritatively.

Zinqumo has never taken him seriously, that's why he still has Shiysiwe pinned to the couch.

"This bitch knows who took my brother, I'm going to make her speak one way or the other." Zinqumo is persistent.

His stubbornness is frustrating, Ndaba's muscles flick angrily at his jaw, he looks around.

He's searching for his father, if his car is here then he must be around somewhere. He pulls a gun from his waist and points it at his brother.

"Ndaba, are you pointing that thing at me? Your brother?" The shock in Zinqumo's voice.

"Voetsek, shifta shlama." (move.)

Ndaba says it so calmly, his eyes are full of threats

to shoot and kill.

“Ndaba, her uncle took our brother. You can’t also be blinded by her innocent act.” Zinqumo tries to explain his way out.

“Ngithe shayisa mgodoyi, all of you. Fusegani zinja.” He fires one shot, the men in black duck. The second shot has them lying down on their stomachs. Zinqumo is glaring looks that could kill, he hasn’t let go of Shiysiwe.

“Back off wena, I’ll destroy that English twang with a bullet. You’ll puff out gunpowder each time you open your mouth to speak.” Ndaba points up and releases a shot, neighbours should be on the phone with the police by now.

“Bhedlindaba don’t do this, she knows where brother is. We have to get the truth out of her.” The little brother argues.

“Yabona ntwana yami, I don’t mind having a brother who has no hand. Either you move it or you’ll be the next cripple in our family.” Ndaba.

His squared jaw is tensed visibly, a vein has

appeared on his forehead. If Zinqumo does not move away from Shiyiwe, Ndaba's pitch black skin will turn grey from anger.

"What's wrong with you Ndaba?" Zinqumo asks, he sounds more white than black.

"I-flop yakho, ile attitude nyana yakho yamasimba you dammit. You don't listen you rubberneck."

Ndaba.

(What's wrong is your stinking attitude.)

"I'm not afraid of you," Zinqumo challenges him. His voice is shaky and words uncertain.

Ndaba chuckles, "ufuna sibambane ngamabhande you bloody swine?" (You want us to fight?)

He fires a shot, Zinqumo slowly moves away from Shiyiwe. She is clearly traumatised and shaken. She moves from the couch and runs to hide in Ndaba's chest.

He doesn't hold her back, but waits for her to cool down. Once she's calm, she steps away from him while wiping tears from her eyes.

“Someone took Mthombo, I swear I don’t know who it is.” She tells him.

“I know,” Ndaba replies.

“That’s a blatant lie, she is a Jele. You can’t believe anything that comes out of her mouth.” Zinqumo’s face is flushing with rage.

“I told you that I didn’t do anything, it’s not my fault that you’re stupid enough not to believe me.” That’s Shiysiwe.

“You bitch, who do you...”

“Get out of my house, all of you.” Ndaba is telling his brother and his minions.

Zinqumo has never looked so shocked in his life.

“I’m not going anywhere, father is on an important call. He said to wait for him here.” Zinqumo takes a seat.

Ndaba was right to think that Zwangendaba is here somewhere.

“Zwangendaba!” He yells in anger, cracking his neck in preparation for a fight. “Show yourself you

bleksem."

He's about to go ghetto on his father.

He wants to search every room but he can't leave Shiyiwe with these twigs, they might kill her and point fingers at each other.

"He's not in the house, he left with Thambo. I don't know where they went." Shiyiwe tells him.

"Isn't Thambo your bodyguard? Why did he leave you with these cockroaches?" Ndaba asks and points his eyes at the men in his living room, not one has dared to get up from the floor.

"I had a bodyguard, I don't know what happened to him. Thambo is just my driver." Shiyiwe's answer has Zinqumo cracking up with laughter.

"From rags to riches, a poor girl allocated a driver and a bodyguard? To go is to see indeed." He says, flipping through channels.

He is ignored because that's his spoiled-rich-ass talking.

"Shiyiwe, I need you to tell me everything that happened. Did you see their faces?" Ndaba asks.

"It was too dark to make out anything, and everything happened so fast. My focus was helping Mthombo, they dragged him away like a bag of maize meal. You have to find him please." She sounds desperate.

"We are going to find my son, alright," says a voice by the door.

It's Zwangendaba, there are guards surrounding him.

"And you are going to help us find him, Miss Jele." He finishes, his voice thick with a hint. His murderous gaze is on Shiyiwe.

.

.

Sponsored by Zamangwane

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Thirty

SHIYIWE-

****WARNING!!!**** This chapter contains sexual assault, it may be troubling/triggering to sensitive readers. Reader's discretion is advised.

.

.

The look on Zwangendaba's face has me shaking in my bones, it takes everything in me to show that I am not affected by him and the menacing tall men he's with.

These men are made from Herbal Life, steroids and streetlights.

"What do you mean Taima?" Ndaba asks, pushing me behind him. I'm shocked by his change of accent and way of speaking. It's a very familiar language.

"Does Velakithi ring a bell?" I frown at Zwangendaba's question.

"He's my uncle," I say, eager to know what he has to say about my uncle.

"Your uncle has my son," he hands one of his men

what looks like a picture. The bouncer looking man is coming towards me, Ndaba stops him at arm's length.

"Brika sfebe!" (Stop)

Ndaba's tone is smooth, yet menacing. The man stops and slams the picture on Ndaba's chest, he remains standing like a brick.

I don't like the way these people look at me, I want to go home. But which home? I have no one, and if something happens to Mthombo, I will be a street-aunt all my life because there is no way I'm going back to KZN. What will I do there?

Ndaba holds the picture up, it's Mthombo lying on a dirty mattress. There are bruises on his face I can barely recognise him.

"What did they do to him?" The words leave my mouth before I could control them.

Zinqumo snatches the picture, his eyes widen before he's turning them to me. If his eyes fired bullets, I would be dead.

“I swear, I don’t know what my uncle is up to.” I defend myself and take up a pathetic defensive posture, and that’s folding my arms on my chest.

This is Ndaba’s house, I’m selfish and rude to want these people to go. I wish Zwangendaba would disappear with these robots he calls bodyguards, I don’t like the one standing in front of Ndaba the most.

He makes my skin crawl with how he is challenging him with a blank stare, Ndaba has taken up the challenge. He is staring back, the gun is still in his hand and I know now that he is not afraid to shoot.

“Thank you for the picture taima, now take your people and leave my house.” He says, not removing his glare from the giant in front of him.

“She’s coming with us.” Zwangendaba says, pointing at me with his head.

I must be the “she” that he is talking about, what makes him think I will follow him?

“She is not going anywhere.” Ndaba retorts. I like a man who knows how to take charge, I should take a

picture of him carrying that gun for future reference.

"This is war between Velakithi and me, stay away from it Bhedlindaba." Zwangendaba.

MG never mentioned the old man being part of the war.

"Mthombo is my brother, he expects me to keep her safe."

I'm the "her" Ndaba is talking about. I'm basically in the lion's den, we are outnumbered.

The men we found here have joined Zwangendaba, looking ready to attack.

"Alright, you leave me no choice." Zwangendaba says, as if he is giving his guards a go-ahead.

They move at once, the one in front of Ndaba punches him across the face, Ndaba returns it just as hard, they start exchanging fists and I know I will get hurt if I stand close.

As I rush to hide behind the couch, Ndaba fires a shot. The man is hit on the chest with a bullet, he dies instantly.

Silence! They are looking at Ndaba, shocked.

“Test me Zwangendaba, and I swear on the money you worship that I will travel from Cape to Cairo, coast to coast to bring you down.”

Zwangendaba is a bastard, he's not touched by Ndaba's threat. He's crackling in intimidating chuckles.

“Look around son, you are outnumbered. I suggest you stop this fake gangster act of yours and step aside. It took me two seconds to cum and you were planted into your mother's womb, I can take you out of this world just as fast.”

Ndaba shakes his head, matching Zwangendaba's cold chuckle.

“There's a zulu proverb, ikhota eyikhothayo, engayikhothi. iyayikhahlela. It's Tit for Tat taima, you fuck with me, I return the favour.” Ndaba says and I swear my body reacts to the threat, it's the way his voice carries the promise.

At this point, I know he will shoot his father dead, it's not for me but his brother Mthombo.

“When did you learn to speak like that wena Bhedlindaba? Is this what you learn at the soccer stadium?” Sounds like daddy has issues with his son having a soccer team.

“That’s irrelevant, gather your rats and get the fuck out of my house.” He spits, waving his gun around.

It would be nice if they listen, but I don’t always get what I want. All Zwangendaba’s men have their guns pointed at Ndaba, all cold faces and tight jaws.

“You are a child boy, still teething. I don’t want to hurt you.” Zwangendaba’s voice echoes, carrying cruelty and malice. What is it that my uncle did to this family?

How can life be so cruel? How did I end up in such a predicament? My mistake was accepting a job at the Meyiwas, I wouldn’t be here. I’d still be in my father’s house, job haunting and arguing with MaMbuyazi over dishes.

“You have got to be kidding me.” The gruff voice drowning in irritation belongs to Ndaba, I zoned out a

bit for a while.

“Ndaba watch out!” I scream when Zinqumo nears him from behind and hits him on the head with the barrel of a gun.

Ndaba falls, almost unconscious. He’s still moving, I jump over the couch to check on him.

Zinqumo grabs my hand before I can touch him and throws me on the ground with a back hand. I think I’m dying because I see white flashing before my eyes, but I think I’m instantly revived by ancestors because I can see Zinqumo hovering above his brother.

He’s kicking him and groaning as if it’s the most painful thing he’s ever had to do. A guard joins him and lands a kick on Ndaba’s face, blood splutters from his mouth. He spits and laughs, showcasing stubbornness.

“No!” I hear a scream leave my mouth as I force myself up in this dizzy state, and jump on Zinqumo’s back.

Like I’m an annoying toddler he doesn’t want on his

back, he shakes me off him. My useless body falls down like a spider from a curtain.

Two guards lift Ndaba up, they are holding him against his will, one on each side. His body is slouching mid-way, his almost-awake eyes are on me. I see anger in them.

“Madoda, do it right this time and send the footage to Velakithi.” It’s an order from Zwangendaba, he’s ogling at me. With the way he’s looking at me tells me he has more to say, but the rest of his order remains unspoken.

His mouth twitches making me think he’s about to flash a smile but the fucking bastard is only sneering at me.

There’s a sinister look on his face as he nods at one of the guards, I’m suddenly reminded of that day in Riverlea when I was attacked by those men, when two of them approach me.

Did he send those two boys that day?

“Taima, don’t do this.” Ndaba threatens. He’s too weak to move, that does not mean I can’t fight these

men. Who am I kidding? I can at least try though. I kick one of them on the groin, he growls grabbing his useless sack and instantly drops to his knees. My chest bursts with pride but the feeling is short-lived, the one standing attacks without giving me a chance to think about my next move, he backhands me so hard my head hits the floor first.

Through my blurry vision, I see Zwangendaba walking away.

As if his absence fuels these men, they hover around me like moth to a flame.

“No one will save you now.” Zinqumo says.

He looks at Ndaba then at me, the look in his eyes makes me feel dirty and cheap. I stand to run but there’s a brick behind me, these people are everywhere.

There is no escape, something about my face must be annoying this man blocking my path because he slaps me with so much force that it sends me crashing to the floor once again, like it’s where I belong. The pain almost knocks every breath from

my lungs, I'm wheezing, trying to catch my breath.

"You guys do your thing, she's not my cup of tea. I'll take the video." Zinqumo says, pulling out a phone, he's going to record me.

"Don't you dare touch me," I warn the guard kneeling in front of me. He grabs a hold of my foot when I start to scoot back and pulls me to him like I have never gained weight since childhood.

"I'm going to kill you, mdidi yenu." I hear Ndaba's intonation, he chuckles after the delivery. It's empty, cold.

They pause to look at him before bursting with laughter, Ndaba didn't crack a joke but a threat. But I don't blame these men, we're outnumbered and weak. Two bouncers are holding him back, and I'm caught in the other's grip.

"You're a looker, it's a shame the boss is going to kill you. We should have fun before that happens, don't you think?" The guard hints at something shameless.

"Your death will be a terrible waste." He adds, caressing my cheek with his coarse hand.

“D... don’t touch... me.” I scream weakly, but the man does not heed my words. His filthy hands are touching me everywhere, painting me with nothing but filth.

My nose scrunches up in disgust, tears well up in my eyes. I shouldn’t be crying, it will empower him but I can’t help it. The more I push the guard’s hand from me, the more he persists on harassing my body. He seems to be fuelled by my resistance.

“I said... stop.” The will to fight for my dignity overtakes me, I send a foot forward, kicking the man in his groin.

This is enough to get him distracted, when he is occupied with nursing his painful manhood, I take this opportunity to drag my weak body towards the door. They let me, while watching and laughing. I can’t describe the amount of fear lurking around me, my heart is ready to jump out of my chest.

I need to get out of here... it’s a matter of life and death... it’s a matter of survival... a matter of saving my self-respect.

“Help.” My pathetic voice can’t even carry itself outside the door. The neighbours aren’t close by, but instinct says bang on the door, my hands are disappointingly weak, same as my frail voice.

The laughter behind me is getting louder, Zinqumo is beside me recording every moment.

“Baba, help me.” Unexpectedly, I cry to a dead man. He’s probably here watching and laughing with these men.

“Ma, fight for me please.” My throat pains as I speak, it’s worth a shot though.

I’m slowly losing all my might, there is no help coming. All I’m doing is giving these men a show. Wheezing and my knees giving in, I press my forehead against the door.

Tears knock and streak down my cheeks without my permission, I can hear them laughing coldly behind me. My blood runs cold, and my heart drops to the darkest pit of my stomach.

“There is no one out there baby girl, come party with us.” Confidence and mockery are loud in the man’s voice.

Playing strong has come to a stop for me, I’m overwhelmed by a flood of emotions I can’t even describe. My pent up emotions spew out of my mouth like a volcanic eruption, and I cry like there is no tomorrow.

My hands and forehead pasted on the door, I continue to bang on it, hoping and praying for someone, anyone to come for me.

“Come here sweetheart, I like them weak and vulnerable.” The man states, he’s indifferent, at a single glance at him, one would say evil lives here.

His statement has everyone laughing.

It’s not long before he grips my hair and pulls me back. My body tumbles to the floor with a thump, he doesn’t care, nor does he let go of my hair. He drags me back to the lounge, kicking and faintly screaming for help. I meet Ndaba’s eyes, there are tears in his eyes.

“Shiyiwe!” I have never heard my name said with a hint of an apology.

He’s kicking, trying to free himself from the men pulling his arms back. I don’t hold anything against him, I know if he was not overpowered he would kill them like he said he would.

“I’ll be fine,” I mumble and pray he understands that it’s not his fault. That I will get over it one day, if I survive it.

The guard doesn’t waste any time, but roughly grabs my waist, lifting me up and throws me on the sofa, face down.

I know what is going to happen, I know what this pervert is going to do to me. I can’t fathom the thought of being raped, everything in me tells me to fight.

The guard is bigger than me that even if I had all the strength granted to me from above, I would lose to him.

“Do... don’t do this... Please.” My voice is weak, my body won’t move but I fight anyway till I can’t move a

single muscle on my body.

“Shhhh.” His warm breath in my ear makes my skin crawl, the feeling of his weight on me is nauseating. I want to throw up, I have to cover my mouth to stop myself from retching. I can fight this, I can do this. It can’t be as hard as it seems, right?

“I promise you’ll hardly feel a thing nonos, I’ll be quick.” His lips trail from my neck down to my nape. I’m trying to stop my body from trembling, it’s not listening to me.

“G... get off... me.” I lose all strength when I release a scream.

“Zinqumo stop this nonsense now.” It’s Ndaba, he doesn’t sound as weak as he did before.

“This is fun brother, I’ve always wanted to go into film.” Zinqumo laughs.

My world drops from underneath me when I feel my pants being pulled down along with my underwear. I clench my teeth, anger clings on to me, mostly

because I'm just lying here unable to defend myself.

"No... no stop."

I manage a scream and attempt to get up, but the man grips the back of my neck and roughly pins me down on the sofa. My face buried in it that I can't breathe nor make a traceable sound. I'm squirming under the bastard, fighting for survival with the little strength I'm left with.

Ndaba is screaming, I've never heard a man scream before and I don't think I want to hear it ever again. His screams tear to the deepest parts of my soul, they are unbearable.

"This is going to be good." The guard groans lustfully.

I release a subdued gasp when I hear the sound of a belt-buckle, my stomach churns at the sound of this man's heavy breathing. My heart heavily thuds against my ribcage.

"Cute cheeks you got there, baby girl. I'm about to go to heaven." He teases with lust in his voice, spanking my butt cheeks.

“Don’t worry, I’ll take care of you. You can be my little bitch and I promise to get you out of this hell.”

This he whispers into my ear, for the others not to hear.

I’m disgusted by the words and his breath sweeping down my neck. With such ease, he rips my t-shirt in two, exposing my bare back.

He alternates to kissing my spine down to the small of my back. The kisses are wet and disgusting, slimy to the feel. He kisses my butt cheeks before taking slimy licks.

Traumatised... befuddled and repulsed to my deepest core, I can only scream into the sofa and thrash about to free myself.

This is a fight for my life, a weak body can’t hinder that, I know that I need to fight. However, it is in vain.

“I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.” Ndaba is apologising, I think he’s crying. I’m not really sure, my mind has left my body.

My lungs are crushed when the man uses his knee to press me down, his grip tightens on my neck. This eliminates all my movements.

He curls an arm around my hips and pulls them up to his full view, a disgusting chuckle escapes his mouth.

The only defence I have is trembling with fear, and crying. The bastard can hear my silenced cries and screams, yet turns a blind eye to them. He's blinded by lust and sick desires, that his humanity feels nothing for me.

"Mthombo!" I mumble, it's inaudible. Only I know who I'm calling for.

I think Ndaba is losing his mind, he's yelling cuss words and threats. He speaks like he grew up on the streets.

When I feel the pervert tap his erection on my thigh, a desperate scream for help erupts from my mouth, but it's still pathetic, inaudible. Only this expensive sofa bears witness to my agony.

.

.

Sponsored by Zamangwane...

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Thirty-one

BHEDLINDABA

.

.

His brother trusts him and that is something he can't break, Mthombo will never forgive him if he lets anything happen to Shiysiwe. These fuckers are stronger than they even look, he needs to breathe and think of a way out. His heart stops for a second then races faster than its usual rate, dread has overtaken him.

The man harassing his brother's girlfriend is moaning and breathing heavily. He's teasing Shiysiwe with his manhood, and laughing while at it.

Although paralyzed by shock, Ndaba is able to put on his thinking hat.

His teary eyes are widely scanning the guards holding him captive, the one on his left has a gun shoved on his waist. He looks at both of them, their focus is on the man abusing Shiysiwe.

Taking this chance, he reaches for the gun and without a second thought shoots the owner on his stomach.

His arm is freed as the man falls to his death, the second guard is taken down as well. His head catches the bullet.

Shots are fired by the other guards, Zinqumo runs to hide behind the couch.

“Stop shooting at my brother you idiots,” Zinqumo yells at the guards. He’s running out of the house like a coward leaving his minions behind. Seeing that most of them have been taken down, they drop their guns in surrender.

“Shiysiwe” Her name quietly storms out of Ndaba’s mouth. That stupid idiot is caught in lust that he can’t hear gunshots around him.

“Yeyi wena mgodoyi,” Ndaba barks with rage, anger

calling him out. The protective instinct within him suddenly overpowers every emotion raging through his body. The guard is only startled when Ndaba grabs him and throws him against the wall, Shiysiwe collapses flat on the sofa, wailing painfully while fighting to catch her breath.

At the glimpse of her naked body, Ndaba growls in anger. A type of beast is birthed in him, an undisputable urge to kill the guard engulfs his entire being.

But first, he needs to check if Shiysiwe is alright. He wants to take care of her, cloth her and shield her under his wings. Ndaba quickly removes his bloodstained shirt to cover her, he sits her up mindful of her trembling body.

“Shiysiwe!” Ndaba calls.

Shiysiwe has her eyes closed, head dropped and tears endlessly falling down her face. She's weeping and trembling like a leaf, Ndaba pulls her into his arms but Shiysiwe flinches and pulls away, fear visible on

her body.

"Shiyiwe, are you okay?" A guilt stricken Ndaba questions a traumatized Shiyiwe. His voice finally gets to her, she opens her eyes and stares desperately at him, her arms hugging her barely covered body.

"Tell me that you're okay Shiyiwe." He speaks with anger, he's not sure what that fool did while he was shooting at the idiots that are now lying dead in his living room.

"Speak to me, I need to know if you're okay." Maybe he is not asking this right, he needs to rephrase and make it clear.

Shiyiwe's lower lip and chin quaver, eyes flash with more tears before she bursts into loud sobs.

She must not be thinking when she drops her head on Ndaba's chest and tightly hooks her arms around his neck, or she feels safe with him.

He can't understand how she is still able to find comfort in the arms of a man after what just happened.

Her tears and warm breath tattoo the crook of his neck, he can't pin together why he is angered by her loud cries.

"It's okay," he comforts.

There's an urge to tighten his arms around her and assure her that everything will be okay. He fights that itch, it works as it is overpowered by the urge to kill... Kill the bastard who dared to touch her. Ndaba opts for a light pat on Shiyiwe's shuddering shoulders. He can't stand her cries, they are doing something to him... something dark that will only make him a bad person.

He takes Shiyiwe's cheeks into the palms of his hands right after pulling her away from his chest.

"Look at me, Shiyiwe. Did he..." His jaw grits in anger as the thought is unbearable.

He prays he wasn't too late, it only takes a second to penetrate and it's all over. Shiyiwe flicks her puffy eyes open, Ndaba sees fear in them. He wants to wipe it away, but how?

"Did he touch you? Did he do anything to you,

Shiyiwe?" No answer...

His thumbs gently rub her cheeks, the tears have to be eliminated.

"Dammit, answer me." With gritted teeth, he snaps at the terrified Shiyiwe who drops her head and weeps louder. She's shaking her head, he's a man, he can't understand what this means. It doesn't give him a guaranteed answer, he needs words.

Thambo runs in from outside as if he was summoned, there is a man with him. He looks confused by Shiyiwe's cries and the state she is in. The dead bodies don't seem to bother him at all.

"What's going on?" Thambo asks, moving closer. Ndaba extends a hand to stop him from coming closer.

He is getting angrier by the second, yet he softens his touch on Shiyiwe's cheek.

"Shiyiwe please... tell me that bastard didn't do anything to you." He's still wording it wrongly, his

voice is pleading and desperate.

“N... no.” Shaken, Shiysiwe manages to speak.

Ndaba fixes the shirt covering her body, it's big on her so it does the work. He stands, but Shiysiwe clings on to his leg, she must be thinking he's leaving.

He looks down to find her eyes begging him to stay, he can't take the fear reflecting in her eyes. Hence Ndaba turns back to the abuser and without moving an inch gestures that he comes to him.

“Dwadla shlama.” (Come, you piece of shit)

His tone has become chilly, the guard's eyes widen, terror and fear hold on to him. Thambo frowns, he's trying to figure out what happened here or rather what is happening.

“Phola mdoko, I'm not going to suck your dick. Sondela.” Ndaba adds.

Only now the pervert is buckling his belt, shame settled on him.

“Hade ntwana.” (I'm sorry.)

The guard stutters.

"Inja iz'khotha amanxeba," Ndaba chuckles. "You hit me behind the ear, I send you six feet under, no return."

Eyes glowing with murderous fire, Ndaba's scorching glare makes the guard feel like an ant under an elephant's foot.

"Th... they made me do it. I was only doing my job ndoda." It's a squeak by the guard, his feet falter. His fate is written in Ndaba's eyes, and he's become powerless without his bosses here.

"Voetsek skotheni, ubani indoda yakho?" (Who is your man?)

Ndaba spits, he's growing impatient. This man is taking his time to get to him. He is not going to meet the pauper half way, and he doesn't want to leave Shiysiwe who is desperately clinging on to his leg.

"I said come here, skhova." He grabs him by the shirt and drags him closer. "Lento edla i-cheese ngenkani."

(You greedy bastard.)

They are of the same height, however Ndaba is the least intimidated by the bouncer. He dusts the man's shoulders and helps him with his belt, when he's done, he looks into his eyes.

"On behalf of i-taima lam, you are fired, mgodoyi." He grinds out the words between clenched teeth and without seconds wasted snaps the guard's neck.

Shiyiwe flinches in shock at the sound. Her eyes widen even more when the man comes crashing down in front of her, dead as a bird.

The other remaining two guards stand in hidden shock, the son of the vicious man they work for is more evil than his father.

"Let this be a lesson to everyone present and outside these walls, no one touches this woman over here." Ndaba seethes, his voice stern with no trace of sympathy in its hardness.

He has a finger pointed at Shiyiwe, her cries have Ndaba clenching his jaw. Anger has made a home in him, it radiates through his body.

The men share disbelieving looks, they look back at Ndaba with anger in their eyes.

"Take this message and go tell my father that he has waged war with his son. Ngizophenduka imbuzi efile, into angayazi. He rolled the dice, now I'm ready to play." Ndaba declares.

"Sir, are you sure that's a wise thing to do? You know what your father is capable of." Thambo underestimates him.

"Ungakhulumi amasimba wena, daai man doesn't know who he's dealing with. I'm taking him down, one way or another. Kuzoba phans' phezulu, kube bomvu, kube blue. Sidlal' umagida sbhekane." (It's going to be a messy war.)

He knows they understand this deep language and they will explain it to his father, word for word.

Ndaba bends over and scoops Shiyiwe in his arms, she holds on to him.

"And get these dead rats out of my house." He's telling the guards.

He jumps over the bodies, “Abashwe.” (Let the games begin.)

He yells dramatically as he exits the room with Shiysiwe in his arms, he is heading towards one of the guests rooms.

.

.

Sponsored by Zamangwane...

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Thirty-two

TSHEGOFATSO MOSHEO-

.

.

“Why did you call me here?”

Now this is the face she didn’t think she’d wake up to, she forces a genuine smile. When you want

things done, you do them yourself, and that's exactly what Mme Mosheo did. Shiyiwe has proved to be nothing but a shameless brat who has no regard for human life. What kind of "It's an emergency doesn't she get?"

"I didn't think you'd come,"

Not that she's ever thinking but... it's been years since she saw this woman standing by her bedside.

"How did they let you in Penny? It's past visiting hours." Mme Mosheo asks.

"I have a friend who works here as a nurse." She replies.

People change and transform over the years, but Penny looks just as miserable as the last time Mme Mosheo saw her. She's always been the typical housewife, she dressed it, walked it and spoke like one.

"The last time I saw you, you were wearing the same pinafore and doek. Is Mphako treating you well? You look like a lost soul, Penny."

She wouldn't be Tshegofatso if she doesn't come with double trouble.

Penny serves her with a tongue click, "Why am I here Tshego?"

How idiotic of Tshego to grin like that when her guest is about to explode with anger and looking unsettled, her eyes won't stop running to the exit.

"If you are worried about my husband or Ntebo walking in, you can relax Penny." She's trying to put her guest at ease but it's not happening.

Penny's feet are reluctant, she won't stand still. She has her handbag tightly clutched to her chest as if someone would come and snatch it from her. She's nervous.

"Please sit down..." and like she's enjoying the look on Penny's face, Mme Mosheo widens her grin. Penny rolls her eyes before taking the stupid seat.

"MaMbuyazi is gone, did you know?" A barrier of bad news is a job Mme Mosheo would do perfectly, and pass with flying colours.

Penny's face turns cold, she clears her throat and turns her stone cold eyes away.

"Maybe the world will be a better place without her."

Penny answers.

These words sound awfully familiar to Mme Mosheo.

"Some things never change, twenty seven years later, you are still bitter?" Mme Mosheo giggles.

"Bitter does not describe how I feel, I am seething with rage. That witch stole from me." Penny spits.

Tshego goes the extra mile and pushes out the loudest laugh she can conjure up.

"MaMbuyazi was anything but a witch, she was one of God's favourite children." That's Tshego.

She's not singing MaMbuyazi's praises, it's just the way she's always felt about the woman and that feeling drove her to jealousy.

Penny seems to have no answer for her, she's silent and looking around again.

"How is Mphako and his 23 year-old daughter? Shouldn't she be married with three kids by now?"

The smile on her face is mischievous, she appears to be loving the high horse she's riding.

"Leave my family out of your mouth," Penny is suddenly sweating.

"I'm only asking hau, you haven't changed maPenniza. Anger still lives inside you, no one harbors anger for twenty seven years. Is Athule your garbage dump? That's where you vomit all your bitterness?"

Tshego has always had a big mouth, she can't help but let Penny listen to her ugly laugh.

Penny frowns at her, "Why am I here Tshegofatso?"

"To donate blood of course, surely you are not going to let your sister die? If I'm going to the grave, I'm singing like a canary before I breathe my last breath." Sounds like a threat from Mme Mosheo, it's actually a promise.

Penny exhales deeply, she's never felt so much frustration in her life. Also she knows this woman lying in bed, when Tshego makes promises, things happen.

“Where do I sign?” Penny queries.

She's removing her hand bag from her shoulder, and throws it on the floor. She looks upset, and Mme Mosheo doesn't care because once again she is getting what she wants.

BHEDLINDABA-

He walks up the staircase with Shiysiwe in his arms, he can feel how her body is trembling under his touch, probably still terrified. Her soft cries have not ceased, there is a deep need to wipe her tears away. Instead, Ndaba holds Shiysiwe closer in a protective manner until he reaches the guest bedroom. The door is unlocked, he kicks it open, walks to the double bed and gently places Shiysiwe there.

He moves, only to realize that Shiyiwe is clinging on to his arm.

He lowers his gaze to her only to see nothing but fear and tears drenched in her eyes.

“Shiyiwe!” He has no words.

He has no clue how to comfort her, she’s his brother’s girlfriend. Doing more than what he’s done will be overstepping boundaries.

“Where were you?” Her voice trembles along with her lower lip, her hands tighten around his shirt, pulling him closer against her until Ndaba gives in and relaxes his legs on the bed.

“I called for you, but you didn’t come.” She cries.

Her statement causes confusion, and puts a frown on Ndaba’s face.

“I was there, I’m sorry I let him go that far.” He blames himself for what happened back there.

“I’m talking to my father...” she’s stuttering. “He’s standing behind you.”

Ndaba’s head whips back, she can’t be talking about the man they buried a month ago.

“There is no one there Shiyiwe,” he tells her and

thinks of burning impepho later to ward off evil.
Spirits shouldn't even be entering his house.

"He was there," she murmurs.

He thinks that shock has her hallucinating, she blinks and looks at him.

He's never seen anything more vulnerable and fragile, whoever said women are rocks must have lied. There's nothing wrong with being weak and needing protection.

He wants to hide Shiyiwe in his arms, hide her from the evil world and hide her from himself because he's a man and can be as animalistic as every man out there. But he can't conjure up the courage to do so, for the life of him.

"Why Ndaba?" Tears continue to flow down her face, it's starting to get to him. How many liters of tears do women have?

"Am I such a bad person that I deserve to be treated like that? Does your father hate me this much?
Kodwa yini le engamenza yona ubaba wakho?"

(What did I do to your father?)

Shiyiwe is too innocent for this world, that's the first thought to enter his head.

His mouth opens, words refuse to slip out, although his tongue stands at attention.

"My father is a stupid man, he doesn't know what he's doing. It's the after effects of old age." It's a joke to make her laugh, her face doesn't even flinch. He sighs and wraps a hand around Shiyiwe's throat and massages her pulse point.

The touch is gentle and comforts Shiyiwe, she shuts her eyes and exhales deeply.

"I'm sorry Shiyiwe," he finally says. "I'm sorry that I was helpless... I'm sorry that bastard touched you... I'm sorry my father has put you in this situation and I'm sorry that... that your uncle has my brother. I'm sorry you're hurting because of the Meyiwases. I apologize on behalf of my clan, mntase-khaya. Thina oGasa, oMsomi, sithi yobe Nonyanda. Ayidle izishiyele."

(Please forgive us, my sister.)

Shiyiwe clenches her eyes and sighs. She hasn't let go of his arm. The only way he can help her out of this fear is by seeing her as his sister, this he can do with no worries. He wraps one arm around her.

But the closeness is awkward for Ndaba, still he lets it be. He's suddenly holding Shiyiwe fully in his arms, her cries start to fade as he rocks her back and forth.

"I want to go home, I want my grandmother. Take me home please." She desperately pleads.

"I can't," a whisper in her ear.

He would take her but it's raining bullets out there. One step outside the house and she dies.

"Why not?" Shiyiwe pulls away from the embrace, she's looking at Ndaba with a frown. Her eyes follow his figure as he stands to his feet and irons out his pants with his hands.

"We have to find Mthombo first and stop all this nonsense that's happening, my father is not going to let this go so easily." He says, hoping she'll

understand.

The last thing he wants is to deal with the stubbornness of a woman.

Shiyiwe is back to folding her arms, “I have nothing to do with my uncle. I would never betray Mthombo.”

He believes her, that’s why he fought his father and brother to save her.

“I’ll get you something to eat, the bathroom is through that door. The other door will take you to the closet, you’ll find something to wear there.” He finishes.

Shiyiwe nods, her chest is heaving and breath ragged. Her head gradually falls back on the pillow, heavy eyes start shutting until she passes out. Instinctively Ndaba panics. He jumps to check on her, he places a hand on Shiyiwe’s pulse point to find a pulse and sighs in relief at the tiny thud.

“I thought you fainted, but you’re only sleeping. The people Mthombo chooses to love...” he shakes his head.

He pulls the blanket and covers her with it.

His phone is causing a racket in his pocket, he rushes out of the room to answer it.

“Mikhulu, are you winning?”

“I think I know where your boy is,” Mikhulu says.

Ndaba glowers, he’s making his way to the kitchen.

“I don’t pay you to think Mikhulu. Do you or do you not know where my brother is?” He grunts, already annoyed by the coming excuses.

“It’s not guaranteed ntwana, lezinja are afraid to talk. Whoever took him is feared in these streets.”
Mikhulu says.

“Which streets?” Ndaba asks. “Are you talking about my streets ntwana, where I grew up? Lamaroto should only fear me, not some idiot who is afraid to show his face and fight man-to-man. He’s got my brother Mikhulu, tell me you know where my brother is.”

Mikhulu is quiet, it’s annoying Ndaba. Mthombo is in

a bad state, he's a special case and might not survive a kidnapping.

"The lead is not solid ntwana, it's hearsays." Mikhulu comes out.

Ndaba opens the kitchen cupboard and takes out impepho, he burns it and goes room to room with the smoke hovering around the house. He's warding off whatever Shiyiwe said she saw. On top of that, men were killed in his house. He needs to get it cleansed.

"I don't want stories Mikhulu, trust me, you don't want me doing the job myself. Mang'fika kuleyo ndawo kuyosal'abafelokazi." (I will turn wives into widows on my arrival.)

"Ng'zogcwala ngabo skhoskho." (I will go hard on them.)

That's a promise from Mikhulu.

"Lalela la lova, i-Bree mayiphenduke umlotha. Yonk' into edlula phamb' kwakho idubule. Ng'funa intwana yami." (Turn the rank upside down, and shoot whoever stands in your way.)

He was never going to turn into this ruthless person, they just touched the wrong brother.

“And Mikhulu, you know once we start this war there’s no turning back. Eyamadoda ayipheli guluva. We’re filling up cemeteries, tjovitjo.” (Men’s beef never ends.)

.

.

A huge thank you to Rethabile for the sponsored inserts.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Thirty-three

SHIYIWE

.

.

I hardly slept a wink last night, my eyes are burning from lack of sleep. Last night was a nightmare, I’m having a hard time getting it out of my head. If it weren’t for Ndaba, I don’t know what would’ve

happened to me. I probably would've killed myself.

I blame all this on Velakithi, he doesn't even care about me, but I'm going through hell because of him.

I don't know what time it is, I woke up before sunrise if I ever slept at all and have been sitting in bed since.

Ndaba is not home, I know because I checked on him when I went to the bathroom. According to him, I saw my father last night. I've been searching for the memory but nothing. I don't remember seeing him.

It's just me in the house, there are dodgy looking people outside. I don't know where he got them, nor do I know where Thambo is.

Yesterday when we got to Ndaba's house and found Zwangendaba and his son, Thambo seemed shaken. He was tense which made me think he fears Zwangendaba, and when they left me alone with Zinqumo, it was confirmation enough.

He knew I wasn't safe with them but still followed Zwangendaba where he said they should go. The person I can lay my trust on at this point is Bhedlindaba, it's how he fought for me and went

against his father.

I became too clingy after the attack, to a point of embarrassment. Maybe I thought they were going to come back for me, or I was still trapped in that moment with that man harassing me.

I keep going in and out of WhatsApp to see if Mthombo will go on line, it's crazy because his phone was found at the crime scene. I'm holding on to a hope that does not exist, maybe it keeps me sane.

I want to turn my phone off when MG starts typing, what does he want from me?

MG: *Where are you? Do you know there is a war going on?*

The message says.

Me: *Why do you care where I am? You and your father threw me out of my father's house. Do you know what I have been through?*

MG: *You are in the middle of a cross fire Shiyiwe,

come home. Just denounce that idiot and come home.*

He's not going to answer my question, I don't see a point in talking to him if he won't care what I have to say. These people want me to turn my back on Mthombo, as if they will care for me like he does.

It says he's typing, I call him instead.

"They will turn against you, that's just who the Meyiwas are."

This is the first thing he says when he answers the phone. The selfish bastard.

"Let Mthombo go, he has nothing to do with this." I say, sounding angrier than I feel.

MG laughs, "Did they tell you that we have your boyfriend?"

He adds fuel to his laugh.

"They lied to you Shiyiwe, you can't believe people that killed your parents." He says.

"What about you and your father? You expect me to trust you after throwing me out of my father's

house?"

"We are your family, families fight, it is common. Google it." The arrogant bastard.

"I'm not Googling shit and I am not coming back, I will call the police on you. You're going to rot in jail for holding a man against his will."

What the fuck? Why is he laughing at me?

"I'm sorry, are you talking about my father's minions? Those idiots are on his payroll. We have the upper hand Shiyiwe, we are on the winning side. Now you need to decide where your loyalty lies, with us or your father's killers."

The call is disconnected, I need to find out who really killed my father. It could be either of them, Zwangendaba seems capable. I wouldn't let Velakithi off the hook just yet, he was so keen on having Mthandeni under his wing because he has control over her money.

.

.

ATHULE-

My mother came home late last night and left early this morning, another prayer meeting she said. In a way I'm glad that she's not home, I can be free and spread my wings, and today I'm spreading them all the way to meet up with Xolani. That jerk.

What man sets a date with a woman and makes her wait for hours? I decided to give him my only off-day and this is how he treats me?

I went all out to look nice for him, this figure hugging dress came at a cost of my pride and self-image. I had to wake up early, take a taxi to town just to join the mad dash at Small Street.

It's a Saturday today, my father is at work. Ayanda visiting friends, my brothers are... somewhere. And me, I've been sitting on the porch, looking like I walked out of a Michael Jackson music video with this permed hair and shiny hairspray.

Just when I thought my mood couldn't get worse, here comes the big brother. I don't know, maybe it's

because he grew up ekasi that's why his walk is lopsided, his hands are on his back. Let me not start on the cap that's hanging on the side of his head. He looks like a real tsotsi from this angle, Ndaba should donate some of his clothes to him.

Bhedlindaba? My heart reacts as I'm reminded of him. I don't have his number, I need to confirm our date. Then again, if he is serious he will come to my house. He knows where I live.

"Where is ma?" I must have zoned out, I missed the rest of Sbonelo's indirect walk.

"What?" I stand to meet his height, almost his height. He's taller than me, just like Sizwile and baba.

"Where is ma?"

I don't know why he is asking me about his mother's whereabouts.

"Prayer meeting." I tell him with a shoulder shrug.

He's staring and it's getting uncomfortable. I want to send a hot clap across his face, one that will wipe out that arrogant smirk.

“What?” I ask, my brows have chosen to depict my annoyance.

“You look like a corpse, what is that thing you put on your face?” He’s mocking me, the bastard.

“It’s ponds,” normal to oily by the way.

It works wonders for my skin, I don’t need muds of makeup to doll up.

“I can see,” a chortle paves a way through his curled lips. I don’t see anything amusing about my looks.

“Might as well buy a coffin and lock yourself in it, anyone can see from a distance that this hideous dress belongs to a dead person.”

I don’t believe him, Sbonelo would say anything just to bring me down. I know I’m not his favourite person for some reason.

“If you don’t have anything nice to say to me then move ahead, I’m not in the mood to entertain you.” Goddammit! What is wrong with men of this world?

Maybe there’s life in Mars, and the men there are better. I’d wish for women but we are just as worse.

We hate on each other for no specific reason, the backstabbing, backbiting, jealousy and fake smiles we go around displaying. Humanity is messed up.

“What’s with the attitude sisiwe?” Sbonelo asks.

I step back as he stands a centimetre from me, he’s too close it is creepy.

“Sbonelo?” I wince when he grips my arm, his dark stare pinning me on the spot. “You’re hurting me, Sbonelo.”

He ignores my squirming and tightens the grip.

“One day Athule, just one day.” The threat in the tone of his voice is very much evident.

I don’t know what he means by one day, but deep down, I believe him.

Something about him makes my skin crawl.

My mind is hazy when he starts directing my hand to his pants, I think I know what he’s about to do and my blood runs cold. I try to pull my hand away, I can’t stop him, he’s too strong.

“Wh... what are...” My speech fails me, and the

entirety of my being freezes when he leans into my ear.

“Relax sis wami.” I’m disturbed by the lack of emotion found in his voice, I can’t imagine what he’s thinking. I’d die if I do, he’s my brother for heaven’s sake. My hand is trembling and throbbing by the time it gets to his waist. Without my permission, it lands on something hard and cold. My eyes widen in disbelief, this is a... a...

“You have a gun?”

A whisper shudders out of my mouth, I’m not given time to say anything more as he quickly covers my mouth with his hand. There is nothing in his eyes, one would fault him for a soulless creature. I won’t lie and say I’m not terrified, my heart is not at rest.

“Sssh! If uMa no baba find out about this, I will kill you in your sleep.”

The threat is sent to my ear, he steps back, winks and disappears into the house as if nothing happened. My feet fail me, but I maintain my balance. I raise my hand to my face in frustration and wipe

away the possible illusion replaying behind my lashes.

It must be an illusion, my brother would never do that. He can't be the same Sbonelo who protected me when I was a little girl, he can't be my father's son.

I need to take a walk.

My mind is a scrambled mess as I walk down the streets of Riverlea, it's packed, loud music booms in different houses, it is a weekend after all.

I look at all these people and wonder if they have it easy or life behind closed doors is a war. I thought the only problem I have is working at KFC, little did I know the devil is not done dishing up.

What do I do? How do I tell my father what happened? My brother's threat stands, I heard it in his cold tone.

.

.

MTHOMBO-

He knows by now that Velakithi has been planning this for months, it didn't start after the death of Phindafuthi and MaMbuyazi. Velakithi is an old friend, he knows how his mind works. He didn't abduct him for show but he's going to kill him and he'll make it hurt like hell. But first, he's going to make him and his loved ones suffer.

He's not bound, just locked in a small room that has no air con or big enough windows to let enough air in. They know he won't be going anywhere, his legs don't work.

"Your little girlfriend is naïve," says Velakithi as he walks into the room.

That's his niece that he's talking about, Mthombo's response is a deep frown. He's been kept in this room for hours and no one had come to check up on him.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Forgive my bad manners." Velakithi sneers at him. "How have you been old friend?"

He's taking off his jacket and hangs it on the door handle, he stands with arms folded and eyes digging

holes into Mthombo.

“It’s sad that we had to meet under such circumstances, I would have loved to dine with you in those expensive restaurants you and your family love so much.” Polite and rude, all swirled in one.

“Cut the crap Jele, and tell me what you want from me,” it’s all he’s been thinking about, more than getting out of here. Maybe he’d finally know who is behind the attack on Shiyiwe and the death of her parents.

Back in the day, he was much more closer to Velakithi than Phindafuthi. It’s not shocking though that he’s kept him prisoner, this old bastard has always been competitive, and a little scratchy.

“What do you want from me? Is it my money? The position I no longer hold in the political party? What is it that you want from me Jele?”

Velakithi is such a drama-king, he’s yawning. The disrespectful mother-fucker.

He shoves a hand into his pocket and retrieves a photograph, it’s brown in colour. It appears it was

taken in nineteen van toeka.

He hands Mthombo the picture, “Do you recognise the woman in the picture?”

Velakithi asks.

How can he not recognise his wife? He’d point her out even in his sleep.

“What is this Jele?” Mthombo.

Velakithi chuckles casually, “Will you be able to bring her back to life?”

That is a stupid question, what the hell is wrong with Velakithi? The only man that has ever been raised from the dead is Lazarus, what the actual fuck? To ask him such a question is absurd.

“What nonsense is this Velakithi? Why do you have a picture of my wife? What game are you playing at?”

A head shake, Velakithi is breathing heavily, suddenly consumed by anger. He retrieves a gun and loads it.

“This is not a game Mthombo, I want her back. I want my Zinzi back.” He yells growing more

frustrated and livid, if he's provoked any further, he might pull the trigger.

"Which Zinzi?" Mthombo hisses in fear, he's already thinking the worst.

The coward that Velakithi is, he stands tall above a man who can't size him up and stares down at him.

"That night at your house, six years ago... it was me behind the bullet that killed Zinzi. But it wasn't meant for her, she just... got in the way. It was a mistake, I loved her... she loved me too. The plan was to kill you so we can be together, we planned that whole freak show. But things went wrong."

Velakithi can't be serious, he's a liar. Zinzi would never, he remembers how she loved him. He remembers her last wish, she asked him to find their son.

"I don't believe you," Mthombo argues even though Velakithi sounded believable.

Nevertheless, he'd shoot this man dead if he were the one carrying the gun.

How dare he taint Zinzi's name? There are lumps in his throat, he swallows them down but they rise back up. He is not going to shed tears, not in front of his enemy. But how does he handle the pain in his chest, his twisting heart?

The arrogant Velakithi slowly walks towards the door, he looks back at Mthombo with a sly grin on his face.

"Try not to have a heart attack." He tells him and opens the door.

A woman walks in, she's old and grey and barely can keep her legs steady. Mthombo immediately familiarises with her face, he's seen it before with less wrinkles and a kind smile.

"Makhosi?" His voice trembles, tears fill his widened eyes. This must be a dream.

.

.

Sponsored by Rethabile...

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Thirty-four

ATHULE-

.

.

As I check the time on my phone, I take note of missed calls from an unknown number. The sun must be grilling my brains, here I am dialling the number

“Ndaba’s phone.” I stop moving at the sound of a female voice. I’m not sure I heard right.

“I’m sorry, whose phone did you say this is?” My voice is flat, sounding the least interested in whatever is happening here. Why must men be tiring?

“Bhedlindaba, who are you?” The lady answers, boredom evident in her voice.

“I’m no one, sorry wrong number.”

She clicks her tongue at my answer and the call dies afterwards.

So that chipmunk Bhedlindaba has a woman, yet he

was chasing after me wanting coffee what-whats?

Wonders are from the devil.

Listen to my stupidity, my senseless mind managed to convince my raw heart that Bhedlindaba was chasing after me, I blame myself for enjoying his attention and thinking maybe something will come out of it. Perhaps I expected something from him, I'm always looking for acceptance and attention.

Anyway, life has to go on, there is no time to focus on someone who is not into me.

I have walked long enough, my mother is probably back. I think of going to Sasol garage and buying airtime, but I'm too lazy to cross the road. I'm about to take a right that leads towards the school when a white Tazz stops on the side of the road, two men are inside. I know a Nigerian when I see one, the driver smiles, I don't return it.

"Sorry sister, we are looking for FNB stadium." He says and looks at his friend beside him, there is a silent communication between them.

"Just drive straight, you'll see it." As I say this, I hear

the one on the passenger seat mumble, “She’s perfect.”

I’m not a fast walker, but right now I’d win a trophy for this fast walk.

“We’ve been that side and we didn’t see it,” shouts the driver.

I know he’s lying because FNB Stadium is in plain sight, you can never miss it.

“Then I don’t know, bhuti.” I respond without looking back.

“Emeka go now!” I don’t know who says that, but it sounds like an order. I turn and see the driver running after me, I scream and run like I was born to run.

I can see the taxi rank from here, there are three taxis parked and people moving around. I scream louder, they hear me because two men pick up bricks and start running my way. I recognise them as local taxi drivers.

“Yey voetsek, jou ma se poes.” (Fuck off!)

It's one of the taxi drivers yelling at this guy running behind me, I think he's turned back, I don't hear his footsteps anymore. The next taxi driver stops me from running by extending his arms to the sides, he's also coloured. I'm wheezing and out of breath.

He hugs me to calm me down, "He's gone my skat."

"It's human traffickers, are you okay meisie?" The second guy asks, walking to us. "You need to be careful, young girls like you are always a target for human traffickers."

I can't speak, I'm too shaken. They offer to walk me home, it's not far from the mini taxi rank. This side of my hood is packed, I'm being stared at again by the neighbours. They are muttering words I can't make out just because I'm in the company of men.

The men wait until I walk through the gate and close it.

My heart has come to settle in my throat, no matter how many times I swallow it won't settle back to its place. As I enter the house, my eyes find my mother

on the couch. She's eating pap and maasi from a plastic bowl, her eyebrows crease into confusion.

"And then wena?" Seeing and hearing her voice conjures all the emotions I felt when I thought I was going to be taken.

My sight blurs, "Mama."

Tears instantly fill my eyes and disrespectfully trail down my face. I hate crying, I hate how I'm unable to control my tears. I fall at my mother's feet and rest my head on her lap. I don't know what's happened to the bowl, she's probably holding it because her hands are not touching me. I need her to comfort me and tell me that everything will be okay. I need her to assure me that I am safe in her arms, and what happened today will never happen again.

"Athule, what happened?" Fear is heard in her trembling voice. "Where is your father?"

Oh! She thinks something has happened to him. Any fear of an African woman is losing the man they have built with for years.

"What happened?" Ayanda questions, she's here and

sounds as afraid as my mother.

I need to stop crying, I'm scaring them. I raise my head and narrate the entire story to my trembling mother and sister, Sizwile walks in while I'm at it.

I must be seeing things, but relief plasters itself on my mother's face. She places a hand on her chest and takes a sigh of relief. What is she relieved about? I was almost kidnapped.

"You scared me, Athule. I thought something bad happened to your father." Eh! What about me?

I want to ask her if she cares. The darn tears are back, as I attempt to wipe them away, arms wrap around me. The smell of Black Chic hair food harasses my nostrils, I love this smell on Ayanda. It reminds me of home.

My heart breaks at how she's holding me tightly in her arms, her face buried on the crook of my neck. She's crying.

"I'm glad you're not harmed sisi." She says and just as she says this, another pair of arms join in. I tilt my head to see Sizwile, sandwiching us.

“I’m glad you’re okay too sisi,” his words come out strained. My heart bleeds at the affection, I didn’t think they cared this much. Our sibling tension made me believe we were not on good terms.

“When I say stay at home, you think I’m crazy.” My mother says, she’s on her feet with her bowl. I’m almost jealous of it, how she’s clinging on to it. If only I could get a twinge of the attention she gives to it. Sizwile and Ayanda help me to the couch.

“Clean the house before anything else, your father is coming home early. You’ll have to prepare his lunch, when he’s done eating run him a bath. He can’t sleep without taking a bath, don’t worry about cooking supper. I will be home early today.” She instructs coldly, her eyes refusing to catch a glimpse of me. She leaves for the kitchen and I know she won’t be coming back to the sitting room. I guess she’s leaving the house again.

Maybe I’m trapped in shock, or my brain has slowed because Sizwile snaps his fingers in front of my eyes. I blink to see him crouching in front of me, worry has found a home in his eyes.

“I can cancel my plans with my friends and stay with you.” It’s sweet of him.

“I also have a movie date, I can cancel.” Ayanda.

“I will be fine.”

“Are you sure sisi?” Ayanda asks, I have to fake a smile to get her to relax.

They don’t believe me, but leave anyway.

At their departure, I let my body tumble to the couch and curl into a foetal position. Tears are not God’s perfect art work, I have no idea why pain breeds tears. They are not comforting. I feel the first drop, uninvited, invading my space. The second one follows on cue, the first and last time I cried like this was the day my grandmother died. I wish she was here, I’ve never felt such raw isolation in my life.

.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

Not wanting to function for the day, I went back to sleep after the call with MG. It's mid-day, a little after 12pm I think. My stomach is complaining, I need to fill it with something edible.

"I look ridiculous," I whisper to myself, standing in front of the wall mirror. The most comfortable thing I could find in the closet is a pair of blue jeans and a Nike sweater. These are mom jeans, they surely can't belong to Ndaba. Everything is big on me, I look like I've been rained on.

The clothes smell like they've been in the closet for ages.

I'm startled by a figure of a man when I walk out of the bedroom, I move back, folding my arms over my chest. He's dressed like the men from last night, is he... could he be... My mind is being fried by the many thoughts, I think of running back to the room but my feet are not fast enough. He looks at me then back at the wall, he's like a robot.

Ndaba didn't appoint any guards in the house, why is

this one here?

I turn back to the room, as I push the door to close it, a voice calls out to me.

“Shiyiwe!” It’s Mthombo’s mother.

What is she doing here? She’s rushing towards me and has a glass of orange juice in hand.

“You’re awake, finally.” Someone is relieved that I’m not sleeping anymore.

“I didn’t know you were coming,” I tell her as I move my eyes to the tall man. She looks at him too then back at me.

“Don’t worry, he’s with me.” The smile won’t leave her face, she hands me the glass. I take it reluctantly.

“Come sit,” she helps me to the bed.

I haven’t said anything because I’m trying to figure out why she is here.

“I figured you haven’t had anything to eat, so I made lunch. Drink your juice darling, you need the strength.” She’s spreading the curtains open and pushes the windows wider.

“I’m not hungry,” I lie.

“Ndaba told me what happened to you,” she’s sitting beside me and touching my hand. “I had to come and personally apologise.”

Does she really have to? I don’t have the energy to be faking smiles.

“No need,” I stop her but she insists on touching my cheeks.

“You don’t deserve what they did to you sisi, you are so young and innocent.” She says, looking into my eyes.

“I’m fine, there really is no need for this.” I take a sip and place the glass on the stand.

“Still, nothing excuses what they did to you. I spoke to my husband, he’s stubborn for now but I promise that he will apologise.”

Yeah no, I don’t see that happening.

Why is this one so kind? I’m her son’s girlfriend, she should be spitting on the ground I walk on and I should be hating her.

I stand, I need to make it to the kitchen.

“Shiyiwe!”

What now?

“Yes!”

“You are not allowed to leave the room, Bhedlindaba said so.”

But why would Ndaba say that? Didn’t he fill the compound with guards?

“You’re not allowed to leave the room today, I can’t let you go out of this room.”

“Why?”

“It’s not safe out there, you have to stay here until we know you are completely safe.”

“Really?” I reply, failing to hide my annoyance.

“Ndaba told you to keep me locked up in here.”

My hand waves around, the motherly smile on her face fades instantly.

“Yes.” Her face is suddenly concealed in boredom as she raises her eyebrows.

I don't trust her, when did all this happen? Ndaba would've told me.

"There are men guarding the house, nothing will happen to me in this house." I say, blinking away the dizziness that's suddenly attacking me. I got enough sleep, why is my head spinning?

"It's their lunch break, my treat." She stands, and places her hands on her hips probably because she can. Darn it, it makes her look more powerful and intimidating.

"And they left their stations?"

"I'm a mother before anything, my smile would pursued the devil to give up hell and go back to heaven." Her smile is back and very showy.

There is something about Masabata Dlamini that I don't like, something that makes me feel less important in Mthombo's life.

"Ma'am."

She snorts, "Everyone calls me MaDlamini."

As if that's important.

“MaDlamini, you’re acting strange. What’s going on?”

Her eyes run through my body. She’s looking at the oversized clothes I’m wearing.

“I have a problem with people who think they are entitled to my sons because they favour them, don’t be stupid by getting too comfortable sisi.”

“Excuse me?” Attitude slips past my curled lips.

MaDlamini folds her arms and graces me with yet another motherly smile, she’s sick in the head.

“Girlie...”

“Don’t call me that.”

The smile vanishes when I snap at her.

“Excuse me, I’m going to get something to eat.”

I turn to leave, but that tall man is standing in my way, a frown on his forehead and anger in his eyes.

What the hell?

“I’m afraid I can’t let you do that.” MaDlamini’s reply is filled with bitterness with a splash of irritation.

What is this? Attack-Shiyiwe month?

“Does Ndaba know that you’re here? Or you lied to me?”

“I’m his mother, he knows I would never hurt a fly.”

And I must care about that because...

She grabs my wrist and drags me fully into the room.

“Don’t touch me.” I squeal and squirm, taking my hand back. “I won’t tell your Ndaba about this because you’re his mother. But touch me again, and I will cheer him on while he breaks that hand.” I throw that in.

It’s not that I’m arrogant, it’s what I have to do to survive around here. These people have something against me, each with different reasons and I’m not going to sit and let them bully me around.

“You think this is a game, don’t you?” Her brows are furrowed and eyes bursting with anger. She holds my wrist tighter the second time, if she wasn’t twice my height, I would have my hand back.

“Listen here you little shit, I don’t know which hole

you crawled out from. But ever since you came into our lives my family started falling apart. I am not going to let a down-and-out prick destroy what I have built for many years.”

What is she talking about? I didn’t do anything wrong.

“You must be mistaken MaDlamini...” I can’t control the way I speak, my tongue feels my numb. The feeling seems to travel down to my knees, she must see that I’m unable to stand straight because she leads me to the bed.

She is very gentle as she lays me down on the bed, I try to get up but she pushes me back with a smile on her face.

“Sthandwa sami, you are turning a father against his sons and I can’t allow that. When I married my husband, I vowed to protect him and his image. I’m not going to let some brat stop me.” She says, it’s low... hushed and intimidating as fuck. She has covered too many things that I’m left confused, is she here to fight Zwangendaba’s battles?

“You’ve got it all wrong, your husband wanted his

men to rape me. They almost raped me, if Ndaba wasn't..."

"So?"

Her question painfully shocks me.

"MaDlamini, you better let me go. Your son will not be happy about this." My words are slurred, I sound like a drunk person.

MaDlamini strokes my hair as if putting me to sleep, I don't know if it's working. I want to sleep, maybe for hours if possible.

"A son will always choose a mother over anyone, one word from me and my sons will drop all this nonsense and pretend that you never existed." She says and takes the glass of juice, she traces the edges with her finger.

"Now sleep, who knows where you'll wake up the next time you open your eyes. Don't worry though, I promise to be gentle."

"Why..." I ask, my blurry eyes are on the juice. She drugged me, I'm so stupid.

“I have nothing against you baby, I’m just choosing my husband over you.”

.

Sponsored by Rethabile

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Thirty-five

MTHOMBO-

.

“Sir!”

After disappearing with his son for six years, this is the first thing she says?

“Where have you been?” He has more questions, one of them is what is she doing with Velakithi? But first he needs to know why she’s made him search high and low for her.

“Zimbabwe.” Velakithi answers.

If pride knew a person then Velakithi is the one, he’s smiling victoriously.

“That’s why you couldn’t find a trace of her in South Africa, I sent her away with enough to keep her fed.”

Mthombo can’t express how confused he is right now, this woman worked for his family for years. She was their helper. What business does she have with Velakithi?

“You betrayed me, Makhosi? I trusted you with my son and you betrayed me?” He’s really not asking but confirming what he’s thinking, from his point of view, it appears that Makhosi did betray him.

“Mrs. Meyiwa made me do it, she spoke to me that night and told me that men were going to come to the house and I was to take the baby to Riverlea. She was going to join us there.”

Tears of betrayal are running down her face, Mthombo is appalled by the sight.

“I didn’t want to do it sir, but my daughter was held

against her will and they were going to kill her if I didn't do as told." She explains further.

"Oh please, we were never going to kill your daughter." Velakithi says with arrogance.

"It's sad that Zinzi had to died, I was going to raise your son Mthombo while fucking your woman every night like I had been doing since you started dating."

No, stop and roll the tape. Mthombo's mouth drops, he's trying not to shed tears. The Zinzi this fool is talking about is not the woman he loved more than anything in this world, the woman who treated him like a real man. When did all of this happen?

"I met Zinzi before you, when you introduced her to me as the woman you were going to marry, I knew her as the woman I was sleeping with. She was money driven and very ambitious. It was her dream to find a rich man, marry him, and kill him for his assets. She always spoke about how she will plan our wedding with your money after your death. My little Zinzi was a little crazy, I guess that's what I loved about her." Velakithi explains.

He seems to be lost in thought for a while, he smiles and looks at Mthombo.

"The Zinzi that you knew was a con artist, she made you believe something that was not real. She sold you false dreams and made you believe that she loved you." Velakithi is happy to be delivering this news.

"I was scammed?" Mthombo says in disbelief.

"Yes slow brain, you were scammed." Velakithi responds.

Mthombo is done with all this, it's too much to take in. He knows what he saw, and felt. Zinzi loved him, he thinks she did. She told him with every given chance, they had a son together.

Sikolethu... his son.

Right now he's thinking the worst, stomach sinking thoughts. He's afraid to ask where his son is, what this bastard did to him. Makhosi is standing there, quiet as a hungry guest. She has to have the answers, she was the last one seen with his son.

“Where...” he stops and breathes, it can’t be harder than he thinks. Sikolethu is out there, probably held captive.

“My son... where is my son?” Finally.

“You mean my son? He’s around, don’t worry I raised him well.” Velakithi is the one to answer although the question was meant for Makhosi.

“He is not your son,” Mthombo snaps.

“Biologically, he’s not.” Velakithi confesses.

“Then why did you keep him from me?” Mthombo.

“To punish you, I wanted you to suffer like I did when Zinzi died. You will never meet your son Mthombo, I’m going to kill you and have your body delivered to your father’s doorstep.”

“Name your price, I’ll give you anything. Just give me my son back.” Mthombo grovels, he has no other choice.

“I want to fulfil Zinzi’s wish, give me everything your family has. Up to the last cockroach.” That’s an insane request.

“I can only give you money, I can’t go beyond that.”
He’s bargaining.

Velakithi snorts, “I’m not settling for less. Give me everything or the boy stays with me.”

“He’s just a kid, how can you be so cruel to keep him away from his family?” Mthombo barks, glaring up at him.

“Life is a bitch and we’ve all been fucked by it.” His voice comes out angry, he clicks his tongue before ushering Makhosi out of the room.

Mthombo is left alone, his mind gets to work, serving him with doubts and possibilities.

Zinzi couldn’t have had an affair with that old junk, he can’t accept it. She is not even here to defend herself.

.

.

BHEDLINDABA-

He's been restless since he received a call from his mother, his heart is thumping so hard against his chest that he feels like he'll have a heart attack.

The speed limit in which he is going is not helping as well, he drives through the gate, grabs a gun from the glove compartment and dashes out of the car. His mind is too occupied that he doesn't notice that the yard is empty, the guards are not there.

Where are those idiots?

He stops at the door, prepares to shoot at anything that's not supposed to be in his house.

MaDlamini had said there were men in the house and she was afraid for her life along with Shiyiwe's, the call died before she gave him more information.

He presses his ear on the door, it's too quiet in there. He's about to open the door when he hears a glass breaking, it's followed by a scream.

"Ma!" He murmurs under his quick breath and slowly pushes the door open, he's alert like a soldier at war.

In the living room he walks in to a man holding his

mother against the wall, his hand tight around her neck. MaDlamini's eyes meet his, she tries to say something but chokes instead.

"Son of a bitch!" Bhedlindaba roars, the man turns with fear in his eyes. He steps away from MaDlamini and drops down to his knees, his hands are raised.

Bhedlindaba is too angry to be remorseful, he pulls the trigger. The bullet pierces through the man's shoulder, he falls back groaning in pain.

"Ndaba!" Cries his mother, loudly, she sounds like a police siren. As soon as Ndaba hears that sound, he jumps on the man and starts throwing unrestrained punches. The scene is becoming grisly, he's like a beast that won't stop.

"How dare you touch my mother?" In his ears, his words are moving at a pace of a snail. Too slow for a man who is about to kill a whole human with his fists. While imprisoned by anger, he remembers Shiysiwe. It took long for her to cross his mind, she was supposed to be his first thought. He stops, turns his fiery eyes to his mother. He thinks he spots

a ghost of a smile on her face, and instantly, she seems to be schooling her facial features into dread and fear. It happens so fast that Ndaba convinces himself that he didn't see the smile.

"Where is she?" It's Shiysiwe that he is asking about. MaDlamini is lost, she shrugs like she has no idea what he's talking about.

"Shiysiwe, where is she?" He repeats

For a while he thinks he's losing his mind, then he drags it back to his head.

He hands his mother the gun, "Shoot him if he moves."

Her hands are trembling but she holds the pistol like she was trained from birth.

Ndaba scurries to look for Shiysiwe, she's not in her room. The other bedrooms are empty, now he is sure he is losing his mind.

"MaDlamini!" He howls, guarding his feet back to the lounge.

He thinks the worst when he hears a gunshot, like a

crazy man he sprints to the living room.

“MaDlamini?” She is alive, but the man he left in her custody has a bullet hole on his head. She killed him.

She lifts her bruised face and says, “He moved.”

The gun falls from her hand, she’s crying again. It sounds like there’s an ambulance in her chest, her hands are on her head. Ndaba frowns at her dramatics, he can’t tell if she is real or this is an act.

“Where is Shiyiwe? And what happened to the men that were outside?” His voice is always quick to grow cold.

MaDlamini sits flat on the floor, she pushes her back against the wall and wears a garment of sorrow.

“I came to check up on Shiyiwe because I was worried about her after what your father did. When I arrived, the guards were crying of hunger, and out of the goodness of my heart, I gave them money and told them they could take lunch and the rest of the day off. It wasn’t a problem because I had a guard with me, I thought we were safe but while we were having lunch, men came into the house and took

Shiyiwe. This idiot was in on it.”

She points at the dead man in front of her.

“They took Shiyiwe, I’m sorry son. I’m such an idiot, I should have kept her safe.” She ups the volume of her strange cry.

Ndaba doesn’t say anything for a while, guilt is gripping his heart. He can’t dwell on that, later maybe. Right now he needs to find out where Shiyiwe is. His heavy gaze is on MaDlamini.

“How convenient that Shiyiwe is taken during your visit.” He says.

MaDlamini snaps her eyes up, tears stop flowing down her cheeks. She’s doesn’t look grief stricken anymore.

“What are you saying?”

“That you are lying to me.” His answer is quick.

MaDlamini stands, she looks like she’s been stabbed a thousand times.

“Bhedlindaba...”

“Where is Shiyiwe ma’oledi?” He cuts in and starts nearing her.

“I don’t know,” she didn’t have to scream like that. He’s close enough to hear her and he’s exasperated. He shakes his head and as if this woman did not bring him into this world, he grabs her neck and pins her on the wall.

“Ma’oledi, I don’t have time to play hide and seek. Tell me where that girl is.” He commands, ignoring her desperation to free herself from his grip.

.

.

Thank you Thelma for the sponsor...

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Thirty-six

BHEDLINDABA-

.

.

She won't be able to utter a single word with his hand wrapped around her neck, instead, she will continue to stare at him in shocked silence. He steps away from his trembling mother and calms himself down, he needs to if he is going to get the truth out of her.

She hangs against the wall, knees bent and back hunched.

"Are you going to kill your mother because of a girl you don't even know?" She asks, rubbing her neck and trying to catch her breath.

Ndaba denies her an answer, she wouldn't understand if he tells her that this is about his brother, Mthombo.

"Bhedlindaba, what have you done?" The other elder brother just arrived, he's yelling behind him.

Ndaba side eyes Bongukwanda.

"What are you doing here, Kwanda?" Ndaba asks.

"I was out of the country, Zinqumo told me what happened to Mthombo and that his house burned

down. What's going on?" Kwanda asks, his eyes are on his mother, examining the bruises on her face.

"Zinqumo briefed you in, didn't he?" Ndaba sounds like a cold bastard.

"Ndaba, did you do that to her?" Disgust crosses Kwanda's face. "That's fucked up and abusive, she's your mother."

If Ndaba were a woman, he'd be rolling his eyes.

"I didn't touch her, your mother staged all of this. She paid that idiot lying there to fuck her up just to make this whole show believable. She had Shiyiwe kidnapped or she's hiding her. I don't fucking know what she did to her." It's what he's come up with after he's put his thinking hat on.

With Bongukwanda, Ndaba has never crossed the level of disrespect. He knows he needs to limit his street language.

"I would never do that, what could I possibly have against that girl? What will I possibly gain from it?" MaDlamini.

“Your husband’s trust.” Ndaba fires back.

“You would do anything to shine in his eyes.” He adds.

“Careful Bhedlindaba, you are pointing accusatory fingers at your mother.” She says calmly, despite the tension in the room.

“I am accusing you, openly.” He’s straightforward about it and tells it like it is.

“You are conniving, and untrustworthy. I know you are manipulating all of us, I’m not buying your innocent act.” Ndaba.

MaDlamini blinks in surprise before yelling,
“Enough!”

She breathes out through her nose, closing her eyes to calm herself. When she opens them, she looks more relaxed.

“I understand that you are upset over your brother’s absence, but that is not an excuse to take it out on me. I’m doing my part here, I want my son home.”

“Could have fooled me,” Ndaba is not buying it. He

turns to his brother.

"Please ask your mother where Shiyiwe is." Ndaba seethes.

"What if she is telling the truth? You can't accuse her without facts." Kwanda.

This one lives in his own world.

"Thank you Bongukwanda, I am a woman. I would never do that to another woman." Her face flushes, her eyes are everywhere. Very shifty and secretive.

"Shiyiwe is more of a woman than you will ever be." Okay, he doesn't know this Shiyiwe but MaDlamini asked for it.

"You have no right to speak to me like that, I am your mother. You will respect me." She's murdering him with her eyes.

"Respect goes both ways Ma'oledi, you say you love your children but look at you choosing Zwangendaba over us, and it's not the first time. We have watched you choose him over the years, and stood in corners like pathetic children who have parent issues. It's

enough, as long as Mthombo is not here, I will continue to fight his battles.” Anger is laced in his tone.

She birthed them, but it seems she can’t fathom the deep connection that these brothers have. Their hearts are forever connected, they might fight amongst each other but when someone touches either one, they retaliate. His mother is crying again, it can’t be real.

“I never thought I would ever see the day where my children would turn against me, look at me,” she points at her face. “Look what I had to endure because of Shiyiwe, my precious face is bruised. Is it not enough for you to see that I tried to keep her safe? Why would this man attack me if I staged this whole thing? Tell me huh? Why would I go through so much pain?”

“Listen to me woman, I’m going to find that girl and when I find out that you had anything to do with her disappearance, you better run Ma’oledi.” Ndaba says and with that, rushes out of the house.

He's got two people to find now, it's not going to be easy with his father turning everyone against him.

.

ATHULE

I'm woken up by a hand shaking me, I almost jump to my feet in fright. But baba's face calms me, he's hovering over me, a look of confusion latched on his face.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes." I lie, something I hardly do to him. His back straightens when I sit up, the frown remains, or is it always present?

"Go rest in your room."

"I'm okay baba," my feet are dizzy when I stand, he notices and the crinkle on his forehead deepens.

"You don't look okay." He's observing too much, he knows me better than I know myself. Eleven years

apart and he can still read me like a book. I want to tell him what happened, but decide against it. Maybe my mother will tell him when she comes back.

“I was actually waiting for you, I didn’t think I would fall asleep.” Another lie easily slips past my mouth. He scans his surroundings, Lord, the house is dirty.

“You can have your bath while I clean, your food will be ready when you’re done.” I tell him, he nods hesitantly and walks away to his bedroom.

The house is small, three bedrooms, a bathroom, sitting room and a kitchen. I only have to sweep, mop and wash the dishes.

It takes me thirty minutes to get everything done, my father is settled on his favourite chair engrossed on a local newspaper.

He should be sleeping by now, he works crazy hours. I’m going to make him the usual, beans, eggs and brown bread. While the baked beans simmer, I realise there’s no bread and eggs. I have to run to the spaza-shop around the corner.

I inform baba of my escapades, and hurry out of the

house. On my way there, it dawns on me that I haven't informed my boss about the sick leave I gave myself. It's surprising that she hasn't called me, I have to send Simi a text. I don't know if 37cents will deliver the message, it doesn't.

Coming outside, should be a trigger. But nothing, it could be that the streets are full. All the loafers are awake and gallivanting the streets, as I cross the road, I see through my line of sight a black G-Wagon headed my way.

Call me insane, but I know that car. It's him... I'm proven right when he parks on the side of the road and climbs out of the car. Another Pantsula outfit, why does he not look ridiculous in those? I want him to look like an idiot but he wears them so well I hate it.

He's wearing orange pants, with the thinnest crease line. He's paired them with a red and black, long sleeve, check shirt. A pair of red All Stars hide his feet, of course the yellow spoti has to complete the

outfit.

“Thandolwami.” What? This man is testing me.

“That is not my name.” I argue, making sure my attitude is out for him to see and find the reason behind it.

“In my heart you are Thandolwami.” That better not be another woman’s name, I excuse it because of that stupid smile lingering on his face. I want to roll my eyes but I can’t because I’m smiling back.

“What are you doing here, Ndaba?”

He better have a good reason as to why he’s here.

“I miss you.” He says.

Breathe Athule, you’ve been through worse today.

“I don’t have time for this,” I say gracefully.

Kill them with kindness, I believe that’s what I’m doing. I leave the pantsula-wearing freak standing there and approach Ahmed’s corner shop.

This Pakistani man is like the rest of them, he never misses a chance to touch my hand whenever he

hands me my goods or the change. It's disgusting how some men think they have the right to touch women, do we have the tag 'touch me' on our foreheads?

For brushing my fingers and winking at me, I don't thank him for the eggs and bread. Nonsense, he should make himself useful and give me a bloody discount for subjecting me to those torturous winks and coarse fingers of his.

I don't hide my eye roll when I turn to leave and see Ndaba pull a face at Ahmed. This one also thinks he owns me, I walk past him without a word.

"Athule wait." Great, he's running after me. I have to stop, I don't trust him not to follow me to my father's doorstep.

"What is it?" I'm not about to smile with him... again.

"Can we get in the car and talk?" He pleads.

His eyes are digging into my soul without my consent, like a patient being hypnotised by a psychologist, I fail to cast my eyes away. There's a strong force compelling me to gaze into his eyes.

What kind of witchcraft is this?

“My father is waiting for his food.” Dammit! Why am I whispering?

“I won’t take up your time, I just want us to talk.” He says with confidence.

Dear father God, you didn’t tell me how to say no to these men when they look needy and desperate. At this point, I’m ready to sell my father’s house, deposit all the money into Ndaba’s account and rob the bank to buy him the house of his dreams.

“Fine, two seconds.” I snap and walk past him to his car, he’s right behind me because he reaches over to crack the door open, and waits till I jump in. I’m not thanking him, I’m upset with him for having a woman answer his phone. I place the plastic bag on my lap and keep my eyes forward, the plan here is not to look his way.

“Are you always like this, Athule?”

“Like what?” Another snap from me, if he thinks I’m

going to pounce with joy at the sight of him, he's got another thing coming. Or not...

"Pushing men away." He answers.

If I could, I would push them back into their mother's wombs.

"Life doesn't revolve around men, Ndaba. There is life outside men." They are not as special as they think. A moment of silence walks past, he's staring. I feel his gaze on me and I can see him from the corner of my eye, he's not about to look away anytime soon.

"Your answer alone tells me, you are bitter towards men." This man has the audacity. Finally, my head whips to his direction. I'm not happy with what he just said to me.

"Is this why you called me here? To give me free counselling sessions?" I'm trying not to sound rude.

"No, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it to come out like that."

"Why am I here, Ndaba? What do you want from me?" I'm too old to be playing hide and seek, I hate

the game anyway.

“A date, a chance with you.” He says.

Maybe I would’ve said yes before that phone call that brought me bad luck this morning.

“Why should I give you a chance? We don’t know each other like that?” Playing hard to get is my speciality, I do it best, more especially when you’ve pissed me off.

Besides, I gave him a chance yesterday and he failed to communicate.

“I’m a straight forward man, so I won’t beat around the bush and say I want to be your friend. I would be lying. You fascinate me, Athule. You make me feel things I have never felt before. You make me laugh, you’re the only girl I know with a raw honesty.”

He knows other girls? Why am I not okay with this? I don’t protest when he laces my hand with his, looking into his eyes continues to be a struggle. I’m trying though.

“Won’t you let me in? I will try to be the best version

of the man you deserve.” His confession has me dropping my gaze, what do I say to him now? Being tongue tied is not my best talent.

My gaze shifts from his penetrating stare which is a good thing because I see Sbonelo headed towards the car. Ducking is a black person’s speciality, I hide my face between my thighs.

“Tell me when he passes.” Panic is found in my voice, Ndaba is probably confused as to what is happening or he thinks I’m weird.

“It’s safe,” he says after counted minutes. “Who was that?”

That look on his face. I don’t know if he’s suddenly possessive, jealous or just curious. I’m in for a ride... here.

“My brother Sbonelo,” I twist my head to check the coast, my chest releases a hefty sigh when I see him walk through our gate.

“Sbonelo Makhedama is your brother?” He queries, making a confused face.

“You know him?” Now I’m the one interrogating him.

Ndaba goes quiet for a while. I watch him pondering into something only he knows, he scratches his beard, a plain frown playing at his face.

“Not personally,” he sounds done with this conversation. “Can I fetch you later? I’m not waiting another day to have lunch with you.”

He’s back to being himself, serious with sprinkles of playfulness.

“Do I have a choice?” Is my answer.

I do have a choice actually, but I choose this. I choose to see what will come out of this.

“I can’t wait.” He lightly shouts after me as I shut the door closed, the smile in his voice transfers to his mouth. I think of returning it, but you should never spoil this gender.

.

.

Sponsored by Akhona Mpumlo

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Thirty-seven

MTHOMBO

.

.

Makhosi is back with a plate of dry brown bread, and black tea in an enamel mug. He connects his eyes with hers, she gulps nervously and looks away with a clearing of a throat.

“This is all there is,” she says, putting the food on the floor.

“Is he ever going to let me go?” He hates the feeling of helplessness.

Makhosi moves to stand by the door, she looks nervous.

“I want to apologise,” she starts.

Mthombo is frowning at her, an apology is the most useless thing she can give him right now.

“For what?” He’s snippy, could be because he’s

starving, frustrated and angry as hell.

“Everything,” her answer is a whisper.

“Why did you do it?” He asks.

She told him why, but he’s not satisfied with what she gave him. Makhosi only stares without uttering a word.

“I asked you a question,” Mthombo snaps. “At least say something dammit.

She is remorseful, unlike that greenfly Velakithi.

“I loved you sir, you and your siblings were like my very own children. I didn’t think life would put me in such a position where I had to choose my blood over you, I was never going to betray you. The devil is always hard at work, he makes us do things we never think of doing.”

“Leave the devil out of this, you had a choice Makhosi. You could’ve gone to the police or came to me.”

“They said if the police found out, they’d kill my child. I couldn’t let that happen.” She pitifully defends

herself.

Mthombo huffs, he's not even affected by her crocodile tears.

"I worked for your family for years, I saw things I wasn't supposed to see. I was made to keep quiet, and had my life threatened." That's so random.

"What if I came to you and you confronted your wife? What would have happened to my child or me?"

He can't bring himself to care, he's fuming with rage.

Makhosi exhales, she moves closer. Her eyes are withholding something and it's about to come out of her mouth.

"There are so many things you don't know sir, things kept from you by your family."

"What are you talking about?" He asks, frowning.

"Firstly you need to know that Sikolethu is different, he's not like any normal 6-year-old."

Mthombo has become attentive, this woman is scaring him.

"Are you going to tell me what's going on or keep me

in suspense?" He growls.

"Six years of his life he was isolated, Velakithi instilled hatred in him. Hatred for the Meyiwias, the only thing he knows is violence." She's muttering and looking over her shoulder clearly afraid that someone might walk in.

"He's only six, that's impossible." He's finding it hard to believe her and why should he? This is the same woman who ran away with his son.

"Siko doesn't know anything besides dark video games and movies about killings, he doesn't talk unless spoken to. Ask him about the ABC's, he won't know what you're talking about. But once you play an action movie, he will focus until the end. I thought I was seeing things until last night, I woke up with him standing over my bed. He had a knife in his hand held up mid-air, Velakithi came to my rescue after he heard me scream. He has destroyed that boy, turned him into his weapon."

Mthombo looks at her, more than he should. It's hard to believe these people, no six-year-old could be

that vicious.

"Where is my son? I want to see it for myself." He says.

Makhosi shakes her head, and drops her eyes.

"Siko is not your son, but he is a Meyiwa." She tells him.

He'd widen his eyes and probably faint at the news but this woman is untrustworthy.

"What are you trying to say?"

They hear footsteps outside the door just as he drops this question.

"I told you that I saw and heard things while working for the Meyiwases," Makhosi delivers quickly and turns to the door as it opens. It's Velakithi, he's glaring at her.

.

.

BHEDLINDABA-

A quantum full of young men parks outside a building in Benmore, he's behind the wheel and singing along with the boys to the song loudly bursting the speakers.

He turns the volume down and takes a peek through the rear view mirror.

“Azishe bo-cleva.” (Let’s go)

At this order, everyone jumps out. They are talking above each other, it’s loud and attracting attention. The white people look the most troubled by a bunch of black men walking in a group.

“Mabhebeza, ngeshwapa.” (Flat ass.)

Ndaba says and whistles at the white woman looking at him like he’s covered in shit. His friends think he’s funny, they burst out in laughter and share snide remarks.

Their arrival causes chaos in the reception area, it looks like Orlando on steroids.

“Sir, you can’t go in there.” The receptionist shouts after Ndaba, he’s bouncing towards the boardroom.

His friends are behind him like magnet. The lady stops in front of the door, she is blocking his way.

“Yey, Khanyi Mbau! Shayi’ Johnnie walker and go back behind that desk, and continue looking pretty. You don’t want me to rearrange this pretty face.” He runs a finger down her cheek, she makes a disgusted face.

“Mr. Meyiwa is in an important meeting, he gave strict instruction not to be disturbed.”

Ndaba scoffs, he has a mission and he’s willing to see it through.

“Voetsek,” he pushes her aside. “Ngobuso be-fong-kong.”

He kicks the door open just in time to hear his father saying, “The goal is to extend to neighbouring countries...”

“Daddy, I’m home.” Ndaba sings as he bounces towards his father, he stands in front of him with his hands in his pockets.

His men scatter all over the room, removing anything

that's in a suit from their seats. They starts feasting on the finger foods that's on the table. Fear lurks around, the businessmen run out of the boardroom without uttering anything.

"What the hell is this Bhedlindaba?" Zwangendaba slams his fist on the desk, causing the wooden surface to groan under the impact.

Ndaba doesn't say anything at first till Zwangendaba's gestures become violent, he's looking at him with a dare of the eyes.

"We are here to cheer you on, taima." He lies.

To cause chaos is what has brought them here.

"Get these lowlifes and get the hell out of my building before I call the police." His voice trails firm, his glare hardens. Ndaba matches his father's facial expression.

Zwangendaba suddenly freezes, the look in Ndaba's eyes is somewhat paralyzing.

"Do your business associates know uyi-sfebe behind that suit? That your wife fights your battles?" (You're

a bitch.)

Zwangendaba's face flushes with embarrassment, he keeps his eyes down for a second before deciding to raise them.

"Don't bring our personal matters here, leave." Zwangendaba murmurs.

"What is it taima? You start a fire, now you can't stand the heat?"

"You don't want to go against me, Bhedlindaba. I can turn your world upside down with just a snap of a finger."

"Dala what you must groetman," (Do what you must) Ndaba delivers coldly.

He rakes a hand past his father's shoulder, "nice suit." He says and turns to his friends.

"The party is over maroto," (rats)

He leads the way out, whistling to a song only he is familiar with.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

The first thing I'm met with as my eyes open is complete darkness, I have never been a fan of the dark or silence. The silence and darkness are painfully unbearable, I can't breathe, there's no air. I know that this is not a bed, it's as hard as wood.

I'm lying on my back, I extend my hand to reach for something. There's a barrier on my sides. I'm trapped.

I can taste and feel fear, this is not happening to me. As I close my eyes, red and yellow dots dance before my vision.

"Help!" I scream, but will anyone hear me? I don't know where I am. "Help! I can't open this thing... please... anyone help me."

My nails scratch the wood of the box above my face,

I feel a few of them break. The pain shoots straight to my arms causing me to scream in pain, something blocks my airwaves. I'm exhausting the little air I have left in my lungs, so I breathe in slow through my nose. I can feel my ribcage pushing against the wood surrounding my body, I'm going to die. I haven't lived yet, I haven't loved and I haven't had enough sex to rate it out of hundred.

"Mthombo." I exhale with a desperate little whisper.

Mthombo... the second time his name rings in my ears like a piercing scream without the smallest whisper escaping my lips.

He's the only thing on my mind, his face flashes before my vision. My soul dreads his absence more than my lungs fear the lack of oxygen.

He loves me, he told me many times but I couldn't return it. He asked me to marry him and I fought with him because I'm a fool. I could have at least joined the Real Housewives of Heaven when I get there. I can't be part of the know-your-worth crew on earth and in heaven.

I'm such a failure.

Closing my eyes, I try to hold on to his image. I can see him smiling at me, then he's laughing. The image is quickly wiped out, I'm fighting to breathe again.

Seconds crawl over my body like worms on a decaying corpse, yet they feel like hours. I don't want to go down without a fight, if I'm going to die, I should at least put up a fight.

I bang the box above me, "Help, help." I scream as loud as I can.

My throat feels dry, my head is pounding.

My heart feels like it is beating its way out of my chest, it's not in that fun, pleasurable way caused by Mthombo's finger on my clit or his warm breath on my neck. But it's scary, it's more scary than anything I have ever felt. I can feel myself losing control of my life.

"MaMbuyazi's God, if you are real like she said. Then get me out of here, I'm scared. I don't want to die, and it's so close I can feel it. Please... don't let me

die." I'm barely breathing, tears pool down the corners of my eyes.

I lift my trembling hands and scratch the wooden lid above my face, the pain shoots from my fingers to my hands once more. I scream but continue digging, I'm draining myself of strength. If I continue like this, I will die before anyone hears my desperate cry for help.

My head is getting foggy from the lack of oxygen, it hurts like a bitch. My throat yearns for water and every time saliva goes down my throat, it hurts. The smell of sand blended with the smell of wood is driving me insane, it has me thinking the worst. That I am in a coffin, buried alive.

.

.

Sponsored by Rethabile...

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Thirty-eight

ATHULE-

.
. .

My father has eaten, he's sleeping in his bedroom. This gives me a chance to sneak out of the house, my attire is nothing special, just jeans and a dress shirt paired with a pair of Tommy takkies. I don't use the ponds today, just Camphor cream. I was indirectly called a ghost the other day, I don't want to scare Ndaba away. Is that how I've been looking the entire time?

My phone vibrates as I step out of the house.

I'm at the robots.

Here I was thinking he's a gentleman, I must walk under this heat. Camphor cream does not do well with the sun, I'll be looking grey by the time I get to his car. He could've parked at Ahmed's shop, it's closer to my house. I use my hand bag to shield myself from the sun, I should add an umbrella to my end of the month list.

“Hey nana, come here.” I call one of the kids playing on the street. She looks at me like I’m threatening to wipe out her existence, I just want to ask if I have anything on my face.

“Is my face okay?” I have to bend to match her small height. She shrugs her skinny shoulders and bounces away. Eh! Even children are rude in this place.

It’s time I buy a potable mirror like all girls my age. It feels like my face is baking inside an oven, serves me right for dumping my loyal ponds for Camphor.

There’s that man, standing outside a white a BMW X5. A different car this time, the gold digger in me was looking forward to ridding the G-Wagon. He didn’t change his clothes, of course he wouldn’t. He is a man, they are not all about beauty and carrying mini mirrors in their bags.

“You look like you’re about to faint.” This is how he welcomes me after I’ve walked under the unbearable heat, I’m sure I smell like a human sausage.

“I’m fine,” lies are starting to get comfortable around here.

“Let’s get in,” the passenger door pops open. There’s this smug look on his face as he waits for me to get in, I’m not one to be shy around a man. Why is he an exception?

“Where are we going?” I ask as soon as he closes his door.

“Coffee date first, then we’ll have supper later.”

Coffee at this time of day? I’m not up for any hot beverages, not after that braai party I just went through under the sun. Should I ask him if he thinks I smell like biltong?

“I don’t drink coffee, coke is fine.” I’m parched.

He is silent a while as he reverses and joins the main road.

“How long will we be?” I ask.

My mother expects to find food in her pots, and a clean house. My situation does not afford me the luxury of gallivanting around with men.

“We’re going to eat Athule, and talk.” Why the snap? Did I say something wrong?

“We’re talking now, so that means we’ll eat fast and come back, right?” I tell him and try to make sense of the frown on his face, I’ve heard of permanent frowns. I don’t know if I should warn him.

“Do you have to be somewhere?” He sounds offended.

“Yes, I didn’t tell my father I was leaving.”

“Don’t worry, I will bring you home before babazala wakes up.” He’s smiling.

Why did I put him out of his misery? I should have let him continue thinking whatever his mind was entertaining.

Kwa Mai-Mai? Really? I’ve heard of this place and it’s infestation of Zulu men who wear Brentwood, sing Maskandi and speak Isizulu like it was perfectly made for them.

“I think we should go to McDonalds or something.”

I'm not up for a crowd.

His eyes crinkle, he's confused.

"What is that, a mental hospital?" He asks.

I know he knows what McDonalds is, that's why I don't justify his question with an answer.

He is out of the car before I can protest further, I jump out just as he's about to open the door. His stare is deep, making me want to hide under this car.

"What?" I ask, aiming my eyes elsewhere but his direction.

"Nothing." He replies.

He wouldn't be giving me that look if it was nothing, there is a faint smile threatening to expose his adult teeth.

"Let's go." He says.

His hand glides to the small of my back. I tense a little, I haven't shared even a hug with this man, yet his hand has settled on my most sensitive part. That's where my hormones dwell by the way.

We're met with noise, as we enter the place. Music and loud crowds.

Ndaba ushers us to an empty seat, I can't help but notice how eyes are on us. I can be insecure sometimes and right now is the time.

"People are staring." My voice carries, I guess it tickles him because he lets out a chuckle.

"People always stare, it's nothing to dwell on." He says.

By the easy-going tone he uses, I figure he's used to people staring at him. He is a public figure after all.

He leaves me alone to place an order, I haven't told him what I would like. If he comes back with the head of a goat, I am catching a taxi back home. I don't eat anything that has eyes, mouth and ears. I can imagine that head saying "Yey, wenzani?"

I can see Ndaba from here, he's conversing with a short-chubby middle aged man. It's the respect pouring out from him that has me enchanted, how he regards the old man with so much reverence.

I blink away when our eyes meet, I hope he won't interpret it the wrong way, my eyes are undisciplined when he starts trailing back to our table. This time it feels impossible to look away, his eyes are fixed on me, locked with mine.

"The food will be here soon," he tells me as he slides into his chair. "I forgot to ask what you want to drink, I ordered juice."

You forgot to ask what I want to eat, I don't dwell much on it.

"Can we do this every day?" He asks, looking at me like a sulky child.

How do I answer this? Relationships are nice and all, but seeing each other every day will be taking it too far. I will have to have days where I disappear, pretend I don't exist.

"We'll bore each other," I answer with honesty.

"I'm not sure that is even possible." Ndaba says, the next thing he'll be asking when will I visit him.

"Everything in life comes and goes Ndaba, we don't

control destiny.” Time to put on my serious girl coat. The frown on his face tells me he disagrees with me, I have to wait for him to stop staring and tell me what’s on his mind.

“I hope you will never go away from me, Athule.” That’s it? That’s all he’s going to say? He’s moving too fast, like a Gautrain. I don’t know how I will keep up.

I place my elbows on the table, and look into his eyes.

“I don’t know what the future holds for us, I don’t even know if we have a future together. But if I agree to whatever it is you want to happen...”

“I want you to be mine, I want to be the only man you think about. I want to be the only man who makes your heart stop and race at the same time. The plan here is not to play the dating game, but do life together. Life with you is what I ask for.” He says.

“We barely know each other Ndaba, how have you concluded so much in such a short amount of time?”

“Why should we be controlled by time?” He shrugs

his shoulders, taking on a serious expression.

I don't protest when his hand slides across the table to hold mine. "If I feel that I loved you the first time I saw you, then I will let you know. Time has nothing to do with that."

Why are his words sending tingles through my body? This man is making me feel things I'm not supposed to be feeling. In the real world, things are done differently.

You don't wake up and decide you love someone.

Suddenly I'm struggling to get my eyes off his, he stares too much and most of the time it's into my eyes. Can't he be normal like the other men and pretend not to care who is in front of him?

He's not making things easy for me.

I want to protest when Ndaba shifts his chair closer to mine, a persistent man. I don't know if I should be concerned or ecstatic that I am wanted.

"We're in public." I stutter when he gazes into my

eyes like a freak, people will start thinking he's insane. That's if they haven't concluded that already. And why is my heart doing a cartwheel? Too soon man, too soon.

"You are making me nervous Ndaba." Yeah, my honesty is so disrespectful. His response is a quite laughter as he eventually shifts back to his space. Now we wait for the head I will not be eating.

He doesn't sit down, his eyes are on the exit. I turn to check who he's looking at, there's a strange looking man dressed in taxi-driver couture.

"I'll be back, wait here." He says.

Hell no! Strangers make me anxious, I'm not waiting here.

"You are not leaving me alone here, Ndaba." Maybe I'm freaking out for nothing.

"I won't be long, I'll just greet my friends." He says.

"I'm coming with you," I stand but he's striding towards the man at the door. I hate his long legs.

I will sit here and watch him like a serial killer. More men have joined him, he's exchanging handshakes with them. Sounds like a little celebration, they are too loud. I can hear his voice the loudest, laughing. I wish I was comfortable, but my mother is on my mind. If I get home late she will have me for supper.

Speak of the devil, my phone is ringing. I don't have a choice but to answer it, as I grab it from the table, a gunshot goes off. The entire place goes crazy with screams and more gunshots, people are scattered all over trying to find a way out of the place. I grab my phone and stand while my eyes search for Ndaba, but someone grips my hand before I can take a step.

“Sbonelo?”

“What are you doing here?” He is yelling at me and tightening the grip on my hand.

“I...”

“Come with me,” he interrupts my answer and drags me towards the crowd of people fighting to leave the place. We have to hurry while ducking, and dodging bullets.

“I came here with someone, I have to find him...” He gives me a chiding look with furrowed brows.

“I mean her, I’m worried about her.” It’s a lie, he can’t know that I’m here with a man. No one knows at home that I know how it’s like to hold a man’s hand. Sbonelo says nothing and continues to drag me, he has a gun. I see it when he lifts his hand to push people out of the way.

Where is Ndaba? I can’t see him in this chaos.

“Athule!” That’s his voice, he’s pushing his way through the crowd headed my way.

I want to call out to him, but Sbonelo will see him. He’s focused on getting me out of here, and pulling me with force all of a sudden. It’s more chaotic out here, street vendors are packing their goods and running for their lives.

I guess I can go with my brother since Ndaba is okay.

“Go with this lady, she will take you home.” He’s talking about a woman, my mother’s age. How do I go with a strange? I might as well wait for Ndaba.

“Come sisi, let’s go.” She puts her hand on the small of my back and starts leading me towards a white Bakkie.

“No, I came here with someone. I’ll wait for them.” I push back and stand aside. Sbonelo is exasperated by my response.

“This is no time to be stubborn Athule, go with this lady.”

Why is he insisting?

“I’ll take a taxi,” I tell him.

I don’t like the way she is looking at me, Sbonelo grabs my hand after clicking his tongue and drags me towards the Bakkie.

“Let me go, Sbonelo.” I shout people are busy running to notice what is happening. As we approach the Bakkie, I see a man behind the wheel. He’s wearing a cap and a hoodie on top.

“Just do as you are told for once, I’m losing on money because of you.” My brother snaps, pulling me forcefully.

“I’m not going anywhere with these people.” I yell at him, it makes him angry.

The man with the hoodie steps out of the car, I haven’t screamed, maybe I’m confused as to what is really happening.

“We don’t have enough time.” The lady sounds impatient, she wraps her arms around my waist and starts forcing me to the car. I scream, bend my knees and push my body down. But Sbonelo and the man grab my legs, they are carrying me like a bag of potatoes. It doesn’t stop me from kicking and screaming.

“Athule, Athule!” I hear Ndaba yelling, for some reason Sbonelo is startled. As he drops my legs, his gun falls to the ground. The lady and man release me, I don’t waste any time but pick up Sbonelo’s gun and aim it at him. The fool takes off running, his accomplices are right behind him.

I’m such a coward that I can’t even pull a trigger, my hands are trembling.

“Thandolwami!” He’s behind me and out of breath,

his arms wrap around me from the back, covering me with his huge body. It's a teddy bear hug.

He takes the gun from my hands and holds me tighter, I want to lean into him and scream. But I'm too shocked to be emotional, what the hell did my brother just do?

.

.

Thank you Ntombikayise Fort for the sponsor.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Thirty-nine

ATHULE-

.

.

He's covered in blood, I'm only noticing it now as I turn to face him.

"You've been shot?" I ask, extending my hands to

touch his chest.

"I'm fine," he's says looking at his shirt.

He doesn't look like he's in pain, so I take his word for it.

"Let's get out of here," his words are grinded through shut teeth.

"I need to call my father and tell him what happened," if anyone then my father will deal with his son. Sbonelo has gone too far, I won't let this go.

Ndaba's face has changed, I'm still trying to figure this man out. I can't tell what that look on his face is. How is it that he can confuse me with just a simple look on his face?

"Let's go Athule," he's pulling me towards the car.

My body has given up on me, it won't stop trembling. I can feel my knees growing weak as we walk.

"Are you okay?" He's mumbling against my ear, I assure him with a nod.

I want to cry, emotions can be frustrating sometimes. I don't want Ndaba seeing my weakness,

it's bad enough that my brother has embarrassed me in front of my potential. How did he even know that I'd be here?

In the car, he throws Sbonelo's gun into the glove compartment and changes into a Kaiser Chiefs t-shirt. This is team-cheating, I don't care what anyone says.

I look back as we drive away, the chaos is dying, someone called the police.

Today would've turned out different if Ndaba was not here. I don't even want to think where I would be.

I'm waiting for him to ask about my brother or judge him, I have an explanation in my head and hope it makes sense when I say it.

"He's not always like that you know?" I say, seeing he's not saying anything.

"Who?" He asks?

Really?

"My brother, I think he's in trouble or something. He probably owes people money, he wouldn't sell me

for no reason." Is this me justifying my brother's actions? Xolani called me a fool once upon a time, turns out he was right.

No answer! What's wrong with this man? I don't want him thinking I come from a family of weird people.

I can feel his heavy presence and have to check if everything is okay on his side. He's livid, hands tight on the wheel and jaw clenched. He looks really scary, like he'd shut me up with a bullet if I continue talking. I'll zip my mouth for now, give him time to cool down.

.

.

I don't know when I fall asleep but I'm woken up by someone nudging me, we're parked outside a not so big and not so small beautiful two story house.

"Where are we?"

"Pretoria, you are not safe in Riverlea." He says.

Yoh this man. He just made a decision for me...

strike one.

“Whose house is this?”

“My sister’s.” His face is serious, he’s still holding on to anger.

“Why are we in Pretoria? I have to be home before it’s really late.”

Completely ignoring my question, he gets out of the car and starts treading towards the door. I’m opening my own door today because we at his sister’s house. I can’t be here, I am a child in my father’s house. I have to be home before they eat supper that I’m supposed to be cooking at this moment.

A woman walks out of the house, they share a brief hug. I’m suddenly too insecure to leave the car, clean, expensive looking women have that effect on me.

Ndaba waves, gesturing that I come. I wish they’d look away and not watch me and my kiss-kiss.

“You didn’t tell me you were bringing someone.” It’s the first thing the sister says when I’m within earshot.

She even smells expensive.

“What would you have done if I had told you?” Ndaba says, dropping a hand on my back.

His sister laughs, looks at me, and hugs me, a bit awkward I won’t lie.

“You’re Athule, right? I’m Mabahlezi, call me Hlezi. So you are my brother’s secret?” She says.

I don’t think I was a secret, I just met this man.

“Are you the girl I spoke to on the phone this morning?” Hlezi asks.

Yep! She’s the woman that stirred my emotions? I want the earth to open up and swallow me. How did I conclude that I was talking to his girlfriend?

“It was me,” I look away, shame will embarrass you.

“Sorry I was rude on the phone, I thought you were a groupie.” She must think her brother has a line of women screaming his name. Shame!

“You don’t have to apologize, really.” I tell her.

Why am I being put on the spot like this?

Ndaba's phone rings and I look at him as he sends his hand into his pocket, coming out with a now-louder -sounding ringtone.

"I have a meeting to get to, I'll take you home when I get back. I won't be long." He announces.

I'm choosing to believe him, I just need to have a good explanation when I get home. The thought of being alone with his sister makes me nervous, I don't know her. What will we talk about?

I should be home instead, but here I am in Pretoria. How I got here? God knows. Ndaba and his 'follow-me' aura will be the death of me.

Ndaba bids us goodbye, and disappears out the door, leaving me awkwardly standing with a woman I have one thing in common with.

Him!!!

.

.

BHEDLINDABA-

He didn't think Mikhulu would come to Kwa Mai-Mai bearing bad news. The men appointed to follow his mother spotted her heading into a field.

They were still discussing a way forward when they were disturbed by gunshots, a bullet missed Ndaba and hit and one of his boys. Unfortunately he lost his life.

Ndaba is not sure who sent the men to kill him. It could be Zwangendaba retaliating or a fool who thinks they can take him down. For a second while exchanging bullets with his enemies, he forgot about Athule and remembered her when he saw her brother dragging her through the crowd.

He arrives at Nasrec Memorial park, behind the high walled cemetery is a field harbouring high trees. Mikhulu meets him halfway.

"This way ntawana," he points at one of the thick

trees.

“What am I looking at?” Ndaba asks with a frown on his face. He said to find Shiyiwe, and his men have led him here, they are standing in front of a fresh grave. He’s thinking the worst, how will he explain her death to Mthombo?

“We think she is inside this grave, amaroto confirmed that this is the place.” Mikhulu insists.

“Fuck, we don’t have much time. Start digging.” Ndaba fumes, they should have started digging before he got here.

His broad shoulders hunch over the shovel, his teeth are clenched and eyes burning with rage as he digs as fast as he could.

His companions help him, the only sound in this place is the sound of shovel cutting into wet soil, followed by the thumping sound of the same soil hitting solid ground. After a tormenting couple of minutes, Mikhulu shouts.

“I hit something.”

There’s a frightening expression on Ndaba’s face as he shovels the remaining soil on the coffin lid, it makes his features look rather scary. They can hear something scrapping inside.

The cheap looking coffin is not locked because Ndaba easily opens it, his heart almost stops when he sees Shiyiwe. Her lips are pale, almost whitish in colour. Tears are playing in her eyes.

“Don’t touch her,” he snaps at Mikhulu as he tries to lift her out of the box. Ndaba carries her in his arms like she’s made of glass and places her on the ground, her lungs start to grasp for air. There’s a foul smell coming from her, she messed on herself.

Ndaba hears grumbles from the men surrounding them, they have their nostrils closed. He could shoot them for being insensitive.

“Shiyiwe, thank God you’re alive.” Ndaba says, sounding relieved.

He meets her eyes, she seems to be staring right through him. Her eyes are huge with terror, her chest

is rising and falling in a fast pace.

“Can you sit up?”

She doesn’t say anything but stares in horror.

He’s looking at her face, the vulnerable look of pure fright won’t leave her face.

He ignores the appalling smell coming from her and brings Shiyiwe into his arms. He is confused by this feeling of wanting to comfort her, it can’t be anything else but taking care of his brother’s woman. Right?

“Your... mother... she buried...” She’s crying on his chest.

“I’m here now, I won’t leave you alone.” He rubs her back. “Let’s get you home.”

He scoops her in his arms.

“I can walk,” there is anger in her voice.

Ndaba doesn’t believe her but puts her down, “Okay, hold on to me.”

His arms are around her as they walk to the car

parked on the side of the road, Shiyiwe's steps are slow. Anyone can tell that she is dizzy and having a hard time walking and because Ndaba is also stubborn, he lifts her up again.

Mikhulu is behind the wheel, Ndaba sits at the back with Shiyiwe. Mikhulu opens the windows, it angers Ndaba, although he understands that any human cannot stand the smell of poop. He's trying hard not to focus on it, this girl has been through so much.

She's quietly sobbing beside him, her cries are like fire in his heart.

In an attempt to comfort her, he scoots closer, his arm tightens around her. He doesn't know what he is doing, there's a conflict between logic and reason.

"I'm dirty, don't touch me." Shiyiwe tries to move away but he won't let go.

.

.

He has taken her to his house, the hospital is out of the question. He is in no mood to be answering to

nurses.

"I'll run you a bath," he says. He has never run his own bath, he jumps into the shower, and he's done. Perks of being a bachelor.

Shiyiwe nods hesitantly.

Ndaba looks into her bloodshot eyes, his jaw is tightening. This is not a game, it's becoming more serious.

He can't put into words what the fuss is about between the Jeles and his family. Whatever it is, he knows now that he can't let it get in the way of him keeping Shiyiwe safe and finding Mthombo.

The bathtub is filled with warm water, he's not sure if Shiyiwe is allergic to foam baths, so he doesn't add any. He's on his way to her when he hears loud screams, he panics and rushes to the living room with a loaded gun. She's curled on the floor, her hands pressed against her ears and she's screaming.

"Get me out, please get me out." Shiyiwe.

“Shiyiwe stop, you’re home now.” Ndaba repeatedly says as he sits her up, she fights him off until their eyes meet.

“You’re okay, you are safe now.” He holds her tight, pressing his cheek to the top of her head. She is mumbling something he can’t make out, he doesn’t think much of it. Shiyiwe is still in shock.

“Your water is ready.” His words never falter.

Shiyiwe tries to get up, it's taking her forever and Ndaba thinks that she has grown weak, she won't be able to stand, let alone take two steps. After concluding this, he gently whisk her up and walks them to the bathroom.

Shiywie’s feet wobble the second she's put down, but Ndaba is holding her. Bodies pressed against each other, faces a whiff away from each other. It is nothing sexual, he knows that... he thinks it's because he pities her, that's why he is allowing this strange closeness.

“I don’t want to be alone,” Shiyiwe stops him from walking out.

“I’ll be outside the door.” He says and quickly walks out.

There’s something that’s pushing Ndaba to protect Shiyiwe, it’s annoying him because it confuses him.

He remembers Athule when he sees a text from her, she wants to go home. Athule is the only one who can clear his head.

“Ndaba, are you still there?” Shiyiwe calls from the bathroom.

“Geza Shiyiwe, I’m not going anywhere.” (Have your bath.)

He raises his voice, sounding more annoyed than he intended. His face welcomes a confused frown, he needs to stay away from Shiyiwe until he finds his brother.

.

.

Sponsored by Ntombikayise Fort.

I’m sorry for the late update. The rest of the sponsored inserts will follow after this one.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Forty

MTHOMBO-

“Get up,” Velakithi says, pushing a wheelbarrow in. Behind him is a young man who could be in Zinqumo’s age group, he thinks he looks familiar but quickly dismisses the thought because this no time to be playing the guessing game.

Makhosi was told to leave, Velakithi is suspicious of her. Mthombo would cover for her until she comes back and tells him what’s really going on but he doesn’t know if he can trust her.

“You are wasting my time Meyiwa, get up and sit on the wheelbarrow.”

Mthombo knows when he is being mocked, this son of a bitch is having fun at his expense.

“I said get up Meyiwa,” he repeats and bursts out laughing. Mthombo looks at him, then the boy

smirking behind Velakithi and then at the wheelbarrow. They are going to force him to sit on this thing.

“Relax, don’t cry. I’m kidding, I know you have useless legs.” Velakithi adds, the chuckling bastard.

Mthombo stares, with no twinge of emotion showing on his face. Velakithi looks back at the young man and gestures a nod, the boy steps forward, he’s got duck-tape that he uses to tie Mthombo’s hands.

“I’d tie your legs too if they were working,” Velakithi laughs once more and with the help of the young man force him up on his feet. His legs refuse to support his body, they don’t hold him when he falls back down and lands head first, it almost splits his skull.

He is seeing stars, his head is spinning.

Laughing their heads off, they carry him and place him on the wheelbarrow. Mthombo is groaning in pain.

“Where are we going?” Mthombo asks.

“You mean where am I taking you?” Velakithi is throwing snide remarks. “You can’t move your legs Oscar...”

“Cut the crap Jele, where the fuck are you taking me?” The pain on his head punishes him for barking, he hisses and cusses.

Velakithi doesn’t give him an answer, he’s walking behind the young man who is pushing the wheelchair.

They force him into the backseat of a Jeep.

“Where are you taking me?” Mthombo asks again.

Normally, when an enemy takes you to a different location, it means he’s going to kill you.

“To negotiate with daddy dearest, his son’s life for his money.” Velakithi says, buckling up on the passenger seat.

Mthombo looks around, it’s dark. There’s a dam not far from where they are parked. The house they were in is a shack, isolated in the middle of nowhere.

As the car joins the tar road, he sees a familiar

roundabout. He knows this road, if you drive down you will see Sasol garage and the Rand Show grounds. But they are driving towards Mayfair.

He's not sure where they are going but they've taken the highway leading to Joburg.

Fifteen to eighteen minutes later they arrive in Newtown, the young man parks under a bridge. There are other cars parked here plus a quantum.

"Look over there. Velakithi points at a van, outside is a man who looks like a thug, he's standing with a little boy who looks emotionless.

"Your son is here too, I will need plan B just in case Zwangendaba thinks he can play me." Velakithi tells him.

Mthombo figures that Velakithi doesn't know about Siko's paternity, Zinzi must have kept it from him. That's if Makhosi was telling him the truth.

"Don't involve him in this, he's just a kid." Mthombo.

No one cares about his pleas, they are laughing at

him.

“Your father is here,” Velakithi states, pointing to his left. There are more than five cars driving behind what is said to be Zwangendaba’s cars.

“I knew he was going to bring his monkeys, the old man is afraid of death.” Velakithi.

“You are outnumbered Jele, there is only two of you.” Mthombo says. It’s not a warning but words of victory.

“Don’t patronise us slima, we have men scattered all over this place.” It’s the young man beside Velakithi.

Mthombo sighs, “Whatever happens today, please keep my son out of it.”

Siko is his first priority, he needs him safe. He won’t be able to take his death if ever he dies.

“Get him out of the car, it’s time to negotiate with the old man.” Velakithi.

The young man steps out of the car, he’s takes the wheelbarrow from the boot and drags Mthombo out of the car.

.

.

.

BHEDLINDABA-

He can't leave Shiyiwe alone when she's widely awake, but he can step out after giving her sleeping pills without her knowledge.

Like the day she was taken, he's appointed men to watch over the house with strict instructions not to go anywhere, no matter who says what.

He jumps into a Citi golf, it was his first car at 20. He's kept it because over the years it reminded him of the person he was when he bought it, the person he loves to be and that's Ndaba from the streets.

He's always driving at full speed when there's an emergency. Apparently something is going to go down in Newtown, word has it.

He wasn't told what it could be but his father's name was mentioned.

He makes a call to his sister, she answers

immediately.

“I need a favour, please drive Athule back home. I won’t be able to make it, something else came up.”

“Can’t I request an Uber for her? Johannesburg is too far, my husband worries when I drive a long distance.” She tells him, sounding uninterested in this whole thing.

He'd get one of his men to do it but after what happened in town, Athule will never get in a stranger's car.

“Then let him tag along, please do this favour for me.” When he pleads like this, he usually gets his way. He knows it's happening when Mabahlezi sighs.

“Ngiyabonga Dade,” he cuts the call to avoid her complaints.

He’s driving down President ST, Newtown is not far from here. But his first stop is Bree, it's buzzing and loud at this time of the night. Indian shops are still running, the KFC at the corner is packed. A smile

crosses his face, Athule just came to mind and how they met. There really is something about that girl that drives him crazy.

He loses focus for a while that he doesn't see the traffic light opening, a taxi honks behind him. He snaps out of it and drives on but there's a guy pushing a trolley full of tomatoes and onions blocking his way.

He dodges the man and pops his head out the window.

"Yey wena saan, do you want to die you rubberneck?" It's the frustration talking, he almost ran a man over.

The street vendor returns the same attitude, this is Joburg after all. You slap a person on one cheek, they punch you on the other.

It's hard to find parking, it takes time for him to get a good parking space. This car is not fancy, it won't attract any unwanted attention. He makes it inside the rank, Mikhulu is here.

"There's going to be an exchange at Market Theatre,

your father has organized some guys. Mthombo will be there." There is urgency in Mikhulu's voice.

"Dai man is always up to something, I'm not missing this one for anything. Where are the others?" Ndaba asks.

"There's a full taxi with armed men, they are waiting for your word."

They move to join the others, Ndaba takes the wheel.

.

.

The streets are dark, even more so under the bridge, there is no soul in sight but a few homeless men pushing boxes to find a comfortable place to sleep for the night.

"This place should've been cleared out, if shots are fired these hobos will die." Ndaba says to Mikhulu.

"But we don't know if they will be a shooting ntwana," Mikhulu utters with a chuckle.

"Then what's the point of all this if there won't be a shooting, these men are ready for a fight and we are

going to give them one.” He’s talking about his men.

“This exchange has to do with Mthombo and that mother-fucker Zwangendaba didn’t tell me, he wants to play hero and win my brother’s trust. I’m going to expose him and his wife.”

“He’s your father at the end of the day, you two will have to forgive and forget at some point.” Mikhulu articulates.

“Amasimba lawo, blood means fokol. I don’t suck dick, Zwangendaba can miss me on that.” Ndaba says.

“Whoa! Slow down ntwana, I hear gunshots.”

Mikhulu puts his hand on the steering wheel as a gesture.

As they drive past Scibono Discovery Centre, they see from a close distance people running and ducking. It’s men, dressed in black suits and carrying guns.

“The show has started without me, fok.” Ndaba hisses, grabbing his gun from his lap. “Azishe madoda, shoot to kill.” He gives an order to men

hungry for blood.

They cross the road, heading towards Market Theatre, as they near the place, they scatter around. Shoot to kill means they shoot anyone who is not on their side, Zwangendaba's people included. Ndaba's mission is to find Mthombo first. He finds shelter by an ATM, he can see almost everything from here. He sees his father, Zinqumo is next to him, they are shooting at men across the field.

"That fool brought his son to a gun fight," Ndaba growls in anger.

Only Zwangendaba can put his children's lives in danger.

In the middle of the field, he spots a man lying in a wheelbarrow. His teddy bear body gives him away, it's Mthombo. They have the same body structure, that's why it's easy for him to recognise him from a distance.

He keeps his back hunched and head down as he sprints across the field, he needs someone to cover him if he plans on getting to Mthombo without

catching a bullet.

On his way, he hears the sound of a gun being loaded and that stops him on his tracks. Slowly, he turns to see who the man is and a gun goes off. His heart jumps to his throat, but it's the man in front of him who's been shot. He's bleeding on the ground like a slaughtered goat. Ndaba raises his eyes to see Zinqumo, the little brother shoots the man again.

"Go brother, I've got you covered." It's Zinqumo, Ndaba frowns. He's grateful but he hates that his little brother is part of this mess.

He doesn't say anything, he's still angry at him for what he did to Shiysiwe. He takes off running to where Mthombo is, another gunshot rings in his ears. It came from behind him, he whips his head around to check. Zinqumo is lying on the ground, choking on his own blood. He has been shot on his abdomen.

The man who shot him points the gun at Ndaba but Ndaba pulls the trigger first, shooting the man dead.

He runs back to Zinqumo, whose eyes are wide with fear and face covered in blood.

“Fuck!” Ndaba hisses, tears blind his eyes. He removes his spoti, and kneels in front of his brother.

Zinqumo tries to speak but blood spews from his mouth.

“Ntwana,” Ndaba whispers, wiping tears from his eyes.

It’s hard for him to move, his legs have grown weak. Shock has hit him like a speeding truck, this boy needs the hospital.

“My son!” A horrified scream comes from behind Ndaba, it’s Zwangendaba. He pushes Ndaba aside and pulls Zinqumo into his arms.

“Son, what happened to you?” Zwangenda is crying. Ndaba stands, he chuckles with tears trailing down his cheeks.

“I hope you are happy with yourself Zwangendaba, if this boy dies, it will be on you.” It sounds more like a threat.

Zwangendana lifts his son in his arms, he turns and starts running. Ndaba knows he’s taking him to the

hospital, he's worried about Zinqumo and wants to follow them but Mthombo is alone out there. He's the reason he is here.

The shooting seems to have stopped, Ndaba spots some of his men and some are lying dead here and there. Mikhulu is nowhere in sight, he's a big guy and knows his way around a gun. He's got to be okay.

When Ndaba gets to Mthombo, he's no longer inside the wheelbarrow but lying on the ground. It's a relief that he's moving and there are no signs of blood on him.

"Mthombo!" Ndaba shouts to make sure he's okay.

"Shiyiwe gave you my message?" Mthombo says, sitting up. Ndaba chuckles.

"I'm moving to Limpopo after this, I'm getting too old for this shit." Ndaba replies, helping him to sit up, and throws his arms around him.

"Who did this to you?" He asks after the long vindicated hug.

“Velakithi bastard Jele, please tell me that you killed the motherfucker.” Mthombo grunts.

“I didn’t see him, his goons are scattered everywhere like dead rats.” Ndaba. “If he got away, we’ll find him don’t worry.”

Mthombo nods, “Take me home. I want to see Shiywie.” He says.

Ndaba chuckles, but stops when he spots movement from the corner of his eye. He reels on his heel with a gun aimed at whatever that thing is.

His eyes land on a little boy, he’s dirty and covered in blood. Ndaba thinks he is a street kid. He frowns at him, he doesn’t lower the gun.

“What are you doing here? Get out of here,” he tells the boy because he thinks it’s not safe for a child to be here.

The little boy ignores him and runs to Mthombo, probably for protection. He kneels behind him, hiding his face on his back.

Ndaba won’t put his gun down, he’s taking careful

steps to his brother.

"Move ntwana, there's a tikoloshi behind you." He tells Mthombo.

He doesn't like anything that does not look natural and this child is giving him cold chills.

"Don't shoot him, he's my son." Mthombo pleads.

"What son? Unencosi wena?" (You have a child?)

Stupid question, everyone knows Mthombo has a son.

"Yes, this is Sikolethu. Jele had him all this while." Mthombo reveals.

It's shocking really because who would've thought that the boy was under their nose all this time?

Ndaba drops his gun, but keeps the frown on his face. He has questions, like why this boy is here where men are fighting. And where in God's name has he been all this time?

"Let me take you home, your woman is waiting for you." Ndaba declares.

Mthombo releases a long sigh, he's exhausted and hiding under Shiyiwe's skirt is what he needs right now.

"How is..." Mthombo gasps loudly before the question is entirely formed. His eyes are wide, face coated with astonishment.

"And then?" Ndaba asks, worry visible on his face. He starts to move closer to check on Mthombo, his brother falls on his side before he gets to him. There's a bleeding wound on Mthombo's back.

Confusion is the first thing on Ndaba's face, shock follows when he sees Sikolethu carrying a knife covered in blood. His face is stone cold and eyes a bottomless pit.

.

.

Thank you Phumla Lwandle Duma for the sponsored insert. Load shedding is back and killing our vibe.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Forty-one

THE MAKHEDAMAS-

.

.

“You haven’t touched your food.” Penny is worried sick about her husband, he needs to fill his stomach if he is going to service her tonight.

They only go to Disney Land once a week, their sex is scheduled because Mphako’s heart can’t handle a sex marathon anymore. He used to be a lion in bed back in his days.

“You are still not talking to me?” Penny asks.

She found him this sour when she came home from wherever she had gone, he wanted to know where Athule is. As a mother, she should know where her daughter is.

“I want my baby home,” says the man who was fast asleep when Athule left the house.

“She’s not a baby, she’s a grown woman. Her absence proves it.” Penny’s voice rises a little, it’s normal that she acts this way. All this man ever

thinks about is Athule this, Athule that.

"Athule will always be a baby to me, the fact that I wasn't there for the first four years of her life means nothing." Mphako snaps, he tries to keep his voice down for the sake of the kids in the room.

Penny gulps, she opens her mouth to explain herself but decides against it because Mphako will bring up the Botswana issue too.

He puts his plate on the coffee table and stands up from the couch.

"Uyaphi?" (Where are you going?)

She stands.

"Police station, you better pray that my child is safe or else you're leaving my house." He says, grabbing his Nokia 8110 from the TV stand.

"I'm your wife Mphako, you can't say that to me."

Hee!

The last time Penny addressed him by name was during their dating days. Before they occupied their house with big heads.

“Ubani uMphako?” His clenched teeth show his anger. “Uyeyisa wena Penny?” (You are disrespectful.)

She could tell him not to say “wena” because he’s returning the disrespect but they’ve already caused drama in front of the kids. Young Ayanda is close to tears, Sizwile keeps clenching and unclenching his teeth and Sbonelo has joined his mother in the middle of the room, just in case Mphako tries anything stupid.

He too has no idea where Athule is, in a way Sbonelo is glad because she is not here to tell on him.

“If anything happens to that girl.” Mphako warns, glaring daggers at his wife.

“Nothing will happen to her, she’s probably with her boyfriend wherever she is. I wouldn’t be surprised if she’s not a virgin anymore.” Penny’s words rewarded her a slap across her face, Ayanda shoots up from the sofa, tears pouring down her face. Sizwile storms out of the house in a fit of rage.

“Baba.” Sbonelo barks, and stands in front of his

mother to shield her, he balls his fists. The look in his eyes is a warning to his father. Mphako pushes him aside and faces his wife man-to-woman.

“Don’t you ever say that again, do you hear me?” Mphako points a warning finger at his wife, the look in his eyes has Penny drawing back. This is the first time that he has put his hands on her.

“Kodwa baba, you can’t blame uMa for Athule’s actions. I asked around, and people say they saw her get in the car of some rich man.” He says.

Mphako frowns, he’s slowly calming himself.

“Who is this man? Why didn’t you tell me? What if she was kidnapped?”

“Angazi baba, angazi. We don’t really know what she has been doing back in Botswana, maybe she’s been around with different men or even prostituting her body.” (I don’t know.)

Sbonelo adds fuel to the fire.

Mphako slaps him so hard that he loses his balance, he rubs his burning cheek while glaring at his father

with a flaming look.

“Ngiyaxolisa baba.” (I’m sorry.)

Sbonelo lowers his voice and casts his eyes down, Penny is fuming. No one touches her son, not when she’s still alive.

“Haibo baba? Are you going to kill all of us because of that loose child? Ihlongandlebe?” (A rebel.)

Penny says, as she touches her son’s shoulder, her way of comforting him.

“Usaqhubeka njalo?” (You’re still going on?)

Mphako roars, pointing his forefinger at her and the room goes dead quiet. These people have never stood up to him, he is beside himself with shock.

“I will kill anyone, and I mean anyone who dares to hurt that child. Athule has been through a lot, it’s enough now. Kwanele!” He’s still shouting.

“But baba...” Penny.

“Thula!!!” A tongue click follows after the second roar. “I’m going to the police station, you two better pray she comes back home tonight or you will know

me."

He wouldn't be a Zulu man without that tongue click, he walks out leaving them shocked and in disbelief.

"Mah!" Sbonelo turns to his mother to complain.

"Aiii Sbonelo, awume kancane nawe." (Leave me alone.)

Penny interjects, she's breathing mostly with her nose. Huffing and puffing, she takes off to her room.

.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

I'm woken up by a terrible nightmare, Mthombo was getting married to his dead wife Zinzi. That woman must stay where she is, dead and buried. Mthombo is mine, I don't care if she comes back as a ghost, she can never have him. I know the strong feelings of love are slowly creeping in, what will I do with it

when he leaves me?

I don't know when I fell asleep, it feels like it was a deep one. I get off the bed to look for Ndaba, how will I ever be able to repay that man? He's done so much for me. I have never had anyone protect me the way he has, not even Mthombo.

The top floor of the house is quiet, I'm not comfortable with the silence. It reminds me of that day MaDlamini drugged me, that witch. Nxa!

"Ndaba!" I'm careful and very much aware of my surroundings, lest a snake in a form of MaDlamini comes from nowhere.

Voices coming from the living room lead me there, we have company. It's a house full of depressed people, they all keep quiet when they see me.

Bongukwanda is here, the woman sitting next to him must be his fiancé. Mabahlezi is here as well, and that bald headed man must be her husband. His fingers are intertwined with hers.

Athule? What is she doing here? And why is her head on Ndaba's chest?

I feel like I slept and woke up in a foreign country with people I don't know.

"What's going on?" I ask.

The silence is making me anxious, I turn to Ndaba.

"Did someone die?" I ask, but it seems I have a big mouth because Mabahlezi starts crying. Now I'm freaking out.

"Where is Mthombo?"

He's the first to cross my mind, they can't all be here looking sad for no reason.

"Where is Mthombo?" I repeat, why are they not answering me?

Ndaba stands, places his hand on my shoulder.

"Mthombo is fine, how are you feeling now?"

I feel like death... is what I want to say but I keep it in.

"Fine," my detective eyes browse around in search of the truth. The only thing I see on their faces is

sadness.

"Have you heard anything? Is he okay where he is?" I question him again.

Ndaba suddenly looks annoyed by my interrogation.

"If I hear anything you will be the first to know."
Ndaba.

"I'm going to make everyone coffee," Ndaba's sister offers. "Will you help me?"

She's talking to me, I'm not in the mood but I follow her to the kitchen. Athule joins us a second later.

"I want to help," she says glancing at Mabahlezi.

"How come you are here?" Curiosity has me asking.

I don't like the look she is giving me, pity and stuff.

"She came with me, I'm supposed to be taking her home but I had to come here first after hearing my brother has been shot."

Her brother? Okay there are two of them in this house, the only ones that are not here are Mthombo

and Zinqumo.

“Which brother?”

She looks at me, eyes shifty and opens her mouth only to close it again. I need to collect my emotions and group them in an orderly way, panicking never helps.

“Zinqumo, he’s at the hospital. Mom and dad are with him.” Mabahlezi replies while pouring water into a SMAG kettle, there are tears in her eyes.

I feel like a monster for the relief rushing through me, I need Mthombo alive and kicking or I will wake him up and kill him myself.

“So you and Athule know each other?” Mabahlezi asks.

She looks different in the kitchen, more like a wife than a rich kid who spends daddy’s money.

“She saved my life once, along with her father.” I don’t want to go into detail about it, I’m avoiding the triggers.

“How have you been?” Athule.

If I tell her half of the things I have been through this week, she will not believe me.

"Good," sometimes we lie to get people off our backs. "How is Mphako?" I ask.

She laughs, must be because I called her father by name.

"He's fine, I'll tell him you said hi..." she sighs and stares into space. "That's if he's still talking to me."

The added statement puts a frown on my face.

"What did you do?" I like people's news.

"I left home without his knowledge, my father is a very strict man. I haven't mustered up the courage to call him." She fears her father, this one.

She could've gone home if that's the case.

"I'm sure he'll understand," Mabahlezi steps in. "I'll go with you and explain to him. We can add in some lies."

Since when is she this person? The first time I met Mabahlezi, she was very intimidating and a little closed off.

“This is all your fault,” we hear Ndaba snapping at the top of his voice. He’s scolding someone.

“It’s not my fault, Velakithi started shooting when I couldn’t meet his demands. We couldn’t just stand there and do nothing, we had to shoot back.” The retorting voice sounds like Zwangendaba’s.

Those people are talking about my uncle, it’s suddenly quiet in the kitchen. Mabahlezi is looking at me, she’s nervous about something.

“Don’t go in there,” she stops me before I exit the kitchen.

“It could be about Mthombo, I need to know if he’s okay.” I can be stubborn, she grabs my hand when I let my feet lead me out of the kitchen.

“Please sisi, let them resolve this.”

What’s wrong with her? I have a feeling she is hiding something from me, is this even a good time to tell her that her mother had buried me alive?

“And now my sons are dead,” Zwangendaba’s voice

breaks.

A glass shatters in the kitchen, it was in Mabahlezi's hand. Tears well up in her eyes before they stroll down her face. Two of Zwangendaba's sons are present, the other two are not. He said his sons are dead, does that mean?

I forget Mabahlezi's request, I'm in the lounge in a flash. Zwangendaba is here with two men that almost look like him and his kids, I'm thinking it's the uncles.

"What did you say?"

All eyes turn to me, my eyes connect with Ndaba's, he drops his gaze. I asked a question but these people have their heads bowed.

Tears, I hate them with a passion but they always seem to visit me. Is this what Mabahlezi didn't want me to know?

"Where is Mthombo, Bhedlindaba?" He won't look at me. "I asked you a question."

This is his house, I shouldn't be screaming at him. Finally his bloodshot eyes meet mine, tears fall down his cheeks. He wipes them away with one swipe.

"Shiyiwe... he... there were complications at the hospital. The doctors tried everything... they couldn't save him. He followed our little brother Zinqumo, my brothers have passed away." Ndaba.

"No... Mthombo no..." it can't be true. "Bhedlindaba please... tell me it's not true."

