



CHERYL ZEE BRINGS YOU A SKHANDA LOVE

CALL ME DADDY

A NOVEL

CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 1

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“Will you be okay?”

I don’t know how to answer Juba’s question. I never thought Joburg would fail me and I would find myself taking the first taxi back to KZN with nothing to my name.

“Yes.” I have been giving him one word replies. I am not happy with him.

“Baby, isn’t there anything I can do to help?” He knows there’s something he can do, like offer me money and a place to stay.

He looks at me with pity in his eyes as he folds his arms on his chest.

“Don’t worry about me,” I say.

Whoever told him I need a hug can kiss my black ass. He tightens the embrace when I try to pull apart from him. Hugs are forbidden at taxi ranks, drivers don't like this kind of content. When he lets go, he tilts my chin up, making me look into his eyes.

What a waste of thick eyebrows and a bushy beard.

"I love you, don't forget about me, okay?"

Like he forgot about me when I was incarcerated for 2 years. The reason I called him after my release is because I was stranded and had nowhere to go.

I hope the Ngwenya ancestors punish him for daring to breathe after abandoning me when I was arrested. He won't be the first man whose ancestors turn their backs on.

I put up a façade of a smile, after all, he's sponsoring my trip back home, instead of

helping me start afresh. I know he has the money.

“How can I? There is no life in KwaNyuswa, I promise to occupy all my time thinking of you.”

And begging karma to visit you.

“Sisi, are you leaving or not?” Says the grumpy taxi driver.

I’m yet to meet a kind one, Joburg taxi drivers are all the same. Rude as fuck!

Ntando is no different. He’s Juba’s younger brother, a year younger than me. He has no respect whatsoever.

Juba gropes my ass, pulling me closer to him when I tell him that I have to go.

“Give me some sugar.” He kisses me without my permission, then proceeds to his Mercedes-Benz E-Class.

I don’t look back as I take my bag and weave

my way through the crowded taxi rank, it's three days after Christmas. Where are these people going?

Ntando has reserved a seat for me at the front, just what I do not need.

The disadvantage of taking the front seat in a taxi is counting change, something I am not an expert in. I haven't been in a taxi in years, boy, I was living the life before my arrest. It was so perfect that I forgot everything I had was built with innocent blood, and tears.

My parents believed, and still believe that I am an OPS (Operations Manager Salary) at SARS. It wasn't my dream job but when the door opened, I took it with both hands.

I was 21 years old when I left Bothas Hill KwaNyuswa, in my handbag was an interview letter from SARS. The future was promising, so

much so that I filled my parents' hearts with many promises, promises I knew I couldn't break.

My father worked hard to get me through varsity, and I graduated with a degree in Business management. Neighbours knew when to run and hide when Madlala showed up on the streets because his greeting would transition to stories about his beloved daughter.

The entire village knows what position I hold at my so-called work place and how much I earn, and that I am my father's pride and joy because he never misses a chance to tell them.

He's the real definition of a chatter box.

Things didn't work out for me in Joburg, I didn't get the job. But that was no reason for me to go back home, I couldn't disappoint my father like that. I got to know that Joburg isn't the city of

gold everybody talked about and why it's called "igoli eligola amadoda."

Only, I'm a woman and I wasn't safe from it. It's survival of the fittest out there. Eat or be eaten—Kill or be killed—go hard or go home and I had to choose a struggle.

Unfortunately, my struggle didn't lead me to greener pastures.

Some died while chasing rands and mansions, I count myself as one of the lucky ones. At least I'm on my way back home, five years later, not in a coffin nor infected with a killer virus.

Every year, except the years I was locked up, I visited my family once, during Christmas holidays. This time I'm going there for good.

The taxi ride is long and lonely. My phone battery dies along the way, I can't even tell Juba how far I am. It's afternoon, we'll probably arrive

at dusk.

My thoughts are interrupted by the taxi abruptly stopping and screams from commuters. The driver hit someone. I almost fly out the window but Ntando pushes me back with his hand.

“Shit!”

Cusses are always at the tip of his tongue.

I watch in wander as he flies out the taxi, removing a gun from his belt buckle.

It's the Shaka Zulu in him, always ready to fight.

Every one exits the taxi, panicking and worried.

Ntando is pointing a gun at a man picking himself up from the ground, the poor man's mother has been sworn at and ridiculed.

Only Ntando would run over a person on a bicycle and shift the blame on him.

“Yey wena Mzekezeke, I'm talking to you. Are you going to pay for my taxi?” Ntando barks.

He's bashing the man's skin colour which is dumb considering Ntando's is pitch black as well.

The man doesn't bother to look up, he must be deaf because anyone would be apologizing profusely when pointed at with a gun by an angry taxi driver.

"What if he's hurt?" I ask Ntando.

"What if my taxi was hurt by his bicycle. He should be riding it where pedestrians walk."

That's stupid, I'm sure he was crossing the road.

The man stands up tall, bringing his bicycle with him. He is huge and way—way taller than Ntando. He looks constipated, like he's holding in a fart. He looks like the type that has sex without kissing and cums with a straight face.

"Sorry." The man speaks, a thick, deep rumble that matches his built and stone cold face.

A tongue click, “Can’t you drive your toy on the side of the road?”

Why do I keep forgetting that Ntando thinks Shaka Zulu was his grandfather?

Let me also apologize.

“My brother