He's shaking his head, why is he shaking his head? I need him to tell me that Mthombo is alive. Hearing Mabahlezi and Kwanda's wife crying shatters my soul, I look at them thinking this is a prank.

Mabahlezi is in her husband's arms, crying a river. Kwanda sinks to the floor, buttocks first, and carries his hands on his head. He's crying like a child.

No, I refuse to believe that Mthombo is gone. This has to be a prank, but why is Zwangendaba crying as well?

"He can't be dead, Mthombo can't be dead." I'm screaming like a maniac, my knees decide not to

support my body. I'm on the floor, weeping. I don't know what's fuelling these people, they are crying louder now.

I feel arms surround my shaking body, I'm familiar with the scent now. It's Ndaba, he's holding me tight in his arms.

This is how it feels when you are deprived of air, being buried alive is nothing compared to this feeling.

"Shiyiwe, I need you to breathe okay." Ndaba's desperate tone has me opening my eyes, his family is standing around us looking down at me. They are suffocating me, I want to tell them to give me some space , but my chest feels tight. There is no air going into my lungs.

Ndaba's palms on my cheeks are making it worse, it's so hot in here I want to strip naked. I want water, I want Mthombo, I want to die. I'm gasping for air, something heavy and invisible is sitting on my chest.

"Shiyiwe breathe for me, please." Ndaba says, locking his eyes with mine. I think my body goes into

shock, I think my body falls to the floor. I'm lying on my back, gasping for air.

I never have panic attacks, I'm Shiyiwe Jele.

"Call an ambulance," someone says.

"I'm on the phone with them," another answers.

Ndaba is unbuttoning my dress shirt, "Help me help you, Nonyanda. It's up to you if you want to live, you have to fight this. Breathe for me, Shiyiwe, you can't do this to me, please breathe."

I hear desperation in his voice, I'm trying to breathe. I want to tell him that but I can't seem to breathe a word out.

.

.

Sponsored by Phumla Lwandle Duma.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Forty-two

MTHANDENI-

The house is crowded, Samson moved back in with his family this morning. Velakithi has not been informed, he's away on business. MG is not home too, she's never felt so alone in her life. She has tried to call Shiyiwe, her phone is off.

She's in the kitchen slaving away, it's past supper time but Samson is making her cook for him after they had bunny chows for supper.

She's almost done preparing the seven colours when Gezani staggers in, he's drinking Black Label from a bottle.

"Smells nice," he digs his nose into her pots. "It doesn't look as nice as it smells though."

As if he can cook a better meal. Mthandeni says nothing and continues with her cooking. He's standing behind her, his breath is on her neck. He reeks of alcohol and it's turning her stomach into

knots that will have her throwing up if she doesn't control it. Chills rush down her spine, she moves and gives him a scolding look. He grins and shrugs his shoulders.

"You are crowding me," Mthandeni snaps.

Gezani's face changes, he's offended by the innocent scolding. He grabs her hand, pulling her closer to him. Mthandeni's eyes widen, her heart flips unexpectedly. She's squirming and fighting to free her hand.

"Let go," she sounds feisty.

Gezani chuckles, his eyes are on her lips. He's leaning in as if to kiss her, Mthandeni pulls a sour face and looks away.

"I saw your little sex video, won't you give me a taste too?" He whispers into her ear.

Mthandeni is triggered, something about Gezani has her skin crawling. Her heart comes to stop in her throat, fear covers her entire being, she pushes him, runs out of the kitchen, and bumps into a grinning Samson at the door.

.

.

.

ATHULE-

Shiyiwe has collapsed, everyone is panicking. No one else knows CPR here?

I'm looking at Ndaba giving her mouth-to-mouth. He's breathing like it's painful to breathe, he looks more worried more than anyone.

"I'll get some water," Mabahlezi offers and runs off to the kitchen.

"Dammit, Shiyiwe. We're not going through this again." He says desperately, he's pumping her chest and blowing air into her mouth.

I'm confused by the affection he's showing her, is she not his brother's girlfriend?

"Ndaba don't press her chest too hard, she's all skin and bones." Bongukwanda's fiancé says.

Ndaba ignores her and continues sharing his breath

with her.

“Shit! Where the hell is that ambulance?” He is yelling at us, I step back flinching.

I don’t want to entertain the thoughts going through my head, he wouldn’t be interested in me if he were in love with her.

“This is SA Bhedlindaba, they won’t jump to save a life.” His father is the one to give a reply, Ndaba shoots him a cold stare but won’t stop trying to revive Shiyiwe.

“Do people collapse from a panic attack? This girl is faking it.” His father adds more words that annoy Ndaba.

“Dad not now, leave if you won’t be of any help.” Bongukwanda says.

Their sister is back with the water, I don’t know how they are going to make her drink that. She is unconscious...

Okay... Mabahlezi empties the glass on Shiyiwe’s face.

“Are you insane, why did you do that?” Ndaba roars at his sister, his anger is quiet scary. He is not given an opportunity to continue, Shiyiwe is coughing.

I can’t help but notice the look of guilt on his face as he examines Shiyiwe. It’s as if it was his responsibility to keep Mthombo alive and that for Shiyiwe.

“Are you okay?” His hands are delicately cupping her face, she doesn’t respond to his question. Her eyes are wide and wandering everywhere.

“Mth... Mthombo...” her voice trembles.

“You need to rest Shiyiwe, come with me.” He says, trying to help her up but Shiyiwe pushes him away, he staggers back and falls on his butt.

“I’m not going anywhere with you.” She hisses, tears welling up in her eyes.

She must have loved Mthombo a lot, her body is visibly trembling.

“I don’t have time for this nonsense,” Ndaba’s father grumbles and walks out.

No one cares about him, they are worried about the girl on the floor.

"I'm taking you to bed," that's Ndaba.

I feel a sting in my heart at the sound of his words, he carries her in his arms, she's fighting him but he won't let go. I watch them till I can't see them anymore, suddenly I'm not sure about being here. I feel like an outsider, I am an outsider.

"What about the ambulance?" Bongukwanda asks, Mabahlezi shrugs.

She looks distressed, she goes to find comfort in the arms of her husband. I offer to finish that tea we were making in the kitchen, it's the least I can do. Instead of standing around feeling useless.

Ndaba seems to share a special bond with Shiyiwe, something that can never be replaceable. If ever something comes out of this thing he's pursuing with me, then I don't think I'll ever be able to compete with what he has with her.

There is something about them, when she moves, his eyes move with her. He's like a hawk, watching her every move.

The way he held her in his arms when she was struggling to breathe, and how he spoke to her, it was all I could focus on, and not the despair and loss of the family. I feel bad for being that person.

I'm done with the tea and serve everyone, Ndaba is still in the bedroom with Shiysiwe. I wish I knew what's going on. Maybe it would've been better if that ambulance came, what is taking so them so long? What is taking Ndaba so long? My eyes are on the corridor, waiting to see him walking back in.

This is not how I expected my date to end, today has been terrible.

It's very late, around 11pm. I haven't spoken to my father, I hope Mabahlezi will still accompany me to tell him where I have been or he will kill me.

Ndaba walks back in with his hands on his head, and sad eyes. I want to throw my arms around him and comfort him but his sister beats me to it.

He buries his face on her shoulder and releases a long sigh of exhaustion.

"Should I check why the ambulance isn't here yet?" Hlezi asks, he shakes his head.

"She's calm now and resting." Yet he still sounds worried.

"I made tea, do you want some?" I ask him, he shakes his head without looking at me. The same man who wouldn't stop staring at me is refusing me a single glance.

"This is all wrong... it wasn't supposed to happen like this. What am I going to do? How am I going to explain this when she wakes up..." he stops and heaves a sigh.

"What have you done Mthombo? Look what you made me do."

His voice is breaking, he heaves another sigh and drops his body on a chair.

"Mthombo is gone bhuti, he's gone. It's the end... this is it. This family will never be the same, he was the

glue that held us together.” Hlezi’s cries evoke the pain that’s already active in my heart.

“Don’t cry sisi,” Bongukwanda’s fiancé comforts her.

“Are you sure that his son stabbed him?” That’s Kwanda going back to the past.

“Yes, but the doctors could’ve saved him. I don’t know what went wrong at the hospital.” Ndaba replies.

Something doesn’t add up though, hospitals are norm to killing people. But, what is this thing that went wrong?

The story as Ndaba had told is that Mthombo’s son has been found, he stabbed his father on the back. That’s all he told us, he won’t say where the boy is.

I don’t even know what’s going on with these people.

I’ve known about the Meyiwases but I was never deep into their business.

“I don’t understand though, how did Sikolethu stab Mthombo? I’m trying to connect the dots, but it’s not happening.” Mabahlezi says, she’s sitting on her

husband's lap. Very clingy this one.

"I don't know, I'm baffled as well. But right now Shiyiwe is my worry, she won't be able to get over Mthombo's death. She might try something stupid, we have to keep an eye on her." Ndaba.

"That's quite too extreme, how long had they been dating?" Mabahlezi sounds judgemental.

"Love has no timing dade," Ndaba retorts.

I'm affected by the offence in his tone.

"We are going through loss, we don't have time to be looking after a girlfriend." I didn't expect Mabahlezi to say that, maybe it's the grief talking.

Ndaba looks ready to bite her head off, "I will keep an eye on her, myself. I won't leave her side." He says, adding to my insecurities.

I sit on the empty seat next to Ndaba to get his attention, my eyes land on him in search of recognition, he gives me a quick look and looks back at his sister.

"Why do you think she will take her own life? I agree

with Hlezi, their relationship was still new. Suicide would be very dramatic, and absurd." Kwanda says.

His fiancé agrees with him, Ndaba is the only one on Shiyiwe's side.

Their little squabble is making me uncomfortable, I think of going to kitchen just to give them space. As I stand, I see her... Shiyiwe. She's standing in the entrance between the corridor and lounge, and has a gun pressed to the temple of her head.

"SHIYIWE!" I scream as fright takes control of me.

Ndaba jumps to his feet, the others are too afraid to move.

"Where did you get that?" Ndaba asks, slowly approaching her.

Shiyiwe yells, "No!"

He stops, and raises his hands in surrender.

"Uphi uMthombo wami?" (Where is my Mthombo?)

Her teary eyes are on Ndaba.

“Shiyiwe... Mthombo’s gone.” He replies.

“Don’t lie to me, Bhedlindaba.” She screams.

“Somebody better tell me where Mthombo is, or I swear to God I will pull this trigger.”

“Shiyiwe please, don’t.” I don’t think Hlezi should be butting in.

“I know what you are going through,” she adds.

Shiyiwe shakes her head, “No you don’t, you don’t have a clue what I’m going through Mabahlezi. You have no idea what I’m feeling right now.”

She’s yelling at the woman.

“Your husband is here, next to you. You were not told the man you love is dead. You get to touch him and smell him.”

“Shiyiwe give me the gun,” Ndaba is stepping forward again. It’s risky, she might pull the trigger.

Shiyiwe ignores him, she looks at Bongukwanda.

“Kwanda sir... Ndaba is your brother, he must listen to you because you are older. Please... tell him to tell me where my Mthombo is.” She doesn’t believe that

he's gone, I would be in denial too.

"I'm sorry Shiyiwe, he's really gone."

Kwanda could've said something else, not that. This woman is threatening to kill herself for heaven's sake.

"No! I refuse to believe that and if you people think he's gone then you don't know Mthombo at all, he's open and very sensitive with me. He knows that I have no one, that he is the only thing I have. He would never leave me, he promised me a life with him. He said... he... he loved me and that we'll have children. Why would he leave me like a liar?"

She speaks of him as if he is still alive.

"Nonyanda, give me the gun." That's Ndaba's focus, getting the gun from her.

Seeing him getting closer, Shiyiwe panics and points the gun at him.

"Ndaba!" It's my turn to yell out in fear, this woman is delusional. She will shoot if he dares her.

"Shoot me if that will make you feel better, but I am

getting that gun one way or the other." Ndaba murmurs. I'm almost jealous at the gentleness in his voice.

"Bring him back to me, I want Mthombo back." Shiysiwe is losing strength, it must be because of the way Ndaba is looking into her eyes.

"Don't you know by now Shiysiwe, that I will always protect you?" I see tears in his eyes.

What is going on here?

He moves closer until the gun is pressed to his stomach, his eyes are locked with hers as he takes the gun from her trembling hands.

He hands Kwanda the pistol while wrapping his arms around Shiysiwe.

"Don't ever try that shit again," he whispers into her ear. It's a scolding but it's filled with so much emotions.

I can't do this anymore, the only thing I understand is what she is going through. Everything else, like their closeness is confusing me.

“Ndaba, do you have R100 for me?” It’s embarrassing that I’m asking him for money, we are not even dating.

He nods, and with Shiyiwe hidden on his chest pulls out a R200 note and hands it to me. I would’ve felt better if he spared me a look.

The Uber will be here in 3 minutes, I grab my bag and quietly rush out of the house.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Forty-three

ATHULE-

.

.

The Uber drops me off at the gate, thankfully it’s not locked. I rush inside and close it, the lights are out. They must be sleeping, but I doubt my father is. The number of missed calls I received from him are insane, I have some explaining to do.

Carefully I unlock the door and shut it after I have entered the house, a hand grabs my shoulder,

startling me.

“Ayanda!!!”

I hiss, thinking it's her, only to meet my mother's disgusted face.

“Where do you come from?”

She's too old to be awake at this time.

“My friend was shot Ma, I was with her at the hospital.” My lie comes quicker than expected.

My tongue is not shocked, lying is not a luxury here.

“Don't lie to me wengane. Sbonelo said he saw you getting into a man's car.”

I hate him.

“That's not true Ma, Sbonelo sold me to human traffickers. I ran away and lost my way home, that's why I'm only coming in now.” The last part is a lie, my mother clicks her tongue and she does it so well it hurts.

“Stop lying to cover up your nonsense, you're gallivanting around with men, Athule?” She keeps her

voice a bit loud, which makes me wonder if my father is home.

“No ma, I’m not lying.” I defend myself, it’s useless really. It doesn’t look like she believes me, she turns to the couch and grabs a belt. How did I not see it?

“Didn’t you leave this place with a man?”

“I can explain ma,” I take a careful step backward. I’m trapped between her and the door.

“I’m listening,” she says, narrowing her eyes at me. I’m screwed, I have run out of lies.

“He’s my friend.”

“A male friend? Do you think I’m an idiot Athule?” Her voice gets louder each time she opens her mouth, my father must not be home. “No.”

“Phoke?” (So?

“Mama, am I not old enough to...”

Her hand meets my cheek, and leaves it burning. I didn’t think she would ever slap me, and where did she learn to slap like a man?

“Old enough yamasimba, uyeyisa Athule maan.” (You unruly child.)

“Today I will show you, I won’t wait for your father to come back because I know he won’t do anything to you.”

It’s confirmed that he is not home, she grabs my arm and starts dragging me towards her bedroom. This woman doesn’t care about my age.

Something tells me it’s not because of Ndaba but the hatred she feels towards me.

I’m pushed inside her bedroom with force, my back crashes against the wall. African parents take offense when you act strong, they think of it as disrespect.

“You are opening your legs for men, Athule?” She’s locking the door.

There is no escape for me, my mother is twice my size. She could crash me like a bug.

“I’m not sleeping with anyone Ma, I swear.”

She doesn’t respond to my dispute instead baptises

me with a belt, it lands on my back and before I know it she is having her way with me. I don't fight her, nor do I show my stubbornness, it hurts and I have to take every beating like a child. That means screaming and jumping and asking her to stop, it's tiring really.

"Mom open the door..."

That's Sizwile's voice on the other side of the door, he's banging it.

"Mom, stop it. Please open the door."

The banging gets louder but she's not stopping and it's starting to hurt, tears burn my eyes.

I don't want to give her the satisfaction of seeing me in tears, she must sense my stubbornness because she hardens her hand.

"Mama stop!" I'm able to snatch the belt from her and throw it over the bed, it's an abomination to a black parent.

"You are hitting me now Athule?"

I will never hear the end of this.

“Mom open the door, please.”

Hearing Ayanda’s voice triggers something in her, she looks defeated. Her angry eyes are on me as she opens the door, revealing her two youngest kids. Sizwile is fuming and Ayanda is traumatised.

“Get out of my house, phuma!!!”

Her loud voice pierces my ears. I’m not going anywhere, this is my father’s house.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

I don’t remember anything after the suicide attempt, and I don’t know why my body feels weak and my head is spinning.

I try to sit up and the throbbing pain on my head sends me back on the bed.

“Mthombo!” He’s the first person to cross my mind.

I turn to my left and for a second I think it’s him and

he can walk now. But Mthombo would never be seen in those ridiculous clothes, only Bhedlindaba can walk into a shop and pay for that.

He is with a white man wearing scrubs, they seem to be discussing what appears to be serious. The sliding door is closed, I can't hear a thing, and because I'm friends with curiosity, I try to get up. My eyes fixed on Bhedlindaba, I want to ask about his brother.

The moment my feet hit the ground, I lose balance and fall flat on the floor.

"Ndaba."

He turns to me with horror on his face, in seconds he's rushing to me.

"Are you okay?" He asks, helping me up. He wants me to lie down, but I insist on sitting.

"Be careful love, your body is not strong yet."

He covers me with a blanket, I push it away. It's hot, damn it.

"What happened to me? Why am I so weak?" I wasn't

this weak yesterday.

"You've been sleeping for three days now." He says.

I think he wants to be a comedian when he retires from being a coach.

"Why? Is something wrong with me?" I ask, as fear starts to linger around. There must be a new virus in South Africa that makes people sleep for 72 hours, I will not believe any other explanation.

No normal person sleeps for three days without waking up.

"You know everything I do is for you right? I will do anything to protect you." I'm not in the mood to be hearing such things from him, I need an explanation.

"What happened to me, Bhedlindaba?"

He drops his gaze, this is bad.

"I had to inject you, you were a danger to yourself."

I don't know if breathing is advisable, I have been through enough shit to be desperate for air. What the fuck is this man saying to me?

“You drugged me?”

I am not shocked, it's beyond that.

“I had no choice, you were shaken and wouldn't calm down. Shiyiwe you tried to kill yourself.”

“I was an emotional wreck Ndaba, I wasn't thinking straight. Your father paid people to molest me, your mother buried me alive, and your brother decided to leave this world without so much as a goodbye. I'm human, I was fucking vulnerable. Didn't that cross your mind?”

I have to straighten my back for this, my head hurts but fuck it.

“Careful, you're still not strong.”

He's pushing me back against the headboard, I shove his hands away.

“Don't touch me.”

I feel violated by him and his family, I didn't expect this from him of all people. Hurt flashes in his eyes, I don't care. I'm more hurt because he drugged me.

“You need to take it easy Shiyiwe” Why is this white

man talking to me, I don't say anything to him. He probably prescribed the damn drug to Ndaba.

I'm pissed off, in fact let me ask this blonde haired man what his deal is.

"Tell me doctor, this drug that he gave me, was it prescribed by you? Because I fail to understand that there is a legal drug that can knock someone out for three days straight."

The white man gulps, he's sweating under those bangs.

"Shiyiwe, you need to understand that I did it for you." Ndaba can say anything, I don't want to care anymore.

"I will take my leave, you've got my number." The doctor says and takes his leave like he said he would. I'm alone with Ndaba, caught in silence. He's standing, looking at me with a worried gaze.

"I'm not suicidal, you know? I don't know what came over me."

Now that I am calm, I'm embarrassed to say the

least.

Sure my life is a mess, but I would never willingly kill myself. I was overwhelmed by everything that happened to me. The sexual assault, being buried alive and Mthombo dying. The only escape I could see was death, I was convinced that it would do me good.

“You don’t have to apologise, you’re only human.” He says.

I have put this man through so much.

“I will leave your house, you have already done so much for me. But I have a request before I go.” Ring or not, I believe I have the right to this.

“I want to see him, I want to see Mthombo.”

He avoids my eyes.

“I want to see him today,” I insist.

Ndaba stands, “My brothers will be laid to rest today.”

No fucking way!

“What is the rush?”

Shouldn’t they give people a few days to grieve, call family members? Peel carrots and make salads.I

I can’t stand this, another person I truly cared about has been taken away from me and these people want to bury him like a dog.

“There is no rush, while you were out we were up and down organising the funeral.” He says.

This family is weird, they can bury Zinqumo today I don’t care. Hell they can even bring back yesterday and bury their last born, I don’t give a fuck.

“Don’t do this to him, please. Give Mthombo a dignified funeral, he deserves that.” I don’t want to cry, I have shed enough tears. My emotions need to go back to order, I can’t let them control me anymore.

“We are giving him a dignified funeral, it’s just going to be family, no friends or distance relatives.”

Bullshit!

“Why not distance relatives? Surely there are

members from far who want to pay their last respects.” I argue.

“Why do you care about them? You don’t even know them.” He’s smart.

I don’t care about them, I’m speaking for myself. His mother will make things difficult for me, I know she won’t let me anywhere near the funeral. I should call the cops on her, and have her arrested for burying me alive.

“Fine then, can I borrow some money?” Yes, I just unashamedly asked him for money.

“Sure... what do you need it for?”

“I don’t have formal clothes, I’m not going to bury my man wearing washed out jeans, pumps and an ANC T-shirt.”

He narrows his eyes at me, “You are not strong enough to attend...”

I’m strong enough to take a peek into Mthombo’s coffin, I’m not a fool.

“I’m going to the funeral...” I interrupt and extend my

hand to him.

“Are you giving me cash or card? I can send you my Capitec account number.”

He smirks, there really is nothing to smile about. I’m drowning in sorrow and grief.

.

.

Sponsored by Thando Hlakanyane

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Forty-four

ATHULE-

.

.

Simi sent me back home after I arrived looking like a Zombie, my eyes refuse to open fully. I have been nursing a headache for two days straight, plus things haven’t been good at home. My parents are not talking to each other, my mother tries to strike a conversation with her husband while he acts like she

is not even visible.

It's something past 8am when I arrive at home, my mother is off today. I'm not looking forward to spending the day with her, I haven't seen Sbonelo at all. He could be hiding from me, it's not like I'm going to tell on him. His mother will probably convince her husband that I'm lying, he is his first born son. That man loves his sons, they are his heir. The ones who will raise the Makhedama clan.

"What happened to you? You look terrible." Ayanda greets me with these words when I walk in, she's on the couch and typing away on her phone.

"Where is everyone?" I ask.

I won't answer her question, I know I look terrible. Must be the stress, I've lost weight within three days. All I think about is moving out of this house.

"Work, church and whatever."

She stretches her legs on the couch, and starts channel searching.

"Do you ever have time to study? If not your phone,

you're glued to the TV screen."

She rolls her eyes, I guess this is my cue. Walk away Athule, walk away.

My phone rings as I carelessly dump my handbag on the bed, I take a deep breath and dig for it inside my bag. It's that pantsula-wearing, Meyiwa fool. I put the phone on silent, change out of my uniform, and hide under the covers. I need the sleep to get rid of this headache.

Ndaba thinks he's a celebrity and... okay maybe to other people he is a celebrity. I guess it's my mistake for thinking a famous man like him would be interested in me, soccer players are known to be womanisers, what more a soccer coach and owner of the team. That man thinks I'm one of his groupies.

.

.

I'm woken up by a splash of cold water on my face.

"Why are you sleeping at this time? Who will cook for you?"

“Mah?”

“The sun is up in the sky and you are still sleeping, your father will be home soon. What will he eat? You’ve always been lazy, but not in my house.”

That man and his nightshifts are costing me my sleep.

“Mom you don’t have to scream, she’s right here next to her.” Ayanda and her bravery will get me into trouble, my mother ignores her. Her war is with me, not her precious Ayanda.

“But Ayanda can cook too, I’m not feeling well. That’s why I was sent back from work.” I thought Ayanda said no one was home, just I was starting to dream about that fool, this one wakes me up.

“I’m going out of this room and if you are not up by the time I get to the kitchen... basop.”

With a tongue click she leaves.

I don’t understand how people are always shouting at the top of their lungs, her ears must be blocked by now.

Her tough love shakes me up sometimes, she didn't really grow up in a loving home.

A quick meal, pap, gravy and grilled meat, the dragon lady is in her room. I have a feeling she prefers to stay out of sight just to avoid quarrelling with me. My father is on his way, any mistakes with me would put her on his bad books. She's already messed up for belting me.

"You're trending on social media." Ayanda likes sneaking up on me.

Trending how? She's crowding me in the kitchen, her phone dancing in her hand. She flips it and there I am in Ndaba's arms, we're outside Kwa Mai-Mai.

*Ndaba Royals coach caught in a shooting.

Meyiwa bachelor saves girl from traffickers.

#KwaMai-MaiDrama...

#How to get attention from a rich man...

#TeachUsGirlTeachUs

#Womandla

#FebenzaGirl*

The insults are too much, the world thinks I'm a gold digging prostitute. There are a few pictures of me from my late teenage years, when I looked crustier. I was fresh from Serowe, the village.

"How did they even get those?" The thought escapes through my mouth.

"Please don't be mad, I once posted a few pics of you. My friends have this thing they do on the first of every month, sister appreciation. I was the only one out, I just wanted my friends to see that I also have a sister." Ayanda.

In her head, it makes sense. I mean it's sweet but my privacy has been invaded.

This should be illegal.

Can I sue them for this?

"Your father is going to kill me." I tell her.

Maybe I should run away, pack my things and never look back.

The picture of me in Ndaba's arms has been turned into memes, there are so many of them.

How to climb your way to the top...

From match box to mansion...

"I think you should open a social media account and clap back, explain your side of the story. How you're not a gold digger and that Bhedlindaba fell in love with you, and you guys are planning on getting married."

I'm not doing that...

Where does she even get the things she's saying?

"My friends are jealous that Bhedlindaba Meyiwa is my brother in- law."

Brother in what? My life has been planned by a 15-

year-old.

“When are you two getting married? Have you been to his house? I hear it’s huge, have you met his players?”

She grabs her phone from me and replies to a message, I’m thinking we’re done but...

“When are you taking me there? Can I move in with you when you get married? My friends will be so jealous, I can already see their faces. Please ask him to take pics with me, I’ll post them on my Instagram and...”

I’m over her and her crazy mind.

Ayanda might as well carve my coffin and bury me in it, it’s what my parents will do when they find out. Whoever took those pictures that day, and plastered them all over social media will be responsible for my death.

I push the sister out of the kitchen and continue with my task.

Oh hell no, what is Ndaba doing here? I zoom in

through the kitchen window. He is standing outside the gate looking depressed.

I check the coast to see if my mother is anywhere near.

Ayanda is too occupied on her phone and taking numerous selfies to care about me.

After debating with myself, I decide to call him, the phone is in my room. Seven missed calls?

Is he on drugs? There are messages as well.

The only safe way I can get out of the house is by sneaking out, he spots me standing at the door, and slightly pulls the gate open.

I signal for him to stop, rush to meet him and pull him to the side. He looks nice in this basic black suit, it's the yellow t-shirt peeking through his chest I have a problem with, and who would forget the yellow hat? Not Ndaba.

“What are you doing here?”

There is no need for him to look at me like I asked a

stupid question.

“Why are you not taking my calls?” His voice is warm and comforting, I let him touch my hand.

It’s a Sunday, people are screaming “I receive” in church, and some are sleeping in. The streets are graced with peace today.

Ndaba is gently rubbing the back of my hand, my brain shuts down for a while, I fight to have my sanity back as shivers run down my spine.

“I will have you know, my father is a very traditional man. You need to leave before he gets here or anyone sees you.”

I’m wasting my breath, he doesn’t care.

“Why did you leave the house Athule? I was going to take you home the following day.” Not with Shiysiwe crying and causing drama.

His question irks me really, three days later he comes here to ask me shit.

“You should know why I left.”

A frown! He is trying to touch my hand again, I step

back with a sigh.

"I'm sorry, she's my brother's..." He pauses and shakes his head.

"I'm sorry I forgot about you, it wasn't my intention. You were my guest, it was rude of me," he sounds apologetic.

I hum in agreement, I'm over that whole Shiyiwe drama, I got over it when I convinced myself that this man and I will never have anything.

"I have heard your apology, you may leave now."

"But you're sick, they are slaving you here. What were you doing in the kitchen? Are they making you cook? Did you tell them that you're not feeling well? Maybe I should call a doctor so he explains to them. You need to come home with me, I'll take care of you."

Lord give me strength.

I don't know who to thank for this lunatic standing in front of me.

"How do you know that I'm not feeling well?"

He's staring at me, not caring that I am waiting for a response.

"I thought you were at work, I went there first. Simi told me that she sent you back, come with me please." He thinks the world revolves around him.

"This is my home Ndaba, we are not dating or married. You cannot come to my father's house and demand that I go with you. Please go, my mother will come out and see you here, then I will get in trouble. I'm sure you don't want that."

Emotional blackmail always works.

If he stays here any longer, I might end up following him.

"No." He drops his hand on my hip, a very stupid move in a place like this.

Ndaba looks offended when I remove his hand.

"Do you know my pictures are plastered on Facebook, and they are saying nasty things about me?"

This might get him to back off.

“Is this what being with you will be like? I’ll be insulted, ridiculed and degraded?”

“People will always talk Athule, it doesn’t mean we should stop living.”

What an excuse...

“My father is going to kill me when he finds out, I’ll cease to exist then.”

“I’ll fix it,” he says.

He’s not Jesus, he can’t fix everything.

“I’m asking you to come with me because I want you by my side when I bury my brothers today.”

I forgot about them, my mother won’t let me leave, unless I lie and say they want me back at work. She will have millions of questions but a few problems because money comes first. She loves it when one helps around the house.

“I’ll go change, wait for me.” Yep! Stupid Athule is at it again. One day, this man will shove me to the back of a shelf, come back and ask for me and I will follow him like the fool I am. He has a hold on me, I

just know it.

.

.

“Hurry up before they fire you.” Penny Phiri is a strange woman in deed.

I have to wear the uniform to make it convincible. I pack a black dress and black shoes.

“I’m leaving, ma.”

She’s behind the stove, checking the food I cooked. I get a nod from her and rush out.

Ndaba steps out of the car as I approach, “We’re going to a cemetery, not KFC.”

I’m insulted.

“I had to lie to my mother, she wouldn’t have let me go had I told her the truth.” I say.

He’s staring at me, making me breathless. No, no... I need to stop letting this man control my emotions. I manoeuvre past him, and open the passenger door. It’s occupied by a lady in black.

“Shiyiwe?”

This I did not expect.

“Finally, here you are. We’re running late.” She states.

She looks better today, I must say.

“Please sit at the back,” that’s Ndaba standing behind me, he drops his arm around my waist and pulls me closer to him.

I don’t know what he’s trying to prove by doing this, I couldn’t care less where I sit.

Shiyiwe shoots me a smile, returning it becomes a mission. It’s an awkward moment for me.

She steps out of the car, how did I miss the dramatic black outfit she’s wearing? She’s dressed like a widow, hat, gloves and heels. I don’t think she can walk in heels, she has to hold on to the car while walking to the back.

“Careful...” Ndaba snaps when she almost falls, he doesn’t move from my side though. Shiyiwe’s hat falls, as I bend over to pick it up, my mother’s voice

rings in my ears.

“Athule, you forgot your phone...” My heart stops beating, she’s rushing here. Confusion is written all over her face, it’s this car and the man standing with his arm around me.

“What’s going...” Her question trails off, she’s looking at Shiyiwe. Her eyes are wide and mouth open.

“Ma, they are just giving me a ride to work.” I say, and hope she will understand. This woman is very unpredictable.

She holds on to the car, fanning herself.

“Mah,” I grab her arm to stop her from falling.

“Is she okay?” Shiyiwe asks, removing the big sunglasses from her eyes.

“Let me help you,” she takes my mother’s other hand but Mphako’s wife releases a loud gasp of fright and falls to the ground, bringing me down with her.

“She fainted?” Shiyiwe asks the obvious, sounding extremely shocked.

.

.

Sponsored by Konanani Nemakhavhani

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Forty-five

THE MAKHEDAMAS-

.

.

.

There was no need for Athule and her friends to drive her to the hospital, had she been awake, she would've told them where to get off. Now here she is, in a hospital bed at Bara. The doctor has seen and dismissed her, she won't be staying the night thankfully. She hates this place, it reminds her of her mistakes and sins she committed when she was young, in love and thought with Mphako's dick and not her brain.

She fixes her dress, gathers the medicine given to her and leaves to find her sister's wardroom. That one is enjoying hospital hospitality, she's still in the

hospital even after getting that blood transfusion.

Penny walks in on her taking her pills, she looks stronger than she did the last time she was here. She's sitting on her butt and giving her appointed nurse an attitude. The last pill and the nurse exits the room with a tongue click.

"I didn't think you were coming back," one would think Tshego is happy to see her sister.

Penny doesn't return her smile, she looks like a trampled rose that needs rescuing.

"What happened to you?" Tshego.

Penny stands next to her bed side, and sighs her frustrations and worries down on her sister.

"We have to keep them apart," Penny thinks her sister lives in her head and knows every damn thing going on in there.

"What happened now?" Tshego.

Something is always happening with this one, years away from each other was a good break. Now this stupid blood transfusion has opened a door they will

never be able to close.

“MaMbuyazi’s daughter and Athule can never be close.” She’s starting to make sense.

“They’ve met?” Tshego asks.

She’d be panicking and losing control of her breathing had she had something to lose.

“I saw them together, do you know how big a threat they are combined? I am not going to lose my husband Tshego, we have to keep them apart.” She tries to keep her voice low, walls have ears or in this case, curtains have ears.

“Relax, they don’t know anything. The only threat was MaMbuyazi, she’s gone. Go home Penny and continue playing the good wife.”

Yawn! Really? Looking unbothered with zero problems, Tshego leans back on the bed wincing and hissing. The knife wound is healing, slowly but surely.

“I’m serious Tshego, help me keep that child away from my family.”

“I’m not doing anything, Penny. That girl has given me a hard time.”

Penny is confused.

“I have tried everything in my power to bring her down, and failed. That girl is protected, she seems to be immune to my powers.” Only Tshego would convince herself that she has powers.

“Are you talking about witchcraft?” Penny.

It’s not as shocking as it was muttered, her sister practices, go-figure. She should already have a PDH and certificate to go with it, it’s been years. Mme Mosheo is not going to answer that?

“Listen to me Penny, if you want a peaceful life, stay clear of Shiysiwe Jele. That girl is trouble, she is undefeated.”

“There is no such thing, everyone is defeated one way or another. What does she have that makes her undefeated?”

“Her ancestors.” Mme Mesheo’s reply has Penny huffing, but deep down she is terrified.

“She was never introduced to her ancestors, who could be protecting her?” Penny.

These are the same words that had Mme Mosheo thinking she could go guns blazing and destroy Shiysiwe’s life.

“I’m starting to think otherwise,” Mme Mosheo says.

“I don’t care what’s happening with her, I have to keep her away from Mphako. He will kill me if he ever finds out what we did.” Penny says before noticing the irritation on Mme Mosheo’s face.

“You can’t be annoyed with me Tshego, it was your idea that we do this.”

“That’s because you came to me for help, you were so desperate to keep Mphako as if he’s the only man with a dick. You didn’t care whose life you were going to ruin.” Mme Mosheo’s clap back hits hard, too severe and unfiltered.

There’s are footsteps by the entrance, Mme Mosheo is the first to see him.

“He’s here,” she mumbles with eyes as wide as

saucers.

Penny silently cusses, she knows who this one is talking about. She takes a deep one before turning to the entrance and there he is, Mphako walking up to her. He is carrying a frown on his face and hands in his pockets.

Mphako gives his wife one look of confusion, and then he's frowning deeply at the sister lying in bed.

"Baba... wh... what are you doing here?" Penny stutters.

As far as this man knows, these sisters are estranged.

"MaPhiri?" By the look on his face, he didn't expect to find Tshego here.

"It's Mosheo, I'm a married woman now." She flashes the stop-nonsense ring wrapped around her finger.

Mphako chuckles an awkward one, "You were Phiri before you became a Mosheo."

She doesn't care, Tshegofatso Mosheo sounds

better.

“Where have you been? Twenty seven years is a long time to be away from your sister.” Mphako has always been interrogative.

“I have a life outside my sister,” there is rudeness in Mme Mosheo’s response. Penny makes eye contact, she wants to tell her not to talk to her husband in such a way.

Mphako ignores her, she’s always been rude.

“Mama, Athule told me what happened. Are you okay?” Mphako.

“The nurse said my high blood had gone up, but I’m fine now.” Penny.

She tries to ignore the sour attitude deriving from her husband, they aren’t on speaking terms but him leaving work and coming to the hospital to see her means a lot.

“I brought the car, let’s go home.” He says.

She was expecting him to ask more about Tshego, how she found her and what put her in a hospital.

But Mphako doesn't seem to be bothered by that.

"Yebo baba," Penny says.

There's a scoff coming from Mme Mosheo, it's giving disrespect and condemnation.

"MaPhiri, I hope to see you around soon." Argh! How polite of Mphako, Tshego looks like she is ready to roll her eyes and tell him to get away from her with his Zulu man tendencies.

The couple leaves, with Mphako leading the way. Penny looks back at her sister, it's a desperate cry for help.

.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

I can never get used to going to funerals, I thought I would be strong for this but I feel like an overcooked potato salad. My hands are shaky, silently letting me

know that I'm not ready to bury Mthombo.

They are driving out of the church premises when we arrive, we missed the service. I blame Ndaba, he insisted that we drive Athule's mother to the hospital. Athule couldn't come with us, she was too worried about her mother.

I'm upset with Ndaba, he talks, I listen, and deny him answers. I wanted to bid Mthombo goodbye, see his face for the last time.

We drive behind the slow traffic, I have counted five cars so far. When we arrive at the cemetery, it's confirmed that this is an intimate funeral. I know every face here. Kwanda and his woman, the parents plus the uncles I saw that day.

Ndaba won't leave my side as we walk to the grave site, his hand is fidgety on the small of my back, steadyng me. It's the shoes.

He wanted me to change my shoes, he thinks he knows me. I'm still wearing them, maybe that's why he's holding me.

He is convinced that I will fall, this man is the reason behind this crazy outfit I have on. I bought everything he told me not to buy, this is also my way of showing these people that I was actually someone in Mthombo's life.

His mother and I haven't locked eyes yet, she's too occupied with crying at the moment.

MaDlamini's heart breaking cries are ear splitting, Kwanda's woman is comforting her and stopping her from falling.

The sun is scorching hot, and my heart is heavier. I didn't get to see Mthombo's face, all because of Ndaba.

"Why is there one casket? I thought we're having a double funeral." I ask Ndaba.

The pastor takes a stand, he's going for another sermon I presume. I need answers before we continue with the burial.

"Ndaba, who is inside that casket?"

He's not looking at me, I swear to God after this, I will keep my distance from this family. I step forward, he pulls my hand.

"What are you doing?" He hisses.

People are looking at us, he's pulling me back and I'm fighting to get to the casket.

"You won't tell me who is inside that, I will check myself." There is no reason for me to keep my voice down, I have given these people a show so, why stop now?

Ndaba's hand tightens on my wrist, I'm making him angry.

"Zinqumo," he mumbles through gritted teeth.

"Where is Mthombo?"

Why does Bhedlindaba have to do this to me? I'm not cut up for this shit, it's too much really.

"Cremated," he says after clearing his throat.

Life is cruel, honestly. This can't be happening to me, I knew I have bad luck. I need to find my mother and change my name and surname, I can't carry such a

burden all my life.

I take the heels off, and throw them inside my bag. I will need to walk properly if the plan is to get as far away from these people.

“Where are you going?” Ndaba should not be touching me right now.

“Stop it,” I snap.

“Bhedlindaba what is this? Why did you bring this girl here? She doesn’t belong here, we’re trying to bury our son. Send her away.” His father is the last person to be trashing me, after everything he’s done to me, he should be locked up.

“Taima, I’m handling this.” Ndaba.

His gaze is on me, this man controls everything around him to a point where he controls people around him as well. He thinks I’m one of them.

“Well go and handle it somewhere else, my son deserves respect.” Zwangendaba.

“What about Mthombo? Where is his respect?” I’m yelling, releasing everything that’s crowded in my

chest.

“How could you cremate him? Is it because he was in a wheelchair? Why does this one get a better funeral and Mthombo is wiped out like he meant nothing to you people?”

Amagugu can wait, today they will hear me.

“Who the hell are you to tell us what to do with our sons?” MaDlamini has the nerve.

“I am the woman Mthombo loved,” hell yes I will rub it in their faces. I was once loved by a man, it lasted a week, but fuck it felt good.

“I can’t believe I used to admire this family, I envied you and wanted to be so much like you. You paint a different picture to the world, little do they know that you’re fresh on the outside and rotten inside.”

“Shiyiwe that’s enough,” Ndaba grabs my wrist and pulls me to him, my body crashes against his. He’s breathing down on me, eyes glaring. “There is no need to be dramatic, he wanted to be cremated and that is what we gave him.”

I don't care what he wanted, or maybe it's not about him wanting to be torched to ashes. Ndaba lied to me, he said there will be a double funeral. I bought a whole outfit for this coconut lying in a coffin.

"Where are his ashes?" I ask.

Lord, what will I even do with his ashes? He points at his mother, there's a golden urn on her lap.

I'm speechless, when did all this happen? How long was I out?

"Can we continue now? I have another funeral to attend." The pastor says, he's just like these people. Rushing everything and everyone.

"Yes we can continue pastor, but I'd like to pray for this family before we do. Their souls are doomed."

I put my shoes back on, Ndaba is pulling me again. I yank my hand and join the pastor.

"Can we please close our eyes," okay, they don't want to.

"Dear Satan, father of the Meyiwases. You probably

don't know me, I go by the name of..." No, I can't give the devil my name.

"I don't know how these people pray to you, maybe there's a secret code. 666? Illuminati, lies, deceit or whatever they say. Please take that and hear my prayer. I know you are expecting them one day, the father of this family first. I don't know how Zinqumo went ahead of him. But I ask that you make the fire that will burn them very hot, MaDlamini will follow after him. Braai them in such a way that they will not be able to recognize each other, you can add spices if it will help."

Someone grabs my hand forcing me to open my eyes, it's MaDlamini, she's carrying the urn.

"You little shit, how dare you?" Her hand comes for me, I duck before it reaches my face. It's made her upset, this woman does not scare me one bit.

"Shiyiwe please, stop it." Ndaba is whispering beside me. I see his brother didn't tell him who I am. He wouldn't be stopping me if he knew that I am Shiyiwe Jele once.

“Ungizwa ngendaba unyoko,” (your mother doesn’t know me.)

I say to him and turn my anger back to MaDlamini.

“You are a sick twisted family, hiding behind cheddar cheese and big cars. You think you own this world? Your husband goes around paying people to rape young women, and wena you bury them for a living. Your son thought he was God’s gift to mankind, that bloody ashtray Zinqumo. Why didn’t you burn him instead? I would’ve flushed his ashes down the toilet.”

She’s crying, I couldn’t give a damn that she’s mourning.

“Zwangendaba... this girl is insulting my dead son and you are just standing there.” MaDlamini.

Her husband looks at me, he wants to say something but decides otherwise as he turns his eyes to Ndaba.

“Look what you did Bhedlindaba, I told you not to bring this woman here.” His father is chewing hot coals.

“Ndaba didn’t bring me here, no one did. Why are you yelling at him? Talk to me, Shiyiwe Jele. I’m the problem here.” He whips his cold stare to me, his hand goes up but stops midway as Ndaba stands in front of me.

“Let him slap me Ndaba,” I push him aside but he growls and pushes me back behind him.

“Stop with your stubbornness, I’m trying to protect you.” Ndaba.

I don’t need his protection, I made it this far without it.

“What about me, Bhedlindaba? Why are you not protecting your mother from this ugly thing?” She called me an ugly thing.

“Watch your mouth Masabata, my father was kind enough to give me a name. And my simple looks make me more beautiful than you, we don’t even know what you look like behind all that makeup. Is your husband sure he is not married to Velaphi?”

“That’s enough!” Ndaba.

This one thinks he can buy me with his soft voice and kind heart, fuck, I am a woman who has been trialled and tested. Not even the likes of Bhedlindaba can calm me down.

MaDlamini raises her hand to slap again, I grab it before she touches my face.

“I am not one of your maids, I was born and raised ekasi. I will slap that fake Queen Elizabeth out of you.” I shove her hand away, she stumbles and crashes on the pastor. The look on her face says she can’t believe what just happened.

My hand is grabbed, Ndaba must stop. I am not done with his family.

I slip away from his grip and approach his mother.

“Where are you going?” Ndaba.

“I forgot your brother,” I say, running to grab the urn with Mthombo’s ashes. These people owe me my life. I will keep Mthombo with me for now.

MaDlamini steps back when I near her, I was weak and vulnerable the day she drugged me. Not today

Satan. I grab the urn, she fights me wailing for her son. I'm not moved by her tears, I snatch the urn and turn to leave. Deep down, I'm scared that Zwangendaba will slap me back to Diepkloof.

"You rich people think you are better than everyone else, you have dark hearts and butter them with money so people think you are angels in disguise." I'm not done complaining, Ndaba is beside me looking defeated. He ignores his mother's cries, holds my hand, and leads me toward his car.

"Where the hell did my brother get you?" He's chuckling.

I don't answer him.

.

.

Sponsored by Slindokuhle Xulu

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Forty-six

ATHULE-

I wanted to be there for Ndaba today, but I couldn't leave my mother alone. She sent me back home when we got to the hospital. I gave myself the task of calling my father, he left work early. I'm expecting them home any minute from now.

His wife is fine, he mentioned something about her blood pressure when I spoke to him over the phone.

Lazing around the house is not how I foresaw this day turning out, especially after the funeral invitation. Ayanda is gallivanting around again, that child has a life outside her family.

"Are you dating Bhedlindaba Meyiwa?"

Damn, Sbonelo has no sense of timing. He's appearing from outside the kitchen, I didn't think he'd come home.

"What?" I pack away the last plate, and hang the dish towel on the edge of the sink.

"You heard me."

Argh! I don't need this really.

"I don't know what you're talking about." I don't get the part where this is his business, I would give him details if it had anything to with him.

"People talk Athule, everyone on the streets is talking about how they have seen you with that man.

"What people and which streets Sbonelo?"

"You know exactly what I'm talking about. You're all over social media with that guy, aren't you ashamed? Chasing a rich man, a blesser."

That's funny, I wonder what Ndaba would say when he hears that people older than him call him a blesser. He'd probably laugh with me.

"I don't have time for this," I walk to the living room.

Why is he talking to me after what he did? The nerve to even show his face.

"Do you know what they call you Athule?"

Oh great, he's following me.

"A gold digging whore." Sbonelo.

I might need to sit down for this, I show no interest on my face as I lean back on the sofa.

“Who is they Sbonelo? You keep saying they but why does it feel like these words are directly from you? And if there are people spreading rumours about me, then you must have started those rumours.”

He’s lying to me, I know how he operates. He can be a bitch when given a chance, he’s acting like one right now.

“I don’t need to start anything Athule, your loose character has put your name in people’s mouths. You are embarrassing us.” He says, hovering over my head.

“My life has nothing to do with you.”

He points a finger at me, “As long as you carry the Makhedama surname, it has everything to do with me. You listen to me and listen carefully. I will not let you tarnish our family name, if you want to ruin your reputation then go ahead but do not drag us down with you. If you really want to know what I’m capable of, carry on with Bhedlindaba.”

“What is wrong with you? I’m your sister, why do you hate me so much?”

“I don’t hate you, I just hate your actions that’s all. You see if you listen to me, and do what I say then you and I will get along very well. If you dare tell baba about this, I will tell him everything about Bhedlindaba. How he’s a gangster and kills people.” Sbonelo.

Ndaba is not a gangster, sure he dresses otherwise but that’s about it.

“You don’t know anything about him.” I defend the man I know zilch about and grab the book I was reading from the coffee table.

“If that helps you sleep at night, then go with it.” The big bully says.

“Okay, thank you.” I say, coming off untroubled. I’m not going to feed his ego.

He’s not walking away, I wonder what he’s looking at. The last I checked there is nothing fascinating about a girl reading a book. I look up and frown when I find him staring, his hands are on his hips.

“Where is Ma?” He’s always asking me about his mother. I shrug and continue reading my book, I’d do anything to hide in the fictional world right now. Worrying about real life problems never gets me anywhere.

“I’m talking to you Athule,” and who asked him to talk to me?

I look up from my book, and almost roll my eyes at the stare down.

“I don’t know,” I lie. His mother will tell him where she was when she gets back.

“Mmhh!” He gives me a peculiar look that sends chills down my spine.

Sbonelo gives me the creeps, he’s my brother but there’s something dark about him. I’m not comfortable with the look he’s currently giving me.

He continues to his bedroom, leaving me to my book. It’s a few minutes later, when I hear him loudly laughing. He’s on the phone I presume. My parents

are supposed to be home already, I think to myself as I check the time on my phone. Baba said they won't take long.

Sbonelo walks out of his room, and stands in the corridor. I can feel his sharp gaze on me, it forces me to lift my eyes. He's wearing boxer shorts, my heart sinks and not because of what he's wearing but the smirk on his face.

"I'm hungry," really?

I'm not going to give him the time of day.

"Did you hear what I said? I'm hungry."

Everything inside me shudders at how he's cutting his dubious eyes at me. I swallow the fear and stand to meet his height, he's taller but fuck it. I don't give a shit, respect goes both ways, I won't let him talk to me like he's taking a shit.

"You have two hands Sbonelo, there's food in the kitchen."

"Be careful how you talk to me, baba is not home. That means I'm the man of the house, and you will

service me.”

Wow! I am yet to hear a funnier joke.

“You are insane bhuti, service yomsunu. I am not your maid.” I retort, not willing to back down. I don’t know when he got to me, my cheek is burning from the slap he just gave me.

“Say that again,” he dares me as I rub my cheek.

“Service yomsunu,” I scream running towards the kitchen, he is behind me. I grab the broom behind the door and swing at him, it hits him on the face, but doesn’t do the damage I was expecting.

“Bitch!” He hisses, charging at me.

The broom meets his face this time, I swing at him over and over. For a while I think I’m winning but he grabs it, leaving me defenseless. He tosses it aside and goes for a hard slap, it pushes a scream out of me while pushing me against the kitchen counter.

He grips my air to forcefully pull me back, I turn around with a Kettle in hand and throw it at him. He howls, stepping back but recovers like the water

didn't burn him.

It didn't burn him because I was the last one to boil the water and that was an hour ago.

"Sbonelo, you're hurting me." I cry out as he grips my hair again, a few strands snap causing me to scream. The closest weapon I have right now are my teeth, I dig them on his arm.

"Fuck!" He barks, punching my back multiple times. Pain explodes on my spine, my screams should bring the neighbors knocking. I wrap my arms around his torso, locking his arms in, to stop him from hitting me.

I'm not as strong as I think. Sbonelo harshly throws me to the floor, I land hands first to prevent hitting my head on concrete down. My mother's Kettle is on the floor, cracked in two. I grab it and toss it at him, the bastard ducks. I have never physically fought with my brother before, he's stronger than me.

I'm on the floor, trying to gather up the strength he took from me, he's murdering me with two pairs of blazing eyes.

“You think you can fight me, huh? Get up and fight me Athule.” My brother wants to fight with a woman, wonders will never be extinct. His expression changes within a blink of an eye, something is on his mind. His Adam’s apple moves, people gulp when nerves kick in.

He’s leaning over, my stupid left brain convinces me that he wants to help me up. Instinct pushes me backwards, he grabs my ankle, and straddles me. My mind almost jumps out of my head, panic has never attacked me this much.

“What are you doing?” I scream, thrashing and pushing him off me. He’s too strong, his hand is on my throat, choking me.

I can’t get a word out.

I grab his cheeks and dig my nails in them, he screams but still has the power to backhand me.

“Might as well give it up Athule, you’re adopted anyway.” His words shock me to the core, I’m too busy fighting for my life to act on it. Sbonelo’s trying

to tear my top open, I'm not letting him win and he hates that I'm fighting him.

"Give it up!" He shouts in anger.

"No!" I shout back.

One minute he's struggling with me, and the next someone is pushing him off me.

It's Sizwile, he's on top of Sbonelo punching him relentlessly. Sbonelo flips them over, he's destroying my little brother's face with hard blows. They are of the same height, just like my father. But Sizwile has a body of a 17-year-old. I'm afraid for him, this man will kill him. Maybe I underestimated Sizwile, he just flipped Sbonelo over and punishes him with harsh sickening punches.

I realize my entire body is vibrating when I drag it up from the floor and press my back against the fridge.

"You sick bastard, I'm going to kill you." Sizwile roars, pounding Sbonelo's face.

Sbonelo grabs his waist and throws him off him. They are on their feet, Sbonelo is exhibiting bleeding

scars from the scratches I gave him, a cut lip and bleeding nose from Sizwile's punches.

"What the fuck is your problem?" Sbonelo is out of breath, how is he still talking?

"You think you're macho, let's see how you fight back now." A bleeding Sizwile pulls out a gun from his waist and points it at Sbonelo who is suddenly drenched in fear.

Where did this child get a gun?

"Are you going to kill your own brother?" Sbonelo asks, and tilts his head to the side to spit out saliva mixed with blood.

"How could you, Sbonelo? How could you do this to your sister?" Sizwile shouts.

"Shoot me, shoot me Sizwile..." Argh!

"Shut up, shut the fuck up. No one will ever touch my sister as long as I'm alive." Sizwile yells.

A tear falls from his eye, then it's gone.

"You want her too, don't you?" Sbonelo.

The sick bastard has a perverted look on his face.

“We can share her, no need to be greedy.”

My heart shatters, Sizwile allows his tears to fall down his face.

“You bastard!” Sizwile booms, pulling the trigger. The gunshot pierces through my ears, too loud that I cover them, screaming.

“You fucking idiot, you shot me.” Sbonelo yells, he is on the floor, crying over the bullet wound on his thigh.

“I’m going to kill you,” there’s a promise in Sizwile’s voice. He is not going to put the gun down, if he shoots Sbonelo, he will go to jail. I can’t have that, he’s only 17. I stand in front of him to stop him from pulling the trigger.

“Step aside, Athule.” His voice is soft, yet there is so much pain radiating in his eyes.

“You’re not a murderer Sizwile, don’t throw your future away for him.”

“He touched you sisi, he fucking touched you.” He yells, struggling to control his tears.

“Why are you so affected by this ntwana? She is not our sister, Athule was adopted.”

God, I want him to choke and die. He makes me sick to my stomach.

“You are lying, you’re only saying that to hurt me.” I snap.

My father loves me, I know he would have told me. Mphako Makhedama is my father.

“Your mother died when you were four, you were found next to her decaying body a week after her death. You don’t belong here Athule.” Sbonelo grunts. He is taking his anger out on me, as if I pulled the trigger.

This revelation suffocates me, I need some air... I need to get away from here. My heart is thudding harshly in my chest as I run out the house.

.

.

Sponsored by Maletsatsi Sunshine Mokhosi

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Forty-seven

ATHULE-

.

.

A car drives in before I make it to the gate, they are here. I want to be strong, and act like I'm okay but emotions take over me when my father hurries out the car, horror is evident on his face as he searches my teary eyes.

"Athule!" He runs to me. "What happened?"

There is urgency in the tone of his voice.

"It's Sbo... Sbonelo." I'm a crying mess, he pulls me into a brief tight hug.

"My son? What happened to my son?" Haibo! This mother! Am I not the one crying?

"He tried to rape me..." my voice is shaky, I'm crying the ugly cry. My father's face hardens, his wife is caught in shock.

"Are you insane? Your brother would never do that."

My mother disputes, she doesn't know her son.

Baba believes me, I see it in his eyes. I quickly narrate everything to them, from the human trafficking saga up to what happened minutes ago.

“Where is he?” He grunts, shaking with anger. My finger points toward the house, he speeds past me.

“Baba wait!” Penny calls, looking terrified and doubtful, it doesn't matter. The most important person believes me.

She gives me a cold one before following her husband. In a spilt second, I hear loud voices. There's an argument going on, I hope they are not yelling at Sizwile for shooting Sbonelo. I scurry in with an attempt to help my little brother, only to find my father strangling Sbonelo.

His hands are clasped around his neck, my mother is behind him trying to get him off her son. Sbonelo is struggling to breathe.

“Oh Somandla, he's going to kill my son.” His wife cries hysterically, she runs out the house screaming for all the neighbours to hear.

“Sizani, sizani. He’s killing my son.” (Help.)

He might just kill him, she’s mourning a man that’s not dead yet. Isn’t that bad luck?

“Where did you get that gun?” I ask Sizwile, concerned that he might go to jail not just for attempted murder but having an illegal firearm.

“I found it in his drawer, I saw him put it there the other day.” He’s talking about Sbonelo.

How many guns does he have?

“Hide it, I’m sure someone has called the police by now.” I tell him.

Sizwile hides the gun inside the bucket of rice, for a moment I think he will try to convince our father to stop, but he stands with his arms folded and watches.

“Aren’t you going to stop him?” I ask Sizwile, he snorts and shrugs. He doesn’t want to get involved. Our mother’s screams are getting louder, she’s pleading for people to save her son. I take a peek through the door, people have gathered outside.

A group of men run in the house, and pull baba from Sbonelo.

“My son!” That’s mom dragging Sbonelo into her arms. He’s choking, fighting to breathe.

“The ambulance is here,” a voice says in the crowded kitchen.

These people are lucky today, they have something to talk about over tea and shared cigarettes. My father is far from calming down, he’s glaring at Sbonelo.

The ambulance arrives, he’s put on a stretcher and wheeled out. Baba grabs his wife’s hand, stopping her from following the paramedics.

“If you walk out that door, don’t ever come back.” He murmurs.

He might as well have shoved a knife through her heart. This woman loves her son, she won’t be able to breathe without knowing if he’s okay.

She chooses her husband over her son, there she goes to the sitting room.

“All of you get out of my house,” baba snaps at the neighbours.

Why are they still here? The party is over.

We’re left alone, the ambulance is gone. We don’t know if the police will come, and someone will have to explain Sbonelo’s gunshot wound at the hospital. We’ll have to come up with an excuse, no way is Siizwile going to jail. I won’t allow it, even if I have to lie.

It’s suddenly so quiet in here, we’re waiting for my father to say something. He’s on the couch, pondering... lost in thought or thinking of a way out of this.

“Baba...” I break the ice, we won’t get anywhere with this silence.

His eyebrows build up into a frown, he side eyes me.

“Is it true that I was adopted?”

“That’s nonsense,” he snaps.

Okay! I didn’t expect that.

“But Sbonelo said my real mother died when I was four, he said...”

“He lied,” he interrupts harshly with a dismissive tone.

My mother clicks her tongue out of nowhere, she marches to her bedroom like someone called there. No one seems to notice this but me, seconds later she toddles back.

She’s carrying a blue shoe box, it’s old and worn out. I have seen it before, a few years back before I was rejected and abandoned to a foreign country. Baba would sit on his favourite chair in the middle of the night, with a bottle of beer, drinking his sorrows away I guess. I noticed how he always had that box with him.

“Penny?” His eyes pop open as he frantically stands from a chair.

“I’m tired of all this, you almost killed my son today.” She says, she looks pissed and scared and confused, I can’t really tell what’s going through her mind.

“Put that box back where you took it.” He demands softly, his voice has changed. It’s authoritative and a bit scary.

“No baba, I will not live with this...” She doesn’t finish talking because he grabs her arm and drags her to their bedroom, leaving us shocked and confused.

We hear a loud smack and a scream.

Why does this feel like déjà vu?

Sizwile attempts to run to the room but I grab his arm, he looks at me. His eyes are wet, he’s too emotional.

They are going at it hard, this must be the biggest fight they have ever had.

My mother respects that man with everything in her but today she is letting her mouth have its way, I know she will regret it after this.

This fight is about me, baba is against whatever it is they are arguing about and she is fighting him.

It must be about the adoption.

Sizwile storms out, I track his steps. I’m not staying

for this.

.

.

PENNY

She snapped when she saw Sbonelo bleeding and almost losing his life under his father's hand. It was all worth the keep, Mphako was worth the keep until he put his hands on her first born baby. She's ready to expose the same secret she's worked so hard to keep, this man has pissed her off. Maybe this marriage is not worth it.

She looks at the shoe box on the bed, it contains secrets that would change Athule's life. Her husband is standing next to the bed, he wants answers.

"Why did you bring out the box?" Mphako.

They swore never to tell Athule that she was adopted, that they would take the secret to their graves. Athule was never supposed to be isolated from the other kids, over the years, Mphako seemed

to forget and put his focus on building a life with his wife. When she suggested they send Athule to Botswana, because granny was lonely, he didn't protest.

Mphako met Athule when she was four, he came home one night and found a dirty, skinny girl sleeping on his couch. Penny's explanation was that the child's mother was a friend and she passed on.

Athule had become an orphan, it was her decision that they keep her.

"Why would you want to destroy that girl's life?" Mphako asks, he's still trying to make sense of what's really going on.

"Her time in this house has expired, it's time for her to go." What an answer.

Mphako regards her with a frown, it's not new that she can be unkind and insensitive but they raised Athule. She is their child as much as the others are, blood relation means nothing.

"Where the hell is she supposed to go?" His teeth are gritted because he is tired of shouting.

“Back to her mother,” shocking that she would utter such an abomination. Her mother is bones and skeleton inside a coffin. What the hell is this woman saying?

“Are you mad? Her mother died, she’s dead. That girl has no one.” His voice skyrockets as he throws his hands up in frustration.

“I lied okay, I lied.” Penny slips, it’s the anger that has her yelling like a mad woman.

Mphako remains calm because he is confused, what did she lie about?

“About what?” He asks, calmly.

“Her mother...” she needs to look away from his stare, it’s too intent and intimidating.

“Athule’s mother was my cousin.” She says.

“Which cousin?”

She exhales and turns her back to him, “Your mistress... Athule is your biological daughter.”

She hears him gasping behind her, then a loud thud follows. Mphako is on the ground, with his hand

tightly pressed to his chest. He's having a heart attack.

.

SHIYIWE-

"Fire me, Mthombo, fire me." Hee! The things we say when we're horny. Look at me today, carrying Mthombo in an urn and unemployed.

Seven years of unemployment should have taught me a lesson, but no... I never learn.

"Are you going to stand there or come in?" Ndaba's voice drags me out of my thinking zone.

It's my last day in this house, I have no idea where the road will lead me.

Maybe I will go back to my uncle's house, Mthombo was the stumbling block between us. Now that he is gone, there is absolutely no reason for me to be around the Meyiwases. I have had my fair share of bad luck with those people.

“You shouldn’t have done what you did today, putting your life at risk like that was very stupid.” Ndaba says, handing me a glass of water. He glances over at me with a ghost of a smile before snapping the fridge open.

“Maybe your presence gave me strength, you have saved my life many times. One more time wouldn’t have hurt.”

He raises his brows, and laughs it off. He’s making something using bread and... oh hell no, I hope that’s not for me.

“I’m not hungry,” I say just in case he plans on making two bowls of bread and nkomazi.”

“I didn’t ask if you were.” He says.

Ohho!

I leave him in the kitchen, taking the urn with me. I’m sure there’s a nice place I can put Mthombo’s ashes, Ndaba’s house is perfect. That way I can visit Mthombo whenever I miss him. There’s a small table next to the TV and a pot plant on it, I place the urn next to it.

“That’s not staying in my house,” Ndaba says from behind me. I turn to find him stuffing his face with food.

“I’m homeless,” he knows this.

“I’m not having ashes stay in my house,” he’s being stubborn for nothing.

He drags his long legs to the couch, I join him.

“You can’t let your parents have him, they will never let me visit.” I sound so worried.

Ndaba has no care whatsoever, I’m starting to worry. Why is he not bothered by the death of his brothers?

I watch him as he cleans his plate, he’s not going to lick that is he? He places the plate on the coffee table and sits back with his arms stretched out. His hand is touching my shoulder, it’s awkward.

“My mother was going to keep it, you didn’t have to snatch it from her.” This is his brother he’s talking about.

“Is there something you want to tell me?” I ask.

“Actually...” he faces me, sitting too close. I put the

urn on my lap to create space between us, it has him smirking. This man confuses me, Zwangendaba and others were distraught but this one is laid back and too composed.

“I want you to kill Velakithi.” He says.

I’m hearing voices, it must be the devil telling me to commit murder because he needs me by his side in hell.

“Shiyiwe!” Ndaba snaps his fingers, I blink and immediately recall his words. “Are you going to do it?”

“I’m not a murderer.” I tell him.

Killing a person is not like going to KFC and ordering streetwise two.

“I’m human Ndaba, if you want me to kill a cockroach, I can do it gladly. Millions of them if you ask, but not a person.” What does he take me for?

“I can teach you how to take a life, and not feel an ounce of guilt.” His voice is a seductive whisper, or I’m imagining things. But he’s leaning in too close,

this must be how he entices women and make them agree to his commands. His eyes are digging deep into my soul.

“Do it yourself? What are you saying to me? I’m not going to kill my uncle, he’s my blood.”

I can’t have blood on my hands, maybe of a chicken or goat yes but a whole human. God forbid.

The devilish smirk is back, Jesus take this demon away.

“Will it make it easy if I told you that he killed your parents and Mthombo?” Ndaba.

“Velakithi killed my parents?” He nods, as he takes my hand and starts massaging my palm. It’s true that the devil comes in many ways.

“How do you know?” I ask.

“Some of us aren’t just living Shiyiwe, simatasatasa. As’totobi, siya phusha.” (We are always busy.)

Oh Lord, I hope he’s not about to go Kasi language on me. I’m familiar with it but his can be too deep.

“Don’t ask me for proof, I need you to take my word

for it." He sounds like he's courting a girl, his charms have no timing whatsoever.

"Just get rid of him for me, I want him to die a slow painful death, make it hurt so bad that he will ask for his mother before breathing his last."

This is scary but I want to avenge my parents, a lot of things were revealed after their death. Things I'm not even sure are true, I'll need Ndaba's help to find out the truth.

"What do I have to do?"

His widening smirk sends unsettling chills down my spine, do I even know this man?

.

.

Sponsored by Thando Njoko...

My apologies for any typos and spelling errors, I'll have it fixed.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Forty-eight

SHIYIWE-

.

.

Life seems so lonely without Mthombo, he spoiled me rotten. I got used to his random phone calls, visits and the way he'd say "Nonyanda."

I miss his voice, how he touched me and made me feel like I mattered. I spent a few days with him but he'd grown on me so much, it makes me wonder if I will ever be able to rip him off my soul.

I'm rearranging my clothes when the door bell disturbs me, I'm not expecting anyone. Ndaba has his own keys, he would've told me if someone was coming over.

"Mabahlezi?" What is she doing here? I peek behind her, who knows? Maybe she brought her entire family to slaughter me.

"It's just me," she says waving two bottles of wine. "I just came to talk, I'm in need of company."

She lets herself in.

“Shouldn’t you be eating shrimp and sushi at the after tears?” Oops! That came out wrong.

She stops halfway to the kitchen, and continues walking without looking over at me.

My mouth is too much sometimes, really.

The fridge is her first stop after placing the wine on the counter, I leave her alone. She seems to know her way around here.

I’m on the couch when she walks in with a packet of crisps, and offers me some.

“I ate thanks.”

She nods and eats.

“Ndaba isn’t here, he didn’t say where he was going.” It’s awkward sitting with her.

“He sent me here actually, he thought you needed a companion.” Hlezi.

The only companion I need is Mthombo.

“I hope he didn’t drag you out of the funeral.” I respond.

She laughs, strange family, this. Zinqumo must come with a hefty insurance, life cover or whatever these people call it.

“Not at all, my mother was boring me with stories about Zee when he was a little boy.” They called him Zee? Sheesh!

“I’m sorry for what happened at the cemetery.” I’m not really sorry but what can I say, the lady has come to keep me company.

“I don’t want to talk about that,” she dismisses me.

I don’t mind, it’s not like I want to talk about her family anyway.

We’re caught in silence, the uncomfortable kind.

“Did my father really try to...” Hlezi stops, sighs and clears her throat.

“I don’t want to talk about it.” I give her a taste of her own medicine.

The silence again.

This is awkward, why did Ndaba think I’d need his sister to keep me company? She’s rich and I’m...

well... yeah, what do the rich and poor talk about? I want to talk about my ex school mate who's having her 4th child before 30 and Hlezi might want to talk about current affairs, the whether and what Cyril had for breakfast.

"I brought wine!" Hlezi.

Okay, we can talk about wine, I'm not a drinker but a taste won't hurt. She looks at me expectedly, I nod. I don't know for what but I'm nodding. Anything to numb whatever I'm feeling.

She hurries to the kitchen and comes back with two glasses and one bottle of wine, she looks more at home now. Must be the thought of drinking wine. She fills our glasses.

"To life," she clicks my glass with hers and gulps down the entire thing. I haven't even taken the second sip and she is filling her glass again.

"If you want to numb the pain, you have to drink up. You'll thank me later," she laughs and fills my glass to the brim.

She's a drinker this woman.

“I didn’t know how much you loved my brother until today, what you did to my parents should be put in the history book.”

I thought she’d hate me for that.

“Love?” I don’t know if it’s safe to use that word.

“Please, no girl would do what you did for a man they don’t love. You went against your potential in laws.”

She’s enjoying this and really going hard on that wine. Third glass already.

“He had asked me to marry him the day he was abducted and I rejected him.” I’m not going to cry.

“You did good wena, marriage is not as fancy as people think.” She says.

I sense trouble in paradise, I don’t even want to ask.

“I believe he would’ve made a good husband, he was a good lover even though it lasted for five minutes.”

My heart cracks at how I’ve lost out on the greatest man I have ever known.

“That was Mthombo, he loved hard. He did love you, you know that right?” Her words are starting to slur,

she's getting tipsy.

"I know, he told me and showed it. Sometimes it scared me because it felt too good to be true."

Talking about him makes my heart heavy, it's pounding in my chest.

"He liked making me sit on his lap, it made me nervous. I think he noticed because I'd start stammering and saying things no human should say. He didn't care that I'm not normal, he fell in love with a crazy girl from ekasi."

"And you loved him too."

I shrug, what is love?

"Did you have bad experiences with love in the past?" Hlezi questions.

I nod.

"You stopped believing in love, or built a wall around your heart. Sweetie, you fell in love with Mthombo but couldn't see it because of the men who have hurt you before."

They say drunk people tell the truth, maybe I loved

him. Maybe that's why I'm struggling to accept that he's gone.

"I miss him so much," the wine must be making me cry.

"I miss pushing his wheelchair and sitting on his lap. We only had sex once, I was looking forward to many more of those. He didn't even reach his orgasm, I'm such a bad lover."

Mthombo must be disappointed wherever he is.

I down the second glass of wine, it's making me feel tingly. It feels like I'm floating, it's a nice feeling. Hlezi laughs when I make a sour face.

She fills my glass and says, "We are going to need more wine. It's a good thing Ndaba has more hidden somewhere here." She stands, I guess she's getting the second glass. This one is not even empty yet.

.

.

BHEDLINDABA -

He arrives with Mikhulu tailing behind him, they just came from a meeting with the players.

“Mthombo!” His heart almost stops when he hears Shiysiwe drunkenly take his brother’s name, her eyes are on him and that makes him frown in confusion.

“You can walk? And you grew your beard?” She is touching his face, her body pressed against his.

“Why are you wearing this ugly outfit?” She cracks up in laughter.

Shiysiwe?” He says, it’s more of a question.

She has to stand on her tippy-toes to reach his neck, her arms curl around it. She tightly holds on to him, and starts crying like a widow.

“That big headed brother of yours said you died, he even had you cremated.” Shiysiwe says.

Ndaba knows that she’s talking about him. He looks at Mikhulu who points at the glass in her hand. He asked Hlezi to keep her company not bring the South African Brewery to his house.

“What’s that?”

“Nothing,” she hides the glass with a giggle escaping her mouth.

“You’re drinking?” It’s not a good sight.

Shiyiwe shrugs, “It’s just wine.”

“You just said it’s nothing.” He’s looking down at her with angry eyes.

“Hlezi!” He shouts, walking past Shiyiwe.

“Mthombo wait.” She can’t even talk properly or take a sober step.

Ndaba ignores her, his fight is with his sister. That one drinks like a fish, it’s almost a hobby to her. He can’t let Shiyiwe take that path, he thinks she’s his responsibility.

“Hey you’re home,” Hlezi’s meeting him from one of the rooms. She doesn’t look as drunk as Shiyiwe, she can handle her alcohol.

“What did I say about drinking in my house?” That’s not what he wants to ask.

“Bhuti...” she’s older but this man acts more like a big brother, it’s always been like that.

“You made her drink?” He asks with a frown dancing on his face.

“It’s just harmless wine, relax.” Mabahlezi.

“Listen here, if you want to drink your life away then go ahead but keep this girl out of it.” Ndaba.

“This girl is a 27 year-old woman.” Hlezi retorts.

This is pointless, he’s talking to a drunk a woman.
What will he reason with her?

He grabs the glass of wine from a giggling Shiysiwe and rushes to the kitchen to pour it down the sink.

Mabahlezi’s jaw drops as her brother empties two bottles in the sink.

“That was expensive wine bhuti.” His expensive wine.

Ndaba refuses her a glance mostly because Mikhuli is behind him wanting to talk in private. They leave the ladies giggling in the kitchen.

“What is it?” He asks, strolling into the lounge. Mikhulu shuts the door and watches Ndaba take up his place on the black leather couch, he leans over the armrest and places his elbows on it.

“Hade ntwana, I know this is none of my business.” Mikhulu says. “I’ve been observing you with umaShishi, you seem to be getting attached to her.”

Ndaba’s brows knit in a frown as confusion etches on his face.

“What are you talking about?”

He knows what he’s talking about, perhaps he wants to see if Mikhulu will repeat his words.

“You seem to be forgetting the plan, she is not yours bozza.”

“I dare you to repeat what you’re saying to me,” Ndaba exclaims, anger evident in his eyes and voice daring him to continue.

He gets up from the couch, eyes preying Mikhulu.

“Hade ntwanas, I don’t mean to cross my limits. But I’m looking out for you, we both know how this is

going to end. Don't be caught in this crazy web." Mikhulu declares, ignoring the stare down from Ndaba.

"You are seeing things skhova. I know my place and I damn well know where my heart lies. It's with Athule." He snaps.

Shame visits Mikhulu, however the man refuses to drop his gaze. A good soldier that never blinks lest he misses an enemy.

"Where is MaThulz? Huh? I don't see you running after her, you're all over Shimza like fries on hot oil."

This one is crazy, Ndaba doesn't see it like that, maybe there are confusing feelings he's harboring but that can be sorted. He just needs to stay away from Shiysiwe, it won't be easy though with this new mission in progress.

"I don't recall requesting an advisor roto, your job is to do what I tell you, and mind your damn business." Basically.

"Hade ntwanas, it will never happen again." Mikhulu.

His clamped jaw is visible enough for Ndaba to see, this boss knows how hard headed Mikhulu is. He hates being told what to do.

“Vaya saan,” Ndaba waves a dismissive hand before perching himself back in the seat.

Mikhulu walks out with his hands raised, it’s an arrogant walk but Ndaba doesn’t call him out on it.

He shuts his eyes and takes a deep breath, maybe Mikhulu is right. Maybe he’s starting to forget Athule and focusing more on Shiyiwe. His plan of pursuing Athule has come to a halt, things changed in the blink of an eye.

Someone is unbuttoning his shirt, his broad chest is revealed. He grabs their wrists and flicks his eyes open. There’s a frown on his face, this girl is too drunk.

I need you Mthombo,” she steals a kiss, Ndaba leans back and jumps to his feet. But Shiyiwe won’t let go, she’s too clingy.

“You’re drunk,” he’s trying to politely push her off him without hurting her.

“I’m not.” That laugh says otherwise. “I had a sip... no two sips.”

She staggers back, he catches her before she hits the ground.

“It was more than two sips... I think I had five glasses.” Her eyes lag as she tries to look up at him, he can tell she’s not in a rational state. Shiysiwe goes back to attempting to undress him.

“I need you Mthombo, please... fuck me.” She’s clearly lost her grip on logic, asking this of him and confusingly calling him Mthombo.

“What?” It’s a whisper, a pucker grows between his eyebrows.

“I said please fu...”

“I heard what you said.” He hisses.

Ndaba is frustrated, he roughly grabs her biceps and shoots her a cold glare.

“Don’t use that word with me. You’re a mess, why did

you drink?" He violently shakes her then slightly shoves her aside.

Shiyiwe tumbles and falls on the couch, laughing like a hyena. He's not staying for this.

"But I need you, don't you find me attractive anymore?" There are tears in her voice.

This is Hlezi's fault, clearly this girl has never touched a bottle in her life. How much did she drink? He hears her seductively giggling behind him, sounds like something from a porn movie. Ndaba side eyes her, she's stripped naked and rolling her hips like a stripper. Now he knows she can't dance to save her life. He wants to slap her back to her senses, but he can't. He's always been gentle with her.

Disappointment is what he feels for her, she's not in her senses but still... this is absurd.

With a tongue click, Ndaba leaves the room. He doesn't know where he's headed, but it's out the door.

Hlezi must be around the house, he's not sure after that mini scolding he gave her.

He gets in the car and slams the door, his feelings were already confusing him. Now this had to happen, it can't be what he thinks it is. Maybe he's being tempted like Jesus, it angers him to the last degree.

Ndaba clicks his tongue as he searches for his phone in his pocket. Her number is the first to appear when he opens his contact list. He needs to hear her voice, so what if they just met? So what if they are not officially-official? He wants her to be his and it's going to happen.

Athule's phone is ringing, it frustrates him that she is not answering. He could leave a message but he might type the wrong thing with how busy his mind is.

Shiyiwe keeps flashing in his eyes, her nakedness, her seductive voice and her drunken state.

"Fuck this shit," he spits and dashes out of the car. He's never walked this fast before, he finds her fast asleep on the couch. She's naked as the day she

was born.

"Hey," he nudges her shoulder with his leg. She doesn't move.

"Hey wake up," he pushes harder.

"Mmh mmh, let me sleep." That's her, she's still alive.

Ndaba clenches his teeth, he is growing angrier. He frowns as he marches to the bathroom, as he gets there he opens water in the shower, and strides back to the lounge.

He scoops Shiysiwe up and heads back to the bathroom, she's fast asleep but that doesn't stop him from forcing her to stand under the cold shower.

It takes a second for her to scream when the cold water touches her body.

"It's cold!" she screams, trying to jump out. Ndaba holds her in place. He's getting himself wet .

Her eyes are no longer lagging, she seems to be seeing him clearly. Confusion takes over, she wipes the water raining down her face, it's blinding her.

"The water is cold Ndaba," she shouts. He doesn't

say anything.

“Please, Bhedlindaba.”

Silence! Her cries are falling on deaf ears or the wrong ears in her case. He is giving her a black stare, expecting her to remember what she did. Shiyiwe gives up fighting him, her body quivers under the cold water.

Her surrender doesn’t move him though, Ndaba takes his time before closing the tap.

“Get out!” he says coldly. Shiyiwe looks up at him, clearly shocked by his actions. What’s puzzling is that his demeanor is calm. He steps back, hands in his pockets and regards her with a frown.

“Here, cover yourself.” He roughly throws a towel at her, she wraps it around her naked body. He can tell she’s not yet sober, her hands are fidgety and eyes bloodshot.

Ndaba takes her up in his arms, and strolls to the back yard.

“Where are we going?” Asks a shivering Shiyiwe, a

waste of breath really because she gets no answer. She has more questions that won't be answered.

He puts her down by the pool side, the sun is out and hot and enough to comfort her cold body. Just as she shuts her eyes, enjoying the heat, a violent cold splash takes that away from her.

She jumps and screams, shooting her eyes open. He's spraying her with a hosepipe, the look on his face stops her from complaining.

"I'm sorry, Ndaba." She has to project her voice for him to hear. He's not even there, he doesn't look affected by the apology or the loud cry.

"I said I'm sorry, I thought you were him. I'm sorry, just stop." Her hands are stretched forward, an attempt to block the water from splashing her body.

Seeing that her pleas have failed her, she drops down on all fours, palms flat on the wet ground.

"Get up!" Ndaba shouts, spraying more water on her.

"I'm tired," she shouts back.

"Get the fuck up Shiyiwe!" He yells.

She shakes her head.

"I said I'm sorry, I'm sorry Ndaba. I will never drink again, I swear. I'll only drink Oros from today, just stop." Her desperate apology seems to be doing something to him, his frown deepens. He drops the hosepipe and of course the tongue click has to be present.

Ndaba walks back to the house without looking back or the sides.

He goes to his room and changes into clean clothes, he's taking his time, maybe he's trying to clear his mind. Mthombo trusted him with the girl out there, tempting him like that pissed him off. He doesn't need to be confused further than he already is.

It's five minutes later when he decides to check on her, she should be in the house by now.

He finds her fast asleep on the green lawn, she better be sober as fuck when she wakes up. Shiyiwe is in his arms again, he takes her to the guest bedroom. Disposes of the wet towel and puts her in

bed, he covers her body with a blanket and stands on her bedside with arms folded on his chest.

She stirs a little and mumbles something vague.

“Don’t lose hope yet, I’ll never dim your lights.” He mumbles under his breath.

.

.

Sponsored by Doh Ndawo...

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Forty-nine

ATHULE-

.

.

We took a taxi to South Gate, maybe it was a bad idea. We left the parents alone, anything might happen. I’m not saying my father would harm his wife, but that’s just my theory. Humans are unpredictable, anything can happen during a heated argument. When love and war meet, a disaster is

birthed.

I want to care and worry about them, I would if I didn't have a little brother to protect. If ever the police do come for him, I'm ready to smuggle him out of the country. I don't know how neither do I have connections, all I know is that I will protect this boy with my life.

Ndaba is not far from where we are, he lives in one of the high gated neighbourhoods in DiepKloof Extension.

There are missed calls from him as usual, my mother has tried to call as well. I won't call her back, that house is too toxic, I need a break.

I call Ndaba, and tell him where I am. He drops the call without saying anything.

I'm supposed to guess if he's coming or not.

My brother and I have been sitting in silence, he's playing with his ice cream that's now melted. I never let food go to waste.

We should be talking about what happened but none

of us seem to be ready. He's upset, I'm terrified.

"Do you think they are still at it?" Oh! I guess he's ready to talk.

"I don't want to think about them, I don't even know if I want to go back home today."

He looks up with a puckered brow, "Where will you go?"

"No idea, I don't feel safe there anymore."

"But baba will always protect you."

He doesn't get it, our father is there but he's missed a lot in his presence. I'm afraid that one day I will leave the house a corpse.

"I want to move out, I'm sure there are rooms I can rent somewhere. I could get a shack for R500, it's not bad for a starter." I never thought this far about moving, but it's time.

"Talk to dad and hear what he has to say." Sizwile suggests.

I'd take this advice if my father didn't agree to me moving to Botswana, maybe Sbonelo is right. I was

adopted.

“Do you think the police came?” Sizwile.

I hope not.

“I doubt it, try not to think about that. Sbonelo will never get you arrested, you are his little brother.” I don’t even know what I’m saying.

“And you’re his little sister but he...” he sighs and clenches his jaw.

It’s hard talking about it.

Saved by my phone ringing, it’s Ndaba.

“Come to Clicks,” Somebody shoot me for wanting this man.

“I’m coming.” Why not?

I owe him an apology for missing the funeral and a ‘thank you’ for transporting my mother to the hospital.

“Don’t forget to use protection.” My brother says when I tell him I’m meeting someone, he’s already concluded that it’s a man. His statement brings me

into a moment of shock, there's a smirk playing on the corner of his mouth.

"Sizwile?" I'm beyond dazed, he finally lets the chuckle out. I don't think he should be saying that to me, he's a boy. Not just that, but my brother.

"Scrutinise sis wami," and with that he walks away. No goodbye whatsoever.

Weaving my way through the crowds, thoughts of Ndaba fill my head. He seems to just pop by lately, invading my mind without permission. It happens mostly when I'm lying in bed at night.

Locating Clicks is not a mission, I spot him standing outside. A small smile stretches his lips when our eyes meet. I can't help but wonder if his heart is doing what my heart is doing.

My feet are disinclined as I near him, my heart is drumming its way to my throat.

I smile, there's something about this man that makes my stomach turn.

He's walking towards me, hands in his pockets.

There's a bit of arrogance in his walk as well, people literally make way for him to pass, careful not to touch him. It strikes me that he's a famous somebody.

"Sthandwa sami!"

I know this voice that just distracted me, I turn around and Xolani is behind me with a smile and a box of Romans pizza.

"What are you doing here?" I'm not happy about this.

"Shopping."

"Oh!" I say, I'm really not interested.

He takes a step forward with his arm outstretched and I see a hug coming, I move back and bump into someone. I instantly turn, to find Ndaba. I'm engulfed in an unquenchable kiss in the blink of an eye. I'm baffled for a second but my lips follow his lead.

My arms willingly fly to his neck, he has me moaning softly. It feels like it's just the two of us here, I'm

hypnotized by his kiss and his scent, it has me feeling like I'm high on crack. I feel him smile against my lips.

Slowly, he pulls back leaving me breathless and yearning for more. This is our first kiss.

My eyes are still closed as I feel his forehead press against mine after a soft light peck on my nose and forehead, and a lingering one on my lips.

I open them and smile at the sight of his face, suddenly I become nervous and shy.

"Hi." He whispers softly, his face close enough to taste my lips again.

"Hi." I'm timid.

There are whispers and stares and tongue clicks but... whatever... life is fucked up anyway. Why not enjoy the little nice things in it.

Suddenly I remember that Xolani is standing behind me. Ehh! He's gone. Maybe this will give him the message I wanted to give him.

“Msomi...” Call an African man by his clan names or surname and he will give you all of his father’s cows. The grin on his face is nice, I’m happy to see he has all teeth in their place. I can confidently repeat Jennifer Hudson’s words the first time she saw her husband, ‘What a beautiful black man.’

“Thandolwami...” and just like that, my heart nudges me before flipping over.

“Won’t you greet me, ntwana?”

I’ve heard this ntwana before.

“Greet me phela ntwana!”

Men are dangerous species. Look at me melting like ice cream on a hot day, he didn’t do much but call me ntwana.

“I thought I did.”

What was that surname calling about? I wasted my energy impressing him. His eyes are intently glancing into mine, ploughing into my soul, and making me feel giddy. In an instant, his arm is around my waist.

He's about to kiss me in public... again, I was caught off guard the first time, but I'm not big on public display of affection. Everyone is a Leon Shuster these days.

Ndaba slowly licks his bottom lip, anticipating a kiss. This is when we call the heavens to come and rescue me. I can't move, even when my brain and shyness remind me that I should lift my legs.

Loud giggles snaps me out of the trance. Sheesh! We're in a crowded space.

"We're in public Ndaba." I hope I don't look as uncomfortable as I feel.

"So, it's nothing they have never seen before." The fact that he has the audacity to say that baffles me, the next thing I'll be trending again in those ugly Facebook memes.

What have I gotten myself into?"

"You're doing things to me, Athule. Are you purposely driving me insane? It's working if you're wondering." Now he has this stupid grin on his face.

“Excuse me, is this man troubling you?”

And then? Who is this man?

Confusion hits me across the face, I don’t know if I have been giving the impression that I’m being harassed. Ndaba does not look offended, he’s staring at the man who is staring back with a blank expression.

“I..”

“Hey, you don’t have to be afraid. You can tell me if this man is troubling you and I will call the police.”

The what, now? Do I look like I want this man behind bars? Ndaba tightens an arm around my waist, more like claiming his territory. Why is he not saying anything to defend himself?

“No, don’t call the police.” I can’t believe he’s dialling them, the man looks at me like I’m losing my marbles when I grab his phone and lock it. I have had enough drama today.

“Hey, you don’t have to be afraid of him. Anyone

around here can see he comes across as a serial killer, just say the word sisi and I will gather a mob and we'll deal with him accordingly."

Oh Jesus! Come take me now, the second coming will find me in heaven.

"Bhuti... I know him. Please don't arrange anything, don't call the police either." I'm standing in front of him with Ndaba behind me, basically shielding him. How am I fighting his battles when he's not saying anything?

The man bursts into laughter, I don't understand what is going on.

"You were right, she's the one." His eyes are on Ndaba, I whip my head up to see the idiot stupidly grinning at me like a child.

"What's going on?" He doesn't answer me, he's bumping shoulders with the man who was so bent on taking him to jail just minutes ago. The betrayal.

"This is Dumi, my uncle." Ndaba introduces.

These two think I'm a takalani, playing such a trick

on me. I am so embarrassed, but more than that I'm upset with this one who has his arm around my shoulder.

"That was a good one," I'm talking about the joke, my hands are still trembling.

"I have to go, it was nice meeting you sisi." Dumi says.

He doesn't wait for our goodbyes, he disappears into the crowd.

"What do you want to do?" Ndaba.

"Anything that you want to do." I say.

His eyes flash with something seductive, he's licking his lips. It's not supposed to be making me shiver and tingly down there.

"Are you sure you want to do what I want to do?" His lips brush against mine, this man and PDA will be the death of me. Sex is definitely on his mind.

"Except that," I protest and move away from his arms.

He laughs, and intertwines my fingers with his. We're

moving fast, too fast might I add. But hey, I'm living for me now. I'm going to jump for this man and hope he catches me.

.

.

I was kidnapped by a Zulu man who drives a G Wagon and dresses like a pantsula dancer. This is what I plan on telling my father when I get home with the hopes that he will address the matter with my mother and come to a conclusion that I don't deserve a punishment because I was taken against my will.

It's after 5pm, we're on the road and there's a little boy sleeping on the back seat. We spent 2 hours at South Gate, when we came out, Dumi was waiting outside the car with the boy.

"Isn't he too big for a car seat?"

I wanted to ask when Ndaba strapped him on a seat.

"Sometimes you have to strap them so they don't

cause chaos." I don't know what he means by that.

"Whose child is he?"

"He's my brother," he says not looking at me.

I get the feeling he doesn't want to dwell much on this issue, I look at him and the furrowed brows. He's thinking about something, it's easy to tell with how he's chewing the corner of his lower lip.

"How was the funeral?" I place my hand on his lap, he steals a look and smiles with no teeth in sight.

"I missed it, but it went okay."

"You missed your brothers' funeral?"

He left me at home saying he was going to a funeral.

"Yeah, it's a long story. I'll explain later."

His mood is different, he's not the playful Ndaba I was with at Sought Gate.

"Where are we going? You passed Riverlea." Where is this man taking me?

"I want to drop this boy home," he answers.

He must be talking about his parent's house. I could protest and demand that he takes me home, but I'm okay here with him. The stress in that house will kill me.

My grandmother once advised me that you don't tell the man you're dating about your family problems, he will use it against you one day.

I don't care right now, I don't have friends to confide in. Ndaba is the closest thing I have to a friend, for now we are friends who kiss.

.

.

We are in the North of Johannesburg, outside a mansion I suppose.

"Wait here," the last time he said this, I got caught in a shooting. This place looks safe, I won't protest.

The kid he's helping out of the car hasn't said a word since he woke up, strange for a child his age. They are always eager and curious. A man in a suit walks out the house just as Ndaba puts him down, it's his

father.

“Who is this?” He asks, curiously.

“The kid you made with your son’s wife,” Ndaba says, slamming an envelope on his father’s chest.

My jaw drops.

.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

It was out of embarrassment that I pretended to have fallen asleep, I prayed for the ground to open up and swallow me while laying on that wet grass. I wasn’t fully sobered up but I was awake enough to realise and conclude that I had messed up.

I heard him moving around the house while I slept, he’s the kind that bangs every drawer, plate or door. He doesn’t have to be upset to do that, maybe he’s partially deaf.

I laid under the sheets, trying to find a way to

apologise to him and Mthombo's ghost. When I failed to find the courage, I came to a decision to take my things and leave.

Relief is the first thing I felt when he banged the door closed, he was gone and given me a chance to leave without seeing his face.

Thank you for everything, the mission is still on.

That's the message I sent him before I dragged my suitcase out of his house and locked the door behind me. I don't see myself going back there.

What happened with Ndaba today can never happen again, I stooped lower than gum under a shoe. To say I am embarrassed would be an understatement. How will I ever face him? Moreover, I have betrayed Mthombo.

The taxi drops me off at my father's gate in Diepkloof, I'm here with my tail between my legs hoping that my uncle won't send me back. I have lies scribbled in my mind that will force him to make me stay.

The house is quiet, but the lights are on. The door is not locked, and it's so quiet in here. Mthandeni is probably in her room or out with friends, someone is in the house though. No way would they leave the door unlocked.

"Hello! Mtha." There's no answer.

I leave my luggage next to the sofa and head for Mthandeni's room. Before I knock, the door opens and Samson appears looking startled. He is shirtless and sweaty, his eyes are wide, it's as if he has seen a ghost.

"Where is my sister? What were you doing in there?"

He says nothing and attempts to run past me, I jump and grip his hand.

"Let me go," he snaps and escapes my grip. I don't run after him, I need to check on my sister.

"Mthandeni!" I run in, she's lying on her back completely out. My sister doesn't sleep naked, she never sleeps naked.

“Sweetie wake up,” I shake her body. She’s not moving.

Samson’s comes to mind, the look on his face when he opened the door. This compels me to check her nether regions, I place my hand there. She’s warm and wet, this is semen.

My armpits and vagina start sweating and itching, I think I just died. Samson has dared me, that son of a bitch.

.

.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Fifty

ATHULE-

.

.

He drove off without another word uttered to his father, I thought we had family drama. This tops it.

We’re home, his home. He insisted and I didn’t

protest, I want to act like the prodigal daughter for once. I want to take the crooked paths, get myself in the innocent kind of trouble. Party, have lots of sex and drink like people my age.

In my teenage years all I did was take care of my sick grandmother, and spent time wondering if Xolani really loved me.

“Are you hungry?” His hand is on my back helping me into the house.

“Yes,” I didn’t eat much at the mall.

“Am I going to taste your cookie for the first time?” I know what I heard.

I cross my arms, looking rather bored by his failed sarcasm.

“Cooking, that’s what I meant.” He rephrases, letting his mouth form a smile. His narrowed eyes are telling me a different story.

“Relax, I’ll try to control my sweet tooth.” He shows me all his adult teeth, this man will make me give it

up before three months.

"You are funny... not." I fake a laugh.

"I'll come help you, I just need to take a quick shower." He says and leaves me in the corridor, good thing I know my way around here.

Here I am in the kitchen, whipping something for somebody's son. He didn't say what he prefers so I'm doing my own thing. Laziness taught me to prepare quick meals.

Ndaba once took me to Kwa Mai-Mai that means pap won't be a problem.

I realise my phone battery has run low when it makes a loud noise, there's a charger near the microwave. Perhaps it's a good thing that the battery died, I need a break. I'm 23 and can do whatever the hell I want, Ayanda's life is more interesting than mine and she's only 15.

I'm removing particles of mealie meal from the stove when his scent hovers over me before his arms are

around me from behind.

“You smell better than the food,” his face is buried on my neck.

“Don’t lie,” I smell like sweat, I’ve been fighting battles the entire day.

He sighs and tightens his arms around me. He didn’t say much when I told him what happened at home.

“How many days ago did we meet?”

How am I supposed to know?

“No idea,” I say, honestly.

“When I first saw you, I didn’t think I’d ever see you standing in my kitchen. I didn’t think you’d actually give me a chance, maybe that’s why I came across as rude.”

Now he tells me.

“Why?”

“I don’t know, women like you don’t go for men like me.” I’m not sure I follow.

“Women like me?”

“Yes,” he turns me around. “You look like a girl any guy would want to wife, you’re simplistic, and beautiful. While I on the other hand am not exactly made of boyfriend material.”

I should not be laughing, it’s childish of me to do so. I happen to think men like him don’t go for women like me, I usually attract the likes of Xolani like any ordinary girl out there, not men who smell of Tom Ford, and drive cars that cost more than my father’s yearly income. I won’t tell him that, let him continue thinking I’m out of his league.

He’s opening my stew and dipping his nose inside, who does that?

“One of my players is in trouble, I have to check it out quickly. I won’t be long.” Is he telling me or trying to get me to agree to him leaving?

“Go ahead, I’m not going anywhere.”

“Does that mean you’ll be sleeping over?” His question.

I have thought that far, and I want to sleepover.

"If you come back before your food turns cold, I might just consider it." I say.

He smiles widely, kisses me without warning, and runs out yelling.

"Two minutes and it will be like I never left."

The next thing I hear is the door shutting closed.

.

.

BHEDLINDABA-

He thinks it's time he visits his future brother in-law as he would put it, first the human trafficking thing happened and he let it go. Now this?

"Y... you?" Sbonelo says, eyeing the entrance. He's not the only patient in this ward room but...

screaming would not help, these are patients who are here for treatment not to scream 'Vimba.'

"How did... what are you doing in here? Where is the nurse?"

Argh! Ndaba is annoyed by the questions and the stuttering, why does it matter how he got here and what brought him here? He's a man who does things by his own rules, no one tells him go and no one says come.

"How is the leg? Did they manage to remove the bullet?" He pulls a chair and sits with his legs crossed.

"You can't touch me in here, these people will be my witnesses."

"You think I'm here to cause more damage?" First he laughs at how Sbonelo is panicking then at his statement, he hasn't pulled a gun on him or threatened him with a knife. But he's convinced that he is here to harm him.

"I'm just here to talk about your sister, poor Athule, so young yet life is tossing her left, right and centre." He shakes his head in sympathy.

"Who's that fool who wants her? What's his name again? Emeka Nwadike, right?" Ndaba asks and answers himself.

Sbonelo is shocked for a second, it's gone the next. He blinks and checks if the other patients are still around.

"Fine guy daai man, fine guy. It's a shame his corpse will be transported to Nigeria tomorrow." He gives Sbonelo a saddened look.

"What happened to him?" Sbonelo.

That was stuttered from the first letter.

"Argh, life. You know how it swallows you and spews you out. It's like Johan and the fish. Do you believe Jonah's story?" Ndaba.

He waits for an answer and shakes his head when all he gets are bulging eyes.

"I don't believe it either, but his wife did. We're men, that mampara had gone to see his side chick and..." he stands and observes Sbonelo's face.

"I'm boring you, aren't I?" Ndaba.

Sbonelo says nothing, he's gulping, his eyes are wide.

"Tell me sbali, why did you have to do Athule like that? Do you think joining a fly-by-night street gang of

Nyaopes makes you a gangster?" Ndaba.

He's seen him on the streets, his streets where his name reigns above anyone else's, and his presence brings a lot to their shaking knees.

"What do you want with me?" Sbonelo finally speaks.

Ndaba leans in and locks eyes with him, "I want you to stop breathing."

It's a soft whisper that brings chills down Sbonelo's spine, if his eyes widen a smidgeon longer, they will snap out of their sockets.

Sbonelo stutters but nothing tangible leaves his mouth.

"Deal?" Ndaba calmly asks, he can be patient, but he can also be aggravated. He hates trouble, especially when they flood his life. He's not good at multitasking.

"If you kill me, my brother will go to jail. The entire neighbourhood knows he shot me," the fastest words ever spoken in the world.

Ndaba is troubled by the revelation, he takes a deep sigh and starts biting his thumb nail. His innocent face does not alert these patients, Sbonelo would scream and they'd think he is losing his mind.

"We'll wait for you to recover then," he pats his cheek.
"Get well soon sbali, see you around."

And with that, he exits the ward.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

My sister was drugged, those are my assumptions. She is not waking up, it's been a while since I called an ambulance. What does a black girl have to do to get some help in this country? I'm so close to calling them again, change my accent and address myself as Karen, maybe then they'd be here before Cinderella loses her bloody shoe.

Being black in this country, the world as a whole is a curse. We have to beg for the government to

acknowledge us, not that they'd hear and adhere to our pleas. Money is the only thing that can get us what we want, and I don't have a single penny. My sister might die, I'm not ready to bury another loved one.

Today I'm going to fight for her life, we are getting to the hospital come hell or high waters.

"Shiyiwe, where have you been?" Thank God Olwethu opened the door. She's the daughter of the woman who got me an interview at the Meyiwes, her father has a car. I'm hoping he will drive us to the hospital.

"Is your father home? My sister is not waking up, I need to take her to the hospital."

"He's not, sorry, but I can drive you there." I didn't know she can drive.

She brings the car out and follows me to the house, Mthandeni is not big bodied which makes it easier for us to carry her.

I dressed her in a dress before leaving the house to

get help, she's not wearing panties, I didn't want to remove any evidence.

Olwethu drives like a learner, her father must be teaching her. She takes the Aeroton route, we make it to Bara in ten minutes. We're told to stay put as they wheel Mthandeni away. She has a pulse, that's the only thing that's keeping me sane.

"Nurse," it's one of the nurses who wheeled her away.

She frowns but gives me her attention.

"I think she was raped, please check that." Tears fall as I deliver this news. The nurse nods before walking away.

"She is going to be okay," Olwethu says, hugging me.

At this point, I'll take anything. Even a hug from a stranger, I am not coping.

"I failed her, I should've been there to protect her." Fuck being strong, I'm human and I'm bloody weak right now. Olwethu lets go with a sigh leaving her mouth.

"I heard what you said to the nurse," she says.

My lower lip quivers, I dump my ass on one of the silver chairs.

"Samson was in her room when I came home, he was shirtless and sweating. He... he..." This can't be our fate, my sister and I. What wrong did we do to deserve this?

Her arms are tight around me, again.

"I heard he spent time in jail, his son too. They should've stayed behind bars." She says.

"Men like Samson are better off behind bars."

I miss Mthombo, he somehow made life easier for me.

"Don't worry, we're going to find him. He is going to pay for what he did." She said it but I'm promising it.

"I didn't know our lives would be hard after the death of our parents, we are orphans Olwethu. Our family will always use that to their advantage. The same people who promised to protect and help us the day we buried our parents, they have showed us their

true colours.”

“They all can’t be like that,” she says.

She doesn’t know the Jeles this one, I won’t even mention the Mbuyazis. We don’t know anyone from that side of the family, MaMbuyazi never spoke about her family. She was living for my father and that’s about it. She was a strict mother, to me actually. My friends were not allowed to visit me, I remember the first time Ntebo came to visit.

MaMbuyazi didn’t return her greeting, I figured she was being her usual self, hating on my friends.

“Shiyiwe Jele,” the nurse is back.

“Your sister was drugged, we also found evidence of forced penetration. We called the police, you will need to give a statement when they get here.”

My back is against the wall, my hands trembling. The lump on my throat is getting harder to ignore. I knew, or speculated but the confirmation is heart breaking.

“I’m sorry,” Olwethu mumbles, rubbing my shoulder.

"I will never forgive myself for this," my voice is shaky and brings tears down my face.

I'm so broken and out of strength.

"Tell me if you want to deal with him traditionally, I know people who know people." Olwethu.

Where has this girl been all my life?

"They can make his totolozi (penis) stop working?"

She whispers like no one else is supposed to hear.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Fifty-one

SHIYIWE

.

.

The police took my statement, I gave a description of Samson and told them where they would find him. There's a slight problem, I don't want them to find him just yet. So I took a risk and located them to

Protea Glen.

My stomach is in knots when Olwethu stops outside her father's house, I've been trialled and tested. I'm done, I won't be playing a puppet anymore.

"Thank you sisi, if I get anything I'll repay you for your kindness." I say to Olwethu as I dash out of her car.

"Tell me when you change your mind about the traditional healer, I'll send you his numbers."

Nah, I have seen too much witchcraft in my life.

I make a stop at the corner shop before going to the house.

I smell supper at my arrival, who is this woman standing behind the stove? She's looking at me.

"Hello sisi, can I help you?" Her smile is too bright.

"Who are you?"

"Gugu, I help around the house twice a week. Mr Jele hired me." It can't be Samson, he's unemployed.

I didn't expect to find anyone at home, especially

Velakithi and MG. Shouldn't he be in hiding after killing Mthombo? I know Ndaba is out for revenge, I've seen that man's rage. I wouldn't want to face it myself. They better kiss their lucky stars that I'll be the one taking them down.

"You're back." He's not asking, just an arrogant statement. He might as well be saying "I told you so."

This is it Shiyiwe, broken niece... take one. I crawl to his feet and drop my head on his lap, we never had this type of relationship. I hope he doesn't see through my acting.

"Uncle, I'm sorry. I was stupidly in love, Mthombo fooled me. He promised me heaven and earth but gave me hell instead. I was never happy with him, he was verbally abusive." Tears are on standby, they know when to come.

"I'm not going to fall for your lies Shiyiwe, why have you come back here?"

Why is he so smart?

"Because you are my family, I have nowhere else to

go. I don't have a job or a place to stay. You can't leave me out on the streets." This man better forgive me before I run out of tears, I didn't budget enough tears.

He exchanges a very suspicious look with his son, this is the part where I wish I could read minds.

"I'll do anything uncle, just don't throw me out please." I wrap my arms around his legs.

"I'm an orphan, my parents are gone. How am I going to survive the outside world alone? You loved me before, can't you love me again? I won't disappoint you this time."

He grimaces down at me and sighs as if I'm annoying him, I'm annoying myself. I despise grovelling.

"Fine, I'm giving you one more chance. And this favour you speak of, I want it as soon as possible." He says.

I get up, instantly regretting my words. There's no lust present on his face, he's not another Samson. It's not guaranteed though, these people are cut

from the same tree.

“What is it?” I ask, it’s not like I’m going to do it.

“I want Zwangendaba’s head”

Jizas! What am I? The angel of death?

These people see a sword when they see me, how am I going to behead that tall man? I’m not trying to find myself in hell, but they are so adamant in sending me there.

“I thought your war was with Mthombo, what did Zwangendaba do?” He hasn’t started, yet I’m already bored.

“I go way back with that old fucker,” he stands to look me in the eye, I guess.

“I knew him before I knew his son, we ate from the same tree.” Do I want to know what he means by that?

“Which fruit?” He frowns at my question.

“Are you going to get me his head or not?” The devil, this one.

“How am I going to do that?” It’s your head I want fool.

“You are a smart girl Shiyiwe, I’m sure you can think of something.” He pats my head and sits back down.

Yeah, I can think of something alright.

“Where’s Mtha?” I ask.

MG looks at me and shrugs, he’s so detached like we were never close. He works for his father, this idiot. These people don’t care about my sister, it’s dark outside. They should be looking for her.

Her room is my first stop, before I track my steps back to the kitchen, Gugu is still at it.

“I’m almost done sisi, you can dish up. I have to rush home before taxis finish.” She removes the apron and grabs her handbag from the chair by the window.

“Bye!” She says.

I’m glad she’s not staying.

Samson walks in through the same door, our eyes

clash. He's startled but quickly wipes it off with a headshake.

I have a knife in hand, I could plunge it in his stomach. Another option would be to question him, this man is big on lies. He would deny it point blank and make me look like a fool. I don't remove my eyes from him until he swiftly walks past me.

I realize I'm boiling with anger and have been holding my breath the entire time he was here, exercising my breathing is not helping. I'm weak, but I can't afford to show my weakness. Maybe when all of this is over.

I haven't seen Samson's family, he probably sent them to the rurals. He wouldn't dare do what he did with Samukelisiwe around.

Gezani walks in as I start dishing up, he looks as startled as Samson.

"Sistaz," he greets with a low voice and hurries to the lounge.

My presence seems to be giving them heart palpitations.

Four men are sitting in the lounge, all family. There is no reason for me to serve them water to wash their hands, I opt for a wet towel.

“Food is ready,” I’m peeking through the entrance between the corridor and kitchen.

They look at me, I say a silent prayer, and take a calm breath. They can’t see through me, can they?

“We’re going to eat here,” Velakithi says as if I don’t know that.

“Gezani and MG, come get your food.”

They grumble and complain.

“Get married if you want a woman to serve you, I’m not aunt Doris.” I leave them getting up.

Samson’s food is placed on top of the coffee table, I don’t want to make the mistake of touching him. I have to stop myself from gagging every time our eyes come in contact, this bastard knows I know. He’s not sure though, I can see it in his eyes.

I join them in the lounge with my plate, there is no other way to make it look like I am for this family,

than dining with them.

The fool Samson keeps looking at Mthandeni's closed bedroom door, his mind is restless. He's wondering if Mthandeni is in there. Let him wonder till his brain explodes.

I have never been capable of hate, this one will turn me into an evil person.

"Have you heard from Mthandeni?" Velakithi is only asking now?

It's fucking late in the night, she's a girl. He should have asked before filling his pot belly.

There's a sudden frown on Samson's face, he will go insane if he keeps wondering like Einstein.

"She texted me, her friend will drop her home." I say.

He nods.

I'm too tired to wash the dishes, I hope Gugu will come by tomorrow morning. I'm not really a TV person, but I join the family on the couch. I don't understand what's playing. Maybe it's that my mind

is replaying so many scenarios at the same time, it's giving me a terrible headache.

"What's wrong Ncane? You're sweating." Samson looks at me with a frown, his reply is a headshake.

"Don't you want to go out for some air? You're sweating." Velakithi suggests.

It's my turn to wonder, how did these people get along? The last I checked, Velakithi had thrown them out of the house.

"I'm fine, I must be getting the flu." Samson says, fanning himself with a cushion.

"I hear there's a flu bug going around, it will be sad if we all get it. I think we should go get vaccinated." They all look at me, I'm bullshitting them.

"I'm also feeling hot, maybe we should open the windows." That's Gezani, he stands and pushes the windows open.

Samson's breathing is starting to escalate, he slumps down on the couch and closes his eyes. His arms are tightly around his stomach.

“Ncane, please call Mthandeni. I ran out of airtime.”
His eyes pop open.

“Wh... what?” I hope he bit his tongue while stuttering.

“You were in her bed when I got home, maybe you know where she is.”

The silence I just created is heavy, all eyes turn to Samson. He tries to sit up and flinches, it looks like something is slicing his intestines.

“What are you saying Shiyiwe?” Velakithi.

This one must focus on breathing, instead of asking me nonsensical questions. I know he doesn’t care about my sister, it’s her money he’s after.

“When I got home this afternoon, Samson was in Mthandeni’s room. He drugged and raped my sister.” The lump is back, I can’t cry now. The mission is not complete.

“That’s a lie,” Samson shoots up to his feet but winces and falls to the floor, his arms are clutched around his potbelly. He’s groaning in agony.

“Samson,” the three seated men jump to check on

him. I will never understand men, they should be focusing on their own pain.

Velakithi is unbuttoning his shirt, I have to take a second look at him. Beads of sweat have covered his face, MG and Gezani are no different. The first pained groan comes from Gezani, he's always been a coward.

"Are you guys okay?" I ask, sitting back with my leg crossed over the other. They are on their knees, looking at me with desperation in their eyes.

"What did you do?" Velakithi grunts.

"Those are allegations, it's her word against mine." Samson denies that he molested my sister. I don't have time for this.

I saw the video on Mthandeni's phone, I know my cousin when I see him. Not only Samson but Gezani molested her as well, they took turns raping my baby. I hope the devil is preparing a place for them in hell.

"I'd be saving my breath if I were you, you have about

thirty minutes to live.”

Their eyes widen, looks like I just dropped a bomb on the mother fuckers.

“Shiyiwe... please call an ambulance. I don’t want to die.” MG communicates with me, I’m not even listening.

“If I call the ambulance, then you people won’t die. I wish I could mzala, I’m sorry.” Tears well up in his eyes, he bursts into sobs. Music to my ears.

“Why are you doing this?” Velakithi asks.

He is still strong or pretending to be strong. His eyes are filled with hate.

“You killed my parents.” I’m too calm, I should be flipping tables and throwing the world’s biggest tantrums.

“Shiyiwe... I didn’t. He was my brother... why would I kill him and his wife.”

“For the inheritance, you knew that Mthandeni would inherit everything. You knew about his accounts and investments.”

He flinches and bends over, “Lies.” He grunts.

“Stop lying to me, you son of a bitch. I don’t have time for your shit.” I want to scream, but I don’t have the strength.

“Fine, I killed him.” He explodes in anger. “I killed him.”

He’s crying now, this man will confuse you with his emotions.

“Why? What did he ever do to you?”

“I was bankrupt, I needed money to pay my debts but he wouldn’t give me. Phindafuthi had money, but he didn’t want to help his brother. That greedy bastard.”
Velakithi.

I didn’t understand the tears, it’s obvious that he is in pain.

“Okay.” I shrug my shoulders. I got the confession I needed.

“Okay? Is that all you’re going to say? We’re dying Shiysiwe, call an ambulance.” Velakithi barks, it’s weak and pathetic like him.

“You bitch... you poisoned us.” MG says, he just figured it out. He looks so sad tossing and turning in pain on the floor.

I grin a fake one, “Rat poison.”

They don’t look surprised.

“The Pakistan man was kind when he sold me the rat poison. ‘too much roto my sister. Kill them all, eeh.’ I told him that I planned on killing every rat and leaving no stone unturned. He even gave me R1 discount.”

“You are evil Shiysiwe, how could you do this to your family?” Samson has the guts to ask me nonsense.

I’m not going to answer him, he doesn’t deserve any answers from me.

“Looks like baby boy is out,” I point at Gezani with my head. Who knew he would be the first to kick the bucket? Samson tries to reach out to him but he’s too much in pain to stretch a muscle.

I hear the first pained scream from MG, he’s rolling on the floor. His face is pinched and teeth grinding.

Screams must be contagious, there goes Samson screaming as well.

I feel nothing as I watch them squirming in pure, terrorizing agony, they are laid on the floor in foetal positions, flinching and grimaces of pain on their faces. I put an overdose of the poison, it's slowly robbing them of oxygen and slicing their intestines.

“Mama ubaba ulala nami, ngicel’ ungelekelele, ungbophel ubaba, sengifana nomuntu oganile layikhaya.” I sing, unsure how the song came to mind.

This one is meant for Samson, and his son. What they did to my sister will always haunt me. Samson and MG have given up the ghost, they aren’t moving anymore. Three down, one to go. I stand over Velakithi and look down at him.

“Shiyiwe, I’m... sorry. Save me please.” The last man standing pleads, touching my feet. I’m disgusted by his touch.

“Don’t worry uncle, I’ll make sure to get you a good

coffin.”

He’s crying, loud and ugly.

“You’re so heartless, you are... not my niece.” His nails dig into my ankles as he growls in agony.

“You’re right, I’m a fucking king.” I return, I don’t get why my tears decide to show up. I wipe them and stand tall.

“The king is back, bow down bitch!” I say.

He groans and falls face down as I step back, I think he’s not breathing. I flip his body, he’s gone.

“Rest in eternal agony mgodoyi.”

City power is always asking us to save electricity and switch off the lights, I turn every light in the house off and lock the door on my way out with my suitcase.

It’s done. I send Ndaba the text.

.

.

Sponsored by Rethabile Mofokeng.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Fifty-two

BHEDLINDABA-

.

.

The two minutes he promised have long passed, his trip was really short as he had said. But duties called. He had to make a turn after the text he received from Shiyiwe. It was shocking, he knew she was capable, he'd seen her strength and resilience.

What he wasn't sure of was if she had the heart to take a life, stubbornness does not make up for courage, turns out when it comes to Shiyiwe it does.

Either she couldn't wait to do it, or something pushed her to the edge, he was yet to teach her the ins and outs of being a stone cold killer.

He cleaned up well nonetheless, the four Jeles will be added to South Africa's long list of missing persons.

“Ntwana!” This is becoming a habit, he’d have a beautiful endearment for her if he’d been this taken by a woman before.

“I heard your car coming and thought I should warm your food.” She says, setting the microwave to 60 seconds.

“I’m sorry.” He thinks she’s upset, hence the apology.

“For what?” She asks, she hasn’t turned to look at him.

“Not keeping my word,” he says.

“It’s okay Bhedlindaba, you had things to do. It’s not like you owe me an apology.”

She’s upset alright.

“Are you angry?” He asks.

“What gives you the impression that I am?”

Women are so good at speaking with actions just as they are champions at uttering, every appliance in this kitchen is bearing the cross for him.

“You’re taking your anger out on the poor spoons,

the microwave just warmed your lover's food, and this is the thanks it gets?" He's trying to make her laugh, it doesn't work.

"Lover!" Athule scoffs.

He'd ask what that scoff is about, but he's already on the bad boy list.

She walks to him with his plate and hands it to him, Ndaba places it on the counter. His hand grips hers before she walks away, he lifts her up and places her on the kitchen counter. Athule tries to jump off, he stops her by standing in between her thighs.

"Talk to me Athule," he pleads.

Her eyes won't meet his, but he chases them until she gives up, and locks eyes with him.

"What's wrong? I'm here now, it's not like I have been gone the entire day." He's digging for answers with his intent gaze, just in case she hesitates and decides not to tell him.

"Why didn't you answer your phone? I called you so many times Bhedlindaba."

Is that it? Women are complicated.

“Is that why you’re crying? Because I didn’t answer my phone?” He tilts his head to look at the eyes she’s trying to hide, Athule sniffs and drops her head. “I’m listening.”

He’s not getting pissed, his voice just delivered the words wrongly. Athule practises her shallow breathing, her eyes look into his again.

“My brother texted, he said my father had a mini heart attack. I called you several times Bhedlindaba, but you wouldn’t pick up. I wanted you to take me home, I wanted someone to be here for me. Why didn’t you answer your phone?”

This is not how he saw his evening with her turning out, she’s on his chest crying for a man who had a mini heart attack.

Maybe his heart is a little cold, he just can’t imagine himself crying because his father had a mini heart attack.

“Do you want me to take you home now?” His hands are on her cheeks, caressing them.

"He's in the hospital, I'll go see him tomorrow." She says.

It seems her emotions are settling down, she's sounding calmer than before.

"Are you sure? I can drop you home if you want." It's not what he wants, he is just being persistent for drama.

Athule shakes her head and hides her face on his shoulder, it must be the look he's giving her. He brings her face up and connects their lips, these kisses are getting serious and doing things to him.

Mostly they bring assurance, that this is the woman he wants. They haven't been through hell and back together like Shiyiwe, but she is it. She's the one for him if he decides to be corny and sappy.

She tastes like the future and everything he wants in life. She tastes like dreams and... and... onion?

Ndaba breaks the kiss with a frown playing on his face, this woman was eating raw onion. It's a crazy thought until the greek-salad on his plate stops his stupid thoughts.

She's still trying to recover from the kiss when he captures her lips again, it's deep, and passionate. His hands are all over her, exploring and wanting to slide under her clothes.

"Is that what you do in your kitchen? Disgusting."

Ndaba turns at the condemning voice, Athule jumps off the counter and stands behind him.

"MaOledi?" How did she get in? "This is my house, you don't just come without calling first. Why didn't I hear you knocking?"

"Do you know how many times I have called you? Why do you have a phone if you are not going to use it?" She eyes Athule with a glare, her face sours up like she overdosed on lemons before she got here.

The boy Ndaba dropped at their house is standing a few steps behind MaDlamini, he's in handcuffs.

"What happened MaOledi? Did he kill your husband?" He'd laugh if he were in the mood.

MaDlamini loses it and narrows her eyes at her son,

this boy is damn disrespectful.

"That's not funny Ndaba, why did you bring this animal to my house? He cut all my expensive couches with scissors, and broke all my china plates. Your father left the house, I don't even know where he went. He's not taking my calls."

She's lost her mind, yelling like she has never been cool, calm and collected in her life.

"That's sad, I was hoping he'd slaughter you and your husband in your sleep." Ndaba says.

"Is this your plan to destroy my marriage? Where did you get that fake DNA test? This animal is not your father's son."

"Your husband had an affair with Mthombo's wife, and Sikolethu is the result. He could be their love child, did you ask him about her? I have a feeling that you were the mistress who became the wife." He says, purposely riling her up. These people need to deal with their own shit, his plate is full.

"When did you become so disrespectful we ngane?" She's glaring, he's not a child that he'd fear a

condescending look from his mother.

"I'm not, if anything I respect you Masabata and your loving husband Zwangendaba. Even though you piss the shit out of me, and test my patience." This is what he calls respect?

"Life will never be kind to you, don't you know your parents are your god? If I start cursing you we-Bhedlindaba, you will never come right in life." She points a finger at him.

He's about to give her an answer, but Athule curls her hands around his bicep, he side eyes her, and looks back at his mother.

"You thinking you're a god is quite funny and narcissistic, is that why you deceive your children and control their lives?" He's not about to shut up, not even this one behind him can zip his mouth.

"What lies are you talking about?" MaDlamini asks nervously, she hasn't moved from the entrance.

Ndaba laughs with a shake of the head, "You knew about Zinzi and Zwangendaba didn't you? Yet you let that gold digging bitch marry my brother and pass

off her bastard child as his son.”

“That’s a lie...”

“You knew how much Mthombo loved and worshiped her, how much he wanted to be a father and you didn’t protect him from that witch. Again, you chose your husband. Better Mthombo than Zwangendaba, right?”

“Nothing of the sort happened, I knew noth...”

“You wanted to get her off your back, you weren’t strong enough to kill her and when she set her eyes on your son, you saw it as manna from heaven. Your son became a sacrifice, just so you can keep that old fool who doesn’t even love you.” He’s pouring it all out, letting it rain with no mercy.

Only this boy can bring his mother to tears, he sees through her.

“Congratulations Masabata, you are the world’s biggest fool.” He clasp his hands, stepping closer to her. MaDlamini takes a step back, eyes wide and watery. He’s not approaching her but the little boy.

"Why is he in cuffs? You could get arrested for this." Ndaba extends his hand out to her, he wants the key.

"This child is not coming home with me, take him back where you found him." MaDlamini says, wiping her tears away.

She should be giving him the key, not biting his head off.

"The keys MaOledi," he insists.

She sighs and digs into her handbag, Ndaba releases the child. He picks him up and heads outside.

"Bhedlindaba!" MaDlamini calls, running after him. She's baffled as he puts Sikolethu in her car and shuts the door.

"Take him back to his father, if you neglect this child I swear by morning, your husband's infidelity will be spread on all local newspapers before you can say good morning baba."

MaDlamini is trembling with anger, this must be the

shock of her life. This devil child never makes empty threats, he delivers and hits where it hurts the most. He joins Athule by the door and watches as MaDlamini drives out of his premises.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

The text I received from Ndaba has put me at ease, I was worried about Olwethu and the Pakistani man who sold me the rat poison. Ndaba said he will clean up, whatever he meant by that. I don't care how he does it, as long as I won't be facing the police, and long hours of interrogation.

Mthandeni is with me, I snuck her out of the hospital. There was no other choice. She's fast asleep, her head is resting on my shoulder. Hitch hiking is not safe, but I had no other choice. The next bus going to KZN will leave in the morning, I can't stay in Joburg till then.

The man giving us a ride has been nothing but kind, he bought us food when he made his first stop. He doesn't talk much, which is a good thing. I'm not in the mood for a conversation.

"We're almost in Durban, where is your destination?" He asks, looking at me through the rear view mirror.

"Ntuzuma," I say, rubbing Mthandeni's back.

They will take care of her there, maybe I will go back to Joburg to look for a job, or move to Durban. I think there are good opportunities there.

I give the man my address, he says he knows where this is. Apparently he lives a few houses from ours.

My eyes are heavy, we're in a stranger's car. Falling asleep would be stupid of me but I do anyway.

I'm woken up by a hand shaking my shoulder, I startle and sit up straight.

"We're here." The man says, pointing at the gate I'm familiar with. My eyes water, I don't want to cry. It's the thought of seeing my grandmother and having her comfort us.

“Sweetie wake up,” I whisper into Mthanden'i's ear. It takes a while but she finally comes to, her eyes are sunken.

“I'm cold,” she says, hugging her body.

“We're home now, I will make you some tea.”

The kind gentleman helps us with the bags, I didn't pack Mthanden'i's clothes. There was no time for that, she will wear mine until I get a job.

“Thank you so much bhuti, I don't have money on me. But we have chickens, you can come by tomorrow.”

He laughs in response, “I have enough chickens. Don't worry about having to pay me sisi, I'm glad I could help.”

I'd return the smile but I'm drained, I didn't know taking a life can be spiritually taxing.

“My name is Lithizwi Mndaweni.” He tells me, I haven't seen a smile on his face since he stopped for us back in Johannesburg.

“Shiyiwe Jele, she's my sister, Mthanden'i.”

“Pleasure meeting the Jele sisters,” he says, eyeing

Mthandeni worriedly.

He's probably wondering why she slept the entire trip, I'd explain if it had anything to do with him. I don't want to burden the man with my problems.

"Go in, so I can leave as well." It's nice of him to want to watch us till we're safely inside.

My arm is around Mthandeni, as we walk through the gate, the other pulling the suitcase. People this side sleep early, there is one room with the lights on. The door opens as we approach, and the first thing I see is a short woman toddling with a walking cane.

"Grandma?" I say, dazed by the fact that she is still awake. She is usually the first to go to bed.

"Gogo," Mthandeni runs into her arms. It hurts to hear her crying, she'll crush our fragile old lady if she continues.

"I had a bad feeling about you both, that's why I couldn't sleep." Grandma says.

If only she knew that her feeling is legit.

"We're home grandma, we're okay now." I say.

She sighs, it's of relief if I'm not mistaken.

"You two are sleeping with me in my room," sounds like an order.

She takes Mthandeni by the hand and guides her inside. Mthandeni looks back at me, she's checking if I'm coming too. I nod and gesture that she goes ahead, I won't leave her alone tonight.

This room is so warm and homey, Mthandeni takes a position in the middle of the bed and cuddles my grandmother. I will have to move her when she falls asleep, grandma is too old to be cuddled. We don't want her suffocating.

I can't seem to fall asleep, I keep seeing my uncles and their sons scattered on the floor. The image is haunting me, I feel dirty. My spirit is down, my heart won't stop drumming.

A message comes through, it's from the green App. Ndaba has sent me a picture.

“Oh my God.” I whisper inaudibly.

It’s a picture of Mthombo lying in a hospital bed.
What the hell is going on?

.

.

Sponsored by Rethabile Mofokeng.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Fifty-three

SHIYIWE-

.

.

I’m grinding my teeth, pacing up and down the dark living room. Ndaba’s phone has been ringing non-stop, he’s not answering. What changed between five minutes ago and now? So many questions are flying in my head, I need to know what’s going on before I die of a heart attack.

“Hello!” Oh thank God someone answered.

“Hi, can I talk to Ndaba please?”

The lady keeps quiet, I’m not up for this. I’ve had a long ass day.

“Hello, are you there?” I can’t believe she’s letting me speak so much.

“Shiyiwe, why are you calling at this time of the night? Is everything okay?” Who’s this, now?

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know he has an assistant now.” I’m annoyed by her dumb question. Yeah it’s stupid O’clock, so what? I didn’t ask him to send me a pic of Mthombo and challenge my nerves. Now I can’t sleep.

“It’s Athule, Ndaba is sleeping.”

Oh! It’s her.

“I know it’s late Athule and I’m sorry for my crazy timing, but this is an emergency. Please wake him up.”

She’s gone quiet on me again, she better be waking that man up. The wait is long, and making me anxious. Just when I escaped Joburg and its crazy

life, this happens. Fate is doing a number on me.

“Shiyiwe!” That’s Ndaba’s voice, he sounds like he was sleeping.

“Please explain that picture you sent, was that before or after he died?” My body collapses on the couch, my knees aren’t allowing me to stand any longer.

“I’m sorry Shiyiwe, his life was in danger. I had to keep it a secret.”

Yeyi, this man must never. What on God’s earth is happening?

“Keep what a secret?” I’m on the edge of the seat.

“Mthombo is alive.” He says.

My hands start trembling, my brain shuts down. It can’t be true, he’s lying to me.

“Bhedlindaba...” I run out of words, I’m shocked more than anything.

“You lied to me?”

“I had to...”

“I don’t care,” I cut in. “Do you know the emotional damage you have caused? Do you even care what I went through? How can you be so cruel?”

“I had to keep him safe and this was the only way.” Does this man hear himself?

“Safe from me?” I ask.

He must be joking or the gods have lost their marbles.

“No, from his enemies. You know what happened to him Shiyiwe, he was abducted by your uncle. You were buried underground but finding you was much easier than finding him.”

I hate him for what he’s saying to me. I want to scream at him and tell him to go to hell. How could he do this to me?

“Is Mthombo in on this?” If he is, I doubt I will be able to forgive him. If he loves me like he said, he wouldn’t have agreed to this sick plan.

“No, he thinks you’re aware that he’s at the hospital. He’s been asking to speak to you.”

I get up, my heart dancing at the thought of seeing Mthombo.

"You said he's at the hospital, what happened to him?"

"He had his surgery, he's in Germany. He'll be able to travel back home in two weeks." Ndaba explains.

I want to jump inside this mobile and slap him across the face for doing what he did to me.

"Why didn't you tell me Ndaba? I could've been there for him, held his hand and told him sweet nothings before the operation. Why are you this person? Why don't you want to see me happy Bhedlindaba?"

"You're getting me wrong Shiyiwe, this was not meant to hurt you. I'd never do that." So he says, I call it bullshit.

I drop the call, I can't be listening to his lame explanations. I'm so numb I don't know if I should celebrate Mthombo's life or curse fate for testing me like I'm a beer that should last for centuries.

I'm going to lie down next to my grandmother, and

I'm going to force myself to fall asleep. I will have good fucking dreams that have nothing to do with Mthombo and his crazy brother, I will enjoy my sleep and wake up at noon tomorrow because I deserve a fucking good rest.

.

.

"There's a man asking for you outside," Uncle Mdu says. It's about time this man gets a job, he can't be a house-husband all his life.

"Who is it?"

"Some idiot with incisions and course hair." He hates him yet he doesn't know him.

I leave the broom on the floor and head outside, yeah the plan to wake up late backfired. Wake up late for what? Not in this household with that old woman around.

"Morning," what's Lithizwi doing here.

"I told my mother about the two ladies I transported

yesterday, she made ujeqe to thank you for keeping her son company. She hates it when I drive alone, especially at night.” He’s blushing, mama’s boy this one.

What are we going to eat this steamed bread with? Uncle Mdu will be a happy man today.

“You really didn’t have to, thank you.” I take the yellow Tupperware.

Maybe Mthandeni will want it, my appetite is still sleeping.

“How did you two sleep?” He asks.

Casual chat? I’m inwardly screaming.

“Okay, thanks.”

He’s looking over my shoulder, he must be eyeing the chickens I promised him.

“I’ll give you one, you can take it to your mother. Thank her for me.”

He laughs, “My mother has eaten too many chickens in her life. I’m afraid she will start growing feathers at this point.”

Okay!

The silence is something I didn't expect, he's still looking over my shoulder. If it's not the chickens he wants, then what is it?

"Thank you again Lithizwi." This is me dismissing him. It's time hau, we can't stand here the whole day.

His eyes turn to me, "I'm going to run errands at the mall, I wouldn't mind if you'd accompany me."

I mind.

"I have chores to do," I deny his offer.

He is disappointed.

"We won't take long, you can bring your sister with." A smile... Mmh! I see this man.

"Staying in the house can be depressing, I'm sure she would like some air. She might also find it therapeutic." The black Dr. Phil, I never thought I would see the day.

I'm not hating on this kind gentleman, but his timing is wrong. I see it in his eyes, how they are eagerly searching the yard. He wants to see Mthandeni, it's

not going to happen on my watch.

“I’ll go with you, my sister is not feeling well. I need green pepper and carrots.” I open the gate and walk out. Why is he looking at me?

Hebana! I said Mthandeni is not going.

“Aren’t you going to change?” His question has me looking at my clothes, I’m still in my nightdress.

“I’ll be back.” I say and leave with his Tupperware.

Mthandeni hasn’t woken up yet, she needs the rest. I will have to pass at the pharmacy to get her medication. At this moment, we’re depending on my grandmother’s grant. I don’t know if it’s safe for me to access Mthandeni’s funds, I will need a lawyer to look at the formalities.

I have missed calls from Ndaba, I can’t talk to him now. I just need to digest everything that’s happened.

My uncle is on my back asking who the man at the gate is and what happened to the wheelchair guy, he’s like a child.

.

.

Black people love Pick n Pay, and I hate crowds. They should be buying from street vendors, Mr. Pay has millions already.

“What are you getting?” Lithizwi asks, pushing a full trolley.

“Green pepper and carrots,” I told him this before. His trolley is full, I’m carrying one green pepper and two carrots. It’s all I can afford with the money grandma gave me.

“My father was best friends with one of the President’s personal guards, we were once respected because of that.” I tell him.

I’m hiding our poverty, shopping is not for the faint hearted. You need money for this shit.

He smiles, “That’s nice.”

“It is, I usually buy food in bulk. We just ran out of these two that’s all.” I blame him for these lies, why was he looking at my small groceries?

“I want Samp, I think it’s on the other aisle. Please

get a 5kg braai pack for me.” Lithizwi.

I thought he said they had chickens, now I feel bad for killing ours. We should be buying as well.

I’m in my zone, thinking how many chickens we’d save if we start buying when a little person bumps into me. I gasp and almost jump out of my skin, this boy has his tiny arms wrapped around my legs. His innocent eyes are smiling.

“Hello.” He grins.

Guessing his age, I’d say he’s five or six years old. If he were older I would’ve scolded him for hugging strangers.

“Hello,” I return his smile and pat his head. “Where is your mommy?”

He’s giggling but not letting go, I’m going to jail for kidnapping. Whose child is this?

“Your heart is pure.” He says, with that same smile.

“Thank you, I’m sure your heart is pure too.” He’s a kid, it has to be pure.

I look around to see if anyone is searching for their

kid, now I must take him to the manager and report him lost.

"Where is your mother?" I ask, trying to push him off me. I have to be gentle of course.

"Mama said it's okay to cry, don't be afraid." He's telling me what his mother said, not where she is.

"Okay, where is she?"

He points at the ceiling, then beside him.

"She's trapped inside the ceiling?" My question, really this child is making my head spin.

"No silly, she's right here next to me. She says you're allowed to cry and that you are going to be okay."

Him.

So what I'm getting from him is that his mother has passed on, and she is a ghost. Where does she know me from? Wrong question... Where is he getting this from? He must get off me now, people are staring.

"She says she's your mother and loves you this big," his arms outstretch. I laugh with him as he releases a giggle, those better not be my ovaries tickling me. I

know my mother died, and no way is she haunting kids at Pick n' Pay.

"Phakade!" A voice snaps behind me.

"Oops!" Says the kid as he covers his mouth, he must be Phakade.

"What did I say about running off like that?" The man says as I turn to face him.

Does God still make them this tall? I'm sure he was making a tree and decided to go for a human instead. He did well though... hey stranger.

"I'm sorry, is he troubling you?" He asks, sending his scolding glare to the little boy.

"No, actually. He was telling me about my mother's ghost."

The man face palms and exhales, "Not again, he's just a kid."

That was not meant for my ears, that's why he mumbled.

"I'm sorry, please don't be offended. It's not his fault, they..." he stops and a frown finds his face.

I thought his son was weird, why is this one staring at me like that?

"I'm Mathonga, this little rascal is my son." He wants to shake my hand, I don't know why I'm looking at his wedding band. The handsome ones are always married or in a wheelchair.

.

.

Sponsored by Khethiwe.

My apologies for the short chapter, we're on stage 500 of load shedding.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Fifty-four

SHIYIWE-

.

.

Mathonga asked if he can follow us home, my grandmother will kill me today for picking up strange men, and bringing them to the house. She will be

more welcoming if I tell her that he is a Jehovah's Witness and wants to pray with us.

Lithizwi tells me that he will come check on us later, that won't be necessary... really.

"We're not going in," says Mathonga, stepping out of the car. He instructs the little boy to stay in the car.

Back at the mall, he told me who he is and why his son was seeing MaMbuyazi. They are a gifted family.

"Why won't you come in?"

He's the one who invited himself, I can't grasp why he doesn't want to step into the premises.

"It's not clean," his response drops my jaw.

"Yes it is, I cleaned it myself." I dispute.

He scratches his head, and laughs, "That's not what I mean. This place needs cleansing, my ancestors won't allow me to enter. Your own mother does not enter these premises, yet it's her matrimonial home."

He's talking about MaMbuyazi, his son was talking about her as well.

"Is she here?" I have to ask, although I'm freaked out by this entire thing.

"No, there is no reason for her to be present. Her job is done, she led me to you."

Strange but okay.

"I'll get some chairs," I tell him and hurry inside.

It's a busy street, people are staring at these weird people sitting outside the gate.

"You have four souls hanging over you, your hands are stained with their blood."

Yeyi, what nonsense is this? His son said I was pure.

"But boy-boy said my heart is pure." I defend my humanity, I don't want to carry this burden.

"Your heart is pure, that's the message from your mother. She doesn't want you beating yourself up for everything that's happened. But your hands are dirty,

they are covered with blood. What you did was wrong, no one should ever take a life. Only God has that right.”

Then God should have given us a manual on how to navigate this life thing.

“I regret what I did, but I’m not sorry that they are dead. They ruined my sister’s life, and mine as well. They were never going to stop.” I’m justifying my evil deeds, this is how I would sound in heaven when God plays all my sins on the big screen.

“I’m not here to judge you, you don’t have to explain yourself to me. You need to know though that those men are not resting in peace, it will affect you tremendously. They have to be brought home and buried, they need to be united with their ancestors.”

He shocks me every time he speaks.

The Jele ancestors want those fools with them?
They should be burning in hell.

“The house where it all happened needs to be cleansed, their souls are hovering there.” Mathonga.

“I don’t care, they can have the house.”

I get a chiding look, Mathonga doesn’t understand that I will do nothing for those men. I don’t owe them anything.

“Is there an elder here?” Mathonga asks, I think he is giving up on me.

“My grandmother, she’s very old and... you can’t tell her what I did, it will finish her.” She’d never forgive me for killing her son.

“I won’t, call her please. I need to speak to an elder about your parents.” He says, and I don’t know why he is smiling at me.

I start practicing what I will tell her, there she is, lying down on the veranda.

“Grandma,” her eyes look up.

Relief washes over her face. Where did she think I had gone?

“You’re back? Your sister was asking for you.” Her voice is low, sounds like she just woke up from a

deep sleep.

“Is she okay?” I will never not worry about Mthandeni.

“She is, who is that at the gate?”

Her eyesight should be on life support, what is this?

“Jehovah’s witness, he wants to pray with us.” I lie to the most important woman in my life. It’s a trick to get her there.

“Let him in, you should never turn away God’s people. He might be an angel in disguise.” She’s suddenly too happy, wait till Mathonga starts prophesying.

“He won’t come in grandma, he’s in a rush. I’ll help you to the gate.”

I will need to fetch her reed mat, she doesn’t sit on chairs. The only thing she uses that supports her body is the bed, her walking stick, and gravity.

Mathonga is respectful when greeting the old lady, he’s on one knee with his head bowed. Argh! The men we wish to bring home to our mothers, look at him.

He narrates his story, while my heart races in my chest. My grandmother is a devoted Christian, I'm surprised that she is listening and nodding to everything he is saying.

"Where is this girl's father?" Mathonga.

I'm not a girl, I'm a woman.

"He died," my poor grandma answers.

He looks at me like he's seeing something, it's the same thing he did back at the shop.

"Your real father is alive, you need to find him so he can do right by you." He delivers.

"My uncle mentioned once that I am not a Jele, I didn't want to believe him. But when I spoke to grandma, she told me that Phindafuthi Jele was my father, and MaMbuzazi my stepmom."

I'm trying to confirm what Velakithi told me.

But this woman I trust with my life said I am, and here's Mathonga sending me ten steps back.

"Your parents were deceived Shiysiwe, you were brought to your mother as a stranger." Mathonga's

elucidation confuses me.

“What is the truth then? Who is my father? How was MaMbuyazi deceived into thinking that I was not hers? The whole family thinks I was found at my parents' doorstep, if that is the case, how was I taken from my mother?” I bombard him with questions, his eyes are drilling me. He's probably looking for answers to my questions.

“I'm seeing two separate placentas, it's not clear yet. There are two women surrounding them. Their faces are hidden, for now.”

Shivers ripple through me, I can't find the reason because Mathonga's words are too vague for me to make sense of them.

“Ndodana, I thought you came here to pray with us.”
Yhu, old people.

Mathonga had introduced himself and said who he is, she couldn't have forgotten already.

“Grandma, remember he said he's spiritually gifted. He is here to help us.”

Grandma says nothing.

"Shiyiwe, I want to sleep. Take me to my room." Her voice sounds so fragile.

Maybe it is time I take her back inside, this is too much for her.

Mathonga allows us to leave, I hurry back with the questions lingering above my head.

"Tell me about the two placentas, what could that mean?"

He shuffles a little on the seat, and clears his throat.

"It's not clear yet, find your father and you will find answers to your questions."

I hope he doesn't leave me hanging. Where will I begin looking for the man?

"You are closer than you think, don't worry you will find him."

Could he be talking about uncle Mdu? That would be weird, MaMbuzazi would never. I'm more confused

than ever.

I'm not a Jele.

My real father is alive, and he's closer than I think.

I have to sniff around and I will find him.

Not complicated at all...

Fuck! who am I kidding? This is more complicated than the Book of Revelations.

My mind is at a battle field, so many things are happening in my life. How many problems is a person subscribed to?

"I'll help you, we'll start with cleansing and removing the dark shadow following you," he says, sending his concerned eyes over to the car. I doubt Phakade will go anywhere.

I tell him about the Sangoma and what she said about Emeka.

His laugh stresses me. Must he do that? It makes me more nervous.

"She told no lies, removing that won't be a problem."

“How much? I don’t have money at the moment, I can sell my phone though.” I wanted to say liver but he’d think I’m crazy.

“My ancestors have given me more than enough, they don’t want anything from you.” He says.

Who are his ancestors? I want to kiss them.

“Where is your aunt?” There’s a frown on his face, he makes a groaning sound that sends shivers down my spine. I thought we were done.

“Which aunt?”

He must be talking aunt Lindiwe, I can’t be sure though. He decides to look over at his son playing in the car before giving me an answer. He is really worried about the kid.

“Your mother’s cousin, she doesn’t speak the same language as you. You need to be careful around her.”

Dammit, how many people are after my life? I’m only one person.

“But I have never met any of my mother’s relatives,” I never cared to ask MaMbuyazi about her family.

When you are under your parents' wings, you tend to be negligent and live life without thinking about such deep connections. These are the results, today I'm being told about an aunt I don't even know.

"Trust me, you know this one very well. After the cleansing, everything will start revealing itself. You will also find out what happened to bab' Jele's corpse."

I wasn't that bright at school, maybe that's why Mthombo is making my head spin.

"I'm available on Saturday. Call me, and we'll talk about a way forward. I have a meeting to get to, take care of yourself." He hands me a business card and scurries to the car.

.

.

The consultation I had with Mathonga confirmed that I haven't been doing right by my ancestors, and that's because they don't know me. My parents were Christians, I'm not sure if I had imbeleko. That could also be the cause of the bad luck following me, I

don't belong here.

Grandma has some explaining to do, that story she told me about my father having an affair with a married woman. They might have lied to her as well, this family will never touch the gates of heaven.

"Your phone has been ringing non-stop." Uncle Mdu says as I stride into the house, he's standing behind the door.

"What are you doing there?"

He widens his curious eyes at me, "Who was that? Is he married? I think you should choose him, he has a nicer looking car and can walk."

I'm not happy about the shade thrown at Mthombo. This is why I say he needs a job, he has too much time on his hands.

"Why are you so persistent on me getting a man?" I mean it's nice of him but...

"No offence Mshana, ubuso buyaqina. You are getting old." His eyebrows are raised, challenging

me to protest my age. I want to smack them back to place, he's annoying me.

"Please, my youth renews like the eagle's." I hurry to my bedroom before he hurts my feelings further.

The missed calls from Ndaba are too much, it's about time I face my demons. He won't stop.

"I don't have time to be running after you Shiyiwe, I have a life too." That's the first thing he says, the tone of his voice is of irritation.

"Yet here you are, after 50 missed calls."

"I didn't leave 50 missed calls," somebody is defensive.

"It doesn't matter, what do you want?" I'm going to give him a hard time, I have no sympathy for liars.

"I bumped my head on the door this morning, something told me it's because of the grudge you're holding." He is trying to be funny.

I'm not holding a grudge, I feel betrayed by him.

“I hope your head twisted and it’s now facing the other way,” I spit as I lower myself on the bed.

Ndaba’s chortle occupies the line, I don’t remember sharing a joke.

“You blindsided me Ndaba, I heard your reasons and I’m trying to understand them. I just wish you’d trusted me, I would never put his life in jeopardy.” He of all people should know. I stayed even after their parents tried to take me out.

“I know, and I believe you. Can we move on now?”
That’s so insensitive of him.

“The hardest part about this is that Mthombo always fought for me. He was always there when I needed him, and I couldn’t return the favor because you took it away from me.”

“Are you going to keep grilling me or end the call? Mthombo is waiting to speak to you.” The bastard says, stopping me.

I wanted to feed all the anger inside me into the words I spit at him, it’s pointless. He doesn’t give a damn.

“Are you with him?” That’s a stupid question, he called me with a South Africa number.

“No, his nurse is. I’ll give her the signal, answer your phone Shiyiwe.” This man is chiding me, and he has ended the call.

Hayi, hayi! Ndaba didn’t say anything about a video call, I’m not ready.

Mthombo's face appears before I get a chance to wipe mine, I didn’t permit my eyes to water, yet here they are.

“Nonyanda!” No one can ever call me that and make me shiver like Mthombo does.

He is in the hospital, I can hear the machines.

“I miss you, how are you?” I try to keep my voice even, deep down I’m a shaking leaf.

“I miss you too, and I’m fine. You look good.” A smile stretches his lips, I’m worried about his swollen face. It looks like it hurts to smile.

“Are you sure you’re okay, Mthombo?”

“Yes. I will be home in two weeks, I can’t wait to hold you in my arms.” The beam softens, I’m not the timid type. But I’m struggling to maintain eye contact with him.

“What did the doctors say?” I ask with my eyes glazing all over the place. When he comes back home, we’ll be doing things that lovers do. How can I not think about it when he has that cuddly body?

“The operation went well if that’s what you’re asking, I’ll be able to walk with time. It will be a slow process, but eventually, I will get there.”

That’s good to hear.

“Did they tell you when you can start having sex?”
That was a thought, and it was meant to stay a thought. How do I turn off this video call?

I see his smile as I look at the phone, he must think I’m stupid.

.

.

Sponsored by Khethiwe...

WHEELS OF LIFE

Fifty-five

NTEBO-

.

.

He agreed to see her after pleading for many days, he gave her directions to his new house. Life seems to be going well for him, a huge house in the burbs, three big cars parked outside, and a bank balance as long as his cellphone number.

He has brought Nollywood to Mzansi.

Ntebo is shocked beyond what her eyes can see, she's sitting in on his expensive looking couch waiting for that drink he said he's going to get.

This is the life she had imagined for herself, a mansion, a man who can provide without counting how much he has left in his account. Fuck! Shiyiwe would be so jealous.

"I don't have Sprite, I hope Coke is fine." Emeka places the glass on the coffee table and sits down

on the opposite couch.

"You're doing well for yourself," Ntebo says, eyes scanning the place.

"Why are you here?" He seems unsettled by her presence, this is the same woman he shared a bed with.

"I haven't seen you in ages, Emeka. You don't call to find out how I'm doing after losing our baby." She's tapping her fingers on the glass, eyes trying to lock with his. But Emeka... he won't keep eye contact. He's done with her, her time has expired.

"We broke up?" He sounds annoyed.

Of course she's aware that they are longer dating, it still hurts though. She's here because she wants to try again. Men with money are hard to find in this country.

"We have to do a cleansing for our baby." Oh, she's here for that too.

Emeka cannot believe his ears, there's another baby? It's impossible, he never slept with her after the

failed lobola negotiations.

“It’s not mine, I broke up with you after the miscarriage.” Stupid-ass idiot. Ntebo exhales and blesses her throat with the cold beverage.

“I’m talking about the baby we lost, it’s alive and growing in the spirit world. We have to give it a name and bring it home.” She is not speaking Chinese but Emeka is glaring at her like he didn’t understand a word she said.

“I don’t have time, I’m a busy man Ntebo.” He stands to attend to the blaring door, whoever is behind the dark, double mohogany wood must think this is their father’s house.

Ntebo springs to her feet, her eyes tracing Emeka’s size 12 slippers that are violently stomping on the floor.

“Hold your horses, before you break down my door.” His thundering roar travels to her ears, and travels down to her clit.

How sexy can this man get?

She'd pay a million to hear him roar again, but this time with his hand tight on her neck, depriving her of every breath till she passes out. Emeka pulls the door open with force ready to bite the knocker.

There's a menacing man dressed in a black hoodie, that's the least intimidating thing about him. The scowl drawn on his face would send anyone running to the police for protection.

"Who the fuck are you?" Emeka snaps

"Are you Emeka?" The man's voice is made of drums and thunder. His face is covered with incisions and threats.

"Who the fuck is asking?" Emeka.

It's not an everyday thing that he's annoyed, Ntebo's presence must be tickling him on the wrong places.

Ntebo is watching with curious eyes, something about the stranger awakens her instincts, and brings her brows in a bushy meeting.

“Emeka, come inside.” This is how she would be as a wife, protective. It takes a swift second for Emeka to snap his head back, and scrutinize the girl under his gaze. The next second he’s lying on the concrete floor with a bullet wound in his stomach.

The gunshot did not make as much as a sound because of the gun silencer.

“Emeka!” A piercing scream that should alert the neighbors erupts from Ntebo’s mouth, however the neighbors are too far, hiding behind high walls and electric fences.

The stranger empties two lethal shots on Emeka’s head. He spares Ntebo no glance as if she is not even there, shoves the pistol on the gun hostler and calmly walks away.

.

.

SHIYIWE

It’s Saturday, a week after my consultation.

Mathonga and I are going to the river, he is fetching me. The week has been a tough one for me, between taking care of a depressed Mthandeni and trying to piece together puzzles of my life. There is something that is stuck with me, my father's corpse. That lady Sangoma said he was following me around, Mathonga didn't mention any of that when we spoke. It could be that he didn't want to overwhelm me with so much.

We have to be at the river before sunrise, I spent my entire night pondering, tossing and turning. It was one hell of a night.

Mathonga feels too good to be true, it's hard to believe that my life is going to change. I have lived under the shadow of bad luck all my life. The thought of having things go right for me makes me want to cry, I, Shiyiwe Jele will be free.

"Can we talk we talk?" Jesus. Where did she come from?

It's still dark outside, I'm surprised that she is awake.

Why do I have a bad feeling about this talk she wants to have?

"Mathonga will be here any minute grandma, can we talk when I get back?"

"Sit down." Her stare is menacing, a glare I can't argue with.

My ass collapses on the sofa. I hope she doesn't make Mathonga wait, I don't want today going wrong.

"Can you make it fast, we have to be at the river before the sun rises." I get a chiding stare.

I'm not doing this out of disrespect, I just feel like she doesn't get why I have to do this.

The entire week she has been trying to talk me out of this, and convince me that Mathonga was lying.

"I don't want you to go," and that's it. The authority in her tone reeks of dismissal.

"Why?" I look her square in the eye, it's not about God, Jesus or the bible. Something is off here.

"You don't know that man, Shiyiwe."

Actually I do, he's the Chief of Izingolweni. I was shocked when Lithizwi told me, this is what happens when you live in Joburg. It's a jungle, the rest of the world ceases to exist.

"He's a stranger sent from heaven, I'm sorry grandma but I believe everything he told me. Most of the things he said make sense, you know I'm right."

Her eyebrows come together.

"I don't know anything, all I know is that you need to leave things alone. Don't go digging for the past, you might not like what you will find."

"But I am not digging, I'm getting cleansed. You of all people know how I have suffered. Grandma, I watched people my age buy cars, get married and promotions. I can't afford a simple meal at McDonald's, I have to count cents whenever I go to the shops. Do you know how that feels? I'm tired of this life, I want to be seen too. I want to live and make something of myself. I want marriage, kids and a big fat bank balance."

She doesn't seem to be getting me, something is

clouding her mind or rationality.

"I want those things for you too, and you will get them. Your time just hasn't arrived yet, wait for God's time. Nonyanda you know we don't believe in ancestors in this family."

I'm not listening to her, even if the devil came and offered to help me, I would take it with wide spread fingers.

"Your parents would be so disappointed, Phindafuthi won't be able to rest in peace." Grandma.

She doesn't know that he is not resting at all, I'd tell her if it were not for her fragile heart.

"He raised you as his, don't let anyone else take his place."

"I feel like you are hiding something from me grandma, what is it? Do you know about my real father?"

This one never backs away from a staring contest, she's quietly observing me. It's deep and tearing into every part of my soul, I don't want us to quarrel. She

is the only parent we have left. If anything, I'd take a bullet for this woman... Maybe if she hadn't lived past 90 years, yho, she has enjoyed life.

"Phindafuthi was your real father, that's all I know. The story I told you is the truth, your father told me himself."

I nod absently, I'm done trying to convince her. It is a waste of time really. It's hard for me to believe her words, yet she says them with such assurance that had I been blind, and naïve, I would put a stamp on them and go with what she says. Why is she worried about me finding my real father?

There's a car hooting outside, Mathonga is here.

"I have to go, I love you, bye," I leave a kiss on her cheek and run out with a duffel bag hanging on my shoulder.

.

.

It takes less than an hour to do the cleansing, I

thought I'd feel light or different... maybe start seeing that light that's kept at the end of the tunnel, as to why it's there—sigh!

"How are you feeling?" Mathonga asks, as we drive back.

"The same," I'm disappointed. Maybe I lost my faith many years ago, maybe it will take time for me to have it back.

"What we were doing there was not magic Shiyiwe, it's not a one day thing. From here on, it's going to be a bumpy."

I don't understand what he's saying to me.

"There's a throw in the back seat, cover yourself so you don't catch a cold." Mathonga.

The cold is the last thing I care about, but I accommodate his request because I'm freezing.

"I thought I'd start seeing change today," I say, hoping he doesn't take this the wrong way. I wouldn't want him to think that I'm ungrateful.

"The people fighting you know what you just did,

they are not going to let go so easily. They will fight harder now, you just need to be strong and stay in prayer.”

Pray? That’s a foreign language. Sure I have heard MaMbuyazi praying for Mthandeni and I behind the closed door of her bedroom. I ever cared to catch anything, I gave up on the Man upstairs when life seemed to tackle me in all corners.

Mathonga drops me off with instructions, there is so much I have to do. I’m seeing him again in a week.

There’s my old lady lying down on the veranda, she shuts her eyes as soon as she sees me.

“Grandma, I’m back.” I say, using my bag to shield my face from the sun. “Grandma.”

Okaaay. She’s upset.

I step in the house, Mthandeni is more than happy to see me, the small smile on her face is everything I need to brush away the hurt caused by my grandmother.

I have another video call scheduled with Mthombo later tonight, we've been at it the entire week. I think it's safe to say I have officially fallen in love with my teddy bear.

I don't know whether distance makes the heart grow fonder, or these are feelings I was afraid to unfold. I'm there now, and never looking back.

.

.

Mdu's wife is one lazy woman, she bosses aunt Lindy. Mduduzi Jele better talk to her, before I open my mouth. She won't like what I have to say.

This uncle as witless as he is, is slowly taking the fatherly role.

I see how he's trying to make Mthandeni comfortable, I'm not letting my guard down though. He is a Jele man at the end of the day, they have a history those ones.

I made Uphuthu today, grandma hates amasi, she prefers it with gravy. The rest of the family will have

to eat what I put on the plate, we're cramped up in the living room. Spoons loudly clanging against plates.

"When are you going back to Joburg?" I thought she wasn't talking to me. There is an emphasizing of condescension in her voice, I don't know what to make of it.

I drop my spoon in my plate and look at her, thinking I'd be able to read her face, it's blank as paper.

"I don't know grandma, Mathonga said I should stick around for a while."

Her face completely transforms, what is with her?

"I don't trust that boy, you pick up strangers from the streets, bring them to your father's house, and allow them to insult your father." She's speaking with her mouth full, bits of uphuthu spewing from all corners of her mouth. It's an old people's thing. Fuck table manners once you go grey.

"He's the chief of Izingolweni," I correct her.

"That means nothing, we don't know him. What did

you do at the river anyway? Are we sure he didn't put a bad spirit in you? I don't know how you can be so careless Shiyiwe. When are you going to grow up?" Another full spoon quickly goes into her mouth after she swallows.

She's sitting on the floor, her legs spreads out. Her plate sitting in between her thighs.

"I support what Mshana is doing, her life is a mess shame." Uncle Mdu

"Your opinion does not matter in this house Mduduzi, you don't bring anything to the house. Just sit there, udle u-shut up."

Haibo, since when is she this rude.

"Why are you attacking me Ma? You are wrong, and I won't keep quiet. This child has suffered enough, why is it a problem that she's getting help?" Uncle Mdu returns, he sounds respectful and I appreciate that.

"Who said it's a problem? What I don't like is people coming here and saying things about my children. Phindafuthi was a good father, Shiyiwe is his

daughter, and no one will take that away from him.”

Is she aware that she is fighting for a dead man who might possibly be slaving around for a witch somewhere in this country?

“Finding my real father does not mean I will renounce Phindafuthi, are you not concerned about my identity grandma?” I ask, gulping down the lump on my throat.

The only parent I have left is fighting me because I want to find my roots.

“Phindafuthi is your father, finish and klaar. I don’t want to hear about other people. My son was not infertile.” She hands Mthandeni her empty plate without sparing her a glance.

I’m stuck on the last statement, I don’t think she realized what she said.

“What do you mean your son was not infertile? Mthandeni is his daughter.” I say.

I called it, she’s confused. Her eyes race to Uncle Mdu, then back to me, then Mthandeni who is

walking in from the kitchen.

A sudden knock calls for our attention. What's with people and visiting? No visitors should be allowed after 6pm, we're eating here.

Whoever is knocking is persistent, they are banging the door actually.

"Siyadla, come back tomorrow." (We are eating.)

Uncle Mdu shouts in frustration.

If someone does not open that door, we'll be buying a new one tomorrow. One of Uncle Mdu's kids runs to open it.

"What are the police doing here?" Uncle Mdu seems to be the only one with the courage to ask.

Me... I'm shaking in my invisible boots. Are they here for me? I look at my sister, she's staring back. She doesn't know what I did back in Joburg, but she dashes to sit by my side, and wraps her arms around my shoulders.

"Does Shiyiwe Jele stay here?" The short, skinny, officer asks. His unkind eyes browse the room.

I can almost taste my heart, I thought Ndaba said he took care of it.

“There she is.” That little brat, what does Mdu feed them?

He looks at me, my hands are trembling. Fuck! My entire being.

“Usuboshiwe sisi...” (You are under arrest.)

The fuck!

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Fifty-six.

ATHULE-

.

.

The tension in this house cannot be cut with a double edged blade, it's that thick. My father didn't spend more than two days in the hospital, he's home on sick-leave. He stopped eating food prepared by his wife, the responsibility has fallen on me the eldest daughter. It's too much, I have work.

A helping hand from my sister would be nice, that one told me that child labour is a crime when I asked her to dish up just the other day.

Another night, more dirty dishes. The only thing I'm confident about is this colourful food I prepared, I'm hoping it will put a smile on my father's face. His depression is depressing me.

The buzz in my pocket catches my attention, Bhedlindaba is calling. I have been seeing this man every day for a week, and I am not complaining, I like the type of person he is.

I can't say I've reached the part where I can't live without him, I'd be exaggerating if I were to say that. Love doesn't come easy for everyone. However, something is happening.

My heart does funny things at the sound of his voice, the mention of his name and smell of his cologne. I'm hooked.

"If I tell you I'm outside will you come to meet me?" This is how calls are answered lately? No hello; nothing.

“Outside my house?” I’m beyond shocked, my father is home. He will turn into something I don’t like and slaughter him.

“Yes, ntwana. Now come out.” Listen to him ordering me around.

“I can’t, my parents are home. Why didn’t you call first?”

“Is this not a call?” Ehh! This man. “I’m not outside the gate, just a few houses away. Please come out.”

How do I say no when he came all the way just to see me?

“I’m on my way.”

This can’t be my life, sneaking out of my father’s house like a thief.

I spot his car parked at the corner shop, the group of boys gathered there make me want to turn back. But the man who came for me is standing with them, I wonder what they are talking about.

He sees me approaching, I’m expecting him to return

the smile I've just sent but nothing. There's a frown on his face and a smile in his eyes, people smile with their mouths, I don't think he knows that. We hold a stare as I stand in front of him, I think the look he's giving me says he misses me. Maybe I'm being forward.

"Let's get in the car." His hand is on the small of my back, gently pushing me towards the vehicle, before I can tell him I can't stay. I'm wrapped in his arms the second he shuts the driver's door.

"When are you going to visit me?" This question is whispered in my ear.

So this is what he came here for, to ask me when will I come to his house? I slept over last week, one day is too long a day for a girl to be away from her father's house. His arms loosen around me.

"Is that a code for when are we going to have sex?" My mouth is on a mission to embarrass me, I swear it sounded normal in my head.

Ndaba is coughing his lungs out, tears prickle down the corners of his eyes. I take note of the shock

dancing in them as he considers me with an inquisitive glance.

“What?” Is whispered.

He’s basically giving me a chance to rectify my mistake.

I will not be doing that, I said what I said.

“I thought maybe you want us to have sex, that’s why you want me to visit you. Nothing happened between us last week, so...” Am I explaining myself?

“I love having you around.”

“I don’t know when I’ll visit, I’ll have to come up with an excuse at home.”

“You’re 23 years old.”

So what? I still live under my father’s roof, a man who doesn’t apply to the modern day rules. This thing of moving out is not up for discussion, I want to do it but I know he won’t let me. I won’t even mention sleepovers, he has no idea I didn’t sleep at home last week.

“My father is traditional, Ndaba. He will want to know

where I'm going, with who and what happened to the bed he bought."

"Maybe you should move out." He says with conviction, like I should not be staying with my parents at this age.

"You can come stay with me, I'll take care of you."

Wooooh! At this pace, we're going to crash. I'm not going to answer him.

"I have to go back, my mother is probably looking for me."

I'm leaving this car, he's so inconsiderate. A grip on my arm stops me from opening the door, I'm met with a confused frown on his face.

"What's wrong?"

I don't know what's wrong, maybe he's annoying me. I sit back, with no answer to give him.

"If I offended you, I'm sorry. Forget I said anything, don't go please." His hand is touching my thighs, he's looking at me with pleading eyes under snapped eyebrows.

A knock on my window pushes my answer back down, my mother will know about my shenanigans before I go to bed. What is she doing here? How did she even see me in here?

“Who is she?” What Ndaba should be asking is, what does she want?

“Our neighbour,” and my mother’s friend. I’m in trouble. I don’t stop him from rolling down the window. Why are his windows not tinted?

“Greetings ma.” He’s smiling, I fight the need to roll my eyes. Mam’Flora is the Daily Sun of this community. This is why she had the audacity to knock on the window, what is she doing peeking inside in the first place. She gives Ndaba a onceover, and fixes her gaze on me. Earth open up and swallow me.

“Athule, where is your mother? Does she know you’re sitting with men in cars?”

I’m sitting with a man in a car. Funny how these people can make you feel like a whore with just one

simple sentence. I don't like the look she's giving me by the way, as if Ndaba and I were sinning in this car.

"Ma... I was... this is..." I'm biting my tongue here, no matter what lie I tell her, my mother will know about this. I'm doomed.

"He's my boss, ma. He's dropping me off, the taxi left me and..."

The devil must be proud.

"Mmmhh!"

You see that hum, it's more dangerous than my mother's clap.

"Yes, I was getting off."

Oh no, she did not just open the door for me. I'm flabbergasted. Ndaba grips my hand when I move, what is he, a toddler? I turn to meet a desperate look in his eyes. How do I tell this big baby that Mam'Flora has dug my grave and she will tell the woman who mothered me to bury my body?

"Thank you for the lift Mr. Meyiwa." And with that, I dash out of the vehicle.

This woman... She closes the door for me, and holds my hand. In which planet does she come from?

I cannot imagine how Ndaba is feeling, I can feel his gaze burning my back and that alone compels me to whip my head back because that's what you do when you leave behind something you treasure. He drives off just as I turn. I know he's upset, maybe I shouldn't have lied. Maybe I should have told this woman to mind her damn business.

"You shouldn't be accepting rides from your boss, Athule. Those people are always looking for the next girl to sleep with."

To hell with this. I stop and claim my hand back with force, a gasp slips out of her mouth. Yeah, you better be shocked.

"He's not like that." I'm angry and I make sure to let it show, she seems surprised by my quip. What did she expect? You don't go around poking your big nose into people's business.

"How do you know?"

I'm not going to tell her because it's none of her

business.

"I just know," I snap. "Please excuse me, I have work to do."

I leave her there, dazed with her jaw dropped. She should mind her children who have no direction in life and leave me the hell alone."

"Athule!"

Lord, what does she want now? And here I am entertaining her, I find a big ugly frown plastered on her face as I turn.

"Do you go to work dressed in dirty clothes?" She asks.

For a millisecond I'm swamped in confusion until I scan my body and dammit, my dress is dirty. Smudges of red polish, and brown stains I haven't noticed till now. My life is over, I should let this granny deliver me to my mother so she kills me once and for all.

"Next time, think hard before you lie." She says.

Whatever.

A text comes through as I walk through the gate, it's the man I was.

I'm flying down to Durban, that's what I came to tell you. I'll see you in a few days.

There's another message, R5000 has been transferred into my account.

My phone buzzes again...

Maybe you want to put those plastic things you girls put on your head.

He means braids, Ndaba can be annoying, I love it. He must've thought I looked like a starved hobo.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

My grandmother is the first one to scream when the officer reads me my rights and cuffs me, uncle Mdu's wife follows. Everyone else is staring disbelievingly.

“I didn’t do anything,” I say fighting back tears.

“We’ll see what the court has to say about that,” the officer grits. He’s pulling me away, Mthandeni runs and circles her arms on my waist.

“They can’t take you away, sisi.” My heartbreaks when she cries.

“It’s okay baby, I’ll be fine.” What am I saying? I’m going to jail where there are hard core criminals who won’t hesitate to kill me at the first sign of weakness. I know I will cry once those bars are locked.

“Wait, wait. At least tell us what she did, she’s just a child.” Uncle pleads, pulling Mthandeni away from me.

“Theft, a certain man has laid a charge against you for theft.” No sane parent would ever name their child ‘A Certain Man’ that would be wrong.

“Who is that man?” My uncle again, he’s comforting my sister in his arms.

My grandmother has no words, she’s on all fours praying in tongues at the top of her voice.

Without giving uncle Mdu an answer, they walk me outside to the car. I'm at a state of not giving a fuck, Mathonga's words have come to settle in my ears. I guess wrongfully arrested is one of the tribulations I'm supposed to go through, courtesy of my enemies.

As fucked up as my life is, never have I ever thought I'd be sitting at the back of a police van with handcuffs restraining my hands.

The car stops suddenly, the one on the passenger seat steps out. He pulls my door open and tells me to stretch out my hands, I have never been caught in such deep confusion since I came to this world. I do as told, he removes the handcuffs, and goes back into the car.

We're on the road again, none of them are conversing. The radio is the only thing allowed a stage in this car.

.

.

"We're here," sings the driver. What is he happy about anyway? I'll be spending the night in jail,

probably 20 years if whoever is blaming me for theft has solid evidence. I'm not a thief, the only thing I have stolen in my life is a piece of meat from Mthandeni's plate only because MaMbuyazi gave her an extra piece.

This place does not look like a prison, where have they brought me?

"Come with us sisi," the other says, gesturing that I lead the way. You get arrested and told to lead the way to your destruction, what a strange thing my life is.

I look around, my heart pumping in fear. The only thing that comforts me is that there are four police men guarding the entrance.

The lights are dim, I can barely see a thing in here. I turn back to the policemen standing behind me, I don't know how much Caster I have in me, but I will evoke every single ounce of it if I smell something fishy and run like I was born to run.

"This is not a prison, why is it dark in here?" I might

be exaggerating, maybe load shedding has hit this side. It's bad these days, even government employees are affected.

They are smiling, why are they looking at me with those silly grins?

The electricity is back, as soon as my eyes adjust to the light my mind falls into utter confusion. This is a chapel, it's decorated for a party I guess. But it's too fancy and extravagant. Parties have balloons, I don't see any. In front of me is a trail of white lilies that lead to the pulpit.

“Sisi, you are under arrest for stealing Mthombo Meyiwa’s heart.” The fool next to me says, I’m too caught up in confusion to acknowledge him. However, that doesn’t mean I don’t want to knock his skeletal body out of that washed out police uniform. Are they even police officers?

“Shiyiwe Jele!” A loud voice I would recognise even in my sleep loudly calls out to me. My heart should not be pumping this fast, I’m shaking, and struggling to control my breathing.

He's standing at the front, a walking stick holding half of his weight. Tears burn behind my eyes.

"Mthombo?" My voice doesn't reach him but he read my lips, hence the nervous smile on his face.

My feet are too forward, I don't like them anymore because as shaky as they are, they lead me to him.

"What's going on? What are you doing here?" I ask.

He doesn't say a word, I'm swallowed by his arms. I hear a sniff, then feel something wet on my neck. His grip is firm around me, I'm holding him tighter not because he's crying but I'm afraid he will fall if I let go. Maybe it's out of joy of seeing him standing on his feet.

"I missed you Nonyanda." He says.

We'll talk about that later, I want to know what this is all about. I was arrested in front of my family, my grandmother will never be the same.

"Why are you here? You haven't recovered Mthombo, look at your face." I don't know if it's swollen or he gained weight. I'm afraid to touch his face and wipe

away his tears.

"It's the medication, nothing serious." He says, sniffing and dropping his head to do the wiping himself.

"Mthombo you look like Shrek, you need to go back..."

His eyebrows snap in amusement, he connects his forehead with mine and breathes in and out heavily.

"I missed you Nonyanda," so he keeps saying.

I missed him too, I won't tell him. He doesn't deserve to hear it.

"You sent people to arrest me because I stole your heart?" I say, placing my hands on my hips. The unimpressed look exploring his body should tell him how not happy I am about this.

His sigh burns my face as he tries to sit down on the floor.

"What are you doing?" I stop him but he moves my hand from his arm.

It takes a lot of wincing, grunting, and clenched teeth

for him to get on his knee. This man is trying to make my heart stop today, he wants to see me dead. Otherwise, what the hell is this?

I look back at the policemen, I left standing by the door. They now have company, my family. The same people I left behind crying and wanting to curse the world are here dressed in their Sunday Church clothes. As I'm about to snap my head back to Mthombo, Bhedlindaba walks through the door wearing a suit, he should lose the yellow hat.

I'm completely flabbergasted and taken aback by all this.

"Nonyanda," it's the man on one knee. He's holding a piece of... ring. Now I see what's going on.

"Please make room for me in your heart, and let me wife you."

Is he insane? It's not that I wouldn't want to marry him, I can't imagine wearing anyone else's ring but his. But then this is too soon and rushed.

Words are failing me, I can't find a single letter.

"Marry me, Nonyanda. Right here, right now." He continues with his insanity.

.

Road to 30K, please help me get there by sharing the inserts.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Fifty-seven

TSHEGOFATSO MOSHEO-

.

Ntate Mosheo walks in on her convulsing on the ground in the middle of the lounge. This is her third fall, the first one was this morning. At 3pm, she was thrown to the ground again. Only she knows why her body locks, her heart pounds so fast to a point where it hurts to breathe, and breathing comes in short circuits that her vision tunnels.

Back to sender... someone is busy trying to fix their

life and she is well aware who that someone is. If she doesn't do something about it, she will perish like Christmas leftovers with no one to claim them.

"I'll get you a glass of water," Ntate Mosheo offers after placing her on the couch.

At first he thought it was a stroke and thought of calling an ambulance, when Tshego spoke without her mouth curved on one side, he knew it wasn't it.

She was discharged a few days ago from the hospital, the nurses would be shocked to see her back.

"I need a favour from you," speaking seems difficult at this point. The giant man sits at her feet, his potbelly covering almost his lower body.

"What is it?" He's ready to do anything for this woman, he's a drunk and knows that without her he would become a hobo overnight because he drinks more than he works.

"Take me to the mountain," Tshego says.

"Which mountain?" People don't just go to the

mountain, he is “people.” Where in this city will he find a mountain?

“There are mountains everywhere,” Tshego snaps. A very bad move knowing how loose Ntate’s hand can be, surprisingly he doesn’t look offended. Maybe she should get stabbed and fall every day, if it will soften this man, then why not?

“Someone is trying to kill me, I will die if I don’t get to a mountain.” Now she can’t tell him that she wakes up at night and throws bad luck on people, shuts their open doors, and sits on their wombs so they don’t get the honour of mothering children.

Ntate is deep into thought when Mme’s phone rings, the caller ID shows their only daughter’s name.

“Pass me my phone,” this one never says please. The world owes her everything, so it’s okay.

“Mme, Mme.” Ntebo is crying, sobbing to put it heavily. Tshego was born with zero patience, this child is wasting her time. She’s dying here and has no time to listen to someone breathing.

“Speak man, are you stupid?” She’s just annoyed by the pain running through her body and the thought of Shiyiwe winning against her.

Ntebo is struggling to say a word, it appears she would rather be crying. Mme breathes in and out... in and out... damn it, it’s not helping.

“Nteboheleng, are you trying to kill me ngwana ke uena? You know I have a fragile heart? What is it that I haven’t done for you in life hee? That you are so keen on putting me in a coffin? Ngwana enoa o batla ho mpolaea.” (This child wants to kill me.)

Complaining is one of her strongest points. She looks at her husband with tears in her eyes, they are not caused by their daughter. It’s the pain shooting through every vein in her body.

“Ntate, this child wants to kill me.” Her voice rises above the pain she’s in. “Your child is testing me. Bua ngwana wa sethoto. Stop crying like a baby and tell me what the problem is. Where are you? Why are you not home? Did you see the time?”

She sounds shocked by Ntebo’s absence in the

house.

“Nteboheleng Mosheo, why are you doing this to me hee?” She’s yelling now, Ntate is not shocked. Dramatic is his wife’s second name.

“Mme, I’m in jail. I have been arrested for murder.” Finally she...

Wait a minute, this child did not just say she’s in jail.

“Eng?” Tshego. (What?)

The phone drops from her hand after that last scream, the pain... the pain is doubled. She lies back on the couch and tries to think positive. It’s not happening, her baby is in jail.

“Kea shoa Ntate, Ntate kea sho. Nteboheleng ngwanaka!!!” (I’m dying.)

She cries, eyes closed and hand tight on her chest. She’s not really dying, her patience is just being tested.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

I don't know how everything was planned, also, I don't know how I feel about surprises. I have never been surprised in my life. The plan to have me arrested is whack when I exclude the part where I saw Mthombo, and the proposal.

He must never repeat that shit again, I am not made of rubber.

I was led to a room where I found a wedding dress hung on the wall, a makeup artist and Mabahlezi waiting for me.

I love the dress, I have imagined my wedding day but never got to a point where I pictured the kind of dress I would want to wear. This one is perfect.

"You guys knew about this?" I'm asking Mthandeni who keeps fixing my dress, I love the look of freedom on her face.

"He came home this morning with his uncle, I don't

know how he knew you weren't going to be around. He asked gogo for your hand in marriage." Mthandeni explains.

I'm surprised grandma agreed. I have unfinished business with her. She needs to tell me what she meant when she said her son was infertile.

"My husband has never done anything like this for me," Mabahlezi says. I don't know if she's tipsy or tired. The glass of champagne in her hand must be doing its job.

"Different strokes for different folks," I hear Mthandeni reply lightly. I don't even know what she means by that.

There's a knock at the door.

"Nonyanda," my heart goes dizzy at the sound of his voice. That's my future husband out there.

"Go away, you're not supposed to see the bride." Mabahlezi slurs, as she sips her drink. Yep, she is drunk.

"I need a word please," he sounds nervous. I turn and

rush to the door before sister in-law stops me.

His eyes water in an instant. He's looking at me in this outfit I never saw myself in no matter how hard I pressed my eyes.

"Wow!" Comes out as a sob.

I'm not okay with him crying, it breaks my heart. I never want to see tears in his eyes, even if they are of complete ecstasy.

"My cry baby," he lets me wipe his tears away. This is what I plan on doing in this marriage, hold him down and be the woman he deserves.

"I'm not a baby," he disputes my claim, pressing his forehead against mine.

"You are my baby and you know what? I will call you baby from now on, it's not right that I call you by your home affairs name. I should be arrested for that, for real this time."

Someone clears their throat, it's one of the ladies. They want to leave the room and we are blocking the way.

Mthombo's arms are tight around me the second they close the door.

"You will never let this arrest thing rest, will you?" He says, pressing a kiss on my forehead.

"Not as long as I live, I will remind you when you make me mad," I'm not kidding. His smile is not really out there, but I see it.

"Then I won't give you a reason to be mad, I'm going to cherish your happiness like gold Nonyanda." His voice is smooth and low, it tickles my insides in a way that has me shivering.

"And I promise to do the same, I will always respect you. You will never be low in my eyes Mthombo... baby."

His mouth nears mine, I'm not going to let him kiss me now.

"It's not time to kiss the bride yet," he knows the rules that's why he's laughing.

"I can't wait for you to be my wife," he says.

I can't wait either, for now, he needs to go and wait

for me at the altar.

.

.

MTHOMBO-

The day he married Zinzi has lived rent free in his head since it happened, he remembers it like it was yesterday.

She was the one for him, it didn't take many dates for him to figure it out. He had just come out of a toxic relationship when Zinzi came with her flowery scent and a smile that could turn any devil into an angel. She was the sweetest thing he'd ever met, soft-hearted, and a humour of a comedian.

What he loved the most about her was how she was with his brothers, she made them her own at first meet.

Zinzi quickly became his safe haven, nine months into the relationship she had won him over

completely. He had to make her his wife, and when they had their first child, he swore heaven was smiling down on him.

Now for Bhedlindaba to come to him and confirm Velakithi's sadistic words.

"Zinzi was not the person we thought she was," Ndaba delivered with no twinge of emotion in his voice.

Mthombo knew whatever bad news he was going to add to that statement wasn't going to be delivered with any remorse because this is Ndaba. He's good at removing his heart from his chest and still have enough strength to carry on.

He continued to tell him how the man that fathered them had tasted the forbidden fruit, and a seed was bred from that. Sure Makhosi had brought it to his attention. He was in denial, having his brother confirm it killed any little hope he had in him.

He lived a lie for years with a woman who was so good at pretending that he was convinced she was

his heaven-sent. His family fell for her charm as well. He didn't know what shattered him the most, the confirmation that Zinzi was a con-artist, or his mother knowing about the affair Zwangendaba had with Zinzi and still bought the most expensive dress, and came to their wedding.

It's an unforgivable act, that's why MaDlamini has not been informed nor invited to this union. He doesn't want to think about them today, not when he's marrying the woman who has his heart in the palm of his hand.

The mastermind of proposing to Shiyiwe in this bizarre manner is Bhedlindaba after Mthombo mentioned, during one of their many conversations that his wish is to marry her.

He didn't think it to be a good idea, but Ndaba thinking his way is always the way went ahead with the plan.

Mthombo thinks his Nonyanda will need therapy after the stunt pulled on her, he's ready to hold her hand and walk this life with her.

Right now, her uncle is responsible for that.

His heart has come to settle in his throat as he watches uncle Mdu accompanying his niece to her forever after, if there is such a thing.

“Are you okay?” A hand squeezes his shoulder, “do you need a chair?”

Mthombo hums a no, releasing a shaky sigh.

“I’m still shocked that she agreed to marry me,” he’s in tears.

Ndaba laughs and tightens that grip on his shoulder.

“You are besotted man,” laughs Bongukwanda.

This one arrived a while ago with his fiancé.

“I wish Zinqumo were here.” Mthombo.

Yeah! Such things happen during sad moments, you remember the departed.

What a strange family, Zinqumo’s body is still fresh underground and today his brother is tying the knot. Poor nonos, had his life cut short.

“He’s here, in spirit.” What a stranger thing to come out of Ndaba’s mouth, guess he’ll be eating Zinqumo’s share of cake.

Heavy silence lingers before the groom remembers that there is a woman dressed in white heading toward him.

“Remember, no sex tonight. Your back is still recovering.” That whisper from Ndaba is laughed at by the groom.

“And you’re mourning your little brother.” Adds Bongukwanda.

Now this is something he’s not going to promise. The devil and this thing of coming in different forms. How will he be able to resist Shiyiwe?

“Will you two shut it, you are making me nervous.” Mthombo snaps with a content smile.

These two brothers of his have managed to put a smile on his face and wipe his tears away with just foolish instructions on something that has nothing to do with them.

His back is starting to hurt, something he ignored after he got up from his knee. He didn't want to trouble anyone, especially Shiyiwe.

The couple locks eyes as uncle Mdu hands him his niece's hand.

"I practised witchcraft for two years when I was in Malawi, hurt my girl and I won't hesitate flying to your house with a broom. I will rip your heart out and feed it to you for supper, try me mfana. Ngiyaloya mina, angdlali." The threat is seriously said, Mthombo's mouth stretches a nervous smile.

"Uncle please, you are embarrassing me." That's Shiyiwe eyeing the laughing audience. Yep they heard everything.

"He's not a witch, it's just a joke." She tells the people laughing.

"I am, try me." Uncle persists with an ugly glare shot at Mthombo.

"I won't give you the chance to complain baba, I love

this woman.” He’s nervous as he says this, he looks at Shiysiwe for rescue. She better send this uncle away.

Uncle Mdu takes his seat, making way for the ceremony to commence.

“You look beautiful Nonyanda,” Mthombo whispers into her ear.

Shiysiwe wanted simple make-up, nothing out of the ordinary. Still as simple as she is, she is his Nonyanda. He wouldn’t trade her for anything.

“You look beautiful too,” Shiysiwe returns.

Her eyes are shining. She looks happy and that puts his heart at ease.

“You mean handsome?” That’s Bongukwanda laughing at his future sister in-law.

“Handsome... is the word I was looking for.” Shiysiwe.

The couple is lost in each other’s eyes that the marriage officiate, a man in a Priest’s attire interrupts them with a clearing of a throat.

He introduces the couple and says, “Should anyone

present know of any reason that this couple should not be joined in holy matrimony, speak now or forever hold your peace.”

Now what is this man saying?

“You want them to stop my wedding?” Shiyiwe asks, disbelief evident in her face.

“It’s formalities Nonyanda, he has to ask this before he starts.” Mthombo rescues her confused mind.

“But he said if anyone wants to stop the wedding they must speak now, why would anyone want to stop my wedding? Do they know what I went through to get here? I was arrested and put in a police van, I won’t mention the emotional damage. My groom resembles Shrek and because of that we can’t take pictures. Please sir, don’t give my enemies the stage. Let’s do this now.” That was a mouth full which has left giggles in people’s mouth.

A wedding rehearsal is always necessary, now Mthombo knows.

The wedding commences.

Just as Mthombo slips a ring in Shiyiwe's wedding finger, mutterings and stutters are heard in the chapel.

Someone screams and jumps to their feet.

"A cat," one person shouts in shock. There is sudden chaos on the left wing of the chapel, the wedding has come to a halt.

"This is ridiculous, all this drama because of a cat." Ndaba hisses, moving forward to check what the fuss is about.

A black kitten runs past him and settles on Shiyiwe's feet, she's shrieks and steps back.

"It's just a cat Nonyanda," says her cheese-brought-up husband.

"It's not just a cat, it's a black cat." Shiyiwe says unable to control the waterworks pouring down her face.

"What's colour got to do with it?" Mabahlezi asks, she's a bridesmaid for nothing.

“I’ll take it outside,” the second born Bongukwanda says.

Argh! These people are not even coconuts, they are blacks dipped in milk that it has even blinded them.

“A black cat is considered bad luck, any black person should know that.” Uncle Mdu must really add his opinion, he’s on his feet exhibiting a displeased look.

“We need to pray before you continue,” shouts Shiyiwe’s grandmother.

Bongukwanda thinks this is Sandton, he has the cat in his arms. There he goes headed toward the door while patting the fury intruder.

“Let’s join hands, to invite Jesus. He says when we gather he will surely come.” Grandmother says, taking Shiyiwe’s hand and Mthandeni’s.

The Meyiwases are forced to believe in this superstition and join the circle that’s expanding. She starts praying, calling God by every name her old and frail brain can remember.

Now this is getting longer than expected, the guests

are getting restless.

Who knows what God is going through? He must have asked one of the angels to pass him a pillow so he can rest his spinning head. Looks like He's going to put the rest of the world on pause because no prayers are as demanding as this old lady's prayers.

Shiyiwe pops one eye open and finds Mthombo glancing at her, something heartwarmingl in his eyes brings tears to hers.

"I love you," he silently mouths. It's for her eyes only and her ears to hear once the marriage officiate finally declares 'you may kiss the bride.'

For now they have to wait for Shiyiwe's grandmother to finish rebuking and giving God a long list of the things he needs to do to protect her grandchild.

It's about time The man upstairs gets a PA, this is not on.

.

.

Road to 30K... please help me get there by sharing

the inserts.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Fifty-eight

SHIYIWE-

.

.

“Smile sisi.”

This photographer is starting to get on my nerves, smiles are contagious. If I smile then this one next to me will want to pop a tooth as well, I can't have that in our wedding pictures. Not when he looks like a blotted teddy bear.

“Bhuti we're here for me, the groom is just a plus one. His job is to worry about the wedding night, not wedding pictures.”

The photographer laughs at my quip and continues to capture our moments inside a fancy photo booth. We don't have to drive outdoors, everything has been

set inside the building where the wedding reception is held. It's beautiful.

"My wife is right, I can even make ugly faces, see." The goofy face Mthombo makes shows me a playful side to him.

"Don't you dare Mthombo." I nudge his rib. Just married and he grabs the first chance to trouble me. He laughs lightly, wrapping an arm around my waist. His forehead is riddled with sweat, either he's feeling hot or something is not right.

"Are you okay," I ask, looking at the hand clinging on to the walking stick. He's trembling.

"Yeah."

That was not convincing. "I think we have taken enough pictures, let's go sit."

I take his hand and lead him out of the photo booth.

We're heading back to the reception, I have had enough partying for the night. My family has gone back home, I didn't get time to sit and talk to them.

"Get on your chair bhuti, you've exhausted your legs

enough.” That’s Ndaba approaching us with a wheelchair.

“I’m not sitting on that thing,” Mthombo spits, his arm clings to my waist.

He hates that thing, and I don’t blame him. But right now, he needs to take a break.

“Bhuti please, you have overworked your legs.” Ndaba.

“I would rather sit on a chair then, I don’t ever want to see that thing in my life again.” Mthombo says, looking over at me.

His fears are plausible.

“Fine, you two should go home. I will take care of everything here.”

I get a suggestive look from Mthombo, he is thinking what I’m thinking. I’m going to torture him tonight, no sex until he shows me the plan he has regarding lobola.

There’s a car waiting for us outside, for a second I’m

convinced that Thambo will come out but it's an old man instead. He gets our doors.

"You go in, I want to talk to your wife." Ndaba must not exhaust me. What does he want to talk about?

"Don't steal my bride." Mthombo jokes and dashes into the car.

"Congratulations," his voice sounds similar to my husband's, reminds me of the day I almost betrayed Mthombo, I step back creating space between us. It's not him, it's me.

"I'm happy for you and my brother, don't ever let anyone come between you two. He loves you, I hope you will never forget that." He says, I see a hug coming and take two steps back. My days of finding comfort in his arms are over.

"Thank you for everything you've done for me Ndaba, there is no reason for us to hug. I have a husband now, he will take care of that." The truth can come off as insolence at times, Ndaba doesn't seem to take offence though.

He nods, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"I found a therapist for you, you don't have to tell him everything that happened with your uncles. Taking a life is not like killing an ant, it haunts you like a bad bitch. So please, do attend. He's based in Johannesburg, you will start your sessions as soon as you have settled in." Ndaba.

Heaven knows I need one, my conscious is practically begging me to get help.

"Thank you... again for everything. My husband is waiting." I crack a smile, I'm going to 'my husband' everyone until they call me out on it.

Ndaba finds my reply funny, he bids me with a wink.

.

.

The hotel looks cosy, there are candle lights and red roses scattered everywhere. I didn't expect any less from him, they were raised like white people.

"Is this our honeymoon?"

He's showering kisses down to my neck, awakening every sleeping thing in me.

“No, that one is a surprise.”

Yoh hayi! I've had enough surprises, my enemies will start feeling jealous and make it rain bad luck.

“Baby, you're not trying to kill the bribe on her wedding night, are you?” Because if he continues like this, I might perish before he can shout ‘surprise.’

He denies me an answer and decides to lead me into the room. I wish he'd listened to Ndaba and sat in the wheelchair. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that he's tired and uncomfortable. I want to tell him to sit and let me take care of him, that he might rip a stitch if he continues like this.

He sits me on the bed instead, and goes to kneel behind me.

“I've always wanted to do this,” he starts, hands massaging my shoulder. It comes with sugar coated kisses, this man knows his way around my body.

“You've always wanted to be a masseuse?” I can't imagine him touching another naked woman's body, I'd strike as his wife.

He kisses my neck... wait... Sigh!

"Mthombo what are you doing? It's ticklish," this man is sucking my neck. His hands cup my breasts, glad to know I'm not the only sex freak in this marriage.

It's a shame I can't have my piece of heaven tonight, I need to breathe, and think about his spine. If he continues like this, I'll end up under him, breathing like I don't have lungs

"I found Sikolethu."

That stops my moaning, I thought we were going North with this kissing thing. Why has he changed the direction?

"That's nice," it was bound to happen. I place his hands back on my shoulders, I don't know why he stopped massaging me.

For some reason his silence is making me anxious, something is brewing.

"What's on your mind?" I ask.

I know I should be congratulating him for finding his

son, and asking where he is and if he's doing fine. Heaven knows why I'm not doing that.

"He's not my biological son, turns out Zinzi had an affair with my father."

I hope we're not going to talk about Zinzi on our wedding night, I don't want to be reminded that once upon a time, he loved a woman so intensely.

Anyway, nothing shocks me anymore, it's bloody 2022. Mthombo narrates the story about how his father fathered Sikolethu. He still sees the boy as his son.

He sits next to me, I'd rather he lies down so I massage his spine and legs. I'm not comfortable with talking about his dad and dead wife tonight, maybe tomorrow.

"Lie down baby," my words are found amusing. He is smiling like a naughty boy.

"We're still talking Shiyiwe, can we do the lying down later?"

This man thinks I'm always thinking about sex, not always but it crosses my mind 90% of the time, and it's only with him. Only he can conjure up such emotions in me.

"Jo, stop asking questions and lie down." He surrenders with a head shake, strips off his shirt and lies on his stomach as per my instructions.

"We're really doing this huh? But how will my penis reach your tambourine?" Men have to have been born stupid, my vagina is a tambourine now?

"I'm giving you a back massage, I don't want my husband to go back to using the wheelchair. I can't be on top all my life, besides, woman on top is not my specialty." I tell him as I start with his lower back. He's tense, I'm not happy about the knots I'm feeling. This man is stressed.

"Oh, so I'm not getting any sugar tonight?"

I can't believe I'm wearing his ring.

"We're going to have mind blowing newly-weds sex once you have recovered, today you strained your back. You need to rest."

“I want to walk Shiyiwe, I’ll use every opportunity I get to use my legs.”

He’s become serious all of a sudden.

“Don’t force me to tie you down on this bed for two weeks.”

He starts moaning, I can tell it’s not from pleasure but pain. I’m careful not to touch the scar.

“As long as you will be tied with me, Nonyanda.” He hisses, and flinches, immediately forgetting his statement.

“Am I hurting you?” Of course I’m hurting him, it’s evident that he is in pain.

“It hurts when you pop the knots, my physiotherapist will be jealous when she finds out about this.”

She?

“Your physiotherapist is a woman?” I move away from him.

This stupid, ugly dress is heavy. Why did they buy me curtains for a dress? What ever happened to silk?

“Nonyanda!”

“I’m busy,” I tell him, trying to get the wedding dress off my body.

“I don’t know where Hlezi got this dress, was the plan to have me wear it for the rest of the days I’m married to her brother?” I hear him laugh.

“Relax, you’re too fidgety, that’s why you’re struggling to get the zip.” What’s he talking about? I, of all people can never be defeated by a dress.

“Can we talk about the part where your physio is woman, not my dress?”

He is limping to me, with that stupid cane. If he touches me I will ask Ndaba to bring the wheelchair.

“She’s not as hot as my wife,” the first thing he drops is a sloppy kiss on my bare shoulder, then his hand that burns my skin.

“So she is hot?”

The audacity for him to tell me this while locking eyes with me through the mirror and touching me like he’s never seen any other woman but me in this

world.

"I don't know, I only have eyes for my wife." Yeah right! He's trying to be smart and... he's making me weak and wet with these stupid kisses.

"Sikolethu can't talk, he's different. Something terrible was done to him. He's undergoing therapy, the process is long but he'll get there."

How are we talking about Sikolethu now? He drops the walking cane, turns me around and wraps both his arms around my waist.

"I want us to adopt him, my father will agree. You are going to make a great mother."

A mother to who? Now I know why I was never surprised as a child, God knew I'd hate them. Why am I going to mother Zwangendaba's child? This is it, he's decided without consulting me first. My life is going to change drastically.

"Mthombo can we..."

His lips cover mine, he's never kissed me like this before. Heated and obsessive.

It's crazy how fast he has deviated from the topic, his hands are all over me. I'd swear he wants to eat me alive.

"Mthombo you're not strong enough, we can't."

"I had my back operated, not my cock."

Yoh, I'm considering an annulment. Right after he's given me my orgasm.

I'd protest if he wasn't touching me this way.

"Let me get on the bed," I say as soon as he pulls my zip down. He's looking at my half naked body.

"No let me take you to bed."

He's crazy, I'm not letting that happen. I manoeuvre past him, dropping my underwear on my way to the bed. I leave it on the floor and lie on the bed with my legs open, as I turn he's staring with a dropped jaw and half lidded gaze.

"Are you coming?"

He's keeping me waiting, I'm starting to feel like a biltong kept in the sun to dry.

He takes a risk by walking without his cane, his flinching face shows me how much in pain he is. He looks like a toddler learning to walk. I hate that he's forcing this.

Orgasm first, then scold him for being stupid. He gets between my legs, I open wider for him so he doesn't hurt his back.

"I want to eat you first," Mthombo is never serious about life.

His back is toy-toying, there's no time to be eating other people's children.

"Let's do it the traditional way first." I kiss him all over his face, his lips are my favourite. They feel good on my lips.

A touch from him always get me wet, I was ready before I was stripped naked.

He's breathing on my face, the eye contact is deep it has me shying away.

"I'm ready, take me... now." I tell him, my eyes darting

here and there. I don't know how wide I can open my legs. I hope he appreciates this yoga I'm practising.

"I love you Nonyanda," he hisses as his tip touches my moist opening. My mind takes a pause when he slowly sinks in, I almost choke a gasp because of how deep he's entered me.

"Mthombo." It's his name sweetly leaving my mouth, I grip his biceps and let my body go.

His strokes are smooth and slow, when it comes to pleasuring me, he considers his back. But when I say sit and rest, he cries me the River Jordan.

"I have been dreaming of this day from the first day I saw you." He says, his strokes growing deeper. I feel him expanding inside my walls, his deep breaths on my neck will kill me.

"I have never tasted anything so good in my life, I missed you Nonyanda."

He has managed to dominate over me, his authority screams for attention. He lifts his head and looks at me in the eye, his hand finds my clit. I'm losing the grip on my senses, my moans are going to

embarrass me.

"Stop acting like we're going to appear on a sex show... don't move fast Mthombo." I want him to think of his back but I also want him to give me all of him.

"Do you want me to stop?" He uses the wrong tone and looks into my eyes again, now I'm susceptible and weak. He is exposed to the helpless me.

"Don't stop," I'm not crying, my voice just decided to change.

"Nonyanda." Another hot breath on my face. He's pushing through sweat, groaning and moaning.

"Are you okay?" I ask.

There are tears in his eyes, he's touching every corner of my walls with just the right amount of pressure. My toes curl, I'm close to exploding. I think he is too, his moans are louder, his strokes deeper. He is groaning like an animal.

"Ahh, Mthombo." I scream when he untiringly nails my G-spot. Waves explode inside me, my vision

blurs a second. It takes me a minute to feel the heavy body crushing me down. He's heaving on my neck, I feel his cum inside and for a strange reason the feeling makes me love him even more.

"Mthombo," I try to push him off, he's too heavy.

"Nonyanda." His voice is low, laced with a twinge of pain.

"Baby?" He hasn't said anything yet but I'm in tears, something is wrong with him.

"I think we broke something," he grunts.

"Is it your penis?"

His chuckle rumbles deep in his chest.

"Can you move?"

"No, the pain is excruciating." He answers.

"Call my brother,"

"And say what? Hey your brother is great in bed, he just gave me the best orgasm and broke his back while buried deep inside me."

"I'm serious Shiyiwe."

I caress his back and land multiple kisses on his sweaty shoulder.

"I know baby, you're going to be okay."

There has to be another option, Ndaba will hold this against me. I don't want him thinking I love sex so much that I couldn't wait for his brother to heal.

Mthombo's tears wet my neck, I'm such a selfish woman. I should've known better, but I never know better. His phone is on the bedside table, I text Ndaba. He will know we were having sex if I call him.

"Can you get it out of me?" He's still balls deep inside me, his twitching member is giving me hot flashes and turning me on again.

"I can't move," he says.

Great, might as well call the newspapers. Ndaba is going to find us in this position. Why did I fall in love with a giant?

.

.

Sponsored by Zamangwane Magubane

My apologies for the late post.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Fifty-nine

ATHULE-

.

.

I want to go into their room and tell them to keep it down, peaceful nights are a thing of the past in this house. I blame Sbonelo for all this, my mother is not happy about her situation. Strange how she didn't confront Sizwile about shooting her first born, my father is the one on the receiving end of her anger.

Quietly I leave my room and softly shut the door, it would be a disaster if Ayanda were to wake up.

My heart almost stops as I see a shadow in the dark corridor.

“Sizwile, what are you doing standing there?”

“Will they ever stop?” He’s not looking at me, I hope he is not planning on breaking down that door. I stand next to him and drop my head on his shoulder.

“I don’t know, do you think they are going to get a divorce?” I ask.

At this point, it seems that’s their next step.

“With this rate they are going, I think it would be a good idea. I’m tired of hearing them biting each other’s heads off.” He says.

I’m tired too but I wouldn’t wish them to divorce, I believe they still love each other.

Something crashes against the door, a scream follows.

“That’s it, I’m going in. They will kill each other.”

I don’t wait for his opinion, I push the door open. Their eyes whip to me, there’s a bible on the floor right where I’m standing. One of them threw a bible at the other and it hit the door.

“Phuma wena!” My mother yells, pointing a finger at me.

“Don’t talk to her like that.” Baba sputters.

Why did I bother coming in here?

The bickering continues, Penny is accusing him of taking my side and he’s accusing her of abusing me. They stray from the main topic, I don’t understand what they are fighting about now.

“Baba stop, please.” My voice doesn’t rise above theirs.

They don’t give me attention, either they choose to ignore me or they are too consumed by anger to notice my presence.

“Why did you get me pregnant if you hate me so much? Why the hell did you marry me?”

Oh, I didn’t hear him utter hateful words to her.

“Were you not the one who came to me crying pregnancy?” He yells. “I regret that one nightstand Penny, you knew I loved her. I ignored your advances on purpose because I was in love with her.”

Oh my word!

“Wow, congratulations Mphako.” She’s loudly

clapping her hands. “You sound like a coward. You make it sound like I raped you when it was consensual.”

“I was drunk and vulnerable and you took advantage of me, Sbonelo wouldn’t have been born if you didn’t deceive me. Look at the trash you birthed Penny, a rapist.”

“My son is not a rapist.” Penny shouts in his face.

“He tried to rape his sister. When are you going to wake up and see that that boy is messed up?” baba.

“That boy is your son, he’s in the hospital in case you didn’t know.” She’s crying, those tears are for Sbonelo.

“But why am I surprised by your hatred for Sbonelo, you never wanted him.” She drops her body on the bed and starts wailing.

“Don’t you ever say that to me, I love all my kids equally. It’s you I have a problem with, I’ve always had a problem with you Penny. That’s why I never stopped seeing her, we loved each other, it was beautiful. She made life simple, she was refreshing

and..."

"That's not true, stop trying to hurt me."

She covers her ears, dad grabs her hands and forces them apart from her ears. How are they doing this in front of us?

"You wanted the truth Penny, now swallow it."

"No!" She screams, pushing him back in anger.

"It's crazy where love can lead a person, her love for me led her into my arms. For years we slept together, I held her in my arms and whispered how much I loved her, and it all happened right under your nose."

Why is he hurting her like this? I'm so confused, who is this woman they are talking about?

"MaMbuyazi married Jele after the birth of the twins, you couldn't have had an affair with her. I know my cousin, she was too holy. That's why I kept the twins from you, so stop lying to me. I am not an idiot."

She's screaming with her eyes closed, unaware of the shock on my dad's face.

"What twins are you talking about?" He asks, his

tone dark. We're not sleeping tonight.

.

.

MTHOMBO-

To say he is embarrassed would be taking it lightly, he wants to die, cremated and have his ashes poured down the drain. Shiysiwe is under him, trying to find her way out. It's easy for his manhood to slide out of her, the hard task is moving so he sets his wife free or he will crash her lungs.

"Try to push yourself up a little, I will slide to the side." This is the umpteenth idea she has come up with, hopefully this one will work.

He uses his elbows to push his body up, there is only room fit for a man's hand. But it works fine for his scrawny wife, she slides to the side and chases her shorts breaths.

"You're okay there Nonyanda?" There is no day he is never worried about her.

“Yes, I just need to put some clothes on you before your physio gets here.” That jealousy in her tone...

Ndaba’s response was that he’s halfway to the airport, and called Mthombo’s Physiotherapist instead.

Shiyiwe finds a morning gown in the bathroom, putting some clothes on Mthombo would be difficult. She finds the bed sheet a better alternative, she uses it to cover his lower body.

“You know you owe my grandmother millions for marrying her granddaughter without paying lobola?”

Where is this coming from?

She sits on the edge of the bed and locks her eyes with his.

“Yes, we spoke about it; me and her. Your uncle was there too, we agreed on a date for lobola negotiations. We’ll have our traditional wedding after.” He says.

She goes quiet on him, her eyes are lost in space. He's always been able to sense her distress, another thing is that she is not hard to read.

"I'm losing you to your thoughts." He says, taking her hand into his. A tear falls from her eye as she blinks herself out of the trance.

"Did your father and my uncle know each other before you?" Her question furrows his brows.

"Which uncle?"

"Velakithi."

"They were in business together from what I heard, I would ask him if we were on speaking terms." He says, and ends it there. Zwangendaba is not a factor right now, the mention of his name is upsetting.

"You said you wanted to adopt your brother, did you speak to your father about it?" Shiyiwe asks.

He doesn't need to speak to him, it's not like Zwangendaba wants to keep Sikolethu.

"He is my son."

"He is your brother, you said so yourself. Zinzi had

him with your father.” The clap back stings like a bee, he didn’t think it would hurt hearing it from his wife.

“Sikolethu is my son, those people owe me that at least.” His face is getting hot, he knows rage is taking over. It’s not directed to her but the people who betrayed him.

“What if I’m not ready to be a mother?”

“When we got together, I told you about Sikolethu. You’ve always known that he might come back one day and that there was a high possibility you will mother him, yet you accepted my love. What has changed now?”

“I don’t know, I guess I didn’t think it this far. Mthombo, he is your father’s child. Can’t you let him raise him?”

“I need you to understand me Shiyiwe, I can’t see him as my brother. I was there when he was born, I was the first to hold him. I cut his umbilical code. I was his father first.” He is exhausting himself with all this talking.

“That can’t be the only reason you are so desperate

to keep him, he is the only thing that connects you to your dead wife. You still love Zinzi, don't you? Even after finding out she cheated on you."

Mthombo keeps quiet, it's not a question he has an answer to. Although what he feels for Zinzi right at this moment is pure disgust.

There's a knock at the door, he expects Shiysiwe to drop a comment since nothing ever passes her mouth. But there's nothing, his eyes follow as she takes her god given time to get to the door.

"Shiysiwe, right? I'm Thando, Mthombo's physiotherapist." She extends her hand for a shake, it's brief.

"Mmmhhh! Ngena." Shiysiwe says, moving a little to the side. She looks at Mthombo, he's looking at her. What he can contribute is a forced smile at this moment, he's not sure what Shiysiwe wants from him with that look she's giving him.

"Hey big guy." Thando greets with a big smile dancing on her face.

His eyes move from his wife to the young lady in Adidas track tracksuits and braids tightly tied in a ponytail.

“What did I say about putting yourself first?” Her eyes are on the unkempt bed.

“I just got married, my wife comes first.” There is no lie told there, he’s an open man, very blunt. That’s why he didn’t have a hard time telling Shiyiwe about Sikolethu.

Thando laughs, she looks over at Shiyiwe and lets her smile broaden.

“Your wife is beautiful,” she says.

“His wife has a voice and can hear you.” That’s the wife retorting bitterly.

“Sorry.” Thando.

Mthombo studies the expression on her face, and makes note of the attitude written on it. It’s possible that she is feeding off on Shiyiwe’s attitude, he clears his throat and mentally crosses his fingers that his wife does not clap back. When others were

born with gifts on the palms of their hands, Shiysiwe was born with a mouth and the right to the world's vocabulary.

"No worries, Mrs..." Shiysiwe strides toward her, her slip-ons making a racket on the marble floor. She tightens the belt of the bathrobe and folds her arms across her chest.

"Just Thando, I'm not married." The lady replies as she places a bag on the bed next to Mthombo.

"Just Thando, we're sorry that you had to come at short notice. We were extra careful but what can I say? My husband can be a lion in bed."

Mthombo chokes in his spit, Shiysiwe is too much really.

"It's uh... I don't mind, it's my job. Mthombo pays me enough to work extra hours." Maybe she shouldn't have said it like that.

"Shouldn't he be Mr. Meyiwa to you?"

The staring contest between the ladies speaks volumes.

“He insisted I call him Mthombo.”

“I insist you call him Mr. Meyiwa. That won’t be a problem, will it?” Shiyiwe challenges her with an icy glare. Thando is the first to break the staring contest, she clears her throat and nods as she looks at Mthombo.

“Can we start? I’m in pain.” There is no other way to end the thrown shades, and low-key argument.

Mthombo sends his eyes to his wife, she rolls her eyes, sits on the edge of the bed with folded arms.

He knows she is keeping a careful watch on Thando.

As Thando pours oil on his back, he extends his hand. It lands on Shiyiwe’s thigh, he has to clear his throat to get her to look at him.

He was hoping their first night as a married couple would be magical and unforgettable, now he has to settle for unforgettable.

“So... a physiotherapist huh? Isn’t that white people’s things?” Only Shiyiwe would ask such a question, he squeezes her knee to get her to stop. Wrong woman

to be reprimanding.

“What would you rather I have chosen?” Thando replies, she’s placing hot towels on his back.

“Marketing, Public relations, social working. Or banking, I think you’d look great in a Shoprite uniform. You already have red lipsticks and drawn eyebrows to fit the role.” She really doesn’t mean it like that, he knows she doesn’t.

“Shiyiwe...” he’s reprimanding a stubborn woman.

“I’m just saying baby hau, relax.” Shiyiwe says.

“Don’t worry about it sir, I’m not offended.” Thando.

It’s not Thando he is worried about but his wife and her marking her territory, there is absolutely no need for her to do that. He can only ever love her and no other woman will ever take her place.

Maybe it’s his fault for mentioning that Thando is hot, Shiyiwe wouldn’t be so possessive.

Silence enters the room, Shiyiwe is impatiently tapping her foot on the ground. He knows that she is waiting for an answer.

“Try to move, or sit up if you can.” Thando instructs.

At her behest, he squirms a little. It’s a little uncomfortable, but bearable. Shiysiwe helps him to sit up, the look in her eyes is of worry. She places pillows behind him to support his back, cups his face, and presses a lingering kiss on his lips.

“You’re okay?” He nods at her question.

“Okay, big guy. My job is done for the night, if you are going to be sitting, I suggest you lean against the dashboard. I would recommend bed rest for at least three days and no more sex.”

“I will doc, thanks.”

Thando packs her equipment, shoots a smile at the man who pays her salary and plods toward the door.

“You didn’t answer my question,” Shiysiwe says after her. She stops, makes a turn and lets her mouth spread into a smile.

“I know,” and with that she exits.

“Hey big guy...” Shiyiwe imitates Thando. “You are big guy wena?”

Physically, he is.

“She was just saying.”

She scoots away from him, a dangerous chuckle slipping out of her mouth.

“Trust me, she wasn’t just saying. How do I know that she wasn’t talking about what’s between your legs?” Shiyiwe.

“Why would she? She’s never seen it.”

It’s absurd really.

“I am a woman, we measure that thing from the moment you walk into the wrong. Your big body is not the only thing that’s big you know.” She’s frowning at him, it deepens when his smile comes to light.

“You think I’m big?” He starts pulling her hand, seductively. Shiyiwe is not having it, she shoots up.

“No, I don’t think anything.”

“Where are you going, Nonyanda?”

“To wash off big guy’s sweat, it’s stuck on my skin.”

That brings a smile to his lips, he is in for the ride of his life in this marriage.

.

.

Sponsored by Zamangwane Magubane.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Sixty

ATHULE-

.

.

Today is Saturday, and my day off. That also means the house is packed, both my parents are home today. Mothers don’t know what a day off from work means. Mine woke up, played IPCC Gospel at full blast, and started taking down the curtains.

The beds have been flipped, couches shifted and

kitchen cupboards emptied. Yes, we're doing spring cleaning.

Last night's drama ended with her walking out on my father, he followed her to MaM'Flora's house demanding to know about the twins. She was crying like a widow that MaM'Flora asked my father to leave, or she'd call the cops.

She was accompanied back home around 1am, my father wasn't home then and when I went to bed at 3am. I was woken up by Gospel music to find them in the presence of an elephant.

Last night, I tried putting two-and-two and came out with nothing. What the hell is going on in this house?

10am is slowly approaching and I haven't come up with a plan to get myself out of this slavery.

"Athule." I look up from the kitchen floor to meet my mother's sour face. Is she not the one who woke up wanting to slave herself? "Hang the curtains, it will rain soon."

But I'm scrubbing the tiles, which is very unnecessary if you ask me. They are black.

"Can Ayanda hang them? I want to finish up here before 12pm."

She gives me a stern look that makes me wish I didn't have a mouth.

"Ayanda has an exam coming, she's studying."

No she's not, she's busy chatting to her friends on the phone.

"Stop arguing with me and do what I tell you." She snaps and turns to leave. Her attitude stinks.

There are three long-ass curtains in this dish, heavy as hell. I would ask Sizwile to help carry them over the line, but the woman of the house is on dragon mode today.

"My boys won't do any house work when there are women in this house." That's what she told me when I asked Sizwile to help me out this morning and by 'women' she meant me. I'm already in her bad books for whatever reason.

After toiling, I head back to the house.

She is in her bedroom, packing shoes and boxes under the bed.

I wasn't kidding when I said everything has been flipped upside down in the house, her bed is standing against the wall, and the wardrobe shifted from its place.

As usual, the old man is settled in his favourite couch, head buried deep into the newspaper.

I want to take a 2-minute break, the room I share with my sister is occupied, like I said she's on her phone smiling to herself.

"Hey." Okay, we'll pretend I don't exist.

The pops open and I jump to my feet at the sight of my mother sneering at me, I should not be sitting considering I have so much work to do.

"Mama." It's the fact that she happens to inflict so much fear in me.

"I need something for supper, please run to the mall." She says and hands me a list with about five

items on it plus a few R100 notes. Her eyes find Ayanda, the sly girl is engrossed on a book. When did she grab one?

“Hurry, I have to start with supper and there’s still so much to do around here.”

“Okay ma.”

I realise I’ve been holding my breath when she walks out and shuts the door.

This time I don’t make the mistake of leaving the house in dirty clothes, Ayanda refuses to accompany me when I ask. This leaves me with Sizwile, I find him in his room lying on the bed.

“Let’s go to the mall, your mother wants me to buy stuff.”

“Anything to get out this house.” He replies, jumping to his feet and slips on his shoes.

.

.

The trip to South Gate mall is short, we’re swallowed in the busy crowd, weaving our way towards

Checkers. My brother is like a woman, he's talking none stop, keeping me updated on his many women, how different they are and his favourites. I wish I could say I'm listening, my mind has left me. It's on Ndaba. I wish to call him, maybe get him to meet me here. I haven't heard from him since he left for KZN.

"Can I borrow your phone? I want to make a call." The bravery I have to ask such a favour, a cell phone is a person's most valuable possession.

"Don't finish my airtime, Athule." He says, handing me the mobile. It looks better than mine, urgh!

*I'm at South Gate, please meet me there if you're in town. Don't call this number, it's my brother's...
Athule.*

The text goes through, I delete it and give back the phone. Did I say I like this version of Sizwile, the one who does not pry and ask things that don't concern him?

Checkers is buzzing with people as expected, I hope the aisles are not packed. I need to be done before Ndaba gets here, I'm not certain he will make it, but there is no pain in hoping.

"Tell me about MaM'Flora, what's her story?" I strike a conversation, I would tell him how she dragged me out of Ndaba's car if he were not my brother. I'm not trying to lose points for Ndaba before he gains any.

"Except the fact that she's always up into people's things, I don't know." He sounds bitter. "Eyy, that woman is weird. You'd think she's a lost soul, she is always walking around at night. Sometimes early in the morning, I find it very suspicious." He spits.

"She likes visiting her neighbours that's why." I debate, trying to get the full story.

"I will burn her alive if she comes to my house."

"Okay, out with it. What did she do to you?" I ask, there seems to be an interesting history here.

"She told your mother that I like her son, so I should stay away from him." His nose crumples as pungent disgust curls around his words.

He heads straight for the trolleys, I wait at the door.

"Is her son aware of his mother's words?" I welcome him back with a question, and follow him in.

"He is and says it's nothing to be upset about. He's not really a talkative somebody, so..." he delivers with a dead tone.

"Is she the reason, you want more than one wife?" My question gets me a chuckle from him.

"No, why have one when there's so many to choose from? Besides, there's more women than men in the world. So, this is me giving back to humanity by helping women that will probably end up single for the rest of their lives due to the shortage of men."

He's laughing as he says this.

Wow!

"You just had to ruin it, didn't you?"

I believe the conversation was going the right way, until he decided to be a man.

As I grab a 5kg bag of braai pack, a hand snatches it

from me. My gaze shifts from it to the man standing tall before me, I don't know who he thinks he is. I saw it first.

"Excuse me, that's my braai pack."

I'm not letting it go, it's the only one with drumsticks. He's staring and not saying anything. Maybe he's mute. How do I tell him, I have made plans with these drumsticks and my mouth is watering at the thought of them?

"Do you know him?"

I hear Sizwile ask beside me, he does not sound happy.

He can be a bit intimidating sometimes, he is more like baba. The look he is shooting at the man has me wanting to walk away. I wouldn't want him to start a fight.

"Never seen him in my life."

There is no memory of him in my mind, he's actually a little taller than I am. Kind of good looking, you could smell his ego from across the room.

“Athule,” the man says and I am beside myself, I do not know this man. Yet my name just left his mouth like we’re long lost friends.

His mouth stretches into a big smile, his scent hits my nostrils as he stands too close for comfort. The only logical thing to do is scoot back, I was almost kidnapped, so it’s normal for me to be vigilant around strangers.

“You don’t remember me?” His voice rings in my ear and I can only frown at his question and the smile that won’t leave his mouth. He is gazing at me like I should know who he is, I deserve an award for the best confused expression in the world.

“I come to KFC for breakfast every morning, you’re the one who usually serves me. We’ve struck a few conversations and...”

He explains like I’m supposed to remember him, we get a lot of customers at the eatery. What’s so special about him that I should remember him?

“Oh, hi.” I reply in the most polite manner. My mind is wrapped around this bag of drumsticks, he should

be letting go now.

"You don't remember me, do you?" He asks, his legendary smile fading.

"Sorry," I don't believe I am sorry.

"Do I need to step away?" That's my brother, he sounds relaxed now. As to why, I do not know. This man is a stranger, regular customer or not.

Sizwile does not wait for an answer, he grabs the braai pack and tosses it in the trolley. My heart dances in excitement, but disappointment stops it when he pushes the trolley away leaving me with this man smiling at me. What are brothers for? I don't think I was informed.

"I don't see a ring," it's the man again. I don't see him shutting up anytime soon. "You see I was raised with the notion that if a man hasn't put a ring on it then he has no claim on you, I've seen you with that man who dresses like a Skhethane."

Lord rescue me from this. Why am I still standing here?

“Athule, should I call a priest and get you two married, or are we going home?” My sell-out brother yells from across the aisle. This is embarrassing, his question seems to tickle this guy. He’s chortling like an idiot.

My feet are fast when I turn to walk away, he doesn’t stop me, but I can feel his gaze on me. Argh! Now I’ll remember him when he comes to my place of work, just what I needed.

“And then? What was that about?” Judas Iscariot has the nerve to ask me this question, after leaving me alone with a stranger.

“Why, you want him to be your brother in-law?” I spit, annoyance in my eyes. Sizwile finds it funny.

“I’d slit his throat before he gets a chance to ask you out.” He says, but won’t do away with the amusement swirling in his voice. My answer is stolen by the blaring sound of my ringing phone, these old things are unnecessarily loud.

“Where are you? Come home now.” She drops the call.

“Let’s go, your mother misses us.” I tell my brother, he growls in annoyance.

Queues can be exhausting, I can finally breathe when we walk out.

.

.

There’s a crowd gathered outside my gate, I’m done with this house. Sometimes I want to leave and never come back.

My mother is on her knees, crying, her arms wrapped around her husband’s leg, there are suitcases tossed on the ground. I turn to the neighbours.

“What is wrong with you people? Aren’t you ashamed? This is our family matter, give us space and mind your damn business.” They drop their heads hopefully in shame and go back to their homes.

“Fuck this shit, I’m not staying for this.” Sizwile

snaps and drops the groceries to the ground. I watch him walk away, he's leaving me to deal with these people alone.

"Baba, what's going on? What are you doing to her?" He doesn't look at me, but my mother does.

"Athule, your father is throwing me out of the house. Talk to him please." She doesn't have to scream, the neighbours have heard enough.

"Baba..." He raises his hand to stop me from talking. He drags my mother up with such ease and starts dragging her toward the gate.

"Mphako please, please. I have nowhere else to go." I have never seen her crying so painfully. Her cries are not affecting him, he wants her gone.

"Okay fine, we stole the babies from her." She weeps.

My father releases her hand, she falls to her knees crying with her head bowed.

"I didn't want you to know about the twins, I knew you were going to leave me. So a nurse friend of mine helped me and my sister. MaMbuyazi had a C-

section and was told the babies were stillborn when she woke up, and that they were considered hospital waste so she couldn't see their bodies or have a burial for them." Her eyes turn to me, I don't know what to read in them. She hates me.

"This bastard child of yours is not even 23, I lied about her age just to keep my secret. She was too small for her age because of malnutrition, you could easily pass her off for a 4-year-old." She speaks with spite and malice in her voice.

What the hell is going on? I look at baba, he's not looking at me but his wife with so much rage radiating from him.

"Call your sister, I want her here now." He tosses his phone at her.

"Baba, what's going on? Why is she saying all these things?"

"Call your uncle's Athule, tell them to come now." He says, not looking at me.

.

.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Sixty-one

SHIYIWE-

.

.

My first morning as a married woman and I'm waking up alone in bed, he's not here. The clock on the wall confuses me, it can't be after 12 midday. I overslept.

I can't hear the water running in the bathroom, so he's not in there. There is a lot to do today, we're flying back to Joburg.

I have to go home affairs and apply for a passport. He said we're leaving for the honeymoon tonight, I think we should wait till his back has healed.

What's a honeymoon without honeymoon sex?

I'm making the bed when the door opens, here he comes carrying shopping bags. Mthombo is

addicted to pain, at this point I doubt he wants to heal.

“You’re awake?” He drops the bags on the bed and presses a kiss on my cheek.

“Hey, where were you?”

“I just went out for some air and I got you something.” He points at the bags on the bed as he sits down.

The smile on his face is that of a child, he looks enthusiastic.

“Dresses and underwear?” Now that we’re here, he owes me shoes. “You bought these for me?”

“Yes, I saw them and thought of you.”

He saw bras and panties and thought of me? Wow. Who on earth did I marry?

“My husband’s got great taste, I chose well. Thank you, soka lami.”

He dodges my kiss, face transforming into confusion.

“Haibo, ubani isoka lakho?” (Who is your boyfriend?)

“You, and you will remain that until you pay ilobola.”

This is the one topic I will never not bring up, men forget once they enter into matrimony. I don’t want our ancestors fighting over money in the underground.

“I am your husband Shiysiwe, not isoka lakho.” Yeah! Whatever makes him happy.

“Thank you for the clothes.” It’s been a while since I sat on his lap, I reward him with a nippy kiss. His arms wrap around me, he squeezes and kisses me longer than I had planned.

“How is your back?”

“I took a walk, Thando’s therapy helped.”

“I’m glad baby,” my mood is suddenly sour. Something about Thando reminds me of Ntebo. If my best friend can steal my boyfriend, what more a stranger? Mthombo didn’t lie when he said she’s hot, she is everything I am not. She’s in his league and very educated, while I have matric to wave around.

“I’ll just use the bathroom, please charge my phone, the battery is low.” I had left it to charge through the night, I guess there was no electricity.

I found a bag with my belongings in the bathroom last night, turns out Mthandeni had packed it for me. That girl has learned to keep things from me. How on earth was she able to keep a whole surprise wedding a secret?

The hot water feels good against my skin, so why not take a shower?

He’s sitting on the chair I left him in when I come back with a towel wrapped round me, his head is bowed. I thought I asked him to charge my phone.

“Is there load shedding again?” I ask.

He doesn’t raise his eyes, he’s reading something on my phone.

“Mtho...”

“What’s this? Why is my brother sending you such messages?” He asks, I honestly don’t know what he

is talking about.

"Your aunt reported her husband and his cousin missing. Do you know Olwethu? She's spreading rumours that you killed them. I told you not to tell anyone, call me as soon as you get this." He's reading from my phone.

I never saw this coming. How am I going to explain myself to this man?

"You kill people now Shiyiwe?" I'm not liking the tone he's using.

"I'm not a monster," the first thought is to defend myself. I would lie to him with a straight face and tell him this message is a lie, but his masculinity controls me now. How do I conjure up a lie when he is looking at me like I disgust him?

"Shiyiwe, I asked you a question." He exclaims.

"You don't know what they did to my sister, I would do it again if they ever come back."

His eyes raise to meet mine, I don't know this Mthombo I'm looking at. He's judging me, he doesn't

have to say it. It's all there in his eyes.

"How many?"

"Don't speak to me like I'm a stranger, I'm your wife."

His stare hardens, his lip curls in disgust.

"How many?" His voice peaks, unexpectedly. I feel them coming in waves, before I can push them back, they flow down my face. Tears should soften his heart, but his frown seems to grow.

"Grab that chair and sit next to me," this man is even using my phone to point the chair, he doesn't care about my crying. I want to tell him to plug my phone before load shedding.

He grips my hand, a little too tight.

"I trusted my brother with you Shiyiwe, a few days with him and you are killing people?"

"They killed my parents and raped my sister..."

His eyes widen, they are suddenly bloodshot. Yes, be shocked Mthombo. They were not perfect.

"You should've gone to the police." He says after what feels like a while.

"What were they going to do, huh? You know that there is no justice in this country."

"So that mentality gave you the right to kill them?"

First he was judging me with his eyes, now his words. It hurts more hearing these things from him, he of all people should understand me.

"How many were they?"

I don't understand why he is stuck on that, he keeps repeating himself and I can't tell him that I have the souls of four people on my conscious.

"Does it matter?." I snap, I'm getting restless.

"Yes it matters, my wife is a murderer."

"I acted out of anger, I'm sorry that I'm not perfect."

"Were you ever going to tell me?" He asks.

"No," I spit without hesitation, and eyes locked with his.

I would never want him to look at me the way he is

right now, that's I would've taken this secret with me to the grave." He pushes his chair back and stands using the walking stick.

"Where are you going?"

"I need to think," he says and it hurts even more.

I'm on my feet, my heart has sunk to the acid in my stomach. For a second I wish it comes back numb, I can't deal with how it's breaking right now.

"This is why I didn't tell you, you're leaving me, Mthombo?"

"I said I need to think."

He won't look at me, I know I disgust him.

"So you're coming back, and we'll still be married?" I don't want him to leave me.

He stops and drops his head without turning to face me.

"We are husband and wife, we're supposed to tell each other everything." He sounds disappointed in me.

Ndaba has ruined me, he shouldn't have sent that text.

"I know and I'm sorry..."

"Sorry doesn't cut it, Shiyiwe. You are my wife, I need to know what's going on with you, every single detail." He says, finally facing me. Maybe he shouldn't have.

"I said I'm sorry, okay. You are judging me, Mthombo even after I gave you a reason why I did what I did. You get angry so fast and refuse to hear me out."

He stares without a word, shakes his head and walks out on me.

.

.

ATHULE-

The uncles have arrived, all three of them from my father's side. The meeting hasn't begun, that means I haven't gotten my answers. I heard my father say they are waiting for Penny's sister. I have heard

about her sister before, I've never met her. I doubt any of us have.

I had to tidy up around the house and prepare a meal for the guests, most of my time in this house is spent in the kitchen.

We don't know where Ayanda is, I left her in the house before I went to South Gate.

Sizwile rushes into the kitchen, I guess he's decided to come back to the mess he left me in.

"What happened to your phone?" He asks, his eyebrows coming into a frown. I shrug because I don't understand his question.

"Here." He hands me his phone. "Speak." He adds, he looks annoyed.

"Who is it?" I take the phone slowly, of course because who am I supposed to be talking to? I must have been dropped as a baby and my left brain has never been revitalized.

"He said his name is Ndaba." He says.

“He has your numbers?” My question meets his raised eyebrow, I’m annoying him.

“Sis wam’ you know I love you right? But please take this call, this man has been calling none stop. I was with my woman just now. Do you know what he interrupted?”

I don’t want to know.

“I had to walk ten houses to get here just to come and give you this phone.” He spills and adds a tongue click.

This boy...

“Hello,” I turn my back to him. Ndaba has a tendency of saying things that make my cheeks flush, I can’t let Sizwile see me like that.

“What happened to your phone?” Really? Same question as Sizwile.

“It’s in the charger, I’m kind of busy we have visitors.”

“You said to meet you at South Gate, I have been waiting for you Athule.” He thinks I’m still... urgh!

“I was running errands, I wasn’t there to camp. You should’ve called me.” I tell him.

I don’t think he has anything to say anymore, he is quiet.

“We have visitors, call me later.”

“You do the calling, akere you don’t answer my phone ntwana.” That’s him.

Now, I have observed this man, his language changes when he is upset. He starts speaking like he grew up on the streets, there really is nothing to be upset about here. He’s got money and enough petrol to drive back home.

“Ndaba I...” He’s gone.

Sizwile snatches the phone from me and leaves the house, great. People are just sour today. I’m the only one with the right to walk around with my lower lip and head hanging.

I will have to buy airtime at the spaza shop, I haven’t touched the money Ndaba sent me. It’s about time I make use of it.

“Athule!” My father’s calling me, my heart decides to hide under my feet.

The lady they have been waiting for is here, she’s sitting in a wheelchair. I’m no doctor, but if I am not wrong, she had a stroke. Her right side looks crippled, her head is lopsided, her mouth as well.

“Greetings,” I greet. The grey haired man beside her returns the greeting, while I get an empty look from her.

“This is your mother’s sister, Tshegofatso.” The man she came with introduces. “I’m their uncle, their father’s brother.”

What do you know? She does have a family.

“Nkosazane.” I glance over at my father after taking a seat on the floor. His wife is seated across me, her back against the wall.

“Whatever you hear today, don’t ever think it’s your fault. You are a child Athule, you’re innocent. It’s us who made a mistake, it was our job to protect you

and we failed. We're not perfect, just remember that."

I can't promise him anything.

"Okay, Penny. As you can see your sister has had a stroke, she won't be able to speak. It's left to you, tell us what you did with the babies you stole." One of the uncle bluntly says.

Penny rolls her eyes, the audacity she has to do that here.

"Mphako has never loved me, baba. I knew from the beginning. He cheated on me with MaMbuyazi, my cousin." There is no need for that substantial attitude and pointing fingers at my father.

"We hear you Penny, but first tell us what happened to the children. We will talk about other things once we have resolved the issue at hand." The same uncle says.

"It was Tshego's idea, I had nothing to do with it. You know how manipulative she can be." She folds her arms, this woman is pointing a finger at everyone but herself. She refuses to take responsibility for her

actions.

My father looks spent, I see how he's so eager to reprimand his wife. But something is holding him back.

"Yeyi wena Penelope, I will let your husband throw you out of this house if you don't speak." The uncle shouts, she drops her head and starts fiddling with her fingers.

"Mphako was in the process of paying lobola when I found out that MaMbuzazi was pregnant. Sbonelo was turning three, I knew I was going to lose my husband if he found out about the pregnancy. She lived alone in a shack in Eldorado Park. I would bring her groceries and clothes just to get a chance to poison her mind against Mphako. That witch called herself a Christian but opened her dark thighs for the father of my child. Sies man." Disgust twirls around her voice.

"Watch your mouth Penny." My father roars as he stands to his feet, all eyes fall on him. Can't he stay

calm, this woman might fuck it all and change her mind about telling the story.

He is told to sit back down by one of the elders.

"When she was 8 months pregnant, Tshego gave me a concoction. My job was to put it in her tea, it was going to kill the babies. It didn't work, the only thing she got was a runny stomach. I had to win her full trust because I was left with plan B. I was the first person she called when went into labour, I called Tshego and a friend of mine who was a nurse. I don't know what she gave her, but it put her to sleep. Before that MaMbuyazi was begging me to take her to the hospital, it was in the middle of the night. What was I going to transport her with, a broom?"

Oh wow!

"The nurse performed the C-section, I was hoping she doesn't survive but she did with her twins. MaMbuyazi was rushed to the hospital because she was losing a lot of blood. I don't know how the nurse got her admitted without questions being asked."

And she doesn't care, that's the attitude she's giving

off.

“MaMbuyazi woke up a day later, and was told the babies were stillborn.”

My father is beyond flabbergasted, he exhales loudly and claps his hands in shock.

“I am married to an evil woman.”

He should've figured that out a long time ago. Tshego's demeanour is that of a person who doesn't want to be here. I don't think she cares about the exposure and revelation.

“What happened next?” My uncle asks.

“I couldn't take the babies home with me, neither could Tshego. So we kept them in MaMbuyazi's shack for three months, taking turns to stay with them, until their umbilical cords fell. Another reason was that we didn't have a plan. Our first thought when they were new-borns was to put them in black plastic bags and dump them in the trash. We didn't go through with it, I'm a mother. We finally agreed to

send one twin to her mother and passed her off as an abandoned orphan. The other twin..."

She looks at me, then drops her eyes.

"There was a lady from Zambia who used to come over to our house to ask for old clothes and do the ironing. With the promise of groceries every month, a place to stay, she agreed to take the baby in with no questions asked. She named her Athule."

No, no, no!

It feels like someone just punched me in my stomach, I remove the doek on my head. I'm still feeling hot, my heart is shattering. A million pieces I will never be able to gather.

"Penelope?" Uncle snaps in disbelief.

"She was a good woman, she loved Athule. It's not like she lived on the streets, I gave her MaMbuyazi's shack." She justifies.

I shrink into a corner and let my tears roll, I don't think I'm still alive. There's something heavy sitting on my chest, it's tightening with every breath I take.

“How did Athule come to live with you? Where is the other twin?”

“The woman died of an unknown sickness, I didn’t care to find out, I received a call from a friend of hers saying she told her to contact me if anything ever happened to her. I had no choice but to pass Athule off to my husband as a friend’s daughter. She was around 7 going on 8, but her body was that of a 4 year old. She was too small and skeletal, it worked to my advantage.”

Basically, I was starved. I haven’t made eye contact with my father’s wife, I’m afraid I might explode if I do.

“I changed her age, in case my past came back to haunt me.”

Me, me, me. That’s all she cares about, herself.

I can’t stop crying, I’m trying but it hurts I can’t help it.

“And the other twin? Where is my daughter?” My father has ceased to raise his voice, he looks defeated and broken.

"You don't listen, Mphako. Your mistress raised her own daughter and she didn't even know it. She never would've guessed because as far as she knew, they were dead." She seems to find some satisfaction in that, her lips twitch to form a smirk.

"MaMbuyazi was living with Jele then, she moved on so fast like she never lost her kids." She shakes her head, showing disappointment towards MaMbuyazi.

"She disliked her own child and even named her Shiysiwe," she cackles and claps her hands.

Shiysiwe Jele? She can't be talking about the Shiysiwe I know. Shiysiwe is my twin?

"What happened to their umbilical codes?" The uncle from my father's side asks.

Penny shrugs, crosses her arms and says, "We wrapped them with a tissue and flushed them down the toilet."

Gasps!

I can't listen to this anymore, I use the strength I have to stand and scurry out of the house.

.

.

Sponsored by Zanele Dlomo.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Sixty-two

SHIYIWE-

.

.

I don't know when I dozed off while waiting for Mthombo, I'm woken up by my face being showered with kisses, his scent tells me it's him before I open my eyes. He's hovering on top of me with a beautiful smile on his face.

Lord, I know I did not die and woke up forgiven.

"You were snoring."

That's it, I'd rather be sleeping. I can't use the blanket to hide from him, he's on top of it.

"I'm tired Mthombo, let me sleep please." I thought

he was upset with me, something has changed.

“We’ll miss our flight, wake up and eat before we leave.” I forgot about that, I need to make a stop back home.

“Okay, get off me first.”

My frown is of confusion, I don’t know if I should be happy about this or he will unravel and start judging me again. He kisses me.

“I like being on top of you,” he’s forgetting we can’t be climbing each other like monkeys.

“Am I forgiven?” I’m starting something I might not be able to handle, I don’t want a repetition of what happened earlier.

He takes a moment of silence, his eyes are on me. I’m glad I don’t see condemnation in them.

“Let’s enjoy each other first, we’ll tackle this when we have settled down.” He says.

I huff, a flurry of emotions take over me. It’s hard for me to believe that we will get through this, I don’t want it hanging over our heads.

That raised eyebrow tells me that he wants an explanation for the tears in my eyes.

“Okay, where is my strong Nonyanda? You don’t cry so easily, what is this?”

His strong Nonyanda went through trials and tribulations and was expected to still come out strong. Somewhere on the road, I lost my strength. I lost my will to fight and I lost myself.

“I don’t want to lose you Mthombo, we just got married. You can’t leave me, I won’t kill anyone again. I won’t even kill a cockroach, I promise we won’t buy Doom in our home.” Sometimes my honesty is not loyal.

“I’m not going anywhere, but we do need to talk about what happened. Not at a hotel though, it can’t be safe.”

Now he is scaring me, there can’t be cameras in here.

“I brought you food, get up and eat.”

“You have to get off me first, you’re breaking my lungs.” I say.

His smile gives me peace. He hands me a white container and a fork, it smells nice.

“What’s this?” I flip the lid open. Noodles? I have never given them the time of day, but since he bought them out of love. If I die, I die. The flavours explode in my mouth, this will teach me to never judge a book by its cover.

“This is so good, where did you buy it?”

“I know right? I had mine already, I bought it at a Chinese eatery down the street.”

He said Chinese? Everything I ate comes back up, I hold it in and make it to the bathroom in time to throw up.

“What happened?” I hear him behind me and stand to meet his height. He’s leaning on the bathroom door, worry on his face.

“Do you know what’s in those noodles?” I ask because really, what normal black person would eat anything Chinese?

“No, but they are good.”

I knew I married a white man, I thought Zinqumo was bad.

“Does the corona virus ring a bell?”

He looks at me like I’m stupid, it’s good to know he understands what I’m saying.

“A Mayonnaise man who looks like Jackie Chan thought a bat was edible, so they ate it and the rest is history.” I tell him, I’d be beside myself with shock if he doesn’t know this story.

He’s still staring like I have grown horns, out of the blue he tilts his head back and bursts out laughing.

“It’s true Mthombo, didn’t you hear the story?” I thought he liked the news.

He walks back into the room laughing. I don’t ever want to see Chinese food on my plate again.

He’s undressing when I walk back in the bedroom, Mthombo loves tempting me. Our eyes meet, he smirks. I see where he is going with this, like the good girl I’m trying to be, I shut my eyes and try to

find my way to the bed.

“Look at your sons Lord, they are testing us. Shame the devil by leading us not into temptation.”

“Shiysiwe...” I can tell by the sound of his voice that he is naked and wants me to see.

“No dick formed against me shall prosper, I give myself to you Lord.” My feet smash against the edge of the bed, there are arms around me, stopping me from falling.

“Watch where you are going, what if you hurt yourself?” Haibo! And then? Attitude?

“I’m fine, I’d rather bump my head than have sex with you.” Okay rephrase... he’s confused.

“I mean before you heal, I shouldn’t see you naked or I will be tempted to touch and then I’ll want you inside me.” It’s that honesty again.

His arms have not left my waist, his pipe is poking me.

“But I always want to be inside you, Shiysiwe.”

Yeah, he thinks he is a sex God this one. Too much

TV will kill our black brothers.

His lips trail down my neck.

“When we get home, I’m going to lock you in the house for a week and have you all to myself.”

Mthombo Grey, this is Five shades of Grey.

He’s slowly pulling my nightdress down to my chest, my back is pushed against the wall as soon as I’m naked. I need a video to record these moments.

“Who said I’m going to let you lock me up?”

Soft moans of pleasure escape my mouth as he alternates to sucking my breasts. I will never say no to him.

“Ba... baby...” I’m gone and never coming back.

“Talk to me, mamas.” Fuck, who taught him that dangerous word. He must not forget that he is a Joburg Zulu, I can’t deal with weak knees.

Do people orgasm from their breasts being sucked? I think it’s coming.

Mthombo sees my knees fighting to keep my weight

and pulls me to the bed. He hovers above me, without giving me time to get comfortable and starts sucking my breasts like they are a pacifier.

“Vuma phela mntano muntu, I bought the cuffs...”
(Say yes.)

He whispers against my lips, before connecting my lips with his.

He's serious about locking me up, his hand is on my clit playing with it.

“Mthombo that's not a toy, don't play with me.” I'm struggling to speak, I want him to fill me up.

He nuzzles his face on my neck and paints my skin with his hot breath, this is not supposed to be driving me crazy. Why am I squirming like a fish-moth under a torch light?

“Tell me first, I won't give you what you want if you don't tell me.” He's looking into my eyes, it feels like I'm looking at a different man. He rubs my clitoris with the intent to drive me to the edge. This is clit abuse, he will never see heaven.

“Please... enter.” I say, wrapping my arms around him and pressing his body into mine till there is no space left between us.

“I’m the one with the dick bambo Iwami, you’ll have to settle for the hand until I say so.” I hate him. This is not fair.

He’s drawing circles on my clit, something shoots inside my veins. I can’t take it anymore.

“What do you say ngilosi yami? Uyang’faka noma uyang’khipha?” (Are you giving me a chance?)

He’s holding back a laugh, but I can’t hold mine, not when he sounded like a tenth grader.

“You’re crazy,” I say..

He removes his hand from my clit, I want to die.

“Ma... maybe.” I lie, I want him to continue pleasuring me. He goes back to sucking my breasts, and rubbing me down there.

He’s going to kill me.

He presses his forehead against mine. My moaning is getting louder.

“Look at me.” He says.

His finger continues to plunge in and out of me. There’s a smirk on his face, as he locks eyes with me.

He enters me without warning, I’m opening my legs again for him. They say you’re lucky the second time. This is our moment, we’re claiming it. He grabs my ass as he presses my legs to my chest.

His finger is working on my clit once more, his erection deliciously plunging inside me. I hold on to him with my legs and arms, like he’s a tree and I might fall if I let go.

“Look at me.” He mumbles, I open my eyes to meet his bloodshot eyes.

“Are you okay?”

We’re having sex, I’m on top of the world. I motion by grabbing his ass, willing him to go deeper. He pulls out and lays me on my side, my back against his chest. He lifts my leg, his arm is under me, hand caressing my breast. I’m trying to process this new position when he slides his erection inside me. His

free hand is back on my clit, there are so many emotions taking over me that I can't grasp a single one. So I go with the flow and fly as he throws me up.

"Say my name," his words are breathless whispers in my ear.

"Mthombo," I didn't mean to scream. It fires him up, he's going deeper. I'm in love with his slow strokes, I can tell he is pouring a lot in them.

His name frequently escapes my mouth, it's the way he's groaning and moving in and out of me that's driving me to the brink of death.

It's like pouring more and more petrol on a burning house.

That addictive tingly feeling overtakes me, my muscles clip. I shouldn't be screaming like a whore but I can't help it. My body convulses in his arms, he doesn't stop. I don't want him to.

"I'm almost there, ride with me Nonyanda." He doesn't have to say it twice, I'm on my second one. He's deep inside me, filling me up. My loud moans have turned into screams, I see white the second

time.

“I can’t cum, lie on your back.” He says, chasing his short breaths.

He’s on top of me, it’s about him this time. His hands cup my breasts. I think he’s getting there, his groans are becoming louder. I tighten my arms around his shoulders, and whisper these words for the first time.

“I love you,” I say as he collapses on top of me.

“Say it again.” He should be gathering his breath, not wasting it on asking me to repeat myself. “It felt good, say it again Nonyanda.”

He’s looking into my eyes, not fair on the emotional blackmail.

“I love you,” I tell him. He nods with satisfaction and drops his face on my neck.

“Wake me up after an hour,” he says.

I’m not spending an hour with this man on top of me. I want to ask about his back, there are no signs of pain.

.

.

TSHEGOFATSO MOSHEO-

Yesis! Mphako should stand in for the president when he addresses the nation, this man can talk for the whole country. He's giving her a lecture about how he is not going to let her get away with what she did, even though she's had a stroke and now wheelchair bound. There's a yawn coming from her core, she wrestles it down and a long slimy drool drips out of her mouth instead.

She mumbles something inaudible, someone better be wiping this shit off her. Her eyes look to Penny for help, Penny is so useless, she is lost in her own problems. Is she aware that her dear sister is in a wheelchair? Her daughter is in jail? And her husband is lying drunk in a tavern somewhere? Selfish Penny.

"I don't know why I have agreed to drop you off, you and your sister don't deserve anything from me." It's about time Mphako gets a job at an airport, his

complaining is getting out of hand.

“Bheka, help me get this hippo into the car.” That’s Mphako calling someone’s wife a hippo, she would narrow her eyes but paralysis is life now.

Bheka is one of the uncles present at the meeting, the youngest and smallest in body. He looks at Mphako, then Tshegofatso and laughs.

“No ngamla, it’s a Sunday today. After Sunday kos, sex with my wife is my favourite thing to do. What if I break my back?” That’s really a stupid thing uttered by this fool.

All Tshego can do is read their expressions, she’d tell them nonsense had the situation allowed her.

“I’ll help you.” Penny is back from her trail of thoughts, her hand touches Mphako’s as she extends it toward Tshego. Mphako looks like he’s about to throw up.

Six hands are better than one, here comes the Mosheo sisters’ uncle. They succeed in getting Tshego into the car, and not forgetting her new vehicle.

Penny claims the driver's seat as she should, the two uncles squeeze in with Tshego. This van is so small there is barely space in the back.

"My wife is calling me, she can't wait to hear what went down today." The Bheka uncle says in excitement.

"Sthandwa sami, prepare some popcorn and order meat. I'm almost there, ngiphethe isgaxa sendaba." He's speaking as if God crowned him king of the voices. He's too loud in a car that's not his.

Mphako huffs and shoots a cold stare at Penny beside him.

"See what you have done? My family is making fun of me." He goes for a mumble and fails. Tshego heard it all the way from the back.

What she would do to click her tongue right now.

The car screeches and comes to a stop, Bheka immediately stops laughing and tells his wife he will call her back.

“Get out of my car Bheka,” Mphako.

And they say women are dramatic. Bheka tries to argue for the sake of the free ride, Mphako is not hearing any of it. The driver wins the argument, he drives off as soon as shocked Bheka shuts the door.

Tshego is sort of relieved, the real relief will be when she finally gets home. She never wants to see these people again.

By the time they get to Alexander, Tshego’s shirt is drenched with drool. As they help her out of the car, they don’t bother wiping her. Mphako looks down at her, his face filled with nothing but repulsion.

“See Penny, this is what happens to people who test God.”

Meanwhile he is looking at poor Tshego. The urge to roll her eyes is stronger than she can ignore. How dare this brother in-law think he can judge her?

“This is not the end MaPhiri, God is not done with you.” He says, and goes back into the car.

“Are you going to leave her there?” It’s the uncle who

was given a free ride asking nonsense.

Tshego hears no answer from Mphako, the only thing she hears is a car driving off.

Those idiots, she hates all of them.

Her eyes move to the left, then right. She knows she can't sit in this wheelchair until Jesus comes.

"Yesis, my back hurts." She exclaims as she wipes her mouth. She stands to stretch herself. Just as she stretches her legs, she sees her neighbour watching with his eyes wide and jaw dropped.

"Ke eng uena, u shebile eng? Have you never seen anyone in a wheelchair before? Voetsek." (What are you looking at?)

She bites the poor man's head off, stands behind the wheelchair and pushes it through the gate.

.

.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Sixty-three

ATHULE-

.

.

Lies can be chocolate covered shit, my father believes mine after I tell him that I am visiting a friend. I'm not making it to heaven, but I know I'm making it to Deipkloof Ext.

I stop by the mall first, Ndaba once mentioned something about seeing me in a G-string in which I responded that it will only happen in his dreams.

Today I am going to make his dreams come true, I buy pairs of underwear with matching bras and add the G-string to my shopping list. I don't see how this piece will work well with my but crack, I see a war.

The taxi to town takes longer than I anticipated, it's after 3pm, so the driver has to drive around looking for passengers. I should've gone inside the rank, these gallivanting taxis think we have time to roam around.

There are four people in the taxi, the driver excluded.

We have to sit through Mariah Carey and Marry J. Blidge blasting through the speakers. It's Sunday blues on a sad Sunday. This driver is clearly going through what I'm going through, maybe his life has been turned upside down like mine.

Finally, we make it to Noord Taxi Rank, my bag containing all my belongings is clutched to my chest. There's always that dodgy guy looking for a bag to snatch, I have to be careful around here. I'd be completely stranded if that happens to me. I make it to Wanderers street in peace, amid the ladies asking to sort out my steel-wool hair. I think I should shave it all off, new me, new hair type of thing.

There is one I trust, my colleague once dragged me here and I was impressed with how neatly the lady did her hair. I didn't make an appointment, hopefully she is not busy.

As I enter the building, my eyes meet with hers. She sends me a friendly smile, I'm glad she remembers me. It saves me the trouble of having to explain who I am.

“Sis’ Zodwa.” I greet, my eyes landing on the little girl seated on the chair I’m yet to occupy.

“Sisi, I didn’t know you were coming.” She says, I believe that’s her way of greeting.

“I would’ve called, but I don’t have your numbers.” I never would have called even if I did. “My head feels heavy, I need help with this hair.”

She laughs at my statement and shows me a sit once she’s done with her client.

“Shave it all off.” I don’t want a strand of it left.

She doesn’t question or ask me why I’m going bold, if she does, I would start telling her how my life has been turned upside down and shaving my hair will at least ease the pain in my heart.

Sis’Zodwa is talkative, time flies and I lose track of it. By the time she’s done, my head disagrees with it. I don’t like the shape, it looks like an egg dipped in oil.

Apparently, I have to take a taxi to Orlando for me to get to DiepKloof Ext. That’s what this short taxi

driver tells me after calling me “Kehla, mfana.” I know I have a big head, but I can’t be looking like a boy. What the heck does that even mean?

“Athule!” A throaty voice yells behind me, I don’t recognise the man hurrying to me. Under any circumstances, I would have ran for my life. I grew up in Serowe Botswana, Joburg feels like New York to me. I don’t know anyone around here, it’s just a big jungle harbouring criminals.

My eyes switch from him to the man standing in front of me, I’m looking for a hero. He’s not even bothered, the man is impatiently waiting for a taxi. The same goes for the granny behind me. I guess this is normal, this stranger smiling at me like we are long lost friends.

“MaThulz, what are you doing here?” Is this how he’s decided to shorten my name?

I would tell him I’m catching a taxi to Diepkloof to surprise my boyfriend and hope we will shag before the night ends because I have some steam I need to blow off. However, I don’t know him.

“You don’t know me? I have seen you a couple of times with Bhedlindaba.” He says, showing me more than a tooth. I’m bad with faces and names. He keeps talking and talking and people are looking at us.

“I’m lost bhuti,” finally, words find me. Confusion covers his face.

“Where are you going? I will take you there?”

I didn’t mean it like that.

“I don’t know who you are,” I tell him as I move with the line. A quantum just arrived, people are pushing against each other behind me, something I don’t get. It’s not like the taxi will leave us. I trip and almost fall when the lady behind me pushes harder, it’s normal for me to give her a sour look. What is the rush for?

This guy, with the ugly pants and orange golf t-shirt pulls me out of the line. I want to protest but his next words calm me down.

“Ndaba won’t like it if I let you take a taxi when I’m here, come with me.”

I am not going anywhere with him, until he tells me who he is.

“I’m sorry, I have this mindset that everyone lives in my head.” He rubs the back of his head, chuckling to himself. “I’m Mikhulu, Ndaba is my boss and my source of headache.”

Okay, weird introduction. I take his extended hand and shake it.

“Nice to meet you,” I feel bad for not remembering him.

“Let’s talk about intwana yami and idliso that you gave him.” He takes my hand and starts walking with me, weaving through the crowds. As to why I have let him hold my hand, is a mystery I never want to uncover.

Mikhulu is loaded with words, my ears are tired.

His car is parked opposite MTN butchery, it’s a Fiat Figo. Too small for a giant like him, I might be exaggerating his height. Everyone is taller than me in my world, I have short legs.

“Where to?” He asks, as he starts the car.

“Diepkloof,” I reply.

My cheeks are on fire, I don’t know why. This guy does not know what I have in mind, or what I have in my bag.

He is silent as he manoeuvres the car through hooting taxis and crowds of pedestrians pushing to cross the streets. God bless Noord, it’s a jungle you wouldn’t want to find yourself in, especially month end.

There’s an incoming call from Penelope, I reject it. Soon after, my father’s call comes through.

“Baba!”

“Where are you?”

“I told you, I’m at a friend’s place.”

“Okay, come home.” He’s insane, I don’t ever want to see that woman unless she is lying dead in a coffin.

“Is your wife there?”

His silence answers my question.

“When is she leaving?”

“Athule...”

“It’s either me or her baba, as long as Penny is there, I am not coming back home.” This is what I have been wanting to tell him.

“We are not talking about this over the phone, come home.” He shouldn’t be saying that to me, I want him to tell me that Penny is leaving our house and we never have to see her face again.

It is best I end this call before it ends in tears.

This one behind the wheel thinks he’s Paul Walker, his driving skills are giving me a headache. We arrive in less than ten minutes, I’m told it takes more or less than fifteen minutes with a taxi. I’ll make sure to remember that next time.

“Don’t lose hope in him, he really likes you MaThulz.” He tells me before I climb out of the car. I know Ndaba likes me, however, it is kind for Mikhulu to

remind me.

I'm outside his house, he doesn't know I'm here. I didn't tell him, which might be a terrible move on my side. I've known Ndaba for close to a month, he wants things done in a certain way. When he says let's do this, then it has to be done.

Nerves begin to settle in, I hope I don't break down and cry about my problems. I don't want to think about them.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

"Are you excited about the trip?"

A small part of me is over the moon, but I'm conflicted. Mthandeni is still very much fragile, she needs me with her. We didn't tell anyone at home about Samson and Gezani molesting her, Grandma is too weak to know. She would die on the spot. So that leaves Mthandeni standing at a corner alone,

with no one to talk to.

"Very, I have to inform grandma that we're leaving and get her blessings. I don't think she will be happy about it though." He turns to look at me with a pucker between his eyebrows.

He doesn't understand what I just said.

"Why wouldn't she? Things that make you happy, should make her happy."

"They, do." except me finding my real father. "She just hates it when we're away from her."

"Gogo's baby." He's teasing me.

"I was closer to her growing up than my parents, she kept me under her wing when my parents focused mostly on Mthandeni. She was their golden egg."

It is common for last born kids to get all the attention from both parents. I join him on the bed, we're dressed and ready to head out. My family is expecting us, I hope they didn't cook. Mthombo ate already, I can't imagine him overeating for the sake of politeness.

“Were you a naughty child?” Such a simple question delivered with a deep meaning.

“Everyone thought I’d fall pregnant before completing high school, that’s how quiet I was.”

He laughs.

The quiet ones are known to be the naughtiest, that’s society’s perspective.

“You were reticent? I’m finding it hard to believe that.” He says, tapping a finger on my knee.

“I was insecure, and had a very low self-esteem. The real me wasn’t accepted at home, and that made it hard for me to spread my wings in public. I was that kid that sat alone during break and only spoke when spoken to. My personality kind of took a turn when I met Ntebo, she was free spirited and I guess that grew on me. The closer we became, the more I broke the walls of insecurity around me. It got to a point where I stopped caring what people thought of me, except my parents. Their acceptance was everything to me but I never got it, I was a failure in their eyes till the day they died. All I ever wanted was

to show them that I can be something in life, that I wasn't the ugly duckling they made me feel I was."

There had to be a way to impress them, and I was going to use my first salary to do that. I was going to buy my mother a dress for church with a matching cocktail hat. My father had always wanted a tool kit, he wasn't talented in the mechanic department. But it was important for a man his age to have one. I knew I was going to score points with them, and maybe be an inch behind Mthandeni.

"You can still do it, they are with you in spirit." He says.

I know MaMbuyazi is, it's my father I am not sure of. Impressing those two wasn't easy, and now that they have crossed over, they might just be too demanding and hard to please.

"My parents were not who I thought they were Mthombo, my whole life I was convinced we were poor only to find out that they left a heavy inheritance for Mthandeni. I wasn't included in their will, not even a teaspoon from MaMbuyazi's

favourite tea-set.”

I get no answer from him, just a deep sigh. I wish he would tell me what he is thinking.

“My memulo was cancelled because MaMbuyazi’s kitchen needed to be renovated, my sister’s school fees was outstanding and the fridge had to be filled. They fought about it, he wanted it done and she wanted her kitchen and her favourite baby’s school fees paid.”

His breathing has changed, his face is unreadable. He breathes in sharply as he removes his eyes from mine.

“How is that possible? I can’t imagine a mother doing that to their child. Umemulo is an important moment in a young woman’s life.” He says.

A lot of things were possible where MaMbuyazi was involved, her way had to be the right way. She knew how and when to wear the pants in the house, the only thing she never could fit into were my father’s shoes.

“She had her loving days and showed me enough to

make me feel worthy of her, it's just that her worst days were plenty."

"What about umemulo? Did you finally have it?"

"No, it took a lot of quarrelling but they eventually saw with one eye. It's amazing what love can do to a man."

She had her fingers deep into my father's nostrils, he went where she pulled.

Mthombo gives me a questioning stare.

"There's love Nonyanda, then there's stupidity."

Did he just call my father stupid?

"We're all guilty of that, love can blind you sometimes. You find yourself making decisions you will come to regret later in life. I guess we're all fools when it comes to love."

I've had my fair share of foolishness, he's had his with that Zinzi woman.

For a while, he doesn't utter a word, neither do I. We're looking into each other's eyes. He thinks I wanted to hurt him with my words, that's how he is

looking at me.

“We should go, it’s getting late.” He stands, I stand with him.

“There’s a man who’s been helping me with cleansing.” He stops and looks over his shoulder. We have been too busy having sex that I forgot to mention Mathonga.

“He’s the chief of Izingolweni...” I continue, he’s facing me, curiosity lain on his face.

“Mathonga?”

Oh!

“You know him?”

It would be shocking, he’s a Joburger and has been in house arrest for six years.

“I met him through Bongukwanda once, it was during a business conference.” He says.

Turns out my world is not as small as I thought.

“I want you to meet him before we go, and I want to thank him for what he’s done for me. Maybe buy him

a cow or two." I'm asking the husband for money, honestly though, I can't go back without showing my appreciation."

"No problem, just let me know when and I will have it arranged."

He is heading for the door, I have to answer my phone first.

"We're on our way, don't cook anything for Mthombo. We won't be staying long." I tell my uncle.

"Shiyiwe." I hear panic in his voice, he takes a deep breath before ripping my heart in half.

"Mthandeni was found floating in the river, Ma collapsed when she heard the news. I'm on my way to the hospital."

.

.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Sixty-four

ATHULE-

“Athule?”

He’s here, towering over me with fire-blazing eyes. Is it something I did? Dammit, I should’ve called first.

“I’m sorry I didn’t call, I wanted to...”

“What are you doing here?” That’s an unexpected question, I thought he always wants to see me.

He’s looking through me, not at me. He hasn’t made a comment about my bald head, however, it appears something has occupied his mind.

“I came to see you, are you surprised?” Stupid question. It doesn’t look like it, he is dressed for travel.

“I was on my way out,” he says, looking rather distracted.

“Are you okay?” I ask because of the throbbing vein popping on his forehead.

He doesn't say anything but takes my hand and starts walking with me to his car.

I have to follow him because well, this is what I have been doing from day one, follow Bhedlindaba Meyiwa.

He's driving in silence, jaw clinched and eyes cast on the road ahead. It's the multiple tongue clicks that have me worried, nobody clicks their tongue like an African man. You'd think they get paid for it.

I want to know the reason behind his anger, does he not want to know why I'm here? Or why I shaved my head?

"Ndaba, where are we going? Why are you so angry?"

"You should have called first." He says.

Is that it? He is mad because of that? How do I roll my eyes again?

"I wanted to surprise you, and I didn't think you would mind."

He gives me a brief stare with a grimace on his face,

before taking his focus back on the road.

"I don't, you just caught me at a bad time." He says.

"Maybe I shouldn't have come, clearly I'm bothering you." I sizzle, allowing anger to take over me.

Ndaba clicks his tongue once again, I want to return it so badly however, I doubt this man will appreciate my tongue click.

"Don't say anything if you have nothing good to say Athule."

Why did I come to see him? My mind is stupid and disrespectful. But then, if not to him, where would I have gone? He's the only one who can accommodate me?

"Where are we?" I ask as he parks in front of a single story house. I know we're still in Diepkloof, but whose house is this? Ndaba turns to me, a frown plastered on his face.

"I want you to stay in the car, Athule."

This man is starting to bore me with this commanding attitude.

“Are you going to boss me around now?” I question, trying not to sound as annoyed as I am.

I don’t want to argue, but with the pace he’s going, he is dragging me there. His eyes soften a smidgeon, he allows his mouth to show me a faint smile.

“Hade ntwana, please do as I say.”

Hade ntwana? Aii!

“I’ll be back,” he’s out the car before I can say anything. I watch as he enters the red painted gate like he lives there. Ndaba better not be visiting some chick while I’m waiting for him here, I can stand it all but not cheating.

It hasn’t been minutes when I see him dragging a woman out of the house by her hair, she’s on the ground kicking, and struggling to get free. Her screams are low, almost as if she doesn’t want anyone to hear.

He slaps her across the face, she falls face down. My eyes are wide and mouth partly open at this point.

For a second, it's hard for me to grasp what is happening, but I quickly snap out of it. I jumped out of the vehicle and run through the gate, I'm not sure what I will do when I get there, but I have to help. He's landing another slap as I near the scene.

"Ndaba, what are you doing?" I yell, he turns to me with a fierce gaze. A look I have never seen before. My bulging eyes run from him to the woman, she is terrified to death.

"I told you to stay in the car, go back to the car." He bellows, taking steps towards me. My heart jolts to my throat, and I immediately roll back.

The dark gaze in his eyes has me trembling with fear, I have never seen this side of Bhedlindaba and in this moment it hits me, I don't know the man I have let into my life. He removes his spoti, pushes it into his back pocket, and leans down to maintain eye contact with the woman.

"Are you ready to answer my question now?" He asks, she nods.

"What business do you have with Zwangendaba?"

He sounds too calm for an angry man.

I don't know her name; she's on her knees cringing. Face masked with tears, there's blood on her lower lip. She clutches her arms around Ndaba's leg, and sings a list of apologies.

One leg shake from Ndaba and she falls on her back, is it stupid of me to want to help her up when this angry bull of man warned me to stay away?

"He wanted to know what happened the day I drove Shiysiwe to the hospital."

Shiysiwe's name pops up again, how many Shiysiwe does this world have? I know the one she is talking about, it's the Shiysiwe Ndaba loves to protect. The Shiysiwe that could be my sister, I should've known this was about her.

"What about the rumours you've been spreading, is he behind that?" Ndaba asks.

I have never seen fear so evident and alive in a person's eyes.

"It was just hearsays, I have a big mouth. I'm sorry

sir, I will fix it. Please don't hurt me." She gives in, she is at the end of her leash.

He grabs something from his waist, a gun and it's aimed at the lady.

"Bhedlindaba!" I snap.

I want to reach out and grab the gun, and if possible tell this woman to run. She lies flat on her stomach and covers her ears.

"I'm sorry, please don't kill me." Her words are suppressed, I can barely catch a syllable.

"Ndaba, someone might come. Put that thing away please." That's what I'm worried about, honestly.

"I'm not done with you, and don't think you can hide from me." He hisses, putting the gun back.

"Let's go," he says, swooshing past me. I'm suddenly not sure about following him. I'm not sure if I want to be around a man like this.

"Athule, let's go." His voice rumbles behind me.

I never prayed for this, I never prayed for a crazy man. Lord, if I did then I take it back. I wasn't in my right

mind.

He's driving full speed, I want to tell him to slow down. If he wants to die, he can die alone. But we are not talking, I'm not okay with how he handled that woman back there. It makes me wonder if that's how he handles women.

"Buckle up."

Listen to this man, I'm waiting for an explanation and all he says to me is buckle up.

"Are you going to hit me when I piss you off one day?" I ask, I need to be prepared, lay down ground rules. I am not going to be any man's punching bag, my father has never laid a finger on me.

"I would never hit you, Athule." He states, offensively.

For a second I'm almost convinced, then a picture of him dragging that woman flashes before me.

"What about her?" My gaze is fixed on him, I want to see if he'll flinch or twitch his eyes. Liars have a way of exposing themselves.

“She’s shitting in my personal space, that’s one thing I will never allow.” His voice is disturbingly hollow.

His words stab through my skin and raises walls. It shouldn’t come as a surprise, he is a man. Maybe he grew a strong liking for Shiyiwe, perhaps my assumptions were correct. There is no reason for me to feel jealous, he is a man. Shiyiwe came before me, it’s not like Ndaba had pocketed his heart waiting for me to surface from the face of the earth.

Nevertheless, the thought of him feeling a twinge of something for her bothers me, I don’t like sharing even if he didn’t know I existed then. I don’t want to know that my possible twin has a special place in his heart.

“Do you have feelings for Shiyiwe?” I ask.

“She’s my brother’s wife, don’t be insane.”

That doesn’t answer my question and the sincerity lingering in his voice confuses the hell out of me. The car stops at a traffic light.

Ndaba leans forward, raiding my space, and attacks me with a kiss that drives all my negative thoughts

away. He is practically devouring me, his mouth pressing deeper as he plunges his tongue in my mouth. His hands are roaming on my body, he pulls out and presses his forehead against mine.

“You’re the only one for me, Athule.” He tells me, his rugged breathing matching mine. Lord have mercy, I believe him. The moment is interrupted by a hooting taxi behind us, we’re causing traffic. He drives, I can’t help noticing how tense he looks.

“Are you worried that lady will tell on you?”

“I have rats everywhere,” he says.

I failed to catch a spot of arrogance, it’s just wrath in all corners.

“What did that lady and your father do to my sister?”

The car screeches and comes to a stop, he glances at me with a frown.

“What did you say?” Him.

Goddammit! This is not how I planned on telling him.

.

.

MTHOMBO-

Flashing on the screen of his phone is a picture of a woman who could be a threat to his wife and their future, she has no beauty that could attract a man like him, and there is nothing in her appearance that he desires.

There is more.

Comes another text message from Thambo, following it is a picture of the very same woman rubbing shoulders with Zwangendaba Meyiwa. This one is baffling, his whole expression warps, twists and turns into something dark.

I want her in your custody now.

He responds to the message.

Your brother is handling it sir, Olwethu Jama will never be a threat again.

His almost twin, Bhedlindaba has some explaining to do, he knows him to be reckless, stupid, and rowdy. Basically, he is the dark version of Mthombo. Very rough around the edges and human life means zilch to him, this he can forgive. He's always forgiven his brother's disruptiveness. It's urging his wife to kill he can't let off. He knows Ndaba is behind it because there is no way a 5'3, petite woman like Shiyiwe could take down four men by herself.

Following the message Bhedlindaba sent to Shiyiwe's phone, he went and did his own investigation and gave his trusted man Thambo the task. There were four men that stayed in the house in Diepkloof who have gone missing without a trace. It is mind baffling, somehow he can't pin together how Shiyiwe managed to do this all by herself.

He hates it, he hates that there is blood in her hands.

There are many things happening to her that he despises, like how she is hurting at this moment. He puts his arm over her shoulder as she rests her head on his chest. She hasn't said anything since they left the hotel nor has she shed a tear and that's worrying.

The driver pulls up at the hospital, Mthombo holds on to her hand before she dashes out the car. Her breaths have lost their regular rhythm, her eyes are wide with questions.

“Wait for me,” he wants to be there for her every step of the way and keep her calm if needed.

Shiyiwe pops the door open and frantically runs out. He should know by now that she doesn’t listen.

It’s taking a while for him to step out of the car, his eyes find his wife just as she dashes through the entrance. He finds her at reception asking the lady behind the counter where her sister and grandmother are kept.

“What are their names?” She’s flipping through a registry book as Shiyiwe calls out their names. A minute too long later, they are told where to go.

Shiyiwe is leading the way, she is a ball of tears now. He catches up to her and pulls her into his arms but she doesn’t want to be touched.

“Baba,” that’s how Mthombo addresses uncle Mdu who is standing in the hallway. They shake hands.

“Where are they?” Shiyiwe asks, she has no time for greetings, her eyes are scanning the hospital room.

“She’s inside, she’s been waiting for you.” Uncle Mdu doesn’t specify who he is talking about. Shiyiwe walks in to the ICU. On the bed, under the white sheet is a woman too old and frail.

“Grandma,” these tears are having a ball on her face.

“Nonyanda,” Grandma struggles with forming the letters of the alphabet. She stretches her shaky hand to hold her granddaughter’s.

“I’m sorry...” she says with her unsteady voice.

“No, this is not your fault grandma.” Shiyiwe kisses her hand. “Save your energy okay, I want to take you to Joburg with me.”

As if that’s important.

“My bag,” grandma points at a black handbag on a chair across the room. Mthombo fetches it and hands it to Shiyiwe.

“There is a picture of your sister’s father in the red wallet.” She says.

Shiyiwe finds it, but the man on the picture is not Phindafuthi. It's a young man with an afro thick and full, in his arms is a young MaMbuyazi. They are standing outside KFC.

"Who is this man grandma?" Shiyiwe asks, before looking back at her husband.

"Forgive me Nonyanda, I kept the truth from you to protect my son's image. When he was ten, he was run over by a car while riding his bike. I was told he will never have children. I didn't tell anyone about it, not him or his father. When MaMbuyazi fell pregnant with Mthandeni, I knew the child wasn't Phinda's. She was having an affair and I hated her for that, but deep down I was grateful that my son would never know he was incomplete. For years I let him believe that Mthandeni was his, I loved my son that much. I would have done anything for him. When you told me about your real father, you tore my heart Nonyanda. Phindafuthi wasn't perfect but he loved you, in his eyes you were his daughter. That's why I lied about him having an affair and bearing you, I didn't want that taken away from him, I didn't want

his memory polluted. One truth always leads to another, and that's what I was afraid of. The family finding out that my son was infertile."

Mthombo is growing worried seeing how weak Shiysiwe's grandmother is, this is no time for a confession.

"Maybe you should get some rest first, we will talk about this later." He suggests but she disagrees with him by shaking her head.

"Grandma, who is Mthandeni's father?" Shiysiwe asks.

"Flip the photograph over." Grandma instructs.

On it are scribblings written with a blue pen...

1999 Mphako and Nobantu.

"I found this picture in one of MaMbuyazi's belongings years ago, somehow I had a feeling that it would come in handy. His name is Mphako, that's all I know. Find him Nonyanda, I want him to know about his daughter before she is buried. I want him at her funeral."

Shiysiwe jolts to her feet, the picture flies to the

ground.

"No, my sister is not dead. She can't be dead." She's screaming and crying, Mthombo pulls her into a tight hug. Uncle Mdu rushes into the room, he freezes midway and carries his hands on his head.

"Maaaa!" He wails painfully, falling to his knees.

Mthombo and Shiysiwe turn to grandma, her eyes are wide and lifeless. She is gone.

"Nonyanda, I'm..." his words are cut short by her body sagging against him. His wife has fainted.

.

.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Sixty-five

BHEDLINDABA-

.

.

Women are complicated creatures, that's why he's

always been part of the smash and run gang.

He's only feared sex once in his life, in his teenage years when the only thing he knew about the birds and the bees was that a man has a penis and a woman a vagina. You combine those two and out comes a small human that changes your entire life. It was a disgusting theory his innocent mind had ever captured and stored.

Until Mrs. Mathe came with her yellow, long legs, big breasts and a cleavage that had every male teacher come in to her class like disrespectful cockroaches to borrow a chalk if not the chalkboard itself.

He and his friends laughed about it, some drooled over her which he found completely nauseating. She was as old as his mother. Surprisingly, Mrs Mathe had no time for those thirsty men with rusty wedding rings trapping them. Her students came first, she was there for them. But mostly Bhedlindaba, how quickly he became the teacher's pet.

He loved it, having a mother figure at school. Oh man, his friends were jealous and that was a bonus.

“Who would like to clean the board?” Mrs. Mathe had asked one afternoon, her red lipstick so bright it blinded lustful eyes. Many hands went up, including the girls who were out to impress. Her eyes ever so eager and inquisitive ran through the classroom, and fell on one boy who looked the least bit interested and bored to his socks.

“Bhedlindaba, you clean the board.” She pointed at him with her red, long painted nail. It was the first time he was picked out, or better yet noticed by the famous, heartthrob of the school. He stood, chest high and a silly smile on his face because well, that’s who he was. The class clown, the leader of the naughty ones, and had a PhD in bunking classes. Bantu education was on his side, plus his smart brain.

The second day he was asked to get a glass and fetch water for the teacher. When he handed her the glass, her warm hand brushed against his. It gave him chills, a feeling he’d never felt before. Also it startled him that he jumped back and hurried to his

seat. It was strange that a touch from his teacher made him feel like that.

A week came and expired, Mrs. Mathe gave everyone attention but him. He didn't care, what annoyed him was that his marks were dropping and only in her class. His class attendance wasn't an impressive one, but he did his homework and studied for his exams. It was fortunate that he was graced with a smart brain.

"See me after class," Mrs. Mathe instructed, dropping a test paper with his terrible results on the desk. He frowned at it, and stretched his neck to check his friend's paper.

"How is that possible? You're the dumbest kid in school." He complained, and that was the honest truth. It couldn't be possible that he got the lowest mark. 32 percent? His father was going to kill him.

After-class came, it was their last class. When everyone packed their books to head home, he dragged his feet to Mrs. Mathe's desk.

"Is everything okay at home?" She looked at him with

pity in her eyes.

"Yes." A short response from him.

"Then why are your marks dropping? Do you want me to call your father?"

"No Ms, I'll do better next time." He said. His eyebrows showed her how irritated he was, his ticking jaw exposing his facial muscles.

Mrs. Mathe stared for a while, mouth open and dribbles of sweat pearling on her forehead. She crossed her legs, and cleared her throat when his frown deepened.

"How old are you Bhedlindaba?" Her voice came out a little strained.

She knew his age from the class register. It was his thick build that confused her, his tight jawline and a rumbling voice that couldn't have belonged to a 16 year-old.

"16." The answer was disappointing, why the hell did God make a 16 year-old look like a delicious man? She became more curious after hearing his age, her

eyes started to wander and linger in places they shouldn't have. She bit her lip, and let out a shaky breath at the sight of his manhood quietly resting in peace behind his Dickies pants.

He cleared his throat again, the roaring sound became too much for her. She squirmed on the seat, released the crossed leg and crossed the other. Her vaginal opening was twitching to his every move and the sounds he made.

It was getting hot in the classroom, she had to fan herself and release at least two buttons on her dress shirt and let her sweating boobs breathe.

"Is there anything else Ms?" He was getting restless, she nodded and raised her eyes to him.

"Grab my books and walk me to the car." This he didn't mind, it was a simple chore. And it also meant he'd get to see her car inside, a white Porsche Cayenne GTS that drove the entire school crazy.

"Do you like it?" She asked a question while the answer was written in his eyes.

He nodded without looking at her, like any boy his age, he was crazy in love with cars. Girls were never something he'd randomly entertain.

“Wanna go for a spin?” The heck!

“Yes please.” Another nod from Ndaba like he’d been offered a year’s supply of free rides in his favourite sports car. He jumped into the passenger seat, high on excitement.

One ride turned to two, then three and before he could show off to his friends a month later, Mrs. Mathe had won him over.

“You can’t tell anyone about this Bhedlindaba, it’s our little secret.” Her hand was on his thigh, it was a perfect opportunity because the boy had the driver’s seat and his 16-year-old veiny hands wrapped around the leather steering wheel. That’s where his focus was, driving the car for the first time in his life.

“You can keep a secret, right?” She asked, crossing her leg over the other and revealing her thunder-striking ultra-Mel thighs. Rainbow chicken had tough competition.

“Sho sho.” He didn’t spare her a look and that annoyed her, but she had time. It was almost midnight, they had driven to the top of a hill, where Joburg was visible in all of its glory.

“Good boy.” She said, extending her hand to turn the radio on. A sound no child should hear came on, it took Bhedlindaba a minute too long to catch what it was.

He’d heard it before when his parents were locked up in their bedroom on a Sunday afternoon, thinking he wasn’t home. He’d never seen pictures that matched the sound, but it made him uncomfortable down there. In a second, his dick was twitching and stretching his Dickies pants. It was embarrassing, he let go of the steering wheel and covered his bulging pipe.

“Oh my, are you sure you’re 16 Bhedlindaba?” Enthusiasm sounded in Mrs. Mathe’s voice, her lust filled eyes on his manhood. She sat with her legs open and started breathing like God had changed his mind and decided to take the breath he breathed into her back.

“Y... Yes.” His eyes were everywhere in the car, she was looking at him, boldly. Bhedlindaba exhaled and pressed a button in an effort to open the window.

“Its locked, I’m feeling cold.” She told him, pushing her hand under her short denim skirt. Her first moan brought his heart to his throat, he looked at her face then down to her skirt. She was rubbing herself and twisting her hips, and releasing moans that matched the ones coming from the radio. His penis was beginning to hurt, there was a wetness he didn’t like.

“I think I need to pee’.” She laughed at his statement and increased the movement on her clit. She moaned and hissed, twisted and squirmed.

“That’s not pee superman, you’re leaking.” The way she said it made him frown. Leaking what? He wanted to ask, but he had already acted stupid.

“I can help you with that, if you like.” She offered, sending her vacant hand to touch his hard penis.

“Oh my God, Bhedlindaba.” Mrs Mathe shrieked with excitement. “Let me see your ID, there is no way you are 16.”

It was a joke Bhedlindaba didn't find funny, he hated that she kept throwing his age to his face. He shifted so she'd stop touching him.

"I won't bite, unless you tell me to." Her voice was seductive, when she saw the hesitation in his eyes, she pulled her skirt up, exposing her nakedness. Her shaved pussy was out for him to see, it matched her body size, wide and meaty.

"Don't mind me, I never wear panties." She laughed, it wasn't funny.

"Can we go home now?" His voice had dropped to the ground, disappointing him.

"I'll let you drive us home if you let me touch you." She removed her hand from her clit and ran the tired finger over his nose. He liked the smell, he was sure of that but not on her. She was old and his teacher.

"Ms... I..." He stopped to breathe, her hand was inside his pants and trying to find all of him. He hissed and threw his head back. No one but him had ever touched his totolozi.

"I can make you cum if you like." She whispered into

his ear before taking a long lick on the side of his face.

“Cum?” He didn’t mean to stutter, Mrs. Mathe unzipped his pants and brought her thick-self to sit on his lap.

“Have you ever had sex before?”

She knew he was a virgin, she could smell them from a mile away and this one was as pure as 100% orange juice.

“No.” He hissed. What she was doing to him felt good, but conscious told him it was wrong. The sexual feelings were stronger, he couldn’t fight them anymore.

His penis sprung out and faced skyward as soon as she released it, as if it was glad to be set free.

She licked her lips and bit her lower one.

“Can I take a picture? I’ve never seen anything like this before.” Her eyes were out and excited. She knew she had to add his dick to her collection, she’d seen big ones on boys his age. But his was the

biggest she'd ever seen, the fact that he was only 16 years old was the most mesmerizing part about it.

"No," he pushed her off and his hands failed him. How was he weakened by a half naked woman on his lap, the smell of a vagina and the sexual sounds filled in the car?

When Mrs. Mathe saw his hesitation, she knew she had to do something to get what she wanted. She wrapped her hand around his pulsing manhood, gave him a few strokes that cloaked his senses, and took one long lick. It was the first time having a tongue run over his mushroom head, his veins went crazy with ecstasy. He shivered like the virgin he was and fell under her spell.

Bhedlindaba could've protested when she reached for her phone and clicked a few pictures of his hard cock. It was sitting on his lower abdomen, ready to be serviced and stripped of life.

"Can I sit on it? Please? I promise I'll make it good."

He didn't give her an answer, the lady on the radio

was screaming like a pornstar, there was a second voice. Deep, low and sensual. Whoever those people were, were reaching their orgasms.

The sexual sounds made them both wet, Bhedlindaba was on the verge of begging her to make the pain on his penis go away. Self control had left him but he managed to maintain a small amount of it.

Mrs. Mathe held on to his shoulders, lifted her heavy body and grabbed his erection to rub the tip against her throbbing opening.

“Good-god!” Were her first words when she lowered herself on him, she held his shoulders tighter and clenched her eyes as she felt him growing inside her. The young man was only 16 but his dick big and strong enough to stretch the walls of her vagina that had been around for 29 years. Her moans were in sync with his low groans.

He didn’t want to touch her, he wouldn’t have. It was when she started grinding her hips and moaning in

his ear that he felt he needed to hold on to something and her juicy flappy waist was in plain sight.

Mrs. Mathe was a sex goddess, she'd done it before, he could tell. She made him cry like a baby when he came inside her.

"Don't worry, there won't be a baby baking in my womb." She told him when she was cleaning herself.

He went home that night, and took the longest bath recorded in history. He wasn't ready to come out when his mother scolded him about spending too much time in the water. He couldn't sleep, Mrs Mathe was all over him. Her scent, her hands, her warm vagina wrapped around his dick and her moans in his ear. No matter what he did, he couldn't get her off him. She was stuck on him like glue.

Monday came and she was nowhere to be found, he didn't see her that week and the week after. To forget what he did, he took his bad boy behavior to

an extra mile. The rich kid lifestyle became a thing of the past, he followed his friends to Ekasi and eventually became one of them.

Mrs. Mathe was part of the past he was trying to forget. Well, that's what he thought. He didn't know how to act when he walked into class with his tie hanging to the side, his wrinkled shirt half tucked in and his school shoes a pair of black Chucks; and she was sitting on her chair, her Ultra-Mel thunder thighs all out for show. He froze at the door, eyes unblinking. His mouth dried in an instant and his heart stopped beating for a second.

"Sit down Mr. Meyiwa, you're blocking the way." She snapped at him without looking in his direction. The class hollered with laughter, it was embarrassing but he immediately brushed it off.

"Mr. Meyiwa is my father." His response earned him a dark stare from her.

During class, she'd pick at him and he knew it was to embarrass him. His classmates laughed and pointed fingers at him, his war wasn't with them. It was with

the woman who took his virginity and disappeared like a weekend special dad.

She ignored him that day, it bothered him and mostly he was annoyed. The next day she came back with a different attitude, Bhedlindaba was the teacher's pet once again. Running errands like he was out to impress. Friday night, she let him drive her car. He was excited about it, the destination wasn't the hill. It was her house, a double story too lavish and extravagant for an English teacher.

The minute he entered, a large portrait of his teacher with a man whose face was covered with a thick beard and coarse hair as his crown hung on the wall.

"Argh! Don't mind him, he's not around." She waved her hand and spoke like the man was a nonfactor in her life.

"Who is he?" It was a stupid question but he was 16 so it was excusable.

He followed her to the lounge, her heels making a loud noise on the tiled floor.

"The man I married," another tone of unimportance.

It gave him the impression she didn't love the guy.

"You're married?" He asked. She looked at him, scanning his big yummy body from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. She hated that he was slow, how was he going to be useful to her when he allowed his smart brain to take a break?

"Yes, I didn't want to. My parents forced me."

She placed two whiskey glasses on the table and poured the expensive liquor in them.

"Like an arranged marriage?" The questions kept coming, only because he needed to understand her. She was a closed hard cover book, spoke nothing about herself and family.

"Yes, I was 18. My parents needed money, and married me off to the richest man they could find."

"Was he 18 as well?" He asked, she mentally rolled her eyes and handed him a glass of whiskey.

"Drink up." She told him, he couldn't say no to alcohol. His friends would honor a day to laugh at him and make it a public holiday.

She sat him down and told him about her husband and his abusive ways.

"He wants to kill me," she cried on his broad chest. He let her and during her moment of teary dramatics, she kissed him. It was their first kiss, his first kiss. He followed her lead and touched her the way she touched him.

They had sex that night, on the bed she shared with her husband, many times than the sex gods would've allowed. When she was tired, smelled like sex and his sweat, she laid her head on his chest, and told him how much she loved him. There was no response from him, he didn't know what love was.

"We have to kill him before he kills me." Her last words before she fell asleep on his chest.

Mrs. Mathe's husband was his first kill, he was a coward about it and missed the target. While Mr. Mathe laid on the floor, bleeding and begging for his life. Mrs. Mathe stood behind Bhedlindaba, held his hand and helped him pull the trigger, riddling her husband's body with bullets.

.

.

Over the years he lost count of the number of people he killed. If he focused on the numbers and perfected his math, he'd add the lady he is about to kill to that number.

"I'm not really a bad person sis Olwethu, people just refuse to understand me." He's sitting on a pile of soil Olwethu has gathered from digging a hole with a shovel he provided.

"My mother used to call me sweetheart, then kiss me on the cheek and wish me a goodnight. No one knows me like she does, I am a sweetheart." He says, waving his gun around. A bullet goes off, Olwethu screams and ducks.

"Don't stop digging, it's too shallow. You're quite a thick woman, you won't fit in this shallow grave." He says.

She cries and pleads for her life. "Shut up, you're giving me a headache." He calmly tells her.

A few minutes after warning her to stop plotting against Shiyiwe, she was holding a meeting with his father. One of his men called him on his way home, he dropped Athule off and left.

He was going to let Olwethu off the hook, but clearly she couldn't be trusted.

He waited for her at the entrance in Expo center, and when she pointed up to flag a taxi, he approached her and asked her to go for a ride with him. Now here they are, in the bushes in Aeroton. She's digging her own grave.

"On your knees." He orders.

"Sir, I didn't want to take his money. He made me do it, he said I have to spread the rumors all over social media. Sis Shiyiwe is my friend, I will never do that to her."

Ndaba appreciates the confession, but it's not necessary.

Olwethu knows it's over for her, he told her he's going to kill her and bury her in a shallow grave with her money.

"Close your eyes, we're going to pray and ask papa G to save your soul."

She cries some more and sheds more tears.

Bhedlindaba yawns, weak people bore him. He commands her to close her eyes, he removes his spoti and bows his head.

"Dlala Sgora sempilo, the real makoyi. Master of the silent treatment. kuvela wena kutatazela bantu. Don't be shocked. You are not imagining things baba wam. Clap hands for me, I'm finally facing you, man to man, one on one. Here's your child my G, she's run the race and now needs help to come back home. I don't mean to bother you, I'd send her back to van toeka af, her mother's womb but she's too ripe and rotten. Accept her with open arms, my G. It's a small favor, nothing hectic. I am your Adam to your Eve, grant me this one wish. Ngcwala ngami skhova, top thokozile. Abashwe." He fires a shot in the air.

When he opens his eyes, she's gone and taken the bag of money with her. A smile appears on the corner of his mouth. This is a man who loves a good

chase.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Sixty-six

ATHULE-

.

.

He dropped me off, told me he's going to a quick meeting. I could have protested and told him to take me home, if I had one to go to.

His roof is the only thing I can hide my head in for now, a bridge is a no go. I'm a woman in a country dominated by demons with no souls.

The missed calls from my father give off stalker vibes of some sort, he needs to leave me alone and focus on his witch of a wife.

Ndaba has been briefed about the saga in my life, the man showed no emotions the entire time.

"Oh!" That was his answer.

Sometimes I wonder if there is a heart inside his

chest.

I find my way to his bedroom, I'm here to offer my vagina on a silver platter, so I might as well leave my bag in this room.

Minutes later, I'm in the kitchen whipping up something to eat.

Cooking for the man is not a crime, he gave me access to his kitchen the last time I was here. I'll prepare something and I hope in turn he will give me a good orgasm. Men who give good orgasms deserve nice things.

There is pasta in his cabinet, clearly he's a lover of it. Why would he have so much of it? I don't know how else to make the pasta but boiling it and adding salt and oil. While the spaghetti simmers, I make mince balls and gravy, there has to be a salad. I hope he eats koslo, I'm not really a master in the kitchen.

Whoever said time only flies when you're having fun, lied. It's almost 6pm, I'm sure Nbaba will be home soon.

I dash to the bathroom, to take a quick shower. Bathing frustrates me, sometimes I want to go days without it and still remain clean, but that's a wish that will never come true.

I googled tips on how to woo a man, this is where the lace bra and matching panties come in. I will deal with the thong another time, my cellulite and stretch marks are too much.

Instead of wearing anything on top, I wear an apron, stand in the kitchen and wait for him.

My heart does a cartwheel at the sound of a car pulling up outside.

I scan the kitchen to make sure it's as clean as I found it. The food is on the stove, waiting to be served.

Here he is, looking at me like I escaped from Mars. He should close that mouth before a fly gets in. He's standing in the doorway.

"Athule" His voice comes out a whisper.

How is he shocked by my presence? Unless his mirror image dropped me off here. A smile stretches my lips, he can't see anything behind the apron, unless I turn around.

"Hi." I'm stupid, I don't know how to flirt.

He steps closer and grips my waist. A spark flickers in his eyes, his lips twitch mischievously.

"What are you wearing behind this?" He queries, eyes running through the apron, he's definitely undressing me with them. I thought I was smarter than him.

"That's for you to find out," I articulate.

He buries his face on my neck, runs his hands on my sides. He smells nice, like always. A little different though, I think he just took a bath or something. He's not wearing the same clothes he had on a while ago.

"You're really here?" He asks, caressing my hips. By "here" I'm guessing he means half naked in his arms. Our eyes lock, the connection is deeper than my heart can take. It takes my breath away.

"I'm here."

I lock my arms around his broad shoulders, he glances down at me with a not so visible smile. He has this frown on his face, it appears whenever he's serious or focused on something.

I stand on my toes and slowly bring my face to his. Our lips meet, the kiss is rushed, his tongue slides into my mouth, and that brings me to a world of my own.

I let my tongue play with his and like that fuels him, he grabs my butt, squeezing and pushing me into him. A soft moan sashays past my throat, my heart is dancing in my chest.

To my dismay, Ndaba stops. He looks at me like it's the first time seeing me, I love it because it makes me feel special beyond reason. I remember that look from when we first met, he was rude then that I missed it.

"I love you." He says, and kisses me. Perhaps this is why I'm crying, he loves me.

"I love you." I tell him, it's crazy how quickly he gripped my heart.

My tears are stubborn, unlike his. Ndaba cages my lips with his, his tongue fills my mouth again. His hands are all over my body.

He stops kissing me again, fixes his eyes on me, both his hands now studying my ass. Like a shy teenager, my eyes widely stare back at him. He begins to work on the apron, the fabric tumbles softly to the ground. “You’re perfect.” He says, eyes drinking in every inch of my half naked body. I doubt anyone is perfect, but if he feels that’s what I am then I can’t dispute that.

“Can I take a picture, please?” Oh hell no.

“A picture?” I reply his question with a question, this picture thing always ends in tears.

“Please,” Lord, he is like a child. Eyes wide and pleading. “You look so good, I want to keep a memory.”

Shrugging my shoulders gives him the go ahead, he’s smiling as he plucks his hand into the pocket of his pants. I’m not a model, pausing for pictures always feels weird for me. Two shots later, I tell him

to stop. He cheats and takes a few more.

My forehead is given a kiss, my heart must know what it means because it is dancing with joy. He grips my waist, sits me up on the kitchen counter, and stands in between my legs.

He showers me with kisses, taking me back to where I was moments ago. The blissful moment is interrupted by the sound of someone clearing their throat, this is not how I imagined the day would go.

“Wandisa?” The annoyance in his voice. “She’s my cousin.”

I appreciate the one sided introduction, Wandisa is ogling at us like we’re sinning and that’s when I realise, I’m half-naked, on her brother’s counter. This is where people eat for Pete’s sake. I try to jump off him, but Ndaba won’t move.

Eish! Does this look normal to him?

“What do you want? How did you get in? I didn’t hear you knocking.”

He's definitely annoyed, alright.

"You know this is a kitchen right?" She retorts. I am so embarrassed, I need a place to hide.

"Yes, my kitchen." Ndaba fires back.

I'm so uncomfortable with her standing there while I'm hooked around my arrogant boyfriend.

"Ndaba, I want to get down."

I whisper while trying with all my might to get off, he presses his fingers on my thighs, stopping me from jumping off. What in the world is wrong with this man?

"Ndaba, please." I have been subjected to beg.

He kisses me as I'm about to protest again, his lips linger on. The throat clearance again, I so want to roll my eyes. A normal person would literally walk away but Wandisa is just too much into our business.

"Excuse me, I am still here and I'm hungry."

"Fuck!!! Wandisa. What do you want?" He snaps, frustrated.

“I’m hungry Dimples.” She says.

Dimples? Ndaba does not have dimples. Jealousy prickles through my skin, is this girl really his cousin?

Finally, I manage to push him and jumped off. A pucker forms between his eyebrows as he packs his hands into his pockets, my eyes involuntarily run to his lower body, his boner is showing. I need to burn those track pants he’s wearing.

What happened to his pantsula outfits? When did he change?

I’m not a fan, but I would choose them over whatever this is he’s wearing.

“Hi, I’m Wandisa.” Oh, I didn’t know we were getting to this part.

She stretches out her hand for a hand shake, I want to snub her, but let me be nice.

“Athule.” I shake her hand and she raises her bushy eyebrows in question.

“Athule, huh? Another one, dimples? Don’t tell me you’re playing these girls, I thought you were done

with your player ways.”

“You’re too smart for your own good, that’s your problem.” Ndaba says. Whatever he means by that. I’m not getting sister-brotherly vibes here, especially from Wandisa.

It must be the sour expression she is sporting, cousin or not, I’m not leaving this man. I’m not going anywhere, if I have to go Russia on someone, then so be it.

“This is Athule, the woman I love. Stop trying to poison her mind.” He snakes my waist, pulls me closer to him. I love how territorial he is, people must know that he is not available.

“Hi, you’re the first cousin I’ve been introduced to so far.” I state, going for the fakest smile I can master up.

Her smile fades as her eyes run to Ndaba then back to me. Am I missing something here?

“We’re not really blood related, but if you want to put it that way then...” She shrugs her shoulders, the smile on her face is shifty. Now, I’m convinced, I am

missing something.

“Are you wearing anything behind that apron?”

Wandisa’s question reminds me that I am not fully dressed, the condemnatory look in her eyes is not helpful.

I feign a smile, my jealousy raider and woman intuition skyrockets. This girl does not see Ndaba as her cousin, or maybe I’m reading too much into her words, but I’m never wrong. I know I’m never wrong. Is it not me who passed all my subjects with colours that fly, or is it flying colours?

“Why are you still in my house?” Ndaba asks, his arm is still around me. As pissed as I am, I should’ve shrugged him off, but this girl hasn’t seen enough of us yet. I want the image of a half-naked me in his arms imprinted in her head. Just in case she fantasizes about him when she’s alone. I want this image to pop into her mind, just when she is about to get naughty.

She gives him a brief look before ambling towards the stove.

“I told you that I’m hungry.”

The audacity to open my pots and dip her head in them, this girl has not met me yet. My jaw drops when she takes a plate and dishes up for herself. You’d think she lives here.

“Why am I here, Bhedlindaba?”

I shoot him a displeased look before walking away. Dammit, I am very upset. I don’t care who that Wandisa woman is—okay maybe I do. But they are not blood related, how is she allowed to waltz into his house and do whatever she wants? She even knows how to open his pots.

I’m in his bedroom, using his bathroom. This is where I’m changing into decent clothes, my plan went south fast. I think I will find him in the bedroom when I walk out, there is no one in sight. He’s probably upset with me for my hysterics.

This habit of his, of demanding to be addressed with respect is so old fashioned. It doesn’t even matter, I have to apologise for my dramatics.

He's not in the living room, neither is he in the kitchen or any other rooms. I'm not that familiar with this house— oh there he is outside with...

What the hell?

"Bhedlindaba?" My voice almost fails me but it reaches him because he pushes Wandisa off him and turns around, he's looking at me with bulging eyes.

"Athule, it's not what you think." He says, staring down at me. I'm tempted to smack the lies out of him, how dare he do this to me.

"You said she's your cousin." I'm yelling, and I sound so stupid right now.

"She is," he replies incredulously, the bastard sounds convincing. "I wouldn't do this to you Athule, I love you." He's touching me, I throw his hands away, scowling up at him. This man thinks he's clever.

"You don't want me to touch you now?" Haibo! Lord your son, come and intervene.

"Are you kidding me? You were kissing that woman

just now, and you..."

"I didn't kiss her, she kissed me." He interjects, gritted teeth and all. Why is he upset? He has no right to be, I'm the one who has been wronged.

"What you walked in on was not a consented agreement, she jumped on me, catching me by surprise." He's touching me again, I should not be getting lost in his eyes, but I am and I despise myself for it.

Right there from my side vision, I catch a glimpse of the biggest threat standing feet away from us with a haughty smile on her face.

I see, she's one of those. I'm fast to catch on and attack Ndaba with a kiss, he responds immediately tightening his arms around me. My knees give in when he dominates over the kiss. I hear a tongue click and heals clinking away, the witch has left the building. I tear away from his lips. His brows furrow, he's confused.

"Athule..."

"You're exhausting me, Bhedlindaba. Why does she

even have access to your house?" I say and turn back to the house. I'm not going to sleep with him today, no way am I rewarding him for kissing another girl. As for that Wandisa woman, if she thinks I'm going to leave Ndaba for her, she has another thing coming.

"Athule, ntwana wait." He's behind me, and grabs my arm to pull me back. There is desperation in his eyes, he's sorry. I'm going to give him a chance, but I won't tell him.

"I'm sorry, I'm terrible at this. You're my first real thing and I seem to be messing up, just give me a chance." He says.

Mikhulu's words were along these lines. He said not to give up on him.

"We should talk about your twin, huh?" He says, raising his eyebrows and gripping my waist.

"Shiyiwe Jele," I say.

"Yes, my sister in-law is your twin." There could be another Shiyiwe Jele in this country.

“I think I should talk to her first and find out who her mother is, Penny mentioned a lady by the name of MaMbuyazi.”

He looks more curious than ever.

“MaMbuyazi was Shiyiwe’s mother, she died the same night as her father bab’Jele.” He explains.

Really? He’s receiving a call in the middle of our conversation. Confusion visits his face when he looks at the caller ID.

“Bongukwanda... what?... When?”

I sense shock in his voice, something has happened. I want to find out more but there he goes heading to his bedroom.

I don’t know what to do with myself. Do I follow? I settle on the couch and wait for him, minutes later he’s running down with an overnight bag in hand.

“Where are you going?” I ask.

He looks troubled.

“Durban, Shiyiwe’s grandmother just died.”

So? Was he married to Shiyiwe's grandmother?

"We were still talking." I remind him.

"Can we talk when I get back? I'll bring Shiyiwe with and you will tell her everything."

That's not what I want to hear, I want him to consider me first before her.

"Please stay, let's wait for them to return. I'll talk to her then." I cannot believe this man has put me in this position of having to beg him to choose me first.

He kisses me, "You can stay here. I won't be long, I promise." He turns to leave, it shouldn't hurt like this.

"Bhedlindaba, what is wrong with you?" I grab his hand.

"You don't get it do you? Shiyiwe has been through enough shit, I have to go to her."

"You have to go to her? What about me? Why am I here?"

He looks at me, it's the hair, isn't it? He's losing interest in me because I look like a guy now.

“I’m sorry, I have to go.” He moves past me, my mind goes in all directions but the right one.

“She’s your brother’s wife, you said so yourself.” I yell after him, he stops and tilts his head to the side, and sighs heavily with his eyes slowly closing. I wait for him to say something, anything that will erase this terrible feeling inside me.

Must I pay him now to speak to me? He hasn’t shown me his face, just the back of his shoulders moving up and down. What does Shiye have that I don’t?

“I’m not letting you go Bhedlindaba, you approached me and made me fall in love with you. You can’t do this to me now that I’m here, I’m not going to be your second best.”

He can't tell me about Shiye, I'm not going to compete with her for his love.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Sixty-seven

ATHULE-

.

.

I'm such an idiot, Xolani has told me this before and I never believed him. Look where it has landed me. I have allowed myself to fall in love with a man who gives zero fucks about me when my supposed sister crosses his mind.

He drops the overnight bag and fixes his gaze on me, I can't tell if he is upset, I can't grasp anything from those empty eyes.

"Is that what you think? That I'm putting Shiyiwe first?" Is he kidding me?

"I don't think you're putting her first, I know. You are not her superman Ndaba, stop trying to play her hero."

"Do you know what she's been through Athule? I was there, I saw..."

"What about what I've been through Bhedlindaba?" I snap loudly, his eyebrows meet and show me his angry face. At this point, I don't care.

“I asked you a question?” I yell, he’s staring. Jaw locking and unlocking, he is not the first angry man I have faced. I have seen worse, I have seen Xolani in his beastly form.

“Are you talking to me like that Athule?” What does he think?

“Yes, maybe it’s the only language you understand.”

He does that jaw thing again, and with narrows eyes takes a step toward me. I hold my breath and step back.

“I’m not going to talk to you when you’re in this childish state?” He says and I am extremely offended.

“Where are you going? I’m not done talking to you.” He’s leaving, I run to the door to block him from going out.

“Get out of the way,” he hisses.

I dare him to push me aside.

“You are not leaving, I said we are still talking Bhedlindaba. You are not walking out on me.”

He must think I'm stupid if he thinks I'm going to sit back and watch him treat me like leftover pizza. I won't entertain another Xolani in my life, this relationship is going to work.

"And I said I won't talk to you when you're like this," he lifts me up with one arm and places me aside.

"I will see you in a few days."

"Walk out that door and I will burn down this house with me in it." Okay, where did that come from?

He faces me again, there's a look in his eyes. It's anger and confusion, and it causes my heart to tremble in fear.

His powerful strides moving toward me give me an impression that he's going to smack me, so I step back. My hands are shaking.

"Fine, you want to talk? Let's talk." He says.

How disrespectful.

"You're seriously timing me so you can rush to your Shiysiwe?" I feel like screaming my lungs out.

"Do you seriously expect me to talk to you when

you're like this ntwana?" He says.

I don't like the way he's looking at me.

"I'm not doing anything wrong here, it's you who's fucking up. Shiyiwe is not the only one with problems, my life is falling apart. I just found out my whole life has been nothing but a lie, and when I told you about it you turned a blind eye."

"That's a lie, I listened Athule."

"You listened and said nothing, you offered me nothing Bhedlindaba. One word that Shiyiwe has lost her grandmother and you're ready to fly down to KZN just to comfort her. Why the hell am I here then? Why did you tell me you love me?" I wish he'd step in and close that damn door, having to stand there gives me the impression that no matter what I say, he will go to her regardless.

"I meant every..."

"Bhullshit!" I snap, breaking into a fit of rage. His face turns into something nasty.

"I don't like your tone Athule." He grips my arm,

looking down at me with empty eyes.

“Let go of my arm,” I snap once again. Deep down I have this fear that he will slap me back to my father’s house, he does the opposite. Releases my arm and steps back with an apologetic look in his eyes.

“Why are we fighting ntwana? You’re here with me, I chose you over everything. I love you.” How is he saying these things with such ease?

“You chose me after everything and everyone, will I ever make first place in your life?”

Silence is never a good thing, I don’t know what to make of it.

“I want out, I want to stop loving you and move on with my life like you were never here. But first tell me what to do with this love I have for you Bhedlindaba. How do I stop loving you? I can’t cry it out, I can’t rip my heart out and cleanse it. You put it there, make me stop loving you and I swear to God I will leave you alone. You will never hear from me again.”

What have I gotten myself into? I’ve been knocked

down by love and it's making me stupid and desperate.

He takes my hand, I don't want him touching me and he's hurt by that.

"I want you, God-knows I want you so bad." He cups my face and presses his lips on mine.

"No, you don't care about me." I tell him, he kisses me. I want to believe him but my mind is overloaded, there's a fear in my heart. That he will always want my sister and I will always be her substitute. He pulls away, exhales deeply as he presses his forehead on mine.

"That's not fair Athule, when did I ever make you feel like you don't matter?"

"Every time you mention her name." I move away from him, creating a huge space between us. Ndaba exhales and scratches his head clearly frustrated.

"Why do you feel a need to be jealous of her? She is my brother's wife like you said and I told you that I'm

in love with you." He says, caressing my cheeks. He's insisting on having his hands on me.

"But you're not showing it, you are in love with Shiysiwe. It's like there's a bell inside you that rings when you hear her name." I've pissed him off, he's cold again and indifferent.

"Do not ever repeat those words out loud again." He spits. "Get your things, I'll be in the car."

I watch him walk away. He wants me to follow him like I have always been doing, I should have seen this as a red flag when he asked me to follow him to his car with his bags of KFC.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

Mthombo brought me to my grandmother's house and told me to get some rest. My heart is in turmoil, it's not allowing me any peace. I don't know where he is, I'm lying on my back facing the ceiling.

The room is dark, I haven't moved since he tucked me in bed and left.

My phone has been ringing non-stop, distant relatives keep calling, wanting to know about grandma's death and Mthandeni's condition.

She's in a coma, and pregnant. If she ever wakes up from it, I don't know what I will tell her. Grandma died thinking Mthandeni had passed away.

There so much happening, I can't take it.

The pain in my heart is overwhelming, I don't know what to do with it. I want to scream and maybe the tears will set me free.

My thoughts are disturbed by a terrible ring tone, it's another unknown number. I know it's people wanting to pass their condolences, frustration swallows me.

I throw the phone against the wall, and in this instant, tears get my attention as if they have been on standby.

I don't know how I get on the floor, all I hear is an

ugly cry and I know it belongs to me. Crying seems to fuel the pain, I want to be numb, it's the only way I will get through this. I have a funeral to arrange.

The light blinds me when I flick it on and the plan to make the bed goes down South fast. I'm rearranging the room, turning everything upside down. Every item I touch, I toss it on the floor screaming in frustration.

"Shiyiwe," I told Uncle Mdu to leave me alone. Why is he knocking on my door? I try to stop crying, it doesn't work. His arms are around me, he smells like chicken poop.

It's the first time he's ever embraced me, my uncle is not an emotional person. Rarely shows his feelings.

"It's okay my baby, ncane is here."

For some reason he reminds me of my father and that makes me more vulnerable.

"People I love keep leaving," I sob, the need to breathe is urging me to heave and maybe I will catch

a whiff of air. I'm suffocated by the emotions loaded in my chest.

"I know, Mshana. I know." He's patting my back.

"I can't breathe," I push him off and get on all fours. My palms flat on the ground and head facing down.

"Stop crying Shiyiwe, you'll be able to breathe then." He says.

I want to stop, but I have forgotten how to at this moment.

"Shiyiwe?" Mthombo is back.

I don't want him to see me this broken.

"Nonyanda?" I lift my eyes, he's standing in the doorway. He's found me broken, on my knees and wailing. My chest is heavy with pain, I'm struggling to control my tears which is not right. I need to be strong for grandmother and Mthandeni.

His scent finds me before his arms.

I push him away and look into his eyes, "Mthombo, I haven't found my father's corpse yet. How will I bury my grandma?"

“We’ll find him, I promise. You need to be strong Shiyiwe, I know I’m asking for too much. But it’s the only way you will get through this.”

I know and I hate it. I’m left with nothing but weakness.

“I’m not ready to bury my grandmother, she left too soon.” I tell him the second thing that’s weighing me down.

“You’re not alone Nonyanda, you don’t have to do anything. Let me take care of you and everything.”

He sits me on his lap and rocks me back and forth. For a minute I think I’m hearing things, he’s actually humming a song as he presses his arms around me. It calms my demons.

“Actually, she lived through 90 years, she must thank God when she gets to heaven. Not everyone gets that opportunity.” Uncle says. I can’t cry in peace when he decides to be himself. I look up at him, trying to find any remorse in his eyes, there is nothing.

“Sorry, but it’s true. We were also tired of seeing her face. Did you see her cracked feet? What was left was for us to use cow dung to plaster them, shame Mah lived, jealous down.” He doesn’t mean that.

“Baba, now is not the time.” Mthombo chides him, I’m not going to interfere.

Uncle Mdu sits down on my bed, legs open and elbows on his thighs.

“Do you think she was a witch?” Where is this uncle taking this?

“Stop it uncle Mdu, she was your aunt.”

“Exactly and old, way too old and bored. She had enough time to practice witchcraft and...”

I don’t want to hear this, he’s insane.

“Mkwenyana, do you think you can borrow me your suit after the funeral?”

“What for baba?” He asks.

Mthombo’s suit won’t fit this man, why is he embarrassing me like this?

“I have a meeting with Clientele, Desmond Dube and his mother Lilian are expecting me.” Uncle says, a smile on his face.

“What are you going to do there?” I’m done crying, my uncle has wiped my tears away without doing much at all.

“Mah was insured, half a million. I’m going to claim my money.”

This man is a crook.

“How could you? So you were expecting her to die all this time?”

He gave me a different impression, and when he cried for her at the hospital, I was certain he was heartbroken. But those were tears of joy.

“No, but I knew she would kick the bucket any time. Why waste a life when you can make money from it? I’m going to throw a party on her behalf, and thank her for finally sleeping forever.” Uncle Mdu says, nodding to the stupid things going through his mind.

“I don’t think she would appreciate that baba, rather

slaughter a goat, buy her sweets and offer them to her.” My husband is encouraging him, I look at him in utter disbelief. He shrugs like I’m the one who is not right in the head.

Mthombo stands, leaving me seated on the floor and joins my uncle on the bed. What is going on in this house? Yes she was old but this...

“That’s a good idea mkhwenyana, so what do you say? The suit?” He raises his eyebrows, like my husband owes him something.

“My suit won’t fit you baba, maybe if your stomach was a bit smaller and you were 2inches taller.” Wow!

“I don’t mind, I will force it. Bathi force it till you make it.” Uncle Mdu says.

“It’s fake it till you make it baba.” Mthombo corrects. When did they decide that they are done with me and my crying session?

“Mpho... Mphonyana, same thing. I’m still going to Clientele looking like a million bucks, the goal is to impress. What shoe size are you? Can I see your shoe collection?”

I stand and press my back against the wall, only to watch these men be men.

"I'm a 12," Mthombo replies and that makes my uncle happy.

"Big feet mfana wam, I'm impressed." He laughs and pats Mthombo's back. "You know what they say about men with big feet, my daughter will never be disappointed."

They laugh, I want to die and buried next to my grandmother.

"Uncle you're embarrassing me."

"Ai suka wena, Mbombo is family now. We can tell him about the monkey under Mah's bed, he won't judge us."

"You have a monkey..." Mthombo's eyes almost jump out of their sockets.

"No, there is no monkey. Please don't take anything my uncle says seriously, he was dropped by his mother when he was a baby. Unfortunately his left brain was damaged." I have to save my family's

honour, Mthombo will think we're not normal.

Uncle Mdu taps his shoulder to get his attention, the husband removes his eyes from me and looks at the man that is dragging the Jele name down the drain.

"Give me your favourite shoe, the most expensive one. I'm a size 7, but I'll stash newspapers in them. No one will notice." Uncle Mdu continues to humiliate me.

"Mthombo don't..." I chide him, he's tempted to agree to this nonsense.

"What?" He shrugs, looking at my uncle with that same tempted expression.

"Don't listen to your wife my son, it's okay if she denies you the wallet for a few days. You can survive without it, I'll buy you a bottle once I get my money."

I don't think I want to know what he means by that but there goes the husband asking on my behalf.

"Deny me the wallet? Baba, I'm not sure I follow."

Uncle Mdu dies with laughter, he punches Mthombo's side he almost falls off the bed.

"You know, ispatch, ijejezi. The coochie, the pancake. That thing they use to..." I'm dead, where is my coffin?

Why is he talking about me denying my husband sex?

"It's okay baba, I get you." Mthombo cuts in.

If he were light skinned, he'd be red from embarrassment. He's unsettled, he looks at me as he clears his throat. I get in bed and hide under the covers, I will be here, praying the world swallows me.

"Okay, the shoes and suit mfana wam." I feel the bed move, my uncle is leaving. Hopefully.

"Remember, babazala over the pancake. Choose wisely mfana."

Mthombo chuckles nervously. Can he leave already?

.

.

I'll pin our previous sponsor's post, they are left with 600 likes in order to reach their target.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Sixty-eight

SHIYIWE

.

.

Uncle Mdu's celebration has started, he's in his room listening to every song by Yvonne Chaka_chaka and Soul Brothers. People have started coming in to offer their condolences. Aunt Lindiwe hasn't stopped crying, she is in her room and refuses to come out.

My grand aunt is here too, along with her husband. She's my grandmother's sister, twelve years younger. They brought the whole family, it's strange how these people keep popping up from nowhere. They were not here when we buried my parents. The woman has not said anything to us, the only thing we have received from her are dirty looks. Her sons are about Mthombo's age, if not younger.

Mfula, my grand aunt's daughter, said her mother is not coping with her sister's death and I fail to understand her. She never cared to check on her sister all these years.

The sitting room is packed with men I don't know, who carry the Jele blood, my grandmother's room is no different. Aunts, cousins and church friends. I have to slave for all those people, and I doubt any of them are hurting.

"Shiyiwe." Aunt Mfula whispers right after the kettle stops boiling, I turn to meet her sad eyes.

"Ma Phindie hasn't had anything to eat." That's Mfula's mother, I don't know why it's any of my business when the lady is as sour as lemons.

"So?" I shrug my shoulders. I don't have a habit of pleasing people and I won't start now. I see where she's taking this, the look she's giving me says I should be hospitable to that bitter old woman.

"We need to feed the guests." She says, chiding me with a death stare. She's a guest herself, this house belonged to my father.

"She's not my problem aunty, why should I bother with her?" I get a slap on my wrist for my big mouth.

“This is not how your father and MaMbuyazi raised you, Ma’Phindie is having it hard. Her sister has passed away and...”

“Haibo aunty, I lost a grandmother. I’m a grieving granddaughter, but you don’t see me walking around with a bitter look on my face.”

“We-ngane! What is wrong with you? Are you possessed?” She whisper shouts.

I wish I was possessed, so I’d have the courage to tell gog’ Phindile where to get off. I know she has something up her sleeve. I don’t trust the looks she’s been stabbing me with. Uncle Mdu didn’t bother with them, he was sitting on the couch when they walked in here like someone emptied them from a bottle of Black Label. A lot of them didn’t greet, they scattered all over the house and made themselves comfortable.

“Where is my sister’s room?” These were Gog’Phindie’s first words to me.

I take a step away from aunt Mfula just to be safe. She’s not kind with her slaps, I have noticed.

“I can’t feed her aunty, she will probably think I poisoned the food.” The look of defeat on my her face stings a little, I’m too old to be acting like this. But Gog’ Phindile must know that we don’t grovel in this family. This one too, I want her to tell her mother what I think about her.

I want to say something when she grabs a mug from the cupboard. This aunty is not serious about life.

“Since you’ve chosen not to listen to me because you are married, I will make the tea myself.” They have been briefed, they met the husband. I sent him to his room, I know how pretentious these people are. I don’t want Mthombo mingling with them.

“Is the food ready? I want to dish up for my husband.” I cooked specifically for Mthombo and purposely used small pots.

“Dish up for your grandfather first, then your uncles. They are tired of tea and scones, it’s not right to serve grown men such beverages.”

What’s not right is me cooking for my husband and told to serve her Zoo first.

She's looking at me as I take a plate and fill it with food, Mthombo is not a fan of chicken but I give him three pieces. Thick and juicy, like his lips.

"Shiyiwe, yezi wena Shiyiwe." Yoh hayi ke!

I'm not going to entertain her.

Mthombo sits up when I walk into our room.

"Be careful with your back babe, you can't be moving like Oscar Pistorius."

I don't want to be calling Thando, and having her touching him in my presence.

"I'm hungry," he's looking at the plate of food. His smile leaves his face when he sees what's inside. "I smell chicken."

"Thank your ancestors you have a sense of smell, it's a blessing husby" I tell him.

"If my blessing includes smelling chicken, I don't want it."

He groans low in his throat, silently sulking as I place

the plate on the bedside table.

“It’s either you eat chicken or tea with scones, in this heat.”

“I’m not hungry anymore,” he lies to my face.

“Okay, let me get you Vaseline for your cracked lips. It’s in my grandmother’s room.” He jumps and stops me from charging towards the door with his food, Mthombo moves like a rabbit when he should be moving like a tortoise.

“I’m coming with you.” His face lights up.

“My family is still here, they are not the kindest people in the world. I don’t want them bashing my husband.”

He draws closer, eliminating the space between us and glances down at me. It’s not the first time that he regards me with this look. Why am I shying away from it today?

“I’m bored Nonyanda, should I go back to the hotel?” A frown braces his face, his voice is seductive. I don’t know if he is flirting with me or trying to get his

way. His hold on my butt is firm, he bends his legs and pushes my hips against his front.

“Mthombo your rod is poking me, this is the wrong time to be horny.” My grandmother is probably standing in the middle of the room judging us.

“Remember the first time we had sex? It was in this room.”

Is he really ignoring my warning? How do rich people do this thing?

“Yes, I remember and it won’t be happening again. I’m taking a two month break, my vagina is tired.” Habe! This man will kill me with his high sex drive, it doesn’t have timing.

“Two months? Are you trying to kill me, Shiyiwe?” Yeah, let it sting.

“Two months if you don’t stop touching me,” I say.

He steals a quick kiss and pushes me back.

“You’re not allowed to touch me woman, don’t even look at me. I don’t want to get in trouble with my wife.” He’s playing my game too well, I don’t like it.

“Hey, I didn’t say don’t make advances at me. I like it when you’re touchy and needy and clingy and always wanting to shag me.” I approach him with the intent to kiss him, he extends a hand forward, creating an arm’s length distance.

“I’m a married man who can’t go a day without having sex with his wife, don’t tempt me please.” He says.

“Mthombo, let me kiss you hau.”

“Shiyiwe Meyiwa, I said no. My wife is a very jealous woman.” He sounds like a woman, it tickles my laugh bone and has me cracking with laughter.

“You’re so stupid,” I say.

“Does that mean I can go out of this room?” He’s asking for too much.

Aunt Mfula won’t hesitate to ridicule him.

“Be my guest, but just know that they are a million times worse than uncle Mdu.” He better take my warning.

Mthombo grunts and lies on his back.

“Come lie next to your husband.” He pats the empty space beside him.

“Two seconds okay? I need to go back to the kitchen, we have guests.” I state.

He crowds me with his arms, I rest my head on his chest. I can’t recall a day when he never smelt like a man, his scent is intoxicatingly delicious.

“I just want to know how you’re doing, how is my wife?” Mthombo mumbles in my ear.

“I don’t know how I would be if you were not here, you give me strength babe.” It’s all I’ve got to say.

He tips my chin up with his finger so I’m looking up at him.

“It’s not me Nonyanda, you were strong before I came into your life. That’s one of the things I admire about you, you’re a warrior.”

I doubt I am, I’m as weak as the next person.

“Can we take Mthandeni with us back to Joburg? I don’t want to leave her alone.” I have been meaning to bring this up.

“I don’t mind, she is part of you and that makes her important to me.” He says.

I must have been good in my past life to deserve this man. He catches my chin to kiss me, I return his enthusiasm, giving him everything that he’s giving me. His arms envelope me, he calms my heart and puts me in a place of comfort.

.

.

Aunty Mfula doesn’t bother glancing my way when I walk back into the kitchen with Mthombo’s plate barely touched.

“Where have you been? My mother’s tea is ready, go give it to her.”

Bawo! She’s been waiting for me to come back?

“You children think growing up means defying your elders, I must slave in the kitchen when there are kids around.”

People like her always manage to make everything about them. I hope Gog’Phindile won’t throw the tea

on my face. I don't trust that woman.

Tea and Marie Biscuits is what Aunt Mfula prepared,
I'm carrying the tray to grandmother's room.

"Where are you taking that?"

A voice snaps behind me just as I'm about to open the door. I turn to find Gog'Phindile exiting the bathroom. It's the look of revulsion on her face that has me mentally rolling my eyes.

"It's food for you." I tell her, not hiding the annoyance in my voice.

If I remember correctly, she's about a few years younger than my grandmother but look at her dressed like she's in her thirties. Gug'othandayo, I guess.

She swings her hips, heading my way. Gosh, I can tell by the look on her face that she's about to give it to me.

"Gogo, I..." My words are stolen from me by her smacking the tray off my hands. My mouth hangs

open as I watch everything scatter to the floor.
“What the hell was that?”

“You killed my sister, now you want to kill me too.”
Her voice is loud and carries spite and bitterness.

Forget that, did this granny just accuse me of
murder?

“What are you talking about?” I try to control my
tongue, it has a life of its own sometimes.

“You think I don’t know what you people do in this
family?” Phindile continues to raise her voice at me, I
should’ve taken karate lessons. That’s how you deal
with someone who refuses to mature, beat her until
she remembers that she’s a pensioner.

The door behind me flings open, and one of her
daughters walks out.

“What’s going on?” Is his first question.

Before anyone answers, uncle Mdu comes running
from the passage. The sound of the dishes and
mugs breaking must have brought him here. I see

his curious face transition into shock as he takes in the mess on the floor.

“Shiyiwe, you dropped the food?” Of course, Mfula is here to defend her mother.

“It wasn’t me aunty, Gog’Phindile did it. She’s accusing me of killing my grandmother, she thinks I want to kill her too.”

Uncle Mdu’s puzzled face welcomes a frown as his eyes dart to the angry granny.

“Mah Phindie?” Uncle Mdu.

“Tell me I’m lying Mduduzi.” Yoh!

“You are lying, Mah Phindie.” My uncle doesn’t waste time. Dammit I love this man.

Phindile laughs, it’s mocking and annoying.

“Please, you think I don’t know that this girl has been going from one sangoma to another. Who knows? She has sacrificed my sister for rituals.”

“Take that back, Mah Phindile.” Uncle Mdu shouts, he’s offended. Heck, I’m offended. Who does this woman think she is?

I swear I saw this coming, I knew she had something to say.

“No, I will not take it back. We don’t consult izangoma in this family. Why did Shiyiwe do it?” Phindile.

I wish she’d keep her voice down, there is absolutely no reason for her to shout. And who told her about me seeking traditional help?

An argument breaks out between her and my uncle, I’m not staying for this.

Someone is striding behind me, aunt Mfula. She is not going to give me peace. I’m ready to throw cups and plates at her if she starts me.

“Get a broom and clean that mess you made back there, you don’t talk to adults like that Shiyiwe. I knew MaMbuyazi was a useless woman, look how she raised you.”

Not my mother, not when she is not here to defend

herself.

“Why are you here, aunt Mfula?”

“Shiyiwe!” I turn to see Bhedlindaba, Athule is standing next to him and staring at me. I didn’t know they were coming.

“Who are they?” Aunt Mfula must leave my kitchen and join her family. She nudges me with an elbow, forcing me to answer her.

“Bhedlindaba, I didn’t know you two were coming.” My eyes dive to athule’s side, I send her a smile, she doesn’t return it. Okay, she’s probably tired.

“We came to offer our condolences,” Bhedlindaba says, taking steps toward me. His eyes haven’t moved from me, it’s as if he is searching for something.

“How are you holding up?” He’s too close, I don’t get a chance to move back. Athule grips his arm and pulls him to her.

“Shiyiwe, who are these people? Do they know we are grieving?” This aunt is testing me.

“Aunty, he is my husband’s brother.”

“Mmmh!” That ‘mmmh’ is downright disrespectful, I will reprimand her when they leave the kitchen.

“Where is my brother?” Ndaba asks.

“The last hut on your left.” I say.

As he turns to leave, Athule moves with him. He stops and mumbles something to her, she doesn’t spare him a glance. I sense tension between them, trouble in paradise I guess.

Someone is trying to break the dishes, I don’t have time for this old woman. It’s late, I’m tired and need my husband.

“I hope they are not here to stay, we don’t have enough food.” Aunt Mfula is quiet a strange woman.

“I hope you are not here to stay aunty, you and your family.” They must voetsek after the funeral, this house belongs to Mthandeni and aunt Lindiwe.

She drops a spoon in the sink, only because she feels it’s imperative that she holds her hips and

regard me with a sour gaze.

“Haibo, Shiyiwe. This is my aunt’s house, my mother’s sister.” Oh hell no! Not my father’s house.

“Why are you people here?” I snap at her.

She flaps her fake lashes and snorts like a pig, I know bullshit when I see it.

“You don’t get to ask me that in this house, you’re not a Jele.”

I knew it.

“Are you coming for me and my family aunty?”

She steps close, eyes daring and lips curling with disgust.

“Guns blazing, you have no right over anything in this house, not even Mthandeni. What gives you the right to tell us when to leave? We will leave when it suits us best.”

Problems are like flies, disrespectful as fuck. This is what fate has chosen to throw at me this time?

“Okay, uyayibasa untiza? I hope you will be able to

put it out, I have been dancing on hot coals all my life. I breathe fire out my lungs, touch my family and see.”

Boldness can be disguised as stupidity sometimes, the house is flooded with potbellied men who speak deep Zulu and have incisions on their faces. I might as well be in a jungle surrounded by gorillas. They will kill me if I try anything.

Aunt Mfula cackles and claps her hands. Hats off to Gog' Phindile, first woman to fart out a baby. What the hell am I looking at anyway? She is her mother's child.

Athule runs back into the kitchen out of breath and teary eyes bulging out of their sockets.

“Ndaba and his brother....he’s going to kill him, please do something.” There is urgency in her voice, the panic in her eyes scares me.

“Mthombo!” I run out, praying Bhedlindaba doesn’t hurt my husband. He hasn’t recovered yet, if anything happens to Mthombo, I swear to God...

Oh Lord!!! Bhedlindaba is groaning on the floor,

trying to be breathe which is impossible with how Mthombo is trapping him.

"Mthombo, what are you doing?" This is not the man I married.

He looks at me, his eyes red with rage. It's the ticking jaw and furrowed brows that make it so hard for me to recognize him. My husband is soft and kind and considerate, he doesn't beat his little brother black and blue then push his knee on his throat.

.

.

Thank you Zamangwane Magubane for the sponsored inserts.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Sixty-nine

SHIYIWE-

.

.

Bhedlindaba is not trying to fight back, he's lying on the floor waiting for his brother to release him.

"Get out of here Shiyiwe." Mthombo shifts his eyes away from me, and continues to press his knee on Ndaba's neck. I'm not trying to see another dead body, I have been traumatised enough.

"I'm not going anywhere until you release him." I snap.

He must be crazy if he thinks I will ignore this craziness.

"You're hurting him, Mthombo." Can't he see that Bhedlindaba is bleeding and struggling to breathe? And how is he suddenly able to bend his back? I thought he was in pain.

And this man pinned beneath him is doing nothing to fight for himself, I know he is capable. I have seen it before.

"Please stop him, Ndaba can't breathe." Athule is crying behind me.

What she is asking of me is exactly what I'm trying

to do. If only I knew this Mthombo, it'd be easy to get him to stop without having to beg.

"Mthombo step away from him," I have to raise my voice to get him to listen to me.

I see how he flinches as he straightens his back, he's in pain. Serves him right for acting a fool. Athule pushes past me and rushes to Bhedlindaba, she cups his cheeks to inspect the bruises on his face. There is blood everywhere, it makes me want to gag.

"Are you okay?" You can easily sense the worry laced in her voice. Bhedlindaba is trying to pick himself up from the floor, he rejects Athule's help and pushes his back against the wall till he's standing up straight.

"What's going on, Mthombo?" My heart trembles at the look on his face, his eyes burn with rage that it has me confused. I don't understand this aura I'm getting from him, it's dark and uncanny.

"Babe," I cup his face to get him to look into my eyes. Maybe it's a terrible idea because chills tour every inch of my body, he is suddenly a mystery I can't

solve.

“Leave us alone,” Mthombo orders. Raging eyes on his brother, Bhedlindaba is staring back indignantly.

“Athule, wait for me outside.” Bhedlindaba’s order sounds as authoritative as Mthombo’s.

“I’m not leaving you alone with him, he might kill you.” Athule boldly says, glancing at Mthombo in horror and contempt.

I will pluck this girl’s eyes out if she looks at my husband like that again.

“Mthombo will never hurt his brother, he loves him.” I sound offended. Fuck it! I am offended.

“Not all of us are blinded by love, I was here when the fight started. Your husband threw the first punch, he didn’t give Ndaba a chance to fight back.” She’s low key calling Mthombo a coward.

“Athule, you don’t know my husband like I do. He would never attack without a reason, Bhedlindaba must have done something wrong.”

Bhedlindaba drops his gaze when our eyes meet, it’s

clear to see he is covered in shame.

Athule folds her arms across her chest. Should I tell her she looks like an alien when she makes her face like that?

“You know what you know about your husband, and I know what I saw. This man attacked Bhedlindaba, he’s a monster.”

I don’t want to be hating on this girl, for Ndaba’s sake and the sake of peace. But no one comes at my husband.

“Athule stop it...” Bhedlindaba beats me to it.

“But Ndaba...” Her voice trembles, I believe it’s out of anger.

“He’s my brother, show respect.” Ndaba grunts a warning.

“Nonyanda, I want to talk to my brother alone.” Since when is this one stubborn.

“No, not today Mthombo. What example are you trying to set? My family is here, please don’t do this. Respect my grandmother.” I grip his arm to get his

attention, he always reacts to my touch but today is a different story.

“Bhedlindaba what’s going on here?” Maybe the little brother will tell me. He moves his eyes my way, his jaw ticks before he shakes his head.

“Fine, if you won’t tell me what’s going on, get out of my house, take your brother and leave.”

This gets Mthombo’s attention, a frown on his face, he grunts my name under his breath.

“Nonyanda?”

“You heard me, get your brother and go kill each other outside my father’s premises. We’re gathered here to pay our last respects to my grandmother and you go and do this Mthombo? You are the son in-law of this family. How could you be so careless?”

He remains quiet and glares at Bhedlindaba after a while.

“I trusted you and you turned my wife into a murderer.”

Thixo onefefe! This is what this is about?

They are back to staring at each other, if I didn't know better I'd think Bhedlindaba is afraid of Mthombo. Could be respect, I'm not quite sure what to make of what I'm observing.

"Hade mfethu." Ndaba mumbles.

"Get the fuck out." The husband orders and this man who looks exactly like him obeys. He walks out with his hand clasped on Athule's back. What the hell is going on?

Mthombo sits down and starts stretching his back.

"My back hurts." He says, I know he is asking for a massage.

I give him a look and leave the room, I need to prepare a room to sleep for Ndaba and Athule.

I don't see them outside, Bhedlindaba's car is not here. I hope he's not driving like a maniac out of anger.

I don't go back to the kitchen, Mfula will ruin my mood further.

“You’re back?”

Nxa!

His eyes are on me as I change into my sleepwear.

“Are you sleeping now? I thought we might take a bath together.” He’s still talking, it hasn’t registered in his mind that I am not talking to him. I am not in the mood for him, his voice and these arms trying to wrap around me.

“It’s hot, move over.” I say silently.

He sighs, but holds me still. He can’t be holding me when my feelings are all over the place, he is confusing me.

“I’m sorry Nonyanda, I let anger control me.”

“I don’t want to talk to you Mthombo, you have ruined my mood.”

I hear him sigh again, “I will pay a fine if I have to. Just don’t push me away.”

“Fine, how about you tell me who the man I saw bullying his brother is.”

I can't see his face, he's behind me, placing kisses on my shoulder.

"The man you saw is me, I haven't changed." There is a sudden stab in my heart, he's lying to me.

I wriggle out of his hold and sit up to face him, it takes him a while to mirror my movement.

"No Mthombo, I saw a stone cold stranger. I couldn't recognize you anymore and that was scary. Who is that man I saw?"

His expression is fixed into an inaudible apology, and the sincerity in his eyes makes me want to forget what I saw and love him like I've been doing before I witnessed his demonic side.

"Bhedlindaba does not deserve your sympathy, he used you Shiyiwe. Your hands are stained with blood because of him. Taking a life stays with you forever, no cleansing ever removes that burden."

He speaks as if he has taken a life before.

"Have you killed a person before?" I ask, his eyes run away from mine. I seem to have touched a sensitive

topic. This is what an arranged marriage must feel like, you marry a stranger and start to discover things about them in the marriage. I love Mthombo with every fibre of my being, I don't know though if I will love the dark side of him.

"We all have skeletons in the closet, I am not perfect."

"Is that a yes?" I dig deeper. He looks at me and I'm hoping to catch a glimpse of an answer in his eyes, he is giving me nothing but eyes made of a bottomless pit.

"Let's sleep, it's late." He says, lying on his side. I lie on my side, facing him.

"I think aunt Mfula and her mother want the house." Might as well change the subject, I can't force the man to open up now, can I?

I'm not sure if he is confused by the change of topic or the statement. I recite everything that happened with aunt Mfula and her mother.

"We have to find out what they want and why they came back." He says curiously. It's normal to worry

about their sudden visit, for years they never bothered to check up on my grandmother.

“They want a family meeting, I’m afraid I’ll end up saying something I shouldn’t.”

“As long as you are saying something that’s in your heart, speak your mind if you have to. By the looks of it, they aren’t going anywhere anytime soon.” His arms are on me, pulling me against his body.

“I know, it’s not just the looks. Aunt Mfula told me they will leave when it suits them. That was confirmation enough that they came for the house and not to pay their last respects. Plus, gog’ Phindie is convinced that I killed her sister.”

“Did she say that to you?”

Whoah! Down Bobby. I squeeze his hand to calm him down.

“She did and I’m not deterred, she’s an old dog with no teeth. She doesn’t scare me, none of them do. I see right through them and their plan.”

“Their actions are a valid reason why you should

attend the meeting, you will have to make it clear that this house belongs to your family.” Mthombo says.

I ponder on his words for a minute, I will have to tell uncle Mdu about this as well.

“I love you Nonyanda,” he squeezes my hip, a territorial gesture.

“I love you too, but I loved you more yesterday. Today you pissed me off.” He must take it or leave it. He laughs into my ear, and kisses me endlessly.

.

.

It’s Wednesday today, the meeting has been scheduled for this afternoon which is absurd because umlindelo is this night. I protested and lost the fight to Phindile and her children. We’re burying my grandmother on Saturday. I don’t know how things are going to play out, and I don’t see a diplomatic funeral.

I was dragged out of bed by aunt Mfula.

“What are people going to eat if you’re still sleeping at this time?” She raised her voice behind my bedroom door, I opened my eyes to find Mthombo awake. He wanted me to continue sleeping, I had to paint a picture of the kind of woman aunt Mfula is for him to let me leave the room.

He’s out this morning, playing with other men. Uncle Mdu to be precise, I trust him to defend my husband from my long lost uncles and their foul mouths.

“The eggs are ready, is there anything else I can help with?” Athule asks.

They have been sleeping here since Monday, I found her in the kitchen dressed in a long dress and a doek covering her bald head.

“There are cups in the top shelf, please rinse them and add teabags.” She nods at my instructions and does my bidding, I can sense her withdrawal from me. It’s hard to tell that this is the same woman that saved me from being raped months ago. She’s indifferent and unkind, I know for a fact that the only

reason she's chosen to be domestic is to impress Ndaba.

Something falls as she opens the shelf, she's startled but quickly picks herself up.

"And then?" I'm stupefied. These are our family pictures that were displayed on walls and tables. How did I not notice that the walls have been stripped naked?

"Who put these here aunty?" I ask this buffalo buttering the bread. Her aura is arrogant and disrespectful.

"Portraits shouldn't hang on walls during a funeral."

Bullshit!

"Says who?"

She turns to face me and I swear with that look on her face, she wouldn't hesitate to plunge that knife into my stomach. These people came like a hurricane, they are here to destroy.

"I don't have to explain myself to a child." That's her answer? Really?

“I want those pictures back on the wall aunty.”

“You don’t get to tell me what to do, this is my...”

“Your aunt’s house, yes I heard you.” I interject, placing my hands on my hips for effect.

“You packed our photographs away, the next thing you will pack our bags and throw us out of the house.” I’m testing her power, to see how far she can go. She looks at me squarely in the eye, her boldness can be misguided for rudeness.

“It appears you’re a smart girl Shiyiwe,” she’s challenging me. She stuffs a whole slice of bread into her mouth.

“Smart enough to burn the house down,” I deliver and I’m not kidding. I will turn this house to ashes if they dare me.

She thinks I’m bluffing, I would love to see the day she takes me serious.

“Why do you have a picture of Mthandeni?” Athule interrupts our staring contest. She has gathered the frames on the countertop, in her hand is a small

frame of my sister.

“She’s my sister,” her eyes widen.

“She’s my friend,” she says regarding me with a look I can’t pinpoint.

Small world, but really there is nothing special about her befriending my sister.

“Where is she? I haven’t seen her around.” Now she wants to strike a conversation with me, this girl’s mood swings are not attractive.

“Mthandeni was in an accident, she’s in the hospital.” I won’t give her the details, I don’t want to end up crying in front of her.

She’s quiet, good. We can continue with this stupid breakfast.

But why is she staring at me?

“What?” I ask.

She blinks and frowns.

“I was looking for a resemblance,” she says.

“Mthandeni and I don’t look alike,” but people used

to say our nose looks the same. It's round and I hate it.

"You have the same nose," she says like it's a shocking revelation. She's touching hers with wide eyes.

"Wash your hands before you touch anything," aunt Mfula steps in.

She is always complaining about one thing or the other.

A little boy unexpectedly runs into the kitchen and bumps into Athule, the frame slips from her hand.

"Aunty, malume is asking for boiling water for the chicken." Boiling water for the chicken? Huh!

I see the boiling water, but who is aunty? This child must be cross-eyed, I know he did not just "aunty" me.

"Boy, there is aunty there. I'm also a child like you." I point at aunty Mfula, she can be the aunty of the nations for all I care. I'm not ready to be called aunty.

“Malume Mdu said I must tell the aunty with the ugly pink dress,” it speaks.

I’m the only one wearing a pink dress here, uncle Mdu will hear it from me.

I turn the kettle on. I haven’t seen Mthombo since I woke up. He must be hungry. I decide to dish up for him first, there is no harm if he eats before everyone else.

“Please give this plate to uncle Mthombo, he’s sitting under the tree.” I tell the kid who’s now picking his nose, I’m not ready to be a mother.

“Uncle Mtho is with uncle Mdu, he’s teaching him how to slaughter a chicken.”

What is this child saying to me? And why is he giggling?

“What’s funny?”

“He scared of a chicken,” he laughs louder. I will smack this brat’s teeth out.

“You’ve gone pale, are you okay?” Athule has observed and spotted my distress.

“Mthombo can’t witness chicken murder, he will need therapy all his life.” I explain.

If he hated chicken, he will spit the ground it walks on after seeing it being beheaded.

“Don’t you think you baby your husband too much? How old is he?” Aunt Mfula asks, she’s strong on annoying me this woman.

“Old now enough for me to baby him,” I drop the plate on counter and charge toward the door.

“Where are you going?” That’s Athule, like she cares about my whereabouts.

“I’m going to get my baby,” they think I baby him, so why not call him that?

“Cheese-boy don’t run, don’t run Cheese-boy” Uncle Mdu is yelling outside, it’s mixed with laughter.

Today he is cheese boy, the other day he was mkhwenyana because he wanted a suit. That man can’t take care of my husband even if I paid him a million.

“There is never peace in this house,” Aunt Mfula

complains in disapproval.

My heart knocks against my chest when I hear Mthombo screaming, I run and witness a scene I will never forget.

Mthombo is running without his walking cane, behind him is a headless chicken with blood spewing out of its neck. When did Caster Semenya die and come back as a chicken? Such speed should be illegal for a chicken that's about to become a meal.

Uncle Mdu should have tied its legs, he did this on purpose.

“Ntwana stop, it won’t bite.” Bhedlindaba shouts after him. He’s dead with laughter, I hear more laughter behind me. It’s Athule and aunt Mfula, I will deal with their ugly laughs later. I have to save my husband.

“Mthombo, babe this side.” I shout as I take off running to him. I stretch my arms to grab him, he moves past me like lightning, enters the house and shuts the door behind him, leaving all of us outside.

The laughter doubles. That's it, we're going back to Joburg.

.

Sponsored by Zamangwane Magubane.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Seventy-

ATHULE-

.

"He's going to be fine," my eyes run to the female doctor assuring Shiyiwe that her husband did not break a bone not even the soft one. She insisted that he comes for a check-up after that marathon he did, very unnecessary. Her aunt is right, she treats Mthombo like an egg. No egg is strong enough to do what he did to Bhedlindaba and I'm upset with Ndaba for not fighting back.

"Are you sure he won't have problems at all?"

Shiyiwe asks.

I'm getting bored, we have been here since morning.

"You worry too much Shiyiwe, I told you there was no need to bring me here." I change my mind, I like Mthombo.

"Don't talk to me, we wouldn't be here if you weren't afraid of a headless chicken." She scolds him with love, he might not see it but it's easy for the next person to pick it up.

"That was part of my morning run, the chicken was helping me." Liar.

Ndaba snorts a titter, "You were screaming ntwana."

"Voice exercise," another lie that brings Ndaba to tears. He's laughter is cute, I like this side of him.

"Let's get out of here, I hate hospitals."

That's the only good thing that has come out of my sister's mouth today.

The resemblance is there, I see it whenever I look at her. When she speaks or laughs. Mostly I see my father in her when she smiles, she has the same

crooked canine teeth as his. Her nose wrinkles like his, and there's this one dimple that forms on her left cheek. My father has it, it only appears when he smiles. I'm probably observing more than I should, and wanting to see similarities.

What blew my mind is the shape of her nose, Sizwile has the same nose.

My father used to say he got our grandfather's nose, Shiyiwe's is the same.

It puzzles me though that her sister Mthandeni has the same shape of nose. It has left me confused.

Coming to the hospital has given me a chance to see Mthandeni, I feel bad that I haven't been in contact with her. The last time I heard from her was when she had promised to get me a job at Ndaba Royals, something I wasn't hopeful about. I mean what were the chances that her sister worked for the Meyiwes?

Fate is a funny thing, the way my path crossed with Shiyiwes and meeting Ndaba at my work place.

Speaking of, Simi has given me a warning. She

wants me at work after the funeral, I had to lie and say my grandmother passed away. Oh well, turns out lying is one of the rules to survive in this life. Story of my life.

Bhedlindaba and Mthombo choose to wait in the car, something tells me they are afraid of hospitals.

Nothing shocking there, a person could be afraid of a bird but be obsessed with snakes. Different strokes for different people, I won't even try to judge them.

"Will she be okay?" I ask Shiyiwe standing on the other side of the bed.

The tears in her eyes come so quick and have created a weird ambiance, I don't know if I should comfort her.

"I don't know, the doctor said she might wake up anytime. They just don't know when." She replies.

I watch from the corner of my eye as she wipes away her tears. It's as if she doesn't want me to see her crying.

“You’re allowed to breakdown you know, you’re not perfect.” I say.

She huffs with an eye roll, she knows she is not perfect. I don’t know if she is aware that she is only human and has cracks that need to be allowed to break in order for her to start over and be whole again.

“I’m afraid I will fail my loved ones if I let myself go, I’m so used to picking up pieces and fixing them for everyone.”

She’s afraid of disappointing them.

“Something must have triggered that, I’m all ears if you want to talk.”

My opinion doesn’t usually matter to people, I was always that extra piece of meat people didn’t want because their stomachs were satisfied. Penny didn’t give me a voice in my father’s house like the other kids.

“I don’t know,” she shrugs and a tear glides down her left cheek.

“Growing up, I wanted to impress my parents. I was desperate for their attention, or to hear the words ‘I love you’ from my mother. So that made me work hard in trying to make them proud and somewhere along the line I lost myself to insecurities.”

I laugh, bad thing to do. She’s crying and sniffing and I’m an idiot.

“I’m sorry, it’s just hard to believe that you are insecure.” I have to give my stupidity an excuse.

“You’re the life of the party Shiyiwe, you’re loud and carefree. Everyone wants to be around you.”

“That’s what you see on the outside, I’m a mess deep down. I have fears that keep me up at night.” She says and my curiosity and habit of liking things wants to know what they are.

“Like?” Yep, Athule, you are that girl.

She stays quiet, eyes on Mthandeni.

“I’m not easy to love, Athule. I learned that from my parents, I had to work for my share of love. There came a point where I felt I wasn’t enough for them, I

wasn't enough for my boyfriend and my best friend. I was surrounded by betrayal. My parents choosing my sister over me, my boyfriend choosing my best friend over me. When Mthombo came, it took a while for me to realise that I love him. I knew then that I had built walls around me, to protect my heart from more heartbreak. It was broken at a young age, by the same people who were supposed to love me with every breath in their lungs."

Lord, MaMbuyazi was like Penny? I'm glad I never knew her.

"I wake up at night to check if Mthombo is still sleeping next to me, when he's out of my sight, I panic thinking he will never come back. My head spins when he talks to other women, maybe he will see that they are better than me and leave me for them."

"But he loves you, shouldn't you trust that." Stupid question from the queen of insecurities.

"I do, but I can't help but feel this way. I come a long way with these feelings, my parents instilled them in

me. I hate the feelings of jealousy, I hate wondering if Mthombo will leave me one day like everyone I loved. My parents, Emeka, Ntebo, my grandmother and now my sister.”

She's crying again.

I can't fault her on that, I'm a crier too. Sometimes I wish to eliminate the weak person that lives in me.

Is this the right time to tell her what I know? I want to wait till after the funeral.

“Have you raised your concerns with Mthombo? Tell him how you feel, there has to be a solution to this.” I say.

A frown masks her face before her cackle finds me and leaves me confused.

"Men don't like insecure women."

Yeah, that notion is absurd. By men, she can't be talking about all men. Men is plural, “some men” is what she should say.

I for one would like to believe that there are black men out there who understand such situations, and

are willing to hold us down no matter how messed up us black women are because we deserve to be loved too with our flaws and mishaps.

I hope Bhedlindaba is that man for me. That he understands that I am from the dumps and will need scrubbing and cleaning before I become his perfect gold.

I'm happy when we eventually leave the hospital.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

Grandma must be turning at the mortuary. I could swear I have entered the wrong house. It's filthy and reeks of alcohol, and cigarettes. There are kids running around the house, some jumping on the couches. Teenagers quarrelling over the TV remotes, it's a mad house.

"Aunty, what happened?" I ask as soon as my eyes

find her in the crowded room. She's curled up on the couch with her sisters, drooling over Jack Mabaso.

"Finally, I thought you were never coming back. The house needs cleaning, and I didn't cook. We're hungry mntanami." Wow!

I feel Athule sighing beside me, she knows she will have to clean the house with me.

"But aunty, what about those girls?" I point at the teenagers who roll their eyes at me. "They are old enough to cook and clean the house."

I have never seen my father's house this dirty.

"Mbali burnt her hand while making tea after you went to the hospital, and Nonka is suffering from period pains." Her answer frustrates me, no one has ever died from period pains or a small burn.

"Those are excuses. What will people say when they walk in here and find this place a mess?" I'm wasting my time asking this question, she has taken a break from me to continue flapping her lashes at the actor who has no idea about her existence.

“I’ll help you,” I appreciate Athule’s offer. But we won’t be doing anything tonight.

“The house is going to be cleaned, but not by us. Come with me.” I drag her out of the loud living room, we bump into Gog’Phindile on our way to the kitchen.

“Where are you going?” She hugs a bible close to her chest, a very bad combination with her standoffish demeanour.

“The meeting is starting in the lounge now.” Her eyes are on me, not once has she looked at Athule.

She walks past us to join everyone in the living room.

“What’s her problem?” I don’t have an answer for Athule because well... what the hell is her problem?

“Please get Mthombo and uncle Mdu, they have to be present.”

She leaves after a nod. I think I like this Athule, the same Athule I confided in at the hospital. She reminds me of the Athule that saved my life.

Is it me or has the people in the living room doubled?

There is no place to sit, I fetch three chairs from the kitchen.

The kids shouldn't be here for the meeting, and no one seems to be telling them to leave.

On the three seater are three big men, Gog'phindile's sons. Her husband is occupying the single couch, my father loved that chair.

Mthombo walks in with his brother and uncle Mdu, he settles on the chair beside me and places a hand on my knee.

Their arrival seems to stir up something, the room is dead silent. There's a staring contest between gogo's kids and us, they are all transparent it's easy to see what's running through their minds.

"Who's this boy touching you in front of us?" This uncle is drunk.

"He's my husband, you met him yesterday."
Mthombo can't be that forgettable.

They all look at him and Bhedlindaba, I'm getting

uncomfortable on their behalf.

“So this is the husband?” He says. I’m starting to think they never gave Mthombo the time of day. These people live in their own world.

“Yes Themba, he’s the husband.” Uncle Mdu answers.

Themba and his brothers don’t seem interested in knowing who Mthombo is, then again, there is something about the way their eyes run from him to Bhedlindaba.

The young man sitting next to Themba points a finger at Bhedlindaba, he’s trying to recall something.

“Ndaba Royals!” He says like he just cracked a tough puzzle.

“You are Bhedlindaba Meyiwa, owner of Ndaba Royals.” He repeats.

“Meyiwa? I know that family, they own busses.” Themba says. “I have always known Phindafuthi was a smart man, he got you married to a rich man before he died.” He continues.

Mthombo's hand tightens on my knee, he doesn't have a short fuse. At least that's what I'm hoping.

"Phinda has nothing to do with this marriage, it was all me." Uncle Mdu pats himself on the shoulder, a smile playing on his face. I'm not going to take the credit away from him.

"What about you Mthandeni? When are you getting married? I'd like to be one of abakhongi." Themba thinks Athule is Mthandeni, goes to show that they don't know us.

"We should begin," Gog'Phindile says.

Pin drop silence hovers in the room, they fear this old woman. It's the pucker between her eyebrows and her deep male voice.

"As you all know, the funeral is on Saturday. I expect everyone to be in their best behaviour." I agree with her on that.

"The following day, everyone should have chosen a room. Whatever room you pick will be yours."

Gog'Phindile.

"Calm down sthandwa sami," Mthombo murmurs in my ear.

He's right, I need to breathe or I will die an early death.

Uncle Mdu glances at me, I'm expecting him to take over from here as the eldest. I might mess this up if I speak.

"No one is moving in here, after the funeral all of you will go back to wherever you came from. There is no space for you people here." Finally, the man of the house speaks.

The granny is not happy with my uncle's words.

"There will be space once Shiyiwe and Mthandeni leave this house." She says. "I know they are not my nephew's children, they are outsiders."

And that gives her the impression that she has more rights to this house than we do?

"These children were raised by Phindafuthi Jele, he renovated this house with his wife MaMbuzazi. It's his legacy and you will not take it and give it to your

children.” Uncle Mdu says, pointing a finger at the elderly woman.

“Phindafuthi had no clue about Mthandeni’s identity, my nephew was deceived. Now that he has passed, it’s my duty as the eldest to rectify my sister’s mistakes.” She fires.

How could grandma tell this bitter woman our family secrets? Didn’t she love us?

“Mah is right, we will fix what needs to be fixed. The first thing that needs to be done is to send these girls back to the streets where their mother took them.” That’s Themba, I knew from the first time we met that he’s trash.

“That is my mother you are insulting baba.” I can’t keep my mouth shut anymore.

“Your mother was the first mistake to enter this house. Phindafuthi has never done anything right in his life, he took a prostitute and made her a wife.”

“Take that back Themba,” I snap. He seems shocked by my outburst.

“Uyadelela we-ngane, is this how you address elders?” I see his mother didn’t teach him that respect is earned not given.

“Is that what they teach on the streets where your mother found you?” Them a.

Chairs start flying, someone screams before many voices breakout in mayhem. I’m too slow maybe that’s why I’m only seeing Mthombo and Bhedlindaba engaged in a fist fight with the uncles. Uncle Mdu is fighting the youngest, he’s ducking more than he’s throwing fists.

Athule grabs my arm and pulls me aside, her eyes are watery.

“Shiyiwe, was our mother really a prostitute?”

What did this girl just say to me?

.

.

Sponsored by Zamangwane Magubane...

WHEELS OF LIFE

Seventy-one

PENNY-

.

.

News came that her sister is gravely ill, she has been in and out of the hospital for four days and these four days Penny has been hesitant about visiting her.

It's not courage that brought her to Alexander, heck she doesn't know why she is here.

No one knows where Papa Mosheo is, he is not taking his wife's calls neither does he come home anymore.

The curtains in the bedroom are closed, Tshego refuses to let a little sunshine in. She hasn't gotten out of bed to release herself or take a walk outside, she would if her legs would support the weight of her body.

"I know a sangoma who can help you." It's not that Penny cares, she will be all alone if Tshego kicks the bucket. For years she has been her accomplice.

“Keep those people away from me,” she grips Penny’s hand. In her eyes is a desperation Penny can’t grasp.

“It’s too late for me, I have lost.”

Penny is confused, sure she looks like death but it doesn’t have to be like that. Tshego is not a quitter, she fights till her last breath.

“I tried to take down the man helping Shiyiwe and failed.” Tshego explains, she’s exhausting her breathing bundles.

“Who?”

“Mathonga Khanyile... his ancestors came at me with spears.”

Mathonga doesn’t ring a bell to Penny and she sure as hell doesn’t care who he is.

“Didn’t you know you were entering a lion’s den?” Penny queries.

In all her years of practising witchcraft, she has never been this careless.

“I didn’t see them coming,” Tshego snaps. She

doesn't need a lecture, life is slipping out of her hands. The only thing she wants right now is to see her daughter.

"Ntebo... my baby is in jail. Get her out please." She tightens her grip on Penny's hand.

"You are asking for the impossible Tshego, where will I begin?"

"Please grant me this wish, I won't rest in peace knowing my child is locked up." Not that she deserves to rest in peace because really, there is no rest for the wicked.

"I will see what I can do, my own life is a mess. My husband wants a divorce, he hasn't been sleeping at home lately. That fool is worried about his daughter." She speaks with disgust in her voice.

Tshego blocks her voice out. Who cares about Mphako and his bastard daughter?

Her eyes feel heavy, she wants to sleep.

"Nteboheleng." She takes her last words as her eyes shut closed.

Penny bows her head and takes a deep breath, she knows that her sister is gone. There is nothing she can do for her, but cover her body and call the morgue.

There's a sudden smell in the house.

"Don't tell me she's already decaying." She covers her nostrils, stands to look around the house. She doesn't have to go far, right there on the kitchen floor is a body of a man she last saw years ago.

"Phindafuthi?" At first she is stunned, then reality settles in. She's standing in front of a decaying corpse. Penny runs out of the house screaming her lungs out.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

"What did you say?"

She blinks, mouth open and eyes scanning the chaos in the room. I grab her hand to get her attention back.

“Athule, I asked you a question.” She doesn’t like being touched maybe by me. She yanks her hand back and gives me a displeased look.

“MaMbuyazi is my mother, we’re sisters Shiye.”

No, fate is at it again. Haven’t I been through enough?

“How? Who told you? How long have you known?”
She ogles at me with a frown on her face.

“I just found out that we’re twins, my father was in love with your mother... our mother. They had sex and we are the result.”

The man I have been looking for is Athule’s father?
This reality surpasses all my expectations, I remember that man that saved me from those thugs. I remember his gentleness and how he was with his daughter.

I pull Athule to the kitchen, away from the chaos.

“Tell me everything you know, how sure are you that

we are siblings?"

She opens the fridge and takes out a bottle of StrongBow. That alcohol belongs to one of the baboons in the living room.

"You'd be shocked to hear my story sis," Sis? We're there already?

"Mphako and MaMbuyazi were careless in their love and look where that has landed us." I will address her laughter later, I'm more interested in the name she just uttered.

"Mphako? That's Mthandeni's father's name." If grandma had her story right.

Athule looks at me as she gulps down the beverage. I don't think she drinks, you can tell with how she swallows that 14% alcoholic drink.

"No, he's my father and your father." She's unbothered, probably on the verge of not giving a fuck. She sits on the stool, after grabbing another bottle. This is the right time to tell her that Bhedlindaba is not a fan of drunkards.

“My grandma gave me a picture of a man standing with MaMbuyazi, she said he is Mthandeni’s father.” I tell her.

She shrugs and laughs.

“Mphako Makhedama is a legend.” She says, and I’m sure that’s meant to ridicule him.

Aunt Mfula dashes into the kitchen screaming, “Call the police, Mduduzi slapped me. Call the police.” She throws her body on the floor and rolls.

“Can we talk about this later, we need to intervene. They are going to kill each other.” Athule says, looking down at the woman rolling on the floor.

“I’m okay.” What I want to say is that I’m drained, and exhausted. Let them fight and kill each other.

“I hope Gog’Phindile dies, or gets a heart attack.” I’m saying this from the bottom of my heart. Athule laughs, I think the alcohol is doing its magic in her system.

“Hayi, Mah.” Oops! I forgot Mfula was still here shining my floor with her floral dress.

I stand to help her off the floor, she is not helping me help her. Seeing she wants to remain on the floor, I let her be. I'm eager to find out more about Mphako and MaMbuyazi, clearly it's not going to happen with people fighting in there and a drunk Athule who is now more interested in laughing than telling me what happened. Alcohol is not for everyone.

"Shiyiwe!" That's my uncle screaming.

Sigh!

It's suddenly quiet that side, curiosity pushes me to go and investigate. I should have known that Bhedlindaba would pull a gun, it's one of his languages.

"Everyone who does not belong here, grab your shit and get the fuck out." With that authoritative tone, they should be bumping heads, fighting to be the first to exit.

No one is moving, these people have upheld a

certain type of stubbornness.

"Did you hear what I said?" Ndaba calmly asks, beside him is Mthombo and a tired looking uncle Mdu on the other side.

"No one is leaving this house."

Jeer! Gog'Phindile is still alive?

"There will never be peace if you insist on staying, aunty." Uncle says, holding on to Ndaba for anchor. He will fall if he doesn't sit.

"Then let there not be any peace, we are not going anywhere." Themba replies, pulling a gun out. This is not ending well.

"Put that thing away Mkhulu before you hurt yourself." Ndaba says, stepping closer to him. Although he looks like someone I wouldn't want to cross, Themba is not frightened. He looks him straight in the eye.

We're in the crossfire, standing before angry Zulu men who look hungry for blood.

"This fight has nothing to do with you, Meyiwa. You

are not family." Says Themba.

"It doesn't have to be a fight, you people can go back wherever you came from and we will pretend this never happened." I say.

Gog'Phindile's sons crack in laughter. I don't like the way one of them is looking at me.

"How much do we pay to keep your mouth shut and go get busy in the kitchen? Or you only accept money for your body like your mother?" The man laughs in mockery.

A gunshot clogs my ears, I scream as Athule dives at me. We land on the floor with a bang.

"Are you okay?" She's on top of me with a panic stricken expression.

"Mthombo," I scream and push her off me. Everyone is on the floor, stomachs down and hands on their heads. Frantically, I search for my husband among the sea of bodies.

"Mthombo, where are you? Where is my husband?" I scream.

He can't do this to me, not again.

"Shiyiwe!" I hear his strained voice, it's coming from uncle Mdu's side.

"He's fine," Ndaba says to me. He's the only one standing with a gun in his hand, the man who insulted me is lying on the floor nursing a bullet wound on his shoulder.

"Uncle Mdu move, you're crushing him." I can't get his body to move, he's so stiff.

"Uncle Mdu."

What the fuck is happening?

"My uncle is not moving Mthombo, my uncle is not moving." I can't recognise my screams. Not uncle Mdu.

"Get him off me first, I can't breathe." This man is insensitive, he's worried about breathing when my uncle might be dead.

Bhedlindaba helps me drag uncle to the side, he falls like a bag of mealie meal. "Is he dead? You killed my uncle Bhedlindaba."

“I fired one shot, he probably fainted. Check his pulse.” He points at him with that stupid gun, I shove his hand away and kneel to check my uncle’s pulse. Indeed, there is a pulse.

I’m exhausted.

.

.

Sponsored by Zamangwane Magubane.

A/N: My apologies for the length, load shedding is not kind.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Seventy-two

SHIYIWE-

.

.

Money doesn’t only buy you happiness, it can buy you freedom as well. Had he not been a Meyiwa and

filthy rich, Bhedlindaba would be in jail. Gog' Phindile was adamant in laying charges against him. Money shut her big mouth, there were negotiations I didn't want to be part of.

Hospital bills were paid for her son who was shot, a bribe and another bribe to make them disappear.

I thought we'd see them at the funeral but once the money reflected into Gog' Phindile's account, they disappeared like a man denying a pregnancy.

I knew it wasn't about my grandmother but the house.

My uncle is the happiest, he gets to live in peace with the chickens, his wife and kids.

And us... we're a few minutes away from Joburg.

Spending two weeks in KZN was not planned, we had to sort out Mthanden'i's transfer papers. She will be arriving at Helen Joseph hospital tonight.

"How much did you pay Gog' Phindile?" It beats me why he hasn't told me, that old hag was desperate to have that house. Surely she was paid handsomely.

“Does it matter?” He asks.

He thinks he is clever.

Why am I even laying my head on his chest?

This one has built quite a relationship with uncle Mdu, they have planned trips I am not included on.

I love them for each other and the role my uncle is playing in Mthombo’s life. I hope my real father will have the same relationship with him.

I need to use the loo before the plane lands.

This morning before we boarded, Mthombo mentioned the honeymoon. The fact that I have to travel to a foreign country and enjoy myself while my sister is in the hospital does not sit well with me. I’m not going.

Lord! Why is Ndaba standing by the door?

“Don’t go in there, give it a minute or two.” It’s embarrassing when someone uses the toilet right after you’ve come out. He smiles like he doesn’t want to, and plunges his hands into the pockets of

his pants.

He's observing me a little too much I must say.

"You look happy," I don't know what he is trying to say.

"Your brother is my life." It must be clear to him how much I love Mthombo. He removes his bucket hat and squeezes it in his hands, he is nervous.

"Does he know?"

I know what he's talking about, I never got the chance to tell Mthombo what his parents did to me.

"I didn't tell him anything and I expect you not to say anything either, he is still recovering. I don't want him stressed."

He sighs, and answers me with a nod.

"My brother is stronger than you think, you know?"
Where is this coming from?

I stare, only because I'm too tired to be throwing questions at him. He can't be wanting me to guess what he means.

“You treat him like he is fragile and that is not the case, Mthombo is...”

“Stop.” I raise my hand to clog his words. I think I got a glimpse of the Mthombo he is trying to tell me about back in KZN, I’m not interested in that Mthombo. The man I married painted a different picture of himself to me and that’s what I am sticking with.

“I’d like to go back if you don’t mind.” I say.

He nods, the sigh again. It’s worrying, this man has something on his chest.

“Go ahead.” He says and walks away first.

As I turn back, my eyes catch a whiff of Athule. I’m a woman and I know jealousy when I see it, there is absolutely nothing to be jealous about. What will I do with Bhedlindaba?

I would entertain her insecurities if I were in the mood.

.

.

We finally land, Athule and Bhedlindaba will not be travelling with us.

"I would like us to tell him together, if you don't mind." I tell her.

I want to see Mphako's reaction, I want to be there when my father finds out that I am his daughter.

Athule regards me with a nod and wraps her arms around me, "I will call you."

She bids her goodbye and walks away with Bhedlindaba.

There is so much I need to know about MaMbuyazi and her lover. It's shocking really how everything played out from the time they were together to our births.

Those two have a total of three children together, twins plus a daughter, 7 years younger. How on earth did they not fight for their love? Maybe our lives would've turned out different.

What puzzles me is that Ntebo's mom is my aunt, and that makes Ntebo my cousin. I've always known

that life doesn't love me.

"I have something for you." Mthombo tells me as he welcomes me. The airport is crowded and we're causing unnecessary traffic by standing in the middle of nowhere.

"What is it?" I ask.

Curiosity killed a cat, but I can't help it.

Mthombo hardly buys me gifts and we haven't been together too long to have received a lot from him.

He takes my hand and leads me towards the exit, I follow, trying to keep up with his fast pace. The walking cane is still around, he won't be needing it soon though.

We get outside and I look around, waiting to see what he got for me, he stands in front of me, takes my hand and kisses it.

"You know I love you right?"

I have no doubt, I nod.

“I need to hear you say it,” he raises an eyebrow.

“Yes.” I smile faintly.

“And everything I do, I do with you in mind.”

Where is he going with this?

“Babe, you’re scaring me.” My voice breaks a little there.

Why is he keeping me in suspense?

“I’m sorry, I just want you to have an open mind about this okay.” He says.

He looks a bit nervous, why is he nervous? This man and nervousness are not best friends.

I swear if he cheated on me with his crooked back, and got a woman pregnant, I will cut out his balls, frame them and put them on display in our bedroom, and on his side of the bed.

I want to ask who she is but I don’t want to offend him, instead my tears fail me. The thought of him touching another woman breaks me, I can’t handle it. He frowns, the look on his face says he’s confused.

“Why are you crying?” He asks

I’m asking myself the same question.

“I don’t know.” I sniff and look away from his burning gaze.

“You haven’t seen what I have yet, hayi Shiyiwe.”

His frown grows, I should keep an open mind like he asked.

I send the back of my hand to my cheeks, and wipe my tears away. He exhales before ushering me outside to the parking lot, he takes a few strides and stands next to a silver grey Volkswagen Tiguan.

“Mthombo, no. What have you done?” My tears are pleading for attention.

“It’s yours sthandwa sami, your wedding present and... before you say anything, you don’t have to take it now. Get your driver’s licence first then you can start driving it, Thambo will drive you around.”

Thambo is back?

The driver door opens and the man in question steps out.

“Mrs Meyiwa,” he greets with a nod. Since when am I Mrs. Meyiwa to him?

“It’s good to have you back Thambo, I hope it’s for good this time.”

I get another nod, he’s too formal.

“I love the car, thank you.” I reward Mthombo with a kiss.

He holds an amused expression, before his mouth forms a smile. That proud look on his face right now is priceless, I love it.

Excitement has me throwing myself on the bonnet, arms outstretched and plant a few kisses on it.

“My baby.” I’m talking to my car.

I run back to the smiling husband and put my hand out with my palm facing up. He raises an eyebrow.

“Can I have the keys?” With a big smile on my face.

“Awukwazi ukushayela nje.’ (You can’t drive.)

Mood killer.

“I know, I just want to kick start it, that’s all. It’s my

car, I should do the honours.”

I gleam and he shakes his head, looks at Thambo with a gesture. The man in a black suit pulls out the keys from his right pocket, and hands them to me. I can't contain my excitement, this feels better than sex.

I jog to the driver's side, open the door and dip my head in to inhale the fresh smell of a brand new car, it smells like my dreams coming true.

Curious, I jump in, close the door and start it. A smile creeps on my face at the sound of the engine. Mthombo takes a step forward the moment I start the car.

He needs to relax, I know I can't drive.

I wave at him gesturing that he should come in, he ambles to the driver's side and opens the door.

“Do you like it?” He asks.

“I love it, a lot.” I can't contain my smile.

“I'm glad.”

His smile is genuine. I love how he is not afraid to

show his emotions, whether it's through a smile, tears or a frown.

"Okay, let Thambo drive." He's spoiling my mood now.

I'm not ready to step out, I need to soften him so he lets me bask in it a little longer. Flapping my lashes should do the trick.

"That look makes me weak but it's not worth losing you over. Who will look at me like that when you're gone?" He's trying to be funny now.

"Okay babe, let me drive to the corner."

He seems frustrated.

"Huh ah Shiyiwe, must you be stubborn?"

You can't play with this one, I must insert money for him to play along.

"I'm sorry, it's too risky. I don't want you to get hurt, I'm not prepared to lose you."

I understand where he's coming from, so off to the passenger's side I go.

Why is this man not getting in?

“Are you taking a taxi?” I ask.

Either that or he’s walking home. He laughs and puts his head through the open window.

“Thambo will drive you home, I have somewhere to be.”

I forgot my ears back in KZN. What did he say?

“Why? Where is home?”

His house was torched, he has no home but the Meyiwa mansion. I’d rather live under a bridge than go to that house.

“You will see when you get there.”

“Mthombo no, I’m not going to your father’s house.”
I’m not kidding.

“I know, please trust me.”

.

.

The trip was longer than I expected, we’re in

Lanseria. Blair Athol to be precise. My mouth drops the moment Thambo drives through a high gate. I don't know why we are here, in such a lavish estate.

"What's this place, Thambo?"

"Sir said to bring you home and that's what I have done." He says, eyeing me through the rear-view mirror.

Mthombo can't do this to me, what will I do with such a big house? "Why didn't he tell me? I thought we'd lease an apartment before looking at houses." Thambo has no answer for me, I want someone to complain to. This is too much.

There are two cars on the driveway, Lord knows who is in there.

"Are you coming?" I'm not going in that house alone. Thambo drags my suitcase and follows me, the door is not locked. Like I said, this house is too much. The corridor is vast, I don't want to think about the other rooms. Who is going to clean this place?

"I will be outside if you need anything." He says,

leaves the suitcase and walks out.

There are voices coming from the living room,
Thambo didn't say anything about having company.

The boy lying on the couch looks familiar, he is the same boy I saw with Velakithi in Riverlea.

"Sikolethu?" He whips his head, his expression is blank. It's as if he is here, but he's not here. He takes his eyes back to the TV screen. I need air... it's okay Shiyiwe, you have been through worse.

"Are you Shiyiwe?" Jezus! Where did this woman come from? She's standing with a bowl of crisps and a glass of juice.

"I'm Thina, I'll be looking after Sikolethu."

I have heard enough, I walk past her. I don't know where I'm going. Mthombo does not love me, if he did, he wouldn't be trying to kill me. This is what the car and new house is for, he was buying my agreement. I'm not touching anything in this house, not the boy or a damn spoon. Mthombo will find me sitting on the floor in this kitchen.

.

.

.

BHEDLINDABA-

His house is hosting a mouldy smell and has collected a fair amount of dust, the cleaner hasn't been around to do her weakly touch ups. He doesn't have OCD but he likes his space clean and germfree, he'll have to call the agency and get a new cleaner. To let the house breathe, he cracks the windows and doors open.

Athule is in his bedroom recovering from jet-leg. He loves having her around, as insecure as she is, she brings him peace and reminds him of the child he was before Mrs. Mathe. Before he had a list of dead bodies to his name, Olwethu included. Her death was quick and span, he buried her alive in that shallow grave and went back home to Athule.

It's not long since they arrived and someone is

banging down his door, it's getting louder with each stride he takes. He's irked and frustrated by the time he gets to the door.

Mphako is the last person he expects to see standing at his doorstep. How does he know where he lives? And why did he bring the police with him?

"Where is my daughter?" The man does not try to be polite or show any courtesy.

"Your daughter?" He knows who Mphako is talking about, repeating himself is a way to annoy him because this man brought the police to his house. Sometimes words cut like knives, who knew that disrespect would feel the same?

"My daughter has not been home in two weeks, I was told that she is here." The arrogance in his tone ticks Ndaba off.

"Who told you that?" He asks.

Mphako is here in search of his daughter based on hearsays, he is not completely sure that Ndaba is keeping her, yet he is on a roll and willing to have him arrested. A man like this does not deserve his

respect.

"Sir we need to search your house, Mr. Makhedama says you kidnapped his daughter." The officer says.

"Are you serious? You come to my house and accuse me of kidnapping?" The gods must be high, or imohlola kaJames has doubled.

"Athule is in this house, her colleagues said I will find her here." Mphako says, looking over Ndaba's shoulder, he can't see beyond broad shoulders and a tall build.

"With all due respect sir..."

"Ehh baba, we don't have time for courtesy, we need to search this house now." The officer interjects.

Bhedlindaba could retaliate and be Ndaba, however it's no use making any counter-attacks when the man standing in front of him is the father of the woman he loves.

"Lalela la sfebe, talk to me like that again, and I will have your badge. Do you hear me? How the hell did you get in here? Do you have a search warrant?" The

attack is directed at the shrinking officer, yet Mphako seems to be the one to take offence. His glower is striking and regards Ndaba as if he is nothing in his eyes.

“How old is this person you’re looking for?”

“Twenty three... twenty seven.” Mphako's eyes drop to the ground as he corrects himself.

“Old enough to go wherever she wants...” Ndaba shuffles the old man’s feelings and challenges him with a firm stare. They can stand here the whole day and argue about Athule’s whereabouts. He’s got all the time in the world.

There are footsteps coming behind him, he sees from his side view that she’s nearing the door.

“Ndaba, who is... it?” This she says, standing next to him. The situation would’ve been controlled if she wasn’t wearing his shirt and nothing beneath. Mphako is about to explode with anger.

“Is this where you are hiding, Athule?” He asks.

She says something and Mphako shuts her up with a

slap across her face. She staggers, and falls in Ndaba's arms. Mphako does not wait for a reaction from either of them. There he goes, walking away.

"Looks like our job is done here, Khumbule'khaya sisi." The officer says and takes his leave.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Seventy-three

SHIYIWE-

.

.

No one wants to wake up to the sound of their name being butchered. I look up and it's the nanny. Her twang is too deep.

"Don't you want to go to bed?" No, I don't want to go to bed. But I want to get off this kitchen floor, it's dark outside. I figure the man is not home otherwise he'd be the one waking me up.

"What time is it?" My head hurts as I drag my body up.

“After 9pm, Mr. Meyiwa is not home yet.” She says.

Where is Mthombo? How long is this meeting of his? I should call Bhedlindaba and ask, I don’t know if it’s appropriate.

I have troubled him enough.

“I can help you to your room if you like.” She knows the way to my room? He buys a house, doesn’t tell me about it, and moves strangers in first.

“I will wait in the lounge, you can go home.” What am I saying? Who will look after Sikolethu? Is it safe to be alone with him?

“I’m a live-in nanny.” She tells me with a smile on her face.

This is strange for me, I’m not judging her. But with that twang, she obviously went to a multiracial school? Why choose to be a babysitter?

“I see. Where is the child?”

“Sleeping in his room,” she will never stop smiling, will she? “Are you sure you don’t want to sleep in your room?”

I need Mthombo to tell me what is going on first. I feel like he is forcing Sikolethu down my throat.

My suitcase is not where I left it, I need a jersey. I don't want to touch anything from this house.. It comes with terms and conditions.

"Where is my suitcase?"

The smile, "The maid took it to your bedroom."

There's a maid? Haibo! When did Mthombo plan all of this?

"I want my suitcase," the maid must bring it back. I didn't ask her to take it.

She gives me a nod and walks away, poor woman looks confused. I'm not in the mood to accommodate her, not when my head has gone to Mars to look for answers, and that man I married who has disappeared from the face of the earth.

His phone is completely off, it would be better if at least I hear from that white woman telling me to leave a voice mail, but there is nothing. Anger turns

to worry, Mthombo does not love me. That's why he is doing this to me.

His brother's phone rings, Bongukwanda not his almost twin.

"Makoti?" He says over the phone, I'm ashamed. First night back home and here I am asking his brother where he is.

"Hi, I'm sorry for calling so late, I'm worried about Mthombo, his phone is off."

"He's with me, we had a family meeting." Oh wow! Family meeting the new wife knows nothing about. "Is that her?" I hear Mthombo's voice in the background.

"Hold on Makoti, he wants to talk to you." Kwanda says.

I don't want to talk to him.

"Nonyanda..." Yep, the bastard is still alive. I drop the call, he must not even dare.

.

.

Either he didn't come home last night or he left early this morning, for my peace of mind, I opt for the latter. I don't want stress. As I sit up from the couch, I see him seated on one of the couches. He's deep into thought, I don't want to imagine what is going through his mind.

"Why didn't you sleep in the bedroom?" He asks.

"Where did you sleep last night?" He's still wearing yesterday's clothes. He's staring at me without saying anything.

"Mthombo where did you sleep last night?"

"Here, on the couch."

"You slept on the couch? Then why didn't you wake me up when you arrived? I wanted us to talk."

"It was late, I didn't want to disturb your sleep."

"What time was late?" I ask.

He looks at me and clears his throat, I wait for his answer with an impatient sigh.

“Come sit next to me.” He gestures to the empty seat beside him.

I don’t want to sit next to him, I want answers.

“Please.” That please would make me sell myself just to please him.

As I take a step, Sikolethu comes running into the living room. He takes the spot I was about to occupy. Mthombo’s face brightens, he puts the child on his lap.

“Hey champ, did you sleep well?”

The boy nods, he appears to be reticent. However, he is warming up to Mthombo. I thought he was detached from people, when did they build this thing I’m looking at?

Mthombo lifts his eyes to look at me, “Have you two met?”

Hee!

“Nonyanda, he’s our son.”

“He’s not our son, he’s your...”

“Shiyiwe!” He snaps, scrutinizing me under a dark gaze. This man thinks I care about his outbursts.

“He’s fragile, please be careful with your words.”

Mthombo is a clown, he can’t see that Zinzi controls him beyond the grave.

“Thina,” he calls and the lady scurries into the lounge. The smile she gives my husband makes me extremely uncomfortable, maybe I don’t want any woman smiling at him. Men respond with their penis to almost anything.

He stands the second they are out of sight, his arms find me and snake around me.

“Don’t you like the house Nonyanda?”

I knew it, it’s a shut up gift.

“You’re buying me with gifts now, Mthombo?”

“No, we didn’t have a home and I thought of buying you a house.”

“You thought of buying me a house and a car so I agree to raising your half brother.” I’m trying to wriggle out of his arms.

Why does he have to be the strong one, it's not like Adam was useful in Eve's life and stuff. She still ate the forbidden fruit and look where that has landed us.

"Don't touch me." He lets me push him away. I want him to leave me alone, but not this man. He stops me from walking away by grabbing my hand.

"Nonyanda wait." He pulls me towards him, reducing the space between us. "What's wrong?"

People who think are clever always have this question at the tip of their tongues, knowing very well what is wrong.

"I want him out of the house now." I tell him.

"Shiyiwe please, he's a child." He's touching me again.

"I said don't touch me," I walk past him but again he thinks stopping me is good. Or maybe this is who he is, we will talk whether I like it or not.

"Nonyanda..." That's not my name. "Talk to me please."

"I have nothing more to say to you."

This man wants me to repeat myself, as if he doesn't know I don't want Sikolethu here.

"Please Shiyiwe."

"What do you want me to say, Mthombo?" I wouldn't yell if he wasn't annoying me. "What am I to you? A trophy wife? Zinzi's replacement?"

His eyes widen, fuck him and his feelings. It's not like he cares about my feelings.

"No, how you could you even think that?"

"You planted these thoughts in my head, you don't care about me, Mthombo. It's all about that boy."

"His name is Sikolethu." He spits out the words, his eyes slowly narrowing.

"I don't care, I don't care. I want him to leave, I am not going to raise your father's child."

"He's my son..."

It angers him that Zwangendaba fathered Sikolethu.

"Fine," I give up. "You want to raise Sikolethu, bring Zinzi back because clearly you're looking for her

replacement.”

“Why are you saying these things to me, Shiyiwe? Are you purposely trying to hurt me?”

Dammit, he hurts when Zinzi is insulted? I don’t know what hurts, the fact that he refuses to see Zinzi for who she was or that he wants me to play her part in Sikolethu’s life.

“I was there when he was born, he was my son and he’s still my son. I love him.”

“I’m not disputing that, like I said, bring Zinzi back so you can raise your son together. I don’t want to be a part of this.” I’m shouting.

“Shiyiwe calm down, you’re saying things you will regret.” He says. He must not start with me.

“I am calm,” so what if my voice is higher than usual? I’m tired of looking at his face, if I stay here he will eventually succeed in softening me up.

Zwangendaba can fuck off for all I care, I am not going to raise his son. Only when pigs fly!

“Where are you going? We are not done talking.”

I hate it when he says that. The bastard does not deserve an answer from me. I leave him calling out to me.

What do we have here? Thina was listening in on us, she's standing in the corridor, leering at me with a condemning gaze. I walk past her to find the stupid bedroom. I have to go through three bedrooms to find the biggest. The interior is not bad.

The maid must have brought my suitcase in here. I'm hungry, sticky and fucked up. I head straight to the bathroom for a quick shower.

When I come out, Thina is in my room. She is leaning on the door post, giving me a stare down.

“Can I help you?” This is wrong in all levels, my mother never allowed anyone into her bedroom.

“You're lucky to be married to him you know?” I don't know if she is asking or telling me, and how does she know Mthombo to be telling me this?

"Excuse me!" I ask.

She folds her arms, and smirks.

"Sikolethu is a child, is it so wrong for his father to want to raise him? Why must you come between them?"

Shembe! I'm hearing things.

"Who are you?" I ask.

Such disrespect is uncalled for, I will not stand for this garbage.

"I'm his aunt." She says, with pride.

"You're Mthombo's aunt?"

"Siko's aunt, Zinzi was my first cousin."

What the fuck!

I scream for Mthombo, I don't care how fast he will climb those ugly stairs. I want him here now.

"Sisi calm down." This woman better get away from me.

I am tired of people telling me to calm down, they

make me feel like I'm losing my mind.

"Get out of my sight, now."

I don't know where this is coming from, the rude me.
I feel like a ticking time bomb and will explode if I
don't defuse it in time.

Thina looks guilty, sorry or regretful, I don't care. She takes off in speed and leaves the door open.

The first thing I hear and see is his walking cane,
then his bulging eyes.

"Shiyiwe..."

"Who is that woman?" I point towards the door. He knows who I'm talking about, his eyes are everywhere but on me.

"Who is that woman, Mthombo?" Okay! Don't scream Shiyiwe.

"She's been looking after Sikolethu during our stay in KZN, she reached out when she found out he's alive. He warmed up to her, I think it's because she's Zinzi's cousin."

That name again.

“Don’t mention that name to me.” I tell him.

This is all her fault, she is controlling my life beyond the grave.

“I was going to tell you after you’ve settled in.” My knees are weak, my hands won’t stop shaking.

“Oh my God, what have I gotten myself into?”

“Nonyanda...”

“Shut up, shut up Mthombo.” I scream, maybe I am losing my mind. Maybe this man is driving me to the brink of insanity. “How could you do this to me?”

“Nonyanda...” he extend his hands to restrain me from moving. I escape his grip.

“Why am I here Mthombo? Because everything belongs to Zinzi, you, Sikolethu and her sister. What else is hers?” My head is starting to hurt from yelling. I have never spoken to him in this manner, I want to stop but I can’t. He’s making me angry.

“Did you buy this house thinking of her? Was this her taste?” I pull the bed sheets and throw them on the

floor.

“These ugly bed sheets, it’s her taste, right? The curtains, the carpet and every bloody thing in this house is Zinzi’s taste.”

“No, everything is yours Shiyiwe. You speak as if I don’t love you, as if I never loved you.”

“You don’t love me, Mthombo, that’s why you’re doing this to me. You are trying to bring your dead wife back.”

“Stop saying that to me, you know damn well it’s not true.”

“I don’t know anything, turns out I’m an idiot. I agreed to marry you regardless of knowing you for less than a month.” That’s it, he planned all of this.

“Wow, bravo Mthombo Meyiwa. You are good at this, kudos to you.” I clap my hands, disgust trailing in every string of my veins.

“What are you talking about?”

I hate him for staying calm when I’m fuming and wanting to behead him.

“It’s all clear to me now, this is why you were in a rush to marry me. You wanted me here, living Zinzi’s dream.”

Dammit! Why is it so hard for me to breathe? I can’t stop my hands from shaking.

“Shiyiwe you have it all wrong, I would never do that to you. I love you, I want us to have a family together.”

The family he and his late wife had always wanted.

“You expect me to believe that?” I sit on the bed, I don’t trust my legs to hold me up at this moment.

Mthombo pauses for a second, his eyes fixed on me. He doesn’t get to frown at me, I’m the victim.

“Why would I lie to you?” He kneels in front of me, placing his palms on my knees.

“I don’t know Mthombo, you tell me.” I shout. “Why is that woman in my house? Send her away before she starts making moves on my husband, and moving into my bedroom.”

Panic attacks are normal and happen to the best of

us, I just need to breathe slowly and calmly.

“I cannot believe you just said that.”

“Mthombo, she is your dead wife’s sister, you can’t tell me that she doesn’t remind you of her.”

“Where do these insecurities come from Shiyiwe? Do you honestly think I would do that to you, my wife?”

He’s shocked by every word that came out of my mouth. I’m done being considerate.

“Stop asking me useless questions and get those people out of here.” I stand as I snap at him.

“I am your husband dammit.” He yells back, for the first time, Mthombo yells at me. “What is wrong with you? Why are you so mean and insensitive? I am trying to be civil Shiyiwe, but you are persistent in dragging me down and making me feel like the scum of the earth.”

“What about me? I am tired, I am tired of having to fight for everything in my life. That should’ve ended with my parents. Why must you do this to me? Why do I have to compete with a ghost? I should be enough for you.”

"There is no need for you to fight, Zinzi means nothing to me now. It's you I want, it's you I love." He's taking steps toward me, I step back and he stops. The hurt in his eyes breaks me, but I bet it's nothing compared to what I'm feeling.

"At this point I don't care Mthombo, I don't care. I want those people out of the house and out of our lives, I don't want Zinzi's name mentioned in this house ever again." How do I make him see reason when he won't see anything past anything that has to do with Zinzi?

"Shiyiwe it's me, your husband. Will you stand there and talk to me like that?" He frowns, maybe it's anger reflecting on his face.

"Oh please, you are Zinzi's husband. I don't know where mine is. I'm not going to compete with a skeleton. You want to continue from where you left off with her, right? Don't involve me in it. I'd rather we go our separate ways, I'd rather we get a divorce."

He gasps and looks at me like I pulled his heart out of his chest.

“Nonyanda...” a whisper.

“You take me for a poes wena Mthombo, I wish your legs stop working again and your hands. Maybe then you will get off your bloody high horse and humble yourself.” I’m getting out of here, to a place I won’t see his face. I will deal with the bathrobe later.

.

.

Sponsored by Rethabile Mofokeng.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Seventy-four

ATHULE-

.

.

My father was furious when I got to the car, he didn’t say a word to me or even look in my direction.

I knew I was in trouble, he dropped me at home and said he had to run to work.

Why did he skip work just to look for me anyway?

Is this what old people do?

I'm 27 for Pete's sake and can take care of myself.

That old man likes exaggerating a lot, now I have to stay in this house with Penny. As to why she is still around beats me. Sizwile said Sbonelo was sent to Nqolothi after he was discharged from the hospital, Mphako refused to stay with him. Penny should've followed, seeing my father won't divorce her.

I try to stay out of her way as best as I can.

Turns out we get paid per fortnight, I thought there was a mistake when money reflected into my account.

There is nothing at home, and as expected I have to buy the groceries. My salary is not enough to buy much, I'm using a calculator and making sure I don't overspend.

I manage to get half of the things on my list. Where do I apply for women's grant? Surely we ought to get

paid for bleeding every month, enduring birth pains, mood swings and crazy cravings.

Two hours later, I have survived the crowds. It's the fact that I have to work a distance to get to the taxi rank, it's on the other side of the mall.

"Watch out!" I hear a man shout and of course I'm bound to turn to see what the fuss is about. As I turn, a young man pushes me, my groceries tumble to the floor. Before I know it one of the taxi drivers is holding him back. He's carrying a knife and is glaring at me with bloodshot eyes.

I know this boy, he's one of the nyaope boys from my street. He's not saying anything, but struggling to free himself from the man holding him, and takes off running the moment he's free. In a second, a crowd surrounds me, I'm paralysed by shock unable to say a single word, nor move to help the men gathering my scattered goods.

"Athule, are you okay?"

Oh great, as if I don't need any more harassment.

“I’m fine Xolani.” I try to walk past him, forgetting my groceries, but he grabs my hand.

“I saw what happened, you are obviously not fine.” Why did I decide to take a taxi? I should have requested an Uber.

I forgot that he is a taxi driver and chances of bumping into him at the taxi rank are very high.

“Come sit,” the foreign concern in his voice shocks me. Xolani is not one to care for other people’s feelings.

I guess it’s the tone he uses, but I let him lead me to a bench. My groceries are placed beside me, by a boy wearing a lime green security vest. I would thank him if I were in my right state of mind.

“Do you know who he is?” Xolani queries, crouching before me. He’s looking into my eyes, I can’t hold the stare. I don’t want to believe the worry behind his eyes.

“Not really,” It’s the honest truth. I only know him in passing.

“Let me take you home,” Xolani says.

Now, that’s an offer I can’t accept. Knowing him, he’ll expect something in return.

“No, I’ll call someone.”

“You mean that idiotic coach? I know you’ve been hanging around with him. Are you cheating on me Athule?”

Ehh! Didn’t I break up with him? I remember breaking up with him.

“We’re not together anymore Xolani, I have a boyfriend now.”

He sighs, he’s not really hurt by this.

“Do you know who he really is Athule? You don’t know what you’re getting yourself into.”

He would say or do anything to get me back, I’m very familiar with how he works. I fish for my phone in my bag and text the only person I know will drop everything for me.

Xolani continues with his rambling, I can’t risk listening to him. The last time we spoke, he lied

about wanting to meet up. How can I take someone like him seriously?

Thank God he is called to duty, apparently his taxi is full and he has to transport the passengers. My eyes are everywhere, searching for that lunatic who wanted to stab me. I'm barely new in the employment world, and I have people wanting to separate my soul from my body.

I can't grasp what I could've done for that boy to want to kill me, if it were not for the man who held him back, I would be soaring to god-knows where.

"Ntwana!" He's here, towering over me with fire-blazing eyes. Is it something I did? I think he will pull me into his arms and comfort my shuddering body, but he goes for my plastic bags and starts walking.

Bhedlindaba is not talking to me, I want to know the reason behind his silence. Does he not want to know what happened to me? Why he found me in a state of shock?

"You should have called me if you wanted to go

shopping.”

Is that it? He is mad because of that?

“You were at work and I didn’t want to bother you.”

He gives me a brief stare with a grimace on his face, before taking his focus back on the road.

“Bother me? I don’t know if I should be offended by that. Funny you managed to bother me with the text you sent.”

I’m not sure what he means, and why he’s taken offence. But I don’t like the way he’s addressing me.

“Maybe I shouldn’t have.” I sizzle, allowing anger to take over me.

Ndaba clicks his tongue.

“Do you know who that laatjie is?” A random question from him.

He must be talking about the guy who almost stabbed me. He’s already informed about what happened. Is there anything this man does not know?

“He lives in my area, I don’t know his name. What

could he possibly want from me?" I don't show my face when I'm home, neither do I have friends.

"Someone put a hit on you." Ndaba voices without looking at me, I can sense anger in his voice. "The question is, who would want you dead?"

Beats me. I'm a good girl, God would attest to it.

"What if he knows where I live? Ndaba, he'll follow me home."

"It's okay, nothing will happen to you." He sounds so sure about it.

No, it's not. I don't want to die.

.

.

He drives around with me, running errands. It's getting late, Mphako is keeping watch of my moves. I don't want to receive another slap from him.

It's after 6pm when he decides that he should take me home. My street is buzzing, God bless those

rubbernecks. I can't leave this car without being seen.

"Won't you give me a kiss?"

He's stupid if he thinks I am going to reward him for taking me home late, Mphako will have me for supper today.

"Thank you for the ride, I will call you." I say.

"When are you moving out of this place?" He keeps mentioning this, it began the day my father slapped me in front of him. Now in all our conversations, he brings it up.

"We want to tell my father the truth first, then I will start looking for a room to rent."

"We? As in you and Shiysiwe?" He asks, something happens to this man when he says my sister's name.

"Yes, I have messed up by travelling to KZN without his knowledge. I'm trying to score points back."

Mphako sure knows how to hold a grudge. He talks to me but it's different, he's holding back a lot.

"My house has enough rooms, you can come live

with me."

Not happening.

"Vat n sit? You're kidding right?" I ask.

I don't see myself doing that, I would have to lower my standards.

"Why not? We have chemistry, we love each other. Why not take it to the next level? And you were willing to stay with me two weeks ago." His reasons are not valid.

"That was until my father sent Penny packing, I was going to go back home eventually." I love Ndaba and I wouldn't mind staying with him, the problem lies when he has to marry me. He'll be getting all husband privileges, and won't see a reason to put a ring on it.

"You are stubborn," he sighs and leans back on the chair.

"Are we ever going to have sex? Or are you the wait till marriage type." Argh! Foolish man.

"I have to go, before my father comes out."

He looks at me with a bored expression, “A kiss for the road, then

?” His hand is trailing up my thigh as he leans to steal a kiss. He’s conjuring feelings I won’t be able to control.

“I love you.”

I love him more.

Bhedlindaba drives off immediately, I scan my surroundings as I rush to the house.

“Athule!” That’s my brother, he’s standing against the wall, smoking. If his father sees him all hell will break loose. Mphako is a bull waiting to attack everyone who pisses him off.

“Are they home?”

He nods to answer my question.

“I haven’t been home in hours, they think we’re together.” He tells me. This is what brothers are for.

“How did you know I needed back-up?” I ask, only to get a mischievous smile as he takes my groceries.

“I know everything that goes on in that house.” Sure he does.

Sizwile is the hill Penny is willing to die on, he’s her light. She trusts him with her life, anything he tells her, she takes it and stamps it. I won’t ask what lie he told them.

“Let’s go, we’ve wasted enough time.” I say.

I lead the way.

What is Mphako doing sitting on the varander? He doesn’t raise his head when we walk through the gate, my heart is thudding loudly in my chest. It stops and drops to my stomach when Sizwile slows down his moves, he is suddenly hesitant. It’s not every day that he shows fear for this man, this is bad. It must be the look on baba’s face, it would kill if it could.

We’re standing before him, waiting for a verdict. There must be a reason why he’s seated out here glaring at us.

“Where have you been?” He asks as he stands, Sizwile says something but I miss it as I gasp at what my father just did.

“I’m sorry baba,” Sizwile apologizes, rubbing the pain away from his cheek. Is he going to go around slapping people?

“Baba, I...” He stops me with a raise of the hand.

“I will deal with you later.” He’s talking to Sizwile and dismisses him. My brother walks past Penny at the door, without sparing her a glance.

“Where have you been? I was worried sick.” Baba says.

How do I answer when I’m next to be punished? I’m stunned when he wraps his arms around me.

“Why are you doing this to me Athule? My heart is not too strong, next time call me when you’re going to be late.”

I can’t promise him anything.

Penny appears through the crack of the door, I’m

trying to grasp the anger behind her eyes. Is it because I didn't come home early? She clicks her tongue and goes back in, slamming the door shut.

Baba takes note of it, he side eyes the door.

Something flashes in his eyes, anger of sort. I'm not entirely sure which is which, it's gone in a flash.

"I'm not a child baba, you don't have to keep track of me every time I leave the house."

He pulls me into his arms again, it's a brief hug.

"Go inside Athule." He exhales in exasperation.

What will be his reaction when I decide to move out?

Penny is in the kitchen, dishing up. You'd swear she has multiple disorder, she's smiling at me.

"You're just in time, I'm done dishing up." This is a first, this woman does not cook nor serve when I'm around.

"Serve your father first," she says, standing aside to make space for me.

News flash! Mphako does not eat her food. Has she

forgotten that? I don't say anything to her, and I won't be serving my father.

My silence causes her to cry, she wipes it so quick and finds that smile she lost a while ago.

"Here's your plate," she points at a plate with more meat. "These two are Sizwile and Ayanda's food."

Speak of the devil, Ayanda strides into the kitchen, earphones plugged into her ears.

"Mah, I'm hungry." She takes a piece of meat from one of the plates and throws in her mouth.

"No Ayanda!" We're startled by Penny's piercing scream, she grabs Ayanda's chin and shoves her fingers into her mouth.

"Spit it out, spit out now." She's screaming.

"Mama no, what are you doing?" Ayanda tries to get away from her.

"Why did you eat that Ayanda?" Penny yells on her way to the fridge and takes out a bottle of milk. Her hands are shaking as she forces Ayanda to drink. I think of calling my father, he scurries into the kitchen

before I make a move.

“What’s going on?” He asks.

His wife is still trying to get Ayanda to drink milk, and plunging a finger into her mouth to get her to vomit. My sister is on her knees crying. She doesn’t understand what is happening.

“Baba, we have to take her to the hospital. My baby is going to die, she ate poison.” Penny cries, placing her hands on her head. Shock does not begin to describe how I feel. I look at the plates, Ayanda took the meat from my plate.

“You poisoned my food?”

.

.

Sponsored by Rethabile Mofokeng...

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Seventy-five

SHIYIWE –

.

.

It's getting dark outside, I don't know how the sun works in Lanseria but it seems to be opposing with the one in Joburg. According to the time on my phone, it should be completely dark out.

Speaking of, it has rang a million times. It's that man I blindly gave my heart to, he's left voice messages too. I don't have the guts to listen to them, not after the things I said to him. I hate anger as much as I hate death, both these things change a person. How will I ever face Mthombo? He'll never forgive me for the things I said to him.

Then again, why does he have to be the person he is? We were doing so well, loving each other and on our way to building a good marriage.

He's crazy if he thinks I'm going to stay with Zinzi's cousin under one roof.

I can't figure out how I got to the city. All I know is that I walked until my legs burned, until every breath scraped my hurting lungs.

Someone drops a 50cent coin on my lap, the bathrobe catches it. I look up and realize I'm sitting on the side of the pavement, Indian style.

"Hey, I don't need this." The person doesn't glance at me. I'm giving hobo vibes, but the white man with tanned skin beside me looks more hoberish than I do, he's got a "feed me" sign to prove it.

It must be the robe, it is the robe. Another passerby drops a white package, in it is a half-eaten pie. Okay now I am offended.

I stand and give the street-adult the pie and 50cents. I'd give him more, but I have nothing on me but my phone.

I need to get out of here, I don't know this place, I don't know where home is. Maybe I do need that 50cents and more. I'll request an Uber and pay the driver at my arrival.

Letting out an exasperated sigh, I jump the street. The plan is to ask the street vendor if I can use her phone.

"Sawubona Mah." She stops packing her tomatoes,

looks up at me and responds in deep Sepedi.

“I’m sorry, I’m kinda lost. Would it be possible to use your phone?” I ask.

“Airtime is expensive sesi, sorry I can’t help you.”

She replies with a soft tone.

“I will replace your airtime, I’m new around here and got lost. I want to call my husband, I will give you the money the second he gets here.” I’m making promises or I will be stuck in this place.

With a nod, she hands me one of those cheap phones you find at PEP, I can only make a call. His phone rings, he answers almost instantly.

“Hello.”

“Hey, it’s me.”

He keeps quiet, I wouldn’t win a competition in being patient.

“Me who?” He asks.

Really? This man knows my voice.

“It’s Shiyiwe, I’m lost and hungry. It’s getting dark.” I

haven't eaten anything today.

I'm met with his silence again.

"Mthombo, did you hear what I said?"

"Yes, what do you want me to do?" Wow!

My shoulders slump in defeat, my voice shakes as I chuckle. Maybe I shouldn't have. He will think I am laughing in arrogance.

"Can you ask Thambo to pick me up?" I am humble, I have to be. I fucked up.

Mthombo closes the call. Jehova, what will I do now? What if he doesn't want me anymore? I mentioned getting a divorce and said some hurtful words, my stupid brain is useless.

"Miss!" The voice behind me forces me to turn around. Thambo is here? Wait a minute! That is not possible.

"How did you get here so fast?" I ask, he laughs as he plunges his hands into his pockets.

"I've been watching you the whole day." Thambo says.

Nothing shocks me when it comes to Mthombo, I can't say though that this was expected. The man in front of me narrows his eyes as I shoot him a glace, I stop my reply and ask him to give the lady R20 for using her airtime.

He points to the left, my eyes wander until the car I was gifted comes to view. He unlocks the door and allows me to jump in. Throughout the ride back to the house, I look out the window, my gaze tracing sources of lights as we drive through the dark town.

.

.

Thambo swerves the car into the parking lot, I thank him and rush into the house. The first thing that crosses my mind is Thina and Sikolethu, I wonder if they are still around.

Somehow fear has me slowing down my pace. Not

knowing how Mthombo will receive me makes me uneasy, however, I'm not the only one at fault. He did things that put us in this situation, things I will never be okay with.

He's on the laptop, typing. He lifts his eyes, for a second I see a smile of relief on his face. Behind it, he looks exhausted. It disappears, he suddenly looks fierce as predicted.

"I didn't know you're an aspiring hobo." That's how he welcomes me back.

I'm not offended, I'm just not okay with the fact he and Thambo knew where I was and decided I was fine there.

"I didn't know you wanted a hobo as a wife," my clap back is unexpected. I bite my tongue, I don't want us to go back to where we were hours ago.

"You're my wife?" Why does that sound like a question? I don't like the way he's raising his eyebrows at me, he's daring me to answer rudely. It's not normal for me to break eye contact, but this man seems to bring me to my knees each time our eyes

meet. I send my eyes to a different direction.

“You said you wanted a divorce.” Mthombo adds, closing the laptop and lying down on his back.

Not knowing what to say to him, I take off in the direction of the bathroom, I need a shower and to get out of this thing I’m wearing. I wince with every stride, it’s the headache threatening to take me out.

At my return, I find him wearing trunks and lying on his back. Our eyes meet, I can’t read anything behind those empty eyes.

The image of our dispute and the terrible words I said to him invade my mind with far too much clarity, I don’t need this right now.

I press my eyes shut, trying to focus on the moment but the images stand still.

“Why are you crying?” His voice knocks me out of my dazed state. He’s frowning at me, I don’t know this man lying on the bed.

“Are we getting a divorce?” I ask. It’s probably what he wants, it will be on me if he does divorce me.

“You know you should never give in to anger?” He says, ignoring my question.

“I didn’t.” It’s the next logical thing to say at the moment.

Failing to look at him, my eyes wander. I can’t look into his eyes when he’s exhibiting such a heavy aura. Mthombo lets out a displeased sigh as he sits up, it takes him a while to stand to his feet. I don’t want him closer, I’m ashamed of myself. He looks into my eyes, too absorbed. He has this thing of looking deep into my eyes.

“I guess it seemed normal to you to talk to me the way you did?”

“No but...” I don’t want to look away but I do.

“But what? How old are you Shiyiwe?”

Sheesh!

“Excuse me?”

“You insist on acting like a child. Did you lie about your age?”

“You’re insulting me Mthombo?”

“An insult is what you did before you stormed out of the house.”

I slump against the wall when he grabs my wrist, he’s hurting me and I don’t think he realizes it. He is letting anger cloud his senses.

“You’re hurting me.” I yelp.

He doesn’t seem to care about my pain, he lets go of my wrist and grabs my upper arms. I wince, but afraid to struggle free.

“What is that you said to me, huh?” He’s taking it back to hours ago. I don’t want to, it would be better if we pretend that nothing happened, that everything was a terrible nightmare. The fight, Thina and Sikolethu.

“You want me back on the wheelchair, paralyzed from the neck down?” He’s hissing to my face, plus it’s all a lie.

“I didn’t say that.” I dispute.

“Then say what you said, and say it to my face.”

“Mthombo you’re hurting me.” He’s a nutcase, his eyes are deranged and carry a danger I have never seen since I have come to know him.

“Mthombo...” His fingers are digging into my flesh, it fucking hurts.

“Mthombo please, you’re hurting me, I don’t need this. My head hurts, I’m hungry and tired.”

Why is he looking at me like that? I am not crazy, unlike him. Why would he put his hands on me?

“You think this is painful? You wouldn’t be able to utter a word had I been hurting you.”

His words freeze the blood inside my veins, he speaks to me as if I need taming. I step back when he lets me go, one foot is how far I can go. He’s blocking my path, hovering over me with his threatening size. I keep my eyes on his chest, because that’s how short I am and I am not willing to lock eyes with the monster he is.

“Am I a joke to you Shiyiwe?”

He folds his arms, I blame this urge of wanting to

walk without a cane. Now he can trap me against the wall and manhandle me.

“I don’t follow.” I’m trying to lose the attitude, it’s pissing him off further.

“You knew what I wanted from you from the beginning, I pursued you not the other way around. I wanted marriage from you, not just that but a partner who will love and respect me. Why am I getting the opposite? You seem to be taking my love for granted.” He says and I cannot believe this is his view of me after what he’s done.

“I’m not.” I want to snap and show him his mistakes.

“Then what are you doing? Am I not your husband? Do you think I would ever hurt you?” That’s a funny question, he’s the one manhandling me.

“Mthombo, I’m sorry. I said those things out of anger, I didn’t mean it...”

“I’m still talking.”

Haike!

“You don’t respect me, clearly. Is it so hard for you to

respect me Shiyiwe?”

Ehh! What happened to Nonyanda? Not once has he called me that.

“It’s not.”

“Then why do you talk to me like I’m nothing to you? You don’t have manners, you do as you please and say the first thing that comes to your mind. Did I force you into this marriage? Do you want out?” The interrogation is starting to annoy me, but I answer him anyway.

“I don’t want a divorce, I love you.”

I clear my throat and take his hand, he snatches it back.

“Don’t touch me,” he snaps, giving me a taste of my own medicine.

“What do you want Shiyiwe? I refuse to be disrespected by the woman I love. You didn’t give me a chance to explain why I brought the boy and his aunt here. What you did was downright childish. I need you to make a decision now. Are we in this

together? Because I'm not letting you go."

I can't make a decision as long as Sikolethu is in the picture, I'm not going to raise Zwangendaba's child.

"Wow!" He says when I don't give him an answer.

He leaves me standing against the wall and settles down on the bed.

"You want me to do things your way." Finally, I let it out. Mthombo raises his eyes, the glower confirms my stupidity.

He doesn't give a reply. I don't like it when he's not talking to me. I climb on top of the bed with my knees and crawl to him, I hug him from the back.

"I'm sorry that I made you feel disrespected." I say.

He's tense and doesn't respond to the kiss I plant on his cheek. I run my hands down his chest and kiss his neck.

"I'm not in the mood." He rejects me and shifts away.

"I'm trying to make things right, Mthombo." I try to

touch him again, however he turns in a haste, grabs my waist and throws me on the bed, making me lie on my back. In my stunned state, my mind goes blank.

He pulls the bath towel wrapped around my body, and tosses it to the floor. Okay, we're going to have sex. I'm expecting a passionate kiss from him, it's not coming. His hand is working on my clit, to hell with kisses, this feels a million times better.

"Mthombo... yes." I grab his wrist willing him to continue. He stops, pulls his trunks off. My eyes are on his shaft, he's grown twice his normal size. If this medicine does not heal me, then I give up on sex.

It's bothering that the only emotion on his face is anger. Are we having angry sex?

Mthombo spits on his hand, and rubs it on my throbbing opening.

What happened to him making me wet by touching me and kissing me? What is this thing he's doing?

I'm questioning and about to answer myself when he pushes his growing length inside me, without any

preparation.

He's in between my legs, heaving and thrusting into the deeper parts of my inner walls. I want his lips on me, his tongue on my nipples. I'm not getting what I want, and that makes me cry.

"It feels good Mthombo." The words slip out of my mouth.

There is no reply from him, he's focused on moaning and thrusting. I move my hips to match his grinding, he is doing me so good that I open my legs wider to accommodate more of him.

"Dammit!" He hisses as I grab his buttocks and dig my nails into his flesh. Wanting more of him, I press him into me, moaning into his ear.

My clit is on top of the world, so am I, I'm closer to a major orgasm.

My claws tighten on his buttocks.

"I'm almost there, babe." I breathe into his neck.

But why is his body tensing up? No no! There's a warm fluid occupying my stretched walls. He stops

and pulls out, I'm not ready. I feel a cold wind as his body separates from mine.

"Mthombo, where are you going?" He can't walk away from me, I haven't gotten my orgasm yet.

He ignores me and walks into the bathroom. I'm confused, why did he not let me cum? I'm lying in bed, leaking and stained with his cum. He's probably getting a towel then we'll pick up from where we left off. I wait and wait and wait. Mthombo better be alive in there, or I will kill him myself.

Here he comes... wearing a pair of Jeans and a t-shirt.

Is he leaving? This fool is leaving. I'm unable to say anything, it must be shock. That man that just walked out on me and my throbbing clit is not my husband. I need answers.

.

.

My apologies for the delay, load shedding hit while I was editing.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Seventy-six

ATHULE-

.

.

I lost it and grabbed Penny's cheeks with my claws, she screamed and attacked back. We ended up on the floor, scratching and biting each other. I don't know where the strength came from, it took my father snatching me off her to stop the fight. She left a few scratches on my face.

"Baba she attacked me, she has to pay a fine for attacking her mother. I want two cows." The witch yelled under her quickening breath.

"You are not my mother, you're evil. I hate you." I wanted to grab her face again, Sizwile pulled me back. He was close to receiving a hot clap from me for interfering.

Guilt found me when I saw Ayanda on the floor,

coughing blood and running out of breath.

I stood outside the gate and watched my father put Ayanda into the car, Penny jumped into the back seat with her, I wanted to tag along. But I had to use the chance to pack my bags and leave.

I left him a note, and told him where he will find me when he decides to throw Penny out. If he comes for me again, I will stand my ground.

.

.

I guess going to his house without calling first is okay, our relationship is legit, so that means I can go to the house anytime.

The Uber drops me off, I say a thank you to the driver as he takes my suitcase out of the car.

I hear loud music from the gate, this is not like Ndaba. He better not have whores in there or else...

The music gets louder as I march toward the house.

The kitchen door is wide open, I enter into a mess. There are empty bottles on the floor, dirty dishes in

the sink. Something must be wrong, Ndaba is a clean freak.

There is a loud commotion coming from the living room, that's where the music is imminent.

I drag my suitcase there and find the brothers engaging in a conversation. Mikhulu and a guy I have never seen is among them. My eyes find Ndaba first. Our eyes meet and the music stops at my expense.

“Ntwana, you’re here?” He’s confused by my presence, I should have called.

“Athule, join us.” It’s hard to imagine Bongukwanda without a smile on his face, he’s the lighter one. Bhedlindaba and Mthombo give off the same unsettling aura. That fight they had back in KZN was something out of a uncanny thriller, something I never want to be part of. As far as I know, they didn’t resolve their issues. They were back on speaking terms the following day and I felt like a fool for taking sides. Mthombo doesn’t like me, I see with how he acts like I don’t exist.

“Hey, I’m sorry I should’ve called.” I say.

I have this sickness that this house and the man who lives in it belong to me. He looks at me and the suitcase, worry quickly paints his face.

“What’s going on?” He asks.

I can’t tell him in front of his brother that my mother tried to kill me and I moved out for good this time.

He’s looking at my face again, his demeanour changes in the blink of an eye.

“Come with me.” He pulls me and my suitcase away, we get to his bedroom, he shuts the door and holds my face. I love it when he worries about me. I’m allowed to feel special, right?

“What happened to your face? Who did this to you?” He asks.

Confusion is not a friend of mine.

“Did what?”

“These bruises on your cheeks.”

I turn to the mirror, how did I miss these scratches? Penny did her worst here.

Brown skin should hide such things, but nope, not mine. It looks like I had a fight with a cat, now I have to tell him that my mother is the wicked witch of the West.

“It’s nothing serious.”

I turn to him as I let the lie slip right out my tongue.

“Don’t piss me off Athule, who did this to you?”

Jeer! I had to fall in love with him of all people?

“I had a fight with Penny after she tried to poison me,” what will I lose by telling him the truth. His anger is forever on standby, I doubt though that he would ever hurt a woman.

Did I say his anger is forever on standby? It’s here, he growls and punches the wall.

“That witch. Who the fuck does she think she is?”

He’s marching towards the door, I grab his arm before he could open it.

“Where are you going?” I ask.

He looks scary right now, he’s scaring me. I can’t

imagine what he would do when he gets his hands on Penny.

“Clearly your mother hasn’t met me yet.” He says through gritted teeth and pulls his hand back.

What the hell does that even mean?

“No Bhedlindaba, please. You’ll make things worse, my father is not over me running off with you.”

“She tried to kill you Athule, twice.” He snaps. My eyes widen, maybe I’m slow and not aware of my surroundings.

“What?”

“That boy at the rank, she paid him. Your mother can’t even hire a proper inkabi to take someone down.” He’s talking but my mind has gone with the wind. I can’t be this careless, how did I not figure it out?

“That woman hates me,” I say, turning away from him. There are stupid tears trailing down my face I don’t want him to see.

“Your mother needs to be taught a lesson, next time

you won't be so lucky ntwana."

He turns me back around.

"My father will punish her." I say, I know he will.

"Don't be stupid Athule, you saw your face in the mirror."

I don't appreciate the tone of his voice.

"I'm not stupid," I argue. He's working to annoy me and it's bloody working.

"Hade ntwana," he breathes a long sigh. "I want to protect you Athule, don't stand in my way."

Chills trail through my skin at his words, I don't want to ask what he means by that. But I know it's bad. He clicks his tongue, a habit of his.

"I get you Ndaba, but it doesn't have to boil down to murder."

My mouth is too big for my brain, I'm speaking nonsense.

Ndaba doesn't blink, he's staring with empty eyes and a hard face. I can sense the anger springing

from him.

“Please let it go Ndaba, let my father deal with it.”

He hears me, but he is not listening.

“What kind of a mother does this to her child? What is wrong with those people?”

Those people are my family and unfortunately they are fucked up.

“Those people are my family.”

“Are you serious right now?” He sizzles, judging me with his eyes.

“Dead serious.” I return.

Ndaba clicks his tongue and marches out, leaving me to guess where he’s headed to.

I pray he isn’t going to look for my mother, nothing good is going to come out of that rage he is harbouring.

I have to follow him.

Oh hell no! Bhedlindaba locked me inside the room.

“Ndaba!!!”

I shout and bang the door.

What is going on? What is he planning on doing?

“Bhedlindaba open the door.”

“Mathulz?” Mikhulu!

“Mikhulu, please open the door, Ndaba locked me in.”

The door handle is moving, I step back as it swings open. Bongukwanda is with him, they both look confused.

“What’s going on?” Kwanda asks.

“Where is Ndaba?” I step into the corridor.

“He dashed out of the house in a fit of rage, the last I saw him like that was when he found out his English teacher was killed.”

Kwanda says and pauses, I think he slipped and said something he shouldn’t have. Why would Ndaba be maddened by the death of his teacher?

Kwanda clears his throat and recollects his words,
“Did you two have a fight?”

“No, Ndaba will kill her. Please Mikhulu, you need to stop him.”

“Kill who?” Mikhulu looks unbothered. Why are they not panicking like I am?

“Penny...” I say to men who look like deer caught in headlights.

“My mother,” I rephrase. “Look I can’t explain much but you need to stop him.”

“Eish Mathulz, you know when Ndaba makes his mind up, no one can change it. Entlek, what did your magriza do?”

They’d cheer him on if I tell them, then I will be responsible for three men going to prison.

“I think I know what Ndaba is capable of when he’s angry but he can’t kill Penny, he’ll get in trouble.”

“Askies, I’m sorry Mathulz. Rest in peace to i-oledi lakho.”

Mikhulu is okay with all this? He is not trying to act,

call Ndaba or something.

“Mikhulu please.”

“Hade Mathulz, there is nothing I can do at this point. If Ndaba has made up his mind...”

“Jo you sound like a robot right now.” I snap.

This is not something we can take lightly.

“Will someone explain to me what’s going on?”

We both look at Kwanda and fail to give him an explanation.

“The only person that can change his mind is Mthombo, your mother is stupid ntwana. I hope she’s lucky enough that Ndaba sympathises with her because she birthed it and raised it.”

Chills run down my spine at the sound of those words. It’s a bit of a relief that Ndaba didn’t tell Mikhulu about Penny not being my mother, the less people know, the less embarrassed I will be.

“Mthombo... where is he? Please call him.” I say to Kwanda, Mthombo is my only hope.

“Honeymoon, do not disturb.” Mikhulu answers, he’s deep into this family’s business.

“I don’t really know what’s going on but I will call Ndaba and ask him to stop whatever he’s planning on doing.” Thank God for Kwanda.

I wait anxiously as he dials Ndaba’s number and presses the phone to his ear.

“And?” I ask, I have waited for too long.

“He’s not answering, I’ll try again.” Kwanda says.

Oh God! Why is Bhedlindaba doing this to me? What if gets arrested and spends life in jail?

“Bafo, where are you? Come home, Athule is worried....”

He pauses before rubbing his eyes in confusion, Ndaba is saying something. Probably spewing lies so Kwanda thinks he is not up to no good.

I can’t take it anymore, I grab the phone from Kwanda. I will apologise to him when I’m done.

“Ndaba... Come home, you better turn back now, don’t do this please.”

Tears are a woman's weapon, but this one is not saying anything. I can hear him breathing.

"Bhedlindaba say something," this is the time to start sobbing.

"Why are you crying?" He doesn't sound like the monster that left the house fuming. These tears better change his mind.

"Come back."

"Stop crying Athule, I'm not coming back. Your mother is a dickhead and she will pay for what she did to you."

He loves clicking his tongue, might as well make those tongue clicks useful and record a mapiano track.

"Bhedlindaba Meyiwa, come home now. You will lose me if you do this."

I yell and he drops the phone right after clicking his tongue for the umpteenth time. I wipe the useless tears and glance up at Mikhulu and Kwanda.

"What did he say?" Kwanda asks.

“He hung up on me.”

I am shocked, I need to sit down. I let my butt drop on the floor and breathe. I need to be strong if I’m going to stop Ndaba from whatever he is planning on doing.

“Argh shame, at least you tried ntwana.” Mikhulu is not helping. “I have a question.” He adds, I look up at him.

“Did you give him a Christmas party?” What?

“What are you saying Mikhulu? Christmas is in three months.

He laughs timidly and bites the toothpick stuck between his teeth.

“No, I mean has my boy ate from the tree of good and evil.” I’m really not getting him. I look to Kwanda for answers, he raises his hands in surrender. I get the feeling he knows what Mikhulu is saying.

“Umdavazo MaThulz, it’s easy to get him to do what you want if you’ve let him hit it. Christians say there is power in the name of Jesus, but I say there is

power in the choochie." Sex? Really? It's none of his business.

I don't know if it's embarrassment I feel or shyness.

Kwanda walks away embarrassed. Mikhulu sighs, he's chewing that abused toothpick too loudly. It's a disturbing sound. I almost feel sorry for it.

"It is what it is Mathulz, it is what it is. Take my advice and go layby an outfit for the funeral. Call AVBOB and pick a coffin, magriza is the walking dead. May her soul rest in peace," he pulls out another toothpick from his pocket and puts it in between his teeth.

He walks away singing, "Amagugu, alelizwe ayosal' emathuneni."

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Seventy-seven

NTEBO-

.

.

It's the day after the news of her mother's death reached her, she's been released from jail. Lack of evidence, is what the detective said. It's a relief, something worth celebrating. However her heart is numb and heavy, she's lost her dependent, her lifeline.

In her purse is a R50 note, the money she was going to use to catch a taxi back home from Emeka's house.

Little did she know that fate had other plans for her, prison is the last place she expected to be. She's fuming, confused and grieving. Sure she hasn't been on God's good girl list but fuck it, no one is perfect. Most evil people get away with a lot and live tell more days than any good person out there.

"Sisi, close the door."

She blinks at the taxi driver glaring at her, and shuts the door. Her mind won't cooperate with her lately. It's nothing to worry about, now that she is out of jail she can start from scratch, try to make something of

herself.

The first step is to bury her mother whose body has been lying in the morgue for a whole two weeks. She thinks of calling her father, not once did he come to see her in prison. He should have been the one to break the news to her, he should have buried his wife and collected his daughter from jail. The man is missing in action, she plans on asking neighbours where he could be.

Her neck is straining from looking out the window, a displeased look lies on her face as she exits the taxi.

Her hands are sweaty, her heart is jumping in all directions. She has to identify the body before claiming it.

Walking through the funeral parlour feels like death itself, she stops at the door and looks around.

“Sorry we’re closing in 5minutes, come back tomorrow.” Says a man in a deathly dark suit, it reminds her of undertakers. Ntebo’s face turns sour.

“I’m here to identify my mother’s body, detective Mduli sent me here.” The mention of the man of law

humbles the man in black.

“What’s her name?”

Her heart does a flip, it makes her dizzy.

“Tshegofatso Mosheo.” She draws a long breath after.

“I’ll be back.” He leaves her alone with her grief.

Time slows down, Ntebo thinks of taking a sit. Her knees have grown weak.

Barely a second and the man is back, “Follow me.” He says.

Another heavy breath, but her breaths are coming out short.

They enter a cold room, Ntebo immediately sees her mother. She really is dead, she was hoping for some kind of miracle.

“Mme you can’t do this to me,” she cries with her head on her chest. Mme Mosheo is stiff and cold as ice.

"There were two bodies found at the house, the other is a male. We've issued out an ad on local newspapers." The man says.

Her father crosses her mind. Mme was capable of murder. Could it be that she killed her father?

"Can I see him?" She asks.

"If you're strong enough to look at a decomposing corpse, come with me." He leads the way.

If the corpse is decomposing, it means he didn't die the same day as Mme Mosheo.

As the man unzips the body bag, Ntebo's eyes widen.

"Bab' Jele?" It's confirmed, she knows who this is. She gags and throws up right on the corpse.

.

.

.

MTHOMBO-

He took a short walk to clear his head, it's not like Shiyiwe to speak to him the way she did. She's a warrior at times but to be disrespectful and unkind is not a thing she would do.

He's trying to wrap his busy head around her behaviour and comes out empty handed.

Sikolethu is sleeping in the room he shares with Thina, she's standing outside the door watching Mthombo approach from the staircase and a smile crosses her face.

"You deserve better you know," that's her view.

Mthombo frowns upon her words, he is not going to discuss his wife with this woman.

"The only reason you're here is because of Sikolethu, know your place." He says, entering the bedroom to check on Sikolethu.

The boy had spent three weeks in the rehabilitation facility, when Mthombo thought it was time for him to come home, he didn't hesitate to take a drastic decision. It was a wrong move, but he hoped his wife would understand, he thought she'd have the same

adoration he has for him.

He spent six years loving Sikolethu and praying for a reunion one day, he's here now and letting him go is hard. He hasn't confronted his father about the cheating, part of him wants to, another part is exhausted.

Zwangendaba denied the child, and wanted to give him away. Mthombo couldn't have that, this is his baby.

"When are you going to start spending time with him?" Thina asks, standing behind him.

Mthombo ignores her question and tucks the boy in. He turns to leave, she blocks his path.

"My cousin would never have spoken to you the way that girl did." She's testing him, he hates tests.

"Your cousin cheated on me with my father," he returns scowling at her.

"I know, and you deserve a good woman Mthombo. Someone who will worship the ground you walk on

and love you right. Shiyiwe is a little girl, she can't handle a big guy like you." She runs her hands down his chest, Mthombo's jaw ticks, he grabs it before it reaches his lower abdomen. She squirms and winces in pain as she looks up at him with wide eyes.

"My wife... is off limits, don't even dare look in her direction." He pushes her hand away.

"Pack your things, you're leaving first thing in the morning." He calmly finishes, yet in his voice lies a threat.

Thina is losing focus, there is no need to keep her around.

"But... what about Sikolethu? He needs me." Her voice breaks, she didn't expect him to react like this.

Mthombo walks on without looking back.

Shiyiwe is not in the bedroom, she must be taking a bath. He goes to find her, she's in the shower, basking under lukewarm water.

"Hey." He says as he sits on the edge of the bathtub.

“Hey.” Her greeting is soft.

Mthombo stares without a word, he loves this woman more than he could ever articulate. Not once does he ever want her to drift away from his sight.

“What’s wrong?” Shiyiwe asks, the stare is too long.

“I miss you.” He feels that she is changing, he wants that girl who dribbles in her words and speaks nonsense none stop. He wants her all to himself. On top of that, he takes this husband thing seriously and to simply dismiss it is not okay.

The mention of divorce drove him insane. When she walked out on him after her outburst he wanted to go after her, bring her back, and tie her up until she goes back to her senses. He loved a woman once, a woman who didn’t love him as much.

It’s not going to happen with Shiyiwe, if he has to be harsh or take the devil’s form to keep her, then he will.

“Are you going to sit there the whole time?” Shiyiwe snaps him back to reality, usually he would speak but tonight he’s too quiet.

“I’m enjoying the view.” He winks at her with a smile.
“The glow on you is amazing, you’re beautiful Nonyanda.” He continues.

Shiyiwe laughs, he is glad she’s not holding a grudge after the orgasm stunt he pulled.

“Tell that to Mfundu, he thought I had a big head and a kiss-kiss.”

Great, there’s a threat.

“Who’s Mfundu?” Mthombo asks, ready to slay all the Mfundis in the world.

“My crush,” this girl is treading on dangerous ground. He stands, his mood has been ruined.

Shiyiwe is caught in confusion, before she realises that she needs to be clear.

“I was in grade 08, and he was in Matric. We were going to get married, buy a house in Sandton and have seven kids. But he hated me, he’d tell me voetsek each time he caught me staring at him.” She takes a sponge to scrub her back, he offers to do it for her.

“He was rude,” Mthombo says, his mind is on the apology he wants to give her for his stupid behaviour.

“He was rich and the most handsome boy in school. I was that short chubby girl with pimples and an oversized school jersey.” She’s still laughing.

“You were chubby?” He asks.

There is so much they need to learn about each other, it’s about time he starts dating his wife.

“I was a chubby baby, I started losing weight in grade 9. MaMbuyazi changed my diet, she thought my weight was embarrassing. I kid you not, that woman low-key hated me.”

He’s heard her speak of her mother before and without attaching any emotions to it, deep down he knows the little girl in her is screaming for help.

“Was she that bad as a mother?” He questions, but it’s starting to feel like an interrogation.

“She was okay, I didn’t expect much because I never received much from the beginning.” She increases the water temperature, he waits for her with hands

plunged into his pockets.

“Do you want to talk to someone about your childhood experiences?” He has his own that haunt his dreams.

Shiyiwe steals a glimpse at him, meets a frown on his face. She freezes while staring at him.

“Therapy, it helps.” Mthombo clarifies.

He wouldn’t know, there is no harm in trying though.

“I’m fine,” she says and goes back to showering.

She is not fine if she keeps taking these trips down memory lane.

“I love you, you know that, right?” He confesses, cracking a smile.

“Will you join me?” Shiyiwe asks, with a frown smile on her face. She shrugs her shoulders when he doesn’t respond.

“Can we compromise?” He’s talking about therapy, it’s the only way she will get over it.

Shiyiwe spreads facewash over her face,

“Compromise on what?”

There is silence for a while.

“Mthombo are you still there?” With her eyes closed, her voice rises above the running water. Mthombi is changing out of his clothes, he jumps in the shower behind her.

His breath is on her neck, his hands mapping her breasts. Her nipples harden, goosebumps cover her skin. He runs his hands up and down her hips, dropping kisses in all the right areas. His manhood awakens and hardens as it taps Shiyiwe’s buttocks.

“We’re not having sex, I haven’t forgiven you.”

Mthombo understands, what he did was wide of the mark.

“If you agree to go to therapy, I’ll come with you.” He whispers softly in her ear right before placing a soft kiss on the side of her neck.

“That’s not a compromise.”

“Considering that I have demons to face and hate therapy, it’s a huge compromise.” He’s not really

planning on talking about himself when he gets there.

Shiyiwe turns around to face him and finds love bursting in his eyes, the kind she would feel without him saying those three words.

“Why do you love me so much?”

Mthombo is not familiar with this question.

“You’re the only purest thing I have, you complete me Shiyiwe.” That’s why he was enraged when he found out about the murders.

His answer doesn’t stop her from feeling unworthy of such love, however this look in his eyes makes her feel wanted, her worth is staring right back at her.

When he met Shiyiwe, Mthombo was at his lowest. Ten seconds from giving up on life and without knowing it a glimpse of Shiyiwe Jele changed all of that. From that day he dreamt of making her his wife. She brings him peace. How can he give up something so precious?

Mthombo cups her cheeks and steals a kiss, "You're all I have Shiyiwe, I refuse to live without you. If fate forces us apart, I'd wage war with it and get you back."

Any woman would be smiling hearing these words, Shiyiwe looks troubled.

"What about Sikolethu? You have him too."

This is not the place to be having this conversation, he's planning on explaining everything to her.

"I can't abandon him, please don't ask me to."

"Can't you love him from a distance? His father is capable of looking after him."

"My father wants nothing to do with him, he was going to give him up for adoption."

He feels uncomfortable talking about his father while naked with his wife. Shiyiwe escapes his arms, she presses a hand on the tiled wall.

"Close the water, please." She heaves.

Mthombo closes the tap, "Are you okay?"

“My head is spinning.”

He grabs a towel, wraps it around her and helps her back to the bedroom.

“Should I call a doctor?”

Mthombo is in a rush as he throws in a pair of pants and a t-shirt.

“I’m fine baby, it must have been the hot water. I was in there for too long and you made it worse with your charms.” And there is her mind running to her mouth again, too late to catch it. He smiles in amusement, dropping his face on the palm of his hand.

“Please get me a glass of cold water with ice.” She knows by the frown on his face that he’s about to argue. Mthombo holds a stare too long for Shiyiwe’s liking.

She imitates his frown and mouths, “What?”

“I’ll get you tap water,” he says. “The baby drinks what you drink.”

Shiyiwe’s eyes bulge, she chokes on her saliva.

“What baby? I only want to quench a thirst.” She

removes the towel and lies on her back naked as the day she came into the world. Mthombo takes a pillow and places it behind her head to support her neck. He sits on the bed, his curious eyes are on her lower belly. He places a hand there, Shiysiwe shivers at the touch. She shoves his hand away and glares at him.

“What are you doing?” She knows what he’s doing.
“I’m not pregnant, I can’t be pregnant.”

.

.

Sponsored by Mamsukwini Ntame...

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Seventy-eight

SHIYIWE-

.

.

I have been tossing and turning, thinking of ways to leave this room and sleep in the spare bedroom. I’m irritated by him, but mostly myself.

How could I be so careless? I can't fully fault him for this, when it comes to sex my mind stops working. It's embarrassing really how I never mentioned using protection.

There is so much on my chest I need to get out, I'd talk to him but he's different.

He was my best friend and confidant, now I can't finish a sentence without him making me feel like everything I say is wrong.

Why don't I have friends? Oh yes, they are full of shit! But I need someone to vent to about this man sleeping next to me.

Ngaze ngaythela Jehovah!

Whatever possessed me to agree to marry Mthombo when we barely knew each other, may it burn in hell...

I need to call Mathonga. Only he can tell me what is wrong with him.

He's crazy if he thinks I am going to agree to raise his little brother. It's not just about the love or whatever he feels for Sikolethu, I know for a fact,

without a doubt and sober without a twinge of alcohol in my system that he is still very much in love with that Jezabel. Respect the dead be damned—my life is a mess because of her and the father in-law she fancied.

His ringing phone disturbs my thinking, I press my eyes shut when I feel him shuffling.

“Yes... where?... I’m on my way...” On my way? Did he see the time?

I could open my eyes and interrogate him about where he is going, it’s bloody stupid O’clock. But let him go, I need time to think, away from him.. We’ll tackle this matter tomorrow morning.

“Shiyiwe!” I feel his heavy presence, his scent is resilient. He’s standing above me. I don’t comply, he must go and leave me to breathe.

His lips touch my forehead before I hear his footsteps fade away. I flick my eyes open and there he is, walking without his cane.

Two weeks later and his back is durable, I’m happy for him. It’s what he’s always wanted, then again, I

hate those long legs. They are changing him, unless he's always been this person. He closes the door without looking back, I suck in a long breath and quickly sit up from the bed.

Now, where is that phone? I wish MaMbuyazi was here, she wasn't the best but she had ears and a mouth. I'd talk and tell her what's on my mind and she'd nod and add a 'mmmh' It's better than nothing.

12:03am... Someone's grandmother is doing a Sithi-Sithi on someone's roof. That's how late it is.

I scroll down my phone looking for who to call, Ntebo's number catches my eye first. My heart immobilizes, I wish I never found out about her and Emeka. Why didn't God take me out of that situation before showing me what they were doing behind my back? Mthombo's words come to me like a hurricane. "There's a baby in your womb."

There can't be a baby in my womb, but I'm not there yet.

Ntebo lost her baby because of me and not once did

I feel regretful, I was driven by anger and the need to avenge myself. I'm a murderer, my uncles and cousins are not the first people I killed. It was Ntebo's baby, and now that I could be nurturing Mthombo's seed inside me. I can't not be apologetic. I owe her an apology and have to atone for my sins.

.

.

BHEDLINDABA-

Baragwanath Hospital looks like a ghost town at this time of the night, the corridors are as quiet and dark as a tomb. He's been watching her making runs around the hospital, since his arrival.

Now she's sitting on the cold silver chairs beside her husband... shivering as if she is married to Casper the ghost.

He plans on making a move once the husband is out of sight, harming Mphako would be a mistake he'd

live to regret. He is the father of the woman he loves, Penny is an exception. He doesn't plan on killing her, she'd be lucky to survive his brutality though.

Not many have.

He's masked his identity with a black cap and black hoodie on top, a change of clothes that reside in the trunk of his car. Time is going at a snail's pace, he killed most of it solving Soduku puzzles from a newspaper he took at the reception desk. However, he'd rather be plunging a knife into Penny's flesh. That sounds more fun than what he's doing. Boredom must be a sin.

He stands at attention at the corner he's chosen to hide in, when he sees a doctor approaching the miserable couple, they stand with fear on their faces.

"You're still here? I told you to go home, your daughter's condition will not change overnight."

"Doctor, can I please stay with her?" A desperate cry comes from Mphako, pressing his hands together. Could be nerves or worry.

"It is against hospital rules, sir. Come back tomorrow

during visiting hours." The doctor disappoints.

This doctor must leave, distracting Mphako won't be hard.

To his luck, Mphako and the doctor take off heading to the same direction, leaving Penny crying her eyes out.

It's loud and attention seeking. He huffs arrogantly and prepares to charge at her. The corridor is empty, nurses on shift are keeping warm somewhere. No one will be gallivanting these ghostly hallways soon.

It's now or never, he wraps the knife with the folded newspaper, totally not his style but he's going for the slaughter.

Penny does not see him coming, he curls his hand around her neck and commands that she gets up and start moving.

"I said move." He repeats, pushing her old frail legs with a knee.

"Please, I don't have anything." Cries of a woman get

to him in ways that touch his heart.

Now is not the time to think of the past, nothing will ever change what happened.

There's a back door leading to the dark, empty alley. He pushes her against the wall, she gasps and screams. Ndaba covers her mouth and plunges the knife into the flesh of her chest, it's swift and sudden.

The way to a man's heart is through his stomach, and the way to a woman's heart is right through her chest—down and slightly to the left. Penny squirms, kicks and screams behind the hand clogging her voice as the knife rips her chest. Ndaba pulls out the knife with violence, he's going for round two when she escapes his hold, and frantically turns to run. But Penny stumbles forward and falls to the ground in soundless screams.

She's lying face down, trying to flip herself over, however her body is irresponsive.

This is a great view for Ndaba, cowardice but beggars can't be choosers. He leans over, stabs her

on the back multiple times.

"Things never change. Still chasing after oldies?" A voice says from behind him. He stops with a sigh, he hates being distracted when he's working.

As he turns and sees a face he doesn't see regularly, his upper lip curls in disgust.

Ndaba snorts, letting his eyes get used to the giant standing with hands plunged into the pockets of his track pants. He snorts again when he sees the EFF beret, things never change indeed.

"At least I have a heart, I can't say the same about you. How's the creepy sociopath living in your head treating you? I'm surprised you're not in a straightjacket, locked up in a mental hospital." He thinks he's hit a nerve, hence the smirk pulling at his lips.

He is proved wrong when the man throws his head back laughing, hand on his stomach and mouth wide open. His laugh stabs sharper than a knife.

"And you should be behind bars, in a thong, playing someone's bitch sis'Ndabenhle." The man rumbles before he falls into a fit of giggles.

"U-sis'Ndabenhle unyoko owadla abafowenu."
(Sis'Ndabenhle is your mother who killed your brothers."

He didn't make a joke but the giant is laughing, head thrown back, mouth wide open and hand on his stomach.

Ndaba clicks his tongue, a habit when he's deeply irked.

"Uthini ngoyihlo owadla umalokazana wakhe?
Umsangano lowo." (What about your father who slept with his daughter in-law? That's madness.)

The man claps back.

This is a secret only the Meyiwas knew. How did this creep find out about it?

Penny is groaning on the ground, fighting with all her might to get back up and run for help.

Blood is pouring out from every open wound. She presses a hand to her shoulder, that's where the blood seems to be leaking the most.

At this point it's survival of the fittest, Penny switches gears from fight to flight. Or her ancestors have come through for her, she staggers to her feet and drags herself away from the devil in black, leaving a trail of blood on the crime scene.

Ndaba clicks his tongue, he's not done with her.

The goal is not to kill her but inflict so much pain that the only thing she will ever focus on in life are the scars on her body.

"Let her go, she's not your type." The man stops him from charging at the injured woman and giggles titters that crawl under Ndaba's skin.

"Stop that giggling, you're annoying me." He fires, using the newspaper to wipe the flesh on the knife.

"Short and irritable? Some things never change." Says the man with raised eyebrows as he tilts his head to the side.

“Or in your case, some things never grow.” He adds and giggles.

“Like your mother’s brain, mgodoyi.” Ndaba fires shots, and spits a mouth full of saliva when the smell of blood invades his mouth.

He rolls his eyes at how the giant man looks at the crimson blood as if it were a snack, his Adam’s apple bops and goes back to stillness.

“Keep your zip up wenja, being aroused by the sight of blood is a sign that you need help.” Ndaba shoots him a disgusted glare.

It’s not that he expected him to change, men like him never change. They give an impression that they have, but behind the smiles and 9-to-5 jobs, evil lurks.

The man sighs, and giggles. Will it ever stop?

“Why didn’t I get an invite to the party?” The man again, he steps closer to get a proper smell of the blood.

He sniffs and sniffs with his eyes closed, a content look on his face.

It's creepy from Ndaba's view, he takes two steps away and strangely his eyes fall on the man's tightening pants. The psycho is aroused by the smell of blood.

"Keep your distance, you don't want to reach your father's house in a body bag." That's a threat Ndaba's acquaintance takes lightly.

He doesn't giggle this time, but lifts his hands in surrender, and steps away from Ndaba with a sly grin on his lips.

"Another thing," Ndaba says, pointing the knife at him. "Call me short again, Ntabezikude Khanyile and I will cut your balls out and record it for the world to see. How does the Giant without testicles sound to you? Giggling giant yamasimba."

Ndaba finishes with a tongue click.

Ntabezikude grabs the knife from him, laughing like he always does.

"Little boys shouldn't play with knives, I handle them better SpongeBob." He pats his head, only because he is a shoulder taller than Ndaba who is well aware

that the name SpongeBob is meant to ridicule him for his height.

He's not short, in fact, he's taller than the average man. It's just that these Khanyiles tower over everyone.

"Uyanya!" Ndaba sizzles, taking his knife back.

This exchange of insults stems from the past. The first day he met Ntabezikude in the dark alleys of Hilbrow where demons and drug dealers lurk.

It was a scene as similar as this one, Ndaba was picking up one of his soccer players from a night club who was high on drugs and causing unnecessary havoc when he heard agonizing screams of a grown man.

He found the sound alluring and that pushed him to go check it out, he found Ntabezikude slashing a knife on the man's throat without blinking or flinching.

The scene was for the books. He'd heard about the

giggling Giant on the news. Meeting him in person made his stomach churn, but he wasn't uncanny as people said.

Ntabezikude straightened his back. It was clear from his body language that he knew someone was standing behind him.

He turned to face Ndaba, his hand close to his nose that sniffed the pungent smell of blood like it was scented with Indian spices.

A creepy smile drew from the corner of Ntabezikude's mouth as he side eyed Ndaba. He was face to face with the devil, his legs grew weak that had he moved to run it would've been an epic fail. So he stood in awe watching Ntabezikude clean the blood stained knife, and walk up to him with a boner.

He stopped in front of Ndaba and carried his hands on his back.

"You killed him?" Ndaba's voice came out shuddering. He'd killed before and he had reasons, all times it was hard.

Ntabezikude nodded, showing all his adult teeth. There was no emotion on his face to show he was human, he was as dark as the night.

"I missed my plane, I need a place to crash for the night." He said, like he didn't just kill someone.

Ndaba gulped, his eyes running from the dead man to the giant standing before him.

"Don't worry, I'm harmless. Just give me a place to sleep and I will be out of your hair by morning."

Harmless he said, giggling at whatever he found funny.

Ndaba could've taken him to a hotel, heaven knows why he drove to his house. Showed him a guest bedroom and borrowed him his clothes to sleep in. An acquaintance began that day, Ndaba wanted to be his sidekick, learn tricks from him but Ntabezikude was not about that life.

His focus was on the only woman who gave him sleepless nights, he was on a mission to win her heart.

Three years later, they are here in Ndaba's car. He's driving to his house where Athule is waiting for him. Ntabezikude has explained why he wants a place to lay his head again. He's not alone this time, there is a pregnant woman sleeping in the backseat. His wife. He steals another look on the rear view mirror.

"She's not dead, relax." Ntabezikude says from the passenger seat.

"You never know with you, you kill people as a hobby." Ndaba answers, checking the side mirror for any incoming cars before changing lanes.

"Khethiwe is my wife," Ntabezikude says.

As if that should count for something.

"Why Bara? Are you going broke?" He changes the subject.

"We were on our way to KZN when she started having contractions, Bara was the closest hospital." Ntabezikude says.

"Why am I taking you to my house again? There are hotels in the south that would gladly accommodate

a Khanyile."

"I hate hotels," that's Ntabezikude's answer. Ndaba frowns upon it but continues driving. There is a question in his mind.

"How did you know where to find me?" The questions have turned into an interrogation. Ntabezikude laughs, he seems patient enough.

"I wanted to see you having sex with an old woman, I know you like them old."

Ndaba is disgusted by the giant's response, the only old woman he ever liked was Mrs. Mathe.

"I regret ever telling you about that, msunu wenja." Ndaba spits.

"I'm not judging you ndoda, it's your preference. You like them wrinkly and I like them chubby like my wife." Ntabezikude takes a peep at the back.

Ndaba sighs, he's exhausted.

"Did you just call me fat Ngwane?" The wife is awake. The two men exchange glances, Ndaba smirks in victory. He knows he's going to enjoy the lecture this

one will be getting from his wife, his thoughts are stopped by his phone ringing.

“The paralympic is calling,” Ntabezikude points at the phone with his head. His observation has Ndaba snorting.

“That’s a terrible thing to say Ngwane.” His wife Khethiwe slaps his shoulder.

“Hau, kodwa KaMadonsela. The man was once in a wheelchair, hau. Didn’t I tell you?”

“Yeah, but that doesn’t justify you insulting him. Don’t mind him Ndaba, he can be insensitive sometimes.” Khethiwe.

“If calling him a paralympic is an insult, then all the paralympics should sue the country.” Ntabezikude says. Ndaba steals a brief look, his eyebrows crumpled together like unwanted paper.

“It’s paraplegic slim,” he says and answers Mthombo’s call.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Seventy-nine

ATHULE-

.

.

I'm close to calling him for the umpteenth time when he walks through the door looking cooler than an icebox, I jump off the bed and run into his arms.

"What took you so long? I was waiting for a call from the police station telling me you've been arrested." I press my face into his neck. His body is tense, he's not holding me like I want him to. He lets go, he can barely look into my eyes.

"We have guests, some old friends. They are in the guest room." He says making his way to the wardrobe. Ndaba did something, I'm afraid to ask what he did to Penny.

"How is Penny?" I keep my eyes on him, waiting for a reaction. Nothing.

What is he? A robot?

"I don't know, call her if you're worried." He says and disappears into the bathroom.

Call her? That could mean one thing. Penny is still alive, I don't know if I'm relieved that he didn't get his hands dirty. Or disappointed that Penny gets to see another light of day.

"Mthombo called." I have to stand behind the bathroom door for him to hear me.

"I spoke to him, he's on his way." He says.

Oh! Mthombo didn't mention he was on his way over. That reminds me, I have to set a meeting with Shiyiwe and my father. Our father. It's about time Mphako meets his other daughter. Maybe for her, he will leave Penny. I'm appalled that her blood runs in my veins. MaMbuyazi was given the worst sisters.

I'm flabbergasted when Ndaba walks out of the bathroom naked, I catch a glimpse of his manhood. What was he doing in there? His erection is hard, it bounces as he walks. I should be looking away any minute now. Damnit Athule, look away.

Great! He catches me staring, and smirks.

“Aren’t you sleepy ntwana?”

How can I sleep after seeing his second in command? It’s big and thick and very much alive.

He’s laughing, I blink and look away but damn my eyes won’t let me. They won’t stop going back.

“I haven’t had sex in a year,” I’m probably lying. I don’t remember the last time I had a man in between my legs.

The smile on his face!

He’s coming over, my head is in the gutter. I’m thinking he will attack me with a kiss, but he hands me a bottle of Vaseline for men.

What am I supposed to do with this? I’m more interested in what’s between his legs.

“I catch reach my back,” he says, turning around. I apply the lotion on his back, my hands won’t stop shacking.

“My ass too.”

Now he’s tempting me. I can almost see the smug look on his face.

I don’t question him but let my hands glide on his firm buttocks. This man takes care of himself pretty well. It must be the results of being on the soccer field.

Ndaba touches my hand, and draws it forward. My fingers touch his pubic hair, it feels coarse against my skin. I’m a bit relieved that he is not the type that shaves.

Why is he laughing?

“Stop pulling your hand away, it doesn’t have teeth.” He says, side eyeing me mischievously.

Oh I’m afraid to touch it.

He lets my hand go and I continue rubbing his buttocks, I run a finger down his butt crack and grab his ass cheeks and separate them.

Ndaba jumps back in a fright.

“Athule?” He shrieks turning to face me with wide

eyes. His manhood looks like it has been drained of energy. Wasn't he horny a blink ago?

"I'm sorry." I suppress my laugh, the expression on his face is funny. He'll never heal from this.

"Don't ever do that, huh ah ntwana."

I burst out laughing, I didn't know that's a sensitive spot.

"As long as you keep calling me ntwana, I won't make any promises." I crack a smile, I'll do it when he's fast asleep.

Confusion finds him and stays on his face.

"What's wrong with ntwana?"

He's a man, he'll never understand. He used to call me Thandolwami but that went away with the wind, I'm glad. It's someone's name, not an endearment of love.

"It makes me feel more like your friend than your lover."

He sits, undressed. I'm not that comfortable in my own skin.

“What do you suppose I call you then?”

I thought he'd never ask.

“Growing up I had an imaginary boyfriend. His name was Jack, he was white and quite a looker.”

He drops his head, I know he wants to laugh.

“Should I be jealous?” His eyebrows skyrocket.

“Yes because Jack called me sweetpea. He took me out on date nights, he'd ask me to dance and treat me like a princess. I was his everything. The last time Jack visited my thoughts, he asked me to marry him.”

“Did you agree?” He cracks into laughter.

“No, I was still thinking about it.” I reply.

“Next time he visits, tell him you're taken by a Zulu man who would kill to have you.”

I didn't expect him to say that, my heart melts.

Sometimes he makes me feel like I matter to him and sometimes it's as if I'm not here.

“Would you really do that?” I ask because I have to

make sure. You never know with his kind.

“Would I what?”

God! Talking should come with a salary, we use up too much energy.

“Kill to have me?”

He smiles and my cheeks catch fire as he undresses me with his eyes.

He grabs a pillow and covers up. Shu!

“I’d do anything to have you with me, I might not have my priorities straight or feelings completely figured out. But I know you’re the one I want.” Ndaba.

Speaking of priorities.

“What about Shiysiwe?” This is my chance to find out what the big deal is.

“We went through a lot together, and that in a short amount of time.”

It’s that “We” I have a problem with.

“My brother wasn’t around to look after her, she was in a lion’s den. My mother on one side and my father

on the other, they saw how vulnerable she was and took advantage of that. It's not my place to tell you what exactly happened to her, maybe one day she will open up and tell you." He says.

Shiyiwe and vulnerability can't mix, it's impossible.

Ndaba exhales and continues, "I was the only one who could keep her safe, maybe I took it too serious... I don't know. I won't lie to you, I am fond of her, and I'd do anything to protect her, same way as I would protect you."

I'm stupid for not wanting to be equal with her in his eyes. Can she at least be a little lower than me?

"Does that mean you will always drop everything to be by her corner?"

His face tells me he doesn't appreciate my question.

"She's important to me, I am not in love with her if that's what you're thinking." His answer comes from the side of offense.

"That's a relief," that came out wrong. "I'm sorry, Ndaba. It's just that sometimes you fuel my

insecurities when you run around like a headless chicken to get to her.”

“It was never my intention, maybe I’m loving you wrong. I’m not perfect Athule.”

“No one is, I too have my flaws. I’m an over-thinker. When you love me, I need you to love me with everything in you.”

“Are you a Pisces?” The smile on his face.

“To the bone.” I say and get to hear his laughter.

“I’m in trouble. Does that mean we get to celebrate Valentine’s day? I hate red, white reminds me of death.”

Of course, he’s a pantsula freak. It’s bright yellow or nothing.

“I expect my valentine’s day cup and red roses please.” Not really.

He heaves a sigh, “I can manage.”

“What’s your star sign?” Lord knows why I’m dwelling on this, I don’t highly believe in horoscopes.

“Virgo.”

Yeah neh! I’m not loved in this world.

“Okay, Mr Virgo. How many groupies besides Wandisa will I need to fight?” I ask.

He loves laughing. Does this man know how beautiful he looks when he’s laughing, compared to when he’s barking and threatening to beat people up?

“That’s my job, yours is to love me and help me be a better version of myself so I can be the perfect man for you.”

Mmhh! Is he asking me to fix him? Does he have hidden issues I don’t know about?

He takes my hand and kisses it, his eyes rush to my head.

“I love your none haired head.” Okay that didn’t make sense. But I got him. “It suits you baldie.”

Oh no he didn’t.

“I need money to buy a weave.” I tell him.

If he's going to call me baldie, then I'm covering it.

"How much?"

"I hear it ranges from R3000." I'm not sure about my answer. I sit on his lap and wrap my arms around him, he holds my waist and a serious expression takes over his face.

"Don't you want to wear that number you were wearing the other day?" That's random of him.

I don't wear numbers, really his language confuses me sometimes. But I know what he's talking about.

"Ndaba I..."

"Please," his eyes are burning holes on my body. My clit reacts to the lust pouring out of them. His manhood is hard again. This one will have to send cows to my father's house to replace me because there is no way I am going back.

The items are in the closet, I didn't take them with when I left his house. It's a black lacy bra that matches with the thong.

I rush to the bathroom to change, I thought buying the G-string was embarrassing. Wearing it is a hundred times worse. I feel naked as I walk out of the bathroom. Ndaba stands, eyes wide and mouth open.

“I’m happy that you’re here.” He says randomly.

His eyes seem to swirl with heat, glancing directly into mine.

His faint smile will be the death of me, I’m melting at how he’s glancing at me. His hands are sly, they are on my thighs, and slowly moving upward.

“I love this little number,” he grips the string of the thong, slowly moving in on my parted lips.

Not only are his hands sly, he’s sly as well.

“You’re wearing this for me?” That question.

The man grins like a child, I didn’t know it takes so little to make this gender happy.

“Yes.”

Part truth.

“You look better in this than any...”

“Any what?” I cut in. I don’t want to hear about his moments with other women.

He clears his throat before enslaving my lips, his tongue is in my mouth dancing with mine. Ndaba is quick with these passionate kisses, he doesn’t wait for the build-up.

I’m a tad surprised when he doesn’t protest when I tear from the kiss.

“Your guests?” I ask, breathing heavily against his lips and grabbing his front. He hisses when I caress the mushroom head and gives me a brief steamy kiss.

He walks up behind me, resting his hands on my shoulders and dips his nose on the bow of my neck.

A light shiver ripples through me at his touch, I move my head to the side to encourage him to go further. His lips press to my neck, and I moan softly as I melt into his firm chest. I can feel his cock rubbing against my buttocks.

“I love everything about you Athule.” He notes, clipping at the spot on my neck that carries more hormones than I could count. A small whine pulls at my lips as I push myself back against him and earn a lust-filled growl that has my clit vibrating.

It doesn’t take much to get me wet, I have been celibate for too long. Before I can grasp the fact that his hands are now on my waist, he spins me around until the back of my knees hits the base of the bed.

Ndaba stands back enough to get a view of the pieces I’m wearing, I can barely contain the throbbing in my nether regions.

I hold my breath when his large hand grips my hip, his dark eyes bursting with lust.

“I’m not perfect Athule, but I want to love you right. You’ll teach me?” He says, his voice low and husky.

“We can teach other,” I whisper. I too am knew to this love thing.

The look on his face says he can’t hold on any longer, but he’s staring at my body. His chest rising and falling with each breath he takes in his effort to

maintain self-control.

“Can I take a picture?” He’s serious.

I nod because why not?

He’s curious and enthusiastic as he stands with a phone in his hand and clicks randomly. One is too much, I didn’t dress up for pictures.

“One more without the bra?” Is this flirting or foreplay?

I don’t like taking nudes. I’m reluctant as he strips the bra off me, exposing my breasts.

“Keep those safe, Ndaba.” I want say more, but I’ll offend him if I continue.

A smile stretches his lips as he nods at my instructions and throws the phone on the bed. I gasp when he wraps his hands under my thighs and lifts me up, dropping me on the mattress a second later.

Ndaba kneels on the bed, he presses his hands against the inside of my thighs to part my legs until I’m spread out for him.

"Beautiful." He praises.

He looks at me like I'm a meal he can't wait to dig into, his eyes touring my body.

He brings out a sigh and cups my cheeks with both his hands, his lips smash into mine, immediately my knees weaken. I wouldn't be surprised if my lips start bleeding with how our mouths are crushing together.

His tongue meets mine, skilfully swirling around my mouth and making me moan.

I have never had a man kiss me with such desperation and roughness. His kiss consumes me, and sends bolts of electricity through my veins and goosebumps on the surface of my skin.

I can't breathe, I need to stop and catch my breath.

My lips stop moving, he bites my bottom lip, forcing me to return the kiss.

An unsolicited moan rings in my throat as the sharp pain travels through my veins and jolts down to my clit and twitching opening. His body presses against mine, trapping me on the mattress. His hands are

everywhere on my body, learning to touch with a gentleness I can't describe.

He presses soft kisses to my inner thighs, moves the thong to the side, and traces a finger over the outline of my clit and hums in approval when he touches a wet spot.

"Ndaba..." Who said foreplay is fun? I'm desperate for him to fill me.

The goal is not to show my desperation, but when the clitoris takes over, Lord have mercy.

"Condom," I remind him, my breath spurting out.

Ndaba sighs, runs to the bathroom and comes with one condom. He puts it on like it's an emergency.

Something vibrates beside me, it's his phone.

There's a message from Mthombo, I can only see three words flashing on the notification box.

Open the gate.

"You brother is at the gate." I sound disappointed.

"Shit, then we need to hurry." He says, jumping on the bed. This is not how I pictured my first time with him.

"Turn around baby." He says.

Wait, he called me baby. We're off to a good start.

My back is turned to him, he pulls the thong down. His thick cock slides between my ass, making me whimper.

"Not there, Ndaba." I move away from him.

The only thing that has gone in there is the handle of a spoon. I was obsessed with cinnamon and sprinkled it in everything I ate. One day I woke up and couldn't do number two in the toilet. I spent four days trying to push it out, laxatives worsened my situation. When I couldn't take it anymore, my grandmother told me to use a spoon to dig the poop out.

I spent two hours in the toilet, my butthole refusing to let the spoon in. When I left that toilet, my body

was trembling, and I was in need of a therapist.

Ndaba pulls me back against his chest, he lifts my leg and guides himself into the right hole. The feeling of being filled is nearly enough to make me cum.

“You feel so good.” He says, kissing the back of my neck.

Ndaba tightly grabs my hips as he thrusts in and out at a rough speed.

His phone is making a racket beside us.

“Shit!” He cusses.

His brother is too impatient.

He increases the pace, his strokes turn my world upside down. He pulls my hips back, keeping my leg hooked on his arm. I scream as he slams directly on my G-spot, the leg he’s holding wobbles.

My hands desperately fly around the sheets, looking

to hold on to something. I end up grabbing the edge of the bed. He is pounding me like he will die if he doesn't.

The sound of skin slapping against skin meets my screams, I don't have time to warn him before I hit my release, and scream louder as I cum.

There's a hoot outside, and his phone is ringing.

"Baby, you feel so fucking good." He says.

I scream from pleasure, arching my back when he thrusts himself into my G-spot again. I grab the pillow with my teeth, making sounds I don't recognize as he fucks me senseless.

He seems to be reaching his line, he's moaning and breathing heavily before he slams into me and releases a growl.

His head falls on my sweaty shoulder, we're panting heavily, trying to catch our breaths.

"Your bother..." I remind him because he's not pulling out.

The neighbours will end up calling the police on him.

“What brother?” He asks, and presses his sweaty body against mine.

Mthombo can wait a little longer.

.

.

I didn't get enough time to edit, my apologies for repetitions you might have found.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Eighty

THE MEYIWAS-

.

.

The call with Bhedlindaba was brief, he could tell he was hiding something and didn't want to engage in a conversation with him. It's witch O'clock, he should be home cuddling his new bride. But he's sitting in his brother's lounge, sipping on a cup of tea.

Here comes Bhedlindaba, wearing boxer shorts, a pair of Adidas push-ins with yellow socks and

nothing on top.

“You’re friends with Ntabezikude Khanyile?”

Mthombo asks, placing the cup of tea on the coffee table.

The man in question is the one who let him in after waiting at the gate for minutes that felt like a lifetime.

Ndaba frowns, he’s exhibiting exhaustion and irritation.

“He’s an acquaintance,” he doesn’t explain further.

Mthombo decides not to push, he is not here for that.

“What’s this I hear about you wanting to kill a woman? When did you get here Bhedlindaba?”

Mthombo knows of the skeletons in Ndaba’s closet, he knows he’s killed before. But not women.

“Kill is a heavy word, I only wanted to teach her a lesson.” Ndaba says, sitting lazily on the couch. He looks bored to death.

“Did you?” Mthombo asks.

Ndaba's reply is a shrug before he speaks like what he did matters not.

"Just a few scratches, she will live." He yawns and looks at Mthombo unpleasantly. "Shouldn't you be home with your wife?"

Only now Ndaba seems alive and interested to talk.

"You're the reason I'm here, I had to come and convince you not to kill Athule's mother." Mthombo has always been the voice of reason, the fixer. Of all his brothers, the one that looks like him had to become the ugly duckling.

"Would it have mattered? I learned from the best." Ndaba says, eyeing Mthombo with a judgemental stare.

This is one memory trip he doesn't want to take.

"I did what had to be done, I saved you from that woman." It's Mthombo, shooting him a condescending glare.

"I didn't need saving." Ndaba's voice elevates, his jaw ticks as he takes a moment. He's never raised

his voice at his big brother. He didn't do it when he found him stained with Mrs. Mathe's blood and he's not going to start now.

"You were a kid Bhedlindaba, trapped by a manipulative, sick and twisted paedophile. Of course I had to do something."

That something involved a gun and three bullets, two on her stomach and one that took her life which was fired in between her eyes.

Had Bhedlindaba's friend not opened his big mouth and sang like a bird, Mthombo would never have found out about Bhedlindaba and his English teacher. An affair that had been going on for almost two years. Mthombo was livid, he didn't ask any more questions. His mind was made up, Mrs. Mathe's time on earth had expired and Mthombo made it his duty to send her back to where she came from.

"What is this I hear boy?"

Urgh! Cats and dragging in every nonsense they find on the streets.

Seeing his father appearing from the kitchen and his wife trailing behind, Bhedlindaba sighs and slouches down on the couch while Mthombo stands to his feet.

“Dad?” He says, eyes faltering when they meet with his.

“Why are people at my house so late at night?”
Bhedlindaba grumbles in boredom.

No one gives him attention.

“What is this nonsense I hear? You got married?”
Zwangendaba asks, just as Mthombo is wondering what he is doing here in the middle of the night.

Mthombo looks at Ndaba and finds him staring back, they avert their inquisitive gaze back to their father.

“Who told you?” Mthombo asks.

He’s not denying it.

He was going to tell his parents as soon they settled in, Zwangendaba was not supposed to find out before that.

“Are you insane boy? Do you know what you have

done?"

Mthombo breathes and exhales deeply, "Did you not name me at birth dad? For how long will you address me as boy?"

As soon as he says this, Zwangendaba slaps him across the face. The slap is not enough to get him staggering back. He's breathing heavily, body shaking from blazing rage.

"You got married in secret? And to that Jele girl. I have always known you were stupid, I didn't know it was this bad." – Zwangendaba.

It's not the first time he's dragging his son down, it's actually how he gains his confidence. Mthombo refuses to show he's affected.

"I will never allow this marriage, that girl will never be a Meyiwa." Zwangendaba roars.

"What do you have against Shiysiwe?" Mthombo should have asked this a long time ago.

"I don't like her for any of my sons, I want her away from my family." He bites Mthombo's head off.

"Well tough luck, she is my wife, and she's not going anywhere." He is fired up and it's taking a lot to stay calm.

Zwangendaba breaks a chuckle, in his eyes is a look of hatred. Mthombo is not guaranteed if it's for the hatred he feels for Shiysiwe or a newly found hatred for him because he married a Jele.

"Fuck that, I demand that you annul this marriage."

"I'm not going to do that." Nothing will ever convince him to leave his wife.

"Boy you know I can make your life difficult with just a snap of a finger."

"Your threats don't faze me, Zwangendaba Meyiwa." Never in his life has he addressed his father by name. Zwangendaba grabs him by his clothes and pins him on the wall. Bhedlindaba stands, eyes narrowed and fists clenched.

"Listen to me boy, you are what you are because of me. I made you and I can break you just as fast."

Zwangendaba grunts, throwing a few light slaps on Mthombo's cheeks. He moves back while glaring at

his father.

“Do your worst.” Now that’s a challenge he knows his father would gladly accept. The older man’s nostrils flare, his eyes shoots daggers.

Mthombo shoves Zwangendaba off him, he reels back, eyes popping out of their sockets.

“Why do you hate Shiyiwe? What did she ever do to you?” Mthombo.

“She killed your grandmother.” Zwangendaba blurts out in anger.

This seems to be news to the brothers, their eyes widen as they stare at him in disbelief.

“Why are you lying?” Ndaba asks. “Gogo died in her sleep, that’s what you people told us.” His parents are ‘you people.’

“Your father is not lying, you were kids. We couldn’t tell you what happened.” MaDlamini says.

Mthombo finds all of this absurd.

“How deep does your hate for Shiyiwe run? I was sixteen when grandma died, that means Shiyiwe was

four or five." He says.

"Why would I make this up? If Phindafuthi were alive, he'd vouch for me. We were business partners, I invited him to the house for a celebration after we landed a huge deal. He brought his daughter with because his wife was ill. My mother offered to look after her while we discussed business. Thirty minutes in, we heard a gunshot. When we ran to check, we found my mother, your grandmother lying in a pool of blood and that Jele girl feet away from her. Next to her was a 22 caliber hand gun. That morning, I had taken it out to clean it and forgot to put it back in the safe. She must have been playing around the house, and found the gun." Zwangendaba explains.

"Then you are responsible for her death, not Shiyiwe. She was just a child." Mthombo.

Shiyiwe can never know about this, she has too many deaths in her name already.

Zwangendaba shakes his head, he's disappointed.

"You keep flaunting your stupidity, boy. When are

you going to wake up and realize that girl is trouble? She will be your down fall. You have never done anything I say, why do you keep trying to prove that you are a man? You think you're better than me? Huh?"

He doesn't think he's better, he knows he is a better man than him.

"Say whatever you want, I'm done. You've always taken my respect for you for granted and mistaken it for weakness. I am not afraid of you Zwangendaba"

"Watch your tongue, boy. Do you know who you're talking to?" The old man yells.

"A bully." Mthombo yells back. "But don't think I will continue to bow because you walked into the room. Those days are long gone, just like my respect for you."

"Mthombo that's your father, you don't talk to the head of the house like that..." MaDlamini steps in.

Bhedlindaba raises his hand, a smile on his face.

"Actually, I'm the head of the house. You people are

in my house and I'd like you to leave." Of course he had to let that known.

Again, he is ignored.

"You're always defending him mom, this man never does wrong in your eyes. He slept with my wife, my wife mother, and you stood back and said nothing about it. What kind of a mother are you? If he were to ask you to sacrifice your children, you'd do it just to please him." Mthombo's words don't find MaDlamini well.

She's heaving sighs in bulk, they better catch her before she faints.

"That's not you talking, my son would never talk to me like that. Of all girls in this country, different tribes and races, why did you choose her? Couldn't you do better son? Look what she's doing to us? She's turning you against your parents like she did with Bhedlindaba. He's turned into her puppet."

Tears! How quick they find her eyes.

Someone bursts out laughing, it's Bhedlindaba. He's decided to lie on the couch, hands on the back of his

head.

“Look at your father Mthombo,” she places her hand on Zwangendaba’s chest. “He’s lost so much weight, you are stressing him. He’s done more than enough for you kids, took you to expensive schools and made sure all his children are set after Varsity. Is this how you thank him?”

Mastermind of mind games.

Bhedlindaba is dead with laughter, he stands to give his mother a hug.

“Masabata Dlamini for the Oscars everyone.” He says, patting her back. She grabs his wrist and shoves it away, he’s not deterred by her stare down.

“This conversation is pointless. You insists on being ignorant. What happened to you mother. Why are you addicted to this man? Does he have something on you? Is that it? Is that why his happiness comes first? Before your children?”

“It’s the dick...” Bhedlindaba doesn’t finish, he has to duck a punch coming from Zwangendaba. It lands on Mthombo’s jaw who moves a few steps back

before he maintains his balance.

Bhedlindaba clenches his fists and charges at his father, MaDlamini panics and stands in between them to shield her husband. But Mthombo grabs her arms and throws her aside like she's made of paper. The Mbokodo in MaDlamini is never sleeping, it awakens before Bhedlindaba touches her husband.

She grabs Ndaba's hand and pulls him back with enough force for his giant body to move. He hasn't registered what she just did yet, and she's sending a slap. Ndaba ducks and it lands on Mthombo's face.

MaDlamini gasps, tears fill her wide eyes.

Time to scream!

Athule is the first to run out of the bedroom, the Khanyiles follow shortly.

"Look at this, she is not here, but we are fighting each other. That witch has cast an evil spell on my family. She should've died that day I buried her alive."

There are gasps in the room.

MaDlamini's eyes pop out like the words she spoke, with fear in her eyes she looks at Mthombo. The silence in this room is thicker than the Meyiwases' bank balance.

"What did you say?" Mthombo.

Even his strangest nightmares would never show him such a heinous act.

MaDlamini is sweating, her breathing quickens. She takes her coat off and throws it on the couch. She tries to catch her breath but ends up heaving and that has her removing her expensive weave and places it on the couch.

"Now that we're opening diaries, your father here ordered his men to gang rape Shiyiwe." Bhedlindaba says, glaring straight at his father.

The silence is back.

In a second it's replaced by heaving sounds, it's Mthombo. His intense eyes are fixed on

Zwangendaba. The man in question should look apologetic, but he is staring back with a smug look on his face. He does away with it and grins arrogantly.

That's enough to push Mthombo off the edge, he pushes his mother aside. She falls on the coffee table, unfortunately it's glass and can't maintain her weight. It breaks in half and bringing her down with the shattered pieces. By the time she blinks and shakes her spinning head back to order, Mthombo is sitting on top of the man she fought so hard to protect, strangling him.

She screams with all her might, "Mthombo, he's your father."

That is not relevant at the moment, Mthombo is out for revenge.

MaDlamini picks herself up, walking away with a few cuts on the palms of her hands and a painful hip bone. She scuttles to help, she's failing to pull Mthombo's arm. He's too strong and huge.

God carved this one with a hidden agenda and today

he's using his strength to kill his father.

"Bhedlindaba don't just stand there, help your father." She barks.

"Wait, I want to see who will win first then I will help him." Bhedlindaba says, folding his arms across his chest. He thinks this is Wrestle mania.

His brother's fight is his as well, but today he chooses to stand back and watch because Mthombo is on the winning side.

MaDlamini growls, just as she tries to grab Mthombo again, Zwangendaba flips them over. He's the one on top, punching his son senseless.

"R5000 says madala wins." Ntaba whispers to Ndaba.

Ndaba smirks, "Deal, Mthombo's taking this one."

MaDlamini can't believe her ears, "How did I give birth to such an evil child?"

"Beats me," Ndaba shrugs. "Look at our bad luck Ma'Oledi, we're related."

“Ahhh! I hate you.” Her voice is too loud.

“That’s one thing we have in common.” -Ndaba.

He moves before his expensive vase reaches him.
He gasps and frowns as it misses Athule by an inch
and crashes on the floor.

He could ask if she is okay, but he wants to address
MaDlamini first.

She gulps at the death stare on his face.

“That was an expensive vase.” Ndaba.

“Shit, your brother is winning.” Ntaba distracts him,
Mthombo is topping again. Serving blood curdling
punches to Zwangendaba.

This is too much for MaDlamini, she drops her body
on the floor and cries. Her husband hasn’t died yet,
but she’s wailing like she’s going to be sitting on the
mattress for a week.

“My husband can’t die, he can’t d...” she wails louder.

“He’s not going to die Mrs. Meyiwa.” Athule tries to
wrap an arm around her shoulder. MaDlamini’s tears
dry up instantly as she waves her away.

“Voetsek,” she says with a huge frown on her face. She looks at Ndaba and presses play on her crying session.

Athule looks confused.

“Someone open the windows, I can’t breathe. My high blood, my BP... where are my pills?” She cries, pressing her hand on her chest.

“We can’t open the windows, it’s not morning yet.” Athule says and gets a glare from her. Her attention keeps catching the wrong person.

“Call my doctor!” MaDlamini yells at no one in particular. She’s lying flat on the floor, heaving and tearing up.

“Ndaba please stop this fight, your mother is having a heart attack.” Athule says.

“A few more minutes, my father hasn’t felt anything yet.” He’s enjoying this.

“Ndaba please,” the tone she uses stirs him.

Ndaba jumps and pulls Mthombo away from his father, for a second MaDlamini is relieved, she

stands up and dusts herself until Ndaba sits on her husband and starts serving endless slaps on his cheeks.

MaDlamini cries louder. There she goes again taking her widow position on the floor.

.

.

I know you worked hard for this insert, thank you to those who voted. 400+ comments and I drop a bonus around 10pm.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Bonus

SHIYIWE-

.

.

“Wesisi wake up, you have a call.”

Why am I being woken up by this woman? She's standing in the dark, looking down at me.

"Mthombo is on the line, he wants to speak to you." She says. Why is Mthombo calling her? I have a phone.

Oh! I switched it off out of anger because I wanted him to find it off when he called.

I take the phone and wait for Thina to leave, I know it's her phone but I still need my privacy.

"Bring it back when you're done." She rolls her eyes before walking out.

"Yes!" He better have lost his memory and can't find his way home.

"Nonyanda, I'm not coming home tonight."

Hehe! Mihlola!

"Okay bye!" I will bite his head off in the morning.

"Aren't you going to ask me why?" He says.

He disturbed my sleep for what exactly?

"I have a feeling you're going to tell me either way." If I didn't know better, I'd think he has a mind of a child.

"I'm in a holding cell with Ndaba." He says.

Where is that Thina woman? She didn't wake me up properly, I'm stuck in a bad dream.

"Don't joke like that Mthombo, it's not funny."

I reach for the light and switch it on, I can't hear him well in the dark.

"We fought with our father, MaDlamini called the police on us after Zwangendaba collapsed." He says.

I know how Masabata works, she lives for that husband of hers. I can't imagine carrying a baby in my womb for nine months, going through labour pains, only to choose the sperm donor after all that suffering.

"Then bride your way out of that cell Mthombo and come home." I'm not getting worked up, he shouldn't have left the house to begin with.

"We tried, he's not a man of colour." Not a man of colour? He must be pitch black then, because I know white men love money too.

"We have to wait for bail hearing, the judge will be available in the morning at 10." That's insane.

I need to breathe and think of a way out for him. He annoys me sometimes but that doesn't mean I want him behind bars.

"Where are you?"

"In a holding cell." He says.

Lord, my husband can be slow at times.

"Which one?"

"Sun City, don't come Shiyiwe." Oho! Like he ever listens to me.

I drop the call and dial Thambo. He says he's on his way.

I have a plan to get Mthombo out, hopefully the white officer will pity me in my situation. All I need is a big pillow, I throw one of my old dresses on, morning sleepers, and a black stocking on my head. I check myself on the mirror, I look very pregnant and ready to pop.

Thina's bedroom door is open, she looks at me like I have lost my mind when she sees my big belly. This is not for her, she should go back to sleep.

"And then?" She says, running her eyes up and down my body. I don't answer her, it's none of her business.

.

.

Thambo is very resourceful, I find him waiting for me, suit and all. It's very cold out and dark, there is no time to go back for a jersey.

"I'm sorry for disturbing your sleep, Mthombo is in trouble." What I actually wanted to say is, why is he wearing a suit at 2am?

He's looking at my belly.

"Did I miss months or something?" He asks.

"I will explain later." I say, walking past him to get to the car.

I won't explain anything, he will see when we get to Sun City.

Half way through the drive, my phones rings.

I don't recognize the number, I answer thinking it's the husband.

"Shiyiwe, please don't hang up. It's me Ntebo."

Lord, why do you always pass me when you bless others?

"What do you want?" I ask.

"I can't sleep, there is someone with me in the house."

"Talk to them, at least you're not alone."

"You don't understand Shiyiwe, there is a presence in the house. When I start to fall asleep, someone slaps me on the head. At first I thought I was hallucinating but it's happened too many times. I'm scared Shiyiwe, I don't know who to call."

"Pray Ntebo, pray. There is no other way out of this." What does she want me to do really? I catch Thambo's eyes in the rear view mirror. He's interested in this conversation.

"I did, but it overpowers me. I'm scared Shiyiwe,

please.” She’s crying.

I don’t know why I can’t bring myself to feeling sorry for her.

“Continue praying it will eventually go away.” This call has been going on for too long. “Goodbye Ntebo.”

“It’s your father, his spirit is in my house.” She shouts before I can press the red button.

“What are you talking about?” Either she is telling the truth or high on dagga.

“Your father’s body was found in my house two weeks ago, I was away then. I was going to call you in the morning and tell you.” She says.

“How did my father’s body get to your house?”

“I... my mother...” she’s stutters. “I don’t know Shiyiwe, only my mother can answer that.”

“Then put her on the phone.”

“She’s not here, she... my mother passed away two weeks ago Shiyiwe. Her body is in a morgue as we speak, I need money for the funeral. Please if you

have anything.”

I thought we were talking about my father.

“Nteboheleng, I am not going to help you until you tell me what my father’s body was doing in your house.”

Mathonga needs to know about this.

“I don’t know, okay. I was framed for killing Emeka and when I came back...”

Wait! What is this girl blabbering about?

“Emeka’s dead?” I ask.

“Yes, he was killed by some mysterious guy. The police found me at the crime scene and thought I did it. I was held for...”

I’m not interested in her life story, yes I am sorry for killing her baby. That doesn’t mean I want her close to me.

Back to my father, “Somebody stole my father’s corpse, and somebody will answer for it. If it was your mother, then you will answer on her behalf.”

I'm actually getting angry.

"I'm sorry Shiysiwe, for everything. Please help me, my father is gone. I don't know where he is, my mother had no family. I have no one and I don't know who to ask for help." Ntebo pleads.

Could her mother be the aunt Mathonga spoke of? He said things will be revealed and that my aunt will blurt out where my father's corpse is.

Mme Mosheo is no more but her daughter is still around and she will answer for her mother's doings.

I look out the window and sigh, there is so much to grasp. I can't just agree to help her, there are so many things to consider.

My safety for starters and the safety of my husband.

What if I will be inviting the devil back into our lives?

"Where is my father's corpse?"

"I can take you to him, is it okay if we meet tomorrow?" She's crazy.

"Send me the location to the mortuary, I will find my way."

She goes quiet, I'm not going to negotiate anything with her.

"Shiyiwe I am your best friend, please. Can't we meet for two seconds?"

"You are nothing to me Nteboheleng, I told you before that I hate pretentious people. I don't want you anywhere near me."

"Please... I..."

"We're done here, don't forget the location." I close the call just as she screams into the phone.

"Forgiving is not for the other person, but for you." I knew Thambo was listening.

"Somethings are not easy to forgive Thambo, she betrayed me in the worst possible way."

Maybe if she didn't invite me to her lobola negotiations to rub salt to the wound, maybe I would look past the betrayal.

"I know, but for your betterment, it is best to forgive. No one is asking that you forget. We are humans. We are not wired to forget life experiences, but God

is a forgiving God. He who forgives our iniquities is greater than us his creators, so who are we to hold grudges?"

Huh? I don't know if I should say Amen or praise the Lord.

"Maybe one day, I don't know. God will have to forgive me for this one." I say.

Thambo laughs, "How ironic."

I'm lost.

"You expect God to forgive you for harbouring anger and a grudge yet you don't..."

"Thambo please, don't judge me. I never said I was a saint."

"No one is a saint sisi, we're all trying to make it in life and be good people. But it's not possible because the world is full of temptations." He says.

I don't know how I got myself in this church sermon and this man... he shoots a gun like a sniper. How is he suddenly a pastor? I smell a woman behind his words.

I don't provide him an answer. I feel suffocated by everything. I close my eyes, he will wake me up when we get to Sun City.

.

.

I feel kind of lost when Thambo wakes me up and tells me we have arrived. It's still dark outside. 2:58am, the time says.

He helps me out of the car, "Don't you want to take off that stocking on your head?"

It's part of the outfit.

"I have to look the part in order to pull this off." I tell him, he nods. Sometimes he's too serious that I wonder if he is okay.

"Let me hold on to you, let's go." I say, wrapping my arm over his.

"You're walking like a pregnant woman ready to pop, even I'm convinced." He says.

Well then, let's play.

We walk in, and talk to a lady who gives us an attitude and tells us to go home. I pull every pregnant woman stunt and cry her a river so she lets us in. It takes Thambo flirting and exchanging numbers with her plus promising her a date for her to grant us access.

I don't blame her, I am her, she is me.

She instructs a male guard to take us to their supervisor.

I was expecting a white man, part of me is glad that it's a black man. I hope I didn't dress up for nothing.

The man is sitting behind a desk, I don't know if he is playing games on his phone or watching adult videos. There is a naughty smile on his face.

Popeye and Spinach stand when they see us.

Shame Mthombo looks like a hobo behind those bars. Even worse with those bruises on his face. But why is he the only one with bruises if they both fought with Zwangendaba?

“And then? Are these witches? Did you see the time Jama?” He’s talking to the guard that brought us here.

I go on my knees and start crying.

“Bhuti, that’s my husband in your holding cell. Please let him go.”

“Let him go?” He snorts.

“Shiyiwe? What happened to your belly?” Mthombo must not ask me nonsense.

I reprimand him with a look. Time to put my non-existent acting career to use.

“Mthombo this is what you do to me? You leave your 9 months pregnant wife alone in bed. What if my water broke? How could you be so heartless?”

“Sisi, please keep your voice down or leave.” The man says.

I’m getting Mthombo out of here, one way or the other.

“No bhuti, you don’t understand. I left my family for this man after he got me pregnant. He lied and said

he will take care of me. Look where I am, at a police station in the early hours of the morning because I vowed to love him and stand by him. I am here.”

“Shiyiwe...” it’s the husband. He will ruin my plan if he doesn’t catch on fast.

“Ahhh!” I scream, clutching my belly.

“Shiyiwe what’s wrong?”

Mthombo sounds worried, good he must be worried after putting me through this.

“The baby is coming,” I scream, holding on to the edge of the table.

“Baby? What baby?” This man will get us caught if he continues acting a fool.

“This baby.” I wink, trying to tell him with my eyes to play along. The frown on his face Lord, I know he is about to say something stupid.

“What’s wrong with your eyes?” Mthombo.

Jesus when are you taking me?

I see Ndaba whisper something to him, stupidity

flies out the window.

“My baby...” His eyes are wide with fake shock. “My baby is coming, I’m going to be a father.”

Finally, he’s playing along.

“Bhuti please, I can’t give birth without my husband.” I tightly grip the officer’s hand.

I have never seen a man consumed by so much fear.

“Sisi go to the hospital, I can’t let your husband out. He has to wait for the judge.”

What kind of a prison guard is this? He can’t be South African.

There is only one way to get him to let that fool out of the cell.

I hold on to the officer as I lie down on his desk and spread my legs open.

“Okay, you take the baby out.” I scream in pain. I’m counting down my breathing. What I need is for my face to start sweating just to make this believable.

“Shiyiwe no, that’s my job. Don’t touch my wife.”

Mthombo's acting is not good.

"Somebody get this baby out of me." I shout, digging my nails into the officer's flesh. He flinches and winces.

"Shiyiwe push!" Ndaba says.

The officer's eyes widen, "No, no. Don't push, please sisi don't push."

He takes my hand to pull me up. Why is he pulling me up?

"I'm taking you to the hospital." He says.

My plan is going down the drain fast.

The pillow falls and lands on my feet. The officer gasps, then there's silence. I should've worn a body suit.

"Bhuti, I'm sorry I just..."

He sighs, closes his eyes and opens them. "All of you, get out of here." He's opening the cell for the brothers.

Mission accomplished.

I'm leading the way, Mthombo and Bhedlindaba are walking behind me. I don't want to hear anything from them until we get home...

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Eighty-one

SHIYIWE-

.

.

"You leave home in the middle of the night without so much as a note, the next thing I get a call from you telling me amasimba."

This man thinks he knows me because he put a ring on it.

"Watch your tongue Shiyiwe."

Like I said he doesn't know me like he thinks he does.

"Oh please, I haven't even started with you Mthombo. The last thing you should be worried about is my tongue."

He shakes his head and attempts to stand, Ndaba

grabs his wrist and pulls him back down beside him.

They are squashed on a two-seater, occupying too much space with their big bodies. I'm standing in the middle of the lounge, looking down at their sorry faces.

It was too late to drive back to Lanseria, Ndaba's house was the closest.

"What?" Mthombo almost bites Ndaba's head off.
"I'm exhausted, dog-tired, the last thing I want to sit through is inhlamba from my wife."

The bastard.

"Yes your wife, this is the woman you married. You should know by now that her screws are loose."

What?

Bhedlindaba looks up at me and raises his hands in an apologetic gesture.

"Not like that Shiyiwe, what I mean is that he should know by now that you are a feisty cat." Ndaba.

"So you're condoning her sharp tongue?" Mthombo asks.

“I’m not, I’m only saying you married her knowing she has a sharp tongue. You expect her to change because she’s a wife now?” Ndaba says.

What is this? I sat these men down to reprimand them, they have turned this about them. What do I do with this anger inside me?

“I’m not saying she should change because she is a now a wife...”

“Then what?” Ndaba cuts in.

“Why are we even arguing about this? I’m not in the mood and it’s too early in the morning to be talking so much.” Mthombo says, folding his arms across his chest.

This is not happening to me.

“I’m not arguing with you bhuti, you’re my brother I can never argue with you. I love you man.” Ndaba.

What the fuck?

Mthombo looks shocked, “Really? You have never said this to me before.”

Oh my god! What is this I have gotten myself into?

“Don’t get used to it, it’s the first and last time you’re hearing it.” Ndaba nudges him.

Are they... Jezus they are hugging. I am being tested, not just any test. It’s solve for X and I’m bad at maths.

I look at Athule sitting across the room, she’s shrugs with a light laugh.

“You’ve got to be kidding me, Mthombo? Bhedlindaba? What is going on here?”

They look up at me. The confusion on their faces confuses me.

“What do you mean?” Ndaba thinks he’s smart.

If I didn’t know better, I’d say he initiated the fight they had with their father. Mthombo is smart but not sly.

“What do I mean? You were arrested, what If I didn’t come there?”

“But you did Nonyanda and...”

“Nonyanda my foot,” I shut him.

He thinks being my husband gives him a ticket to soften me up.

"I think that's enough Shiyiwe, they didn't ask to be arrested. Their mother called the police on them."

Athule has been quiet this whole time, only now she feels a need to speak because she feels sorry for them.

"I get that Athule," I look back at the brothers. "I'm not saying you shouldn't have beaten him up. But at least you should have avoided getting arrested."

They are quiet, looking down at their feet. I'm dealing with a bunch of kids here.

Sigh, "Did the police take your finger prints?" I ask because being on a police file is something to take lightly.

"That's not a big deal, the police always take my finger prints when I have to certify documents."

Ndaba says, unbothered.

I did say he thinks he is smart.

I need to sit down for this.

“Shit!”

“What?” Mthombo asks, how quick he got worried.

“I forgot my pillow.”

Ndaba bursts out in laughter, “You forgot your baby at Sun City.” He stands.

“Take my advice, don’t ever have kids. You’re already bad parents” He taps my head in passing, I know he is saying this as a joke, but it’s taking me back to the supposed pregnancy. I look at Mthombo, he’s suddenly too serious, lost in thought.

“What baby?” I hear Athule ask, she’s following behind Ndaba with this question.

“Nothing, let’s go to bed.” He reaches back to take her hand and grabs it. Before they make a turn, Athule looks back at me and I see a twinge of insecurity in her eyes.

I have serious things to worry about.

Mthombo lifts his eyes to look at me. What is he nervous about?

“I’m not ready to be a mother.” I start, and move to sit beside him.

“What if you’re pregnant?”

That’s a scary thought honestly.

“I don’t know, there is so much happening in our lives. Having a baby right now is not a good idea, I wouldn’t want our child to be born in a toxic environment.”

“But what if you are pregnant? Are we going to keep it?” He’s not listening to me again.

To answer his question, “I don’t believe in abortion. The child is innocent, we can’t erase it because our lives are messed up.”

He looks relieved as if he is so certain and without a doubt that there is a baby in my womb.

“Can I tell you something?” I say, facing him. He turns to face me, and places a hand on my knee.

“I wish with everything inside me that there is no

baby." I say.

Mthombo sighs and moves his eyes away from mine, he's hurt by my honesty.

"Babe we just got married, and you just got your legs back. Can't we enjoy each other first before we bring a soul into the world? Have you had enough of me?" I add the last one to soften him up, I'm expecting a smile but nothing. He's tense. I don't get why he is so worried, and also eager to have a child.

"You're right, maybe after a year."

Huh, ah man! This man. What I say to him goes through one ear and escapes through the other. Does he know how much time flies? A year is equivalent to a month.

"Can we buy a pregnancy test in the morning? If the test comes out negative, I will start taking an injection. We have to be extra careful."

The disappointed look on his face again.

"Sure..." he shrugs.

"Mthombo we're married, I want you to be 100

percent into this. I can't be making decisions alone. I need you to lead us, but to the right direction, not where only you want to go. I might not like it there because I had no say in it."

"I hear you Nonyanda, and I promise I understand. If the test comes out negative, then we will do as you say until we're ready to start having kids."

Good!

"But for now, can we practice how to make children? Being behind bars caused me so much trauma that I forgot." He's losing his mind, one screw at a time.

I dodge his lips, but his hand glides through my inner thighs. I'm turned on but not tonight.

He frowns when I push his hand away.

"I'm not going to have sex with you, you haven't apologised." I stand, he does the same.

"What did I do?"

He doesn't know what he did? Who do I call to come and explain to him?

"You'll be sleeping on the couch until you figure out

what you did and apologise for it." I say and walk away.

"Shiyiwe come on, we're newlyweds." He shouts after me.

"Newlyweds yamanyala." The tongue I'm supposed to be watching takes over. I will see him in the morning.

.

.

It's morning, I'm on a call with Mathonga and I have told him everything Ntebo said. He hasn't confirmed anything, but he says I should meet up with Ntebo and hear what she has to say. The grudge thing Thambo mentioned also came up, apparently grudges give your enemies power.

A witch dying doesn't mean they have stopped bewitching you, she can still find other means to get to me from the other side.

"We are not fighting against flesh and blood, but principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness

of this world..." He quoted this long verse.

But why do humans agree to be used by those rulers and principalities? Argh!

I had to text Ntebo back and agree to meet up.

"Let me go with you."

Not a chance in hell. I'm not going to risk Ntebo meeting my husband and no it's not insecurities talking. I know he will never take a second look at her. I just don't want her seeing him.

"Athule is coming with me ." I turn him down.

Athule was reluctant when I asked, I guess she agreed because I was insistent.

"What if it's not safe? The things you told me about this girl..."

"I can handle Ntebo, don't worry about me." I turn to face him, he looks miserable with those bruises on his face and bags under his eyes. I want to take care of him, but I'm not going to bend. It's about time Mthombo knows when he's wrong and takes

responsibility for his actions.

He stands from the bed I was peacefully sleeping on... alone, and stands in front of me.

"Can I get a kiss before you leave?" He leans in, I lean back and move to pack my things into my handbag.

"Take your bath, brush your teeth and have breakfast. Your painkillers are on the bedside table, I will see you when I get back."

I turn to leave. It is about time I stop babying him, he's getting used to it and it's starting to show.

"What time will you be back?" I knew he was not going to let me walk out the door in peace.

"I'm not sure, I'll let you know if I decide not to come home."

His wide eyes right now.

"Should I ask Thambo to buy the pregnancy test?" He says.

"We can't put such a responsibility on Thambo, he's our driver not errand boy."

“He doesn’t mind, I’ll talk to him.” -Mthombo.

How do I wake up with memory loss every day? This man’s stubbornness doesn’t want to live in my head, and there’s no rent to be paid.

“Babe, Thambo is a man. Of course he’d be embarrassed buying a pregnancy test, people will look at him and assume he’s been having sex.”

A pregnancy test is the same as a heavy pregnancy, you’re carrying the evidence of sex.

He's laughing. Men are kids in big bodies.

“I’m running late, stay away from trouble. I’ll see you when I get back.”

I’m ready to leave, he’s not letting me.

“What time will that be?”

“Anytime, even tomorrow is appropriate.”

“Shiyiwe don’t...”

“Bye Mthombo, do those things I told you and go to bed. Time moves faster when you’re sleeping.” I say and don’t wait for him to reply.

This man has not felt my wrath yet.

.

.

Athule is waiting for me in the car, Thambo is taking us. I hope he won't be keeping Mthombo updated about my whereabouts. He hasn't suffered enough.

There's a faint smile on his face when he steps out of the car to open the door for me.

"No drama today?" The smile broadens, I know he's thinking about last night.

"No drama today," I reply.

With how my life is, I'm making empty promises.

He shuts the door after I've settled in.

"How long will we be?" Athule looks bored already, I'm not eager as well but this has to be done.

"Hopefully we won't be long."

Thambo is a fast driver, we arrive in Sandton Mall. Ntebo chose this location because it's closer to where she lives, Alexander.

“I want to pass by a pharmacy first,” I tell Athule walking beside me.

Thambo is behind us, it feels strange because I know he’s on bodyguard mode and there are a few people who stop and stare. I should have told him to lose the suit and dark shades. We’re at a Mall for crying out loud, casual is the theme.

I’m happy when Athule doesn’t ask questions until I grab four boxes of clear Blue pregnancy tests.

“You’re pregnant?”

She probably didn’t intend to sound judgemental, but I feel judged.

“I’m a married woman, surprise.” I say and walk over to the till.

The cashier is giving me the same look I got from Athule. Haybo! Am I being judged for letting a man cum inside me? I place my hand on the counter, just to flash the wedding ring, nothing major.

She looks at it and her expression changes, she seems rather friendly now.

I can't imagine what Thambo would've gone through had he been the one buying these because I was really going to tell him to buy four or five.

"Why so many boxes though?" Athule hasn't left that ship.

"I want to be sure that I'm pregnant, the first and second tests are not always accurate."

I shove the package into my handbag as we walk out.

"Isn't it too early to be getting pregnant?"

Not that it's any of her business.

"Ever heard of honeymoon babies?"

I'm polishing Mthombo's name, I don't want her thinking we're not goal oriented.

"Yeah but you're still young Shiyiwe? I thought you'd want to enjoy your marriage first before moving to change diapers and waking up in the middle of the night to breastfeed a screaming baby."

She's making it sound terrible.

"My husband is getting old, the sooner he has a baby

the better.” What am I saying really?

“Mthombo is not the one who will be carrying the baby, and making sacrifices. It’s you, your body will change... your entire life basically. What? Is he tying you down?”

“What do you mean tying me down? I’m married, I’m already tied down.”

Mthombo is tied down too, by me.

She snorts, “Not like that. From where I’m standing, Mthombo wants to housewife your arse. Typical Zulu guy.”

Under different circumstances, I’d actually laugh at this and she’s my sister. This is supposed to come from a good place, but I’m offended. That’s my husband she’s trash talking.

“You don’t know him, and the sex we have is always consensual. That means I’m also responsible for this pregnancy, if there is a pregnancy.”

I’m justifying myself when there is no need for me to do it.

“Okay, but has he ever asked you what you want in life? Surely you have dreams, something you want to venture into before you become a mother.” She says.

I don’t know how we got here, or who this Athule is.

“Yes, we tell each other everything during pillow talk.” I lie and that shuts her up.

I’m not going to hang my laundry in public. Like I said before, it’s none of her business.

My phone beeps just as we walk into Macdonald’s, Ntebo said to meet here.

Capitec: Payment +R30 000.00 into Savings account; Ref I'M SORRY; Avail R30 060.00.

Someone is paying for an apology. The only person who has enough funds to purchase an apology is Mthombo.

Who do I report this crime to?

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Eighty-two

SHIYIWE-

.

.

He's calling me, I have no choice but to take his call. Thambo follows as I make my way to an empty table by the exit, I gesture that he stays back with Athule.

"Apology not accepted."

"You're transferring the money back?"

"I'm keeping the money, there should be more where that came from." Now that reminds me, we haven't gotten to the financial conversation. How I'll be spending our money, the bills and groceries.

"Mthombo this is not you, you're open and sensitive with me. You used to tell me what's on your mind, you'd cry to me and we'd speak about everything. Why are you changing now? What's going on?"

I miss that side of him. I hear him sigh, it's taking a while for him to answer.

"Maybe I'm trying too hard, maybe I'm afraid of failing as a husband like I did with Zinzi." He says and it pisses me off that he'd think I would ever do him like that. Also, why is he blaming himself for that woman's infidelity?

"Maybe you should stop comparing us, we are two different people. I am not Zinzi, I would never do that to you."

He sighs, "We'll talk when you get home."

"Fine, bye."

"I love you," he says and cuts the call.

I guess I do love him too.

When I come back, Athule is crying on Thambo's chest. He's not holding her but that doesn't stop me from not understanding what is happening.

He looks to me for help, I know he wants to be rescued with how he widens his eyes and points them down at Athule.

"Athule?" She turns, her eyes are red and puffy.

I try not to think the worst. “What’s wrong?”

“I just spoke to my father, he wants me to come back home.”

That’s why she’s crying? I don’t get it.

“Then go home?”

“I can’t,” she sniffs and uses a handkerchief to wipe away her tears. “He...”

“Shiyiwe, over here.” Ntebo’s voice interrupts us. She’s waving from the table at the far back.

“We’ll talk later, you can wait for me in the car. I won’t be long.” She might not be comfortable showing up to a stranger with red eyes.

“No, I’m okay. I want to be here for you.”

Argh! Sweet.

Typical of MacDonald’s to be this crowded, I wonder if these people have it all figured out in life. They are laughing and eating like everything is fine. I’m not going to lie to myself and say my life is going perfect

since I got married. It's falling apart, I am losing the grip. It feels like I don't have control over anything.

"Shiyiwe!" Her arms are around me in the blink of an eye, she caught me off guard. I escape her arms.

Ntebo is looking at Athule while I'm wondering what a portrait of her mother is doing on the table.

"You can wait over there Thambo."

He hesitates with frown on his face.

I knew Mthombo spoke to him, that's how he keeps tabs on me. I'm not complaining, it's new though.

From simple Shiyiwe a girl from Diepkloof to a Meyiwa wife who is driven around and guarded like my life is worth millions.

We settle down after Thambo has given us space.

"Who is this?" That's the first thing she's got to say? I'm not okay with how she is looking at Athule, as if she's disgusted by the mere sight of her.

"You have a new best friend Shiyiwe? Wow."

Wow indeed! And I'm talking about her audacity.

"She's my sister." I say, in dismissal.

Ntebo averts her gaze back to me, I don't know if that's hurt I see in her eyes.

"You have another sister?" She asks.

"We're twins, not just sisters." Athule hastily jumps in.

Ntebo sighs and regards Athule with the same expression she's been giving her. It's confirmed, she doesn't like her.

"You said you wanted to meet." I remind her because by the looks of it we will keep going back and forth about this sister-twin thing.

Another sigh!

"Shiyiwe, I know I fucked up and ruined us..." Not this, I'm not here to talk about the past.

"You said you know where my father's corpse is." I interrupt.

She keeps heaving sighs, and looking deep into my

eyes. There's something uncanny about her eyes and it's giving me chills.

"Yes, I will take you there. But please let me apologise first." She's so keen on apologizing, it makes me wonder if she is hoping we'd rekindle our friendship.

"I was driven by the devil, my mother wanted me to have Emeka. All I had to do was get his underwear and give it to her, it was obvious that a bachelor like him did his laundry at a laundromat. I followed him one Sunday morning with my laundry. I waited for him to leave before I went snooping. The people there were careless, they hardly noticed what I was doing. I don't know what Mme did to his underwear. A week later Emeka couldn't stay away from me."

Yoh hayi!

"It's true then, your mother was a witch." I say.

Mathonga's words are starting to come to light.

Ntebo widens her eyes at me, surely she must have known about her mother's shenanigans.

“Is this your mother’s picture?” Athule asks, grabbing the picture from the table.

I’m convinced that Ntebo dislikes her, she’s glaring at the poor girl.

“Yes.”

That ‘yes’ is full of attitude.

“This is my mother’s sister, she is my aunt.” Athule expresses in disbelief.

It comes as a shock to Ntebo, she sends her eyes to me then back to Athule—mouth open.

“I don’t understand, I would know if I had cousins.”

This coming from the girl who told me last night that she doesn’t know her mother’s side of the family.

“Why would I lie? This woman came to my house and was introduced as my mother’s sister.” Athule.

Well... this is turning out to be a family reunion than a meeting. Either way, I don’t want Ntebo in my life, especially now that I know we’re cousins.

“Your mother must have been ashamed of her sister.

“Why would she hide her from you?” I ask Ntebo.

She looks confused as hell.

“You’re my cousin?” She’s asking Athule.

“We’re both your cousins, Shiyiwe and I share a mother and father.”

Nice! I wasn’t going to disclose that.

Ntebo’s face brightens when her eyes turn to me,
“Shiyiwe, we’re related.”

Someone is happy.

“Wait, so MaMbuyazi was not your mother?”

Oh Lord! Now we have to tell her the story.

“She was, and Athule’s mother.” I’m causing more confusion. This is not the time to talk about MaMbuyazi and Mphako’s legendary saga.

“It’s a long story Ntebo, I want us to talk about my father’s corpse. I want to take him back home immediately, he is not resting in peace.”

“Where is your mother Athule? Does she know that her sister has passed on?” She is still there?

Athule places her elbows on the table, she looks as invested in this conversation as Ntebo. I should've warned her about the type of person Ntebo is. Just a warning before she thinks of befriending her "cousin."

"I don't know, I wasn't around for two weeks. No one mentioned death or a funeral when I got back."

Athule.

I'm getting bored, my eyes feel it too that they start to wander. Where did Thambo get the newspaper he's suddenly engrossed on? That coffee he is drinking is calling my name, I'm hungry. I should go and order something, leave these two to bond.

They are caught up in a conversation about introducing Ntebo to Penny when I stand. I haven't met my father yet and this is happening? I don't want Ntebo a part of my life and I will repeat this a million times if I have to.

Thambo stands when I walk past him. He's following

me. He takes this guarding job too seriously. I could tell him to sit and drink his coffee, then again I'd be wasting my time.

I order a coffee for myself and a muffin plus large chips, chilli cheese.

There's about two women before me, my order should be ready soon.

I forgot to ask Athule if she wants anything. Oh well!

My order is called, I collect my food and head back to the table.

They are laughing and chatting up a storm. I want to know where my father's corpse is and I will be on my way. Sure Athule and I are twins, it doesn't mean we'd have an instant bond. If she wants to be friends with Ntebo then... I mean she is old enough.

"Did you get me anything?" My twin intuition is not on yet, I got her nothing.

"I forgot to ask what you would like, sorry." She would've noticed my departure had she not been

busy talking to Ntebo.

"We'll get something before we leave," I say and she nods with a smile, her inquisitive eyes landing on my food.

"Wait, is that coffee?" Athule takes the cup and sniffs the opening. Where in the world has this ever happened? There goes my appetite.

"You can't drink coffee, you're pregnant." Athule, Athule! This was supposed to be our secret, I know I didn't put a disclaimer when I told her, but shouldn't she know?

Tears fall off Ntebo's eyes, I don't understand why she is looking at me like I stripped her of everything in life.

"You're pregnant?"

Sigh! "No..."

"Shiyiwe you're pregnant?" She pushes her chair back as she stands to her feet.

People are watching because Miss 'You're pregnant' here decided to raise her voice.

“Sit down, you’re making noise, people are staring.”

To say I’m embarrassed would be an understatement.

“Don’t tell me to sit down,” she’s still yelling.

“You killed my baby Shiysiwe, I lost the man I love and everything he was going to give me because of you. And now you’re married to a rich man and having his baby?” She laughs, but it’s in anger.

“Why are you shouting? I’m right here, I can hear you.” I don’t want to stoop to her level. We’re already the centre of attention.

“You killed her baby?”

Athule must not start with me. Had she kept her mouth shut, Ntebo’s brain wouldn’t have escaped from its cage.

“Yes, I was pregnant and she poisoned me. My baby died.”

“That’s not true Ntebo” I stand.

I need to watch what I say or I will be held accountable for my words or worse jailed.

“It is true, you poisoned everyone that day and I had a miscarriage.”

Honestly, that was supposed to work as a laxative. I didn’t know it had side effects.

“I understand you’re angry, but please calm down.”

“Stop telling me what to do.” She screams, throwing my coffee at me. Why is it warm? They gave me warm coffee. I’m drenched and wiping my face with a serviette when the chips I bought hit my face. Now that’s hot.

Ouch!

“Ntebo...” I don’t get to finish talking. Thambo grabs Ntebo’s hand, twists it and slams her face-down on the table. People leave their tables and circle ours, they are taking pictures or whatever with their phones.

I shouldn’t have come here.

“I hate you Shiyiwe, I hate you so much.” Ntebo yells, squirming and wriggling beneath Thambo.

“Thambo, let her go.” GBV is not taken lightly in this

country. He will get arrested.

"Thambo let her go, please." I have to repeat myself. He's taking his time to release her.

Ntebo winces as she rubs her wrists, she is breathing fire. I have never seen such wrath and hatred reflecting in a person's eyes.

"I'm sorry about your baby Ntebo, I swear to God I didn't..."

Thambo places a hand on my back and leans in to whisper, "Don't say anything that will get you into trouble."

His eyes run around the eatery, he's right. These people will have my confession on tape.

This means I can't apologize to Ntebo right now. She will have to forgive me.

"We should leave." Thambo says and I think it's for the best. I grab my belongings and hope Ntebo will understand, which is insane. I ruined her life like she said, then again, she ruined mine as well.

"Are we leaving?" Athule asks.

I don't know what it looks like. I shouldn't have brought her along, things would've turned out different.

"You are a gold-digging prostitute Shiyiwe Jele." Ntebo yells just as we turn. She is giving these people a good show.

A wise man once said, ignore a fool to avoid noise, that wise man has never been called a gold-digging prostitute.

"Your husband will soon see you for the whore you truly are, sfebe ke wena."

This girl is walking on thin ice.

"What about you Nteboheleng? You man-eating bitch." I spit back.

"Sisi, walk away." Thambo says, trying to take my hand, I don't want him touching me right now.

"At least I don't pretend to be perfect. Mthombo Meyiwa will soon realize your worthlessness and dump you like the piece of shit you are. You think marrying rich men for their money makes you wife

material? You're no different from isfebe, you satisfy his sexual needs and in return he puts food in your dick-sucking mouth. Mthombo Meyiwa has class sweetie, something you will never have."

Ntebo is proving to me once again that she will never change.

"Do you have anything to prove your accusation? I'm a bitch right? A social climber? Then show me the evidence. Don't just speak without having anything to back your words up." I snap back.

Silence.

Her chest is bouncing up and down, her eyes could kill. How does she let so much anger consume her?

"Just what I thought. You don't get to talk about my husband, wesisi. And you talk as if you're an angel that fell from heaven? Newsflash Nteboheleng, you're just like your mother. And so what if I am a bitch? I am my husband's bitch. What do you have to do with it?"

Ntebo grabs her braids and screams her lungs out, she's losing her mind.

"I curse you Shiyiwe Jele, you will never carry a baby till full term and when you do, it will be stillborn. You will never hear the cry of a baby."

Her body is shaking, I guess from anger.

Her words do something to me, I should be retreating and leaving like Thambo said. But I lose it and punch her on the face, she falls back on the chair.

There are a few gasps, I don't pay attention to them. I turn to walk away and this time it's for real but someone throws a chair at me, it hits me on my back. I almost fall face down but Thambo grabs me.

Chaos!

People are yelling, and clapping and shouting. Ntebo jumps on me too fast for me to move back, she has my hair in her grip. I grab her arms trying to push her away, she kicks me on my belly.

I see her aim, she's trying to terminate the pregnancy. Ntebo is held back by two male workers in MacDonald's uniform. Thambo scoops me up and throws me over his shoulder, he's rushing us out of

the restaurant.

"You will pay for this you stupid bitch, do you hear me? I will make you pay Shiysiwe."

Ntebo screams as we make our exit.

I'm put down the moment we weave into the crowd.

"Are you okay?" Thambo asks.

I'm not, my back hurts. There's a sharp pain in my belly.

"Is that blood?" Athule asks, looking down at my pants.

My heart knocks against my chest. I was pregnant, Ntebo has done her worst.

.

.

Thank you for reaching the target. 400+ comments for a bonus at 2pm.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Eighty-three

BHEDLINDABA-

.

.

He's on his way home from dropping Ntabezikude and Khethiwe at the airport. Athule is not answering her phone, neither is Shiyiwe.

He tries them again and just when he cusses in frustration, he remembers that Thambo is with them.

Thambo's phone rings unanswered as well. That can't be possible, at least one of them should pick up.

Calling Mthombo would be causing unnecessary stress. They could be busy and nothing is wrong.

Traffic is light in the East Rand, he's out of the highway in no time and headed fast to the South of Johannesburg.

A few uneventful minutes pass, he makes a U-turn to avoid the slow jam of taxis heading to Noord taxi rank, there's a bridge just after Maboneng. Cars hardly pass there, but it will get him home early.

His phone vibrates on the dashboard. His brother Mthombo is calling.

“I can’t get a hold of Shiyiwe and Thambo, have you spoken to Athule?” Mthombo says without greeting.

It is odd, this is what he’s been trying to do for the past fifteen minutes.

“They are not taking my calls too, do you think something has happened?”

There is a possibility, though he can’t think who would want to harm Shiyiwe and Athule. MaDlamani is too occupied nursing her injured husband, those two won’t be available for a couple of days.

“What if there was an accident?” Mthombo worries too much, it’s all he ever does whenever Shiyiwe is not beside him.

“I hope not, let me hang up and try Athule’s number.” Ndaba says.

“Before you go, there is a package for you here. A lady in a tight suit dropped it off.” Mthombo says.

“What is it?”

“A huge ass box, I haven’t opened it.”

“No stress, I’m on my way.” Ndaba’s attention on Mthombo slowly wears off, his focus is on the big car stopping in front of his. It’s black with tinted windows.

Something is fishy, he looks into the rear view mirror as the thought to escape nudges him. There’s a similar car parked behind.

How did he become so distracted that he didn’t see this?

His gun is always close by, he grabs it, checks if there is enough bullets lest they fire at him. He cocks the gun and waits for the inevitable.

The wise thing to do now is to text his brother and let him know what is going on. Heaven knows what those four men in black, dashing out of the car want from him.

They are huge, with broad shoulders and menacing faces. He’s been around the world and can tell where the person is from by looking at them.

If they are not Nigerian, then Ghana must be their place of origin.

I'm surrounded, I'll text you if they start shooting

He sends the text, his eyes keeping watch of the men. They draw out their guns.

"My friend, we are not going to harm you. Step out of the vehicle, we just want to talk."

Yep! That's a Nigerian accent alright.

He is not going to step out of the vehicle, and so he sits still.

Mthombo is calling him, Ndaba answers and puts him on loud speaker.

"I'm here," he says, letting his big brother know he's okay before he asks.

"Who are they?"

"Nigerians with thick ass incisions on their faces."

Ndaba has seen close enough to tell.

"Who did you fuck with Bhedlindaba?" The annoyance in Mthombo's voice makes him exhale.

“No one, I swear.” He says, and checks the rear view mirror. The men in the car behind have exited the vehicle as well.

“Shit! There is no way out.”

“Give me your location, I’m on my way.” Mthombo.

“No, I’m not going to put your life at risk. This is my fight, you stay put.”

“You mean me and this big head on your coffee table.” Mthombo says.

Ndaba is confused, “Who?”

“There’s a man’s head inside that package, judging from the colour of the blood, he was beheaded today.”

Okay, maybe he didn’t mess with anyone as of late. But he does have a long list of enemies. Where will he begin?

“Give me your location, I’m sending backup.” That’s Mthombo.

Backup would be nice and that’s if they get here on time.

“Are you coming out of the car, or should we make you?” The same man yells.

Ndaba rolls down the window, he can’t hide in here forever.

“Who are you?” He yells back without dipping his head out the window.

“Your worst nightmare.”

So much for “we just want to talk.”

Ndaba’s shoulders tense, his eyes turn cold, not a single drop of emotion.

“That’s an odd name, don’t you think? Your mother should’ve done better.”

Wrong time to be showing off his rudeness.

“Are you trying to get yourself killed?” Mthombo snaps over the phone.

“These idiots think I’m afraid of them,” Ndaba replies behind clenched teeth. He is boiling with rage.

“Which you should be, you’re surrounded.” Mthombo

says.

Ndaba keeps his eyes on the men in front of his car, not daring to even look in any other direction. They are drawing in on him. His gun is ready, if he is going to go down today, it won't be without a fight.

His body goes rigid with adrenalin when one of them smirks and keys the entire side of his car.

"You're a pretty cocky motherfucker, and I don't like that at all." This man has been the one talking, although dressed like the rest of them, Ndaba has figured out that he's the one in charge of this crèche they have gathered.

"Cut the crap Barbie, and tell me what you want."

Ndaba shouts.

"Okay, smart ass. Listen up because I won't repeat myself." The man is standing right in the middle, staring directly into Ndaba's cold eyes.

"I want an exchange, your girl for your life." He says.

That's a bit confusing, his girl is Athule. But who are these men trying to bargain with both their lives?

“I don’t have a girl.” Ndaba lies to the man’s face.

The man extends his hand to one of his accomplices, a picture is put on his hand.

He plasters it on the windshield and the first thing Ndaba sees is a bald head. It must have been taken today because that’s what Athule was wearing when she left the house this morning.

She’s in a crowded place, it seems like she was walking. Beside her is a not so clear image of Shiysiwe.

“Give us the girl and you get to live another day.” The man says.

“I don’t know who she is.” Another lie from Ndaba.

“Okay, then we’ll take her and your life. The other girl with her will be a bonus, just because we can.” The man smiles with badly veiled contempt.

The other girl is Shiysiwe. Ndaba’s hand clenches around the gun. Something is telling him to shoot them. That something must not see that he is outnumbered.

Shooting at them would be suicide.

From a corner, behind these men standing in front of his car, he spots a police car moving to their direction.

“Cops.” Someone shouts from the back.

There are grunts and cuss words as they casually walk back to their cars and drive off. This is his cue to leave, he doesn’t want to be explaining things to the men in uniform.

Mthombo must have run out of airtime.

Ndaba takes the freeway leading to Roodeport. Athule’s phone is not going through anymore. All their phones are off.

He’s losing his mind and if he doesn’t think straight, he might lose Athule and Shiysiwe. He makes a call to Mikhulu and tells him to search the whole of Sandton, it’s the last place Athule and Shiysiwe were seen.

In minutes, he drives through his gate. Mthombo is waiting for him outside.

“I almost lost my mind, are you okay?” Mthombo asks, giving him a brief hug.

Bhedlindaba nods, “Where is it?”

He’s following Mthombo into the house, and into the longue. This man has not removed the head from his coffee table.

“Do you know him?” Mthombo.

“One of my men, he was a hitman.” Ndaba replies.

He’s trying to piece the puzzles together, he can’t remember the last job he gave him.

“You have inkabi working for you?” It is rather shocking.

Ndaba nods again, “Emeka.”

His memory is back.

“He was assigned to kill Emeka, Shiyiwe’s ex.” He looks at Mthombo.

“So, the men that came for you...”

“Might be Emeka’s family or friends.” Ndaba finishes.
“Shaka was one of the best, how did he get himself killed?”

“If that’s the case, then you’re in deep shit.”

Mthombo raises the issue as he closes the box with the head inside.

“We’re in shit ntwana.” He drops down on the couch and looks up at his confused elder brother.

“We?”

“They want Athule in exchange for my life, they said they are going to take Shiyiwe as well.”

Mthombo’s entire demeanour changes, “No one is touching my wife.”

Ndaba believes every word, he’s seen how he becomes when his family is threatened.

“Their phones are off, what if we’re...”

“What if nothing Bhedlindaba.” Mthombo snaps. “Get up, we’re going to look for them.”

Ndaba stands and grabs the box, he’s going to dispose of it at a river somewhere.

As they get outside, Mthombo's phone vibrates. The big brother cusses under his breath.

"It's Thina, Zinzi's cousin." He says, letting his eyes run through the bright screen.

"Sikolethu has collapsed, she's taking him to the hospital." Mthombo tells him.

Ndaba doesn't really care, nor does he see himself building a relationship with the boy.

"What are you doing with your dead wife's cousin?" It's news to Ndaba.

"I brought her to the house to look after the boy, he's fond of her. But she'll be leaving soon."

Of all his brothers, he didn't expect this brother to be the most gullible.

Ndaba pinches the bridge of his nose, he's annoyed.

"Does Shiyiwe know about this? Is she okay with all of this?"

"No, but I'm hoping she will accept Siko." Mthombo

answers, and he really is hoping. Ndaba can tell from the tone of his voice.

“Shiyiwe would never agree to that, you’d be ignorant if you think she will ever accept that boy. You know what your father did. Why would you put her through that?” Ndaba asks.

Had he known in time, he wouldn’t have allowed Mthombo to take such a decision.

“Suddenly you know what my wife wants?”

“No, any woman would never agree to such an arrangement. Why are you so insensitive Mthombo? Did you even ask Shiyiwe how she is after finding out about the harassment?”

Heavy silence visits them, they are staring into each other’s eyes.

“This has nothing to do with you Bhedlindaba, I know how to take care of my wife.”

Not from where Ndaba is standing.

“It has everything to do with me because I was there, I saw the trauma she went through. I watched while

she tried to fight off more than five men who were looking at her with lustful eyes. I was there while Zinqumo video tapped everything with a smile on his face.”

Anger takes over, he slams the palms of his hands on Mthombo’s chest.

“I was there Mthombo and I couldn’t protect her, excuse me for wanting to make up for my failures.” He’s grunting, glaring into his big brother’s eyes.

Mthombo breathes in and out, he’s trying to calm himself down.

“Where is the video?” Mthombo.

It’s the last thing they should be thinking about right now, the women are missing. They need to find them.

“Worry about that when we find them.” And with that, Ndaba begins his walk to the car. He stops when he sees Mthombo stationery, looking down at his phone.

“Are you serious? What if that Thina woman is lying about the boy?”

“Why would she lie?” Mthombo answers, impatiently.

“What about Shiyiwe? She’s your wife and she is missing.”

Mthombo suddenly seems to be caught between a rock and hard place.

“Your wife or the boy?” Ndaba says, daring him to make a decision.

.

.

My apologies for the delay.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Eighty-four

SHIYIWE-

.

.

The car won’t start, Thambo thinks someone tempered with it.

The Sandton Mall underground parking has no

network. I've had to reset my phone more than once but it's still out of coverage. Athule and Thambo are facing the same problem.

During this time, no one has come in and gone out of the parking lot. It's strange really, Sandton is a pretty busy mall, at least more than six cars should have driven in already.

"Sit in the car Sisi."

I'd rather sit on the paving, it's better than being baked inside the car.

Athule is settled in the car with the door open and her feet touching the ground, her eyes are on me, apologetic and stuff.

I'm trying hard not to think that I might have lost my baby. I haven't bled further than a few drops.

"You're doing it again." Athule enters my thoughts and pulls me out with her concerns.

"What?" I know what she is talking about.

I zone out and she tells me to come back.

I can't help it, I'm trying to come to terms with what

happened back inside the mall. The curse, the fight and the possibility of losing a baby I was not sure was even there.

“Shiyiwe,” Athule snaps me out of it again. “Stop thinking so much, you’ll stress yourself out.”

Too late.

“Do you think there was a baby?” I don’t know what I’m expecting her to say.

No one wants to miscarry, whether they want it or not.

“I don’t know, where would the blood be coming from?”

She’s right.

What am I going to say to Mthombo? Should I keep it from him? It’s not like the pregnancy was confirmed.

“When will the car be ready?” Athule asks Thambo. He doesn’t say anything, nor look at her only because he has answered this question a million times since he started fixing the car.

“I think we should go back inside and request an

Uber.” Athule suggests.

I hadn’t thought of that.

“You don’t have to, I’m almost done.” Thambo dismisses Athule’s suggestion.

“We’ve wasted too much time Thambo. What if something is wrong? What if I have miscarried?” I don’t know why the thought scares me to death. I mean just this morning I was telling Mthombo that I am not ready to mother a child, I remember telling him that if it happens that there is a baby then we’d keep it.

Thambo stops what he’s doing and looks at me, “Are you in pain?”

“Not really.” But I bled and he knows this.

“Then there shouldn’t be a problem.” He says.

“What if there is a problem? Ntebo kicked her in the stomach, what if she terminated the pregnancy with her high kick?”

Honestly though, Athule.

“That girl is going to get what’s coming to her.” He

pauses, eyes flickering from here to there. By the looks of it, he didn't mean to let that slip.

"Let her be please." I tell him. I have been in this family long enough to know how they deal with things. Most of them to be precise.

I have seen their wrath, and how it controls them. From the father to the youngest son. Mthombo remains innocent in my eyes, although something tells me he has grave secrets I wouldn't want to uncover.

"We should try calling them again, but there is no reception here." Athule, she's the most impatient and I don't blame her. I don't get why we have to wait for Thambo to fix the car.

He thinks something might happen to me if he's not around.

Athule stands, waving her phone in the air. She's tried that before and couldn't get any network.

"I am so fired, I have missed enough days at work to get me fired." She's saying absent minded.

“Ndaba will get you a job, you’re warming his sheets now.” I say and wait for a reaction and there it is, eyes widely open and mouth loosely hanging.

“You’re a screamer, I heard you this morning.” I was lying in bed, minding my own business when I heard her screams of pleasure.

Athule snaps her eyes to Thambo, I doubt he heard a thing. He’s too occupied with fixing the car.

Is she blushing?

“You’re embarrassed?” I say, and she looks away from me. “We’re twins, we shared a womb. Don’t be ashamed.”

“The car is ready, let’s go.” Thambo interrupts us.

I stand, eager to get to the hospital and find out if there is or was a baby in my womb.

A sharp pain in my lower abdomen sends me back down screaming in agony.

Thambo is beside me in a flash, he never looks worried or anything that has to do with emotions.

He's just... Thambo.

"You okay?" He asks.

"I don't know, something is happening." My voice breaks as I press a hand on my belly.

I not sure if I'm crying because of the pain or the thought of losing this baby.

"Hold on to me, I'll help you to the car." He wraps an arm around my middle while I hold on to him like he said.

"The pain is gone." I tell Thambo, sounding a little relieved.

"I'm sorry Shiyiwe, I really didn't know the story between you and Ntebo. I swear I wouldn't have..." She pauses, eyes behind me.

"Sisi get behind me." Thambo orders, pushing me behind him. It's only now that I see a tall man in a black suit strolling toward.

I get why Thambo is alert, there is nothing appealing about him. His appearance gives of unsettling vibes.

"You look like you need help with the car." He has a

thick Nigerian accent.

“We’re fine.” Thambo says.

Athule and I are practically standing behind Thambo, but not hidden. The man’s yellow eyes run to me, his mouth twitches. He is going for a smirk, but doesn’t let it all out. He diverts his gaze, it lands on Athule and stays longer there.

“Are you sure? I can give you a ride.” There is something cocky about him and the way he speaks, it’s almost as if he is sure of himself.

“We’re fine.” Thambo coldly responds.

He puts his hand on his waist, where his gun always is, and I know shit is about to happen. The man notices and grins. My whole body shivers, he’s creeping me out.

We have to get out of here. I nudge Thambo’s side. He turns to me and mouths “run!” He pulls the gun out and fires at the man in front of him.

I don’t see what happens next, I grab Athule’s hand

and take off running toward the entrance. More shots are fired, all I can think about is making it home alive.

“Who is that?” Although out of breath, I can hear panic in her voice.

“I don’t know.” I say.

The door is closed, it’s a sliding door. I don’t get it.

“Why is it closed?” Athule yells, banging the glass door. I join her, trying to get the attention of the two men standing on the other side with riffles.

It’s SBV, but why close the door if they are loading money into ATMs that are ten feet from here?

“Hey open the door, open the door.” We shout in unison.

They have not turned to see what the commotion is about. Can’t they hear the gun shots?

“Shiyiwe he’s coming, he’s going to kill us.” The fear in her voice.

I turn, the man in black is coming this way. Looking further, I see Thambo lying on the floor. He... he

killed Thambo.

Just as we're standing with our backs against the glass door, I see a red Jeep driving this way. Athule dashes to stand in front of it and screams "Help!" while waving her hands in the air.

"Athule, what if it's one of them?"

"It's a woman." She replies, continuing to wave. The car stops and indeed it is a she, slim and dark skinned— dressed in an elegant red suit. She doesn't look a day over twenty-five.

The woman rolls the window down, confusion evident on her face.

"What's going on?"

"That man is trying to kill us, please help." There is desperation in Athule's voice.

When the lady sees the man approaching us, she cusses and tells us to hurry into the car.

Athule and I jump at the back, she speeds off the second we shut the door.

“Please drive us to the police station.” I say, she nods.

We have to report what happened at the mall. I’m worried about Thambo, he can’t be dead.

I figure the lady will do just that since she is eager to help us.

“We have to call Mthombo and Ndaba, and tell them what’s happening.”

Where is my bag?

“I think I dropped my phone and I don’t have my bag.” Athule speaks first.

“Me too.” I say and we both turn our eyes to the woman. “Can I borrow your phone?”

Silence, like I never said anything. Did I speak Chinese?

“Excuse me, may I please borrow your phone? I want to call my husband and let him know what happened.”

Silence! Ehh!

I'm about to ask what her problem is when her phone rings, she opens the dashboard and takes out a gun before answering the call.

"I'm on my way... they are with me..." she says.

My world flips over, we have been tricked. I need to breathe...

"What is it?" Athule asks, probably wondering why I'm trying to open the door. This bitch has locked it.

"We've been kidnapped." I answer.

Her eyes widen, she glances at the woman in scepticism.

"I see you right behind me." The woman says, adjusting the rear view mirror as she looks through it.

There is a car following this one, it's the only car behind us.

"Who are you? What do you want from us?"

I'm ignored again.

"You are not going to get away with this." I can't help but yell in anger.

Why is she ignoring me?

"Please stop the car, we didn't do anything wrong."

Yerr! Athule is wasting her tears, this lady does not care.

"Don't grovel, our lives are worth nothing to her." I tell her the truth and nothing but, otherwise we wouldn't be here.

Athule shakes her head, moving to the edge of the seat.

"She's a woman, she'll understand and let us go."

How do I explain this to her?

The car stops, I don't know where we are. This place looks deserted. Just an empty, straight road, arched by trees.

The same man we escaped back at the mall, the one that shot Thambo steps out of the car behind us.

This witch of a woman points the gun at us, "Stay put."

She says and steps out the car.

Does she really think we are going to listen to her?
She must be stupid. Our chances of an escape are very slim, they are leaning against the boot.

I'm trying to think of a way out but my sister's sobs are disturbing me. She grabs my hands, and looks into my eyes.

"I don't want to die, Shiyiwe I'm scared."

I'm scared too, I have no idea how we are going to escape these people. I browse our surroundings, the lady is engrossed on a conversation with the guy.

"I think we can escape." I tell Athule and right now, that's all it is. A thought that we have to turn to a reality.

Athule wipes away the tears on her face, she looks inquisitive.

"How?"

"See how they are not paying attention to us, we're going to open the door and run into the woods."

She shakes her head. I'm putting Mphako's child at

risk here but we have no other choice. It's either we flight or we die.

She looks back at our kidnappers, "I don't know Shiyiwe. They'll kill us if they catch us."

No lies there, they look hard-core. I didn't expect it from the lady, she looked harmless when she picked us up.

"Can we act first? We'll think later." I say because if I let this girl lead, she will want to finish crying first.

I notice her hands shaking as she brings them up to her chest, I grab them and look into her eyes.

"I won't let anything happen to you, you're my sister. I take care of my family."

She cries more and I don't understand how that's more important than surviving. I too have a flood of tears wanting to escape my eyes but I'd rather save them for later.

"Athule, I need you to get a grip and focus."

She rubs her eyes and breathes heavily three times, "Okay, let's go."

Say no more.

With that, I check the coast first. The guy has a phone in hand, his lips are moving and the lady has her eyes on it. I think they are talking to someone on loud speaker.

I open the door as slow as I could while praying that it doesn't make a sound.

My pubic area is sweaty, not more than my palms. I can't control the insane rapid beat of my heart, it calms down a little when the door opens without a loud sound.

"You go first. Run Athule and don't look back."

"No! You go first." She shakes her head. I'm tired of arguing.

I hunch over and step out of the car.

"Shiyiwe, I can't do it." Athule mumbles behind me. I have to turn my head, this child is sitting in the car, ogling at me with teary eyes.

If we both let fear consume us, Mphako will lose his twins.

“Athule come on.” I snap, maybe she will jump and follow me.

She shakes her head, placing her feet on the seat and hugs her legs to her chest.

“They’ll kill us...” She’s trembling.

“Hey, what are you doing?”

Shit!

They are running to the car, guns blazing. A figure runs past me in full speed. When did Athule get the will to move her legs?

“Stop right there!” The man yells after us.

I’m behind Athule, trying to call upon the Usain Bolt in me when a shot is fired. The sound surges through my ears, as if fired right next to me.

Something hot pierces somewhere in my body, I don’t know what happens next but I kiss the ground with a loud thud. I can’t move, no matter how much I try. I’m in excruciating pain, it burns and my vision is tunnelling. My eyes are heavy, I’m struggling to keep them open. Either way, I look up, Athule is out of

sight. She must've disappeared into the trees.

"Go get the other girl." The lady's voice sounds so far yet she's standing here.

I hope Athule makes it out alive, she'll tell my husband what happened to me. I don't want Mthombo to be the one to find my dead body, he will never heal from it. I hope he will know that I fought to get back to him. I hope he will know that I died thinking of him.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Eighty-five

MTHOMBO-

.

.

"Come on Shiyiwe, answer your phone."

It rings once and takes him to voicemail, this is the fifth call and she hasn't answered. At first he thought it wasn't a big deal, but now he's starting to worry. It's really unlike her to miss his calls and to make matters worse, Bhedlindaba instilled guilt in

him.

Now it weighs heavy on his shoulders like the cross of Calvary.

Nevertheless, he thinks it's crazy that Bhedlindaba dared him to choose between his wife and half-brother.

Of course he is worried sick about Sikolethu, but that doesn't mean he's put Shiyiwe on a shelf. She became his number one priority the day he set his eyes on her, he'd die without her, that's why he's here, in the car, speeding to the north of Johannesburg.

He tries Thambo's phone, it doesn't ring. He's suddenly caught in a ring of worry.

His phone rings, it's Ndaba. They took different cars because it was necessary to split.

"Hello." He says.

"Shiyiwe has been kidnapped." Ndaba wastes no time, he sounds like he's running out of breath.

A frown crosses Mthombo's face because there is no way.

“Are you sure?” His mind is trying to process things.

“Mikhulu called, there was a shooting at Sandton mall. Thambo caught a bullet. He was rushed to the hospital.”

“What about my wife, Bhedlindaba? Where is she?”
His voice peeks, thanks to the anxiety attacking him.

“I don’t know ntawana, I’m almost at the mall. Where are you?” Ndaba asks.

“Give me a few minutes, I’m almost there as well.”

“No, make a U-turn. I’m not staying, this place is flooded with the police. I managed to pay off the head of security, we’re going through the mall’s cameras. Something should come up.” Ndaba says.

“Someone has my wife Bhedlindaba, they have my wife.” It’s hard to believe that Shiysiwe has been taken.

“Relax ntawana, she’s a strong woman. We’ll find them.” Ndaba says.

“Them?”

“Athule was with her.”

Of course, Athule had accompanied her to meet this Ntebo chick.

“She said she was meeting up with Ntebo, the girl might know something.” Mthombo tells him with urgency laced in the tone of his voice.

“Do you have her number?”

“I don’t, finding her won’t be easy. I’ll go see Thambo, he might be awake.” Mthombo says.

There is something hovering in his mind, the Nigerians that threatened Bhedlindaba earlier today.

“Who has my wife?” He asks between clenched teeth.

The silence on the other side of the line gives him an answer but not clear enough to confirm his assumptions.

“Bhedlindaba?”

“I’ll find her ntwana, please trust me on this.”

Confirmation!

“You better pray we find her alive, we don’t even know who we’re dealing with. If anything happens to

Shiyiwe..."

"I'll kill them before they touch her." Bhedlindaba says and cuts the call.

Mthombo heaves a sigh. He has protected Shiyiwe from day one, and he will continue to do so even when the odds are against him.

An incoming call flashes on his phone, it's an unknown number. He answers without hesitation, but keeps quiet.

There's a laugh he is not familiar with, it's irritating as fuck.

"Who's this?" Mthombo grunts.

"Mthombo Meyiwa, my brother's down fall." The voice says and that invites a frown to Mthombo's face.

"Who are you?" Mthombo asks again.

"Your replacement."

"Are you going to waste my time, or tell me who you

are, and what the fuck you want?" He's growing more irritated.

He has a wife to find and this fool is playing games with him.

"An exchange."

Mthombo is confused.

"That beautiful woman you married is in my custody. She's become an asset. Killing your brother is nothing compared to what I have in store for you two brothers."

"What do you want?" –Mthombo.

He's figured out that this person clearly wants something from him, cussing and yelling over the phone and demanding his wife back will be a waste of time.

"I want you and your brother to suffer, I would kill the girls but that won't give me the revenge I want. I've done my research lover boy. Your wife means the world to you, doesn't she?"

He's not going to answer that.

“Quit stalling and get to the point.” He parks on the side of the road.

It’s annoying really, although he thinks he knows what this fool wants. He’s never been one for war, rather peace although he has killed before. However, he’s planned a life filled with peace for himself and Shiyiwe. Sikolethu is also included in this equation.

If this is what destiny has designed for him, then he will fight until he gets the peace he’s always wanted.

“Your brother killed my brother, I could kill you too so we’re even. But that won’t give me clarity, instead I’m going to take these girls you both love and you Mthombo Meyiwa are going to hand your wife to me.”

“You’re crazy if you think I’m going to do that.”
Mthombo spits.

Perhaps he nailed it when he told Bhedlindaba that they don’t know who they are dealing with. This man sounds so sure of himself.

“Then call me crazy because you will divorce her, or I will courier your wife to you in pieces. Try me

Mthombo Meyiwa, fucking try me.”

That sounds like a determined man.

Mthombo sighs heavily, roughly rubs his face and pulls the sleeves of his jersey up. Destiny is definitely having a good time.

“I have money, name your price. Just let my wife go.”

“I don’t want your money, I want to see you suffer. Either we do this the easy way, or take the rocky path. Divorce your wife or bury her in pieces. Pick a struggle Meyiwa.” The call dies, and leaves Mthombo panicking.

“Hello? Hello?”

He grunts and cusses when he realises that the fool dropped the call.

He wants to throw the phone out the window, out of frustration. Then again, he needs to call Bhedlindaba and give him the bad news.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

The hope of being found died when I opened my eyes and heard Athule asking if I was okay. We were in the car, my head on her lap and a burning pain on my thigh.

They brought us to this shabby looking house, I'm not sure where it is. I doubt we're still in Johannesburg. I was in and out of consciousness during the drive.

I haven't received any medical care. The bullet pierced through the flesh on my thigh. I was dragged in here like a corpse.

There is so much blood that the stench has made a home in this room. I can't stand the smell, it reminds me of death.

"We need to pour alcohol on it to prevent an infection." Athule says, tying a pillowcase around the wound. I'm glad she was not harmed in anyway, there are no injuries on her and that lessens my worries.

“Not so tight, it hurts.” I push her hand back, she frowns and blows on the wound.

“You’re going to be okay,” she says.

Yeah! I have heard a lot of those before, I am yet to be okay, like people have been telling me. She grabs a pillow from the double bed I’m lying on, places it on the floor and sits.

This room is someone’s bedroom, a male. Everything that is found in a bedroom is here.

“How did I get here?” Athule sighs, resting her chin on the palm of her hand.

I’m not sure what she means, but I have been “here” a couple of times than I can count and I have come out alive each time. However, luck can be a bad bitch. It’s left me all my life, and found me 2 percent of the time. I don’t know if we are going to survive this storm.

“I’m a bad person Athule, I have killed people.” Might as well confess, I’m going to hell anyway. Her eyes widen.

I meant to blurt that out.

“I’m not entirely sure about Ntebo’s baby, I can’t confirm that it was my fault.”

“Shiyiwe...”

“MaMbuyazi told me about a forgiving God, a God who’s waiting for us on the other side. If that really exists, then I want to be right with him. I want to meet my mother when I die.”

“Shiyiwe you’re not going to die.” She’s crying, I reach out to wipe her tears.

“Mthandeni was pure and innocent, but our uncle took advantage of her, he and his son took advantage of my absence and raped my sister... our sister.”

Her mouth drops, probably from shock.

“I snapped I guess and killed them. I also killed uncle Velakithi, he killed my parents and I had to punish him as well.” I grab her trembling hands. I’m waiting to see disgust in her eyes, fear maybe... but none of those exist. She pities me.

“My life was simple before my parents died, but all of that changed. I had to fight for peace, to stay alive and keep a roof above our heads. Had I known all of that would come with the price of blood. I would’ve taken Mthandeni, and ran.”

I should’ve done that the day Samson and his family occupied my father’s house.

“But you didn’t know, life doesn’t come with instructions. We all make mistakes Shiyiwe.”

I shake my head, “I intended to kill them, it wasn’t a mistake. I’m a murderer, my family didn’t want to die but I didn’t care. I know now how they felt, still given a chance to rectify the past, I would still buy that poison and put it in their food.”

“Stop.” She covers my mouth with her hand.

“I have heard enough. You’re not a bad person Shiyiwe, you were provoked.”

I am taken aback by her view on what I have shared.

I sigh, maybe in relief I don’t know. However it feels good that she’s not judging me.

“I have to get to the hospital, I don’t want anything bad to happen to this baby.”

I rub my belly and my heart twists.

“What if you lost the baby?” Athule.

“I don’t know, what I know is that now more than ever, I want to be pregnant. I want to be a mother and give my child everything I never had. Loving parents and a good childhood.”

Athule opens her mouth to speak but the sound of the doorknob twisting stops her. She shifts closer to me as we turn our eyes to the door, it opens and in walks a tall man. Athule lets out a trembling breath.

“Ladies.” He says politely.

Something about him reminds me of Emeka, the resemblance is too strong to ignore. He’s looking at me, I want to look away but my stubbornness won’t let me.

“Our wife.” He grins.

“Who are you?” I ask.

“Don’t tell me you don’t know your brother in-law.”
He plunges his hands into the pockets of his pants.

“You are not my brother in-law.”

He laughs out loud. I must have made a joke.

“As far as I know, you were married to Emeka. He was your spiritual husband.”

Yeah, yeah! Story of my life.

“I was never his anything,” I spit.

Spiritual husband my foot! Confirmed or not, I will never verbally accept that Emeka married himself to me. I hope he is burning in hell.

Athule nudges me and says nothing, I don’t know what she wants or what is going through her mind.

“It’s okay if you’re in denial, we both know the truth.”
He says.

Write a Nollywood movie already... Good Lord. I have never met anyone who is proud about their sibling practising witchcraft.

His eyes turn to Athule. Heaven bless my twin, I can

smell the fear flowing around her.

"You are Ndaba's love interest?"

He speaks as if he knows Ndaba.

He must notice the question on our faces because he laughs again.

"He is the same reason why you two are here." He says.

I don't want to believe him, but I know Ndaba and how he never avoids trouble.

"That bastard killed my brother because of you Shiyiwe." Urgh! Why is he saying my name like that?

And how did I not know that Ndaba is behind Emeka's death?

"I don't believe you, you're trying to instigate us against him." Athule.

My sister has not seen the light yet, I hope she never comes to know the type of person Ndaba is. She might be okay with me being a murderer, not the man she's sleeping with.

“Why would I do that when I have you both in my custody?”

He's got a point.

“Initially, I wanted you.” He points at Athule. “Had I known you come with a bonus, I would have paid my men extra.”

This fool.

“You are not going to get away with this.” I inform him. He must not know this Ndaba he speaks of because if anything, Ndaba is the one who is going to kill him.

“I already have— wifey.” He winks.

Gag me!

“It wouldn't be such a bad idea to finish what my brother started, don't you think?”

He'd wish he was never born if I start thinking.

“Your brother was a weak man, he didn't have the balls to hold on to a woman like me. That's why he went about it the spiritual way. It's foolish of you to think you'd do that. But if you want to fit into your

brother's size three shoes, be my guest. Just know that you will die the same way he did, like a dog."

I hate the way he laughs, it's getting to me and tickling the bile in my stomach.

"Shiyiwe, don't provoke him."

I'm not going to listen to Athule. Why should I show fear just because we're held captive? If he wants to do his worst, then he must.

"I like you Shiyiwe, you'd make a great wife."

"Tell that to my husband." Asshole!

He doesn't do away with the smile on his face, I don't like how he's looking at me.

"I'll get someone to tend to that wound, I don't want my future wife to die. And don't worry, I'm not my brother. I don't believe in witchcraft, we're going to do this the normal way. You'll be wife, and have my babies."

The laugh is back, he carries it with him to the door and walks out without looking back.

“What have you done?” Athule snaps.

Why is she looking at me like that?

“What do you mean?”

“You provoked him Shiyiwe, and now he’s going to force you to marry him.”

“What was I supposed to do? Cry and beg him to let us go?”

“Yes, he probably would have, seeing how he’s found a liking in you.”

What is this girl saying to me?

“You don’t think Shiyiwe, you say whatever nonsense comes into your mind. You wasted time showing off your ego, instead of pleading for him to let us go.”

I didn’t hear her say anything to the man.

“Don’t talk to me like that Athule, I am older than you.”

“We’re the same age, I can speak to you any way I want.”

“Please, you were twenty three until yesterday. Don’t

come and flaunt your new age in my face, I will slap you so hard you will cry for the mother you never met." This girl is trying me.

She stands, nose flaring and eyes glaring.

"You're so inconsiderate Shiysiwe, you only think about yourself. I wish I never met you." She's yelling.

When did we get here? I don't understand.

"What the hell is your problem? You're upset because I didn't show that man my weak side? Is everything okay in your head Athule?"

"You see? This is exactly what I mean, you're insensitive and unkind. Why are we even sisters? I should've never told you about my father and MaMbuyazi."

I need to sit up, I can't hear her while lying down. I push my body up till my back leans against the wall. This child will disown me if I call her out on her naivety.

"Why are you yelling at me?" I ask because I need to know what's going on in that bald head of hers.

“I’m not yelling.” She yells, throwing her hands in all directions.

“You’re yelling Athule. You think I’m the reason we are here, don’t you?”

“Are you not?” She folds her arms and bounces her head like a stupid little girl.

“That man said Ndaba killed Emeka and we both know that Ndaba would do anything for you, he killed Emeka for you. And these are the results.”

Oh! Now I get it. It’s jealousy talking, not my sister Athule.

“I didn’t ask Bhedlindaba to kill anyone, it was his choice. It’s his fault we’re here, not mine.”

Two fights in one day! Fate is playing a tricky one on me. I’m in pain, I don’t need this shit.

“You can say whatever you want Shiyiwe, if those men dare touch a strand of my hair, I will never forgive you.” She clicks her tongue, picks up the pillow and finds a corner to sit in.

MaMbuyazi must come fetch her daughter before I

slap her. I don't care how she gets here, through Mphako or arrive herself.

.

.

It's been a long road since the last sponsor, I didn't think it'd take us a week. Thank you to those who bought the book.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Eighty-six

SHIYIWE-

.

.

Athule is not talking to me. I haven't tried to strike a conversation since she distanced herself. I'm in pain and have lost so much blood, my body is weak. That arrogant man hasn't come back with the help he boasted about. It's been hours, I'm not sure. It feels like I have been waiting a lifetime.

"Shiyiwe!"

I wonder what she wants now, I want to sleep. My eyes feel too heavy, I can't flick my lashes.

"What?" My eyes are closed, she'll probably think I'm insensitive. Let me explain.

"I'm tired Athule, leave me alone." Why does my throat feel dry?

"Shiyiwe, open your eyes."

Didn't this girl hear me?

I'm not going to do that. She must be losing her mind if she thinks I will listen to her demands.

"Shiyiwe please, keep your eyes open. Help is coming."

Mother Theresa, she is crying.

"Help, someone help us."

Great now she is screaming.

I force my eyes to open, but it's so hard. All I want to do is sleep, I know without a doubt I will be fine when I wake up. If only Athule would stop banging the door. It's so cold in here, I don't remember

seeing a fan.

"Please... Please, my sister is dying." She's banging something, the door perhaps. Her desperate sobs are starting to get to me.

Wait a minute! Which sister is dying?

I need to open my eyes for this. Why can't I open my eyes? My body feels heavy, yet light. I can't move a muscle.

"You son of a bitch, open this door now. I know you are out there." And just as fast as her deflating, loud voice reaches my ears, her arms are on me, violently shaking me.

Does she know I'm in pain?

"You better not die on me, Shiysiwe. What will I tell our father? He can't lose you too. What about Mthandeni? What will she say when she wakes up and you're not around?"-Athule.

I feel her arms wrapping around me. She's holding me in a tight embrace, and sobbing.

I don't understand what's going on. I can't be dying,

I'm still here Athule. I'm not dying.

.

.

NTEBO-

The address she found on Facebook has brought her here, in Riverlea. There was a number as well, but it rings unanswered when she tries to call it. Surely Athule won't mind when she arrives unannounced, they are cousins at the end of the day.

The streets in a way remind her of Alexander, neighbours chatting over gates and children scattered everywhere, their loud voices dominating over the sound of the airplane in the sky.

She opens the gate and walks in, her feet are hesitant, her heart is hammering in her chest.

A grey haired man walks out of the house, on his face is a frown as he looks at her with narrowed, questioning eyes.

Ntebo recognises him from the Facebook pictures on Athule's album. His facial features don't support the grey hair on his face, he can't be less than sixty years. Unless he's the type that ages like fine wine, the black don't crack kind.

He puts his hands on his back, zooming his small eyes on her.

"Who are you?"

His voice is a little shaky, the grandpa years are calling him, alright.

"Greetings Ntate, my name is Nteboheleng Mosheo. I'm looking for Penelope Mosheo."

She must have watched Khumulekhaya before coming here.

The old man's brows snap inquisitively.

"Who are you to Penny?"

What a strange question, Ntebo seems to think. She shortens the distance between them.

"Penelope Mosheo is my aunt, I recently found out about it from Athule. Is she home?"

“No, she’s not home.” He answers.

The old man suddenly looks worn out and deprived of life, it lasts a second before he braves it up.

“Oh!”

“When last did you see Athule?” He asks.

Ntebo is not here for this, she’s looking for her aunt. Her mother’s corpse is lying in a funeral home and needs to be buried soon.

“This morning, with her twin.”

His eyes snap open, as wide as saucers. Tears well behind them and run down his face.

Well this is awkward.

“You met my Shiyiwe?”

Ntebo looks around, before turning back to him. She doesn’t know what to do with this old man crying before her.

“Yes, Shiyiwe and I have been friends for years. I didn’t know she’s a twin, I recently found out about it.”

Ntebo is about to explain further, but there goes the man dropping to his knees and tearing up. Most men would cover their faces, this one is looking up at her.

“Where is my Shiysiwe?” He sobs.

Now, how does she roll her eyes without coming across as disrespectful?

“I think she’s home with her husband Mthombo Meyiwa.” She could spit, bath with pink water and drink a whole bucket of sugarless Joko tea to vomit out the bitter taste this has left in her mouth. How dare Shiysiwe? The audacity to dream big and get what she wants.

Hau! Wasn’t this man crying a second ago?

His face straightens, he stands to his feet and frowns down at the child.

“Meyiwa? Is he related to Bhedlindaba Meyiwa?” This man has made this whole trip about him and “his” Shiysiwe. What’s happening to the world?

“Yes.” She sighs.

“Take me to them, those men have my daughters.”

He pats his pockets, probably searching for his car keys.

"Uh, Ntate Mphako, I'm here for my mother's sister. My mother passed away, it's been two weeks Ntate. I haven't buried her yet. I have no one, my father is missing. I came here thinking aunty Penny will assist with the burial."

Ntate Mphako looks bewildered. She has fed the poor old man too much in a day.

"I'm sorry about your mother my child." He doesn't look or sound sorry.

"Your aunt Penny is not around, she will be back later. In the meantime take me to my daughters, we will sort your matter out when we get back." He better, or she will raise hell.

"I don't know where Shiyiwe stays with her husband." Obviously in a mansion... that fool is living a soft life. Nonsense!

"I know where the other one lives, let's go." He runs into the house and comes back with a boy tailing

behind him.

"This is your cousin Sizwile, let's go." Mphako rushes to the car, leaving the two to greet each other.

They stare with no words shared. It's really an awkward moment.

"Let's go, hau." Mphako yells from inside the car.

This day is not turning out the way she expected, everything is always about Shiyiwe.

.

.

MTHOMBO-

Thambo is critical, the doctor who delivered the news didn't seem hopeful. He wasn't allowed to see him until he lied and said they are brothers. One bullet missed his heart, the other went through his right shoulder.

There was no need for Mthombo to stay at the

hospital, and so he left.

Mthombo's car drives into Bhedlindaba's premises. The day is about to take a bow and the sun counting down hours before it hands the shift over to the moon.

He notices a yellow Bentley driving in behind him and a long sigh kisses his lips.

This woman has the nerve to show her face after getting them arrested.

He steps out of the car and waits for her. She always looks like she walked out of a meeting with her expensive, body-hugging formal dresses and 4 inch heels.

"I thought you wanted the boy, why did you send him back?" No greeting or anything. Nice!

"What are you talking about?" Mthomb questions his mother. He'll address her rudeness another time.

"That bastard child Sikolethu is in my house as we speak."

Haibo! Thina had told him the child collapsed and

was hospitalised.

“Some dagga boy brought him over, he said he was instructed by Bhedlindaba.”

That makes sense, Bhedlindaba despises the child.

Mthombo releases a sigh, he's not in the mood for this. His wife is missing for Pete's sake.

“Is he safe?” He asks.

“He's in my house, what do you think?”

What has happened to dear MaDlamini? This is her golden child, she once treated him like an egg.

“Then go back home and look after him, it will take nothing from you to take care of your husband's son.” There is no use in keeping the boy with him, it all means nothing without Shiyiwe.

He turns to walk away, but nope, he's not about to walk away from her. She's the queen bee of the Meyiwa dynasty. Her word should stand and commands heard.

“Mthombowomnotho Meyiwa, I am still talking to you. Get inside that car and fetch that dirty boy. I

don't want him in my house, do you know how expensive sanitisers are? I will have to throw away everything he has touched, again and sanitise my house—again." Her nose crumples in disgust.

He's not surprised really, this woman thinks she came out of Queen Elizabeth's royal vagina.

"MaDlamini, you don't have the right to tell me what to do." Ehh! That's news mos.

MaDlamini gasps.

When did the devil escape hell and possess her innocent child? This one was the only good boy left. Bongukwanda is not even a factor, she's never really bonded with him. Bhedlindaba is the prodigal son. Heaven throw Zinqumo a party for making it home before twenty-five. He's better off where he is. May Mabahlezi and Culoletu get married and never come back home.

"I am your mother, I have every right."

"Don't make me laugh woman." Yet his face is as hard as a rock. "I have better things to worry about, get out my face."

God, see the world you created.

“Mthombo?”

“I am done with you MaDlamini and your husband.”

“Mthombo I am your mother...” Yeah he got that the first time.

“No mother would do what you have done to us, you don’t have children we-mama. You and Mr. Meyiwa failed as parents, you failed all of us. Zinqumo died because of you, Bongukwanda doesn’t know you as a mother. You denied him your love from the day he was born and you drove Bhedlindaba to the streets with your negligence.”

“That is not true, I have done nothing but protect you boys. The only thing I asked was that you respect your father.”

“Respect goes both ways.” He barks, pointing an accusatory finger at her.

MaDlamini calls upon her strongest weapon. Tears!

“Why are you doing this to me son? That Shiyiwe girl...”

“My wife... doesn’t control what I say. I always thought Bhedlindaba was stupid for being rebellious, but he had a valid reason. You destroyed your own children MaDlamini. Congratulations! We don’t need you anymore, go back to your husband.”

This is embarrassing, she’s making a scene with her loud sobs. Nothing in Mthombo is urging him to comfort her, not even the bond they shared when he was in her womb and sucked milk from her breasts until he was four years old. He turns on his heel, and saunters toward the house.

“Son please.” Her arms are around him in a split second. “I’m sorry, you can’t disown me Mthombo. They can all go, all of them, I don’t care. But not you, you’re my first born. You made me a mother, I can’t lose you.”

There is a circus outside Bhedlindaba’s house and he’s here to watch, Bongukwanda is standing beside him. They look astounded. It has to do with what she said not the tight hug she’s giving Mthombo.

“This looks cosy.” Bhedlindaba says, ramming his hands into the pockets of his pants.

MaDlamini ignores him and hides her face on Mthombo’s back, she tightens the hold around him, crushing his ribs.

“Let go of me,” these words sting like a bee.

“No, I’m not losing my son.” MaDlamini.

Bongukwanda exhales, and shakes his head.

“What is this drama now?” He’s talking to himself, no one answers him.

Mthombo forces his mother’s arms apart and creates a distance between them. That seems to bring more tears to her eyes.

“There is nothing for you here, leave.” He’s so cold and insensitive, she’s finding it hard to grasp why he is this way.

“Fine!” She screams. “You need a sangoma, don’t worry son. I know a good one who will deal with that witch Shiyiwe.”

“Not again.” Ndaba laughs.

“She bewitched you Mthombo, you can’t see it because you are under her spell.” She’s still screaming, her children’s eardrums are in danger.

“Yey Ma’Oledi, this is not a Nigerian movie. No one bewitched anyone.” Ndaba tells her.

She doesn’t bother to look at him, her teary eyes are on the standoffish Mthombo.

“You’re going to be okay baby, I promise.” She cups his face and kisses both his cheeks. “Mommy will make it better, I promise.”

One thing about Bhedlindaba, he can laugh during serious moments. He’s leaning against Bongukwanda, dead with laughter.

“That’s enough, if you don’t leave from here, I will call the police and have you arrested for trespassing.” Mthombo, not that it’s his house or anything but... well.

MaDlamini rushes to the car, they think she is leaving until she comes back with a roll of two ply...

baby soft.

"Mthombo, Shiyiwe doesn't love you." She rolls enough toilet paper, wipes her tears and blows her nose. Her tears are on a mission. These boys will burn in hell for making their mother cry.

"Okay, thank you. You can leave now." Mthombo sneers.

"I'm serious son, your mother will never lie to you. I heard that she's getting married to some Nigerian guy. I have his numbers, you can call him and..." she covers her mouth, eyes wide and bouncing from one son to the other.

Mthombo's face transforms into anger, his jaw ticks and nose flare.

"What did you say?" He closes the distance between them. MaDlamini gulps and steps back.

"Where is my wife?" He extends his hand to grab her. She lifts her hands screaming, the two ply flies and lands on Mthombo's car. Her eyes roll to the back of her head before she falls to the ground like a puppet

doll.

“Haike!” That’s Bongukwanda, clapping once.

“Well, that was not expected.” Bhedlindaba says, lifting her hand to check if she has really fainted. Her arm is weak, it falls back down when he lets it go.

Bhedlindaba stands with his hands on his hips, “Should I call PIKITUP to come take out the trash?” He’s looking at Mthombo.

“Bring her inside, she knows where the girls are.” Mthombo orders and walks into the house.

“I’m not touching her, you do it.” Bhedlindaba tells Bongukwanda.

“She’s your mother, you carry her in.”

“She was your mother first.” Bhedlindaba disputes.

“She breastfed you and I drank from a bottle.” Bongukwanda.

They are not going anywhere with this.

“For one month, so my bones are not that strong.” Bhedlindaba.

"My back hurts ntwana, carry your mother."

"Okay, to be fair. The one who gets to the door last, will have to carry her." Bhedlindaba suggests.

They share a brief look and take off running to the door.

Two big bodies are forcing their way through a small door opening, it's a mini wrestle as they fight to be first to enter the house. Hulk Hogan would love this.

They both come crushing down, yelling in pain. It's too loud that Mthombo rushes to inspect. He sighs when he sees his brothers lying on the floor, wincing and rubbing their hip bones. No one wants to get up because no one wants to carry MaDlamini.

Mthombo shakes his head, he goes to the kitchen, pours water into a jug.

He jumps over his brothers to get outside and empties the jug on MaDlamini. She gasps and gulps and wipes her face with her hand.

His wife is sleeping home tonight, and this woman will take them to her. Even if she faints all the way to

the Nigerians.

.

.

A big shout out to our breadwinner, Rethabile Mofokeng.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Eighty-seven

ATHULE-

.

.

I think she's dead, she is not responding to my desperate cries. I have screamed and called out for help yet not a soul has come. There is nothing more I can do for her, we're locked up in here with no way out.

"I'm sorry Shiysiwe, I take back everything I said. You're my sister and I don't regret it one bit. Please don't die on me." How many times have I said this? It won't bring her back.

Someone is coming, I hear voices behind the door.

That man is back, with him is a short, chubby man in a white coat. He must be the doctor he mentioned earlier.

“What happened?” He seems shocked by Shiyiwe’s situation.

“You killed her.” I tell him and expect to see remorse on his face. Nothing.

“Damn, I guess I’ll be marrying you instead. Do you think we can burn this one doc?” He says, pointing at Shiyiwe.

“You bastard.” I scream and jump on him, he welcomes me with a hard slap that sends me flying across the floor. I see stars, and get an instant headache.

“Don’t try that shit with me, little girl.” He says.

I want to kill him, I hope he dies from a mysterious death and burns in hell forever.

“There’s a pulse.” The doctor guy says. I try to turn my eyes to him, and see more stars. This fool

rearranged my face.

"Wake her up then, my revenge is not complete." Our kidnapper orders. His attitude is different from the one he had before. He's actually a dictator.

"I can't 'wake' her up. She needs the hospital." I hear annoyance in the doctor's voice.

"No one is leaving this place, you better do your job and fix this bitch, right here." The man's accent deepens when he shouts.

"I'm not God, I'm a doctor. Get this girl to the hospital now, unless you want a dead body in your hands."

I manage to stand, there is a blood stain where my face had landed. I search for a tooth, my jaw is throbbing painfully. This fool broke something in my mouth.

"She's my sister, please save her and her baby." I say.

The man chuckles, he looks at me and I see something sinister in his eyes.

"Pregnant you say?" He says.

I didn't mean to let that slip.

“Doc, we’re taking her to your surgery. We have a baby to save, let’s get moving.” He says, scooping Shiyiwe up into his arms.

Oh God, what have I done?

.

.

MTHOMBO-

He’s known this woman for 38 years and this is the first he is experiencing her full blown stubbornness. She’s sitting on the couch, arms folded and mouth tightly shut.

They have dished out threats to get her to speak, but Masabata Dlamini has lost her voice.

“This is a waste of time, I say we pipe her.” The suggestion comes from Bhedlindaba.

The only person who looks shocked in this room is MaDlamini, the others are pondering upon it.

“Good idea, bring a towel and a bucket of water.”

Mthombo says.

Bongukwanda is happy to do it, he marches to the kitchen and comes back with the said equipment.

Their mother jumps to her feet. "She's in Berea, I'll take you to her."

"That's what I'm talking about, let's get this party started." Bhedlindaba says, pulling a gun out from his waist band.

"I'll stay behind just in case you need back up."

Bongukwanda sits his businessman ass down.

They look at him, it's not shocking really. He doesn't do violence unlike these two pubic hairs of Satan.

"What?" Bongukwanda shrugs. "I have a fiancé okay, she'll kill me if I get myself killed." He is stupid.

"I think Mthombo should stay too, I'll take my men with. We can handle this." Bhedlindaba.

Insanity comes in different forms.

"Shiyiwe needs me, I'm not staying."

I mean it's crazy that Bhedlindaba would suggest

such a thing.

"This is my fight, I killed Emeka for Shiyiwe. The Nigerians want me, not you." Bhedlindaba says.

"It was your choice to kill Emeka, Nonyanda didn't ask you to." Mthombo argues.

"Nonyanda was bound by that freak, and I was helping you both. You were unavailable ntwana, I had to do something to keep her safe." -Bhedlindaba.

"And I appreciate that, really I do. But I'm here now, I'd appreciate it if you stepped back and let me take care of my wife."

Mthombo emphasizes on the wife part.

"I will step back once I know Shiyiwe is safe. Before that, I will do whatever I want."

There is suddenly an elephant in the room that needs to be addressed.

"Are you two serious?" Bongukwanda needs a deeper voice than this, they keep ignoring him.

"What is this attachment you have with my wife? I ignored it at first, but now you're rubbing it to my

face.” Mthombo asks, raising his brows.

“There is no attachment, I’m worried about her too.”

“That’s not what it looks like, are you in love with my wife, Bhedlindaba?”

Alright!

They are caught up in this argument that they can’t see the smile on MaDlamini’s face. She’s on her phone, typing something.

“I care about her.” That’s an honest answer. “If caring is love, then yes I love her.”

Bhedlindaba really didn’t have to take it that far.

Mthombo clenches his fists, and hovers over his little brother. There’s a flash, mother dearest just took a picture. They barely notice, it’s heated in here.

Bongukwanda sighs in exhaustion and jumps to stand in between them.

“What Bhedlindaba is trying to say is that he loves her as a sister.” Bongukwanda corrects, lightly pushing Mthombo back.

“Right ntwana?” He continues.

Bhedlindaba doesn’t answer, his focus is on Mthombo.

Being the first middle child is hard, Bongukwanda needs a holiday. These two have overworked him to exhaustion.

“Are you two insane? Two women were kidnapped, and it’s all because of you. Yet you’re fighting like dogs? I don’t know what they ever saw in you.”

Maybe they will finally hear him since he’s shouting.

“I don’t know what Shiyiwe ever saw in Mthombo, she’s faced nothing but bad luck ever since she met him.” The fire in Bhedlindaba has been lit, he’s fuming.

“That’s rich coming from the man who instructed her to kill her family. You’re so obsessed with guns and shedding blood that you blindly targeted an innocent woman. Shiyiwe was pure and you ruined her.”

Mthombo fires shots.

“They ruined her life, what else was she supposed to do?”

“Not kill, she’s only a child. Barely 30 and you have turned her into a murderer.”

“Actually, she became a murderer at a younger age.” MaDlamini says.

“Shut up mother.” Bongukwanda bites her head off, she drags his body with her eyes and looks away.

Bhedlindaba is not there, he has things he needs to tell his brother. He pushes Bongukwanda out of his way to get a better view of Mthombo.

“I saved Shiyiwe’s life, something you failed to do. All you do is obsess over that boy who is not even yours. You act so tough but you’re struggling to come to terms with the fact that Zinzi cheated on you with your father. When are you going to get that through your big head?”

“Take that back.” Mthombo roars.

“I’m not taking shit back.” It’s a back and forth yelling contest.

“You were cheated on, so what? The world owes you nothing dammit, Shiyiwe owes you nothing. It’s time for you to let go of that bitch and let her soul burn in hell without you constantly reminiscing about her. Shiyiwe will never take over Zinzi because she is more of a woman than Zinzi ever was.”

Bongukwanda huffs and puffs, it’s exhausting watching these two brothers go at it.

“Will you two stop it? You’re wasting time you idiots, Shiyiwe and Athule are in danger.” Bongukwanda is trying his best.

“Tell that to your big brother, I don’t know why she married you, you’re so dumb you don’t even see it.”
–Bhedlindaba

Mthombo pulls out a gun and aims at Ndaba, Bongukwanda moves a bit far. It could get ugly at this point.

There’s a loud gasp in the background, Bongukwanda is dumbfounded because Bhedlindaba also has a gun aimed at Mthombo.

“You’re aiming a gun at me Bhedlindaba?”

-Mthombo.

"I would renounce you for Shiyiwe." That's something Ndaba would've never said. Things are turning out bad.

"Then pull the trigger." Mthombo dares him, putting his gun away.

This is a dare he shouldn't try, especially because this one with the gun grew up on the streets.

"What are you waiting for? Shoot me boy, shoot me now." Mthombo is not going to shut it anytime soon.

Bhedlindaba shakes his head, "You sound like your father right now. It's pathetic."

"I am nothing like that good for nothing man." - Mthombo.

"Guys please, stop acting like fools." Bongukwanda gathers the courage to stand in between them again.

"Are you going to destroy your relationship because of a woman?"

Silence!

“This is witchcraft, she bewitched them. Look Kwanda my boy, they are fighting each other.” MaDlamini is still here.

“Put that gun away Bhedli...” The doorbell rings, cutting Bongukwanda off.

“I’ll get it,” MaDlamini says, a smile dancing on her face. Mthombo pulls her back and pushes her on the couch.

“Sit your ass down.” He says and goes to attend to the door.

There is an old man and young woman looking up at him.

“Where are my daughters?” The old man says, peeping over Mthombo’s shoulder.

“Mthombo hi, it’s nice to finally meet you.” The young lady throws herself in his arms.

He’s startled by the hug, that he looks back into the house, eyes searching for Bhedlindaba. He’s the famous brother in the family, perhaps this girl he’s

pushing off him is a fan of the great soccer coach.

“My name is Ntebo, Shiyiwe’s best friend. I have heard a lot about you.” She reaches to grab his hand, but he shoves it into his pocket.

The old man sees Bhedlindaba approaching and pushes his way in, he grabs him by his shirt and pins him on the wall.

“Mr. Mphako. I can explain.” Bhedlindaba says, he’s strong enough to throw the old man on the floor but takes the manhandling he’s been subjected to.

“Where is my daughter?”

“She went out.” He lies.

“You’re lying, you’re hiding her in this house.”
Mphako.

He lets go of Bhedlindaba and scatters around the house calling Athule’s name.

“Who is she?” Mthombo asks, his wife has never shown him a picture of her father.

“The twins’ father.” Bhedlindaba replies with a frown on his face. He’s wondering why, all of a sudden

Mthombo is scratching himself.

“What’s wrong?” He asks.

“I think I walked through a spider’s web.” Mthombo roughly rubs his face using the sleeve of his shirt.

“Not in my house, go wash your face. I’m out of here.” Bhedlindaba grabs MaDlamini and walks out. Mthombo follows behind, leaving Bongukwanda to deal with the old man.

“Where did that boy go?” Mphako asks as he walks back from the lounge.

That’s a simple question, why is he not answering him?

The young man scratches his head, he’s nervous.

“Uh! Would you like some tea and biscuits?”

It’s what old people drink, right?

Wrong, he gets a frown in return.

Where is that girl this old man came with?

Bongukwanda looks around, she’s not here. Great, she’s wondered off into the house.

.

.

I'm sorry it's so short, I ran out of time. Please don't forget to like, comment and share.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Eighty-eight

BHEDLINDABA-

.

.

It's not like him to go off at his brother, he's always shown nothing but respect for him. Something happened, a ticking bomb probably exploded. He can't say, one minute he was glad they were going to find the girls and the next he was all up in Mthombo's face telling him things that should stay hidden.

"If caring is love, then yes I love her."

His words repeat in his head like a broken record.

What the hell was he thinking?

He is the one behind the wheel, Mthombo is at the back and MaDlamini on the passenger seat. They are accompanied by silence, the radio should be on to kill the quietness but nope.

“You two should stop this nonsense, and kiss and make up.” It’s a bit too late for MaDlamini to play mother of the year.

Bhedlindaba turns the radio on, a song sashays through the speakers. He is not a fan of amapiano, but it will do over his mother’s annoying voice.

MaDlamini clicks her tongue. For an old married woman, she has a strange relationship with that phone. She’s been on it for way too long.

Mthombo grabs it from the back and starts going through her messages.

“Hey, give that back.” She snaps, kneeling on the seat and tries to fight for her phone. Mthombo pushes her hands away and continues to read.

“That’s my privacy Mthombo, give it back.” Really now! There is no reason for her to scream like a teenager who is hiding porn from her parents.

The car hurtles to the side and throws her against the window. Bhedlindaba did it on purpose.

“Are you insane? You’re trying to kill me.” She yelps.

“Arrive alive Ma’Oledi, shut up and buckle up.” Ndaba.

A glare is what he gets for his big mouth and devilish behaviour.

“Who is Udoka?” Mthombo enquires curiously.

His mother crosses her arms and stares ahead, she’s choosing peace.

“You told those people we’re on to them?” Mthombo says, alarmed by the findings.

Bhedlindaba chuckles, “What?”

“Here, she’s been chatting to some guy named Udoka and telling him to run.” –Mthombo.

This is sick, MaDlamini has stooped to the lowest of the lowest.

“I did it for you boys, you’re better off without those girls.” She’s crying, it’s exhausting. Will she ever stop?

“Have they left the building?” Ndaba asks.

Silence! Ehh this woman.

“Answer me, have they left the building?”

“I don’t know, Udoka didn’t say.” Of course Udoka would be smart enough not to tell her.

“Thats it, I’m tired of your games.” Her oldest son grunts, he retrieves his phone from his pocket and dials a number.

“It’s me... get the best network engineer you can find...”

Bhedlindaba steals a look through the rear view mirror. What’s this one up to?

“Clean all Zwangendaba Meyiwa’s accounts, leave nothing behind, not even a cent.”

There is no way Mthombo could pull that off, Zwangendaba is a powerful man in the business world.

However, something about this order is making his mother sweat marbles, she gulps and looks back at him with terror evident in her eyes.

“You wouldn’t dare.”

Daring a man who is desperate to find his wife is not such a good idea. Mthombo narrows his eyes at her, this is a game he can play with his eyes closed. He's got nothing to lose now.

"I want it done before you dine with your wife for supper. Send me all the evidence when you're done."

He ends the call and looks over at his mother.

"You seem to forget how powerful your father is." MaDlamini says, snatching her phone back.

"He was powerful because we let him, behind all the money, expensive suits and authoritative voice is a weak man. I could've destroyed him back then when he bullied me, but I had everything to lose. I have my legs back MaDlamini, your husband can't touch me even if he were standing two feet from me." He says.

MaDlamini frowns, "I didn't give birth to demons. I should have killed you both while in my womb."

"For once, you have said something sensible. Turns out you're smart, and not just Zwangendaba's dick warmer." Bhedlindaba's audacity is on another level.

“You piece of shit, I don’t care who you think you are. I am still your mother.” It’s starting to hurt.

She takes a deep breath and fixes her weave.

“I don’t know where Udoka is taking the girls, he didn’t tell me anything. His cousin, Uzoma is in charge. It’s up to you if you choose to believe me or not, I have done my part.” She says and looks out the window with folded arms.

“What? We’re supposed to feel sorry for you?” Mthombo asks.

“I am not asking for pity, the only thing I need from you children is that you respect me and your father. Parents are considered gods, you should be worshiping the ground we walk on.”

She was doing so well, she couldn’t resist being her usual self. Ndaba cracks into laughter, Mthombo fails to pull a ghost of a smile.

.

.

ATHULE-

The first thing that comes to mind as I watch him walk away with my sister loosely dangling in his arms, is that I don't want to find out what he has planned for us.

My mind has never worked so slow, we're doomed if I don't think of a way out fast.

I'm standing with my back against the solid wall, entertaining regret. How will I live with myself if something happens to Shiyiwe and the baby?

"I'll bring the car around."

The doctor hurries out the door. I've always thought doctors were superheroes but in all honesty, I was lying to myself. They are as money hungry as anyone else out there. Otherwise this one wouldn't be taking orders from the likes of this criminal.

This criminal—I have to do something before he walks away with Shiyiwe.

A man appears right after the doctor's departure, he seems distressed.

“Brother, they are on their way here.” He says in a frustrated voice.

“Dammit! Change of plans. We’re going to Mozambique. Clear this place immediately, I’ll meet you at the location .” The one carrying Shiyiwe says, in his voice is anger.

The messenger scurries out, I don’t know what’s going on and why I’m looked at like I’m the one that killed his brother.

“Start praying baby girl that you survive a tank, I’m shipping you off to Mozambique.” His voice grows sarcastic, eyes narrowed into a glare.

I’m not going there, I’d rather be swallowed by a fish.

We hear the sound of glass breaking, he snaps his head back to the door. Perhaps startled, I don’t know.

I grab the chair from the dressing table and slam it on his back as heavy as it is. He falls down with Shiyiwe still in his arms. He has fallen on top of her, crushing my sister with his body.

He’s slowly recovering from the attack and that

gives me a chance to shut the door. I don't know how many are out there.

"Bitch." He hisses, slowly pulling himself up. I don't give him a chance, I grab the chair and slam it on his head. It's heavy wood, I think it has rendered him unconscious.

There's no time to double check, I have to make sure that he won't be getting up before I get us out of here, which is a crazy idea because I don't know how I'll do it.

He groans, and moves. I see, he's the diehard type. It's either us or him and I refuse with my life.

Panic fuels me, making me continuously smash his head with the chair with enough force to cause major damage. Blood splatters all over my clothes, the smell harasses my nose.

"Get up you bastard." I kick his leg.

Deep down I'm praying that he doesn't get up and I think he won't be getting up... ever.

I push him off Shiyiwe, the bastard is bloody heavy.

"Shiyiwe, talk to me, sisi." Her eyes are twitching.

There's hope. I have to get us out of here, but how when I don't know how many are out there. I think I killed their boss, they won't let us go so easily.

A weapon... there must be a gun hidden somewhere here. I find it on his back. It's small, I don't know how to handle a gun. The last time I held one was when Sbonelo tried to traffic me and the only training I have is from watching action movies.

"Mmhhh!" A moan. It's Shiyiwe.

"Athule!" Her voice is strained.

"I'm here babe, hold on a little more. You're going to be okay, I promise."

I don't believe my own words, the doctor will be here soon. I have to think of something real quick.

There's a bathroom, maybe if I hide his body in the bathroom. I put the gun on the dressing table. One of his shoe comes off as I grab his legs, it's going to take a lifetime to drag him to the bathroom. He's too

heavy. What do men eat that makes them weigh so much?

I switch and grab his arms, still not easy, but I'm able to drag him like a sack. I'm sweating and itchy by the time I get to the bathroom.

The smell of blood permeates through my nose, making my stomach move in a wave of nausea. The little that's in my stomach rushes up and fills my mouth. I bend over the toilet bowl, gagging and heaving until nothing is left in my stomach.

After a quick mouthwash, I grab a wet a towel and head back to the bedroom.

There goes my luck, the doctor is standing in the doorway, widened eyes on Shiyiwe. He looks at the trail of blood leading to the bathroom then at me.

I quickly grab the gun and point at him. Is this thing loaded?

“What did you do?”

Isn't it obvious? I thought doctors were smart. I'm

not liking what I'm slowly finding out about doctors today. I want my childhood back.

"I think your boss is dead, he wanted to take my sister. I couldn't let that happen, she's all I have. We're orphans, our parents died. Please help us get out of here, we didn't do anything wrong." Small lies aren't such a bad thing.

He's a doctor, he ought to feel sorry for us. He's staring.

"I want nothing to do with this." He says, and runs out the door.

Now what? He didn't give me a chance to ask how many are out there and he's left me with the task of closing the door.

I guess I won't be cleaning this blood.

"Athule." Shiyiwe...

"Babe, are you okay?" Her eyes are on me, heavy lidded but she's looking at me.

"Call Mthombo, tell him where we are." She speaks, but the voice is all wrong, like she is speaking while

being choked.

Why didn't I think of that? That man must have a phone. I rush back to the bathroom, and search him. There is one in his left pocket. Thankfully it doesn't require a pin.

I haven't mastered Ndaba's number by head, I was too busy trying to get him to notice me.

"What's his number?" I ask.

She calls it out, slowly.

"It's ringing." I tell her, and expect to see the same excitement I have. She gives me nothing but pain-filled eyes.

"What?" He answers, angrily.

"Mthombo, it's Athule. We've been kidnapped, Shiysiwe was shot. Please come and get us."

"Is she alive? Is my wife alive?" He's panicking.

"Barely..." Shit! I should have given him hope instead.

He's hurling cuss words I would never repeat.

"Where are you? Send me the location."

I'd swear he's angry at me.

"Let me see if there's WhatsApp on this phone. I'll have to save your number as well."

"Do it now Athule."

He doesn't have to yell at me, I didn't do anything wrong. I Drop the call, save his number and log into WhatsApp.

All my focus is on searching for Mthombo's number on the app that it takes me forever to grasp the hand tightening on the back of my neck.

The phone and gun slip off my hands as I lift them to grab the large hand wrapped around my neck.

"Athule!" I hear Shiye through my ringing ears, her voice is weak and frail.

"Let me go." I shout, as if he would listen to me.

Swiftly, he turns me around and lands a sickening punch, targeting my mouth and jaw. It throws me to the floor, bleeding and screaming in pain. I'm caught in an attempt to rearrange my senses when he grabs me by the neck, bringing me up and wildly swings a

knee into my stomach.

The pain travels through my body, in a spilt second I'm lying flat on the floor drooling blood. He's going to kill me, I don't want to die. Shiyiwe can't die either, we just found each other.

The sound of the gun cocking travels through my ears, I raise my hands over my bowed head and scream.

"Please don't kill me, don't kill me... please. I'll do anything."

I can't believe I'm crying, and I've just wet my pants.

The gun goes off, and an ear splitting scream escapes my mouth.

Wait! He missed?

I force my head up to check, he's lying face down on the ground. A bullet went through his back, he's dead. My eyes browse further and I see Shiyiwe seated with a gun still held out. Her hands are trembling, eyes droopy and mouth as white as ash.

"Shiyiwe?" My voice trembles.

Tears well behind her eyes, she drops the gun and falls on her back sobbing loudly.

"Shiyiwe?" I don't know what to say to her.

I have to get to her, as much as I'm in pain, I go on my knees and crawl to her.

"I want to go home." Her loud cries are heart wrenching and contagious, I'm failing to hold my tears back. I lie beside her and hold her tight in my arms.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Eighty-nine

NTEBO-

.

.

It's not fair that God has favourites, this must be why people like Tshegofatso Mosheo turned to the devil for help. A quick and easy way to get things done in life.

God's timing for what?

Suffer while watching people like Shiyiwe marry rich men and living in huge houses with staircases.

Why can't it be her sleeping in this comfortable king size bed she's sitting on? This huge ass bedroom should belong to her and the man of this house should be hers to claim. She's not a saint, nor has she ever devoted herself to the Man upstairs.

He's slow in blessing people that one, that's why she's going to grab, take, steal and bewitch her way to the top. Heaven can miss her. She'll probably bargain with Satan when she gets to hell and be his sex slave. A soft life on earth is what matters at the moment.

Notes with Mandela's face are calling her name.

She stands from the bed, grabs a Dickies sweater she found in the closet and puts it on. It smells like a man who baths in money and uses crispy R200 notes to wipe his ass.

"You look good Nteboheleng." This voice is in her head, assuring her of something she already knows.

She grins, wriggles hers shoulders like a teenager.

“I know.” She giggles and takes a spin.

“You can be the queen of this house, you know.”

That assuring voice is her favourite thing till date. It speaks nothing but the truth.

“I know.” Ntebo says, freezing with her eyes on her mirror image.

“You deserve all of this, ngwanaka.” This must be her guardian angel, fairy godmother, or mother Marry herself. Forget that the voice is the same voice as her mother’s voice.

An angel had probably lent it to her and claimed it back when she passed on.

“I deserve a good life, I want a good life.” She speaks, eyes hard and face stone cold.

“Good, just do as I say.”

What’s that saying? ‘God bless this guardian angel’, or is it ‘Oh Lucifer great one?’

Footstep outside the room interrupt her dreaming moment, she quickly takes the sweater off and shoves it into her Gucci bag along with the other

items she found in the closet.

She couldn't resist taking a bottle of perfume and foam bath. Shoot her for wanting to smell like the man she's going to marry sooner than one day.

She heads to the door and pulls it open. Damn, these Meyiwa boys are so fine.

She looks up at him, looking down at her. She doesn't know this one's name.

"What are you doing in there?"

He's talking to her, not her clit that's doing a bump jive at the sound of his rumbling voice.

"I was looking for the bathroom." No big deal, it's not like she doesn't eat lies for lunch, breakfast and supper.

His brows crease, that's a sexy move. She'd take a pic if she could.

"The bathroom is that way." He points behind him.

He's suspecting her, she can tell with how his bedroom eyes are looking at her.

“Oh, thanks.” She weaves past him, his scent follows her and makes her shiver. He must be one of God’ favourites.

“Wait!” He calls.

Now what?

Ntebo forces a smile and turns to look at him, her favourite bag tightly pressed under her wing.

“Why was the door closed? What were you doing in there?”

This is the problem with rich men, they can be too smart.

“It closed on its own when I walked in, I honestly thought it was the bathroom.” Lies. Lies. Lies.

That furrowing of his brows will be the death of her.

Don’t look at the bag, don’t look at the bag. Damn, he’s looking at the bag. Ntebo tightens her grip on it, she can’t go back to jail.

“What’s in the bag?”

What’s this one’s name? She’s going to Google him

and deal with him once she has his full name. Nx!

“My things.” She says.

He can narrow his eyes too? And it's as sexy as when he raises his brows. He's walking up to her, jaw clenched and eyes searching hers. She drops them, he's intimidating as fuck.

“I'd like to see for myself.” He says, snatching the bag.

“Hey, you have no right.” She tries to grab it, he holds it up and zips it open.

This is illegal.

“Those are my things.” Ntebo complains.

And this is her favourite Gucci bag, she got it for R150 in Small Street.

He pulls out the sweater she had on, and glances at her with condemnation in his eyes.

“This is my brother's jersey.” He says and continues to dig further. Ntebo's head falls in shame.

“You're stealing from my brother? Who are you?”

He's growling.

It shouldn't be sexy, her clit needs to calm down, she might be going back to jail.

Ntebo runs, it takes a few seconds to get down the staircase.

Mphako is still here, seated on the couch with crossed arms. Aren't we comfortable?

"Ntate Mphako, please take me back to the house, I want to speak to my aunt." She says, hurriedly

"She's not home, I told you."

"I'll wait for her there." She pulls his hand to get him up. This old man is her only way out of here, he's got a car.

"She's won't be coming home for a while, she was attacked and has been hospitalised." He says, and too chilled for a husband whose wife is lying sick in the hospital.

"Let's go Ntate Mphako." She's still pulling his hand, and constantly looking up the flight of stairs. Here

he comes, the man who found her out.

"No one is leaving this house." He shouts from up there.

.

.

ATHULE-

Luck must be on our side, the house is vacant. They must have gone to the location they were going to meet at. Shiyiwe's arm is over my shoulder, I'm clinging on to her waist. She can't walk with one leg, hence it's a mission to get outside. Her whole weight is on me, she's drowsy and struggling to stay awake. Buts she has no choice, I can't carry her out. We are basically the same height and size.

The gate is not far from the door, neither is it locked. A bunch of kids playing outside stop and stare, it's late for them to be out.

Shiyiwe staggers and falls, bringing me down with her.

“I’m sorry, are you okay?”

She doesn’t answer. Although her eyes are open, she’s out of it.

“I’ll help you up, please try to move, okay.”

It takes a while, but we’re up and moving again. There are no cars on this street, if only we can get to the main road. That’s where we are headed.

“Car...” Shiyiwe slurs.

Indeed there is a car driving this way. Lord, can it not be more of them. I spoke to Mthombo before we left, he said to wait here.

It’s not safe.

The car stops, it’s a white Nissan Tiida. My heart will explode with how it’s pounding, I don’t have the will to fight anymore. We continue walking, ignoring the car.

“Hey, get inside. I’ll take you to the hospital.” It’s the doctor, he came back.

“We’re fine.” I tell him.

I can’t trust him, the reason he ran back there was because I had a gun.

I want us to pick up the pace, Mthombo will be here soon.

The doctor dashes out of the car and runs to us. I brought the gun with me, it’s pointing at him. He stops and lifts his hands.

“I swear I want to help, I’m a doctor. I took an oath to help people. I worked with Uzoma and Udoka to pay off my depts. I’m not a bad person.”

Like I’d believe the devil just because he’s wearing a halo.

“What’s the nearest hospital?” I ask.

“Johannesburg Hospital, it’s not far from here. We’re in Berea, Uzoma’s territory. If his men notice that he’s not answering his phone, they might come back. Believe me, sisi, you are not safe here.”

We’re not safe with strangers at this point.

“You might also want to leave his phone behind,

they'll track it." He says.

"How do you know all this?"

"I worked for him for years, he's smart. Why do you think he was able to pull off the kidnapping?"

Shiyiwe is falling again, the doctor rushes to her side and lifts her in his arms.

"Put her down," I bark, aiming the gun at him. I don't care about the children on this street. This is probably nothing new.

"I'm a father, I have three girls. I'd do anything to keep them safe. I'm sure your father is worried sick about you, let me help you please." He targets my weakness.

"I'll borrow you my phone, you can call whoever you want and tell them where you are. My name is Dr. Lungile Mpande, you can tell them my number plates as well."

"Why are you so desperate to help us?" I can't trust anyone so easily after what we went through.

"I told you, I took an oath as a doctor. And you have

freed me from the clutches of Uzoma and his brother. I am now indebted to you." He says. "We have to go, this girl's life is in danger and it's not safe here."

"Give me your phone."

"It's in my pocket." He says, pointing to the right pocket with his eyes. I find it and call Mthombo back.

"Dr. Lungile Mpande, number plate FL 26 MN GP. He's taking us to Johannesburg Hospital, if anything happens to us, find him. He says he's got three girls, you will see what you do with this information." I say with my eyes locked on the doctor.

He gulps, and blinks a million times.

"We're stuck in traffic on Joubert Street, don't go anywhere Athule. Who is this doctor? You can't trust him." Mthombo says.

Does he always sound angry?

"Shiyiwe has lost so much blood, we have to get to the hospital." I say.

He's telling someone the doctor's name and says

“Look him up.”

“Put the phone on speaker.” Mthombo.

I do as told.

“Lungile Mpande, born and raised in Eshowe. Moved to Johannesburg after high school...” He’s reading the doctor’s biography. We don’t have time for that.

“Husband to Nontobeko Mjajubana and father to three girls...” He names the children, their ages and the school they go to.

Only when the doctor’s eyes widen and fear fills his eyes do I get where Mthombo is going with this.

“If anything happens to these ladies, I am coming for you, your wife and kids, and your parents.” Chills run down my spine, he sounds serious.

The doctor’s breath hitches, “Who are you?”

That was shaky.

“Try me and you will find out.” Mthombo threatens.

“Stay on the line Athule, until you get to the hospital.”

“Let’s go.” I tell the doctor.

He puts Shiysiwe in the backseat, I join her and let her rest her head on my shoulder.

“You can put that gun away.” Lungile says as he starts the car.

“Not a chance.”

I’m not taking any risks.

There are so many cars on this side of town, he drives past houses, and enters a lane arched by tall buildings.

“How is Shiysiwe?” Mthombo asks.

He was having an inaudible conversation with Bhedlindaba, I want to speak to him and tell him that I’m okay.

“Not doing good,” I did tell him before. “Can I speak to Ndaba?”

“He’s driving, let me speak to Shiysiwe. I want to hear her voice.” He says.

But I want to hear Ndaba’s voice.

“Hold on.” I say and hold the phone closer to her.

“It’s Mthombo.”

I shake her to make sure she is awake.

“Nonyanda.” Mthombo says, I think he’s crying. Very wrong with Lungile listening, he might think he’s not as manly as he sounded a while back.

“Mtho...” She struggles to finish his name.

“Don’t speak munt’ wami, you need to save your energy.”

He’s right, she’s lost so much of it. God, let her baby be okay.

“I’m on my way to you, Nonyanda. You’re going to be okay, I promise.”

Humans and making promises we can’t keep, only God has the right to make such promises. Life is unpredictable, the same God gives and takes. It’s a sad world.

Shiyiwe nods, not that Mthombo can see her.

“We’re going to go to our honeymoon when all of this is over, I’ll make you happy again.”

“50% happiness? I don’t want it,” trust Shiysiwe to say this when she’s fighting to live.

Mthombo lets out a long breath, he sounds exhausted, or apologetic. I can’t make out what it is exactly.

“I know, we’re going to do things your way. You are my life Nonyanda, it’s you or no one.” He mumbles.

This is how I want Ndaba to love and worry about me. I guess the best things in life don’t come easy.

Shiysiwe is too weak to answer him, she nods.

“Ngiyak’thanda yezwa?” He says with tears in his voice.

She hums.

“We’re here.” The doctor says.

We’re outside the hospital, of course.

“Mthombo...”

“I heard him, we’re not far. Please take care of my wife.”

It’s all I’ve been doing.

.

.

My apologies this came late, we had load shedding the whole night. Don't forget to like, comment and share.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Ninety-

MTHOMBO-

.

.

Bongukwanda called and told him about Ntebo and her shenanigans, seeing that the girl was accompanied by Shiyiwe's father, he thought to report the matter to Bhedlindaba first.

"Don't call the police, let them be." Mthombo told him, knowing it would be embarrassing for Mphako.

They just arrived at the hospital, Athule is in the hallway.

Her face lights up before she's shedding a flood of

tears at the sight of Bhedlindaba. She runs to him and crashes against his body, Ndaba welcomes her with a tight embrace. His arms gently around her waist.

“Are you okay?” He asks and gets nothing from her, she’s weeping. He tries to pull away, Athule won’t let go.

“I thought we were going to die.” She cries.

Mthombo is growing impatient, there’s a lump on his throat threatening to send him to tears. He’s looking around, in search of a doctor or a nurse.

Bhedlindaba mumbles something to Athule, he doesn’t care what he said. He wants to know if Shiysiwe is okay.

“Where is Shiysiwe?” He finally asks.

“The doctor is with her, I was told to wait here.”
Athule.

Patience is what Mthombo doesn’t have. It feels like everything is slipping out of his hands.

“Where is the doctor that brought you here?”

Bhedlindaba asks.

“He left, I gave him that man’s gun and phone.”

“What?” Mthombo snaps, exchanging looks with his brother.

“Did you use that gun?” She frowns up Bhedlindaba.
“Answer me Athule, did you use that gun?”

“Shiyiwe killed one of them, I think his brother.” Her eyes are caught in confusion.

“Shit, dammit Athule. How can you be so stupid?”
Bhedlindaba explodes.

“He said he was going to get rid of it, I believed him because he brought us here.”

“He brought you here because I threatened him. He’s going to use that gun against us.” Mthombo is out of his head with worry.

Athule drops her head and covers her mouth, tears run down her face.

“I didn’t think, I’m sorry. I was too worried about Shiyiwe that it didn’t cross my mind.”

“Dammit!” Mthombo cusses and punches the wall behind him.

Bhedlindaba is breathing heavily. He pulls a phone out and steps aside to make a call.

“Excuse me.” A woman says behind Mthombo. It’s a doctor in scrubs.

“Doctor, how is my wife.”

Like every doctor in this place knows his wife.

She looks at Athule, “This is Mthombo Meyiwa, my sister’s husband.”

The doctor asks him to walk with her. Athule’s focus has fallen on Bhedlindaba who is still on the phone, she hardly sees them strolling off.

“Your wife is fine sir, she had lost a lot of blood but we handled it. We removed the bullet on her thigh, she will have to use crutches for the coming four weeks of the pregnancy.”

He’s not sure he heard right, this woman said pregnancy. He stops.

“She’s pregnant?” Tears evade his eyes, he carries his hands on his head.

“Yes, two weeks. It’s a miracle.” She says, shoving her hands into the pockets of her scrubs.

“We’re going to keep an eye on her for the coming week, you can take her home once she has recovered.”

Mthombo blinks back a river of tears threatening to expose his weak side.

“Can I see her?” He asks.

“She has to be transferred into ward with other patients first, the nurse will let you know once it’s done.”

What’s this one saying now? Does she know who his wife is married to?

“I want her transferred to a single room, my wife will not share a ward with other patients.” He says.

Lady please, she’s a big deal.

“Unfortunately, we don’t have enough rooms.”

He doesn't care.

"Mthombo Meyiwa's wife will not share a hospital room with other patients." Bhedlindaba is back, he places a hand on Mthombo's shoulder.

Doctor's eyes brighten up, her lips crack a smile.

"You're Ndaba from Ndaba Royals?" Of course, his pantsula clothes give him away too.

"Yes, and I am his brother. I want Mrs. Meyiwa transferred to a private hospital immediately. My wife deserves better medical care."

Single room... private hospital. These men want the doctor to work a miracle.

"Yes sir, I'll see to it now." The doctor scurries away.

"You stay here with Mthombo, I have something to take care of." Bhedlindaba tells his "love interest."

Athule jumps in panic and clings on to his bicep, "No don't leave me please."

Bhedlindaba shares a look with his brother.

Mthombo knows where this one wants to go.

“I don’t want to be alone, I’ve been through a lot today.” She says, resting her head on his chest.

Bhedlindaba sighs, “I know baby. Mthombo is here, he will take care of you. Someone has to clean up the crime scene.”

Her eyes pop into shock, “You’re getting rid of the bodies? Ndaba you can’t do that, let the police find them.”

“I’m going to check if you and Shiyiwe left anything that will lead the police to you, trust me, you don’t want to be interrogated by them.” Bhedlindaba says.

Mthombo knows it’s not true, they got a lead on the rest of the crew and this sly brother of his is going for blood. He’d follow but he wants to be here when Shiyiwe wakes up.

“Can’t you ask Mikhulu to do it?” Athule asks.

Mthombo sighs and leans against the wall, he won’t intervene. It’s none of his business.

“Athule, I know you’re scared. But I promise, nothing

will happen to you now. You're safe, I trust my brother. He'll keep you safe for me."

Sure he will. He owes Athule for saving Shiyiwe's life.

"Bhedlindaba is right, I won't let anything happen to you." Mthombo speaks so lazily, like he's being forced to speak. He's drained by this straight way, slow rollercoaster between these two.

Bhedlindaba cups her cheeks and kisses her. Mthombo would tell them to get a room, he chooses to look away instead.

"I love you." Bhedlindaba declares.

"I love you too." She replies, and kisses him.

One more look at her, a smile, before Bhedlindaba pulls Mthombo for a private conversation.

"I swear this is the last time, no more enemies after this." –Bhedlindaba.

It's what Mthombo was thinking.

"I'd come too, but Shiyiwe..."

"I have enough backup, you keep watch on the women. What about the doctor?" Bhedlindaba asks.

He could be an itch they will need to scratch in the near future, money hungry people are always digging for more. It's like a drug.

"I doubt he'd double cross us after I spoke to him, but pay him a visit. Make sure he got the message loud and clear. Don't forget the guy, dispose of it."

Mthombo says.

"Got it." He taps Mthombo's shoulder. "Last time right? We have to keep them safe."

His eyes run to Athule, she's staring back with crossed arms, and tears in her eyes.

"No more guns," he's not sure if they are lying to each other.

"We have two problems though, Zwangendaba and MaDlamini. They continue to be a threat to Shiysiwe."

Mthombo says.

His mother is the most stubborn, he'd swear she has lost touch with reality. She insists on taking Shiysiwe

down.

Bhedlindaba crosses his arms, a deep frown creasing his eyebrows.

“Poison can take her out instantly, or we make her crazy and send her to a mental institution.”

Mthombo laughs at the idea, sounds like a good one.

“Let’s sleep on it, go do what you must do. Don’t get yourself killed.” Mthombo says, pulling his little brother into a hug.

“I wouldn’t know how to do this life thing without you, you’re my better half.”

“Don’t get all mushy with me, I’m not on a deathbed.” Bhedlindaba tells him, but holds him back.

They pull out and hold a stare.

“You’re my brother, I wouldn’t have it any other way. I’m proud of the man you are ntawana.” Mthombo says.

Bhedlindaba laughs at the word use, he’s not into street talk this one.

"I'm proud of you too, father to be." He says and turns to leave.

"Ndaba wait," that's Athule.

She throws herself into his arms and holds on for dear life, "I love you. Hurry back."

He doesn't say it back but begins his walk without turning back. Athule looks at him until he is out of sight, she shifts her gaze to Mthombo.

"Is he going to be okay?" She asks.

"He will." Mthombo says, he doesn't want to say anything further lest she bombards him with questions he won't be able to answer.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

"They do not call me diehard for nothing."

I've always wanted to say this, even though I've always hated Leon's Schuster's movies. There's a Zulu on my stoep being number one on my hate list.

Athule laughs, "You scared me for a while back there."

I open my palm, she places her hand in it.

"MaMbuyazi was a prayer warrior, I'd hear her behind the closed door of her bedroom praying for us. Sometimes she'd come into our room around 3am, place her hands on our heads and go into warfare. Mthandeni and I hated it, she disrupted our sleep."

"She was putting a hedge of protection around you." She says, tightening her hold. "My grandmother was a prayer warrior too."

She clarifies.

"I guess she was. Back in that house, I could hear her prayers so loud and clear in my ears. It felt as if she was there with her hand above my head, praying for me." I say.

Turns out MaMbuyazi's prayers were not in vain.

“I wish I met her before her demise.” Athule says.

“She would’ve loved you.” I’m not sure, but why not give her hope.

“Where is the doctor?” I ask.

That man was our saving grace, anyone in his position wouldn’t have come back.

“He left, his excuse was that he’s going to get rid of Uzoma’s phone before his men track it, and the gun. I think it was an escape from Mthombo.” She laughs nervously.

“Where is Mthombo?” Shouldn’t he be here?

“ He was in here before me, you’ve been out for hours, he’s sorting out papers for your transfer.”

“My transfer?”

“To a private hospital. My wife deserves the best medical care.” She mimics his voice.

It’s like him to do that.

“What about the baby? Is there a baby?” I ask.

My heart is going crazy in my chest, I meant what I

said. I want there to be a baby. Athule's sigh is not giving me hope.

"I don't know, the doctor spoke to Mthombo. I haven't spoken to him yet." She says.

The door opens, the first thing I see is a bouquet of white balloons.

His big head pops in after, our eyes meet and lock.

Tears in his eyes. This is the Mthombo I know and love, the vulnerable one.

He walks in, ties the balloons on the bedpost, his hands are shaking. He puts them into his pockets as he walks around the bed, head dropped to hide the tears in his eyes.

"Nonyanda." He sniffs and leans in for a swift kiss on my lips.

I'm ready to wipe his tears when he digs his face on the curve of my neck. A wet substance tickles my skin, he's crying.

I glance over at Athule, silently asking for privacy.

She stands and leaves.

“I’m okay,” I tell Mthombo the second the door shuts closed. He doesn’t say anything, he’s sobbing.

“It’s okay.” I tell him, gently rubbing his back. His whole body is shaking.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” He lets go and looks at me, ugly cry and all. I have seen him cry before, not like this.

“Just a little drunk from the medication they injected on my ass.” I wasn’t awake when it happened, I felt the stinging when my eyes opened.

More tears.

A sob escapes through his trembling lips, in this same moment, snort comes out of his nose. He doesn’t wipe it off, instead shakes his head regretfully.

“I’m sorry Nonyanda, I’m so sorry sthandwa sami.” He weeps, eyes closed.

I wrap my arms around his convulsing shoulders and hold him tight. I hate it when he cries, it will never not

break my heart. Nevertheless, I let him have his moment.

When he's done, he pulls out of the hug and looks into my eyes.

"I almost lost you today." He wipes his tears away.

"Almost doesn't count, so stop crying." I send him a smile hoping he'd catch it and put it on his face.

"How are you feeling?"

"In pain, but I will live."

"I've transferred you to Netcare Hospital, they will take better care of you there." He speaks as if I will die if I stay here.

His jaw tightens as his eyes land on the bandaged knee, he clicks his tongue. One tongue click is enough, more than that is tongue abuse.

"Those bastards, I'm going to wipe out the whole lot of them."

"Mthombo, I'm tired of all the fights, the bloodshed and gunshots. I have had enough. Can we let the police deal with them?"

He takes my hand, opens my palm and kisses it.

"No one will ever touch you again, I swear on our baby's life." Baby's life?

My heart is doing a cartwheel, it needs to calm down.

"There's a baby?" I ask, trying to fight back tears.

"There's a baby." He's crying again. "We're going to be parents."

I think I'm starting to like the thought of being a mother.

"I'm going to keep you safe Shiyiwe, I will protect you from anything and anyone. I don't care who they are, no one will ever harm you again." He says.

I want peace. Can he give me that?

"What about your little brother?" At this point, I am not going to sugar coat anything. I will say it like it is. There's a life coming into the world, a life we both will be responsible for.

"Sikolethu is innocent, he deserves better parents. Not Zwangendaba and MaDlamini."

Do I like where he is taking this? I'm ready to put my foot down, sure he's innocent. That doesn't mean I should accept to be his mother, not everyone is a mother Theresa.

"I will speak to Kwanda, and MaSibiya. They have been trying to have a child." He says.

Bongukwanda has a kind heart, he might not mind.

"What if he disagrees?"

"Then we will get a nanny for him, my brothers and I will take care of him. There are also good Christian boarding schools out there, he still needs therapy. I will search for such a school. He will visit during school holidays."

A boarding school isn't bad, I personally think Sikolethu will be better off there than here where there are guns, constant quarrels and dead bodies.

Speaking of dead bodies, I have a father to bury.

"Please call uncle Mdu and tell him to come. My father's corpse has been found." I tell him.

It's better to move away from the Sikolethu topic.
Mthombo is kissing my palm again.

"I did, he said he will catch an early plane tomorrow."

Ehh! The world is revolving, uncle Mdu will be flying to Johannesburg? We will never hear the end of this.

"He insisted on flying." Mthombo explains when he sees the questions in my eyes.

"I see him screaming all the way to Johannesburg." I laugh, he joins me.

Pin drop silence visits us, he's staring into my eyes.

"Is the baby okay?" I ask.

After going through that portal of hell, something must be wrong.

"It is, doctor said it's a miracle. Early pregnancies are risky, you lost a lot of blood. It's a miracle that you both made it."

My heart again. There is a God, MaMbuyazi was right.

"My mother's prayers." I tell him, he blinks rapidly, confusion crowding his face.

“She left but her prayers stayed with me, I would’ve lost the baby had it not been for her resilience.”

He sighs heavily and kisses my temple, “Thank you for not leaving me, Nonyanda. There are two things I’m terrified of losing in my life.”

“What?” I indulge him.

“You and my sanity.” He says and throws me into a fit of laughter. Of course, no one ever wants to lose their mind.

“I still have fifty years to annoy you.” I tell him, wiping his stubborn tears. No man cries like this one.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Ninety-one

ATHULE-

.

.

I don’t know what time he came home, his head was buried on the pillow when I woke up. Whatever he went to do wore him out, he’s too quiet that it’s

starting to worry me.

He was upset about the gun last night, a mistake I wasn't aware of.

He can be unpredictable sometimes that it scares me. Sometimes it feels like I don't know him like I think I do.

He's in the shower, I'm waiting for him, he said he won't be long. I thought he was taking a quick shower.

My mind takes me back to my father's house and the environment there, I just can't stomach the thought of being there, and cohabiting is off the topic.

I need to gather my belongings, I know my father will want me back home after Shiyiwe and I have spoken to him. He must be ashamed of me, I've been living with a man who's not my husband.

I know I'm wrong on my part by allowing it, but I needed to be away from Penny for my own sanity, hence I followed Bhedlindaba. I've been doing it since the day we met.

No one can protect me like he does and he's the only person I feel safe with.

A sound of a phone ringing brings me back from my journey of thoughts, it's his.

"Babe, your phone is ringing." I yell.

"Please get it, I'll be out just now." He shouts back.

I reach for it on the nightstand, the caller ID says Noxolo. There's a picture of a young woman, weave, long lashes and heavy makeup.

This better be his co-worker or something. Come to think of it, I don't know much about his workers and his team.

Clearly if I'm the woman in his life, I need to know who works for him or who's willing to drop their panties for him.

"Ndaba's phone hello."

"Put Ndaba on the phone." This Noxolo woman has an attitude.

“He’s busy.”

My voice instantly becomes cold, call it a woman’s intuition.

“Tell him his girlfriend wants to speak to him.” She says.

A cold wave rushes through my body. I want to drop the call but decide otherwise.

I think I want to hear what she has to say.

“Bhedlindaba is busy at the moment, call later. He’ll be very much available.”

He walks in with a towel wrapped around his waist, he heard what I said. I’m this close to crying.

“I know you’re lying bitch, put him on the phone now.”

Whoah! She’s yelling.

“Call me bitch again and you will curse the day your parents made you.”

Bhedlindaba has the phone on his ear, I don’t know how he got to me but damn he’s fast.

“What did you just call my wife?” He snaps over the phone.

I don’t want to listen to this conversation.

I grab my overnight bag and hurry out the house, I bump into Wandisa on my way out.

I’m reminded that she is beautiful and better looking, and man these weaves are starting to get on my nerves.

Who doesn’t have a weave in this city? Everyone is a fucking Beyonce.

She frowns like she’s never seen me here before.

“Watch where you’re going.” She snaps. “Where is Dimples?”

Wow, Bhedlindaba has done it?

“Great, another one. You lot can have him, I’m out.” I retort as I push into her and stroll to the car, the door isn’t locked.

Why is my happiness always short-lived?

It makes no sense that my heart always has to be

broken one way or the other.

I'm done crying, letting his girlfriend disrespect me like that.

Or maybe I'm the other woman and Wandisa is the main chick. I don't know with Ndaba anymore but there's one thing I'm certain about, he loves me. I see it in his eyes and the way he holds me.

.

.

I see Ndaba ambling towards the car, he's taking his own time. He's angry, if it's directed at me then Lord forgive me for what I am about to do.

But... Who insulted who here? Argh.

I don't know why I got into his car, I should've requested an Uber. I'm looking out the window, I can't look at him.

He starts the car but doesn't drive.

"I want to go home Bhedlindaba." I say, not looking in his direction.

“Tell me, Athule. When do you plan on growing up? Because I am tired of waiting for you to do so.”

What? Am I missing something here?

“Really Bhedlindaba? After what just happened you will speak to me like that?” He can’t be serious.

He’s frowning at me.

“How else should I speak to you? You insist on acting like a child.” He says

Hee!!! This ‘old’ man.

“You’re insulting me Bhedlindaba.” I snap.

“If I were insulting you Athule, you would know.” He retorts.

I’ve heard this line before.

I’m so angry. Why is this man acting like nothing happened in there? Like I was not disrespected by his girlfriend?

“You know what? Go back to your girlfriend, I will take a taxi back home.” I snap and reach for the door, it’s locked.

Why is the door locked?

I turn to him, he has this unsettling look on his face.

“Open this door Bhedlindaba” I instruct.

The look on his face says he won’t.

“What did you say to me?” He hisses, looking at me like he’s about murder me.

“I said go back to your girlfriend and let me go.”

I still have the nerve to repeat myself.

Look at me being a big girl and standing up for myself, my father should be proud.

“Do you think I’m stupid Athule?” Rhetorical!

I’m stumped.

“What?” Me.

“I’m not going to repeat myself, you heard what I said.”

I don’t know what’s gotten into this man, I don’t like it at all. I should be the one angry at him not the other way around.

"No... I don't think you're stupid." I answer him anyway and look straight ahead with crossed arms.

"Then why would my 'girlfriend' as you call her come to my house while you're around? Why would I cheat on you Athule, the one woman who has my heart? Why would I risk losing you? You think everything I did for you, I did it just to bang you."

I need to be balanced here, who uses the word bang?

"I don't know Bhedlindaba, you tell me. Why is there a girl blowing up your phone and calling me a bitch? You even put a picture on her number. Then another one just budes into your house without knocking, clearly you are "banging" them as well because obviously, I am not enough for you. Men like you are never satisfied with one woman"

I'm being dramatic, even my tone testifies.

His face hardens, he grabs my arm roughly. This Hitler doesn't care that he's hurting me. I catch a glimpse of his eyes, too afraid to look into them. I don't like what I'm seeing.

"Do not patronize me Athule, you will not like it when

I retaliate. I dare you to test my love for you, qhubeka. You need to grow up and fix your attitude, not once did you ask me who Noxolo is, you know the story with Wandisa. Yet you decided to jump into your own conclusions like you always do and I'm tired of it. You took their words and decided to go with it."

I'm mystified by this fool chiding me for fighting for my girlfriend rights.

He lets go of my arm, I rub the pain away at least some of it, he's right though.

I let my mind convince me that they are his girlfriends, it's the first thing it provided and I took it.

I feel ashamed, I lower my gaze, his gaze is intimidating anyway.

There's an awkward silence for a good minute before he pulls out of the driveway. This is going to be a long ride.

He keeps side-eyeing me, he wants to say something. It better be an apology for speaking to me like that.

“Wandisa is family, I don’t know what to call her really. We are not blood related.”

Do I even want to know this?

“Her father is my father’s step brother.” He says.

“Your uncle?”

“What?” I’m confusing him, his face says so.

“He’s your step uncle so that makes her your step cousin.” I explain.

I’m still not comfortable with her around him, there’s no blood relation between them so...

“Don’t complicate it any further, let’s just leave it at family.” Yep, he’s confused.

“What about Noxolo?”

The side eye.

“She’s nobody.” He says.

I know what this means, I feel myself getting emotional as a wave of jealousy washes over me.

“Did you sleep with her?”

The look again...

Jeer! Sometimes I hate how he can be so mysterious. I’m struggling to read his emotions and it doesn’t sit well with me.

I’m waiting for him to provide me with an answer but he doesn’t, and he’s not about to.

I guess his silence answers my question.

My stupid disloyal tears turn against me again, I wipe them but they insist on falling, darn it.

“Why are you crying?” Him.

Because I hate you right now.

“You slept with her Bhedlindaba and you’re asking me shit.”

My emotions get the best of me making me shout at him, he parks the car on the side of the road, turns to look at me with a scowl on his face.

“Talk to me like that again.” He grunts with a threatening tone that has me swallowing hard.

I don't like the angry him, why is he suddenly this person? It's true that you never truly know a person.

"How could you do this to me Bhedlindaba?" I'm letting my tears do as they please now, I've given up trying to fight them.

"You see why I say you jump into conclusions without thinking, that girl means nothing to me, it happened once okay."

"And that makes it okay?" I shout.

There's one thing I've noticed about him since this relationship began, Ndaba can't lie to me, it's either he doesn't know how to or he loves me too much to do it.

"We were not official then, you were playing hard-to-get. I wasn't sure if you were ever going to give me a chance. What was I supposed to do huh? Wait for you to decide if you want me or not?" He continues to break my heart.

Does he even know how to apologise?

He slept with another woman while I was pushing

the only boyfriend I had away.

"What does she want now?" He seems shocked by my question and that I'm not fighting him anymore.

"She was being a nuisance but I took care of it, she will never bother us again."

Yeah, I don't trust these words.

He takes my hands into his and plants kisses on them, I'm fighting the urge to smile.

"You are everything to me, Athule. I will not let anyone come between us. Athule, I will fight hell for you and still come out a winner, that's how much you mean to me. Anyone who tries to break us up will meet a terrible fate. I'm not losing you over some stupid one night stand that didn't even mean anything." He says.

I'm thinking he thinks that's supposed to make me feel better, it doesn't, the man I love shared a bed with another woman.

I look at my hands, they are trembling, I'm hurt

beyond anything.

I have never shared him with anyone as far as I knew. This Noxolo chick had to come and turn my life upside down. This fool has done a great job hiding it.

My heart is shattered and he's not even sorry about cheating.

"Where did you do it?" I ask.

It's eating me up inside, I can't get over it.

I know he will never disrespect me by bringing a woman inside the house I share with him.

He frowns, I think he doesn't want to talk about it anymore but I don't care, I want answers.

"This house belongs to you Athule, no one will ever have a claim on it. No one will ever walk those gates without your knowledge, it doesn't matter how far apart we are." He says.

He just touched my heart in a way I can't explain, and right at this moment, I love him more than I did when we left the house.

“You’ve hurt me, Bhedlindaba, you of all people. I gave you my heart because I trusted that you would protect it, but you broke it. How do I get over the fact that you cheated? I thought I was the only one for you.”

He cups my cheeks and presses his forehead against mine.

“I’m sorry baby, I’m sorry. Don’t leave me, Athule. I love you.”

There’s that apology I’ve been wanting to hear but it does nothing to my broken heart, I thought it would heal it.

“I’m not leaving you Ndaba.”

Again, the shocked look on his face.

“Thank you baby.” He pulls me into a tight hug.

“Ndaba.”

I pull away, he looks confused.

My heart is still breaking and I don’t want him to think that he can cheat on me and I will be okay with it, I doubt I will soon bounce back from what he did.

Ndaba is supposed to be mine and mine alone, now some whore who got a taste of him thinks she has a claim on him.

“What’s wrong now?”

“I don’t want you thinking that it’s okay to sleep with other women, just as much as you don’t want to share me, I don’t want to share you either.” I will not say this again.

“I know baby.”

“And that girl should know her place, fix this Bhedlindaba. As much as I love you, I don’t have the strength to fight for you. I have done enough fighting in my life.”

I’m not going to be pulling another woman’s weave out just because my man can’t keep his pants on.

“I know, you won’t have to worry about it anymore.” He assures me.

That sigh proves that he’s as drained as I am.

“I love you.” I feel the need to tell him this.

He smiles faintly.

“I love you baby.” He says.

He leans over and claims what is already his.

I feel his hand on my breast, as he deepens the kiss.
I have to pull out.

“Mmhh mmhh.” I wipe my mouth. “You’re not out of
the woods yet.”

He’s staring at me, I shrug my shoulders.

He shakes his head, “Nothing, I love you.”

.

.

Please continue voting for Ntokozo Mthombeni, the
competition closes on Saturday.

Let’s boost this bonus chapter with 500+ comments
to get our next insert at 5pm.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Ninety-two

MTHOMBO-

.

.

It's almost 11:58 in the morning, nerves are hastily kicking in, thanks to Mphako's visit. The old man is on his way to the hospital to see his daughter.

"What's wrong with you?" Shiyiwe breaks into his thoughts. She's frowning at him.

"I don't think it's a good idea that I should be here when your father arrives."

About that, Mphako had to be informed that his daughter is in the hospital. She was hijacked and shot on the leg. A lie they had to feed him to avoid any outbursts from the old man.

"We're married."

Sure they are.

"African parents don't care about a white wedding, it means nothing to them. As long as I haven't paid lobola, you don't belong to me." It's his words, chosen by him yet he looks dejected.

"I doubt Mphako is that traditional." Shiyiwe tries to

put him at ease.

“Yeah, your doubts won’t save me from getting my ass kicked.”

She laughs at his response.

“You didn’t see him when he held Bhedlindaba against the wall, demanding his daughters. I was lucky to have escaped.” It would have been a traumatic experience had he been a victim too.

“I’m starting to like Mphako.” She says laughing.

Mthombo honestly can’t see a relationship between him and Mphako, he looks like he knows how to shoot a gun.

“I spoke to uncle Mdu, he has landed. Let’s wait for him.” Mthombo informs her.

It’s better to have backup.

“If that’s what you want, but if Mphako gets here before uncle, we’re not getting rid of him.” She says.

Mphako can’t find him looking shabby and unkempt. He stands and slowly turns, “Do I look okay?”

She stifles a laugh.

“Those jeans are dirty babe, I told you to go home and change.” That was before she was transferred to a private hospital. He hasn’t left her side and he is not planning to.

“I’m not leaving you alone.” He sounds like a broken cassette, he’s been singing this song for hours.

“My father will judge me for marrying a man who doesn’t smell or look hygienic.”

Wife for sale! This one is too blunt.

“It’s my armpits right?” He knows alright.

Shiyiwe nods with a smile, “You still look handsome though.”

On second thought, he’s keeping this ego booster.

“Ngyabonga Nonyanda, I’ll use the bathroom to freshen up.” He heads to the bathroom.

“You can use my toothbrush.” Shiyiwe shouts after him.

“I was planning on it.” He says, and shuts the door

behind him.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

Mthombo went to buy something to eat, for himself. I haven't been here for long but I am done with hospital food. I'm counting ceiling tiles when a woman walks in.

I haven't seen her since... since Samson. For the first time in my life I am speechless.

She's changed, lost so much weight I hardly recognise her. Did Samson infect her with a virus? I wouldn't put it past him. She's wearing a denim shirt and skinny jeans, or to a healthy person would be skinny jeans. I recognise them, these are Mthandeni's clothes.

"Shiyiwe," she is soft spoken and humble if it's not early to say. Sounds different from the Samukelisiwe I knew.

“How did you know where to find me?”

She puts her handbag on the bed and places her hands on her hips.

“Johannesburg is not that big, people talk.”

Who are those people? Is what I want to know...

“I hear you’re married and expecting?” It’s more of a question, her eyes run over my body. Her down-sided mouth pulls a smile, I know a genuine smile when I see one and this is the fakest of them.

“I’m happy for you, your uncle would be too if he were here.”

Bullshit! And she knows it.

I have to school my features, can’t give myself away.

“Why are you here Samu?” She hasn’t told me, I don’t want this woman near me.

“To check up on my niece, haibo.”

She will cry if I remind her that Samson never married her.

“We’re not related.”

“Your uncle was my man.” Such a shame. “Do you know where he might be? He left without a word, Mohammed says he last saw him walking through the gate after you bought some rate poison from him.”

Why did this woman come here? Mohammed has a big mouth, I should have him deported.

“Why would Mohammed be talking about me? He doesn’t know me.”

She pulls her eyebrows, this woman looks so sure of herself.

“I needed to know where my husband disappeared to, I went around Diepkloof asking if anyone had seen Samson and Gezani. Mohammed was the only person with information I could use.”

If she says his name again, I’m going to throw up.

“Then ask him where your “husband” disappeared to. How am I supposed to know? We were not close.”

She’s starting to bore me.

“Okay.” Samu.

That okay is not okay with me, Samu is up to something. She laughs and pulls a seat.

“You know I never believed in izangoma, there’s this one who told me you killed Samson.”

Shit! Ndaba didn’t think this far.

“Samu, you’re consulting izangoma about me?” I act shocked, I’m trying to play her game. If she truly went to a sangoma, my life is over.

“A friend dragged me there.” She’s lying. “It’s crazy what he said though, it’s impossible that you would kill your uncles and their sons. He gave me an option to avenge their deaths, but you know me, Shiyiwe. I am a good person, I would never harm a soul.”

She laughs as if she is not playing with my feelings like a game of chess.

“You better be a good person, or revenge will be the last thing you worry about.”

That voice, it’s Bhedlindaba. He’s standing in the doorway, frowning at Samu.

She looks at him, eyes wide. There is no fear evident on her face, she can't be a woman scorned. She has no proof that it was me who killed Samson and Gezani.

Some how, Samu carries a certain confidence I can't grasp, it's giving me chills.

"You don't play with people's lives and think you will live a happy life, ask around sisi." Haibo! This woman came with a mission.

"Yey, yey, votsek." Bhedlindaba grabs her arms and drags her out.

He throws her bag out, it falls on her feet. The last thing I see is vengeance in her eyes before she picks up her bag and walks away.

"Are you okay?" He asks.

I am not okay, I won't tell him though. I am not his burden anymore.

"I'm fine."

He nods, stares into my eyes for a while and leaves. He's weird sometimes.

Samukelisiwe is coming for me, I have to protect myself and my baby. I can't tell Mthombo about it until I have spoken to Mathonga.

If this is Karma catching up with me, I give up on everything I ever believed in.

.

.

I'm nervous about meeting Mphako, Athule should be here to do the honours of introducing us and make things easy for me.

"Nonyanda, we have ten minutes before your father gets here."

I know that look.

"Huh Mthombo!" Shameless!

"What? I'm craving my wife, can't I have her when I want her?"

Marriage is not heaven, you can't have everything you want.

"Your one legged wife is in pain, and we're in the

hospital. Anyone can walk in.”

He throws a look at the door, his eyes have grown small. Do men always think about sex? It's not making sense no matter how much I crack my brain.

“A minute kee? We can break a record, 123 and I'll be done.” He's unbuttoning his pants. I am not doing this.

“I am not a sperm dish Mr. Meyiwa.” Where is that father? This one is starting to test the little patience I have.

He sits back on the chair, hangs his head to the side, his palms on his cheeks.

“Stop sulking, it doesn't suit you.”

He looks like a big baby.

“I'm not sulking,” he grumbles.

“Mthombo I am not giving you sex on a hospital bed. What if somebody died on it, and they are watching us? Imagine trending in the afterlife as two humans who can't control their hormones.”

“Two married humans.”

He'd say anything to get himself laid.

"Shiyiwe look, it's so sad. Don't you feel sorry for it?"

He's pointing at his erection, I don't want to say anything but I have to put the dog down.

"Smack it, maybe it will sit."

He laughs, "You are pregnant and pregnant women have raging hormones. Don't come to me when you are horny."

Please, he will give it to me by fire or force.

I'm saved from the grumpy man by a knock at the door.

"Come in," I say.

Mthombo nudges me, "What if it's your father? I am not ready."

His covers his member, he's grown twice his size.
I'm not rescuing anyone when his pants tear.

"Sit down and cross your legs." I tell him.

My father can't see this.

He's here, the man that loved MaMbuyazi through time. Three children with the same woman while married.

He's a crier like the man I am married to, he heaves and tears up. I look at Mthombo, this is awkward for me. Where is Athule?

Mphako's back hunches, he puts a hand against the wall and takes a moment.

"Cry baby." He mouths, squeezing my hand.

I have no comment for him, he is the king of cry-babies.

"Should I give him a hug?" Mthombo is not funny really, this man is my father. Tears come and pool down my face because I can be a cry baby too.

Mphako raises his eyes and rids of his tears.

"My baby." Finally he's normal. He steps closer, his eyes harden when they find Mthombo's hand on mine. The husband clears his throat and lets go like my hands are made of hot coal.

"You look just like your mother." He sniffs, extending

his hands to touch my face but seems to change his mind.

I don't look like MaMbuyazi, I look like no one actually.

"Where is Athule?" I ask.

"She's coming." He won't take his eyes off me.

I thought there would be a connection, I'm not feeling it.

"Would you like to sit?" I ask.

Why can't this moment not be awkward?

"I'll stand, can I give you a hug?" -Mphako.

I guess I'm the only one feeling the awkwardness. I need a retake.

"Sure."

He feels like a stranger, I'm really trying here. I shift as he opens his arms for a hug, tears flood his pupils just as he wraps his arms around me.

"My baby." Mphako says and strangely at this moment, I feel like a baby being cradled in her

father's arms. But part of me is uncomfortable. This door is busy today, I'm thinking it's Athule. But nope, it's the uncle I left back in KZN. He's wearing a very tight three-piece suit, in his hand is a brown briefcase.

"Step away from the child." What is uncle Mdu doing? Mphako is startled, he jumps a little and turns to face him.

"Who are you?" Mphako asks.

"This is my uncle, Mduduzi Jele." I must make it clear, I'm not liking the serious look on uncle Mdu's face.

"Yes, not only her uncle. I raised this child, I was there for her first walk. Her first tooth, her first word."

This is coming from the man who appeared during funerals only.

"Her first word was Mduduzi, tokswit (stocksweet). She loved lollipops and of course it was my job to buy her everything she wanted."

Why is this man lying? He flew all the way from KZN to do the devil's work.

"Uncle Mdu..."

"Don't interrupt Shiyiwe, men are talking." He doesn't spare me a look.

He places his ugly briefcase on my bed and pops it open. There is nothing in it but a piece of paper.

"Here's the bill." Uncle Mdu hands Mphako the paper.

"6 Million rand?" Mphako's eyebrows rise.

We're confused this side too.

"That's your child maintenance, 3 million per child. What do you think we were raising? Cows?" Uncle says and winks at Mthombo. The hubby is stupid enough to entertain my uncle with a thumb's up.

These two have been conspiring against my father.

Mphako clears his throat, he loosens his tie. They are going to chase him away before we bond, I'll stay an orphan forever.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Ninety-three

ATHULE-

.

.

Baba says Penny won't be coming back home, I don't know where she will go when she leaves the hospital. I don't care either. I want her out of my life.

Ayanda is recovering at home, she is suffering from depression. She deleted every picture she had of her mother on her phone. Both she and Sizwile haven't gone to visit Penny at the hospital.

That woman is getting what she deserves.

I came here with my father after Bhedlindaba dropped me off in Riverlea, I won't be going back to his house soon. I won't be going back to work either. Simi fired me.

"You think this is your father's place?" She said over the phone and told me to hand over my uniform.

I'm officially unemployed.

Shiyiwe is doing well, I'm happy that she's finally met her father. They haven't had time to talk, Mphako walked out of here with her uncle and Mthombo.

"That looks pretty bad, does it hurt?" She's observing the bruise on my lip. Besides my father, she's the only one who has asked about it.

"Funny how you're the only one who's noticed. Baba too, I lied and said I hit my face against a door." I fake a laugh.

"And Bhedlindaba?"

That one is a whole different story, he's hot then cold.

"Ndaba is still learning to love me."

Shiyiwe gives me a judgmental look, she's not buying my bullshit.

"He still has to learn? I don't get it, I thought you two were going strong."

I thought so too after the night we had.

I shrug, “He says he loves me, his actions speak different. There’s suddenly these women appearing, I don’t know if I should stay or leave. His attitude is giving patriarchy type of vibes, I don’t think I’m the submissive type. If Ndaba is the person I’m starting to think he is, then I don’t see us working out. I love him so much Shiyiwe.”

It was so easy for me to give my heart to him. I can’t imagine loving anyone else. I want a life with him.

“Do you want me to talk to him? I won’t mention your name. I’ll attack him randomly he won’t know we were talking about him.”

I would appreciate all the help I can get.

“You’d do that for me?”

Her lips stretch and a smile appears, warm and full of love.

“You saved my life, I owe you mine.” She says.

“If you put it like that, then please talk to him for me. Or ask Mthombo to do it.”

Mthombo probably doesn’t care, his life revolves

around Shiyiwe. The rest of us can go to hell.

“Nah, he’ll tell me to stay out your business. I will talk to Ndaba myself.” Shiyiwe says, taking my hand into hers.

“Did I tell you I’m glad we’re twins?” I tell her.

“You should be glad, can we make TikTok videos now and chow money?” She’s crazy.

“You mean stand in front of the camera and pout for 10seconds?”

I’ve found those videos very uninteresting and boring. Shiyiwe cracks into laughter. I might have lost my job, and can’t understand my relationship but this girl right here gives me peace.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

I don’t want to talk to these two childish men after

what they did to my father. Uncle Mdu is dead serious about this R6Million, Mphako is out of his head with worry.

He's not the same man who walked in here crying, I'm going to dismiss this stupid idea before he gets a heart attack.

"Take a walk with me, Mphakathi." Uncle Mdu puts an arm around my father's shoulder. They just walked in from God-knows where, they are leaving again.

"It's Mphako babomncane." I correct him and he's stealing my moment.

"As in Lunch?" Uncle Mdu.

The raise of the eyebrows is overly exaggerated.

"Yes, my father gave me this name." Mphako answers with pride.

"Did your mother forget to give him umphako for work? But why punish you?" Nooooo! This is not happening.

"Ncane please, you are embarrassing the Jeles." I

chide him.

He's forgetting his surname sounds worse than Mphako's name.

Uncle Mdu laughs.

"Baba, it's a boy." I don't know whose female voice uncle Mdu is imitating. "Yeah mfazi, you forgot to pack my lunch izolo. We will name the boy Mphako."

This time he imitates a man's voice, deeper than his.

Is this why I made it? To witness such an embarrassing moment? Mphako looks lost, I don't want with my father. This is my father.

Mthombo is suppressing a laugh.

I tap my father's hand and whisper, "Blink twice if you need help?"

Because I am ready to throw uncle Mdu out of this room. Mphako shakes his head with a smile.

"Kodwa baba, we agreed to name him Mandla."

Uncle Mdu is not done, he's talking like a woman again.

"Yeah mfazi, next time don't forget umphako wam."
He says, imitating my grand father's voice.

I'm finished, these are my grandparents uncle Mdu is throwing shade at.

Mphako sighs, I'm sure he's never met such a man in his life.

I pinch Mthombo, he has his face hidden and dead with silent laughter.

What puzzles me is that uncle Mdu has not cracked a single smile, he's serious. Something is wrong with him.

"Take a walk with me, Mphako." Uncle Mdu puts an arm around his shoulder and leads him out.

.

.

It's good they have left, I can give this one an ugly look without being judged by the elders.

"Tell me when you're done laughing at my family."

He purses his lips, eyes wet from tears.

“Mthombo you are not seriously cry-laughing.” I’m not seeing this.

“Sorry Nonyanda, it’s your uncle’s fault.” He clears his throat, and settles down on a chair.

“How are you feeling? And the baby?” He’s rubbing my belly, it feels good.

“We’re okay, I think.” It’s the pain on my thigh that’s challenging me.

“I can’t wait to take you home.” He says.

“Soon babe, I need to recover first.”

“Not you, I’m talking to Snookums.”

He kisses my belly. This is what I get for loving a coconut, no baby of mine will be named Snookums.

“Whose name is that?” He must not try me.

Here he goes, trying to buy my calmness with a smile.

“Our baby of course.” He answers.

We will see whose baby will go by that name. Who cares that her grandmother thinks she shits gold.

“Thank you for this gift Shiyiwe, you have made me the happiest man alive.”

And don’t you ever forget it Mr.

“You’re my headache, what else can I do? Everyone needs a headache in life, I’m glad I found mine.” I confess.

His lips meet mine, he’s kissing me with everything he has. His hand starts to wander on my body, he plunges his tongue inside my mouth. He’s becoming sly by the day. I push the hand gliding up my breast and pull away from the kiss, heaving and chasing shorts breaths.

“You look so good vulnerable and submissive.”

Mthombo says, swiping his thumb across my wet lips.

“You are evil, don’t think I will ever fall for your games.”

He thinks I’m joking, “Can we both wear the pants in this marriage?”

That’s an odd ask.

“Tired already?” I tease, he laughs.

“I want us both to have a say, you’re not my slave Nonyanda, you are my rib. You can never be behind me or beneath me, I want us to walk hand-in-hand in everything we do. Let us teach our children equality. A man is not greater than a woman, neither is a woman greater than a man. We’re a team muntu wam, I believe if we go through life with this notion, we will grow stronger.”

He is growing, I love this for him... for us actually.

“I agree, we can do this. It won’t be easy, I know for a fact that I’d fail in this life thing without you Mthombo wami.”

He squeezes my hand, a faint smile reaches his mouth.

“You will never have to do it without me, I’ll always be here.” He says and pecks my lips.

“I’m glad it wasn’t you in that urn I stole from your mother.” I say, not knowing how my mind traveled and reached this place.

His brows snap to infinity, grown men are defeated by confusion.

I narrate the story about how he died and was cremated, the drama at the funeral and his ashes.

“I got drunk for the first time in my life thinking it would numb the pain but I ended up doing something stupid.” It’s about time I confess.

The curiosity lingering in his eyes makes me nervous.

“I thought Bhedlindaba was you, I said things to him and asked him to sleep with me. I stripped naked. He got angry and called me out on it.”

His face hardens, he drops my hand and stands.

“I swear I wasn’t in my right senses, I thought he was you. I will never drink again, I promise.”

It’s not my fault that they look so much alike.

“Mthombo it was a mistake.”

Why is he not saying anything? He’s not looking at me either. I hold his hand, he doesn’t hold me back.

“I don’t want to talk about it,” he says, barely opening

his mouth.

"What is this you said a while ago? We're doing this life thing together, that means we talk things out and fix what needs to be fixed before it's completely broken." I remind him.

He sighs and finally looks at me.

"I know, give me time." He asks for time.

I don't blame him though, I'd react the same if I were in his shoes.

"Let me check on your father, I don't trust your uncle." He kisses my cheek, I was hoping for a peck on my lips.

He walks out, leaving me with a heavy heart. My father walks in right after, not giving me time to drown my stupidity.

.

.

"My child," he sits with a heavy sigh.

"I'm sorry about my uncle," I have to apologize on his

behalf.

Mphako shifts in his seat, the mention of uncle Mdu makes him sweat.

“I’ll try to borrow money from the bank.”

Which bank will give this man R6Million? If I tell him not to stress about it, he probably won’t, and I will get in trouble with my uncle.

It’s better we move away from this issue, for now.

“Tell me about your mother. How did she die?” He’s digging old wounds with hard scabs.

“She was shot, they were outside the house when a man appeared and claimed both their lives.”

He drops his head, is he crying again? I can’t with grown man tears, I’ve had enough bad luck already.

Habe!

“You loved her didn’t you?”

Mphako nods.

“She was everything to me.” He answers softly before sniffing a couple of times.

“Then why did you marry someone else? Why didn’t you choose her?”

“We were torn apart, I guess it became impossible to fix what people had broken. Circumstances wouldn’t allow us to be together.”

His explanation doesn’t cut it. I’d fight everything for the one I love.

“Yet you had three children together?” I say.

His eyebrows crease into confusion.

“Three? No, we had two. You and Athule.”

He doesn’t know about Mthandeni. Didn’t Athule speak to her father?

“I have a sister, her name is Mthandeni. She’s twenty. Before my grandma passed away, she told me that Mthandeni is your and MaMbuyazi’s child. There was a picture of you two in your golden days.”

“My child, what are you saying to me?” He’s on the verge of tears as he stands. He’s going to make me cry this old man.

“Oh Nkos’ yami!” he falls back on the chair crying.

“What have I done MaMbuyazi? What have I done to you sthandwa Sami?”

What do I do? He’s getting louder with each word uttered. He drops his head on the bed, and weeps. This man is crying like a widower.

“Baba.” It’s not that I see him as my father yet, it’s out of respect that I call him baba. I touch his shoulder, he looks up. God should limit men’s tears because wow, we can’t be put in situations where we have to comfort grown men.

Half the tank or empty it, once.

“Where is she?”

“MaMbuyazi?” I ask.

I’m confused, he was calling out for her just now.

“Mthanden? Where is my baby?”

Don’t cry Shiyiwe.

“Mthanden has been through a lot baba, when our father passed away, she became a target to vultures. They took her innocence and she couldn’t stand the pain I guess. She tried to take her life. She’s in a

coma.”

His shoulders start shaking, tears ruin his face. I need an umbrella, it’s raining tears. He covers his face with his hand.

“I failed her, I failed my baby, and I failed MaMbuyazi.”

Technically, he didn’t. He didn’t know he had kids outside. How do I tell him to lower his voice without sounding like a heartless bastard?

Three people run into the room, uncle Mdu, Mthombo and Athule. I’m sure there’s a crowd of people outside.

Mthombo runs to me and puts his arms around me.

“Are you okay?” Why does he look shaken?

“I’m fine.” He gives me a tight hug. What’s going on?

“Mshana, we thought you died?” Uncle Mdu says.

I’m not a goat, why would I die? I pass away.

“We heard loud cries and thought...” Mthombo starts

to explain.

Silence! Everyone is staring at Mphako who is trying to hide his tears and stop his sobs. I wipe mine away lest I become a victim too.

“Why is he crying?” My uncle.

“I told him what happened to MaMbuyazi and...”

“Haibo! We cried months back baba, where were you?”

I wasn’t done talking, what’s wrong with this uncle?

“Mthanden’s situation broke his heart as well.” How do I explain this to my uncle?

“We’re all sad that Mthanden committed suicide but she will be fine.” Uncle Mdu.

Mthanden didn’t commit suicide, she attempted to. This uncle is a lost cause.

Mphako sniffs, “I failed MaMbuyazi.” He says.

“So? Women fail us every day by faking orgasms.”

Uncle Mdu no.

Mthombo chokes on his saliva. I'm moving to China to teach English.

"He loved her, uncle Mdu, don't be..."

"I also loved those chickens I've been eating since your parents died but they had to be eaten. I loved the whiskey they offered me in the plane, and the first class traveling but I had to get off the plane."

My eyes shift to my husband, he looks away instantly. I knew he had something to do with this.

"I love this suit, but I have to give it back to cheeseboy. It's life baba, we love, we learn and we lose. I've lost all these things I mentioned but you don't see me crying. Please wipe those tears, before you give my niece bad luck."

"Shiyiwe?" Athule just met my uncle.

"You'll get used to him." I tell her.

Mphako should take my uncle's advice, he cries a river when Mduduzi Jele continues talking.

"You're still crying?" Uncle Mdu, please shut up.

"Let my father grieve in peace."

“No, I’m going to fine him.”

Mphako walks out, I think he’s going to finish crying outside.

“Babomncane, why do you have to be this person?”

“I was helping him hau, amanye amadoda cry in the toilet. Why do you think we take hours in there?

We’re crying about every problem we’ve ever faced. Isishebo, the woman I have to share a bed with every night and the money I lost on Betway. The newspaper is a cover up, make sure you flip the pages loud enough to dominate over the sound of your cries.” He’s probably the only man that does that.

“I don’t take an hour in the toilet. I cry on your chest, angithi Nonyanda?” Mthombo comes to his own defense. I nod because he does and I love it.

“No man, Mphako needs to man up, instead he creates a whole circus. Hai suka.” Uncle Mdu.

“He loved her baba.” Mthombo says.

“I’m not disputing that, but you can’t love a woman

with your whole heart mkhwe. When Jesus said love your enemies, he didn't mean whole heartedly."

Hau, women are enemies?

"You enter with your toe but aboMphako, gulukudu whole body, inside. That's why his heart is always dudududu too much."

He emphasizes by repeatedly beating his chest.

This one will not be part of abakhongi during my lobola, he will kill my husband.

"Where did he go? I want my money." He walks out, clearly with a mission.

Uncle Mdu is too much and he needs to take that suit off, he looks ridiculous.

.

.

Let's boost this chapter with 450+ comments for another one after supper.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Ninety-four

SHIYIWE-

.

.

Mthombo once mentioned therapy, I have a feeling we'll be taking Mphako along. He can't be okay after what my uncle put him through a week ago.

I'm home, the house Mthombo bought. Sikolethu is not here. But my uncle is, he chose a room for himself and I don't see him leaving. That one is going to forget about his wife and kids back home, Igoli will swallow him.

It's Sunday morning, Ntebo's mother is being laid to rest today. I'm not going, I don't want to go. Mphako wants me there, I told him no. That woman ruined my life, I want nothing to do with her and her daughter.

Speaking of, Ntebo is missing. Mphako has been looking for her all over. Her neighbors have different stories about where she might be.

I haven't brought myself to the state of caring. My

only worry is Samukeliswe, she's in my dreams a lot lately. I told Mathonga about her, he said don't worry. These were his exact words.

My bedroom is downstairs for the next two weeks, of course the husband followed me.

Here comes the uncle whistling and doing a little dance. What's he happy about?

"You're whistling in the house Babomncane."

He does a dramatic spin, I guess he's showing me this expensive black suit he has on. Everything is new, from the hairstyle to the shoes.

"Because I'm happy." He sings, snapping his fingers.

If he's happy about Tshegofatso's downfall, then I'm happy too. I'm worried about this outfit, I don't remember him going all out for my father's 2nd funeral. Mathonga helped us with cleansing before and after the burial. I am happy that bab'Jele is resting in peace.

"You're not dressed."

I didn't know I was supposed to be dressed up for a

funeral I will not be attending.

“Why are you going to that funeral uncle Mdu?” I ask, only to understand what’s going on.

He sighs and sits beside me, “I love it when you call me uncle Mdu, not that babomncane poverty sounding name. Heaven knows where you adopted it from.”

Wow.

“Uncle Mdu makes me feel like a rich uncle.” He says.

I guess I will continue to call him uncle.

“I know how you feel about that woman my child, believe me I feel the same. I’m glad she is gone.”

“Then why are you going to her funeral? You went as far as buying an expensive suit.”

Why is he smiling?

“Not just a suit baby, it’s Versace.” Pride dances on his face. Mthombo is spoiling this man, he’ll be broke when it’s time to pay lobola. I don’t come cheap, he hasn’t heard.

“I’m doing this for you mshana, I want to make sure that woman is buried six feet under. You don’t know what witches are capable of.”

I doubt Mme Mosheo will come back from the dead.

“Do want you must, but don’t eat their food. We have food here at home.”

He’s laughing at me, “I attend funerals for food Mshana.”

I should have kept my mouth shut.

I don’t want him there, he’s taking my husband with him. Athule and my father will be there as well, the level of betrayal is too much.

Mthombo walks in folding the sleeves of his white shirt. It’s good to see he didn’t buy himself a new suit. He’s paired the shirt with formal black pants.

“I’m ready.” He comes to stand next to me, I look up to find him staring.

“Come back soon.” I’m hoping he will change his mind, but uncle Mdu will probably hold it against him.

“We won’t be long,” Mthombo says.

He wants to lean in for a kiss, but hesitates.

Uncle Mdu excuses himself, says he's going to fetch something in his room.

My uncle has a room in my house.

Mthombo takes his place and attacks me with a heated kiss.

"A kiss for the road," he says, dropping a few more kisses.

"Your brother is coming over." I remind him.

I'm not sure about the conversation they had after I told Mthombo I wanted to speak to Bhedlindaba. He wasn't happy, he's still not happy about it.

"I know, I spoke to him this morning."

I ruined their trust for each other.

"I love you, don't ever forget that." He says and kisses me.

He speaks as if he is reminding me that it is him I love. I don't want to comment on what my mind is

telling me.

"I love you just as much." I tell him.

Uncle Mdu is back.

Before they take a step, Bhedlindaba walks in, hands in his pockets and a yellow spoti covering his head.

"I'll see you when I get back," Mthombo says to his brother.

He glances over at me, walks back to kiss me, I guess goodbye.

"You are mine Nonyanda, only mine." He's loud about his declaration.

I'm angry at him for thinking whatever he is thinking, I would never cheat on him.

There's a staring contest between him and Bhedlindaba, Mthombo's entire demeanor and approach on this is wrong.

Uncle Mdu complains about time, that's when the husband blinks and walks out.

"You asked to see me?" Bhedlindaba queries.

“Sit!”

.

.

MDUDUZI JELE-

I wasn't invited to the funeral, but who cares? The deceased was not a celebrity, but a woman that gave my niece a hard time.

This boy is driving slow, Johannesburg is far.

“Let me drive, we'll miss the funeral.”

He shakes his head.

“You don't have a license baba.” He says.

That's small waters but he won't get it.

“Just let me drive.”

“You'll crash my car.” This boy is disrespectful.

“You will buy a new one,” he has the money.

Mthombo frowns, clearly not liking my retort.

“You need to learn to save baba, money is not everything.”

“God didn’t only take away the use of your legs, he took your brain as a bonus. Unfortunately one of them has not been returned.” I complain.

He glances at me, it’s brief.

“What did I do now?”

“You’re forgetting that I’m about to be the richest man in South Africa.” I say.

The look on his face says he hasn’t heard the news.

“Did you win the jackpot on Betway?” This boy thinks Betway is a walk in the park, I have lost too much on that stupid game. I’m going to sue once I have my money.

“No, the money I’m going to make from the lobola. Mphako’s debt, he owes me maintenance, damages and the money we used to bury MaMbuyazi.”

“But why am I your target baba? I thought we were friends and you’d go easy on me during the lobola

negotiations.”

“Not where Shiyiwe is concerned, she’s my daughter and I don’t play when it comes to my children.”

Shiyiwe will get everything she deserves in life and I will make sure of it.

“I also don’t play when it comes to my wife, I’d do anything for her.” Mthombo is a good boy, I hate that I like him for my Shiyiwe.

“You don’t have a choice cheese-boy, otherwise I will pluck your testicles out like grapes, cook them and feed them to you.” I mean what I say.

He chokes on his saliva, the car hurtles to the side. I’ve made him nervous with my threat.

“There will be no need for that baba, I will never hurt her. Shiyiwe will never shed a tear because of me.”

That’s what I want to hear.

“Cherish her mfana wam, don’t take advantage of her love. Some men tend to change years after marriage, they start looking around for a quick fuck. Sex is like a drug, but you need to make sure you’re

addicted to one woman. If you taste other drugs while married you will want more and want to explore different kinds. That will be the end of your marriage, don't lose a good thing over nothing. It takes a few seconds to have sex..."

"I take longer actually." He interrupts me.

"Really? I thought... my wife, she..." Damn! That's why that woman is always faking an orgasm.

Mthombo suddenly looks uncomfortable.

"Do you know where I can get pills for Mdu junior? He's not as strong as he used to be. Women called me Mduduzi the black Stallion back in the day, I used to ride..."

"Baba no please, spare me the details." Ohho. It's his loss.

"Just make sure you treat my daughter with love, don't dim the lights when it comes to loving her. Suffocate her with your love mfana wam, but don't let it make you weak. You need to stay strong if you are going to keep your home grounded, there will always be people who will want to break what you

have. Don't let it happen, set an example to your children. Be the best man you can be for your family.”

He's nodding, I see a tear trailing down his face. If I comment on it, he will say I hate him.

“Thank you baba, my father has never cared enough to advise me. You're like the father I never had.” He is getting soft.

“I have a soft spot for you because you make my Shiyiwe happy, asbonge ndoda.”

He keeps his reply to himself.

The rest of the drive is in silence.

.

.

This is a strange funeral, I'm used to crowded funerals. We missed the service and had to drive straight to the cemetery.

“Are you sure you want to attend this funeral?”

Mthombo asks as we step out of the car.

“Please, don’t be an enemy of progress. Not enough people have seen me in this outfit, I look good.” It was expensive, and the next time I wear it will be December. I lead the way, fashionably late. Yeah, yeah. People must stop and stare, it can’t always be about the dead.

“Proceed mfundisi,” I give the pastor the go ahead.

I spot Mphako and his daughter sitting on black chairs. He takes this thing too serious, respecting the dead as if they can see him.

This woman lying in the coffin has not met me, I’m about to make her pay for what she did to Shiyiwe.

“Who are we burying again?” I ask the man in dark shades standing next to me.

“Tshegofatso Mosheo, she was my wife.” Oh.

Then why is he wearing a pair of jeans and a Kaizer Chiefs t-shirt, and not sitting with the family over there? He smells like a brewery.

“Argh shame, Shegofaso. May her soul rest in peace.”

"It's Tshegofatso baba, you don't pronounce the G in Zulu." Mthombo steps in.

"Yebo, her. What happened to her?" I ask the husband.

"She died in her sleep." He answers.

I see, "But what was she doing sleeping? She'd be alive today, you know."

The pastor stops preaching, I didn't realize I was loud.

"I'm sorry, please continue."

He frowns and shuts his bible.

"A little announcement before we bury our beloved sister, don't go home straight after the burial. The family has prepared refreshments, they are asking that you come and eat with them." The pastor says, he must be drunk because there is no way such announcements are made at funerals.

"Why can't we eat before going to the grave yard? This thing of eating after swallowing dust must stop, you're ruining our appetites man." I raise the issue.

He ignores me and asks men to help lower the coffin,
I thought they'd have those fancy things like on TV.

Must be a low budget funeral.

"I'd like to help."

Mthombo grabs my hand stopping me, I escape his grip forcefully and trip. I fall on the coffin, and because there are men carrying it, they stagger and drop the casket.

Loud gasps fill the cemetery, it's a good thing it didn't open.

I ask the men to help me put it back on its place, my mission is to flip it over. They seem to be following my lead, they probably think I have a strategy on how to lift it up. It's heavy.

"Come on madoda." I shout, pushing the coffin.

It flips once, and drops right into the ground.

"It fell upside down." One of the men says in shock.
It's what I wanted.

"It's not like she will suffocate to death and stuff,
besides, the demons have a better view of her ass.

She gave my niece a ‘kiss my ass attitude’ when she was alive. Why not continue in death?” I grab a hand full of soil and throw it inside the grave. She’s lucky to be the first woman buried upside down.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Ninety-five

SHIYIWE-

.

.

I didn’t like the look on Mthombo’s face when he walked out of here. Do I even have the resources to justify his jealousy? He can be insecure, makes me wonder if he has trust in me or the love I have for him.

The old Shiyiwe would have loved his jealousy, it’s something I always wanted from a man as proof of his love. However, Mthombo has showed me that loving a woman is not showing how jealous you can be. It’s a love I never knew existed.

“Your driver is doing well, I was with him this

morning." I sense nerves in the tone of his voice. Why he feels he needs to tell me about Thambo leaves me confused, unless Mthombo asked him to check on him.

It is a relief though that Thambo is getting better, I haven't gone to visit. Someone's husband said the sick can't visit the sick, it's unheard of. Whatever he meant by that.

"I'm glad he's healing, I'll visit sometime next week."

He looks at me with raised eyebrows and inquisitive eyes, just when I'm trying to read his face, he blinks his eyes away from me, rubbing the bridge of his nose while at it.

"Would you like something to drink?"

He will have to get it himself, I'm a couch potato till Mthombo comes home and lifts me up from here. The house help is not around, she wasn't around when I came back from the hospital.

"I'm fine." He seems nervous as well. Strange thing to notice on Bhedlindaba Meyiwa.

Who sits with their hands tucked in their pockets, an unreadable expression on their face? His presence feels heavy.

“You look good, how is the leg?”

This must be why he was staring, I was getting a little uncomfortable.

“Why?”

His eyebrows snap. He looks at the leg stretched on the couch, I have shorts on because of the bandage.

“Why what?”

“Why are you asking about my leg?”

Confusion is splashed all over his serious face.

“Because I care, I want to know if you’re okay.”

Irritation is coated around his voice. An insensitive man does not care about anyone, so I don’t buy his bullshit.

“Does that mean you don’t care about my sister?”

“Your sister?”

He frowns as he shifts to sit on the edge of the couch, the hands are out of his pockets.

“What’s going on Shiyiwe?”

My assumptions are right, he’s insensitive. He should know what I’m talking about after mentioning Athule.

“Do you love Athule, Bhedlindaba?”

His breath forms a sigh, I can tell that he is already exhausted by this conversation.

“Why am I here?”

I called him here, yet he’s the one intimidating me, in my house.

“This is not an ambush Bhedlindaba, I only want to know how you feel about my sister.”

He narrows his eyes and scratches his head. I didn’t ask him to solve for X, did I?

“That’s my business with Athule.”

“She’s my sister, I deserve to know.”

“Mthombo is my brother, have I ever asked you how

you feel about him?"

I don't like smart men.

"It's not the same."

"It is to me. What is this about Shiyiwe? Did Athule put you up to this?"

I'm saying it again, I don't like smart men. How did he even come to this conclusion?

"She didn't, I have the right to worry about her. She's hurt Bhedlindaba, did you notice that bruise on her face?"

He starts blinking like a fish that's been taken out of water.

"Do you even know how she got it?"

"I... I didn't ask."

Turns out he is not that smart.

"Do you know how much she loves you?"

He gives me a look that tells me to mind my own business. If Mthombo were to walk in and hear me saying this, he'd tell me the same thing.

“I love her just as much.” Liar.

“That’s not the impression she is getting from you, you’re not showing it Bhedlindaba. Athule is committed 100%, she is not getting the same vibes from you.”

You’re ruining it Shiyiwe, who says vibes in this day and age? I’m pissing this man off and he is doing a perfect job not hiding it from me.

“If Athule had a problem with me, why not come to me? What is she trying to prove by asking you to intervene?”

This is what I get for trying to help my sister.

“Bhedlindaba...”

“No offense Shiyiwe, what I feel for your sister has absolutely nothing to do with you. I’d appreciate it if you focused on your marriage instead of my relationship with Athule.”

“But...”

“Athule is not a child, she can speak for herself.”

He’s starting to annoy me with his rudeness.

“Bhedlindaba I only...”

Someone just opened the front door, he stands to check. He stops in the corridor, looking at someone with that face of his.

“Good day sir.” A woman’s voice.

Bhedlindaba nods and comes back to his seat.

I don’t know this young lady smiling at me.

“Good morning Madam, my name is Nolwazi Ndlela, I’m the house help. I’m sorry I’m late, I had an emergency...” She goes on about the emergency, I’m stuck on how young she looks.

How am I madam to such a young girl? She looks nothing over twenty.

“Excuse me,” Bhedlindaba strolls out. I hope he is not leaving, it will be a mission to get him back.

“Nice to meet you Nolwazi. How old are you?” I have to ask because, why is such a young girl a house help?

“19 years.” She’s very energetic, reminds me of Mthandeni.

I realise I’m staring when she clears her throat, “I’ll start with lunch soon. Would you like anything at the moment?”

“No, I’m fine.”

She nods and walks away.

If Mthombo is responsible for hiring this tiny figured child, then he will hear it from me. That girl is too young to be working as a house maid. I wonder what her story is, she should be at school and not slaving in people’s houses.

My phone rings, some guy called Mikhulu brought it over at the hospital.

I was hoping it’s Mthombo calling, his cell number lives rent free in my head, I don’t know this one.

Because it’s an unknown number, I accept the call and keep my mouth zipped.

“Hello?” It’s a man’s voice.

“Can I speak to Shiyiwe please?”

He’s speaking deep Zulu.

“Speaking.” I say, reluctant about answering whoever this is.

“It’s me, Lithizwi.”

“Lithizwi?” I don’t remember giving him my number.

“I got your number from malume Mdu.” He says, as if he read my mind. Uncle Mdu will sell me off one day.

“Is everything okay?” I ask because why else would he be calling me? We’re not friends or anything.

Bhedlindaba walks back in with a cup and a plate, there’s a sandwich inside. He sits closer this time and starts stuffing his face.

“I’m in town, I thought I could come see Mthandeni.”
That’s Lithizwi.

I should have figured it out, he was taken by Mthandeni.

“She is not feeling well, I’m afraid it’s not a good time

to visit.”

“I know, malume told me.” He’s malume now? How close did these two get in my absence? I hope uncle Mdu didn’t sell my sister off.

“How is she though? I’d like to see her... please.”

This is a disaster.

“I’m kind of held up at the moment, I will call you back in a few days?”

I need to think about this.

“I’ll be waiting for your call.” He sounds disappointed.

He will have to be strong for these coming few days. I close the call and give my attention to this man who finished a four slice sandwich in seconds.

“Can I leave?”

Now that he is full he wants to leave.

“We haven’t concluded anything yet, I’m really worried about Athule.”

The serious face is back, what is wrong with this man? He sighs, places the plate on the table and sips tea.

“Let me do the worrying, you focus on getting better. Athule is my responsibility.”

Technically, she is not. They are not married.

“Please think about what I said, either you love her right or leave her.”

I can't believe I'm saying this, Athule would hate me for it.

“I'm not leaving her, Shiyiwe. That's something that will never happen.”

The sudden anger is unnecessary. Turns out this one hates being on the losing side.

“Tell me what's on your mind, Bhedlindaba. Maybe I will understand why you are like this.”

He stares, too hard. I look away, then back at him to find him still staring. His hand moves and lands on my toes, he's touching me.

“The truth?”

I don't like the tone he is using and how he is looking at me.

"You." He says and I am confused as fuck.

I wait for him to continue because he has to fill in the blanks.

"You're on my mind, you are always on my mind."

What is he saying? I don't like where I think this is going.

"Stop touching me."

This man must not try me, he must never.

"What are you saying Bhedlindaba?"

I should not be asking him, I don't want to know what he meant by that. He releases a breath, it's a good thing he's keeping his hands to himself.

"I love Athule, but I don't know how to love her right. Sometimes, I see you in her. Sometimes I ask myself why she is not you becau..."

"I think you should leave."

He has overstayed his welcome.

“Shiyiwe... I...”

He tries to touch me again.

“I said get out,” I snap.

He’s not moving, the Meyiwas and their stubbornness. Fine, if he won’t leave, I will.

“There is nothing special about you Bhedlindaba, you’re just an uncultured patriarchal adult-child who can’t see love even when it’s standing in front of him.” I tell him, grabbing my crutches with anger.

“I’m sorry, I should not have said that.” He’s trying to stop me from standing up.

I shove his hands away and shift on the couch.

“I am your brother’s wife. The audacity for you to say that to me is disgusting. You shouldn’t even be thinking it.”

“Shiyiwe, I said I’m sorry. You’re going to hurt yourself, sit.”

I don’t care, I want to get away from him.

He is pissing me off.

Mthombo is the one who helps me move around, but today I am in the mercy of his brother whom I will not be asking for help.

He's a jerk.

"Shiyiwe watch out!!!"

I didn't intend to step with the injured foot, it happened by default. Now here I am, lying on top of Bhedlindaba after he caught me. He fell on his back on the couch with me on top of him.

"You okay?" He asks.

"Yes, help me up."

Beggars can't be choosers.

Just as he places his hands on my waist, someone pulls me up. The husband is back, and seemingly fuming, his eyes are burning with fury.

"Mthombo..." This is not what he's thinking.

I know Mthombo, his mind has left his senses, he's thinking the worst.

His hands tighten on my waist, it hurts but I don't say

anything.

“Sit.” He says, sitting me back down.

Uncle Mdu is not here, but Athule is. She thinks I betrayed her, there are tears in her eyes. She’s looking at me, disappointedly.

“Athule wait...”

There she goes, flying out the house. This was not planned.

“Get up.” Mthombo growls at his brother.

He grabs him by his clothes, and as soon as he’s brought him to a standing position lands a punch on his little brother’s face.

“Mthombo no.” I yell.

He ignores me, shoves Bhedlindaba to the floor, sits down on his hips with his fits ready to punch him.

“I trusted you, you son of a bitch.” Mthombo growls.

The blows that follow crush into Bhedlindaba’s jaw, temple and mouth.

Why is he not fighting back?

“Nothing happened Mthombo, nothing happened.” I shout for him to stop, he doesn’t seem to hear me. He is going to kill him if he continues like this.

“She is my wife, my wife.” I hear tears in his voice. He really thinks I was cheating on him.

Nolwazi runs in, her face is that of horror. I’ll apologize later.

“Mthombo stop it.” I have to move or he will kill Bhedlindaba.

Pain shoots through my leg as I stand on both legs, I latch my lower lip between my teeth to suppress the pain and grab Mthombo’s hand.

He elbows me just as he raises his hand, the hit throws me back on the couch screaming and thrashing in pain.

“Nonyanda, I’m sorry.”

“You bastard.” I think that’s Bhedlindaba, I’m not sure. My ears are ringing and I’m nursing a throbbing pain on my eye, everything is flickering.

I’m going blind. I’m seeing whitish spots dancing

around, but the right eye is functional.

Bhedlindaba is straddling Mthombo, my husband is the one beneath him and receiving hard punches.

“Let him go,” I shout through my pain. Bhedlindaba is sane enough to listen and obey. He steps away and heads to me.

“Let me see,” he says.

I want to tell him to stay away from me, but Mthombo beats me to it.

“Stay away from my wife.” He pushes a bleeding Bhedlindaba away.

“Both of you, stay away from me.” I grunt, pressing a hand on my eye.

Dumb and Dumber refuse to move, they are staring at me.

“I said get out of my sight.”

Bhedlindaba is the first one to walk away. What is this one waiting for? Candy?

“I’m sorry.” He says and walks away.

To hell with him and his apology, I hate him.

.

.

Our previous sponsor hasn't reached their target, you can vote more than once.

Please share the chapters, and help me get to 31K followers.

Let's boost this chapter with 500 + comments to unlock the next insert around 1pm.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Ninety-six

ATHULE-

.

.

I don't know what I saw, I know I had to get away from there. I don't want to overthink things and conclude anything. I told myself that I won't come to his house, till he proves himself that I am the one he wants.

Now I don't know if coming here was a good idea, especially after what I saw.

I have never been so confused in my life.

He offered to take me to therapy after telling him about the man I killed haunting my dreams, I can still smell his blood till this day.

Bhedlindaba found someone, he goes with me to therapy and never misses a day. He holds my hand and speaks for me when I can't, he was changing and becoming the man I want him to be.

His change came with random flowers, cards, gifts, and money. I have more money in my account than an ordinary working citizen. Car insurances and real estate agents have made me their targets. I don't know how they found out I'm moneyed.

Cooking is the only way I can pass time, while waiting for him to come back. It's not for him, I need to keep busy to stop myself from thinking.

I grill a few T-bones, make dumplings and chicken salad. I dish up for my siblings and father, I won't cook tonight. That old man went to visit Mthanden

with uncle Mdu, they have been doing that ever since baba found out about her. He is there every day without fail.

He cried when he walked into her room and saw her attached to so many pipes and machines.

When they leave the hospital, they will go drinking with uncle Mdu, a very bad idea. Uncle Mdu has no filter, he will drive my father to insanity. My old man seems to like him though, it's his life.

I leave food on the stove just in case Bhedlindaba doesn't come back and I will have to go back to my father's house. It's after 1pm, time must be rushing to get somewhere. Perhaps it's because I'm waiting for him.

I settle on the couch and channel search, it's either I watch The Kardashians being fake towards each other or Mzansi bioskop.

I must've dozed off on the couch, my heavy sleep is disturbed by a doorbell.

Who could it be?

Oh hell no.

“What are you doing here?”

I’m being tested here.

This Wandisa bitch just won’t give up. She’s her usual self, weave, tight dress, heels. She is carrying two boxes of pizza in her hand and a bottle of wine on the other.

A closer look at her, she has bruises on her face.

Someone must have gotten tired of her bullshit and beat her to a pulp, I swear this woman would turn you into an atheist, she just has to be herself.

“Where is Bhedlindaba?” She zooms her eyes into the house trying to peep through. I block her view.

“What do you want with him?”

I’m done being miss goody-two-shoes.

“It has nothing to do with you.” She says, her coconut accent sounds fake.

“That is where you are wrong, it has everything to do

with me. Bhedlindaba is my man and if a woman comes to his door step asking for him, I have the right to know why.”

She throws her big head back, laughing.

“I’m here to see Dimples, get out of my way.”

The nerve of this woman to try to force her way in.

“He is not here.”

I pull the door to shut it, she is not getting in here. As long as Bhedlindaba said I am the only one, then I am the only one.

She kicks the door open.

“You’re lying, I want to see Ndaba now.”

Did she just lay a demand?

“Tell me, whats-your-face. What is Bhedlindaba to you really?”

She flicks her hair back and regards me with a frown,
“What?”

The longer the heels, the more stupid she is.

“You come here, clearly without calling and demand to see him. If you’re not opening his pots and acting like the madam of the house, you’re budging in without calling. Bhedlindaba doesn’t want you, you’re not even a liability. One word from me and it will be like you never existed.”

“Listen here you stupid bitch, before you came along I was in charge here.” She says.

I know a lie when I hear one.

“Having Bhedlindaba and living in his house has always been a dream of yours right? I haven’t been here long enough but I know you’re desperate and Ndaba... my Ndaba doesn’t do desperate. He has never taken a second look at you and never will, that’s why you’re hovering around him like a fly, and he keeps shooing you away because you’re annoying Wandisa. At least have some dignity, for how long do you intend on facing rejection from a man who hardly notices you when you walk into a room?”

I touched a nerve, the rise and fall of her big chest testifies of it.

“Who do you think you are, huh?” She barks.

“Get out of here and go get your dignity wherever you left it.” I won’t entertain her, she knows just who I am.

“You bloody lowlife. Who the hell do you think you are?”

I’m getting bored, frankly. But let me amuse her since she insists.

“I’m the woman who has Ndaba’s heart, something you will never have, not even in your wildest dreams.”

“NO.”

She screams like a psycho, maybe she is one.

“You’re a slut dear, that’s all you will ever be. Do you think Ndaba will ever settle for one woman? You think you’re special and you’ll tie him down? That’s not how he rolls sweetie, he’s a soccer star. Google it, they are natural born man-whores. He’s only passing time with you and once he’s had his fun, Bhedlindaba will throw you away like the trash you

are.”

She says and laughs, and it’s on my face.

“Do you think your toothpick body can compete with this?” She turns to show me her body, she is thick I won’t lie. But fuck it.

“Ndaba fucked this toothpick body and liked it, you want proof sisi? I’m the one on the other side of the door, in his house. You’re out here, grovelling like a stray dog. Know your place sfebe.” I retort.

I’m done letting people play on my head.

She throws a box of pizza at me, it hits me on the face.

I retaliate and punch her, she reels backward and gently places the wine on the ground, just to punch me back. It hurts.

I want to throw her to the floor and finish the job on her face.

“You bitch!”

I grab the remaining box of pizza from her and throw it at her. She screams, covering her head to protect

her hair.

“Eww!” She complains as she cleans herself up.

“Get the hell out of here and don’t ever come back.” I push her, I’m not afraid to throw her down on this ground and rearranging that make-up on her face.

“You will pay for this you stupid thot, do you hear me? I will make you pay.” She yells.

She’s taking her wine with her. That woman doesn’t know me, I have been too kind and patient with her bullshit.

.

.

SHIYIWE

It hasn’t been ten minutes since I told him to leave, he walks back in with an icepack and sits where his brother was seated.

“How is your eye?”

I don't answer him. He doesn't care.

"I would never hit you, you know that right?" He's dabbing the corner of my eye with the icepack, his eyes are on me.

Pain is evident in them.

"Why would you think I would ever cheat on you? Don't you trust me, Mthombo?"

His jaw ticks, he doesn't drop his eyes.

"It's not you, it's him I don't trust with you." He says with a long sigh.

He's told me this before.

"I stepped on the floor with the injured leg and almost fell, Bhedlindaba was merely assisting me. What you walked in on was not me cheating on you, Mthombo. I would never do that to you."

Another sigh.

He leans in to blow cool air on my eye, "Does it hurt?"

There is anger lain in his voice.

“A lot.” I answer with the same attitude he’s giving me.

He puts the icepack away and intertwines our fingers, his thumb rubs the back of my hand. This is another form of intimacy, he’s telling me he loves me without actually saying it.

“I hear what you are saying, Nonyanda. But I am human, I’m allowed to feel whatever way.

Sometimes I can’t control my emotions and act a certain way.” He drops his eyes, I can see the ridges of his jaw. He’s angry and doing a lot to keep it at bay.

“Maybe we should see that therapist, we can’t be dominated by emotions. They will pull us back.”

He nods and says nothing, he leans in to kiss—probably the pain away and blows some more.

“I’m sorry, I would never put my hands on you. You have to know that Shiyiwe, I’d never hit you.”

It’s the guilt talking.

I cup his face, “I know. You are a good man

Mthombo Meyiwa, I would never second guess your manhood.”

He smirks, his eyes heaping with lust.

“My manhood?”

He’s making me shy, I should have kept my mouth shut.

“Don’t even think about it.”

I know what he’s thinking.

“What? You mentioned my manhood.” He laughs lightly and grips my uninjured thigh, leaning in to kiss my lips.

His touch is cautious and gentle, a rushed breath takes its place in and out of my mouth.

“I’m going to be gentle, make sure to open for me. I want to bury myself inside you, until you beg me to stop.” He whispers into my ear.

I press my hands on his chest, slightly pushing him back. He gives me a measured smile, it’s the tears

pouring from his eyes preventing his smile from reaching his eyes.

“Sometimes I feel like I’m losing my mind, I have never loved anyone like this Shiyiwe.”

He’s caressing my inner thighs.

“I love you more.”

He will always be the only one for me.

Mthombo gently runs his fingers down my cheek, he pushes against me till I’m lying flat on the couch and shoves his erection toward me. Probably a way to tell me that he is ready for me.

My hands start to explore, searching lower for the zip of his pants. I unbutton his pants and pull the zip down.

“You’re on a mission to seduce me?” He says.

He’s the one doing the seducing.

“Call me mommy.” I tease only for his eyes to darken. His touch transitions from light to rough, my breathing paces as a response.

He pulls my shorts off, I see them flying across the room.

Wind instantly kisses my vagina, he's looking at it and spreading my legs open for a better view.

"I like it when you don't wear underwear, but do it in the house, okay?" He says.

I'm not going to listen to him.

"If you tear my stitches, I'm suing." I warn him, he lifts his eyes for a brief moment, giving me a faint. It seems he'd rather look at my nether regions than me, his wife.

"I'd eat your pussy, but I'm afraid I will explode while at it." He stands and lets himself loose from his pants and boxers. I will never get over the fact that he is big and thick. A little frightening if I were a virgin.

A pearl of pre-cum has touched the tip of his mushroom head, it's asking for attention.

"I want to taste it." His eyes widen, like he almost cannot believe my words. I can't believe them either,

but I want to know how he tastes.

“Are you sure?”

“If you’re going to explode, why not in my mouth?”

Shut up Shiyiwe! He chuckles and walks over where my head is.

“Sit up, you’ll choke doing it lying down.”

Heaven send help.

He makes sounds of appreciation when I take the first lick, I don’t know what I’m tasting but I don’t like it. I look up at him, he’d be disappointed if I back out. I offered and so I have to deliver.

I glance at his balls dangling between his veined erection, I grab it, shut my eyes and swirl my tongue around his head and toward the base.

I take my time to explore the feel of him and the taste before swallowing him, he doesn’t go all in but whatever has gone into my mouth is driving him insane.

“Nonyanda.” He hisses, grabbing my hair.

He controls the pace, pushing me further and further in with every stroke.

I'm starting to enjoy the feel of him in my mouth, the taste, not so much. My clit aches to be serviced, it all has to do with his moan.

I keep telling myself that this is pleasure returned, he's been giving, it is time I do the same for him. This is me saying I love you.

Mthombo is starting to lose control, he tightens the grip on my hair pressing me into him. It must be the slurping sounds coming from me, they are fuelling him.

He's fucking my mouth with a pace I'm failing to maintain. I raise my teary eyes when his moans get louder, his eyes are shut and head tilted back. His breathe hitching every second. I'm trying not vomit everything I ate this morning and praying he doesn't explode in my mouth.

I want to tell him I can't breathe, but he's not done.

"Pull out, Nonyanda." He says, out of breath.

I gladly pull out and lie back down, I'm not going to die from sucking a dick, am I? I can't breathe.

Something wet and slimy coats my thighs, I open my eyes to see him emptying his cum on me. He's grunting and hissing and making sounds that have my clit throbbing.

Our eyes meet, he smiles.

"You're my best friend Nonyanda, thank you."

As he leans in to kiss me, someone clears their throat. I grab a cushion to cover my nakedness as my eyes instantly flick to the entrance.

Mthombo jumps over the couch. That sounds like it hurt.

When did my uncle and father get here? My father is horrified, uncle Mdu is probably thinking about the money he will make from this.

I respect both these men and they have seen me with a gigantic dick in my mouth. I am going to die right here. I know my uncle will put 'sucking dick' on my cause of death.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Ninety-seven

ATHULE-

.

.

Ndaba makes his entrance late. I hear the door swing open more loudly than usual. I don't turn, don't acknowledge him. He's kept me waiting for too long, and I am pissed.

Then he speaks, "Why is there Pizza all over my door step?"

I turn, in one shattered moment my heart and breathing take a pause. He's a bloody mess, nose bleeding and eyes red-rimmed. I want to comment on it but he asked me a question first.

"Ask your girlfriend."

"I am." He says.

Hee! For someone who is injured, he sure has the guts.

“Why is there pizza on my door step?”

I thought he hates repeating himself.

This authority of his is not required really. What is he upset about?

I take my attention back to the TV screen.

“I am not going to repeat myself, I hate that shit.”

You did though.

“Wandisa was here.” I give him his answer without glancing his way.

“She came back?” The man is swimming in shock.

“She came here demanding to see you, we argued. One thing led to another and fists were thrown.”

“She hit you?”

His voice changes, Ndaba is quick to anger. In a second he’s kneeling beside me touching my lip, I am dazed really because, since when? The talk with Shiysiwe must have gone through his thick skull.

“You’re bleeding?”

He clenches his teeth, attempting to touch me, I push his hand away.

“I’m fine, I don’t know about her though.”

A frown grows on his face, I’m getting tired of his mood swings. You’d swear he goes on his periods.

“Who threw the first punch?”

“I did.”

“Why didn’t you walk away Athule? Why did you stoop to her level? You don’t have to be like her.”

Wait, what?

“Don’t you dare compare me with that woman, I am nothing like her.”

Ndaba exhales, he puts his hands on my thighs. “I’m not, I was...”

“Do you know she called me names and threw pizza at me? That girl thinks I’m your slut. The next thing I knew, my fist was on her face.”

He clenches a fist, anger finds his face. He’s suddenly caring... this mman

“How dare she?”

“Don’t worry about it, I handled it.”

I know he’s not going to let it go, I can tell by the way he’s pacing up and down. I guess it’s his way of trying to calm himself.

“She’s going to hear it from me,” Ndaba says.

I am astounded, he never shows this much concern when it comes to me.

“Like you didn’t know.” Yes I said it and I am not taking it back.

What exactly gives Wandisa the courage to keep coming here?

“What?”

“I want to go home Bhedlindaba, I don’t want to be here.”

“Excuse me?”

He lets out a tired sigh, I don’t know why he’s exhausted. He should walk a mile in my shoes.

“I know you’re not stupid, I said I want to go home.”

Maybe I shouldn't have snapped.

"Don't speak to me like that, Athule."

He can growl like a lion all he wants, I won't bow.

"What will you do Bhedlindaba? Hit me?" I'm on my feet, raising my voice at him.

"Athule!" The stern voice and intense eyes don't frighten me.

He hovers too close to my body, the tension of a predator heavy on my shoulders. I swallow hard. He's never laid his hands on me, but he's a man and anything is possible.

I brave it up and speak with purpose. "I said I want to go home and you can stay here with your Wandisa.

"Let me explain..." What's he going to explain? There are a lot of things I need clarified.

"Don't even bother. You will decide whether you will eat that pizza outside brought by your girlfriend, or the food I cooked for you.

He's quiet, cat caught his tongue.

“I’m done Bhedlindaba, you don’t respect me. Maybe that bitch was right, I’m just a phase in your life. Someone to warm your bed before the next one comes along. I’m going home, this relationship or whatever you call it is over.”

I’m walking away from everything, him, and the trouble he comes with.

Ndaba roughly grabs my arm and smashes my body against his.

“Let me go,” I push him off me, surprisingly he lets me. Time flies by in a blur while I wait for him to say something, anything will do.

I grab my bag and turn to leave, he runs to stand in front of me.

“Athule, I’m sorry. Don’t go, please.” Bhedlindaba Meyiwa begs? Never thought I’d see the day. What exactly did Shiysiwe say to him?

“Touch me like that again and I will tell my father and brother and watch them beat you to a pulp.”

He drops his eyes, this man never drops his eyes.

One part of me wants to throw my arms around him and tell him how much I love him, but the other part of me has had enough.

“I will do better, don’t go please.”

“You promised me, Bhedlindaba, you said I won’t have to deal with your women again.”

“And I meant it, I don’t know how Wandisa came here after the warning I gave her. You can’t leave me, baby. Please Miss Ma...” he pauses and takes his eyes off me.

Miss? He’s never called me this before.

He grabs my hands, “I’ll do better for us baby, I’ll try to be a better man.”

I ignore his desperation, and walk past him. When I get to the door, I turn to find him looking back. He’s almost like a kid, needing a parent.

I don’t understand how he’s become vulnerable all of a sudden.

This should stop me from walking out on him, but it doesn’t.

.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

My father is the first to walk out, uncle Mdu follows after giving me a disapproving look. I am a married woman, such things happen. Don't they know that?

"Mthombo get out here," I say searching for my shorts.

"Are they gone?"

Coward.

"Yes, come out and give me my shorts."

He jumps out with a sigh of relief and says, "That was close."

"For you it was, you left me to be slaughtered after saying I was your best friend." He's a traitor.

He finds shorts and helps me put them on, I don't know when he put his clothes on. The betrayal is strong.

“Survival of the fittest Nonyanda.”

Is he throwing shade at my leg? I gave this man the time of his life, he can’t come here with his survival of the fittest nonsense.

“Was your father here?” He asks, curiously raising his brows.

“Yes, uncle Mdu too. I think they are outside, please help me to the bathroom, I want to do a mouthwash.”

“What for?”

And then? Why is he shocked?

“My mouth tastes funny, I can’t talk to them with my mouth smelling like you.”

I must be making jokes, he’s laughing.

“And you’ve got hair sticking out at the corner of your mouth.” He points at my mouth.

“Mthombo!” He can’t be serious, I think I’m going to throw up. Hair is disgusting on food and in your mouth. I don’t care if I offered to suck him.

I wipe my mouth many times than I can count.
Mthombo throws his head back and laughs.

“I’m kidding, relax. You’re good munt’ wam.”

This man! I am not a happy wife, he must know. He’s coming for a kiss, our lips meet.

“I enjoyed the blowjob, can we do it again tonight?”

I am not crazy.

“My throat hurts, you will not be getting one in years.”

Mthombo tucks his head on the curve of my neck, shivers ripple through me as his warm breath dances on it. A tingling feeling tickles my insides, he’s giving me butterflies.

“Okay, we’ll wait for a week.”

Gee! Must be nice being him.

He raises his head after what seems like a minute and a smile creeps on the corners of his mouth.

This beautiful black man’s smile is a sight to behold. My laugh bone is tickled, I think he is thinking what

I'm thinking. A laugh escapes my mouth.

His smile turns into a chuckle and before I know it, we are both laughing our heads off.

Okay that was a risk.

It's terrible that my uncle and father walked in on us, I hope Nolwazi left the house after Mthombo's fight with Bhedlindaba.

His lips meet mine, they linger on. His arms clasp around me as he lies back on the couch. This man easily forgets that I am injured.

I rest my head on his chest, my lower body between his legs and my injured leg safely placed on the couch.

"That was crazy, Nonyanda." He's still laughing.

Everything about this is crazy and...

"You are crazy babe, did you forget we have someone in the house?"

I'm talking about the house help.

“I didn’t hear you stopping me,” he’s turning against me again.

He didn’t give me a chance did he?

“You know my weakness right? One touch from you and I lose it, so I didn’t have much of a choice.”

I’m pulling his leg, he laughs at my retort.

“Neither did I, I couldn’t resist you. Fuck! You’re so damn sexy woman.” He’s so dramatic.

A titter escapes my mouth as I look up at him, and pucker up inviting another kiss. He leans over and covers my lips with his, my body shivers when his tongue pushes through the seams of my lips.

“Do you think they saw everything?”

“Who?” Really?

“My father and uncle.” I put his mind at ease.

I bet his answer is not what any normal person would say.

“It doesn’t matter, we’re married.”

Yet he jumped over the couch like Spiderman.

“Really Mthombo?”

“Seriously Nonyanda, you worry too much about what people will say. This is our home, I can have you anywhere I want.” He says this gliding his sly hand down my butt, the squeeze is not doing my clit justice. I spank it, he removes it with a chuckle.

They are probably waiting for us to look decent, we should get up.” I tell him.

I have nothing to say to my old men, Mthombo will have to fight this one.

He helps me up and on the couch, he takes my hands as he kneels before me.

“And then?”

“Let’s pray first, your uncle is going to kill me today.”

“Mthombo stop playing, this is serious.”

“I know, that’s why I need to repent before dying. I’m not going to hell Nonyanda.”

Argh! I’d never let my uncle touch him, he needs to relax.

"Okay, give me a kiss for good luck."

After what happened, he still wants to be intimate?
We have stalled for too long, I'm sure they are
growing impatient. He pouts, moving in for a kiss.

"Yey, voetsek." My uncle's voice rumbles into the room. Mthombo jumps to his feet and stands at attention, head bowed and arms knotted on his back.

My father is also here, he's not looking at me. I know he will never be able to look at me, seeing his daughter chocking on a dick is the worst thing a black parent could ever witness.

"Are you not ashamed?" Uncle Mdu.

He toddles over to Mthombo, slowly and intimidatingly. My husband keeps his head bowed, he's tense though. I can sense it from here.

"Uncle..." He raises his hand to stop me from talking.

"I'm still coming to you Shiyiwe." Uncle Mdu.

I have never seen him so serious before. I look at my father for help, at least he should understand that we

are married and we can do whatever we want in our house.

“Are you two insane? Are you possessed by the spirit of pornography? Z@nele S!fuba and Davido.”

Haibo! Uncle Mdu.

“No baba,” Mthombo answers.

“Then what is this nonsense we walked in on? Don’t you have a bedroom where you can do it?”

Yoh hai.

“We do baba, I apologize.” My poor husband.

“Apologise yamasimba! Do you know how traumatised I am? How will I sleep at night after seeing your black mamba? Are you going to pay for my counselling?” Uncle Mdu says.

“Look at me when I’m talking to you cheese boy?”

Yeah no, this has gone too far. Mthombo lifts his head, his eyes rush to my father before he quickly drops them.

I wish I knew what Mphako is thinking, he’s dead

quiet and standing at a corner with hands on his back.

“Baba?” I call him, he seems to acknowledge my presence without glancing over at me. Nolwazi walks in, lugging a suitcase.

She’s not carrying the same confidence she had when she came here earlier, her eyes are everywhere. I’m thinking she saw us.

Wait, “That’s my suitcase.”

Mphako sighs, “You’re coming to stay with me.”

I didn’t see this one coming, Mthombo whips his head to me. Tears well behind his wide eyes.

“You’re not taking my wife.” He grunts, his anger is instant lately.

“Watch me.” Mphako retorts.

Does this man know how old I am?

“We are married baba, you can’t take her from me.”

“On what grounds are you keeping my daughter? And don’t tell me about the law, as long as she is not

married to you traditionally, you have no claim on her." I wish he didn't say that.

Mthombo is shaking with anger.

"I have every claim on Shiyiwe, she is..."

"Sshhh!" Uncle Mdu shuts him up, he's agreeing with my father.

"But baba, he wants to take her away."

"I know, it has to be done. You haven't paid anything Mthombo, she's pregnant with your child and you have not paid a cent."

Uncle Mdu is explaining but it's not making sense to me.

"I don't get it uncle Mdu, we are husband and wife. The court would attest to it."

"Not your ancestors." He says.

"Which ancestors? I am only a Makhadema by blood, they don't know me that well to claim me."

Mphako seems hurt by my words, he should be. He can't expect me to leave my matrimonial home.

“Don’t you think I know that Shiyiwe? It’s my fault for leaving your mother, but I will fix everything. We will do umsebenzi to introduce you and your sister to the Makhadema ancestors. You will change your surname from Jele to mine and when all of that is complete, your husband will come forth with the lobola.”

No, that sounds like a lot. And who said I want to change my surname? I can do the ceremony, not change my surname.

“When will all of this happen?” I ask.

They look at me with no words said.

“Shiyiwe is pregnant with my baby, I’m not missing this moment for anything. You are not taking my wife away.” Mthombo takes my hand.

“Mthombo, we’re trying to fix the mistakes made by your elders. Whose surname will this baby use? Yours? That would be a huge mistake mfana, ancestors don’t play. Let us help you two, you will thank us later. Do you want your child to appear on Khumbule’khaya looking for his paternal

grandfather's family because his life is falling apart?" My uncle says and sighs in exhaustion, he looks at me.

"We are doing things by the book, my daughter will stay with me until the lobola has been paid." Mphako says.

He grabs my crutches and helps me up, "We're leaving."

"Baba please, there has to be another way." I plead.

What kind of tradition is this? I have never heard of it before, if this is Mphako being strict, I will never forgive him.

He's ushering me toward the door, "Most men forget about lobola once they start living with a woman. I'm helping you my child, you will thank me one day."

Mthombo would never do that.

"Nonyanda." I look back, he's trying to move past uncle Mdu. He can easily push him, but he's not doing it.

“I will talk to my uncles, you’ll be back home soon. I promise sthandwa sam.”

Why am I crying? It’s not like they are separating us from each other forever. This has Mphako written all over it, he thinks he owns me.

“Sit down black mamba, you’ll faint after I tell you how much you owe me. You think my niece is those goats your father used to herd in the village, milking her for free. You don’t know me, wena mfana.”

Uncle pushes Mthombo on the couch and hovers over him.

“How many orgasms did you get from that freak show?”

Mthombo’s eyes rush to me. Why is he confused?

“Baba, I don’t understand.” He says, it’s time I call that therapist.

“Yeyi, I’m charging per orgasm.” Uncle Mdu grabs a newspaper from the table, and finds a pen in his pocket.

“Start counting.” He says, ready to jot down.

Mthombo probably regrets falling in love with me, I can't be from such a weird family.

"One orgasm, R5000. Two orgasms, R10 000. Three orgasms..."

He can't be my uncle, this old man must be my brother. No way do I have an uncle like him.

.

.

A big thank you to all those who voted

WHEELS OF LIFE

Season-Finale P1*

SHIYIWE-

.

.

"Look at you."

Every time someone says that, my self-esteem drops. No one told me that six months into my pregnancy I would be three times the size I was.

There are times when I don't recognise myself when I look in the mirror, the big nose, and busty chest. My neck is gone, my feet are swollen. I have to wear flip-flops because shoes don't fit anymore.

Ntebo's whereabouts remain unknown, part of me hopes that we never hear from her. I haven't reconciled with the fact that she tried to bewitch my husband. This came to light during one of my conversations with Mathonga. He didn't say what she put on him, but whatever it was wore off before the end of the day.

His grandfather protects him from beyond the grave, that's why whatever Emeka had done to me to chase men away never worked on Mthombo. He has isthunywa behind him always ready to fight his battles.

Must be nice.

"You don't have to say it like that." I grumble and look away from Mthombo.

He tickles me, forcing me to look at him.

"Come on baby, I didn't mean like that." He calls me

baby now, I don't know which Nollywood movie he's been watching in my absence.

My absence—I was kept away from him for a whole two months, Mphako was on a mission.

During that time, I was introduced to his ancestors, he did everything by the book.

Athule helped me sleepover at my own house with the pretext of a girl's trip. This one time, we were gone for almost two weeks, Mphako had no idea that I was in my house, sleeping in my bed next to my husband.

I'm back home, thanks to the Jele uncles that appeared from nowhere and told Mphako that I'm a Jele and the lobola will go to the Jeles because MaMbuyazi was a Jele by marriage, both lawfully and traditionally.

Mthombo had everything to do with it, I don't know how he found them. That night I was back home, beneath the man I love while he was buried deep inside me.

Uncle Mdu was not happy about the mysterious

uncles, having them around means he will have to share the lobola money with them.

“Let’s just go.” I wait for him to lead the way.

Since I gained the baby weight, I feel agitated when someone is walking behind me. I walk like a toddler that’s learning to walk and a granny suffering from arthritis.

“Really baby?” Mthombo.

He’s judging me, it’s so insensitive of him.

Argh!

“We’re going to be late Mthombo, let’s go.”

He intertwines our fingers and makes me walk beside him. He pops the door open and waits for me to get in.

“Your phone is buzzing.” Mthombo says as he starts the car.

It’s a message from Mphako, he says someone spotted Ntebo in Braamfontein, he’s going to get her.

“Who is it?”

“Mphako, I think he found Ntebo.” I sound angry. I am angry.

“Oh!” That’s all he says.

“I was hoping she stays hidden, I don’t want her near my family. Mphako looks at me like I’m a murderer for saying that.”

I have to watch my words whenever I mention Ntebo, it offends Mphako a lot. Something I don’t understand.

His forehead creases, “You’re not a bad person, Nonyanda. Your father just refuses to understand what that girl put you through.”

Mthombo is right, Mphako is downright stubborn. He is convinced that Ntebo was following her mother’s instructions and wants to play Hero. I don’t like him for that.

“He won’t listen to me. I don’t know how many times I have told him to let her be, she is better off wherever she is.”

“Maybe he feels attached to her, he once loved her aunt.”

That's bullshit, my father loved one woman all his life and that was MaMbuyazi.

“I think he needs to stop and focus on Mthandeni, she needs him more than Ntebo does.”

I hate that he has a soft spot for that witch, like he has a soft spot for Penny.

He filed for divorce after his children advised him. He was confused, old people never get divorced.

She comes around a lot, begging for a second chance and Mphako would send her back crying—with groceries and a Shoprite voucher. She needs to stop, her children need to heal, Mphako needs to heal.

Speaking of healing, the husband and I have seen more of Judith than I'd like. Her English confuses me sometimes, I'd had to ask her to speak slow and clearly. At first it was strange for me meeting a black

woman who speaks with a deep British accent, her water does not have a “T” most of her words lack alphabets and that confuses my head.

I don't know why Mthombo had to get us a therapist who speaks through their nose.

I'm past the stage of complaining, she's helped us a lot. I see change in my husband, communication wise. I'm growing as well and have learned that you do not talk to your partner anyhow.

He started a company with Bongukwanda 4months ago, they wanted to go solo without their father leading them.

It's going good, I have a position there apparently. Mthombo said I should do on line lessons, data capturing, or whatever fancies my interest and I will start as an intern when I get my certificate.

I'm going to play housewife for two years first, I want to watch my baby grow. We haven't found out the sex, we want it to be a surprise.

Right now we are on our way to the hospital, Mthanden'i's doctor wants to see us urgently.

There is no baby anymore, she lost it before it reached a month. I didn't ask what happened when the doctor told us, I didn't want to know.

Mthombo finds parking, I struggle with getting out of the car and constantly need help. Most people think I'm 9 months pregnant. What will I look like at 9 months when I look like this at six?

Luckily we find the doctor at reception, he leads us to his office.

I sit with my arm around Mthombo's, it's not like me to touchy-touchy. I didn't realize how clingy I have become until Mthombo pointed it out one afternoon.

It think it's because I was kept away from him for too long. He says it's the baby.

"Is my sister okay, Doctor?"

He smiles and says, "For the first time in months, there was movement. It happened this morning after

your father left.”

“She’s awake?” I ask because doctors never get to the point.

He shakes his head, places his elbows on the table and joins his hands together. He’s making me nervous.

“If we could have your father here more often, have him speak to her and ask her to come back. Maybe she will finally see the light.”

A doctor that works with maybes... Anyhow, Mphako seems to be the perfect candidate for this. He never misses a day, I’m afraid that his obsession over finding Ntebo is going to distract him from his daughter. Mthandeni was informed by him that she is his child, and the doctor once said it’s possible that she can hear us.

She’s probably used to Mphako’s voice and warmth and hopefully eager to come back and meet her father.

“I will talk to him doctor, I’d like to see my sister now.”

He nods and excuses us.

"Let's hope Mphako will put his focus on Mthandeni and forget that girl." Mthombo says as we walk hand-in-hand down the hallway.

"He doesn't have a choice, he needs to know where his priorities lie." I say.

Speak of the devil, he's calling me.

"Baba!"

"Come home now." He says with a twinge of urgency.

My first thought is Athule, she hasn't been taking the breakup with Bhedlindaba well.

"What happened baba?"

Mthombo wears a worried frown, he must be thinking the worst too.

"I can't tell you over the phone, come home now." He drops the call.

Haibo!

"Something is wrong, we have to go to Riverlea now." I tell Mthombo.

I'm starting to feel offended by him holding my hand when we walk, in my head I'm convinced he thinks I will fall if he doesn't.

.

.

Mphako's car is parked outside, nothing seems out of the ordinary. The door is open, I can see Athule from here. Our eyes meet, she holds the stare. She doesn't look happy, and that scares me. I rush in the house and wrap my arms around her without asking questions. A month after she left Bhedlindaba, we found her in her room with an empty bottle of pills next to her.

I hate what she did, she thought Ndaba was going to chase after her and when he didn't, she fell into depression.

"Are you okay?" I ask my sister. I will ask her about this terrible smell in the house later.

"I'm fine, it's your father who is not fine." She replies coldly.

“Friend!”

I pull out of her arms, astounded.

“What are you doing here?” I ask.

She’s sitting on my father’s couch, wrapped in a blanket. You can easily tell she hasn’t had a bath in months, the smell gives it away too. There’s a plate of food on her lap which she is eating like it’s her first in years.

“Baba? What is this girl doing here?”

He drops his eyes, then looks up at me again.

“Your cousin...”

“Don’t call her that, she is not my cousin.” He must not even try to link us.

He sighs, and... argh I’m getting tired of him dropping his eyes like I should feel sorry for him and this girl.

“We found her at a cemetery, naked and freezing to death.” He says.

It’s bloody 30 degrees outside, how was she freezing to death?

"Apparently, she has been sleeping in cemeteries for months, and when she'd find her way to the streets, she'd strip naked and start chasing people." Athule explains, and lets out a dry laugh.

She shares the same feelings as me about Ntebo.

"Baba how can you be this careless? You brought a crazy witch to your house, where your children are?" I am shocked. What is wrong with this man?

"Shiyiwe, please understand."

"Understand what baba? Nothing was hidden from you about this girl, you know what she put me through with her mother."

"I know my child, but people change. Ntebo has no one, please give her a second chance. She has no one."

Second chance yok'nuka.

"Send her away." I place my hands on my hips, maybe I'm crazy to do that in front of an elder. But he is pissing me off.

I feel Mthombo's hand on my shoulder, he wants me

to calm down. It's not happening, as long as I can still see Ntebo's face.

Ntebo's blanket flies off as she drops to her knees in front of me, I'm startled and move back when she attempts to grab my legs. She's naked, she should have at least put on some clothes. Her skeletal body is covered in scars, old and new.

It has nothing to do with me, I don't care about her.

Athule snorts, rolls her eyes and throws the blanket over Ntebo's body.

"I am sorry friend, I never meant to hurt you. You have to believe me, it was my mother. She made me do things I didn't want to do."

I'm not going to talk to her, I turn to face my father.

"Take this crazy person back to her house, or you will never hear from me again."

He's hurt easily, I see it in his eyes. I don't care, I'm done with Mphako and his heroic acts. Mthombo rushes to take my hand the second I step out the house, we are never coming back here.

.

.

Both sponsors didn't reach their targets. But thank you to everyone who voted.

Let's give this chapter a boost of 400+ comments and unlock the next chapter around 6pm.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Season Finale P2*

SHIYIWE-

.

.

I'm going to block Mphako if he continues blowing up my phone, I am not going to answer his calls. It's about time he makes a decision. I refuse to share yet another person with Nteboheleng.

"You're biting your lip." Mthombo brings me out of my thoughts, I glance at him from the passenger side. He's driving slow, an annoying trait he adapted when I started showing.

“We need to be careful, we’re carrying gold.” These were his words when I complained about his driving.

Everything offends me, I won’t lie.

“Can you believe my father? Why is he so obsessed with helping that girl?” I’m beside myself with wrath.

Ntebo does not deserve anyone’s kindness.

“I wish you would stop worrying about her and your father for a while and focus on the baby, all this stress is not good for her.”

“Her? You think it’s a girl?”

I want a boy, it’s easy to dress a boy than a girl.

Mthombo chose a room in the house, turned it into a nursery and filled it with baby stuff. My personal favourite is the baby clothes, he came home with a matching outfit and shoes one evening. We’re buying yellow and white for now.

“I know it’s a girl.” Someone is confident. “Daddy’s princess.”

“Haibo, you’re lying to the child before it is even born?” I’m teasing him, but he misses my joke.

Nausea calls, and fills my mouth with saliva. I dig for the towel I use to discard the saliva.

Athule suggested using a bottle, I think spitting into a bottle is more disgusting.

I make sure to always carry a packet of wine gums and jelly beans with me, I tear one packet and throw a mouthful.

Mthombo drives thru a parking lot, I'm not familiar with this place. The banner is written in Chinese. He switches the engine off and looks at me, serious and all.

"Before you there was Zinzi and Sikolethu, I thought my life was complete back then. That I had everything I needed, I knew for a fact without a doubt that I would die for them and that I'd kill anyone who ever tried to hurt them."

Why is he taking me back to his past? I'm okay not knowing what he felt for Zinzi.

"I'm not sure I know anything, because what I feel for

you and our baby is stronger than anything I have ever felt. I don't know what I would do if anything ever happens to you both."

"Nothing will happen to us." I tell him, although tomorrow is not promised.

He reaches out to rub my belly, and sighs while at it.

"I need you to promise me that you'll never leave me."

What is this now?

"I will die first, and when I do, I will wait for you on the other side." He holds my face and stares deep into my eyes.

"Mthombo..."

"I would lose my senses if you ever leave me, Shiysiwe. You are more than my wife, you're my lifeline. I honestly cannot picture my life without. The thought of it drives me crazy, I swear I'd become something the world hates if you ever left me."

Okay! He's scaring me with this talk.

"I'm not going anywhere, we're growing grey together

babe." I know this for a fact, we are about to annoy each other for the rest of our lives.

"I love you Mthombo Meyiwa, you will always have my heart."

I hate these talks, now I'm a crying mess.

He swipes his thumbs over my cheeks to wipe the tears away, and kisses me softly.

"I love you too baby." He admits and pulls me to his chest, this is home.

There's a faint smile on his face when we pull apart.

"The letter has been sent to your family, this time next week, you will be completely mine. We can have the traditional wedding after the birth of snookums."

Lord! Here we go again. He's never getting rid of this name.

It's a relief for me in way that the Jeles will be handling my lobola. Mphako is too distracted.

"Don't let uncle Mdu fool you into paying more than you should." I must remind him that I have a crazy uncle.

That one went back to KZN, he visits more than once a month.

"You are priceless love, I'd give up all my money just to have you."

Sweet, but ye yi! Love does not make you full.

"My panda, you're so sweet." I squeeze his cheeks.

"I know, now let's go and get you pampered." He says.

I should have known that this is a spa.

I can't help but check him out when he steps out of the car, leaving his delicious manly scent behind.

It's amazing how he's kept his teddy bear body, I can't say the same about his brother Bhedlindaba.

He is going through a lot and refuses to seek help. Mthombo has tried to help him many times. Bhedlindaba stopped opening for him, he stays locked up in his house.

Mthombo and Bongukwanda have taken over his company till he gets back on his feet. While my husband manages the company, Bongukwanda

oversees that everything is up and running with the soccer team. He's hired a temporary coach.

When I asked what's wrong with Bhedlindaba, I was dismissed. These brothers protect each other's secrets so well, it can make you jealous.

.

.

BHEDLINDABA-

Something triggered his trauma, he's not sure if it's the breakup with Athule, or the breakdown was bound to happen.

Mornings are the worst, a reminder that his life is miserable. And nights are a nightmare. It's either he can't sleep and when he does, his former teacher visits him in his dreams. He wakes up exhausted and drained of life, sometimes he cries for her in his sleep, repeatedly calls her name.

Mthombo found him one morning, thrashing in bed and covered in his sweat and tears. He was asleep,

stuck in a bad dream where Mathe had him bound on a bed post, doing unfathomable things to him. Things that seemed strange to a 17 year-old boy and absolutely bizarre to a grown man.

BDSM was what she called it, he remembers the first video clip she showed him. It was disgusting and took away his appetite for an entire week.

When she wanted to try it out, he became hesitant. However, she had a way to make him do her bidding.

"I want you to be my submissive, you will find pleasure in the pain I'll inflict on you. It might not be now but one day, and you will love it." She told him.

That one day never came, he hated every moment of it.

He never told Mthombo about this, nor his friends. It's a secret he is willing to take to the grave.

A man bound by a woman and subjected to physical torture while she had her way with his body. When he made her angry, she'd yell and shout like a

teacher to her student.

He was called weak and stupid sometimes, and slapped around, when she felt his brain was working too ppslow.

He thought it to be embarrassing.

That day Mthombo found him, he had a fever that lasted a few days. His brother was there to nurse him back to health and when he was his normal self again, Mthombo asked a question he didn't know how to answer.

"Did you love Athule that much?"

He shrugged, his eyes drifting into space.

"It's been over two months, call her and get her back."

Call and get her back was easier said than done, you can't get back a woman who knows her worth.

That's what had happened to Athule. He found her at peace, tainted her space, ruined her innocence and left her undone.

Nevertheless, he wasn't sure if his mental breakdown was about Athule or the old woman haunting his dreams.

"She wants nothing to do with me," he told his brother.

It sounded like he was giving up on her, something Mthombo didn't understand. If he could point out a fighter between the Meyiwa brothers, it would be Bhedlindaba.

He sat up from the bed, arms across his chest and forehead covered in pearls of sweat.

"She's back." He said to the brother who took away the first woman he ever loved. At least he thought he loved her.

Mathe was nice when he wasn't tied up and tortured and slow and stupid and all those things that made her short fuse explode.

The frown on Mthombo's face was of confusion, he was lost.

"Mathe," he hadn't said that name in years.

Mthombo instantly became tense and uncomfortable.

"Is she the reason you're in this state?" Mthombo calmly asked, his panic not bending.

"I don't know, all I know is that I was okay until I almost called Athule by her name."

That's when the nightmares started.

"Athule looks nothing like her, why would you..."

"I love Athule, I loved her as well."

It's what his 17 year-old heart knew, Mathe was his first everything. When she died, he built walls around his heart till Athule happened. When Shiyiwe came along, Athule was already safely tucked in his heart.

Shiyiwe was confusion, a fighter while her twin was a damsel in distress. Both these women reminded him of "her."

Mathe was imbokodo, stronger than a rock. He admired that about her, however there were times when he'd see her vulnerability and need to be loved. She hid it, but with his skill to see through people. It

wasn't a mission for him.

He hates himself for letting her die, he should have saved her like he saved Shiyiwe from his parents.

"You need to talk someone." Mthombo's suggestion was insane.

"I'm not going to sit in front of a stranger and tell them that I cry in my sleep because of a woman who was old enough to mother me." He said, hiding beneath the covers.

"Ndaba, there is a 17 year-old boy screaming for help. He will never heal unless you get him that help."

"Shut the door behind you." He dismissed his brother.

Mthombo left that day, having accomplished nothing. Bhedlindaba was left feeling ashamed, a grown losing his sleep and crying for a woman.

The following day, he locked his doors, closed the windows and curtains.

Months later, he hasn't shown his face to the world. His hair and beard have grown longer, he showers

once or never. His house is a mess and his life is falling apart.

Mthombo still comes around and leaves food outside his door.

.

.

He's lying on the couch, wearing only boxer shorts when a knock disturbs his TV time, a deep growl evades his chest. He's not going to answer that knock, people are exhausting. The world at large is a hovel.

If he could fade into oblivion, he would.

The knocking persists, he rolls his eyes and shouts.

"The adults are not around," and goes back to watching nothing on TV.

"Ndaba, my baby. Open the door please." MaDlamini is outside his door.

He hasn't heard from her in months.

He attends to it, not sure why he is opening for her.

Perhaps they've got something in common, they are both miserable and have nothing to live for.

She covers her nose as soon as he swings the door open.

"What is that smell?" She says, her eyes sweeping down his half naked body.

"Hello to you too MaOledi." He leaves the door open and walks back to his seat. There are Pepsi empty bottle on the floor, cigarette butts and dirty laundry scattered everywhere.

"The rumours are true huh? My son has turned into a pig." She's striding into the room as she says this.

"Make yourself at home, mama pig." He's being sarcastic.

He has to turn when he hears nothing from her, and finds her pointing a gun at him.

"What's this?" Bhedlindaba asks unbothered.

"Your father was called to a board meeting this morning, they voted him out. He's lost everything, the company he started. He is being investigated for

money laundering and a whole other things he didn't do."

He thought he was a mess, but his parents take the cup.

"So?" He really does not care what happens to Zwangendaba.

"I smell a rat Bhedlindaba and it's you."

He turns back to the TV, this woman is wasting his time. His "favourite" series is about to end.

"Those idiots are six months late, they should've taken action six months ago when I cared. I would have thrown the mother of all parties."

Ndaba reported his father that day they found Shiysiwe and Athule, his plan was to clean out everything and start afresh with the women they loved. He didn't know he'd be the cause of his own down fall.

Now he's at a point of not giving a fuck.

"Look at me, Bhedlindaba." MaDlamini yells, he looks

at her.

“You are going to fix this, do you hear me?”

“I’m not fixing shit, you and your husband deserve what’s coming to you.”

His words tickle his mother the wrong way, her nose flares. Her chest is bouncing rhythmically.

She fires a shot and misses him by an inch. Bhedlindaba jolts to his feet, fuming.

“Are you insane?” Yes he’s miserable, it doesn’t mean he wants to die.

“Get your father his money and position back, or I won’t miss the second time.” Yep, she’s lost it.

“Never, kill me if you have to.” He’s taking slow steps towards her, provoking her.

“Don’t come close Bhedlindaba, I will shoot.”

He continues until the gun is pressed to his chest, he looks his mother dead in the eye.

“Shoot mom.” He hasn’t called her mom in a long time.

Her eyes are wide, hands shaky and eyes filled with tears.

Bhedlindaba grabs the gun, MaDlamini refuses to let go. They fight over it, he's telling her to let go and she's screaming for him to stop.

A shot goes off, silencing both of them.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Season Finale P3*

SHIYIWE-

Today is one of those days where I'm convinced without a doubt that he knows me more than anyone, forget that we have known each other for less than a year. The pampering is what I needed, I had a full body massage. He took me to get my hair done and shopping for new clothes.

I might feel bloated and ugly, but that small gesture

has made a difference.

"Would you like to eat out?" He asks, placing his hand on my thigh.

"Sure." I don't feel like a crowd, I don't feel like being indoors either. But whatever.

We're on the road, to wherever he's planning on taking us to eat.

He keeps stealing glances, if he continues like this, he will hit a tree.

"Keep your eyes on the road if you're planning on being a father." I reprimand him.

"Are you teaching me how to drive Mrs. Meyiwa? I learnt how to drive before I was born."

That's funny, I can't picture it.

"Sure you did babe."

He's trying to join the next lane, it's not going to happen with all these taxis here.

"Just stay on this lane, you might crash into a car or something." I'm not ready to see my parents.

He keeps quiet and continues trying to connect, the taxi behind us hoots just as he's about to win; and drives past us.

"See how crazy people are? That's why I prefer to be driven."

I miss Thambo, Mthombo gave him time off after he recovered from the hospital. I don't know if we will hear from him soon, it's been four months and nothing, not even a phone call.

"You need to learn how to drive, it's convenient. Who will drive that car I got you?"

Sometimes I forget that I have a car. Athule says my vision is too small. I should be aiming high, use Mthombo's money till he notices that money is coming out of his accounts.

We don't have a joint account yet, I have my own his banker made me open at FNB. Capitec is simple and easy to use, turns out I'm the only one who thinks so.

Getting paid to be a housewife must be the easiest job in the world, all I have to do is wake up, eat and sleep.

This one insisted we keep Nolwazi when I complained about her age. Apparently she is the granddaughter of his former nanny, the woman who ran away with his son.

I doubt Mthombo knows that people take advantage of your kindness. I have been betrayed a lot to trust anyone. I'm keeping a close watch on Nolwazi, she could be her grandmother's granddaughter.

"Thambo can drive me around." I sound like a spoilt rich kid.

"Thambo is on vacation, he might never come back."

"Why? Is it because of the shooting?" I wouldn't blame him, he almost lost his life.

Mthombo looks at me, far too long for someone who is driving.

"Your twin."

I'm new in this twin thing but I hate it when people say your twin or the twins. We have names, yes we are twins but we have names for goodness sake.

We were talking about Thambo. Where does my

sister come in?

“What about my sister?” I ask.

The look again.

“I promised Thambo I won’t say anything.”

Jesu! I like it when we talk, I mean his voice is soothing and all but I wish he’d get to the point and tell me without having to dig for more information.

I don’t say anything further because he has worn me out with his short answers.

“I was thinking Chinese food.” Mthombo says.

He’s going to make me dig, isn’t he?

“What’s going on with Thambo?” I’m annoyed because he’s making me talk so much.

“Nothing, except that Thambo fancies your twin.”

Jeer, that twin thing again.

Wait a minute...

“Thambo fancies who?”

He laughs while I’m on the edge of shock.

“They’ve been spending time together, he’s fallen for her but your twin sees him as a friend.”

How do I not know this? Athule is full of secrets, we talk almost every day and she has never mentioned Thambo to me, not even the letter T.

I’m actually upset that she kept me in the dark.

“The secrets we keep in this family shocks me sometimes.”

This one is not going to tell me anything, I will have to call Athule and ask her myself.

“Why are we here?”

We’re in Diepkloof, Bhedlindaba’s house. I thought we were going out.

There’s a crowd, police officers scattered everywhere and an ambulance.

“What’s going on?” I’m talking to myself.

Mthombo’s aura has completely changed, his brows creased into a frown. He parks next to one of the

police vans, and dashes out of the car.

“Mthombo wait.” He’s gone.

It’s taking me forever to get out of the car.

I can’t see him, he’s hidden inside the sea of people.

Why do people gather where there are police cars?

My worry is Bhedlindaba, I hope he didn’t try to kill himself. I’m tired of burying family members.

Damn these swollen feet, I’m going nowhere slowly.

The door is open, the first thing I see is Mthombo pinning a thin, lanky policeman against the wall.

“Mthombo!” I shout.

Another officer shocks him with a taser, he growls and falls on his knees.

“What are you doing to my husband?” This can’t be happening to me. I swallow my tears, rushing to help Mthombo up.

He’s too heavy for me.

“I’m fine,” he grunts through clamped teeth. His eyes turn to my left, I follow his line of sight. I should have

known that this is about Bhedlindaba. He's lying face down, handcuffs restraining his hands.

Not far from him, on a stretcher is MaDlamini covered in so much blood. The paramedics are trying to revive her.

I look at my husband, his eyes still on his brother. He is consumed in anger, I will never be comfortable around an angry Mthombo. Something about him makes me nervous.

I cup his face, he looks at me with tears in his eyes. These are not tears of pain, but wrath.

"What's going on?" I'm confused.

Bhedlindaba did something to MaDlamini.

"His brother killed their mother." I wasn't talking to this officer, I want to hear it from my husband so I repeat the question.

"Mthombo, what happened?" He heavily exhales, jaw tightening and wipes the tears stuck on his face.

"This man says my brother killed MaDlamini."

He knows Bhedlindaba is capable of doing it, why so

much anger is what I don't understand.

"I know how MaDlamini works, she probably came here and provoked him. He wasn't bothering anyone... he wouldn't randomly kill her."

Ehh! This is the same man who's killed a number of people bro.

"So why are you fighting the policeman? What did he do to you?"

I'm curious but mostly mad.

He looks at me like I'm bullshitting him.

"My brother is innocent Shiysiwe."

We're all innocent, even though we are murderers.
I'm not saying Bhedlindaba should be arrested, what I'm saying is that my husband is not going to jail.

I pull him aside, his body is tense. Seriously he needs to calm down.

"Don't fight with the men of the law Mthombo, I swear if they arrest you, I will leave this child with prison guards—take all your money and start a new life somewhere."

Why can't he control his anger for once?
He thinks I'm trying to hurt him or I'm conspiring with these policemen. I see it in his eyes.

"Bhedlindaba can handle this, you know he can." I tell him.

"My brother is mentally ill, he doesn't care what happens to himself anymore."

Since when is Bhedlindaba suffering from mental illness?

He walks away before I can interrogate him.

"There's a pulse," one of the paramedics shouts.

MaDlamini is carried on a stretcher, I guess no one will be following that ambulance. I didn't even stop to check where she was shot.

Two policemen pull Ndaba to his feet. I think I see what Mthombo meant, there is no emotion on his face. He's damning it all.

I look at Mthombo, there is hurt in his eyes. He

stands in front of Ndaba, cups his face before pulling him into a tight hug.

“I’m going to get you out, I promise.” Mthombo says.

This man does not make empty promises. His brother doesn’t care, he’s staring into thin air with empty eyes.

What has happened to Bhedlindaba?

“Bhedlindaba,” he blinks once and looks at me.

“Shiyiwe?” Is he surprised to see me? His eyes slowly drop to my stomach, tears hover behind his pupils.

He blinks, and they fall down his cheeks. He’s looking at me again, unashamedly in tears.

“We’re going to get you out, don’t lose hope.”

The only reason I feel a need to tell him this is because he looks hopeless, it’s not hard to tell that he has given up on life.

“Take him away, what are you waiting for?” This fool commanding the one in uniform must be the superior.

Bhedlindaba does not put up a fight, he lets the officers take him away.

.

.

THE MEYIWAS-

When Zinqumo passed away he was fighting for his own life, he found out about his death a few days after his surgery.

He loved his brother and cried for him, two weeks later he was standing at the alter marrying the love of his life.

Getting married while the wounds of loss were still fresh didn't mean he loved his brother less, people heal differently and Mthombo had wasted so much of his life grieving the dead, and wishing things were different. So he took a chance and got married, despite being caught in the eye of the storm.

Months later, the second brother allegedly shot their mother. He's driving to Sun City at full speed,

missing robots and getting middle fingers and loud hoots from other drivers.

It doesn't matter, what matters is getting to his brother on time.

He left his wife at the house in Diepkloof.

Pigs will fly before he lets his brother spend the night in jail.

He dashes through the door, and approaches the first person he sees.

"My brother is here, I want to see him." Again this man thinks he's a famous somebody.

The man in a brown uniform scowls at him, "Is your brother Bheki Cele?"

How arrogant this kind is.

"I want to see Bhedlindaba Meyiwa, he was brought here not too long ago." He has to be polite in order to be heard around here.

The man clicks his tongue and leaves him standing alone, like he never uttered a word.

This is the part where he controls his anger. Bhedlinadaba is counting on him, sure they have their shortcomings, but at the end of the day they are siblings, and would kill for each other.

He ends up paying his way in.

“Hurry, before the boss gets here.” The prison guard says as he opens the prison bars.

Mthombo stops when he sees Bhedlindaba curled up on the bed with his legs hugged to his chest, and head resting on top of his knees.

“What did they do to you?” This is not how his little brother looked when the police took him away. He is practically looking at a different person, a broken person.

Bhedlindaba twitches and shudders under a thin blanket he’s wrapped himself with. He pulls his legs tighter to his chest, curling his big body like a baby in its mother’s womb.

“Ndoda?” Mthombo calls, afraid to step closer.

Bhedlindaba is out of touch with reality, waves of nausea add to his misery, there's a pungent smell he can't seem to get rid of.

She's here, he's so sure of it because there is no way that her aura and scent are this strong.

"Ndoda." The voice startles him this time, he didn't hear the bars opening.

He doesn't lift his eyes, instead shudders relentlessly on the cold floor.

He's not sleeping, his hand is on his mouth, and nails between his teeth.

"What's going on Ndoda?" -Mthombo.

This must be witchcraft.

"Open the window." His eyes dart to Mthombo as he gives this desperate request.

His brain feels like it would swell beyond the capacity of his skull, his dehydration is too obvious to ignore. For a moment too long, he feels the walls closing in on him and holds his breath. Maybe this way, he will be able to catch his breath.

“Open the window,” Ndaba grunts painfully.

Mthombo looks around, although he is aware this small room was built with no windows.

“There are no windows here.” He tells him.

Ndaba does not check to confirm Mthombo’s words, he’s holding his breath again, a desperate attempt to stop himself from vomiting.

It’s not working, his stomach lurches and gurgles, he raises his heavy eyelids to his brother and unwanted tears taint his face.

“What happened to you man? What did they do to you?” Mthombo asks.

Bhedlindaba gets on his knees and crawls to the toilet bowl, he gags, and hauls, vomiting whatever his stomach throws out.

A hand pats his back, the comforting feeling should make him better but nothing seems to erase Mathe’s scent and the misery, agonisingly clawing at him.

When he’s done throwing up, he sinks back to the

floor, back to his foetal position.

Mthombo kneels in front him, he wants to look into his droopy eyes.

When his eyes catch Ndaba's, the little brother quickly looks away.

"Are you taking drugs?"

There must be a reason why he's like this, it doesn't make sense to Mthombo.

"I hate MaDlamini, I hate her so much." Ndaba expresses.

Mthombo suddenly thinks she is behind whatever is happening to his brother.

"Tell me what happened in the house." –Mthombo.

"I hate her, I hate her." Ndaba repeats.

"I know ntwana, I know. Tell me what happened. Did you shoot her?"

This is a rhetorical question, he doesn't repeat himself when Ndaba doesn't answer. Maybe it is better they don't talk about that here, walls have ears.

“I hate her, she did things to me, I hate her so much.”
Bhedlindaba continues, his eyes are on Mthombo now.

“What did MaDlamini do to you Bhedlindaba?” Anger is laced in his voice. He cups his brother’s face like he did back in the house.

“I was against it, she didn’t care. She said I was going to love it.”

Ndaba covers his face with his hands and grunts painfully.

“Tell her to apologise, bring her here now bhuti.”
Ndaba pleads.

His eyes keep darting to the bars.

Mthombo shifts, but Ndaba grabs the hem of his shirt. His eyes are wide and full of fear.

“No, wait. Don’t bring her here, don’t tell her anything. She’s going to fail me if she finds out I told you, and you know how baba is, he will cut me off if I fail. Don’t bring her here, don’t bring Miss here.”

Confusion smacks Mthombo, it confines but frees

him immediately. He's talking about Mathe.

A wave of déjà vu hits him. When Bhedlindaba was 16, he found him in his room hiding beneath thick covers on a hot afternoon.

The boy was consumed by fear and disgust.

"Twenty times, I took a bath twenty times. Why can't I get the smell off me? I don't want it on me, please bhuti."

That cry for help pierced through his soul. When he enquired, Bhedlindaba had fallen into sobs. He cried himself to sleep and when he woke up the next day, he didn't want to talk about it. It were as if nothing had happened.

Ndaba is back on the floor, curled up and shivering.

"I don't want to smell her anymore bhuti, she's all over me. She told me that I belong to her, body and soul. She promised to never leave me, I feel her on my skin."

"She lied to you Bhedlindaba, you don't belong to her.

You never did.” Mthombo can’t express how much he hated Mathe, if he could, he’d resurrect her and kill her again.

“Maybe I liked it, that’s why she never stopped.”

Mthombo stands, he can’t see his brother like this. The plan is to walk out of here, but taking another step is damn hard.

“I tried not to focus on what was happening, but I couldn’t ignore the thrusting pain, the violation and the guilt suffocating me. It would’ve been easier to think about school, smoking another joint and the lies I’d tell baba why I bunked school. But I couldn’t.”

Guilt shoots through Mthombo’s heart, he turns his back and faces the wall. This doesn’t stop Bhedlindaba from talking, he wants to be heard, it’s that 17 year-old boy wanting to voice out. It is strange how he is opening up without being told to by a professional.

“I’ll get you help ntwana, you’re going to be okay.” He says, not looking at him.

“What’s that smell?” Ndaba mumbles, eyes darting

all over. Mthombo turns to him.

"Take me to the bathroom, I want to bath." Ndaba says, roughly scrubbing his body.

He frowns at Mthombo when he doesn't move an inch.

"Did you hear what I said? Take me to the bathroom now. I have to get rid of her smell, it's suffocating me." His words break, all that's left are stuttering sounds. He's on his knees, sobbing, his hands tightly gripped on his big brother's leg.

He lets go and goes back to his position on the floor.

Mthombo sits down, it feels like someone has punched his chest as he drags Bhedlindaba into his arms.

"She won't leave me alone, tell her to leave me alone." Ndaba pleads.

His heart wrenching sobs bouncing from wall to wall.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Season Finale P4*

SHIYIWE-

.

.

Athule has just arrived, I had to call her after Mthombo asked me to clean up around here. He's bringing Ndaba home, he didn't specify whether he bailed him out, or bought him out of prison. These men are capable of anything.

"Did we really have to meet here?" She's looking at the house like she has never lived here.

"You're literally the only friend I have," I shut the door and follow her to the lounge.

She faces me, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Why am I here?"

I will need her to have a positive energy if I'm going to tell her what happened to her ex.

"I'm a whale, and my husband wants this place clean ASAP."

She looks at me like I'm losing my mind, then at the

house.

“Fix your face, Ndaba needs us.” I hand her a broom. She looks at it like it’s a weapon.

“I didn’t come here to clean, I came because you called me, and said it was an emergency. Why is it dirty in here? Where is the owner?” –Athule.

Bitter women are like an atomic bomb, if I give this one poison and ask her to poison Ndaba, she might do it.

“Ndaba is sick, he’s been sick for months.” I say.

I don’t have details.

I expected the shock on her face, what I didn’t expect is her brushing it off.

“What’s wrong with him?” The bitterness.

“I don’t know, Mthombo will explain when they get here. I’ll wash the dishes, you can sweep and mop.” I say.

She doesn’t protest, she doesn’t agree either.

It takes us less than 40 minutes to finish cleaning up,

I ate and rested more than I worked. I have accepted that I will be lazy till I give birth.

“I better not look like a Zombie tomorrow.” Athule says as she joins me on the couch.

She hands me a glass of juice, and sits back, gulping down hers.

“What’s happening tomorrow?”

There is so much I don’t know about this girl.

“First day at work, I signed a contract yesterday.”

Oh! That physio thingy she went to school and got a degree for. No pressure Shiyiwe, you have all the time in the world to study.

“Congrats mfazi, at least you won’t be getting me a bibi as a baby shower gift.” Or a tea-set, or a knife set like the one Mabahlezi got us for a housewarming gift.

“I’m buying my niece the most expensive stroller, just you wait and see.” She says with pride.

This one and Mthombo are so sure that I am carrying a girl.

“So what’s been going on with you?” It’s time I dig for information, I don’t like being in the dark.

“With what?”

Yeah! That look on her face says she is clueless.

“I don’t know, work... baba... Thambo.” You need to be skilled to get in this digging field.

Her choking on the juice confirms what the hubby told me.

“What did you hear?”

“Athule! Thambo of all people?” I’m not judging her, Thambo is a looker. I looked twice too the first time I saw him, but... Thambo!!! Huuuh!!!

She rolls her eyes, a habit of hers.

“Thambo is good company, he listens to me.”

“Mmmmh! Wait till he starts listening to your clit.”

Thambo is a man and the way Mthombo made it seem, he is after this sister of mine.

“Ewww Shiyiwe, that will never happen. We’re just... friends.”

That pause—I don’t trust it.

“Friends with benefits, soon?” I know, I know. I need to stop. I’m trying to warn her to be careful. It’s too soon for her to get into another relationship, with Thambo nokwenza! Hayi no!

Athule kicks her shoes off and puts her feet on the couch, I’m waiting for a reply and she is making me watch her gulp down juice.

“That will never happen, I don’t go around dishing my heart to men. It loved once, I don’t think it will ever love again” Now she’s talking.

But...

“Loved? Does that mean you don’t love Ndaba anymore?” Her face changes, she’s uncomfortable. She sighs as she puts the empty glass on the coffee table.

“Ndaba will always be the one,” she says, sitting back and crossing her arms.

I never told her about his confession to me,
somethings are better off untold.

"So... there is hope for him?" I ask.

I don't know why I believe they will be good together.

"I'm not saying there is hope, right now I am better off without him. My life has only started, I'm slowly finding myself and learning to put my feelings above everyone else's."

She's talking about that thing Judith is always saying, "Protect your peace, love you first before you love someone, or you will lose yourself in that person."

I don't know, but I love Mthombo more than I love myself. That doesn't mean I will destroy myself for him, and now that I am going to be a mother, I am certain that I will always choose my baby over him.

"I'm not like you Shiyiwe, I'm not strong. I break easily, letting Ndaba back into my life will ruin me and my peace."

Okay! Someone is growing.

I'm happy for her, she needs to know though that she deserves to be loved.

.

"They are here." I tell Athule.

There's a car pulling up outside. Athule looks tense all of a sudden, she stands and crosses her arms. Her eyes are on the door.

"Relax, you know he doesn't bite." It's meant to be a joke.

I guess I am not as funny as I thought, she's taking this whole thing to heart.

"You can hide in the kitchen, I will call you when he's out of sight." It's a good suggestion.

Athule wriggles her shoulders, "No, it's okay. I don't have to hide from him."

The door opens, Mthombo walks in—shoulders slumped. He looks like a chicken that's been rained on.

I'm holding the door open, waiting for Bhedlindaba to come in.

"Close the door, he's not here." He says.

"But I thought..."

"His bail hearing is tomorrow, I couldn't buy him out of prison." Mthombo explains.

"Is he okay?" Athule asks.

"He'll be fine." He takes my hand and ushers me to the lounge. I guess he wants to talk in private.

"Ndaba is not doing well." He says.

I noticed before he was taken and the mess in this house was loud. Bhedlindaba is a clean freak.

"Can we take him in, it's going to be temporary. I don't want him alone here, Shiyiwe."

"What is wrong with him?" I have to know before verbally agreeing to this. It's not that I mind him staying with us, it will be good to keep a close eye on him.

“He has a traumatic past, something triggered it.”
He’s whispering as if what he is saying is forbidden.

“My brother is slowly losing his sanity Nonyanda, and I don’t know how to fix him.” He sighs heavily, and drops his head on my shoulder.

He’s not crying, he hasn’t since Judith happened.

“You don’t fix a person Mthombo, Ndaba needs to speak to the right people. He will be fine, don’t worry about him.”

There is something about the way he sighs, like nothing can save Ndaba from losing his mind.

“How can I not worry about him? You should have seen him back there, he was like a child begging for help.”

That’s a scene I wouldn’t pay to see, I am okay with the image of a stronger Bhedlindaba. I don’t know how I would handle his weakness, especially after everything he has done for me.

“I spoke to Judith, she will be coming over twice a week to counsel him. He is reluctant about talking to

a professional, but he has no choice. He will self-destruct if he doesn't get help." He says.

I put my arms around him and rest my head on his chest.

"Then let's get him the help he needs, tell me what you need from me and I will do it."

"Hold me tighter," he whispers in my ear, tightening his arms around me.

.

.

BHEDLINDABA-

His brain is confused, as to how he got here is a mystery he is yet to uncover. One second he is himself, fearless and wealthy and in the blink of an eye, he is a 17 year old boy, depending on the monthly allowance from his father.

Right now he doesn't know who he is, it's too quiet in

here—in his head.

If it were not for the group of men whispering on the corner, perhaps he would hear the silent voices in his head, perhaps he would figure out where he is and who he is.

Before his brother left, he tried to knock some sense into him. Child molestation, is what he called what Mathe did to him.

“You can’t leave me here, I will die bhuti.” This is what he told Mthombo when he walked out of the cell and the guard locked the bar.

“They won’t let me take you home today, I’ll come get you tomorrow, I promise.”

Those words meant nothing to him.

This place, the wall and the bars restricting his movement feel like a dark hole.

He chose a corner, and cried like a boy. Crying was never on his list of options, winning was. But the tables have turned, his brain won’t work with him.

He can feel himself losing the grip, it’s there,

creeping up on him and too close to force its way in.

When his mind shut down as he grew into his twenties to protect him from the trauma he faced, he lived his life with the delusion that everything begins and starts with him. That notion gave him courage and made him untouchable.

The cell is crowded now, these men standing over there are laughing, it sounds like they are mocking him.

He lifts his eyes to find them staring and pointing, he blinks and for a moment he thinks they are not looking at him, but minding their business.

But things switch in a split second, they are staring and laughing mockingly.

Ndaba jumps to his feet and presses a hand to his lips, “Shhh!”

Something must be funny about the way they are glaring at him, he falls ass down, laughing his lungs out. The laugh dies in a second, he looks up at them.

“What’s so funny?” One asks, he is offended by Ndaba’s laugh.

“She sent you here, didn’t she?” He knows Mathe did, she had influence and could make men do anything she wished.

The men look at each other, instead of confusion, they are consumed by anger.

Ndaba does not care, these people are here for him. At least he is convinced they are, it’s what the voices in his head are saying.

Mathe sent them.

He stands, and makes a gun sign with his fingers.

“Freeze or I will shoot.” He yells like an officer.

“What did you say?” There’s this one who won’t stop talking, he is angrier than his companions.

He takes a step forward, Bhedlindaba moves back.

“Stop! I am not going with you, tell her I won’t come.” He’s still shouting.

“Ndoda let him be, it’s clear he’s a mad man.”

There's always a voice of reason in a crowd of fools.

The angrier one flashes a grin, then a glare before he turns to get back to his corner.

"Pew!!! Pew!!! Pew!!!" That's Bhedlindaba making gunshot sounds.

They stop to look at him.

"You're dead, dead, dead."

He bursts out laughing like a little boy till he falls ass first.

"Am I scaring you? Huh? Tell Mathe I'm a man now, not a boy. I'm going to kill her if she dares touch me, I will kill all of you."

It's so quick how his laugh transitions to anger, he's yelling again and pointing threatening fingers at the men.

When they don't say anything, he turns back to his corner.

Someone tackles him from behind, he feels a sharp

pain just as he hits the ground head first.

The fall has brought him back to his senses, and made him aware of the splitting headache threatening to take him out. But the headache is nothing compared to the burning, sharp pain repeatedly and violently going into the back of his shoulder.

He's being stabbed.

He knows if he lies down in this bitch position, he will die like one. So he fights, he fights until he is the one on top of his attacker.

Ndaba is pulled back by strong hands from behind, he squirms in panic and frees himself.

He's never seen these men before.

Fear mocks him and takes him back in time, back when he was vulnerable and needy.

To a 29 year-old these men he is locked up with don't look intimidating, but he's stuck in the past. Right now he's a 17 year-old boy who needs protection from the world and these men are making

his heart beat drums.

“Yah sfebe,” one of them spits.

Think Ndaba, think.

“Madoda, I don’t want trouble.” He tries not to sound as scared as he is.

The first speaker laughs, “What were you saying s’febe? Who is sacred now?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” -
Bhedlindaba.

The 29 year-old him is back, he does not know what these men are talking about, he was minding his thoughts when they attacked him.

“Hold him down,” the one who seems to be verbally gifted shouts.

One pulls his arms to his back, the other wraps their arm around his neck.

“Do you know who I am? I am Bhedlindaba Meyiwa.”

His name holds no power here, they are all lowlife criminals—otherwise they wouldn’t be behind bars.

Thrashing and kicking does not stop the bulky man in front of him from plunging a knife into his stomach.

Bhedlindaba gasps, his eyes bugling in disbelief. He doesn't feel the second stab until a few seconds afterwards, a burning and intense pain.

"That's enough man," someone says. His hands are released, but it's useless. His muscles are shutting down, he can't fight for himself. His attacker pulls the knife out, Ndaba feels a cold and hot sensation all at once.

"Hey, what's going on there?" This guard is late, the damage has been done.

When the man griping his neck lets go, Ndaba collapses, facedown, gurgling and sputtering. He feels his life fading from him, and his senses retreating.

If he's ever thought about dying, it was never this gruesome.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Season-Finale P5*

MTHOMBO-

.

.

He finds her in the kitchen, she's bare footed, a sarong wrapped around her body. He understands when she doesn't dress up, she stopped buying clothes five months into the pregnancy. She won't stop gaining weight.

"What are you doing?"

Chopping onions.

"Cooking." She responds after taking one look at him.

He's warned her about hard labour, but she never listens.

"I made you a five minute meal, stir fry and veggies. It's in the microwave." She wipes away tears brought by the diced onions.

Mthombo wrinkles his nose, just the thought of stir fry and veggies sends his appetite flying.

“You shouldn’t be working, you’re pregnant.” He’s said this a million times before, but she never listens.

“Please, let me kotiza. So, what if I want to cook for my husband? The other day you wouldn’t let me iron your work clothes, I didn’t like it. These small gestures mean something to me, I love it when I do things for you, Mthombo.”

“I know baby, but you can do it after you’ve given birth. We should’ve brought Nolwazi with, she should be here, chopping these onions.” He hugs her from behind, and kisses the side of her neck.

“You know how I feel about Nolwazi overworking, she’s a child.” That child wanted a job and he gave her one.

He leaves her hanging without an answer, instead, his body is pressed on her back. Lips plastered on her skin.

“I’m hungry, let me finish.” She can’t move in this position.

“Leave that, I’ll do it. Or we can order.” Mthombo says.

He has introduced her to a healthy way of eating, one she hates and avoids whenever she can.

"Again? I don't think I can handle those organic foods anymore, McDonald's and KFC are feeding me just fine." She is not complaining, but there is nothing wrong with giving in to the baby's demands for once... and this baby wants to swim in fried chicken and big patties.

"Are you working tomorrow?" Shiysiwe asks.

He leans on the counter.

"I will drop by the office in the morning before meeting up with Bhedlindaba's lawyer."

Work should be the last thing on his mind.

"Okay."

"I think I should work from home because it's hard to concentrate with you on my mind the whole day."

Mthombo says.

His corniness is getting worse by the day.

"Bad idea, I want you all to myself when you're home." This is her way of flirting, the onions she is

murdering have her attention though.

“I like the sound of that.” He rubs her back, all the way down to her buttocks. His mind lives in the gutter, rent free.

Shiyiwe reprimands him with a look, the man retreats.

“What are we making?” He peeps in the pot.

Her cooking skills aren’t so bad, but this thing in the pot has a weird smell.

“Custard.” Shiyiwe says, as she shifts to give him space and time to judge her food.

Mthombo scratches his beard, he is no cook but...

“And you are chopping onions?”

“Yes, Why not?”

Yep! Sis has decided that this is what she wants, it’s not her fault that her cravings can be out of this world.

He takes the knife from her, and proceeds with the chopping. He has no words for her.

“So, do I add the onions in there?” He has to ask because... what the hell is she making? He throws the onions in before getting an answer.

“I still have to chop garlic and add chilli sauce, tomato sauce, a bit of sugar and tuna.”

Shiyiwe turns to get the items from the fridge, and shelves, oblivious of the cringe look on her husband’s face. The hairs on the back of his neck stand, yes he made her pregnant.

So, what is a demon doing in his wife’s womb?

“What?” He chokes the question out, eyes widened.

“What... what?” Shiyiwe shrugs, clueless about the horrific look on his face.

“What are you carrying? A dragon?”

Okay! Wrong choice of words. He drops his eyes in the pot of horrors to avoid her cold stare.

“You put the baby inside me, so whatever I feel like eating; even if it’s grass, the fault is yours Mthombo.”

Pregnant women and taking offense, same

WhatsApp group.

He's poured her a glass of juice, she thanks him with a smile.

"I will make you tea as well, you'll need it to wash all of this down." Whatever poison this is.

"I'll finish up here, go sit down before I carry you to the lounge." He adds.

He plans on throwing the custard mixture down the drain, she won't be so upset if he tells her it was an accident.

"I'm fat and heavy now, the days of you carrying me are long gone." This is so insecure of her.

Mthombo pauses task and glances at her, he hates it when she drags herself down.

"You are not fat, you're thick. Imagine if you were the size of this wooden spoon." He holds the spoon up.

"Where would my baby live?"

"Really?"

“Yes,” he kneels in front of her and touches her belly. They are the same height when he is on his knees.

“Look at my princess living in luxury,” his hands glide down to her belly. “Mama you are thick, finely manufactured. I’m almost jealous of God because he got to mend you. If it were my hands crafting this fine art, I would count my blessings every second.”

Shiyiwe cracks in laughter and cups his face, “Can I have ten more of your babies?”

She laughs it out.

“We can squeeze them in there... right now, I can spare a second.” He grins and welcomes the incoming kiss.

A man can’t love his wife in peace, Mthombo’s phone is blasting and it’s irking the living day lights out of him.

“Who is it now?” He grunts.

In Ndaba’s house, the lounge is not far from the kitchen. He is there in a jiffy, checking who the interrupter is. His mood changes in a snap of a

finger.

.

.

Okay, this is a first. Their relationship has been on the rocks since he and Bhedlindaba teamed up and beat the hell out of him. They haven't exchanged any words since, as to why his father is calling beats him.

"What do you want?" Mthombo asks.

"Come to Baragwanath Hospital, your brother was attacked." Zwangendaba says. "It's not looking good."

The call dies, no further explanation whatsoever.

Shiyiwe is looking at him, inquisitively. Something must be wrong, he looks depleted.

"Mthombo, what is it?" She asks.

It's either Mthombo is paralyzed by shock or he is still processing the bad news.

"Baby what's wrong?" She asks again, now she is really worried.

“Bhedlindaba was attacked in prison, he’s in hospital.”

“Lord, what is happening to Bhedlindaba?” Shiysiwe expresses in shock.

“I have to go,” he pats his pockets searching for his car keys.

They are on the counter, Shiysiwe hands them to him.

“Let me get a sweater, it’s a bit chilly outside.”

He stops her from walking out the kitchen.

“It’s late, we’ll go together in the morning. I might be there the whole night.” He says.

He’s tall enough to kiss the top of her head.

“Take care of yourself and her.” He kisses her belly.

“I will, keep me updated.”

Shiysiwe states, wrapping her arms around his waist. She rests her head on his chest and holds him closer.

“Ndaba is a strong man, he’ll be okay.” She wants him to know this, and to ease his burden, if she could carry it for him she would.

Mthombo slightly brushes her lips with his.

It is normal for him to kiss his wife before leaving the house, and just as he turns ready to walk out she calls him.

“Mthombo!” There is sadness in her voice, and he catches it.

“I love you.” Shiyiwe says when their eyes met.

She has to let him know he is loved beyond anything. He pauses for a moment. This is all he's ever wanted, happiness. Will it still be here though if he loses any of his brothers?

“I'll come home to you right?” He's looking into her eyes, knowing she would never lie to his face.

Another thing is that he does not know why he is asking her this question, why he suddenly fears not coming home to her.

“I'll always be here, I promise.”

It's clear to Shiyiwe that Mthombo has let paranoia get the best of him.

.

.

In less than ten minutes, he is parked outside the hospital.

Thoughts of what could've provoked Ndaba's attackers crowd his mind. Bhedlindaba is a strong man, he is powerful both in his family and in the community.

He's running down the hallway, heading to the ward the nurse directed him to. It's on the third floor.

There he finds his father and Bongukwanda with their backs against the wall and sullen appearances on their faces.

"Kwanda!" They share a hug.

"Where is he?" Mthombo asks.

The look on Bongukwanda's face is not promising. Ndaba has to be okay.

"In there." Kwanda points towards the closed door. "We haven't heard anything yet, the nurse made us wait here."

Anger lies in Bongukwanda's voice.

“I don’t understand, what happened to him?”

“The prison guard said a fight broke out, he was stabbed multiple times. He had lost a lot of blood by the time they brought him to the hospital.”

This doesn’t make sense. Who would want to kill his brother?

“Where are those men?” Mthombo asks.

Guilt has surrounded him like a shield, he should have taken Bhedlindaba with him.

Zwangendaba butts in, “Don’t worry about them. I am going to make them pay for what they did.”

It’s hard to believe that he would actually do that, this old man does not have it in him to fight for his children. He has proven that more than once.

“It’s my fault.” Zwangendaba says, avoiding eye contact. Looks like someone has swallowed some humble pie.

His boys don’t say anything but wait for him to explain.

“Everything I have ever done wrong is coming back

to bit me, that's why Ndaba is in there, fighting for his life. I can't lose a second son."

This is no time to be dwelling on self-pity. Mthombo could roll his eyes if it were a habit.

"The doctors are not always 100% certain, he might wake up anytime. I know my brother, he will get through this." Mthombo declares, giving his father a rather peculiar look.

"I agree with you father, this is your fault."
Bongukwanda is not afraid to speak out.

"Why are you entertaining him Kwanda? Can't you see he is trying to make this about him?
Zwangendaba Meyiwa, always trying to steal the spotlight."

"That is not what I'm doing." Zwangendaba argues and sits on the silver bench.

The night is getting older by the second, Bara is empty as a freshly dug hole.

"There is something you boys didn't know." He starts, looking up at his sons. "Please sit."

None of them listen to him, it's not like they ever do.

"One morning, the maid found bed sheets stashed in Ndaba's wardrobe. They had a funny smell, she thought it was fungus building up because they were dirty sheets."

Mthombo sees where this is going, maybe he should take that sit.

"My son was wetting his bed, he was 16 going on 17 in a few weeks. I thought it was insane that a grown man would wet his bed. Your mother and I sat him down and asked him. He told us a story about his teacher doing things to him. I believed him, but I told him not to tell anyone. That people would laugh at him because a man can't be raped, it's unheard of."

Mthombo grits his teeth, his father knew and said nothing?

"Your mother went and spoke to her, we had to make sure the teacher does not slip and tell people. The Meyiwa name was going to be ruined. The thought of the headlines were terrifying 'Meyiwa, raped by woman'."

He shakes his head, the thought of it still gives him nightmares. Broke as he is.

“He was a child.” Mthombo spits, letting anger consume him.

“I know, but we had to protect the family. Money is a need son, we couldn’t let our business associates find out.”

Bongukwanda is lost for words. Yes money is a need, but at the cost of your own kids? That is absurd.

“What’s the catch?” That’s Mthombo, not buying this old man’s sudden change of heart.

His father is lost, it’s written on his face.

“It’s too late to apply for father of the year Zwangendaba.” Bongukwanda says.

They know him to be sly and manipulative, it can’t be that he has changed in a day.

“Bhedlindaba is my son, I’m hurting too, and the only reason I am telling you boys this is because I am sorry. I want to reform, do better for all of you.”

“Lies, you want money don’t you?” –Mthombo is not

having it.

“No, I want a second chance.”

“How much?” Mthombo grunts, caging his father into a corner.

“How much to get you to leave us alone?”

“Son please...”

“You are not wanted here Zwangendaba, we are okay without you.”

They have always been okay without him.

“I’m not leaving, I will stay here until I know my son is okay.” He sits back down, his hands are trembling.

He crosses his arms to hide it from them.

“You are all I have now, I lost everything, the company... the busses. It’s all gone, don’t let me lose you too.”

He can’t have forgotten his wife.

Here comes the doctor looking like he has been conquered by the world, his back is hunched and

shoulders slumped.

No one has the bravery to ask, so they stare and wait for him to deliver the news first.

"I suggest you call friends and family, these coming hours are going to be crucial. Prepare your goodbyes if you can."

That's it? He's just going to walk away after slicing their hearts?

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Season Finale- P6*

MTHOMBO-

.

.

In Mthombo's theory, parents should love their children beyond anything, if they could betray them in such a manner then he is not sure what love really is.

The house is dark and quiet, Shiyiwe must have gone to bed. It's after 12am, quietly he climbs into bed

beside his wife, careful not to wake her up. He exhales when he puts his arm around her, his hand gently landing on her baby bump.

The feeling of love and safety brings tears to his eyes, it's an overwhelming feeling knowing that the woman that's carrying his child loves him.

They are not perfect but they have each other.

"Mthombo?"

His shuffling woke her up.

"Go back to sleep." He whispers into her ear.

How does he tell her about Ndaba? She's pregnant and it might affect the baby if she takes the news badly.

Shiyiwe wriggles out of his arms and sits up. The side light is off but he still turns away, he's never hidden his tears from her before.

"How is Ndaba?" Curiosity has no timing, or worry in this instant.

Mthombo clears his throat, there is a lump big as his fist and it's summoning a bowl full of tears.

“Mthombo?” Her voice breaks.

He can’t lie to her, she will find out eventually.

He turns to look into her eyes.

“Tell me you love me, please.” He mutters with desperation in his voice.

He needs to be reminded that life is not that bad a thing.

“I love you,” she says. “Tell me he is alive, Mthombo.”

The tears he has been trying to conceal come out, full force.

Shiyiwe cups his face, her tears showing up as well.

It’s hard, harder than anything he’s ever had to do. But he narrates the story to his wife.

“Do you think there is a God?” He can’t be sure because he has never taken time to truly find out if God exists.

“I believe there is a God.” Shiyiwe says.

Mthombo holds her hands, “Then please pray for my brother. Pray Nonyanda, it’s all we can do now.”

She drops her eyes, and sniff. She is not that much into praying but tonight, she has to find a way.

.

ATHULE-

“Baba!” I scream, the phone falling off my numb hand.

Pain has seeped into my heart. Bhedlindaba can’t do this to me.

“Sisi, what is it?” Ayanda catches me before I knock the ground with my knees.

How do I let the words out of my mouth? How do I tell her that my sister just told me the man I love is dying?

“Sisi, breathe.” She says and only now I realize that I am chasing my breath, fighting to stay alive. It so selfish of me to be so desperate to live when the only man I have ever loved is dying.

The door opens, my father walks in covered in panic and eyes wide. He hurries to my side, and holds my shoulders.

“Athule? What’s wrong with her?” He is asking my sister.

I do that selfish thing, fight to breathe because I need to get to the hospital, and the only way is to tell him what is going on.

I wipe my tears and turn my teary eyes to him.

“I just spoke to Shiysiwe, she told me that Bhedlindaba is in hospital. I have to get to him, baba.”

He looks at me like I spoke French.

“Baba, please drive me to the hospital.”

“I can’t my child, I took the car for servicing. It’s been making that drrr drrr sound again.”

Argh! I don’t have time for his uncle Mdu moments, he spends too much time with him that he is starting to sound like him.

Thambo can take me. It’s midnight, I can only hope

he understands.

I'm about to cut the call when his voice occupies the phone.

"What's wrong?" He's always worried.

"Something has happened to Bhedlindaba, I need you to take me to the hospital."

Cricket silence!

I glance at my father, Sizwile has joined us in the room and they are looking at me in anticipation.

"I'm on my way," Thambo finally speaks.

"Thank..." Oh! He dropped the call.

He is not a fan of Ndaba, he'd talk about how much he admires Mthombo but trash Ndaba whenever he can. Part of me thinks it's the jealousy talking.

I know how he feels about me, he's told me. Thambo is a blunt man.

I ran into him at a mall this one Sunday, we got talking and ended up finishing our chat over coffee.

His treat.

He kept in touch and started inviting me places, I could see how he looked at me. The way he spoke and would randomly hold my hand as we walked.

He is a good man, but I am not there. I can never give myself to him. I believe I was made to love one man, and that man wants to leave me. He wants to go away forever.

How can Bhedlindaba give up so easily? It is not like him.

.

.

I had to persuade my father to stay behind, it would have been one awkward ride with him and this man speeding down Nasrec road.

“Thank you for this, I can chip in on patrol. But I left my card at home.” I have to break this uncomfortable silence.

“You know how I feel about you always wanting to repay me, we are...” He pauses, his jaw pops.

“We are friends,” I finish for him.

Friends is all we will ever be.

He practices his right to be silent, and doesn’t say anything until we arrive.

“You can go home, thank you for the ride.”

He looks at me with raised eyebrows and jumps out of the car.

“I’m family too,” he says, leading the way.

Okay!

“This is not visiting hours, sisi. Come back tomorrow.” This nurse is giving us an attitude.

Are they born this way, or it comes with the profession?

“Sisi,” might as well give her a taste of her own medicine. The look she is spotting tells me she hates being called sisi.

“We are with the Meyiwases, there is a patient who is...”
I can’t associate his name with the word dying... I

can't...

Thambo's hand is on my back to comfort, I know.

"Bhedlindaba Meyiwa is his name." He says.

The nurse seems to be hating on me alone, her eyes fall and rise on my body.

"That way." She points forward, and turns with an eye roll.

My feet are faster than ever, but it feels like I'm walking too slow.

"Don't run, you will fall." Thambo warns behind me.

I don't care. I'm running. I have to get to Ndaba.

On the hallway, standing against the wall is Shiysiwe and Mthombo.

She holds me in her arms, her cries break mine and we are wailing within seconds. Two black women crying like widows, I hate this sound. The last time I cried like this was at my grandmother's funeral.

"I want to see him," I tell her as we pull apart.

Mthombo takes over from me, he's holding his wife, giving her a chest to cry on.

"You can go in," he says and places a kiss on top of Shiysiwe's head.

My feet refuse to move, but I force them.

I open the door slowly, the sight of him attached to machines is unbearable. How did such a strong man end up like this?

I have to control my tears, they won't stop. I wipe a few, and give up on the stubborn ones. His hand feels warm, for some reason, this warmth instills hope in me.

"Bhuti weshluthu."

He called me lady with the course hair the first time we met.

That course hair has grown back in six months.

"Ndaba, you can't do this to us. You have to pull through, everyone is here waiting for you to wake up. You can't disappoint us... you can't leave me behind."

There is so much I want to say to him, but words fail me. All I can do is lay my head on his chest and cry.

“I never stopped Bhedlindaba... I went away but I never stopped loving you. Who will snap at me if you leave? I have no one to protect me like you did, don’t do me like that ntwana.”

He has to come back, I don’t know what I will do if he dies.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

“I can’t see his future.” Mathonga is telling me something I was not expecting to hear. Don’t his kind have powers?

“Please Mathonga, ngicela umkhanyisele. There has to be something, it’s not his time yet. I know it’s not.”

Mthombo kisses my shoulder, he can hear the conversation. I was told to place Mathonga on speaker.

“I don’t want you to be hopeful for nothing, I will check though. Give me time.”

He ends the call, my heart is sitting on my chest. I can’t imagine what my husband must be feeling. I hate that he is hurting.

“Babe, we need to be positive.” I tell him.

He says nothing, but lets out a shaky breath. He hasn’t cried yet, I know he wants to. He is a big teddy bear.

“Bhuti...”

Mabahlezi is here with her husband, behind them are women in church uniform. Abomama bomthandazo, I count more than five.

She throws herself in Mthombo’s arms, I try to block out her loud sobs. They are breaking my heart.

“Howzit man?” Her husband extends his hand to shake Mthombo’s.

He responds with a nod.

“I want to see him,” Mabahlezi says.

“Athule is in there, I think you can go in.” I reply.

“Shiyiwe, I’m sorry I didn’t see you there.”

—Mabahlezi.

Her eyes are swollen from tears she’s shedding. She taps my back before I can respond, and heads towards the door. She is barely inside when Athule screams Ndaba’s name.

Panic! Chaos!

Nurses appear from nowhere, scurrying toward Ndaba’s room.

“Code blue, code blue.” One nurse shouts.

We rush in with the medical team.

“You can’t be in here.” One of the nurses says.

The top wavy line on the patient monitor is straightening, the sound it’s making is driving me insane.

“What’s going on? Ndaba, Ndaba!” Athule screams, Thambo is holding her back. Tight arms around her

chest.

I feel Mthombo's arms tighten around me as I start to run toward the bed, I can't afford to panic but I can't help it. He can't die.

"Get them out of here, nurse." The doctor orders, flipping Ndaba's hospital gown open.

"Please wait outside, you are crowding the doctor."

When the nurse sees that we are not moving, she starts pushing us.

"Don't touch me," Bongukwanda snaps.

"Ndaba don't do this, don't leave us." His sister wails.

I don't know what the doctor is doing to Ndaba, trying to revive him I guess. He looks frustrated by our presence and the crying we're making.

"Ntwana—ntwana you're a fighter. Fight bozza yam' nyathela amadimoni sgora, anyise ntwana." I didn't see Mikhulu come in, on his hand is Ndaba's yellow spoti.

His bloodshot eyes meet mine, “MaShishi.”

I guess he is greeting.

This nurse is working extra hard to get us out of here, it’s time she gives up. We are not leaving.

I want to know if what the doctor is doing will work. The wavy line is flat, the doctor looks defeated.

“Ndaba no, please no.” Athule's screams rise above the roof, she is fighting to free herself from Thambo's grip.

“Get these people out of here, now.” The doctor shouts, pumping Ndaba's chest with his fists.

I don't know why the nurse thinks Mikhulu is an easy target, she gets a cold stare when she pushes him.

“Ngizokulum.” He growls at her like an animal, attempting to grab her hand with his teeth. She steps back, looking defeated.

“Ntwana look, I brought your spoti. You never wanted me to touch it, wake up ntwana or I will burn it.” Mikhulu says, he is wiping his tears with the same hat.

“What about your team Bhuti? They are playing tomorrow, you have to be there or they will lose.” Bongukwanda’s voice breaks with each word.

I look at Mthombo, he’s on Ndaba’s bedside. Crying.

“Please ndoda, don’t do this to us. Don’t do this, Ndaba, I will never fight with you again. Don’t leave us.”

My chest is tight, something is sitting on it. Tears streak down my face, I burst into a sob. I didn’t mean to, I didn’t mean to be loud. Everyone is crying, Athule has her head on Thambo’s chest.

Bongukwanda is sitting flat on the floor, back against the wall—weeping like a little boy. A least Mabahlezi’s husband is here, comforting her. I turn to my mine, our eyes meet. The pain in his is shattering.

“Msomi, Bheshwabe, Ntusi, tell me what to do.” He’s loudly calling upon his ancestors. We turn to a higher being when everything fails.

“Mthombo,” I take his hand. He won’t let me, instead he looks into my eyes, tearing up.

“Ngenzeni Nonyanda, my baby brother is leaving me. Tell me what to do, please.” He cries.

I don't know... Lord what is this?

Our lives will never be the same again, these brothers will never be the same again.

.

.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Season Finale P7*

ZWANGENDABA-

.

.

The first and last time he entered these premises were before his wife bore him children.

Five years later into the marriage, Zwangendaba and Masabata were having a hard time conceiving. There was pressure from both families, and friends.

Despite the complaints, he wasn't ready. The world

could pressure you into tempering with God's timing, and temper with it was what Zwangendaba and Masabata did.

They drove to Limpopo and came here, in this hut that smells like it is guarded by a dead rat.

They didn't have to tell the witch doctor what they wanted, he knew the moment they walked through his gate.

"I will give you something, you will have as many children as you want." He sent his yellow eyes to Masabata who shivered in return.

That night, they went home carrying a concoction. He had to mix it with a drop of his blood and drink it before becoming intimate with his wife.

Zwangendaba didn't sleep that night, the witchdoctor's demand kept replaying in his head.

"In return, I want your first seed. Three months in your wife's womb, I will come and take it."

And so it happened that when Masabata was three months pregnant, she had a miscarriage. It was a

hard time for them, but they soldiered on and had more babies.

He feels a heavy presence behind him and shivers in fright.

“I knew you would come back.” The witchdoctor laughs as he takes his place in front of skulls and many bottles mixed with god-knows-what.

He looks at Zwangendaba dead in the eye.

“Are you sure you want to be here?” The witchdoctor asks.

Zwangendaba is not sure, what he knows is that he is desperate.

“Your son is dying, you want to save him.” The old man predicts.

“Yes, help me please.” The cry of a desperate father leaves his mouth.

“A life for a life, are you willing to die in order for him to live.”

This is too much, he didn't come here with the intention of giving his soul up.

Then again, he's lost everything. He has nothing to live for, not even his wife. Why not save the very son he was desperate to bring into the world.

Zwangendaba takes a deep breathe, "I want my son alive, I owe him that."

His heart comes to sit in his throat, every man is afraid of death, including the brave ones.

"You will know when it's time to die, only your sons should bury you. If a woman attends your funeral, this calamity will fall on your generation. No one will be spared."

The witchdoctor is telling him to perform the impossible. His sons despise him, he is so sure that they will never attend his funeral.

.

.

NTEBO-

Mphako sent her back to her mother's house with the promise of helping where he could, at first he suggested a mental hospital. That was stupid of him. Who in this God-given world does he think he is? The audacity of that grey haired man to assume that she is crazy.

Ntebo is baffled, it will stay with her for a while. She has a visitor, her pastor's wife. She came with an excuse of checking up on her.

Ntebo wanted to argue and ask her where she was when she was scattered all over town looking for someone to help her bury her mother. But the pastor's wife didn't come empty handed, she brought food.

She has overstayed her visit and wants to go, but Ntebo is not done venting. They are in the living room, and it's getting late.

"He thinks I'm crazy, he has to apologise to me, I demand an apology." She's been going on about it for a while now.

The lady sitting on a chair across from her rolls her

eyes, she's starting to regret agreeing to check on Ntebo.

"I think I should go, my husband must be looking for me," must be nice to have a husband.

Ntebo snorts and shoots her a cold stare, "Are you showing off Mme moruti? Is it because I am not married? You are not special, you know?"

These people keep thinking they are better than her. Do they know who her mother was?

"I didn't say that sesi..." nerves have surrounded the pastor's wife.

This is her cue, she stands and grabs her hand bag.

"Where are you going?" Ntebo asks.

She can't leave her alone in this house, there is a presence in this house.

"H... home." The elegant looking young woman stutters. Her biggest mistake is letting fear swamp her. How easy she's forgotten about the One who dwells in her.

"Sit down." Ntebo hisses and pulls her down, she

falls back on the chair. Her eyes have grown twice their size.

“What’s going on Nteboheleng?”

Another thing Ntebo hates is when people look at her like she is losing her mind.

She spreads her legs, elbows on her thighs and eyes cast on the pastor’s wife.

“From you? Nothing. You don’t have anything I fancy Mme moruti, your husband is boring and he’s broke. The one who has everything I want is Shiyiwe, I want it all, starting with that baby in her womb.”

I mean she has every right to take it, Shiyiwe must burn in hell for having the audacity to live large and lavishly.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

It’s been a stressful two weeks, Mthombo walks

around like a Zombie. He talks less and hardly touches me. I can't remember the last time we had a proper conversation. Sometimes I don't know what to say to him, lest he snaps. He does that a lot.

Judith must be annoyed by my calls by now, I call her more than I call my twin. We need her, without her this marriage won't survive this grief we are facing.

It's Sunday night, we came back to our house. It feels otherwise, Bhedlindaba should be here with his brother.

Bongukwanda visits a lot, this one time he brought Sikolethu. The boy is growing. He looks taller each time I see him, he's everyone's responsibility. Boarding school is treating him well, he is gaining weight and his vocabulary is growing as well.

"Can I have coffee?" He's leaning against the door post, his sunken eyes barely alive.

"Sure babe, do you want anything to eat?"

This man has not had a proper meal in a while, if he continues like this, he will collapse.

“No,” he says and walks back to the lounge.

I live with a ghost.

I make the coffee, I make my own food lately. The pampering is slowly fading, I think he has lost the will to live.

I find him slouched on the couch, staring into space. I hate it when he does this, he lets himself drown into a dark hole.

I nudge him to get his attention, and hand him the coffee.

“Can I sit with you?” I ask.

He nods and shifts to make space for me.

“Do you know how careful I am with this love, babe?”
Mthombo’s eyes shift to me, finally he is looking at me.

“Huh?”-Him.

“You are the best thing that has ever happened to

me.” I cradle his cheek in my palm, and for that, I’m rewarded with a faint smile.

At this moment, I yearn to see all his teeth.

He’s back to staring at nothing, just a blank TV screen.

“Look at me,” he does. “This love, our love is a miracle for me. You’re my miracle Mthombo, my heart is in love with you.” I assure him, perhaps he will remember that I am still here and I am not going anywhere.

“Why are you telling me all this?”

Yeah, I expected this question.

“I don’t want you to forget it, I don’t want you to forget that I am here. Your baby is here, Mthombo. I know and understand that what you are going through is hard. I’m hurting too, we all are. Don’t shut me out, let me play my role in this marriage. Let me be your peace.”

He doesn’t need that much convincing, I have to calm down. He knows I love him.

He lets out a heavy breath, I can feel how exasperated he is.

“I know Nonyanda, I don’t mean to shut you out. I just don’t know how to deal with everything that has happened.” He says and I get him.

“Let me help you, talk to me whenever you feel like you want to talk. We don’t have to call Judith all the time, I am here.”

Another sigh from him.

“Ngiyabonga mama, I love hearing words of affirmation from you. Don’t ever stop telling me you love me okay, I need to hear you say it every second.”

“I won’t, I love you. I will never stop.” I say.

He accepts my kiss and doubles it.

“What time are we going to the hospital tomorrow?” I ask, positioning myself to lean on him.

“I’m not sure yet, I’ll confirm with Bongukwanda.”

“Are you okay though?” I ask.

The sad look on his face does not sit well with me.

“Yeah.” He doesn’t sound convincing.

Someone is at the door. Why do people think it is okay to visit after hours?

Nolwazi gets the door, “Gogo? What are you doing here?”

Gogo?

“Makhosi is here.” Mthombo says.

He stands and rushes to the door, I follow behind with my penguin walk. I’m baffled by the man standing behind this gogo. He’s heaving, his lips are white as ash.

“Why did you bring that man here?” Mthombo.

He will never forgive him, I know this man I’m married to. He hates his father with a passion for what he did to Bhedlindaba.

Masabata is not spared, he doesn’t visit her in the hospital. I have a feeling that she has healed, she is

there for attention now.

Her children refuse to give her any, and her husband has been missing for two weeks. It's the first time we are seeing him today, he looks like death. Scrawny and underfed.

"There is something your father needs to tell you."

Makhosi says.

Why is she Zwangendaba's spokesperson?

"I don't want to hear anything coming from him."

Mthombo snaps.

"Son..." that's a scratchy voice. He limps forward, Makhosi helps him.

"I'm sorry," he says, holding out a sealed white envelope. His hand is shaky and unsteady.

"Take it..." This woman looks desperate for Mthombo to take the envelope.

My husband glares at it, then back up at his father.

"What is it?" -Mthombo.

"It's a letter, I explained everything in it. Everything I

ever did and why I did what I did.”

“I don’t want it, I have heard enough of your lies.” He pushes the door to close it, but I want him to take the envelope. The nosy me wants to know what’s written in it.

“Your brother is not going to die,” Zwangendaba quickly says, and that stops Mthombo from shutting the door on his face.

It feels like a long time ago when we were all crowded in Bhedlindaba’s hospital room, begging him not to die.

He heard us, there was silence, then the heart monitor came to life.

But it wasn’t something to celebrate, he had fallen into a coma.

We’re waiting for him to come back, I don’t know how many people must be put to sleep in my life. Mthandeni first, now Bhedlindaba. I want a meeting with God, this is not okay.

“What did you say?” Mthombo pulls me back to reality with this question.

His father is in tears, he is so frail and looks unhealthy.

“I gave my life for him to live, I won’t let anything happen to him. I will never let anything happen to you all.” Zwangendaba.

Well, he sounds like a hero. But his words don’t make sense.

“You gave your life for his?”

Good question Mthombo, I also want to know.

Zwangendaba coughs, blood spews out of his mouth. I am pushed behind the husband by the husband.

If this old man has any sickness, I will catch it easily.

“What’s going on?” Mthombo asks.

“Your father is sick son, let him come in and explain.” This woman... does Masabata know about this?

“He’s not entering my house.” Mthombo says, and I agree but the letter is.

I grab the letter, this one is slow. As soon as I take it, Zwangendaba falls on his knees. Makhosi grabs him.

“Your brother will live... he...” He coughs more blood. What we didn’t expect was for him to collapse.

“Is he okay?” Mthombo asks Makhosi who is checking his pulse.

She looks up at him, “I think he is dead.”

Maybe I shouldn’t have taken the letter, what kind of witchcraft is this?

“He’s dead.” She repeats in shock.

“Did he have to come and die on our doorstep though?” I ask.

I can imagine his ghost outside our door, this must have been his plan.

.

.

Sponsored by #Thanduxolo...

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Season-Finale P8*

ATHULE-

.

.

I sent prayer requests to every group I can find on WhatsApp, I'm also running a campaign on social media where Ndaba's fans can leave their prayers on a page I created.

Over two weeks, the page has grown to over 700K followers. Most of them are fans from Ndaba royals. They have given me hope that he will come back to us, to me. He has to, or I will follow him.

Thambo called saying he is on the way, he dropped the call before I could tell him not to come here. This is not my father's house, it's another man's house. The reason I moved in here was to feel closer to Ndaba, he's been gone for too long.

My father was against me staying in Ndaba house, he agreed after Sizwile said he will come with me.

Every day is a lonely day in this place, Sizwile is hardly home.

There's a car pulling up outside, I rush to the kitchen and leave the dirty dishes on the sink. I don't cook, unless my brother is around. So my nights consist of bread, juice and TV.

"Why are you here?"

Thambo knows I don't want him coming here, it feels wrong when he visits me. We're not doing anything wrong but I somehow feel like I'm cheating on Ndaba.

"Are you free to go out, I have movie tickets." He holds them up as he leans on the door post.

Thambo and I have different tastes in a lot of things, we can never be compatible.

"I'm sorry Tee, I can't." He knows why.

I hate the disappointment on his face.

“This is why I told you to stay away Thambo, I can never give you what you want and I need you to understand that. Please.”

I feel like an ass.

He nods, eyes barely looking into mine.

“I understand,” that sigh though. “I have to go, just... don’t be a stranger.”

“I will not to,” I send him a smile and for a moment he catches me off guard with a kiss on my cheek.

“You won’t hear from me for a while, I have things to take care of in PE. But I will surely call you when I get back.”

That is great news actually, hopefully when he gets back he would have forgotten about me.

“Take care of yourself.” I still care about him, he is a good friend.

He says nothing but stare at me for a while.

“Meyiwa is a lucky boy, tell him I said that when he wakes up.”

No, I'm not going to tell Ndaba any of that.

"I will." I lie.

I'm happy when he walks away without making things anymore awkward.

The picture of Ndaba staring back at me rips my heart in pieces, he looks happy there. There is no smile on his face, but you can easily tell that he was content. I don't know if he perfectly masked his pain, or he was in a good mood that day.

"Come back to me soon Ndaba, I'm starting to lose hope."

.

.

SHIYIWE-

"I don't appreciate people showing up at my house without calling first, next time let us know."

He shuts the door on Makhosi's face, and heads

back to the couch. Mind you, his father's corpse is on his door step. How is he so insensitive?

"You can't be serious." I am beside myself with shock.

I know this man is not ignoring me, what is wrong with him?

I grab the TV remote and switch it off, he doesn't watch TV so I know that this is his strategy to ignore me.

He looks at me otherwise, eyebrows snapped.

"What did Makhosi do to you?" She's just a frail old woman.

"She brought that man to my house."

He is serious... I don't know anymore.

"Babe," I sit next to him, the letter still in my hand.

I love Mthombo more than words can say, but having to beg a person all the time can be emotionally taxing.

"Do you know that there is a dead body outside our

door?"

He shrugs, what am I going to do with this man?

"I didn't ask him to come here, the one who brought him here must take him back."

Sigh!

"Makhosi didn't do anything wrong. Why are you punishing her?"

I feel sorry for the old woman. Nolwazi must come and plead for her gogo.

"She brought that man to my house." He says.

Zwangedaba has failed as a father, his own child does not want him. He is blatantly abandoning his corpse.

Standing up is a mission impossible, I make it anyway.

"Where are you going?" Mthombo asks. I stop and turn to him. He knows where I am going.

"If you open that door Shiyiwe..." he ends it there.

It's a warning of some sort.

“Mthombo I am not saying forgive him, don’t you fear God?” I don’t know what I am planning on achieving by challenging him. He grabs the remote, switches the TV back on.

“Sit down Nonyanda, or go to bed if you are feeling sleepy.”

I am not winning with this man.

Bongukwanda has to come here, Makhosi won’t be able to carry Zwangendaba out of here. He is not her responsibility.

I grab my phone from the couch and toddle to the kitchen for something to nibble on, while my husband tests my patience. I send a text to Bongukwanda, he needs to come see imihlola.

There is a knock at the door, it must be Makhosi. I steal a look through the kitchen door, he is not bothered by the loud banging.

Nolwazi comes rushing, she’s headed for the door.

“Go back to your chores sisi.” He stops her, she

hurries away like a little mouse.

Mthombi is not as scary.

I don't care what happens today, how Zwangendaba will leave my door step. I want that dead body off my property.

I have to talk to Mthombo before someone calls the police.

"Babe, the neighbors will start complaining and call the police."

"No one can hear us beyond those high walls."

This thing of talking to me without looking at me is going to annoy me for the next twenty years.

Do I force the letter on his hand? Place it on the table, or read it for him? I have to get him talking, his silence is unsettling.

"My panda-orgasm-giver-baba-kasnookums." Yep, it's working.

He side eyes me, a smirk finds his lips. I know he

wants to laugh, he is just stubborn.

“What’s on your mind?” I should be asking what’s in the letter.

He looks at the envelope, and sighs.

“What did he mean my brother will live?”

Ndoda, the answer is in the letter.

“Let’s open the letter and find out.” I grab it.

Is he chiding me with that stare? Ai Mthombo.

I drop it, “You are difficult for nothing. I’m starting to think I married the wrong brother.”

No! No! No! That came out wrong. He sits up, scrutinizing me under his gaze. The stare is intimidating as fuck, I have resorted to fiddling with my fingers.

“Mthombo... I...”

“Which brother would you have rather married?” I sense hurt in his voice.

Me and my big mouth.

“I didn’t mean it like that babe,” damn it.

“Then what did you mean?”

“I was only talking... I don’t know how these words came out of my mouth.”

“Saying it means you were thinking it Shiyiwe.”

How do I explain myself?

“Why would I be thinking such a terrible thing, mara Mthombo?” I have to calm down, letting my hormones control me will make matters worse.

His narrowed eyes won’t leave my body. Kanti this man has never made a mistake in his life? Why am I being judged for being human?

“Because you regret marrying me.”

“What? That is not true?”

“That’s how it sounded, you married the wrong brother.”

“Mthombo Meyiwa, do not put words in my mouth. Why are you doing this, huh?”

His right eyebrow arches higher than the other, he

does not believe me.

“What am I doing, but simply try to understand why you would say something so insensitive to me? For you to even say you married the wrong brother is wrong Shiyiwe, especially after what we know.”

He’s talking about Bhedlindaba’s supposed feelings for me. I refuse to believe that Ndaba feels anything for me, anything beyond brotherly affection.

“But I told you it was a mistake,” tears fall down my cheeks, this baby is embarrassing me. Why am I crying? I quickly wipe them away. They won’t stop.

“Let’s not fight Mthombo, I don’t have the energy. Right now, your father’s corpse is outside our door, we should be solving that, not fighting like this.”

Mthombo roughly scratches his head, “I am not fighting. You are the one who has become defensive. It could mean there is some truth in that little statement of yours.”

Mxm! Fuck him.

I refuse to be in the same room with this man when

he won't listen to me. Judith must come here, and see the works of her hands. You can never counsel a black man, they come stubborn.

"Uyaphi?" He shouts after me.

"Away from you." You bore me sdudla.

"I am not done talking to you, Ms. I married the wrong brother. Come back here Shiyiwe."

I know he is on his feet, hands on his hips as he yells at me.

"I want to be alone."

Honestly, I am tempted to go back in there and tell him shit. I can run my mouth just as much. Being the bigger person takes so much from you. Who said it's easy to control your anger.

"Fine, use that alone time to remember that you are married to me, yezwa. Mthombo Meyiwa and not my brother, we are stuck together Shiyiwe. I'm not going anywhere."

His footsteps are loud behind me, but not louder than his voice. I stop and turn when I feel him

breathing down my neck.

He is staring down at me, eyes possessive.

“You are mine, I’d rather kill us both than separate from you.” He whispers in the most, uncanny way.

The fuck!

“Get away from me,” I scream, shoving him back. I’m so close to swearing at him. He is the king of all jerks.

He frowns possessively and tries to touch me,
“Shiyiwe...”

“Don’t touch me!!!” I shout, landing a few slaps on his chest.

“If this marriage does not work out, it will be on you Mthombo... only you and I swear to God, I will never forgive you.”

I shove him away, dash into the bedroom and slam the door on his face.

.

.

Sponsored by Thanduxolo...

Anashe has not reached her target. Let's continue pushing

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Season Finale P9*

MPHAKO-

.

.

He is woken up by a loud knock on his door, his daughters are the first to come to mind. He jumps out of bed in fright, slips into his push-ins and rushes to open.

There are two police officers, amongst them is Nteboheleng looking like she was struck by lightning.

"This girl says she is your niece, is that true?" They ask him.

Mphako glances at Ntebo, she is staring back. Her clothes are torn, hair a mess, and her face bears

fresh scratches. He nods, they are not blood related but, what else can he do?

“She attacked a woman...”

“She started it,” Ntebo interjects. “She called me crazy, I don’t like it when people call me crazy. I am not crazy Ntate Mphako.”

Sigh!

“The lady is not pressing charges, take your niece.”
They leave her there.

Mphako buries his face in his hands, and exhales deeply. Shiyiwe is not going to like this.

“Come in, I will take you back home in the morning.”
Like he has any other choice.

Ntebo walks in and heads for the couch, “You don’t have to take me back Ntate Mphako. I like it here.”

She flashes a wide grin, throwing her feet on the couch. Mphako scratches the back of his neck, her behavior is somewhat odd. Could it be that she is losing her mind?

“You can’t stay here Ntebo, you have a home. I will

take you there in the morning.”

Ntebo’s eyes glare, she stands, taking the posture of a predator. Fists clenched, teeth gritted and back hunched.

“I will burn this house down if you take me back.” She mumbles under her breath.

The frown on Mphako’s face deepens, he wants to say something but can’t find the words.

Like she was not growling like an animal a second ago, a smile cracks on her face, in a split second she throws her head back laughing like a lunatic.

“I’m joking Ntate Mphako, relax.” She laughs her heart out, hand pressed to her chest.

“You should see your face, do you really think I would do that? I am not crazy Ntate, relax.”

Mphako is not sure what to believe, he’s giving her a long stare.

“Can I have a blanket and a pillow, I’m tired.” She drops her body on the couch, and closes her eyes.

“Goodnight.” She sings.

Mphako scurries to his room, he shuts the door and for a while thinks of locking it. He can't though, Ayanda is sleeping in the other room.

.

.

MTHOMBO-

Marriage was not this hard with Zinzi, she made it seem like a walk in the park, and this is something he will never say out loud. He wouldn't dare if he wants to stay married to Shiysiwe.

Zinzi was as peaceful as a silent night, perhaps she was afraid that fights would reveal her secrets.

Today he has tasted Shiysiwe's patience. He needs to find a way to apologize, a sorry will not cut it.

After three knocks, and pleading with her, she opens the door, goes to sit on the bed and places her hands on her baby bump.

Mthombo stands against the door, he is quiet, probably trying to find a way to start a conversation without saying anything that will escalate their fight.

He exhales softly and hides his hands into the pockets of his pants.

“Are you crying?”

Rhetorical.

“No.” She sniffs.

“Your eyes are wet and puffy.” He is observing too much.

Shiyiwe side eyes him, and shuffles on the bed. The pregnancy is giving her a hard time, he can tell.

She breathes like she is running out of breath, her walk is that of a penguin and most of the time she complains about swollen feet.

The glow she had on her first trimester is no longer there, her face looks bloated, her nose lost its shape and her neck sunk.

She gives him a glance, her bottom lip quavering.

“Why are we wasting Judith’s time if we refuse to practice her teachings?” She asks.

“What do you mean? We are trying, aren’t we?”

“Do you really love me, Mthombo?” She can’t look at him, not with that type of question coming out of her mouth.

Mthombo is stunned.

Why would she ask him that? Is she doubting his love?

“Is that even a question?” He shifts to stand across the room, hands in his pockets, eyes fixed on her.

He is trying to read her mood, so he knows where and how to tread.

“I doubt it, I think you are in love with the thought of me.” It can’t be the mouth diarrhea talking, could it?

“I don’t understand, what are you saying to me, Nonyanda?”

“I said you are in love with...”

“Yes, yes I heard that. You are not making sense

though.” His face crinkles in confusion.

“That thing you said out there. You would kill me before separating from me? That was scary Mthombo. Why would you say that to me?”

“I don’t know, I felt like saying it and I did. I guess it’s how I felt at that time.” Mthombo confesses with a shoulder shrug.

For what seems like an eternity, they stare in each other’s eyes, probably wondering how they got here.

“How did that make you feel?” Shiyiwe asks

“That I love you enough not to lose you.” It’s a sensible thing to say. So what if he loves his wife to death, he is not the first man to have loved viciously.

“Mthombo, you threatened to kill me...”

“Haybo Nonyanda, it’s not that deep. My love for you knows no bounds. Why should that be a bad a thing?”

She throws a cold stare at him.

“What am I to you, Mthombo?”

“You’re my wife.” His response is quick, accompanied by a frown.

“Then why don’t I feel like it? You don’t speak to me anymore, you don’t touch me anymore. When last did we make love? When last did you kiss me and meant it?”

Her anger is slowly rising.

“You know I’m going through some things, surely you should understand that. You are my first priority.”

First priorities should never complain, it’s not like they are not God’s favorite.

“I am pregnant Mthombo, you put this baby inside me. It’s your fault that I’m horny all the time, but you don’t try to make it go away. Am I supposed to have sex with my hand?”

Mthombo remains on the train of confusion. How did they get here?

“Baby you are going around in circles, I’m having a

hard time following. What are we arguing about, really?" Mthombo asks.

At this point, he is ready to walk out.

Her hormones are never kind when they decide to show up.

"You see, you are being insensitive. I'm talking to myself here, if you don't love me anymore then tell me, don't..."

"Awkahle Shiyiwe, haybo. Usuyahlanya?" He cuts in, head tilted to the side and eyes narrowed at her.

"What has gotten into you? Who put these ideas in your head?"

It is unlike her, she should know better than that.

Shiyiwe buries her face in her hands, she is sobbing. He thinks of comforting her, but refrains. She is riding those hormones like a rodeo and if he interrupts, God knows what she might do to him.

"I just want to have sex with my husband, am I asking for too much, babe?"

Yeah! Pregnant women.

"You shouldn't even be asking, don't you know my body belongs to you, Nonyanda. I am yours to have anytime. You should have told me how you feel, instead you start an unnecessary argument. I don't like this, sometimes I don't like how you approach things."

Shiyiwe glances up at him with her teary eyes, "I don't like how you approach things either. Sometimes you don't think before you speak."

Okay, looks like they are tackling another topic.

Mthombo thinks this is exhausting, he breathes in and out to calm himself.

"I'm trying my best Nonyanda, seeing a therapist does not guarantee perfection. We're only human, we are bound to fuck up." He says, holding her stare.

She hates it when he uses this language, it doesn't suit his persona.

"I want us to try harder, please." She pats the space next to her, gesturing he sits. He is happy to, his hand finds its place on her thigh.

“I want you to touch me more, give me pleasure and many orgasms.” She declares.

A smile slowly creeps up to his face, Shiyiwe kisses his lips.

“I don’t want you to fuck up, I want you to fuck me.” She says, pulling his t-shirt up.

Mthombo shifts back, it looks like he is rejecting her from where she is standing hence the frown on her face.

“Not today, there is a death in the family.” He reminds her.

She clenches her eyes and exhales, “I almost forgot about your father.”

There is a sudden knock at the front door, Makhosi cannot still be out there, unless Zwangendaba has woken up from the dead. Anything is possible with that man, this whole “I have changed’ saga is hard to believe.

“Let me sort this thing out,” he stands.

“Go ahead, I’ll be right there.” –Shiyiwe.

The knocking turns to banging, he strolls toward the door ready to tell them to fuck off.

“What the fu...”

It’s the one who rented Masabata’s womb after him, and forgot to rent her breast. Hopefully he is not here to finish what Shiyiwe started.

“Ndoda?” That’s a greeting.

“Why is Makhosi sitting outside with your father’s corpse?”

Argh!

“I thought they would have left by now,” Mthombo replies unbothered.

“Gone to where? Mthombo, your father has died. Are you aware of that?”

He doesn’t care, there is nothing special about Zwangendaba that he would mourn his death.

“I am aware of that, and I want him away from there.

My wife is not happy about him deciding to come and die here."

Mthombo makes his way to the couch, his eyes find the letter on the table. Zwangendaba is a master manipulator, he thinks he can worm his way into their hearts after all these years of playing Hitler.

"I called the morgue by the way, they are on the way here. It's cold outside, I let Makhosi sit in my car. You do know we will have to call the family, organize a funeral and bury your father." Bongukwanda exclaims.

Oh, he's not only here to finish what Shiyiwe started, but to add fire to it.

Mthombo exhales in a way that makes it obvious that he is irked, and tough for him, Bongukwanda does not care. He can sigh his last breath away. That man out there is their father, and they have to do right by him.

"Sperm donors don't deserve respect," today he is a sperm donor? Not the man who bought them expensive diapers, fed them purity with a golden

spoon and took them to private schools, so that they become the men they are today.

“Lose that attitude Mthombo, I’m not going to entertain it.”

Eh! And this one? Since when does he speak to him like this?

Mthombo clicks his tongue and shifts his eyes back to the letter, “He brought that.”

He points at it with his eyes, Bongukwanda wastes no time in grabbing it. He tears the envelope open and pulls out an A4 paper.

My dear children.

Just as he starts reading, Shiyiwe walks in wearing an oversized sleep t-shirt. Her head wrapped with a doek and face plastered with ponds.

She ignores their stares, sits next to her husband, and tells her brother in-law to continue.

“What’s that on your face?” Mthombo is horrified, it’s the first time seeing her like this.

“Ponds.” She’s not looking in his direction.

That plastered ponds is as thick as her attitude.
When is she giving birth?

“Continue bhuti.”

Bongukwanda has to forget his trauma and continue reading, he clears his throat.

By the time you read this letter I will be gone. It's a decision I had to make in order to save your brother, my son; Bhedlindaba. I can't tell you what I did, I am embarrassed by it. When we were a young couple, your mother and I made stupid decisions, decisions that cost us our first child.

He stops and ogles at the couple sitting on the couch, they are as inquisitive as he is.

“Continue,” an impatient Shiyiwe instructs.

Bongukwanda clears his throat...

*The one that came before you, Mthombo. We don't know if it was a boy or a girl, your mother miscarried at three months. I was broken, we both were. Six months later she fell pregnant with you, I waited to feel joy, it never came.

My heart was heavy and longing for the baby we lost. Bongukwanda and Mabahlezi came, the same thing happened. I couldn't get over it, it was my fault. I killed my baby, I sacrificed my baby for all of you to live.

Bhedlindaba's current situation took me back to that dark place I worked hard to forget. When I saw my son on that hospital bed, I knew I couldn't let him die. I couldn't fail him like I failed your sibling. I have made mistakes in my life, one of them was neglecting all of you. Climbing the corporate ladder was a way to mask my pain. It's been 38 years, and my heart is still heavy. I long to see the one we lost, I

named them Celuxolo Siphosethu Meyiwa.*

I have heard that children grow in the afterlife, if that theory is true, then he is about your age Mthombo. I think he looks like you, maybe that's why I gave you a hard time the most.

Shiyiwe's sigh interrupts the reading, her eyes find her husband's. He scoots closer to her and laces her hand with his.

You reminded me of the child we failed and my failures. Forgive me my son, I ask for forgiveness from all of you. I love you, believe it or not. Your old man loves you. Take care of each other, your sisters mostly. I failed to love Sikolethu, don't tell him about me when he grows up. I don't want him to know I failed to be a father to him. I trust you to treat him like your own, like you would treat your own children.

Mthombo, I'm sorry for what happened with Zinzi. I have no excuse why I did what I did, I hope one day you will forgive me.

Bongukwanda's voice has changed, he blinks and shifts his gaze to Mthombo.

"Should I continue?" He asks, Mthombo nods.

"Read every word bhuti, we want to hear it all."

Shiyiwe tells him.

*You are going to be a father soon, I am proud of the man you have become. The woman you have chosen is good for you. Tell her I'm sorry for everything, I give you my blessings. Stay happy. Tell your mother not to cry for me, I am going to a peaceful place to meet our baby and Zinqumo.

On the day of my funeral, no woman should be present, or this curse of death will fall upon all of you. Please don't make this mistake, or my sacrifice

would have been in vain.*

“What did I just read?” Bongukwanda says, blinking his eyes in disbelief.

.

.

Sponsored by Rethabile Mofokeng...

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Season Finale P10*

NTEBO-

.

.

She feels someone adjust her pillow.

“Nteboheleng, are you comfortable ngwanaka?” A female voice says.

“I am,” she replies.

The presence is so caring that it calms her. Her eyes are heavy, opening them is a struggle.

“Wake up, Nteboheleng.”

In this instant, Ntebo sees as if in a dream a shadow standing in the middle of the living room, in complete darkness. Her heart is beating so fast, she thinks she would faint any minute.

She stays frozen, waiting for the shadow to move, which it does. It comes into light.

“Mme?” Her heart swells with happiness.

What she would do to have Tshegofatso here with her.

“Your enemies are at work and you’re sleeping Nteboheleng?” Something sinister lies in the tone of her voice.

“It’s late Mme, and I’m tired.” Ntebo’s bottom lip pops out like a sulky child.

Mme’s face hardens, turning ice cold. She turns like a robot, facing the kitchen. The floor creaks as she slowly walks toward the kitchen.

Ntebo swings her feet to the floor, she stands and follows her.

Right there, between the entrance and the kitchen, Mme Mosheo is standing with her back turned, hand pointing forward.

Ntebo gulps, her heart is beating a mile a minute.

“What is in there?” The question leaves Ntebo’s mouth in a whisper.

Getting no answer, she cautiously toddles toward the closed drawer and pulls it open. Stashed in it are kitchen knives.

“It’s time ngwanaka, you know what you must do.” Mme Mosheo says in a cold eerie voice.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

In all my years on this earth, I have never seen anything like this before. These men are cold and indifferent, the death of their father has not touched

a nerve. Bongukwanda tries to show emotions, you can tell that he's forcing this whole 'I don't care' thing they are doing with Mthombo.

My husband... Sigh!

After reading the letter, I expected a tear. Especially since their father focused mostly on him. This is the same man who cries like a baby when his heart is broken.

The body was transported to the morgue, Makhosi was given a room to sleep in. Mthombo and Bongukwanda didn't get any sleep, they spent the entire night calling this person and that person.

Everyone has been informed about Zwangendaba's death, everyone but his wife.

I know that soft knock on my bedroom door, Nolwazi is such a fidgety little girl sometimes. Sometimes she is confident. I have tried to make her feel comfortable and welcome, I went as far as giving her a room after she complained about transport and traffic in the mornings.

“Yes?”

She pushes the door open very slowly and dips her head in.

“Madam, the food is ready.”

I can never get used to her calling me madam.

“I told you to call me Shiyiwe.”

She nods, “Breakfast is ready.”

“Where is Mthombo?”

I haven’t seen him, I hope he’s around.

“He left with Mr. Kwanda and my grandmother 30 minutes ago, they didn’t say where they were going.”

Great! He should have told me, at least. I thank Nolwazi before she walks out.

Where did I put my phone? I need to call Mthombo, he worries me when he is in a foul mood. He becomes a different person.

It’s ringing, but I can’t see it. I end up flipping pillows and bedsheets, my mind is forgetful lately. Here it is, on the bedside table.

Lithizwi is the one calling me, this is one consistent man. I don't know if I am confusing his consistency with stubbornness. He visits Mthandeni everyday without fail.

Mphako doesn't like him, he thinks he wants to take advantage of his daughter. He thinks every man wants to take advantage of his daughters. If it were up to him, he would hide us from the world.

"Sisi, you need to come to the hospital." There is urgency in Lithizwi's voice, plus a drop of excitement.

"What's going on? Is she okay?"

He laughs, heartily.

"She's fine, she's perfectly fine... and beautiful... and awake... and looking at me as we speak."

"What?" I need to sit down for this.

"Yes, your baby sister is awake sisi." He sings with excitement.

It's moments like these that make me wonder if he has fallen for her.

The joy is overwhelming.

“Put her on the phone, I want to talk to my sister.”

“Okay, hold on.”

I hear shuffling in the background and soft voices, I hope Mthandeni is not panicking. Lithizwi is a stranger, I’m not sure if she remembers him.

“Hello.” Her voice...

Lord! When last did I hear this voice?

“Baby, it’s really you. You came back to me.” I was not intending on crying today.

“Where are you Shiyiwe?” Her voice is a tired slur you’d hear in the morning.

“I’m coming my love, Lithizwi will take care of you till I get there, okay?”

She hums.

Mphako is going to be happy, I can’t wait to tell him the good news. This is something I can’t tell him on the phone, I will have to drive to Riverlea. Uncle Mdu has to be told as well.

I text Mthombo telling him the good news, his reply

is that he is around the corner.

Odd, I thought they had gone far.

.

.

Zwangendaba's three children are here, with their mother. She walked in here with her back hunched and hand clutched to her abdomen. She survived a bullet this woman, tradition says the son who shot her has to pay a fine. Bhedlindaba would never, he is as stubborn as these men here.

"Do you need anything mama?" That's Mabahlezi, she's settled beside her mother.

'I'm fine.' Yeah she is fine.

MaDlamini would never accept anything from my house. She will never like me, she's mostly focused on giving me dirty looks instead of that wound that has her wincing every minute.

"Can we talk?" Mthombo says.

He helps me up and leads me to the kitchen, he pulls a chair and sits me down.

I have too many thoughts spinning around in my head, life should be getting better at this point. Could it be that Mthombo has not paid lobola? Everything has been put on hold, we can't be negotiating lobola when people are dying around us.

When all of this is over, I want that honeymoon he promised. I want my husband all to myself, we haven't had time to enjoy our marriage or process the fact that we are a married couple.

It's always one problem after another.

"Anything on Bhedlindaba?" First things first.

He doesn't have to say anything, that deep breath has answered my question.

"He's still the same. Were you able to talk to Mathonga?"

Oh! He'd asked me to call Mathonga and narrate Zwangendaba's story, maybe he'd be able to shed light.

"His wife said he went to a mountain to pray, he will

be gone for three days.”

Mthombo starts to drift off, a few minutes pass before I speak.

“Have you told your mother?” There it is. I asked.

I see him tense, and my stomach aches with worry in response to that.

He shakes his head, I am certain that he feels something for his mother. He might have renounced her but he loves her, he loved her before she showed her true colours, and love is not something that simply vanishes overnight.

He holds my hand, “She keeps asking about him and complaining that he didn’t visit her at the hospital.”

Complaining is MaDlamini’s middle name, I can’t point a finger at her though. I would go crazy if Mthombo does not show that he cares about my wellbeing.

“How do you think she is going to take the news about the funeral attendance?” I ask.

“She loved him, of course she will want to attend his

funeral.”

“She can’t, we have to do everything to stop her.” I don’t want to test this curse Zwangendaba spoke of.

“We’ll talk to her, if she insists then, we will have no choice but to use force.” Mthombo says.

The worry in his eyes cuts into me like a razor, he looks like he needs someone to hold him close and tell him that everything will be okay.

He accepts my hand as I hold it out and helps me up, I put my arms around his torso— a difficult task with this huge belly.

“I want you to know that I am here for you, every step of the way.”

“I know.”

He holds me in his arms, I breathe in his intoxicating scent and try to imagine us in a much better place. I am tired, we need that light at the end of the tunnel. It’s been too long.

We walk back to the lounge, his hand on mine.

“No Hlezi, what are you saying to me?” MaDlamini screams.

Mthombo and I look at each other. Mabahlezi has told her what happened. She’s crying, trying to hold MaDlamini in her arms.

“Noooo! Your father can’t be dead, he would never do that to me,” MaDlamini shoots up, pushing Mabahlezi out of her way.

“He’s gone mama, daddy is gone.” It’s as if she wants to drill it in her head.

She is ignored, “Kwanda you are the innocent one in this family. You never lie, even as a baby. Tell me the truth, where is your father?”

She is roughly pulling his collar, her voice, which usually rings with confidence and certainty is too shaky and breaking.

“Hlezi is right, he died last night.” Kwanda replies. I search his face for sympathy, and find none.

MaDlamini and Zwangendaba destroyed their

children's hearts.

"Nooo." She drops down and starts rolling on the floor, wailing like the widow she has become.

Now it's starting to feel like someone died.

Mabahlezi's cries are loud as well, she doesn't try to approach her mother. I think she knows that her efforts will be rejected.

I feel Mthombo's arms around me, he kisses the top of my head.

"I don't ever want to lose you, Nonyanda." He mutters, holding me tighter.

"I don't want you to ever go through what MaDlamini is going through." He adds, this time burying his face on my neck.

This is starting to get emotional. I don't want to think about dying, leaving him or him leaving me.

"Madam." Nolwazi comes running with my ringing phone. I must have left it in the kitchen. It's a call from Athule.

“Hey...”

“Shiyiwe, Shiyiwe, the house is on fire.” She’s screaming and crying.

“What do you mean the house is on fire?”

“The neighbour called me, she said baba's house is on fire.”

Oh my God!

.

.

Sponsored by Rethabile Mofokeng.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Season Finale P11*

MPHAKO-

.

.

A few hours ago..

He woke up groggily to the sound of something falling, his eyes shot up at the sight of a person hovering above his head. It took him a minute too long for his eyes to make out who it was.

“Ntebo?” He jerked off the bed, and pressed the side lamp on.

She had a butcher knife tightly gripped in her hand.

“What are you doing?” Mphako asked.

Before he could jump off bed, Ntebo slashed the knife at him. He flipped over to the other side, and landed with a thump on the ground.

As Mphako lay on the floor, a throbbing hipbone not allowing him to get up, a smell of smoke harassed his nose. Frantic that something was burning in the house, he got up and quickly caught a glimpse of Ntebo hurrying out of the room.

“Ayanda!” Mphako yelled for his daughter.

His heart was ready to jump out of his chest, what if Ntebo had gotten to Ayanda first?

“Ayanda, Ayanda.” He yelled, running out of the room. A cloud of smoke welcomed him in the corridor, the house was on fire.

It had engulfed the entire kitchen and spreading over to the sitting room.

Mphako didn’t pause a second, he kicked open Ayanda’s door. She was hiding under the covers, he scooped her up, covered her with a blanket and used the front door to exit the house, into the darkness.

He placed her down to check if she was okay,
“Ayanda?”

He said her name in a small whisper, hands caressing her face and eyes searching for any bruises.

“Are you okay? Please tell me you’re okay.” His voice filled with so much sorrow.

“I’m okay dad, I’m okay.”

When her fearful eyes met his, Mphako burst out in sobs. He pressed his forehead to hers, and held her in his arms.

Loud voices called out to him, his neighbours had come out to check on them. Then in that moment, it dawned on him, his house was on fire.

Ayanda clung to him as he carried her in his arms and hurried toward the gate. The neighbours fussed over them, Mphako gave them no attention. All he could do was watch his house engulfed in fire from all sides, he wondered if Ntebo was in there or she had managed to escape.

He could have ran in to find out, or shouted for someone to check on her. However, there was nothing compelling him to finalise that thought.

Tshegofatso destroyed his children's lives, she separated him from the love of his life. And it seemed Ntebo was there to finish the job.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

Mphako is devastated, he has lost everything in that

fire. He's quietly sitting in the back with Ayanda sleeping in his arms. It's daybreak, we're driving to Ndaba's house, it's closer than ours.

Athule is waiting for us there.

Ntebo needs to be found and punished for what she did. Mphako is not sure if she went down with the flames or she escaped. When we left Riverlea, the place was flooded with investigators and the police. I hope they find her soon.

"You okay?" Mthombo brings me out of my thoughts.

He's on the wheel.

I nod and steal a look on the rear view mirror.

My father is staring back, the sad look in his eyes breaks my heart. He will never be the same, his whole life was in that house.

The gate slides open upon our arrival, Athule is waiting outside with Sizwile.

She throws her arms around Ayanda and Mphako. Sizwile is not about that life, his greeting is a nod.

"I was so worried baba, thank God you both are

okay." Athule says, as she ushers them into the house.

Mthombo grabs my hand, stopping me from following the family.

"Will your father be comfortable living here?"

He won't, Mphako is a prideful man.

"There is nowhere else he can go babe," beggars will never be choosers.

It's only temporary, of course.

"Listen, Bongukwanda and I have to be somewhere. Will you be okay here?"

Where is somewhere? I have never heard of it.

"You're leaving?" I don't want him to go, the burdens are getting heavier for me to carry alone.

"He found a sangoma who might know what happened to Zwangendaba, we have an appointment."

In that case, I can't stop him.

"Okay, come bid my father goodbye." He can't just

leave, it's unheard of.

He holds my hand as we walk into the house.

Mphako is slouched on the couch, chin resting on the palm of his hand. Sizwile is sitting next to him, on the armrest of the couch. I don't see Ayanda.

"Baba, Mthombo is leaving. He has a meeting to attend." He looks up.

"Okay ndodana, thank you for fetching us." He says and goes back to looking sad.

"No problem baba, I'm glad everyone is okay."

One thing about my husband, he will grow nervous in front of my father.

"Bafo, can I borrow your car? My friends invited me to a party in the north and..." That's Sizwile, he blends in effortlessly with everyone. We're not far in our relationship, but we talk. Ayanda is shy around me. I'm yet to meet Sbonelo.

“Use a taxi, like everybody.” Athule.

“When my brother in-law has many cars? Never, I have a reputation to maintain.” This child.

“What will Mthombo travel with if he gives the car to you?” I ask because he is thinking like a child. He shifts his eyes to me and smiles.

“Give me yours sisi,” he’s talking to me.

Should I regret telling him about Mthombo buying me a car?

“Sizwile, fusegi, fusegi.” Mphako snaps, unexpectedly.

He sighs and rubs his head. It’s the stress, I’m surprised he hasn’t cried.

Then there’s my little brother who suddenly looks like a mouse deprived of cheese, it’s all fake I know. He wants sympathy so he is given a car to drive himself to parties.

Mthombo comforts him by patting his shoulder.

“Hey, come with me. We’ll make a plan about transport.” Mthombo says.

I know this has to do with money, Sizwile knows it, that's why he is smiling victoriously.

"Walk me out, Nonyanda?" This man is forgetting I need a wheelchair now.

My brother jumps into the front seat, he is not bothered about the house that caught fire. I wish I tackled life with that kind of attitude.

"Will you be okay?" His arm is over my shoulder.

"Yeah, I'll take Mphako to see Mthandeni. He needs cheering up."

"Okay, take Bhedlindaba's car. Your father will have to drive you there."

He's right, Athule and I can't drive.

"Alright, let me go. Call me when you get to the hospital. If I can't make it back on time, I'll send someone to come get you."

"Alright babe, I love you." I say and lean in to kiss him.

“I love you too.”

He tells me to go back into the house before he drives off.

.

.

THE MEYIWAS-

The day has gone by in a haze, the sun is about to set.

They are at the Meyiwa homestead, Zwangendaba's house. MaDlamini is close to losing her mind, she is standing on top of the coffee table screaming at her children. The fresh stiches on her abdomen are nothing compared to the pain she feels for what her kids have done.

What they did is an abomination, she can't wrap her spinning head around it.

“Do you people hate me this much? Why would you put me through so much pain?” She yells.

Bongukwanda finds her dramatic, he's on the couch, leg crossed over the other and eyes showing nothing but boredom.

Mabahlezi hasn't picked her jaw from the floor, she's struggling to come to terms with what her brothers have done.

"You need to calm down MaDlamini, you know exactly why we buried him." Mthombo says.

This one looks the least bit interested in all of this drama.

He wanted nothing to do with Zwangendaba, burying him was solely for the sake of his family, his future generation.

"Do not patronize me, Mthombo. Do you know what you have taken from me?"

He knows exactly what they have taken from her. She had every right to sit on the mattress and mourn her husband. The man dropped dead yesterday, and the next day he is six feet underground. Money does not only buy happiness, but an instant grave too.

Bongukwanda and Mthombo exchange looks, one of them is engulfed by guilt. It can only be Bongukwanda, Mthombo remains unshaken.

“I can’t believe you two are my brothers,” their sister has no business judging them.

They have practically saved the entire family.

“Look, I know we took things too far. But it had to be done today, we consulted a sangoma. He told us what Zwangendaba did, he told us to bury him today. He was not to be buried three days after his death and not on a weekend. Today was the only appropriate day.” Bongukwanda comes out.

With Mathonga out of reach, they sought help elsewhere. It was hard to believe their father’s letter, and the only way they could confirm was to seek for answers.

“What? A sangoma?” Poor MaDlamini.

Hours of labour and this is what she came out with? A bunch of disgraceful, ungrateful daredevils.

“Which sangoma is that? What if he lied?” She gets

off the table, but remains standing. She feels powerful standing above these useless children.

“You don’t know him,” Mthombo waves her off.

“Zwangendaba made a deal with a witchdoctor, he gave up his life for Ndaba’s. The witchdoctor told him that no female is allowed at the funeral, the sangoma confirmed that. He also told us that there was a catch, one the witchdoctor didn’t tell Zwangendaba. When your husband left that place, the witchdoctor drank his blood. He made a pact that every female in this family would belong to him. Our mother, our sisters and daughters.”

“Daughters in-law too,” Mthombo adds.

“The only way to prevent it was to bury Zwangendaba today, not on a weekend and not three days after his death.” Bongukwanda.

“We had no choice, it had to be done.” Mthombo finishes.

“Nonsense, you are telling me nonsense.” MaDlamini yells.

These pubic hairs of Satan will send her to an early death.

Shiyiwe walks in to a battle field, carrying a packet of lays and a can of Coke. She stops when she sees her mother in-law glaring at her. MaDlamini clicks her tongue.

“You, this is all your fault.” Here we go...

MaDlamini charges at Shiyiwe.

She runs behind the couch while Mthombo stands in front of MaDlamini.

“Don’t even think about it.” He warns.

“Ever since this girl came into our lives, nothing has gone right. She is bad luck Mthombo, you need to get rid of her. Send her back to the slumps where she belongs.”

Mthombo inhales sharply, he’s exhausted by his mother’s hatred for his wife.

“Stop acting like a child MaDlamini, what you are saying is ridiculous.”

“One day, one day you will see that I was right and you will come crying to me. You know what I will do son? Because I am your mother, I will accept you with open arms.” Her eyes are on Shiysiwe, cursing her existence.

Mthombo shakes his head, he has realised that no matter what they say to this woman, she will never change.

“Shiysiwe is my wife, I love her.”

“But I love you too, son. Why can’t my love be enough? You don’t need her, I will take care of you.”

Sigh! The stubbornness runs in the family.

MaDlamini is not just stubborn, her screws are loose.

“Like you loved Bhedlindaba?” -Mthombo.

Oh, oh!

MaDlamini falls into confusion, “What?”

“You couldn’t protect your son from a paedophile, it’s your fault that he is not with us right now.”

She blinks and blinks, summoning tears that have dried up.

“I had to protect the family name first, I did what I had to do. Your father didn’t complain, he was proud of me.” She would beat her chest like king-kong if she could, she is proud of herself for holding down this family for years.

“Wow, you really were obsessed with Zwangendaba. All this while I thought it was the dick, but no, it couldn’t have had that much power over you.”

Bongukwanda didn’t... he did not...

MaDlamini is seething with anger, she walks past Mthombo to give her other son a nice slap. Mission accomplished, Bongukwanda is left rubbing his cheek.

“You will respect your father’s memory, do you hear me?”

He hears her, but he won’t abide.

“How about you respect Shiyiwe first, then we can talk about the respect your dead husband does not deserve?” The bravery Bongukwanda has deserves the Oscars.

MaDlamini covers her ears, screaming.

Shiyiwe! Shiyiwe! Shiyiwe! That's all these boys ever talk about. She turns her fire-blazing eyes to the heavily pregnant woman who is now lounged on the couch, munching on lays.

"God will punish you for what you did to my sons," she's pointing a finger at her.

"I didn't do anything." Shiyiwe defends herself.

Her voice annoys MaDlamini that her blood boils at the sound of it.

"Shut up!" Mother in-law screams. "Who gave you the right to talk to me?"

She is a madam, this lady. You don't just talk to her when you're a nobody.

"Mama that was not necessary, Shiyiwe is your daughter in-law and she is carrying your first grandchild. Don't you care about that?" Mabahlezi comes to her rescue.

"Shut wena, you think you are special because you are my first daughter? I don't care about that child

she is carrying, they should both die.”

These words come from the heart.

Mthombo glares at his mother with a furrowed brow,
“Watch your words MaDlamini.”

He roars, but MaDlamini couldn’t care less.

She clenches her fists, shuts her eyes, and takes
another screaming trip.

“Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! All of you, shut up!” As
her eyes jerk open, they fall on Shiyiwe.

“My husband should have killed you when I framed
you for killing his mother...” Oops!

MaDamini quickly covers her mouth, wide eyes
rushing to Mthombo. It’s about time she sells her
brain and mouth, they continue to betray her.

.

.

Sponsored by Salome...

Please like, comment and share. Let’s get to 31K
followers.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Season Finale P12*

THE MEYIWAS-

.

.

“You did what?” People in this family don’t speak, they roar... and shout... and scream... and... and...
Sigh!

There is never peace in this family.

MaDlamini looks away, she winces as she hugs her stomach. Her wound is suddenly throbbing.

“I didn’t say anything.” Of course she will deny it.

“You said you framed me for killing your mother in-law. I have never met her, when did I...” Shiyiwe is panicking.

Mthombo rushes to her side, his arms are on her with the intention to comfort.

“Calm down Nonyanda, you will upset the baby.”

She locks her eyes with his, tears well behind them.

“Mthombo, I didn’t kill your grandmother. I swear, I don’t...”

“She said framed, that means she’s the one who did it.” Bongukwanda jumps in.

Judgemental eyes turn to MaDlamini, her eyes run through all of them.

What are they looking at?

She knows she messed up and has to find a way out of this before things turn for the worst.

“Explain MaDlamini.” Mthombo orders.

As if that will get her to speak. She’s hissing, eyes clenched and hand rubbing her bandaged wound.

“Haven’t you children heard of a slip of the tongue? Jesus! You would swear I didn’t take you to school. You’re all so dump, I don’t blame you. It’s these women you sleep with, a bunch of tikoloshis.”

Wow! Talk about being rude.

"Cut the crap mother, what did you do?"

She looks at Kwanda, why didn't he ruin his life and become a police officer? What the fuck!

MaDlamini slowly leans back on the couch, the wincing and hissing is more evident and loud.

"Hlezi, my baby, pass Mami her bag. It's time to take my pills." Like her hands were not working perfectly fine a while ago, she slowly lifts it, pointing at the black handbag sitting next to her.

"Stop playing games MaDlamini, did you or did you not kill grandmother?" Mthombo snaps.

MaDlamini does not even flinch, she clicks her tongue and continues playing 'dying patient.'

"I'm calling the police, they will do a better job than us." Bongukwanda pulls his phone out, this action brings MaDlamini to her feet.

"We won't be defeated by a fish," he adds.

Only he and Ndaba have the balls to call their mother names.

“What are you doing? You can’t do that? I am your mother.” Hercules is up and ready to continue fighting.

“Then talk MaDlamini, what did you mean you framed Shiyiwe.” Mthombo says, sizing her up.

Bongukwanda called her out just seconds ago, she is blinking like Nemo the fish.

She browses the room with her wide eyes, lips pursed and heart dancing in her chest to the sound of fear.

“Mthombo... I need to explain what happened. Promise you will listen to me.” -MaDlamini.

The only promises Mthombo makes are to his wife, he says nothing but blankly stares at her.

MaDlamini drops her shoulders and deeply sighs, there is hatred in her eyes as she shifts them to Shiyiwe.

“I will never accept this girl, everything about her reminds me of your grandmother. Yesis! You would

swear that old hag's spirit lives in this dirty girl." She spits, face turning sour.

Her former womb tenants are shocked, but mostly confused.

"Shiyiwe reminds you of gogo?" Mabahlezi asks.

"Yes, and I hate her for it. Her big mouth, her bravery and the way she cares for you Mthombo. It's exactly what your grandmother did with your father. He was a mama's boy, I knew the moment I met his mother."

She lowers her body on the couch, no wincing and no hissing. In a split second, she has become a strong horse.

"This girl, this thing is exactly like her. She even talks like her."

MaDlamini is so sure that Shiyiwe is her mother in-law's reincarnation. Of course that old hag as she calls her; was not done tormenting her.

She had to possess Shiyiwe.

"You have stated why you hate my wife, but you haven't told us why you killed grandma." Mthombo

says.

A sigh from MaDlamini.

"It was an accident, we were arguing over which shirt your father was going to wear to work the following day. She was pissing me off, your father was my husband and mine alone. She had no right telling me how to take care of him, I was the one sucking his dick every night, not her."

Bongukwanda clears his throat, Mthombo chokes on his saliva and Mabahlezi is there... shocked. They share looks, they are uncomfortable because someone speaks without thinking.

"Did you say every night? Shiyiwe speaks, and gets a chiding look from mother in-law.

"I had a gun in my hand, I only wanted to scare her so she could stop controlling my marriage. It was nothing serious, but she freaked out and started swearing at me. She grabbed the gun, we struggled for it and it went off." She's crying.

"How did Shiyiwe become the suspect then?"

Mthombo.

“She was at the right place, at the right time. I knew what I had to do, I cleaned the gun, placed it next to her and ran out of the room. The cops were not going to arrest a child, the gun was registered in your father’s name. He had an alibi, and as far as the staff knew, I was not in the house that day.”

There is so much to take in, the silence in the room says so.

Shiyiwe pushes her body up without the help of her husband, she is fuming.

“Where are you going?” Mthombo is after her.

“I am not going to spend another minute in this house.” She rushes out the house, walking like a desperate, dehydrated penguin wanting to have a swim.

.

.

It’s not like Shiyiwe to be so dramatic... okay it is. But

to stand outside the gate and say she will never step foot in these premises is a little too much.

"Shiyiwe come on, this is your husband's home. It's where you will be smeared with inyongo, either way you will enter these premises." Mabahlezi loves being the voice of reason.

Shiyiwe sighs and sits on the paving, it gets Mthombo worked up. Not his wife, she is married to a Meyiwa and it's time she acts like it.

"Shiyiwe get inside." Yeah, no! This man thinks commanding her works, he's forgotten who he is married to.

"Take me home Mthombo."

Why do women have to be complicated?

"Let her go my boy, she wants to go, right? Why are you stopping her?" MaDlamini is standing on the other side of the gate.

These two women have built a ring of stress around Mthombo.

"Get out of here, shooo, shooo." Like Shiyiwe is a fly,

MaDlamini waves her away.

"Don't do that, she's my wife." Mthombo sighs.

"So? Look at her? Sarah Baartman, that's nothing to be proud of." MaDlamini's words crawl up Shiywie's skin. Mabahlezi exhales in exhaustion and covers her face.

The lawful wife gasps and flares her nostrils.

"Did you hear that Mthombo? Your mother called me Sarah Baartman." Shiyiwe is pointing a finger at her mother.

It's nothing to cry about, Sarah Baartman was human too.

"I did, so what? That baby is probably drowning in oil in there, this is why black kids can't swim. They are born traumatised by the fat they were swimming..."

"That's it, I am not going to listen to this." Mabahlezi walks away. She stops and turns to her brother.

"Are you coming? I want to talk to you about something." The sister says to Bongukwanda who is standing with crossed arms.

"Are you kidding me, and miss a fight between uSarah no Thoko? I'm not missing this for the world." Bongukwanda says, a smile reaching his face.

It's the fact that Mthombo is sweating bullets that has him enjoying this scene.

Having two women fight over you can't be nice...

Mabahlezi shakes her head and decides to standstill.

Shiyiwe is in tears, this baby has changed her. This cannot be the smart-mouth Shiyiwe who had an answer for everything.

"Baby, don't cry." Mthombo says, walking out the gate.

He doesn't make it out, MaDlamini grabs his arms and pulls him back.

"Mthombo wait, I have a headache. Please take me inside." MaDlamini pleads.

She is a master at summoning her tears.

“Mthombo, she called me fat. I will never eat anything in my life again.” Shiysiwe increases her cries.

Now that’s something Mthombo is not going to tolerate, he promised uncle Mdu that his wife will never shed tears of sorrow.

He snatches his hand back and hurries to comfort his wife. She’s in his arms, eyes on MaDlamini.

It’s as if she never cried, her eyes are glaring and face hard.

MaDlamini has taken note of Shiysiwe’s game plan, and so has Bongukwanda.

“Nice one, sister in-law.” He whispers to himself, a smile not leaving his face.

MaDlamini screams, and falls to the ground. She has made her stitches bleed.

“My wound, I’m going to die.” She cries, lying down on the paving.

Bongukwanda chuckles in shock, “MaDlamini has surpassed Shiysiwe by two points. The competition is

tough, who will win Mthombo's heart? The mother or the wife?"

Mabahlezi rolls her eyes, she feels she is too old for this, so is Bongukwanda. Then again, men are allergic to maturity.

"Get up mama, you look ridiculous." Mabahlezi shouts.

"Call an ambulance, I tore a stitch." This screaming she is doing is so childish.

"Mthombo, son, my baby. Look at your mother, she is dying."

Mthombo does look, but he does not care.

"You're going to be an orphan if I die today." She cries, pressing a hand to her bleeding wound.

"Mthombo is busy MaDlamini, let me take you to the hospital." Bongukwanda attempts to lift her up, she shoves his hands away.

"Don't bore me wena," she shoots him a cold stare. Bongukwanda steps back, hands raised in surrender.

"I'm taking Shiyiwe home, I will call you when I get

there." Mthombo tells his brother.

He wraps an arm around Shiyiwe's shoulder and leads her away.

"Take Sarah home bhuti, I will take care of uThoko ka Sdumo." Bongukwanda smiles at his brother's threatening look and winks.

As they walk away, he notices Shiyiwe mischievously eyeing MaDlamini with a smirk of victory on her face.

MaDlamini doesn't miss it as well, she gets on her knees and shouts profanities at them, while watching them walk to the car.

Bongukwanda places his hands on his hips, and proudly chuckles.

"Doesn't makoti remind you of yourself?" He's talking to his mother who is weeping for Mthombo.

"Only that you're rusty now, sorry MaDlamini. There's a new girl in town."

"Bongukwanda?" Mabahlezi is shocked.

“The traditional wedding is happening soon sisi, tell your mother to continue practising fainting. This is just theory, once Shiyiwe enters the Meyiwa premises as the traditional daughter in-law, she will be fainting for real.” He says.

MaDlamini has lost her voice, all she can do is scream-cry.

“You’re scaring her Kwanda, look at her.” Mabahlezi points at her mother on the ground.

“Yes, look at her. She’s a rock, in fact the rock of all ages, a stop nonsense. Nothing can bring her down.” Kwanda says.

Mabahlezi crosses her arms, “You are wrong bhuti.”

Bongukwanda shrugs, “Two bad bitches under one Kraal, may the best bitch win.”

He taps MaDlamini’s head and starts walking toward the house.

“Kwanda you didn’t...” Mabahlezi can’t even finish the sentence, her mouth has dropped to the ground.

Who calls their mother a bad bitch and gets away

with it?

“Idibala some more MaDlamz, practise makes perfect.” (Continue fainting.)

He adds without turning to look at her.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Season Finale P13*

SHIYIWE-

.

.

Is it possible for an adult to have imbeleko? Mphako thinks it's normal. Athule is the most embarrassed, she doesn't want to be part of it. Mthandeni thinks it's cool, and won't stop talking about it. While I am planning an escape. I'm seven months pregnant, heavy as ever and my father thinks I deserve imbeleko. The betrayal is my husband and uncle Mdu agreeing with it.

If Bhedlindaba were here, I am pretty sure he would

be having a field day laughing at us. He hasn't opened his eyes, there are signs though that he can hear us. Like a twitch of a finger, his lids flicking.

The doctor advised we talk to him some more, push him to come back to us.

MaDlamini is the only person who does not visit her son, all she does is drink the whole day. Must be stress, shame.

She moved in with Mabahlezi and her husband, I can't imagine what sister in-law is going through.

Her sons wouldn't take her in, she complained and threatened to disown them.

But she does not have the resources to do that, she needs them, especially since her husband is gone.

Mthombo is no longer the zombie I couldn't stand, he is healing. We talk when we feel that there is so much to handle.

Silent treatments ruin the marriage.

I love him more every day, I love him a million times when he feeds my sexual cravings. This baby makes

me feel like a sex addict.

It's a busy Saturday today, the house is packed with uncles and aunts I have never seen. Aside from uncle Mdu, I don't know who in the Jele family will be here.

Another day of waking up without my husband by my side, I have to be here in my father's house with the other kids.

Speaking of a house, Mthombo came up with this idea of buying him a house. He wanted me to talk to him first, ask for his permission.

But you don't ask men like Mphako if you can buy them something, their egos are bigger than the globe.

The person I spoke to was Athule, she warned me about Mphako's pride.

Nevertheless, we went ahead and bought the house. This house. It's at a very quiet neighbourhood in GlenVista. I didn't want to take him away from the

south.

He hasn't been informed yet. The plan is to give him the keys when everyone has left.

The house in Riverlea couldn't be saved.

.

.

Things are slowly going back to normal, for once in my life I am at peace. Life has given me a chance to focus on my husband, my baby and family.

Mthandeni is back home, she lives with us. Mphako protested when I told him, but they are not there yet.

Mthandeni is not comfortable around him. Strange because she has this great friendship with Lithizwi, maybe he knows how to tread around her.

"Sisi, your phone." A little boy runs into the kitchen with my phone.

How do I always misplace, and forget about it?

It's a call from Mthombo, I have been waiting for his

call. He will be joining us later, with Bongukwanda.

“I’m in the car.”

These things don’t greet anymore, married women call them husbands.

“Come in, you’re not a boyfriend.”

When will he stop acting like we are still in our courting stages?

“I can’t come in baby, your father is standing at the gate. I’m looking at him as we speak, uncle Mdu is with him.”

Those old men don’t want to see me happy.

“Eish Mthombo, walking past them will be like swimming in a river with crocodiles.” They will eat me alive.

“But I’ll swim the deepest ocean and climb the highest mountain for you, Nonyanda. Won’t you do the same for me?”

Hee! This man.

“I would, but I can’t swim and I’m afraid of heights.”

“Ngyacela munt’ wami, I miss you.” He’s sulking.

Sigh!

“Let me see what I can do, if I don’t make it out in five minutes, call the police.” I tell him and he laughs in return.

Ah! Music to my ears, I’m stupidly in love, it’s disgusting and I love it.

Now, how do I get out of this house without being noticed?

Amazing, here comes Mphako’s favourite daughters. I love the relationship Mthandeni and Ayanda are building. They share a lot, they both have been through so much. I guess that has made their bond stronger.

I leave the sandwich I’m eating, to dig for money in my bag. I find a R100 note, time to bribe these two.

“Mmm! I wonder what I will do with this R100, having too much money is so stressful.”

I need to be dramatic for this, plus, 2Ks are too

smart for their shoes. They might outsmart me and still walk away with my money.

They look at me like I ran away from an asylum, giggle and walk past me. I'm baffled.

What the hell was that? Don't those kids want money?
How useless...

Sizwile walks in whistling, I don't have to be dramatic with this one.

I let him take whatever he's taking in the fridge, our eyes meet. I smile and he knows.

He peeps out the door to confirm what he's thinking, his eyebrows rise inquisitively.

"50K, and I take them out of the house."

What? Should I call the police?

"My brother is not a phara, please."

He laughs.

"Please ntwana, cover for me." I'm not giving him R50K.

"I don't have a problem with that ntwana, those

pitbulls guarding the gate are no match for me.” He says with pride.

That’s a perfect description actually, Mphako and uncle Mdu might as well be pitbulls.

“5Gig data.” I say.

He frowns, “Money talks sisi.”

Sigh!

I’m just a girl trying to meet her husband. I give him my card and the pin number, the smile on his face tells me that he is going to leave me broke.

“Your favourite brother loves you,” he says as he dances his way out of the house.

I stand at the door, and watch him do his magic.

The two men follow him behind the house.

“Yey wena Shiyiwe, what are you doing standing at the door?” I don’t know this aunt, she’s from my father’s side.

“I don’t understand aunty.”

She holds her hips, “You will be crying alone in the labour ward when that baby refuses to come out.”

Oh that belief. Never stand at the door, or make a U-turn at the door, or the baby will take a peep during delivery, then go back to chilling in the womb.

Those little devils.

I hurry out of the house, she will delay me this aunt.

I’m on the street, I see him, parked a bit far from our house.

It takes me a while to get to him, I have to look back to see if my father or uncle are not behind me.

He doesn’t come out to open the door for me, I guess he’s not going to be a gentleman today.

What’s with the hoodie? Is it a mask to hide himself? I’m not going to ask.

He removes the hoodie from his head when I enter.

“Hey.” I say, as I shut the door.

He doesn’t say anything, but starts the car.

I am dazed, and he’s speeding down the road.

“Mthombo where are we going?” Am I being kidnapped by my husband?

He ignores me. I have a blood pressure that has no timing, it rises like the weather, unexpectedly.

.

.

Mthombo parks the car at the Nasrec grounds in Expo centre, he gets out, opens the door for me, and pulls me out.

I don't speak when I'm confused... sometimes. I let him lead, whatever it is he is doing.

Our eyes lock as he opens the backdoor and tells me to get in, my stupid self gets in. Maybe he has a surprise for me.

He runs to the other side and hops in.

I plan on asking what's going on

“What...”

He grabs my waist, pulling me closer to him and smashes his lips on mine. The kiss is instantly

heated, I'm slowly losing my breath.

His hands are all over my body, with the way he's breathing, he is going to run out of breath.

I'm still in a state of confusion when his hand glides down to my nether regions.

"You don't know how desperately I want you, Nonyanda." He whispers against my lips.

Car sex? At a park? When did we get here?

I push him back, "Mthombo wait."

His eyes are half-lidded, as he looks at me, impatiently.

"Don't deny me this Nonyanda, I had to watch porn last night to jerk off..." I can't believe he just said that.

I shove his hand away.

"What? That's cheating."

"It's not, it's not like I'm attracted to those women."

He brings his lips closer, I move back.

"You don't have to be attracted to someone to sleep with them."

"I have a different notion, I have to be attracted to you first before sleeping with you." He says.

"So if you were attracted to someone besides me, would you sleep with them?"

I am asking because... why is he talking about this in the first place?

His eyebrows meet, "No, we're married. Why would I?"

"Mthombo Meyiwa, if you want to have your testicles for supper, cheat on me." I am not joking about this.

He sighs and closes the space between us. His body feels amazing against mine.

"Why are we talking about this? I came here to feast on my pussy."

He has a pussy? He wets his fingers with his tongue and moistens my already wet spot. Clits should not be given a life, they start to control us.

"You're so warm baby, let me in phela Nonyanda. Awuthi ngingene muntu wam, kuyabanda la ngaphandle." (Let me in, it's cold out here.)

“Really?” Trust a Zulu man to make a woman blush while he’s talking nonsense.

Lord, this slow massage he’s doing on my clit is not nonsense. I’m going to scream from pleasure.

“Mthombo...” I breath, pressing my hands against his chest to push him back.

“Yini? Ngiyagodola, ngenisa indoda yakho, Nonyanda.” (Let your husband in.)

I might as well lie down on this seat, open my legs and offer myself like a grilled chicken.

His hand pushes my dress up, he looks at me like he wants to eat me and finish my bones like chicken licken bones.

“Turn around,” he mutters under his breath.

I get on my knees, he pulls my dress up and I feel his length pushing inside my vaginal walls.

What is the rush?

His thrusts are instantly deep and something tells

me that this is about him today, I doubt I will be getting my orgasm. He is moaning behind me, it's not helping because I want my orgasm now.

"Mthombo..." his name is a gasp.

He grabs the back of my neck and thrusts deeper, he's pounding me like I will wake up without a vagina tomorrow.

His hand finds my breast, he squeezes. His other hand is on my butt, squeezing as well. It sounds like we are running with our quickening breaths.

"Al... most... there." He groans and hisses.

I want to tell him to go deeper but I know he will only go deeper for himself.

"You always feel so good Nonyanda, mmhhh... you feel so good."

He's pushing with everything he has. The car is dancing to our movements, if there are people out there, then we are being laughed at.

I feel him tense, he cusses and hisses and groans before I feel a warmth seeping inside my walls. He

kisses the back of my neck, and takes his time pulling out.

When he was penetrating me, he did it in such a rush like someone was going to cut off his penis before he had sex.

“That was amazing, thank you muntu wam.”

He's stepping out of the car as he says, I guess one would call this an achievement.

Achievement my foot! Only women deserve orgasms.

He opens the front door for me, kisses me before I get in.

The conversation he is striking as we drive back is funny, I don't know what he's talking about. But I'm laughing at this guy he works with who is always late, and has weird excuses about why he is late.

The coast is clear, there is no one outside. Sizwile is probably planning on buying himself a car with my money, that's why he is taking this job seriously.

“I will see you later, love.” Today I am love?

Make your husband happy and he will drive you to the ends of the earth.

“Don’t go far, the party will start soon.” I tell him.

“I’ll be around, I love you.”

I love him more, probably.

He drives off the moment I step out.

.

.

“Shiyiwe, where have you been?” That’s Athule, she is with that aunt in the kitchen. On the floor, in front of them is a big pink box wrapped with a red ribbon.

“You have a gift, and it’s heavy.” Athule says, a smile on her face.

“Open it sis, I can’t wait any longer.” She adds, a little impatient.

“Who is it from?” I ask.

“There is a card,” the aunt grabs the card and hands it to me.

“To the beautiful mommy to be, you deserve all the happiness in the world.” I read aloud and a smile instantly fills my face.

This is Mthombo’s apology for using me as his sperm dish.

“It’s so big, what could it be?” I can’t help but wonder.

I pull the ribbon and open the box.

My eyes are deceiving me, I can’t be seeing what I’m seeing.

“Oh my God!” Athule exclaims in shock.

My knees fail me, someone grabs me before I hit the ground. My body is trembling, my heart hammering in my chest.

A white casket small enough to fit a new born baby. What has torn me to pieces is the carving *Baby Meyiwa* on the lid of the casket.

.

.

Please like, comment and share. Let’s get to 31K

followers...

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Season Finale P14*

SHIYIWE-

.

“This is an abomination, it’s not done. It’s not done.”
This aunt is going to be my favourite.

She’s yelling at the top of the roof, fuming and
cursing whoever sent the casket.

I’m taken to the lounge and made to sit on the couch,
my head is mixed up.

“Call my husband,” I keep saying.

Tears have come to blind my eyes, I don’t want to
cry over this. I can’t give those people the
satisfaction.

Where is Athule? She was here a... oh here she is,
she went to get Mphako and uncle Mdu.

They surround and fuss over me.

“I’m fine, I’m fine.” I tell them.

I have to lie, I’m not fine. My world is falling apart, just when things were going okay.

“Where is Mthombo? Has anyone called him?”
Mphako asks.

I have been saying, Mthombo has to be here. He has to see this.

“I did, he’s on the way.” Athule answers.

My aunt holds me a glass of water and tells me to drink, I can’t really stomach anything at the moment.

I’m going to sit here until Mthombo gets here.

“We should burn that casket,” Uncle Mdu says.

“I don’t think we should, there must be a ritual done to cancel this bad omen.” Mphako disputes.

But who would want to kill my baby? Haven’t I suffered enough in life?

The room is crowded in a second, everyone is here but the man I need. Having them ask me if I am okay is suffocating.

“Shiyiwe!” I hear his voice in the crowd.

“Help me up,” I say to Athule.

I see Mthombo, he’s rushing towards me—eyes wide. I’m swallowed in his arms, a tight embrace.

“Nonyanda...” He presses his lips on my collarbone.

“Someone sent a coffin with the engraving baby Meyiwa,” I tell him.

I didn’t think I would be uncontrollably tearing up, it’s the thought of my baby inside that casket. I can’t get rid of the image.

I feel him tense against me, he pulls back and turns to the direction of the kitchen.

The casket is on the floor, in plain sight. Mthombo’s face flushes in rage, nose flaring and eyes fixed on the casket.

“Son of a bitch!” He mutters furiously under his breath.

Everyone gasps, as he storms toward the kitchen and grabs the coffin with force.

We follow him outside where he harshly slams it on the ground, it doesn't break easily, nor does my husband.

I almost can't recognise him with this sudden anger that's taken over him. I'm not going to stop him because that's how I feel as well, the difference between us is that he is acting on it.

When he's stomped on the box, slammed it on the ground till it's nothing but pieces of wood, he runs into the house and comes back with a lighter, and a can of Doom.

"Step back!" He says, throwing a few lit match sticks on the wood and sprays Doom. It catches fire straightaway.

How did he know Doom catches fire?

Mthombo turns to me, his eyes are bloodshot. It happens when he is consumed by anger.

Somehow, I feel a sense of relief as I watch the fire

destroying the enemy's plan.

Mthombo takes my hand and ushers me back into the house.

.

.

He cradles my cheeks, and looks into my eyes.

"Don't worry Nonyanda, nothing will happen to you both as long as I'm alive."

I know he means it, it's written in his eyes.

"Come sit," he pulls me to a couch and lounges beside me. His face is not the normal face I am used to. He's thinking things, diabolical if I am not mistaken.

"My friends and I are going to look around the neighbourhood, we might find something or someone." Sizwile offers, uncle goes with him.

"Or they could be in this crowd." Mthombo's words bring silence into the room.

Some of these people are strangers to me.

Mthombo stands, eyes scanning every person.

“I think the party is over,” that authority dripping in his voice will get him in trouble with the elders.

“We can’t cancel, we still have to do the ancestral ceremony. Invite the Makhadema ancestors into these premises.” This man that just spoke is a distant cousin of Mphako and was told not to say anything until the ceremony is over.

My eyes rush to Mphako, he’s fallen into confusion.

“Why would you invite them to someone’s house?” Mphako asks.

My eyes dart to Athule, the surprise has been ruined.

“Baba, bab’omdala and the others are going to perform a small ceremony to invite the Makhadema ancestors into these premises because this house officially belongs to Mphako Makhadema.”

“I don’t understand,” Mphako mumbles, eyes turning to me.

I answer him by nodding. My head is not here, I want to go home.

“What have you done?” His voice shakes.

Athule touches his shoulder, “Your daughter and son in-law got you this house baba.”

He looks at me, “Shiyiwe?”

“You deserve it baba,” I say.

Sometimes I forget that his tears are not far.

He buries his face in his hands, then lifts his eyes, and stares at me and Mthombo.

“How can I ever thank you?” His arms are around Mthombo, my husband is not sure if he should hold him back.

“Thank you my son, thank you.” I thought they said this man is egoistic.

Mthombo drops his head as Mphako recites his clan names, a way to make a black man blush is by calling him by his clan names.

They share another hug, this time Mthombo pats his back.

“Shiyiwe, my child.” He kneels in front of me and

places his hand on my hand.

“God will bless you plenty, may you be happy.
Nothing will happen to your baby, your child will live.
The devil lost his power when he was defeated by
Jesus, don’t give him the stage. Your happiness is
here, don’t let go of it out of fear.”

Mphako is making me cry, I guess I’m overwhelmed
by everything that’s happening.

He hugs me, “I love you my baby.”

These words are said to Mthandeni and Ayanda
almost all the time, Athule and I have to wait for
special occasions. I’ll take this as a special occasion.

“Stop crying now baba, you’re making me cry.” I tell
him.

He lets out a light laugh and stands.

His family is around him with many congratulations
and handshakes, it’s beautiful to see your parent
happy. If only MaMbuyazi was here, I would do
anything to feel her arms around me; and bab’ Jele.

There's so much I wanted to do for them.

I feel a hand on my shoulder, it's Mthombo and he's looking down at me. He must have taken notice of my distress.

He wants to know if I am okay. The thing is that I want to go home, but I don't want to ruin this day for Mphako.

"I'm fine." I mouth, he doesn't believe me.

"I think the celebration should continue, we can get people to guard the place.

The ceremony continues I guess.

.

.

I'm sleeping in one of the bedrooms, the crowd became too much for me. It's night time, most of the guests have gone home.

Someone opens the door, they knock once before I hear his voice.

"Munt' wami."

I pull the covers down, he's coated with guilt.

"Are you sleeping?" He asks.

"My mind is all over the place."

I'm glad he is here, his presence makes me feel at ease.

He sits on the bed and puts his hand on my tummy, his eyes water. He is not about to cry, is he? I wouldn't fault him though, like that anger he demonstrated back there.

"Nothing will happen to our baby."

I'm wearing stress like a gown, and this man of mine sees through me, that's why he feels a need to assure me every time.

"My mother never believed in buying a baby a baby cot, she said it was the same as buying a coffin. The belief was carried in the olden days, Mthombo this was taken seriously by our elders. What more when you buy a coffin for a baby? I don't want to lose our baby, we can't..."

"We are not going to lose her, I won't let it happen."

"There is someone out there who wants to kill our baby, someone we don't know. How are you going to stop them?"

Unless we know the face behind the threat, we have lost. How do we fight a ghost?

He rubs my belly and sighs, "I sent word out. The men in charge of the search are experienced, they will find whoever this person is."

I hope they find them soon. If push comes to shove, I will kill for my baby to live.

"Remember my two biggest fears?"

Losing me and losing his sanity.

"I am willing to do absolutely anything to protect you and our baby, believe me when I say nothing bad will happen to you both." He adds.

If he thinks this gives me hope, then he's right. I can't help though but worry.

"How about we go home to our bed, I want to hold my wife in peace." He wants to be naughty, his hand

is running up my thighs.

"I want you to hold me now, we can cuddle here. No one will disturb us." I say.

"Okay, I'll lock the door to be safe." He dashes to the door.

Cuddling and sex are two different things, he might still be traumatized that my father and uncle walked in on us with his dick down my throat.

.

.

BHEDLINDABA-

The call came in around 4am.

"Your brother is awake." The nurse they had paid to keep an eye on him said.

Weeks after Zwangendaba's burial, his son has come back to life.

Mthombo and his wife rushed to the hospital, and on their way there informed whoever cared.

It's mid-day, they are back to check on him. Shiyiwe has left her husband attending to a business call, she walks in to find Bhedlindaba awake. He looks sick and weak, alive but sick.

He was sleeping when they got here in the early hours, it's so good to see him staring back at him.

He forces a smile, it looks like it hurts to smile.

"Nonyanda." His voice is throaty.

"Only my husband calls me that," she teases with a smile on her face. Ndaba smiles, it disappears when he sees tears in her eyes.

"When did you become a crier? What has my brother done to you?" He's teasing as well.

Shiyiwe wipes her tears away, and slowly lowers her very pregnant self on the chair.

"Don't ever do that to us, you scared us Ndaba. We almost lost you." She says..

"You of all people should know that not even death

can defeat me." This must be a joke as well, death is one proud motherfucker.

"How are you feeling? Are you in pain?" She asks, eyes checking every part of him.

"Pain is always present, Shiyiwe. It never leaves us." This is deeper than what she meant.

Shiyiwe shuffles on the seat with a clearing of a throat.

"I am sorry," she says. "For everything."

Another deep meaning. Bhedlindaba nods, there is sudden silence between them.

"Mthombo is on his way," Shiyiwe breaks the silence.

Ndaba gives her a nod, he's observing her under his gaze.

"You look different," two seconds on earth and he's judging people.

Shiyiwe can only snort at the statement, she is still not okay with the snide remarks about her body.

“Your mother thinks I look like Sarah Baartman.”

“She was a beautiful black woman,” Ndaba dismisses MaDlamini’s meaning.

“Yeah, she was.” She is just agreeing, it still troubles her.

The silence comes again, he is looking at her, she is looking at the door.

“I’m happy that you have finally found your peace, my brother loves you. Take care of his love.” Ndaba speaks.

“I will always cherish it. What about you? Athule...”

“I don’t have space for love in my life, maybe when I’m forty.” He answers.

Shiyiwe cracks up in laughter.

“Forty? Women don’t want old men, the fresher the better.”

“Please, have you seen me? I’m an eagle, ageing like fine wine.” Yep! Bhedlindaba Meyiwa is back.

“I will not dispute that.” Shiyiwe falls into a fit of

laughter.

A knock at the door saves them from another silent moment, Athule walks in and her eyes instantly fall on him. Tears stream down her face.

“You came back to me.” She’s hugging him like he’s paying for her hugs.

Not wanting to disturb them, Shiyiwe takes her leave. Athule settles down where her sister was, she makes sure to hold his hand.

“I’m so happy you’re back, I missed you so much. I’m sorry I left you Ndaba, we’re going to start over. I promise we’re going to work out this time.” She’s a crier this one.

Ndaba looks nervous, he should be careful with that sigh, he is still attached to machines. He might exhaust his breaths.

“What’s wrong?” She has noticed his restlessness.

“Remember when I said I want to give you the best version of me?” He asks.

“Ndaba, I love you the way you are.” Of course, he is the love of her life.

He shakes his head, something is amiss.

“Don’t lie to yourself ntwana, we both know I have been treating you like shit.”

I mean...

“This is not the best version of me, ntwana. I have demons I need to fight, I can’t love you right when I’m a mess.”

“What are you saying, Ndaba?”

“You know what I’m saying.” She is a smart woman, it can’t be hard for her to read between the lines.

“No, Ndaba please. Let’s not separate, the past six months have been terrible for me. I don’t think I can live without you again.” Athule’s tears triple.

“You did and you will ntwana, I am not a good person. If I allow this relationship, I will drag you down with me. I’m headed for destruction, a relationship is the

last thing I should be entertaining.”

This is not what Athule expected to hear, she tries to get rid of her tears. They refuse to abide and portray her as a strong woman.

“So what are you going to do?”

“There’s a place for mentally ill people, I will be gone for a while.” Looks like he’s made the decision all by himself.

“How long?”

“I don’t know, it will depend on my healing or treatment.”

Her questions are plenty, however, he is willing to answer all of them.

Athule tightens her grip on his hand and kisses it, she sniffs as she looks into his droopy eyes.

Ndaba forces a faint smile, “Can I tell you something?”

“Anything.”

“I am shit scared,” a nervous laugh reaches his

mouth.

“You are a strong man, you will be okay.”

“I am a man, but strong is one thing I am not.” He confesses with another light laugh.

There is more he wants to say, but men don’t open up about everything.

“It’s okay not to be strong, I am here for you. We all are, you will never be alone.” She takes it deeper.

A lump forms in Ndaba’s throat, he clenches his teeth to control his emotions. He doesn’t want to cry, not in front of her.

He takes a sigh when he feels he is able to speak without his voice breaking.

“Thank you, ntwana.” He says.

This is the beginning of a long journey for him, he will need as many people in his corner.

.

.

Don’t forget to like, comment and share.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Season Finale P15*

SHIYIWE-

.

.

Must be nice, someone is whistling while some of us are stressed.

“Stop whistling in the house.” It’s annoying me really.

He stops midway to the bed and frowns at me.

“Are the hormones acting up? Is it safe for me to be in here?” Hahaha, not funny.

My hormones are not that crazy, I don’t snap or bite people’s heads off for nothing.

“I don’t know if you have forgotten that there is a psycho out there who is after the life of my child, excuse me for not whistling or pretending that everything is okay.”

Did I say I’m not snappy?

"You don't have to raise your voice Nonyanda, I don't have a problem with my hearing." He says.

"I know, maybe you have a problem with your conscience."

His frown deepens, "What did my conscience do?"

"I don't understand how you walk around pretending that everything is okay, when nothing is."

"Keep your voice down Shiyiwe, I told you I am not deaf."

He thinks I care.

"Why would I keep my voice down Mthombowomnotho? The life of my unborn baby is in danger and its father is doing nothing about it."

"I'm doing nothing?"

"Yes, it's been 14 days Mthombo... 14 days, and you haven't given me any feedback. You have not found the person who wants to kill our baby."

14 days in a row, he dismissed me whenever I asked about it.

“Who said I am not doing anything? Do you think I don’t care about this baby?” He looks at my belly then back up at me, eyes flashing with rage.

“You won’t be the first man to not care about their child.” There is a huge bloody number of them.

I sit up straight on the bed when his piercing gaze drills me down on the mattress, he can shoot lasers with those eyes for all I care, I refuse to bend.

Is he walking out on me?

“Fine, I guess I have to do it myself. It’s not like I’m not capable, I have slayed dragons before.” I get off the bed, he stops and glares maliciously.

“Where are you going?”

I don’t answer him, my head and hands are dipped in the wardrobe.

Where the hell is that jacket? Dammit! I’ll wear his sweater, it fits anyway.

I throw in a pair of his track pants, everything is tight on me. Not everyone loses baby weight after birth, I

don't mind a little weight but this baby what-what
has to go.

From throwing on pants and a sweater, my breathing
resembles a running microwave.

He stands in my way, arms crossed and an
intimidating expression on his face.

"I want to pass." I don't want to be tested today.

"To where?"

Did he not hear what I said a while ago?

"I'm going to look for the person who wants to kill
my baby." I stride past him, he grabs my hand and
pulls me back.

"You're not going anywhere." The look in his eyes is
meant to ground me.

"I'd like to see you stop me," I yank my hand.

He grabs me by the waist, making me gasp with how
rough he does it.

His eyes are mysterious but his clenched jaw reveals
his anger.

“Damnit Shiyiwe! Who are you going to look for? Where will you start? If you’re going to put your life in danger, leave my child behind.” His eyes point down at my belly.

He’s stupid, his mother forgot to tell him.

“How am I going to do that? I’m pregnant...”

His grip tightens on my waist, “Don’t patronise me, Shiyiwe.”

How am I patronizing him?

“Didn’t I tell you that I am on it?”

He did but...

“You can barely walk. What will you do when you’re attacked?”

Did he just call me fat?

I snatch myself out of his arms, I am not going to talk to him. I drag myself on the bed, sighing to show him how annoyed he’s making me.

He has gone quiet on me, leaving me with unanswered questions.

“We have a lead,” he says.

I look up at him, a lead is good. It’s something.

“That friend of yours was seen around clubs in Hilbrow.”

“Which friend?” I ask because he knows the only friends I have are my sisters.

“That crazy skinny girl.”

Oh! Ntebo.

“You think Ntebo sent the casket?”

He nods, “Yes. We are not sure yet, she is hard to track. One minute she is here and the next she is not, we think she is selling her body for favours from men with money.”

“What kind of favours? Do you mean money?”

“Money, sending death threats... whatever she needs.”

So that’s how low that bitch has stooped? Ntebo is starting to forget who I am.

Mthombo joins me on the bed, he’s looking into my

eyes. A look of promise, I guess.

“I need you to stay in the house, until we find her. You can’t go anywhere, not even to the gate unless I’m with you.”

Great!

“House arrest? My life must stop because of her?”

“It’s only temporary, let me protect you Nonyanda. I need you to work with me.” He says.

Like I have any other choice but to agree, like he said, I can barely walk.

“What about the baby shower?”

He’s confused.

“Ayanda accidentally mentioned a baby shower, I think it’s happening next week. Athule booked a restaurant, the whole shebang.” I explain.

His hand is on my thigh, drawing small circles.

“Then the whole shebang will have to happen here. I’ll have the house guarded.” He says.

Sigh! I have been guarded by men with guns since I

met Mthombo. Sometimes I wonder if it will ever stop.

“I will speak to Ndaba, he knows men.”

Ndaba is recovering and living with us, he wants to sort out his business before admitting himself into a rehabilitation centre.

Every day is a struggle for him, he has nightmares and wakes up growling or panting. Mthombo and Kwanda spend as time with him as they can.

Mthombo sleeps with him in the guest bedroom, and sneaks out in the early hours of the morning to join me in bed.

“I need you and our baby safe, can you do that for me?” His eyebrows slowly rise, he’s intently staring into my eyes and I have no idea why, all of a sudden I am growing shy. I look into this man’s eyes every day.

“I will stay safe,” I assure him and kiss him with everything in me.

THE MEYIWAS-

Ukuzala ukuzelula...

MaDlamini would slap you in the face for having the audacity to spew such nonsensical words because well... her kids are nothing but a bunch of disappointments.

“9 months, I carried each one for 9 months. 9x5! How many years is that? Huh?” A burp rushes up her mouth, she finds it funny.

The drunkards sitting around her nod in agreement, after she has bought their temporary loyalty with alcohol, why wouldn’t they play for a few hours?

Time flies when you are having fun, and tonight Masabata is having the time of her life that she doesn’t see Mabahlezi’s car park outside the entrance. She steps out in six inch heels, an

expensive weave hanging down her shoulders, and a dress fit for a dinner date.

People stop and stare as she walks through the gate, she pauses her walk, removes her dark shades and scans the Shebeen.

PINKY'S HOTSPOT

The name of the place is written in bold letters. Scattered around the yard are tables and chairs occupied by drunk men and women.

Mafikizolo's Kwela-kwela has them shaking their hips, nodding their heads, and singing off tune.

Ah! There is MaDlamini, chatting up a storm with a group she would rather die than be seen with when sober.

"Here comes one of your nine months," one says when Mabahlezi is within earshot.

MaDlamini follows her line of sight, and welcomes her daughter with a smile.

“My baby,” her arms swing to give her a hug. Mabahlezi ducks, a disgusted look on her face.

“Look at her, look at my baby. Elegant, filthy rich and beautiful.” She’s showing her daughter off to her new friends.

“But you said this one is the biggest disappointments.” A drunk person never lies.

“Is this the barren one who married a loser?” Another shouts.

“I think it’s the dumb one who bought her way out of school.” A third one shouts.

MaDlamini’s face turns pale, she nervously looks at Mabahlezi and finds tears in her eyes.

“Mama? You’ve been saying such things about me?”

“No, no. Don’t listen to these drunkards my baby. Look at them, they have nothing better to do with their time but drink my money.” She defends herself,

Mabahlezi is not having it.

She shoves her mother back when she attempts touch her.

"I came here to take you home, I can't believe I thought of giving you a second chance." -Mabahlezi.

MaDlamini stumbles forward, she is so close to falling on Mabahlezi but the ground catches her.

The soldier in her brings her up, staggering still.

"What wrong did I say Hlezi?" Her chest bounces, bringing forth a loud burp. It's disgusting, Mabahlezi's face turns sour. She's looking at her mother like she is the scum of the earth.

"You and your brothers are useless, all of you. You, my girl are worse. Your first mistake was having the audacity to come out of my vagina with a vagina between your legs. To think you didn't do me enough wrong, you married a loser, a man who can't give you children." She's yelling for everyone to hear.

Embarrassed, Mabahlezi throws her shades back on and let's her braids down.

“How long have you been with that man? You have nothing to show for it, not even a miscarriage. You are a Meyiwa, Meyiwas are not infertile. The problem is that useless man you marri...”

“That’s enough mama,” she half-shouts, slamming her hand on MaDlamini’s chest.

“That is my husband you are talking about, watch your mouth.”

“Or what?” MaDlamini challenges her daughter with a deadly stare.

There is a limit to everything and Mabahlezi has had enough. With a shaky breath, she growls lowly.

“I have tolerated your nonsense and impudence long...”

“Mabahlezi...”

“I am still talking,” she cuts in, pointing a finger at her, and that shocks MaDlamini. Her eyes pop out.

“You are a disrespectful, ungrateful, and bitter old woman who thinks the world owes her something. I put a roof above your head because I felt sorry for

you, I'm done mama. I. Am. Done."

Well that surely got everyone's attention, they are staring.

"What do you mean you are done?" MaDlamini asks.

"You can't be done with me, I am your mother. I brought your sorry ass into this world."

"I don't care, you don't deserve me. You don't deserve anything good, only death is suitable for you." I want you out of my house, don't bother getting your things, I will drop them off wherever you'll be staying." Mabahlezi says.

She has to raise her voice due to the noise in here.

"You can't do that to me. Where will I go? Your father's house will be auctioned soon, you know I don't have money to pay for a hotel."

A five star hotel is what she's talking about.

Mabahlezi glowers at her mother... the audacity.

"How is that any of my business?"

This ungrateful brat!

MaDlamini grits her teeth, she clenches her fists in anger.

“No! No! No!” She shouts, stomping her feet on the ground.

“I will not allow this, do you hear me, Hlezi? I will kill myself first.” She runs to the street.

She wouldn’t be Masabata Dlamini if she didn’t grab everyone’s attention. For an unknown reason they rush after her, staggering and burping, with alcohol in the grip of their hands.

Mabahlezi knows what’s coming, her mother would do exceptionally well in a theatre.

Come to Orlando west, your mother is at it again. She’s calling us 9 months to her drinking friends.

The text and a location are sent to Bhedlindaba.

Mabahlezi finds her lying on her back on the ground,

in the middle of the road.

“Mama, get up from there.” She howls the order, irritated to the core.

“You said I deserve nothing but death, let me die then.” MaDlamini shouts.

This girl will learn to control her tongue next time.

“I didn’t mean it like that mama, you’re embarrassing yourself. Get up and let’s go home.”

Not only is she embarrassing herself, she is causing a scene.

“The next car that will pass here will run me over, I’m going to my husband. You people don’t care about me.”

Her husband is too occupied in the ancestral world, giving Celuxolo reasons why the child’s life was cut short.

MaDlamini’s friends seem to be cheering her on, one of them starts a song—completely off tune. He’s joined by a few, it sounds like a bunch of choking

ducks.

Mabahlezi spends more than fifteen minutes pleading with her mother to get up, it's getting late; her husband is home waiting for her.

The car MaDlamini has been praying to run her over has not arrived yet, instead, she has been sworn at and shown middle fingers by passing drivers.

There's an incoming car, it must be Bhedlindaba. Nope, it's a van, it parks recklessly on the side of the road.

Who called the news people? Someone thinks this woman is a celebrity.

It's two men and a woman, and it looks like they are ready to expose the Meyiwases and hang their dirty laundry for the world to see.

"This is bad," Mabahlezi mumbles to herself.

The nation will laugh at them if this makes it to TV. She thinks of rushing to her mother and forcefully drag her to the car, but the skinny, short cameraman has started shooting.

A tall man wearing pantsula outfit appears behind him.

“Move the camera a bit to the left, just to get her left side. She will thank you later.” He’s talking to the camera guy who turns with a furrowed brow.

“Who are you?”

Huh! Such an insult.

Who doesn’t know the soccer-coach-pantsula-wearing-tsotsitaal-speaking, Bhedlindaba Meyiwa?

Oh! Ndaba is not offended, he’s smiling actually and there goes a hand to shake the camera guy’s.

“Bhedlindaba Meyiwa, one of her 9 months.” He says, pointing at MaDlamini.

“How long will this broadcast on TV? She deserves at least 3 hours of TV time, every day. You can repeat the same scene it’s okay, she will thank you later.” Here’s another tall brother, this one is wearing a suit.

“Who are you?” This cameraman lives under a rock,

who doesn't know the Meyiwases?

The man in question extends a hand, another one stuck in his pocket.

"They call me Kwanda, I'm her second 9 months."

The camera guy's mouth is left hanging, still he nods.

A female voice disturbs him this time.

"Zoom in on her face, she had plastic surgery months ago. Not everyone has seen it yet, she will..."

"Thank me later?" Finishes the cameraman, he is exhausted and wondering who this pregnant woman is.

"I'm Shiyiwe Meyiwa, married to her first 9 months." She's proud about it.

He proceeds with his work but another voice interrupts him.

"Don't forget to play dramatic effects when the car runs her over, she will thank you for that too."

He doesn't have to ask who this one talking is, the question is written on his face.

"I'm Mthombo Meyiwa, her first 9 months." He says.

Ignoring these men is the only way the cameraman can do his work.

"You see? Look at these useless children, I gave them a life and this is the thanks I get?" MaDlamini shouts before bursting into tears.

Mabahlezi cannot believe that Ndaba told his siblings what their mother called them, and the fact that they take it as a joke is beyond her.

To make matters worse, MaDlamini can hear them. Perhaps this is the perfect time to get up and let her children take her home.

"Mthombo, my son. Are you going to let your mother die?"

Okay! She's not going to move from there.

"Mama get up, you are not crippled." Her daughter shouts.

No one was talking to her, she has fuelled MaDlamini's anger.

"Shut up, I'm talking to my baby." –MaDlamini.

Her baby is not giving her the attention she wants, he doesn't seem to care.

"When I grow up, I want to be a super mom like my mom." That's Bhedlindaba, he doesn't take life seriously. Bongukwanda as well, they bump heads as they crack up in laughter.

"Mfethu, does this camera work? Is it on?"
Bhedlindaba asks the cameraman.

Bongukwanda stands on the cameraman's left, and nudges him.

"What's that button for? I didn't see you pressing it, don't be jealous of our incubator ndoda. This is her moment, capture it well." –Kwanda says.

"Mthombo, my son. The only one worthy of my love, don't stand there while your brothers are laughing at me."

Maybe they will stop if she starts acting her age, Mthombo and his brothers ignore her.

"You know what, let me do it." Bongukwanda

snatches the camera from its owner.

Is this even allowed?

“One of my employees asked me to take a boomerang for him, he was impressed. I’m good at these things.” Bongukwanda finishes, face shinning boastfully.

The night is still young, and it looks like it’s going to be one hell of a night.

.

.

Let’s top up this chapter with 400+ comments and we get our bonus at 5...

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Season Finale P16*

THE MEYIWAS-

.

.

She wakes up to a sharp smell of hospital disinfect,

invading her nostrils. The room is too silent, she is used to waking up to the sound of the radio or her daughter humming as she prepares for work.

Slowly, she opens her eyes, squinting in an attempt to wipe out the blurred images before her.

“Mthombo?”

He’s her first thought, always now that her husband is no more.

She sits up as she glances around the room, and takes in the white spongy walls, and immediately she knows where this is. Panic settles in, her heart jumps to her throat.

“Nooo!”

The scream reaches her mouth, her head spins, and pounds as she attempts to run to the shut door. The pain forces her back on the bed, this can’t be happening to her.

Out of impulse, her hand travels to her face, pressing the pounding area on her forehead. She feels a soft material, a bandage. As she explores, trying to

remove the bandage, she flinches at the pain.

“Mthombo!”

Where is that boy? How did she get here?

Confusion refuses to leave her.

Being a fighter that she is, MaDlamini forces herself up, throbbing headache be damned. It's imperative that she gets out of here.

She realises that she is barefooted when her feet react sensitively to the coldness from the white squared tiles.

Draped on her body is a hideous white pants and long sleeve shirt.

Desperate for answers, she makes it to the door, and bangs it as hard as she can. It has a small window she can look through, the only thing she sees is the empty corridor.

“Mthombo! Mthombo... please open the door.” Fear can't be this real, she doesn't remember being a victim of it. Today it is so familiar with her that it

feels it's always been present.

"Someone open the door, please. I'm scared, please." Tears are her best friend.

She screams, and pleads, and cries, and cusses, and bangs the small glass... because this might be the only way she will be heard.

Someone is coming, the footsteps are loud on the floor.

"Open this door, do you know who I am? Who brought me here?" She yells.

Behind the glass and door, her son appears. It's the favourite one, MaDlamini's face lights up. Finally, she will be let out.

First thing she will do when she gets home is take a long foam bath, while munching on strawberries and cream, plus a glass of champagne.

She steps back at the sound of the key turning, the door opens and there's MaDlamini throwing herself in Mthombo's arms.

Mabahlezi is here as well but, who cares?

"Oh my baby, I am so glad you're here." She holds him tighter.

Mthombo pats her back, and lets out a sigh.

"MaDlamini!" He steps out of the hug.

His mother's innocent eyes have him looking away, it's the guilt of bringing her to this place without informing her first.

"Who brought me here, Mthombo? How did I get here?"

She can't remember the drama she caused last night in her drunken state.

"I brought you here, you need help." He tries to sound polite.

Confusion hits MaDlamini like a speeding truck, her eyes narrow and breath hitches.

Unlike most mothers, their mother is confused. She can't differentiate between love and obsession... wrong and right.

"A mental hospital is a little too much." That's her first daughter, after being ridiculed by her mother,

she continues to fight her battles.

“Where else should we have taken her? An old age home?” Mthombo mumbles.

An old age home?

MaDlamini does not know what's more offensive, her son thinking she's that old to be in a home with pensioners or that she has lost her marbles.

“How long have I been here?” She asks.

“You were brought in last night.” Mabahlezi answers.

“But why? What did I do wrong to be locked up like a crazy person?”

Only crazy people lock up other people.

“You're confused MaDlamini, you're a danger to yourself.” –Mthombo.

“That's absurd, I would never touch a strand of hair on my body. I love myself.”

Yep, she does. More than she loves her kids.

“You were laying on the road waiting for a car to run you over and when that didn't happen, you started

running towards incoming cars. That's how you got the injury on your forehead." Mthombo's explanation sounds false, it can't be true that the whole Masabata Dlamini did such an embarrassing thing.

She looks at them as if they are mad.

"No, you are lying to me. I am not crazy, you people are crazy. How can you want to lock up a sane woman?" She's yelling.

"You are not sane and this is for your own benefit." Mthombo argues.

"Mthombo, why did you bring me here?" This questionnaire is not going anywhere.

"Take me home, I want to go home." Fear has clung to her voice.

"I'm sorry, you have to stay here MaDlamini." He turns to walk out, his sister is right behind him.

For a second MaDlamini is frozen, then it hits her. They are leaving without her.

"No, I'm coming with you." She jumps on Mthombo's back, screaming.

“Mama?” The daughter exclaims in shock.

“Mthombo shakes her off, she falls on her butt crying at the pain. In this moment, four men in white scrubs run in.

One of them is carrying a straightjacket, MaDlamini screams and jumps to her feet. It’s a failed attempt to run out of this godforsaken room.

They pin her down, two grab her legs, the other two her hands. The task to strap her in a straightjacket is left to the remaining one.

She’s screaming her lungs out, calling out to her son. Mthombo walks on without giving her a second look, he is accompanied by his mother’s screams down the corridor.

SHIYIWE-

.

.

"There's the little one, 30 weeks old still healthy as a horse."

The doctor points at the ultrasound video.

I stare in amazement, a tingle surges throughout my whole body. It's a rush of excitement I only feel when I see my baby through the ultrasound. For a while, I can't think or acknowledge anything around me.

"That's our baby," Mthombo's voice brings me back.

He's on the chair, holding my hand.

"That's our baby." I glance over at him.

"She's beautiful," he says.

It's funny because all he can see is the foetus.

I hear the doctor laugh, "I thought you don't want to know the gender yet."

"We don't, my husband is so sure that we are having a girl."

"I'm never wrong," Mthombo says.

He's actually serious about this, I don't mind if it's a boy or a girl. I'm having his baby, that's all that

matters. His happiness is my happiness.

"That's it for today Mrs. Meyiwa," the doctor stands to pack his equipment.

Mthombo fixes my top and helps me off the bed to the doctor's desk.

"Do you have any questions before I write your prescription?" He asks.

"I'm having trouble breathing, sometimes it's hard to fall asleep because I can't breathe right."

He smiles, "That's nothing to worry about. Your uterus is expanding to make more space for your baby. This puts pressure on your lungs making it difficult to breathe at times. The little one is growing, we want him or her to be comfortable in there."

He adds a chuckle.

"See, living in luxury." Mthombo says, squeezing my hand.

"Remember, no caffeine, tinned foods and undercooked meat and eggs." The doctor.

"But is everything okay? Is there anything else I need

to avoid?" I ask.

Mthombo's grip tightens, I know what he is thinking.

"Like sex." I finish.

The white man's face turns pink, his eyes turn to Mthombo then to me.

"I have heard that the 8th month is crucial, I need to be extra careful with everything."

"That is a misconception Mrs. Meyiwa, you don't require special attention if your pregnancy is progressing smoothly. So to answer your question, yes you can have sex. Sex can be incredible while pregnant."

And that is coming from a man.

Mthombo is growing uncomfortable, his hand is sweating and I have lost count of the number of times he has cleared his throat.

"However, there are things you need to know about risks and positions before having pregnancy sex."

The doctor is taking this deeper.

"We know doctor, we've been doing our research."

He gives us his famous smile, “Well, in that case, my job here is done.”

He hands Mthombo the prescription, they both stand.

“Thank you doc, we will contact you if there is anything we need to know.”

Sly Meyiwa, he doesn’t mean that. In fact, he can’t wait to get out of here.

Like I said, we are rushing out of the doctor’s office.

.

“What’s the next stop?” He asks as he shuts the car door.

“I don’t know, I’m supposed to stay away from the house until Ayanda says it’s time to come.” The baby shower is today.

I have to act surprised. To say I am excited is an overly dramatic statement.

“Let’s get you pampered then, I think that’s my job for today.”

"It's your every day job, please. Don't retire so soon."

He laughs at my comeback.

"Yes ma'am," he says.

"I love that Chinese place you took me to last time."

Mthombo steals a brief look, most of his focus is on the road.

"You are booked for a whole body massage at 1pm."

-Mthombo.

Heaven knows I need a whole body massage.

We start at the hair salon, he goes in with me.

I want braids but they take time, and that's something we don't have. The hairdresser helps me choose a weave, I go for a shoulder length. She makes me promise to come back to do my nails, this will be our last stop. It's almost 1pm, I don't want to miss my appointment.

I suggest we get Nandos and pizza before we go to the spa, he's not for the idea but he doesn't have a

say. His child is the one wanting to feast.

By the time we arrive at the spa, I have finished a medium box of pizza.

“I need to grab something at Game, you should be okay with Jabulani.” He says.

Jabulani is the bodyguard he hired, he’s been with us for a week now. He hardly talks nor make eye contact, I am yet to be comfortable around him.

“Okay, hurry back. I want to go home.”

“What about your massage?”

I send him a smile, “I want to go home after the massage.”

“I won’t be long.” He says and dashes out to open the door for me. Jabulani is already on standby, he follows us around in a different car.

“Bring me two pies, cooked mealies and chips from Fish and Chips. Salt and Vinegar.”

I know that look he is giving me, he thinks I eat a lot.

“Okay, should I take the Nandos with me?” He takes

the packet, I snatch it back.

“What am I going to eat if you take my food?” He doesn’t want to make me angry.

“Sorry, I’ll buy my own then.” He says and turns to leave.

I don’t know why I grab Mthombo’s arm and pull him back.

“What’s wrong?” He asks.

“Hurry back, okay.” I sound like I’m pleading with him, maybe I am. My stomach is in knots, something doesn’t feel right.

“You can time me if you like, ten minutes and I’ll be standing next to you.”

Timing him would be extreme of me. I shrug, he caresses my cheek and jumps into the car.

This place is crowded today, could be that it’s a weekend. I’m greeted at reception, and told where to wait after confirming my appointment.

There's one spot on a chair at the corner, I feel eyes on me as I toddle there. They must have never seen a pregnant woman before, as I lower my ass on the chair, it hits me that these people are looking at Jabulani as well. He's standing next to me, standoffish.

These people must be wondering why there is a bulky man who walks like a robot following me.

I decide to eat while I wait, I have five minutes left before 1pm.

"Shiyiwe Meyiwa." The lady at the reception calls out. I was about ready to take a second bite at my chicken. I pack the food and take it with me.

The lady ushers me to one of the rooms.

"Is your husband going in with you?" She's talking about Jabulani.

"He is not my husband, I'll be going in alone sisi." I answer.

You strip naked in this place, it would be

uncomfortable with Jabulani there. He can stand outside the door.

“Sorry, I thought...”

“Don’t worry about it,” I dismiss her apology, there really is no need.

“Take all your clothes off and lie on the bed, you can leave your underwear on. There’s a towel to cover up while you wait for the masseuse.”

She leaves and shuts the door behind her. I finish my food before doing what is expected of me.

The room is warm, too warm that I’m starting to fall asleep.

I’m woken up by palms pressing against my throat, my eyes almost pop out in shock. This woman hovering over me is wearing a face mask, I can’t make out who she is.

She is wearing the uniform of this place, she could be elderly. There are wrinkles around her eyes, a little fat on her body.

Her body structure reminds me of MaMbuyazi.

I dig my nails into her wrists, trying to remove her hands. She is stronger.

“Ple... plea...” I struggle against her grip, gulping and gasping for breath.

My eyes rush to the closed door. Where is Jabulani? I want to call out to him, but I can’t utter a single word.

My baby... I’m reminded that I am expecting and I don’t want to die. Mentally, I plead with this woman.

She can’t hear me, but the tears in my eyes speak for me. She ignores my silent pleas, and tightens her fingers around my throat. I can’t breathe, no matter how much I fight to.

Energy leaves every fibre in my body, making my hands fall to my sides.

I see starburst, my vision narrows. The light in the room rapidly begins to shrink, till I see nothing but darkness.

.

.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Season Finale P17*

MTHOMBO-

.

.

Game is packed, he didn't think he would take this long. He has called Shiysiwe three times already, hoping to explain why he is running late.

Worry washes over him when she misses his fourth call, but he suddenly remembers that she might be busy with her massage.

His phone rings as he's contemplating, he answers without checking the caller ID.

"Get Shiysiwe out of there, it's a trap." This is Bhedlindaba's voice.

Mthombo drops his items and rushes out of the shop.

"What trap?" He asks.

"I had Mikhulu follow Athule's mother, something told me she's never going to take what happened to her lying down like a dog." Bhedlindaba explains.

Mthombo is in the car, driving to the spa.

"What did you find out?" He asks.

"They are planning a caesarean kidnapping, Nteboheleng is in on it. Mthombo, they want to cut your wife open and take the baby."

For a while, he can't speak. He is shocked by what he just heard. It doesn't make sense at all, why would their enmity go this far?

"Are you there?" Bhedlindaba cuts through his thoughts.

"Yeah, I'm almost at the spa. If anything happens to my wife and baby, I swear..."

"Just get there now." The call is disconnected.

He arrives in less than five minutes. There is nothing out of the ordinary in this place, clients are quietly sitting in the waiting area.

Mthombo looks around, his wife is out here somewhere.

When he doesn't see her among the people, he takes his search further and sees Jabulani standing outside a closed door.

"Where is my wife?" He grunts, eyes ready to slice the bodyguard.

"She's in there, sir. I was told to..."

Mthombo twists the door knob, the door is locked.

"Sir, I don't understand." Jabulani looks like he doesn't understand, that doesn't stop him from pulling out a gun.

"How many people are in there?" He keeps his voice low.

"Two, including Mrs. Meyiwa. The second lady just walked in minutes ago."

Ndaba was right, those two are after his wife.

"We have to break down this door."

Jabulani does not ask questions, he follows his

boss' instructions.

It takes them one attempt to knock the door down, there is a crack but, who cares? The door has been opened.

What they see is beyond shocking. Shiyiwe is tied to the bed, naked and gagged. Her knees are up and thighs open, between her legs are Ntebo and Penny with butcher knives in their hands. It looks like they have upgraded to being surgeons.

An operation was about to take place at a spa.

Caught in the act, the women are obviously startled.

A gun goes off, they hear screams outside this room. Penny has been shot dead. It's Jabulani's gun that just took her life. He aims at Ntebo, but she quickly presses the edge of the knife on Shiyiwe's baby bump.

"Don't shoot!" Mthombo gives Jabulani the order.

He holds fire but keeps the gun aimed.

Mthombo's glossy eyes turn to Shiyiwe, he can't tell if she is dead or alive.

"Is she alive?" He asks.

She refuses to open her mouth and that angers Mthombo.

"Is my wife alive?" He shouts this time.

"She is... for now." Ntebo answers, coldly.

This is a relief, Mthombo exhales.

Someone appears through the door, the gunshot must have brought this brave one here. She freezes when she sees a dead body, and what one would call a ritual upon seeing an unconscious, naked, pregnant woman with a knife held against her tummy.

"Voetsek!"

Jabulani can't be this rude.

The lady's eyes are about to fall off, she runs away trembling.

Now they can give their attention to this lunatic.

The tears in Ntebo's eyes don't move Mthombo, if he could, he would fire this gun in his hand.

"What do you see in her? What does she have that I don't?

What is she talking about? He doesn't know this person, in fact, who the hell is she?

"What do you want? Name your price and I will give it to you."

Well, there's always a start to a negotiation.

Tears dance down Ntebo's face, "I want you and this baby, I want Shiyiwe's life."

She presses the knife on the baby bump, Mthombo flinches in anger. His eyes are burning with rage.

"I want the life Shiyiwe stole from me. Why does she have to have everything? It's always about Shiyiwe, it's always been about Shiyiwe and I am tired of it."

She's crying... really!

"Shiyiwe didn't take anything from you, what makes you think she did?"

He needs to play his cards right, if Ntebo's screws snap, she will push that knife into Shiysiwe's belly.

"I know she did, she's always gotten everything. I don't know what you see in her, she is not even beautiful."

Mthombo begs to differ... he continues to listen, if he is going to save his wife and baby from this woman, he has to be careful in how he tackles it.

"I can give you a better life, Mthombo. I can be a better Shiysiwe to you and our baby." She says.

A frown is brought to his features, it's not that he is confused. He is thinking of a way on how to approach this matter.

"Ntebo, right?" He keeps his voice at bay, hand held out gesturing that she remains calm.

"Yes."

"You're beautiful, has anyone ever told you?"

"No."

"Well, you are beautiful, more beautiful than Shiysiwe."

“I know, I’ve always known. I don’t know what you people see in her.”

“I don’t know what I saw in her either. Listen, how about you let her go, and come with me. I will give you everything you’ve always wanted, a comfortable home, a ring on your finger. We’ll have our own children. How about that? Does that sound good?”

Her face softens, tears cover her eyes. She blinks, letting them fall down her cheeks.

“You’re lying to me,” she presses the tip of the knife a little further down, lower lip quivering.

Panic hits Mthombo, his eyes widen. His hand tightens around the gun, when he gets his hands on this woman, he won’t spare her.

“Why would I lie to you?” He grunts.

Time is not on his side, this girl can snap and have a change of attitude in the blink of an eye.

“I swear to God, I will take you away from here. I will give you the life you have always wanted Ntebo, just let her go.”

“But why can’t I kill her? Life would be so much easier without her in it.”

He’s not winning here, it’s as if he is talking to himself. Mthombo gulps, he needs to think of a strategy—a way to get his wife to safety.

“If you kill her, you will go to jail. You will lose everything, me, the future you’ve always dreamed of...” Fooling a naïve psycho is not a sweaty job, he can do this in his sleep.

Ntebo’s hand loosens, and loosens until she drops it to her side. In a flash, he shoots Ntebo point blank in the head. She falls to her death, blood oozing out of her head.

Mthombo’s legs come to life as he rushes to check on Shiyiwe.

He presses two fingers on her pulse point, she is still alive.

“Get these guns out of here, and call the police. We will have to come up with a story.” –Mthombo.

“They are on their way sir, along with the ambulance.

“Jabulani says.

He's quick on his feet, that's why he has a pay cheque at the end of the month.

.

.

Bhedlindaba and Bongukwanda arrive at the hospital, he welcomes them with brief hugs.

“How is she?” Ndaba is the one to ask.

“I haven't heard anything yet,” he's anxious.

Hopefully it is for nothing.

“We all know how strong of a woman Shiyiwe is, she will be fine.” Kwanda says.

Yes, Shiyiwe is strong but she breaks too, and right now, she is broken and needs mending.

They fall in silence as they wait for the unknown, time is moving too slowly and that's getting him worked up. Mthombo is irritated, but mostly by his ringing phone. Whoever is calling is not growing tired.

“Are you going to take that?” Kwanda is rather

snappy today.

What he gets is a frown.

"It's Athule, I'll talk to her later." Mthombo reveals.

"Don't you think she should know what's going on? They are waiting for her, she will worry." –Ndaba.

Athule is the last person Mthombo cares about right now. He lets the phone ring unanswered.

The doctors are taking their time, for professionals they should be done and updating him about his wife and baby. He's pacing back and forth, his hands are clammy, and his heart has found a new home in his throat.

Oh, here comes one. Looking like he's won Doctor of the year with that dramatic walk, and his Harry Potter looking –ass.

The three brothers crowd his space, his response is that of a nerd. He fixes his spectacles, giggles and shoves his hands into his pocket. They are staring down at him, making the poor man blush.

“And then?” Mthombo.

He’s the most impatient brother.

The petite young doctor cracks a smile,
“Congratulations sir. You are a father to a NICU
baby.”

This can’t be proper English.

“A what?” Mthombo mumbles, impatiently.

“Your daughter was born premature, we’ll keep her in
an incubator while we monitor her health.”

Would you look at that. There really is power in the
tongue, or the credit goes to the law of attraction.

It's a girl...

Mthombo turns to his brothers, he is a crier and they
have grown comfortable with it.

“I’m a father.”

Yes, yes! They heard the doctor. There’s a little
celebration, noise and hugs that put a smile on the
doctor’s face.

“Will she be okay, though?” He asks.

“Yes.”

“How is my wife?”

Yep! The kid must have a mother, a biological mother.

“She is resting, you may go in and see her.”

This is one proud doctor, must be doctor of the month or something.

That's a tough handshake Mthombo is giving him.

“Thank you.” Mthombo says.

This smile on his face is not going anywhere today.

They don't waste time, but crowd Shiysiwe's hospital room. She's awake, looking drained of energy and life. Her eyes want to give up and put her to sleep.

“Nonyanda,” his arms are forever active where she is concerned. “How are you?”

“The doctors cut me open, I wanted a natural birth... we have a baby.”

There is a little show behind Mthombo, it's Timon and Pumba going gaga over the baby.

Their big heads and hands are dipped inside the baby cot, silly smiles evident on their faces.

The nurse is standing on guard, waiting to take the baby away.

"Awww, she looks like a mouse." Ndaba says.

He's fallen head over heels for the little mouse.

"I think she looks like an alien, all newborn babies look like aliens." Kwanda challenges him.

Ndaba shrugs, "Mouse, alien—same thing ntwana."

Mthombo pushes them aside. Inside the cot lies the greatest gift God can give, a newborn wrapped in a pink blanket.

"My baby." He says, scooping her from her comfortable place.

Mthombo holds the baby to his chest, she is smaller than a bag of sugar.

Her tiny toes peek from the tiny blanket, he counts

them, and smiles at all ten of them. Her fingers are complete as well, her hair is a crazy mass of black curls.

“She is perfect,” he praises their little perfection in a voice that’s almost broken.

“Can you believe humans can be this tiny, and vulnerable?” He turns his glossy eyes to his wife, she nods in agreement.

“I haven’t thought of a name.” Shiysiwe introduces.

“Me too,” Mthombo.

“I say we fix your parent’s mistake, I’m sure they were drunk when they named you Shiysiwe.” Ndaba steps in, looking down at the baby.

“Her name is Ulandiwe Meyiwa.”

Not this again.

Shiysiwe’s eyes come to life, “You are not naming my child Fetched.”

.

.

My apologies this came late. Don't forget to like, comment and share...

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Season Finale P18*

SHIYIWE-

.

.

Never in a million years did we think we would experience what we went through after our baby was born. The NICU experience has changed us forever, seeing all the many tests being done on her. Having to ask for permission to hold her and watching the tiny soul fight for health.

“You said she was fine. Why are you doing all these tests on her?” Irritated and worn out, Mthombo had asked the doctor.

The baby was approaching a month old, yet we couldn’t take her home.

“It’s procedure sir, a premature baby needs to maintain their own body temperature in an open crib

before they can go home. Your little one still needs to be in an incubator for warmth with breathing tubes to help bathe them in life-giving oxygen." The doctor's answer sounded gibberish to us.

Not every black man has the ability to stand tears in their wife's eyes, Mthombo is one of them. I tried to stay strong, for him and our baby. But strength is not something we can easily hold on to.

Having to ask the nurses if I could hold my baby, or breast feed her was torture. We knew she was going to be fine. However, the fact that she was safe in the hands of the medical team didn't take our worries away.

The day the doctor cleared everything, declaring her fit to go home at 40 pounds was the element of surprise.

We were exhausted, finally we could exit the hospital without leaving her behind.

Three months after the birth of my baby girl, my life is slowly falling into place. The name Ulandiwe stays, her father says he loves it. I had no energy to argue.

We arrived in Ntuzuma last weekend, the day before lobola negotiations were going to take place.

Mthombo stayed away until the lobola was finalised and paid in full. Now he even opens the fridge like it's his father's house.

I love that he is comfortable around my family.

It feels weird being here without my grandmother.

My life was moving at a fast pace when she passed, sometimes it feels as if I didn't mourn her death.

Aunt Lindiwe is around, with uncle Mdu's wife. They are helpful with the baby and obsess over her more than I do. I love that they are willing to help, I just hate it when they lay their backward thinking on the table. I am not going to raise my baby based on their terms.

I feel Mthombo shuffle next to me... oh he's not shuffling but sitting on the bed.

"Hey."

"Uyaphi?" He's dressed in Khaki pants, a khaki shirt and a matching bucket hat.

Where did he get this farmer look? He looks like he helped steal the land from us.

"I'm accompanying uncle Mdu, we're going to get the goat."

How many times must I tell him to stay away from him, he'll come crying to me when my uncle has gotten him into trouble.

Uncle gifted Ulandiwe a goat, it's going to be slaughtered and eaten before we leave for Joburg tomorrow.

"You are looking for trouble early in the morning."

He frowns in confusion, "What trouble?"

He's like a child, I swear.

"Last time you were chased by a headless chicken.

Who knows what he has in store for you today.”

“Are you saying he’s purposely scaring me?”

Is he admitting to being scared of a chicken?

“I’m just telling you to be careful, you can’t be running away from something with short feet and four toes; and can’t even speak.”

He laughs, pressing his lips on my cheek.

“Yes, ma’am. I promise, I will behave.” He says, taking the sleeping baby from the bed. I’m thinking he wants to kiss her goodbye, but nope. He spreads a blanket on the floor and gently puts Ulandiwe down.

“Mthombo the floor is hard, don’t put her there.”

“Shh! You’ll wake her up.” He’s whispering and working on his clothes.

I told him to be careful, not strip naked.

“You not going anymore?” My eyes run to his manhood, talking about chickens got him in the mood?

“I am, after my morning glory.”

He falls on the side of the bed, and immediately covers my lips with his.

I push him back, “Mthombo, my operation.”

He forgets that I have an operation that’s taking time to heal, I don’t want to have sex. The pain kills my mood, I just hate my clit for wanting it though.

“I’ll be careful, I promise.” He runs his hand on my waist, down to my hips to caress them, and touches my nether regions.

“I love it when you don’t wear underwear,” he murmurs, looking into my eyes and massaging my clit. It was hot last night, I had no choice but to sleep naked.

One kiss, he spreads my thighs open, and takes his place. He enters me, dry as I am.

It hurts, honestly. Who said women wake up wet?

I flinch and tap his hand a few times to alert him that he’s hurting me.

Mthombo freezes.

“You good?” A faded smile crawls its way onto his lips. I frantically nod.

“I am, I want you to make love to me. So be gentle and slow.” I press a kiss on his lips, he repeats what I just did and connects his eyes with mine.

“I love you,” his hands are all over me as he breathes against my lips.

“I love you more,” I return.

A slow smile spreads across his face, there is a determined glint in his eyes.

My heart is bursting with so much love for him, it’s almost impossible to contain it. Everything about him overwhelms me, and leaves me breathless and vulnerable.

I’m used to his weight on me, and love how he dominates over every part of me.

His lips are touching me all over, a sweet wetness.

My mind can’t grasp how the temperature in the room has suddenly risen, how my body feels so warm against his.

Clenching his jaw, Mthombo sinks in, the light pressure making me whimper beneath him. I bite my lower lip, clinging on to the bedding.

I'm given gentle thrusts that are taking him deeper in. He shoves inside me, every thrusts chasing me higher until I completely lose it. The need for more of him burns my skin, as I impatiently wait for the next touch.

I don't trust myself to be sane enough to receive them, for a moment I am certain that I will lose my mind.

My response to his sweet thrusts is a loud moan.

"Is it good?" He mutters through a ragged breath, fingers digging into the flesh of my thighs as he spreads me wider.

"Yes... it's too good."

He moves in and out of me as if dancing to his favourite song, his cock deliciously pulsing in my territory.

Desperately, I mumble his name, throwing my head

back on the pillow.

Mthombo brushes my clit as he speeds up his thrusts, and throws me into a haze. We're loud, it's not right. There are rooms close by.

I cling on to him when he slams my G-spot, a mind gusting orgasm wracks through my entire body; surging from the tip of my toes, my fingertips and swirling around my body.

He is close, too close, he's determined and plunging harder and deeper. My twitching, sensitive hole appreciates his moves till he eventually groans; "God Nonyanda," and collapses on top of me.

"Wow!" I mumble, at a loss for words.

"I know."

"Wow!" I repeat, clinging on to him as I whimper at his cock pulsating between my walls.

"I'll take that as a compliment." Mthombo says against my neck, pressing his lips again and again while I continue to shudder in the repercussion of our love making.

It's surprising the baby slept through all that noise.

.

.

I thought I'd find breakfast ready, not in this house.
The only thing on the stove is a pot of porridge.
Athule and Mthandeni are not around, they left me to
do all the house chores.

I have a baby in my arms, where will I start?

Aunt Lindiwe is making her way to the kitchen, I
hope she won't ask me to prepare food.

To avoid cooking, I grab the bottle of milk and feed
my baby.

"Does this child get enough breast milk? Those
breasts ceased to be yours the day you decided to
be pregnant. They belong to Lando." I didn't decide
to be pregnant, it just happened.

I'm close to rolling my eyes at this old woman.

When I asked Mathonga to help her with her
condition, I didn't say he must go all out. Okay, that's
wrong of me to say.

I'm happy that her brain is no longer confused, that she can go through life like a normal adult.

"Haibo Shiyiwe, give me that child. That's enough Nan for today." She snatches my baby from me.

Maybe I should get her a man, someone who will fuck her brains out and make her forget about my baby.

"Aunty, I know what I'm doing. The doctor approved."

I'm not obsessed like her, but possessive. After what I went through with Ntebo and her aunt wanting to cut me open and take my baby. I have become very cautious of my surroundings.

For three months, I didn't want anyone holding het. Anyone but Mthombo and I, my family understood and gave us space. But this one crosses all boundaries without a care. She reminds me of grandma.

"Don't tell me about those people with blue eyes and doll hair, they raise their children differently."

Where on earth is uncle Mdu, he must talk to his

cousin.

“Where is your husband? Has he eaten? I made porridge, dish up for him.” She’s swinging Ulandiwe in the air.

As to why this child is smiling beats me.

“Mthombo went for a walk with uncle Mdu.”

Why is she looking at me like that?

“You call your husband by name?”

Ah yes, her adult brain was stuck in the early 90's for almost all her life, I don't blame her.

“He calls me Shiyiwe nje.” I dispute, and maybe I shouldn't have.

This version of aunt Lindiwe is scary.

“No, no, Shiyiwe. We don't do that, isiko says you call your husband baba or by his clan names.”

Yeah, if she finds out the things I say to him during sex, she would have a heart attack.

“I hear you aunty.” Sigh! I am not going to protest.

She looks at me with her judgmental eyes, there is something she is seeing on me.

“When last did you have a bath and dressed sexy?”
Huh!

“Aunty?”

“You look like you just came from the labour ward, Nonyanda. Having a baby doesn’t mean you stop looking after yourself. Don’t walk around looking like a hobo, your husband will run or lose interest in you.”

Yoh! Who let this wild woman out of prison? I must call Mathonga and find out what he gave her.

She adjusts the baby in her arms, her eyes glow whenever she looks at her.

“There is a breast pump in your grandmother’s bedroom, pump two bottles. Lando will need it tonight.”

I need to stand, it sounds like my aunt is speaking Chinese. I think I’m hearing things.

“A breast pump aunty?”

“Yes, the baby is sleeping in my room tonight. I don’t

want her hearings adult things.”

What adult things is she talking about? That look in her eyes. Oh no!

“Aunty, it’s not what you think. You see how thick Mthombo is...”

Her eyes widen. What am I saying to this adult?

“Not that aunty, I’m talking about his body. The bed is too small for him, so he fell this morning, he tried to hold on to me but I also fell. So we both... screamed... it’s not really... what....”

Sigh! I’m wasting my time, she doesn’t believe me.

“He had the whole night to fall, why choose this morning?”

Mhhh! Who knew Lindiwe was this smart?

“I don’t know why he chose to fall this morning.”

“So the screams were continuous? And why was he groaning like he’s in pain?” Yoh hai. I’m done here.

Ulandiwe starts wailing, saving me from this unnecessary interrogation. I take my baby back, and

sit to breast feed her.

"The baby is sleeping in my room tonight, don't forget."

Yeah, this means she doesn't buy my story. I didn't want to have sex in the first place.

There's someone standing at the door, his bulgy eyes are searching the spacious kitchen. He smiles brightly when they land on my aunt.

Haibo! Who is this skinny old man? She's kissing him and calls him Stevovo, giggling like a school girl.

"Thambo lam' leKentucky, unjani mama?"

I've seen it all.

My aunt laughs, "Oh Stevovo!"

Aren't we sly?

The hypocrisy of this woman... I can't watch this. She's old, and it's... I might as well be watching Mphako getting it on.

I leave to find my husband.

Here they come walking through the gate, uncle Mdu
is dragging a goat with a leash.

The distance Mthombo has created between them,
I'd say he's afraid of it, and that smug look on
Ndaba's face is not giving me hope.

Is that goat drunk or...

"Babomncane, I don't like this." I raise my concern
because why is he trying to scare my husband with
that four legged animal?

"What did I do?"

"No babomncane, I'm never bringing Mthombo here.
You are always instigating these animals against my
husband, and you know he grew up eating cheese."

He's laughing, I'm serious yet he's finding a joke in
my complaints.

"Hau mshana, I didn't do anything." He lies through
his teeth.

Mthombo must walk faster than that so I get him in the house, and shut the door.

The goat starts running, I don't know how not strong my uncle is, he's lost the grip on the leash. His four legged friend tackles Mthombo, he falls on his face.

Is this goat dry humping my husband?

"Shiyiwe get it off me." Mthombo yells.

"Uncle Mdu help him, don't just stand there." He looks over at Ndaba and I know without a doubt that they planned this.

"Bhedlindaba?" He drops his eyes.

I am defeated.

"Shiyiwe, help me. It's going to rape me," –Mthombo.

"It won't rape you babe, don't panic."

"It's going to rape me, get it off. I can feel its thing on my ass." He's squirming beneath the goat, trying to fight it off.

Why does it have so much energy? I also don't get why it's able to hold a big man like Mthombo down.

Ndaba is taking a video.

I'm about to grab Ndaba's phone when my uncle's wife rushes out the house, fuming.

"Yey wena Mduduzi, what did you do with the rest of these pills?" She's holding a bottle of pills, hand on her hip.

Uncle Mdu's face grows pale, he suddenly can't speak.

"Are you cheating on me?"

"No mama, you know I will never cheat on you."

When a man stutters, he's lying.

"Don't lie to me, Mduduzi, you bought these Viagra pills last week. Why is the bottle empty? You can't get it up without the help of these pills and I know we haven't done it in five days."

Yeah, no! Too much information.

Wait a minute!

"Uncle Mdu, you gave this goat Viagra pills?" I can

never put this past him.

His shifty eyes widen, when will he ever grow up?

“I would never do that, ask my wife.”

I am done with this uncle and I'll never bring Mthombo to this place again.

“Is that a she goat or a he goat?” I ask.

“Male, it seems to have a strong liking for Mthombo.” Ndaba answers.

Over my dead body, I am not sharing a husband with a goat.

I take off my shoe and throw it at the animal, it jumps off Mthombo.

His brother helps him to his feet.

“Thanks,” he says, taking the baby from me.

I'm going to have a talk with my uncle later, it's about time he stops abusing my husband.

“Shiyiwe, I'd like a word with you and Mthombo. Please get Athule as well.”

Ndaba is suddenly serious. What could this be about?

.

.

I'm sorry for the delay, and any errors you might have come across... the last two inserts will come tomorrow.

WHEELS OF LIFE

Season Finale- P19*

BHEDLINDABA-

.

.

His brain was once an extinguished fire, yet it killed every bad memory that tried to make a home in it. Mathe is one of those bad memories, unfortunately one he can't erase without help.

He's chosen this path, to seek help and be normal again.

He can't believe it went on for so long, that even when he relived it over and over in his dreams, his brain locked it up the moment he'd wake up.

He looks at his family, Mthombo, Shiyiwe and his first real love; Athule squashed in the living room, and takes a deep sigh.

"I'm not going to be long," he starts, his voice vibrating past his mouth.

"I'm not one for goodbyes, my brother knows that. But I feel I owe you one. You all have made a great impact in my life. Mthombo if I was ever a bad brother, please forgive me. I'm happy that you found the woman you love, and congratulations again on the little one. Take care of them, please."

There are tears behind his pupils, he pushes them back by holding his breath.

"You are probably wondering why I'm still here, lurking around and annoying my brother." His smiling eyes find Mthombo again.

"The truth is that I was waiting for my niece to arrive and now that she is here, it's time for me to go. I

don't want any of you to accompany me. Nor do I want you to visit me, I want to do this on my own."

Mthombo's face changes to concern, "You know that's impossible."

"It's possible, I need this please. Don't argue with me." Ndaba replies.

Sure he knows it's going to be hard for them to stay away, but it's what he needs in order to overcome.

"This is what I wanted to tell you, I need the space and time to heal."

His family disagrees with his decision, but they don't have a say. Ndaba is a grown man.

Mthombo hands the baby over to Shiyiwe and approaches his little brother with a hug.

It's goodbye for now, living without him won't be easy though.

.

.

ATHULE-

It feels strange having him under the same roof, we have a lot of awkward moments whenever we bump into each other.

I feel his presence behind me, funny how I can smell him from a distance.

"I have never seen anyone look so sexy while shaking a bottle."

I am going to miss this side of him, making jokes even when life is playing you.

I look back laughing, his smile is small but beautiful as ever. Today he looks different in his Pantsula outfit, today, I love the yellow spoti on him.

I don't know how things will be when he gets back, but I know and I am 100% certain that he will always be my Pantsula-wearing freak.

"Uyahleka?"

He is laughing too, although I'm cracking up like he made the best joke ever made.

“You’re crazy, you know that?” I return.

His face turns serious, did I say something wrong?

He sighs, ramming his hands into his pockets.

“Take a walk with me.”

A walk would be nice, but Shiyiwe is waiting for me.

“I can’t,” I shake the bottle to show him how busy I am.

That laugh is my favourite sound in the world.

“What? Has the baby finished the breast milk?”

Is that possible?

“No, Shiyiwe asked me to make a bottle. I’ll take it to her and come back.” I near him, his scent intoxicates all my innocent senses. I should not be seeing us, naked in bed and doing the freaky.

That smile on his face could only mean he knows what’s going through my mind.

“I’ll be right here.” He says.

Why does he have to be charming though?

Shiyiwe is fast asleep, she sleeps more than the baby. I place the bottle on the bedside table and cover my twin with a blanket. Ulandiwe cuddled up beside her mother, her lips holding on tightly to Shiyiwe's nipple.

I will see her when I come back.

.

.

"Where are we going?" We are heading out the gate, it's almost dark out. I didn't check the time and I forgot my phone.

"Look a spaza shop," Ndaba says like it's shocking to see a Pakistani shop.

"Yeah, I see."

"There is no place you won't find them, even in estates." He's not really looking down on them, it's just a statement for lack of a good conversation.

"Lets' get something, I have a few coins." Okay! He's acting weird.

The Indian guy smiles widely seeing us.

“My friend, do you have ama kip-kip?”

I don’t eat anything they sell that’s not in a sealed packet.

Ndaba buys two, I can’t say no. He will think I’m full of myself. He leads the way, down the street.

“How have you been?” He asks.

“Okay I guess.”

He stops, taking my hand into his.

“This is our first and last walk together,” he says.

My stomach sinks, I don’t want it to be our last.

“Can I get one last hug?” He opens his arms, I don’t hesitate but sink into his embrace.

“One last kiss?” I say, brushing my lips against his.

“One last, I love you.”

This one catches me by surprise.

He holds my waist, chills run through every inch of

my skin. I find myself shying away as he tilts his head to look into my eyes.

“Ntwana, I came at the wrong time.” He keeps his voice near to his lips, rasping and rumbling all at the same time.

“I was a mess of a person, but what I felt for you was real. I’m sorry for not loving you right. You are worth it, Athule. Don’t ever doubt that.”

This assurance changes everything.

“Do you think we will ever find our way back to each other?” I’m holding on to the small hope that one day I will be loved by him and it will be perfect.

“I don’t know, I don’t even know if I will come back to Johannesburg. Maybe my destiny is elsewhere.”

That’s disappointing.

He lets go and steps back, I want to stay in his arms a while longer. Then again, I never get what I want.

“I have to go, my ride must be here.”

“Your ride?”

"Mikhulu is on his way, he's driving me there. I don't want my brothers to see me in that place."

He repeats what he said back in the house, to be honest, I am against it. How will he function without family?

He gives me one final hug, it's hard to let go. I don't want him to leave. His arms loosen around me, tearing every part of me. I try to blink away tears, but they come anyway.

Ndaba pecks my lips, "I will see you around ntwana. Take care of yourself."

For a while he doesn't move, he is looking into my eyes while I'm tearing up as if he relocating to Mars.

My heart shatters as I watch him walk down the street.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

We drove back to Joburg yesterday, no one has heard from Bhedlindaba. He doesn't want to be contacted, I guess we'll see him when we see him. Mthombo is not as worried as I thought he would be, which is a relief for me. I don't have to baby him.

Today Mthandeni is moving out, she's decided to live with Mphako, Athule, Ayanda, and Sizwile. It makes me happy that she is willing to give him a chance, Mphako has been waiting for this day since he found out that Mthandeni is his daughter.

My sister is making progress with her healing, she is able to talk about the past and voice out her feelings without bursting in tears.

I love the growth, and her resilience.

"Shiyiwe, there is woman looking for you outside." I raise my eyes to Nolwazi peeking through the guest bedroom.

"Who is it?"

"She didn't say," she shrugs.

Mthandeni follows me outside while Nolwazi stays with the baby, we are both surprised to see Samkelisiwe. Mthandeni holds on to my hand, her face lacks emotion. I can't tell what she is thinking.

"Shiyiwe!" Her arms are crossed, and she's wearing an unfriendly face that lets me know that she is not here for tea and biscuits.

"Samu." I keep a safe distance.

"Let me get straight to the point, a man in an expensive suit came to the house this morning. He wants me and my children to vacate with immediate effect."

This is news to me, "He wasn't sent by me."

"I sent him." Mthandeni cuts in, eyes glaring at Samu.

"Why? Do you want to go back there?" I thought she was over that house, it doesn't matter that we grew up there and that it belonged to our parents. Samson and Gezani stained it.

"No, I want to use it for business once my inheritance money has been released to me, I will

turn it into a preschool."

Oh! That's smart.

"Where will my children and I stay? That house is the only home we know, Samson didn't have plan B when he brought us there." Samu says.

She's rude about it, you'd think she would play nice considering that she is at my sister's mercy.

"That's not really my problem, the house belongs to me." Mthandeni declares.

"I think you should let them stay there, if you want, Samu can pay rent. It's not for her, but the kids."

Mthandeni shakes her head.

"I don't owe them anything, give me one good reason why I should agree."

I pull her to the side for a quick chat. Mthandeni doesn't need that place, nor does she need the crèche.

"Please let them stay, the kids have no idea that their

father was a monster. They are innocent, why should they pay for his mistakes?"

"We don't owe those people anything, please stop being nice to her."

She doesn't know that I took their father from them.

"I know, but greed will get us nowhere. What will you possibly gain by throwing Samu and her kids out on the streets?"

She rolls her eyes, "Fine but she has to pay rent. It's still my house."

I'm sure Samu wouldn't mind paying rent. I have asked too much of Mthandeni, I can't expect her to agree to everything I say.

Samu still has her arms crossed, she impatiently taps her foot as we approach.

"You can keep the house." I tell her the good news, I expect a thank you, not the eye roll she just gave us.

"It's not like I needed your permission. I just wanted you to get that lawyer off my back."

Oh wow!

“You know what...”

“I think we’re done,” I interject my sister. She can be very defensive when provoked.

“I don’t know what you’re using Shiyiwe, but your luck will run out soon. One day, you will come to me and confess to killing Samson and my son.”

She drops the bomb I didn’t want revealed to my sister, and strides down the driveway, swaying her hips with an attitude in her walk.

The air outside suddenly feels disgustingly humid, I can’t look at Mthandeni. I don’t want to know what she thinks of me after hearing that.

Her hand is on my shoulder, a comfy rub.

“Is she telling the truth?” I brave it up as I look at her, but keep my reply.

“I’m not judging you sisi,” that’s all she says.

Her arms tightly wrap around me.

It was never my intention to hurt anyone, I was angry

and not thinking straight. Revenge was the only thing on my mind.

WHEELS OF LIFE-

Finale

SHIYIWE-

It's a miracle that I survived five years as Mthombo's wife and Ulandiwe's mother. Those two are cut from the same tree, there is no peace whenever they make their presence known.

It's been a hell of a ride with them, I wouldn't trade them for anything. Honestly, I can't remember how my life was before them.

We still live in our old house, Nokwazi is still with us. Her grandmother Makhosi has become part of the family, it took time for Mthombo to warm up to her again.

Ulandiwe calls her gogo, their relationship is beautiful to watch. It can make one jealous as well, I'm talking about Masabata Dlamini.

Yep, the queen is back in town. Turns out she really was crazy.

She was released from the mental institution about eight months ago. We were taken aback by her change of heart, humble and willing to make peace. As long as I'm not part of that peace treaty.

She still doesn't like me much, but tolerates me for her son and grand daughter.

Mabahlezi took her in, she has a soft spot for her. MaDlamini visits whenever she can, we were surprised by how fond of our baby she was.

Their relationship is growing, Ulandiwe calls her grandma, and MaDlamini; well she likes it. I've seen how her face glows whenever she sees my baby.

Mabahlezi and her husband had a fallout and went their separate ways, she adopted Sikolethu after her

divorce was finalised two years ago. Rumour has it she is seeing someone, I'm guessing he is the reason behind her bulging belly. Yes, sis is pregnant and showing.

My father and uncle started a farm together, they have it all, chickens, goats, cows and sheep.

Mphako spends more time in KZN than he does here. He's made peace with his son Sbonelo, our brother. I met him twice in five years, he is too reserved. Almost as if he is always thinking about something, I find it creepy really.

Mthandeni and Lithizwi are going strong, he's old fashioned apparently. Way too old fashioned. My baby has been complaining about the guy wanting to wait for marriage before they hit the sack.

I love him for that, in fact, I'm thinking of funding their wedding when he decides he is taking her as his wife.

Her ex Mzingisi came back, wanting her back. Another man had taken over, fortunately.

We work together, Mthandeni and I. Turns out she was dead serious about opening a day-care centre. It's three years old, we take children from 6 months to five years old.

Ulandiwe is excluded in that five years, she gives me enough headaches at home. I can't have her stressing me out at work as well. I told her father to get the little menace away from me, and find her a school elsewhere. I love her to pieces, but the child is wild.

"Lando get down from there." I screech, the hall falls into silence.

This is my daily life, always yelling at this child. Don't touch that—you will fall; careful that's hot—stop playing with your spit.'

I might write a song and play it for her, that's how exhausted I am.

Today we're having a school function for the little ones, parents have come to see their babies performing in dance and music.

I had to bring Ulandiwe, her school closed last week.

She is going to big school next year, grade 1. I'm hoping the discipline is good there. I need help.

"Mommy look, I can fly." Her arms are spread out, she's about to jump from that table that's taller than her.

"Ulandiwe Meyiwa," I shout running to catch her before she jumps.

"I believe I can fly." She sings at the top of her lungs and takes a leap of faith.

I freeze, shut my eyes. I'm too far from her, what will be will be.

"Mommy look," I hear giggles and open my eyes to see her safe in Kwanda's arms. The smile she gives me finishes all my strength, how am I supposed to be upset with her when she's smiling like that?

I find myself shaking my head.

"Thank you Kwanda," I grab the little rascal and give her a few spanks on her butt.

"You. Don't. Listen. What. Did. I. Say. About. Climbing. Things?" She's not crying, she never cries when I

spank her. I need to toughen my hand and hit her for real.

One day when Mthombo is out of town, away on his business meeting.

“You said I will be strong if I hurt myself again, you won’t drive any child to the hospital.” She remembers, she was four when I told her that.

She came home from school with a broken finger and my exact words were, “you’ll be strong.” I left her like that.

She cried and told her father, which got us in a fight.

“Yes, if you continue acting like a monkey. Only monkeys climb things baby.”

Her lower lip pops out, she thinks that puppy look will work on me. Okay maybe it’s working, she is my weakness after all.

“But Spiderman and Superman climb things and they can fly,” she thinks she is smart.

“You are not Spiderman, or any of those people.”

I blame Sikolethu for this, he makes this child watch

those silly shows.

“But bhuti said I can fly if I really believe and wish for it.”

Bhuti is Sikolethu. I am defeated.

“Let her be sisi, she’s a child.” Kwanda.

Yeah, a child that will break a leg and an arm if she continues with her craziness.

When she was four, she climbed a tree obsessed with this flying thing and broke a leg. Mthombo put the blame on me because it happened under my watch.

I am not having it again.

Where is Mthombo anyway? He’s supposed to fetch us, the show is almost over.

“Let’s go get some ice cream,” Kwanda scoops her in his arms and hurries away before I get a chance to tell him it’s too late for ice cream. Ulandiwe is going to spoil her appetite, I can’t grasp how she has these brothers playing in the palm of her hand.

Bhedlindaba is no different, they are close. He’s

been calling via video call since she was a baby, wanting to speak to her. She is the only one he ever wants to speak to, the rest of us have to wait till he gets back.

Like Bongukwanda and Mthombo, he is like a present father to Ulandiwe. No birthday or Christmas has passed without him sending her gifts.

I feel arms around me, and a kiss is placed on my neck. It's him, I can smell him, besides, I can never mistake these arms wrapped around me even if I were blind.

"Sorry I'm late," a red rose is held out.

"Where have you been?"

He breaks the hug, and turns me to face him.

I take in the wrinkled blue collared shirt I ironed this morning, the sleeves are rolled up and tie loosely hanging around his neck.

"The Christmas party went on longer than I expected, I had to escape my colleagues. They wanted to take

the party to a club.” He shakes his head in laughter.

“It’s a good thing you escaped, your daughter was trying to fly again. I have had it up to here with her.”

Mthombo continues to chuckle, “She’s a kid. Let her have fun.”

Bongukwanda’s words. These men must walk a mile in my shoes.

“Where is she anyway?” His eyes leave me to search for his partner in crime.

“Hey, I’m still here. Your daughter is safe with her other father.” I say, making him look at me.

He rubs the back of his neck nervously, “I just want to greet her with a kiss then I’m all yours.”

Greet her with a kiss for what? They saw each other this morning.

Mthombo swooshes past me, I guess I’ll accept to be invisible until he’s done having his father-daughter moment.

Ulandiwe spots him from a distance, I hear her scream from here.

I'm sure these guests have accepted that I have a crazy daughter. Mthombo spreads his arms as he slouches down, she tackles him with a hug. He falls on his back, with her still in his arms and fake groans.

That puts a flurry of giggles in her mouth.

I feel a lump on my throat as I watch my little family, Lord if I was ever ungrateful, forgive me.

"My cup is overflowing, you have given me too much Lord." I mumble to myself and wipe the tears wanting to embarrass me in public.

"You best believe this is more than enough." That's Mthandeni wrapping her arms around me.

I didn't see her coming.

"You have a beautiful family sisi, Lando is deliciously adorable with those chubby cheeks and bubbly personality." She says.

I look over my shoulder and meet Mthombo's eyes, he winks and continues swinging the child around.

"Try taking her for a week, then come and tell me

how demonic she is.” I joke.

Mthandeni throws her head laughing, “You’re exaggerating.”

“Is the party over?” I ask, this show has been going on since 5pm. It’s late now.

“Yes, parents are slowly grabbing their kids and heading out. Snookums is officially closed for the year.” She flashes a big smile.

Don’t ask about the name, Mthombo had everything to do with it.

.

.

ATHULE-

I am the happiest woman in the world right now, I finally found the one for me.

I update my Facebook status, and log out to avoid a flood of notifications.

“Here are your keys, ma’am. Congratulations on your new baby.”

The salesman hands me the keys, finalising the deal. This baby is mine, and fully paid off with the money I worked hard for.

I never saw myself driving a Mercedes... Life really is a wheel, mine went around in circles. I had no clue what I was living for, I thought I needed other people's validation in order to love myself.

Turns out I was lying to myself. Here I am, five years later. An independent woman.

Today is Christmas, a public holiday. I could've gotten my car any time of the week but when the salesman called and told me my car was ready, I couldn't wait.

I haven't told anyone yet, the plan is to surprise them at the Christmas party Shiyiwe is hosting.

Thambo knows about it, he relocated to Europe four

years ago. I haven't lost touch with him, he's that male bestie that's always there when I need someone.

He talks about his feelings for me sometimes but I can never see him like that.

There's another man who tries to worm his way into my life; Xolani. It'll never happen. He must stay where he is, away from me.

Another person I keep in touch with is Wandisa, Ndaba's "cousin." She reached out to me on social media, I wanted nothing to do with her at first, but she was persistent. We meet from time to time, she's not that bad a person.

What the hell? Someone is knocking on my car window. I blink myself out of my thoughts, my car is the only one not moving. Damn!

I look up and I swear my eyes are deceiving me.

He hunches over as I roll the window down.

"Hey, lady with the course hair. You're causing

traffic.”

I freeze, I haven’t heard his voice in years. Okay, Athule. You need to breathe.

I step out of the car and lo and behold, it really is Bhedlindaba Meyiwa.

He looks and smells filthy rich, and appears stronger than I’ve ever seen him.

He still wears that pantsula outfit like a boss. A faint smile appears at the corner of his mouth, this man will never not be beautiful.

“Oh my God!” I throw my arms around him, it’s the excitement. I can’t believe he’s here, standing in front of me.

He smiles, extending his hand to me.

“Hi, my name is Bhedlindaba Meyiwa and I think you’re beautiful.”

Still a charmer I see. I don’t know what he’s playing at but I shake his hand.

“Athule Makhedama, you are not too bad yourself sir.”

Ndaba chuckles, “Nice to meet you. Would you like to grab a coffee?”

“Depends who’s buying?”

He’s amused by my answer, “What if I say the coffee shop is under my name?”

Well, I can’t say no to that.

I can’t stop smiling, “In that case, lead the way.”

He bows a little, a small smile, then he walks back to his car.

Would you look at fate...

It’s hard to open yourself up to love again when you’ve lost the person you loved the most. Being single for five years was a choice, not because I was holding on to the hope that Ndaba would one day come back.

.

.

SHIYIWE-

Baby shark is busting loud in my house and this child is singing at the top of her lungs. It's bloody Christmas morning. Who listens to baby shark on a Christmas morning?

I miss MaMbuzazi and her Rebecca Malope bursting through the speakers on Christmas mornings.

I find Ulandiwe in the kitchen, on top of the kitchen Island, with a wooden spoon in her hand, dancing and singing along to the song that's been stuck in my head since she was a year old.

This child thinks she is on stage, it doesn't help that Mthombo is standing there cheering her on.

The kitchen is a mess, whatever they were trying to do is obviously an epic fail.

I rush back to the living room to turn the volume down. I'm growing grey, these people do not want to see me happy.

They are looking at me like I just ruined their lives.

"Why is my kitchen a mess?"

"I'm making a Christmas cake for daddy." She

giggles.

“We bought a Christmas cake.” I tell her, only to have her shake her head.

“Nope, my daddy doesn’t like store bought cakes.”

Oh! I look at the daddy, he’s grinning at me.

Mthombo does that thing of rubbing the back of his neck.

“I don’t like store bought cakes,” he sounds like a kid.

“Tough, we are all going to eat the cake I bought. You know how I feel about wasting food.” They look at each other and giggle.

“Mommy relax, it’s not that deep.” She’s repeating her father’s words, plus she talks too much for a five year old.

“The guests are going to be here any minute from now, who is going to clean this mess up.”

“I will, daddy said he’ll help me. Right, daddy?”

“Yes baby, we’ll ask Nolwazi to lend a helping hand as well.”

I give up on these two.

"You," I point at Ulandiwe. "Get off my counter, now."

Mthombo helps her down, I want to have a word with him.

"You, bedroom now."

"Oh! Oh! You're in trouble daddy." She covers her mouth with her hand, giggling once more.

Just as I turn to leave, the door swings opens.

Mthandeni walks in with Lithizwi. There is never a time when they are not lovey-dovey.

He greets and goes to the lounge, there is probably a show he doesn't want to miss. He's a TV person.

"90 day fiancé is on, I regret introducing him to it," she doesn't sound like it.

Something is blinding my eyes, I'm not an expert on rings, but this is an engagement ring on her finger.

"Is that what I think it is?"

She shows me a wide smile first, then wriggles her

fingers to show me the ring.

“Lithizwi proposed.”

Oh wow! Mphako is going to have a heart attack.

“Babe, are you sure?”

“I love him, he loves me more. What more could a girl ask for?” She says.

I can tell she is smitten, I pull her in for a hug.

“I’m happy if you’re happy, congratulations my love.”

“Hello!” That’s Athule disturbing our moment.

Wait a minute, is that Bhedlindaba behind her.

“Family.” He greets, tipping his head a little.

Ulandiwe goes crazy upon seeing him, Mthombo is forgotten.

“And then?” I ask Athule.

Really, I didn’t know they were talking.

“We met on our way here, why didn’t you tell me he’s back?” She keeps her voice low.

“He wanted to be the one to tell you.” I reply.

Ndaba got back this week, it was a surprise to all of us.

“Whose Merc is that outside?” Mthandeni asks, peeping out the window. I rush to check, and yeah there is a white Mercedes-Benz SUV parked outside.

“That’s my baby.” Athule smiles proudly.

“That’s what the status update was about? I thought you were talking about something with a dick.”

Mthandeni has a loose mouth. It’s funny, I can’t help but laugh.

We all run outside to drool over the car, I’m definitely taking this one for a spin. Yes, yes, I can drive now. My vision is growing, being a house wife doesn’t excite me anymore.

.

.

“Why are you not wearing the red dress?”

I hate red, that’s why. It doesn’t go with my body. I managed to lose a good amount of weight, now I’m

comfortable wearing body-hugging dresses like this one.

"I like the green one best babe, it compliments my figure."

He bought the dresses and loved the red one more.

With lust dancing in his eyes, Mthombo grips my waist and pulls me to him.

"How about we go upstairs and have a quickie before lunch?"

Not a chance.

"My father is in the house, forget it," I reject him kindly.

"Argh, when are they leaving? I want to have my wife all to myself." Now he wants me all to himself, till his baby girl comes along.

I have never doubted that Mthombo would be a great father, I didn't know it would be this breath-taking.

He would die for his daughter.

"We'll be full by the time they leave, I won't be having

sex on a full stomach.”

Laughter tumbles past his tongue, “I love you Mrs. Meyiwa. Thank you for the beautiful family you’ve given me.”

I couldn’t have said it better.

“I love you too Mr. Meyiwa, and thank you for being the best father in the world, and an amazing husband.” I break from the hug and take his hand.

“Everyone is waiting, shall we join them?”

He smiles, tightens his grip on my hand and leads the way.

Everyone is here, Uncle Mdu and his wife. They came with aunt Lindiwe and the kids. My eyes find my father, he greets me with a slight head tip. Beside him is Ayanda and Sizwile, Sbonelo made it as well. Of course Athule, and Bhedlindaba beside her. My engaged sister and her fiancé, Lithizwi. The Meyiwa siblings; Bongukwanda, and Mabahlezi, plus their significant others, including the two grandmothers,

Makhosi and MaDlamini. Those two don't get along well, all because of Ulandiwe. MaDlamini hates that she has to share her granddaughter with the woman who once worked for her.

The last born of the family, Culolethu couldn't make it, her flight got cancelled due to heavy snow. That one doesn't want to be in Africa.

Ulandiwe leaves the kid's table and settles on Bhedlindaba lap, I can't tell her anything.

I look at Sikolethu, he's the tallest child at the kid's table. With that bored look on his face, he doesn't want to be there.

He is only 15 years old, unfortunately, he will have to bear his age mates till he is of age.

I feel Mthombo's hand on the small of my back, he hands me a glass of wine and takes his from the table.

"Before we feast, I'd like to toast to family." He raises his glass. "I wouldn't trade any of you for gold."

“To family!” Everyone says, clinking glasses.

Mthombo looks into my eyes, his lips press on mine.
A deep brief kiss.

“I wouldn’t trade you for anything Shiyiwe,” another kiss.

I wouldn’t trade him for anything either, he is my life, my soul and every breath in my lungs.

“Daddy pick me up,” Ulandiwe is bouncing in front of him.

Mthombo places his glass down and takes her in his arms.

“Merry Christmas family.” He says.

“Merry Christmas.” We return in unison and the party commences.

Fate is not that bad after all, I’m grateful for my family. My husband and my baby.

This is where the wheels of life stop, it’s time for us to get off and get on the wheels of happily ever after.

.

.

THE END

A/N: Mama we made it!!!

Thank you so much for staying with me throughout this journey, for your lovely, continued support and for growing this family. Your engagement means a lot to me. I love you to the moon and Mars.

I pray we continue to grow as we go.

The new story will start this week, I'm not sure of the day yet. We're taking a break from thriller; guns, knives, and witchcraft lol. Pull my ears if you see me taking that direction.

Also, we might change the name of the page to Tale it like Cheryl Zee. Don't be alarmed, it's still me. Don't forget to invite your mom, dad, and everyone who knows you.

All my love, Cheryl Chez Zee...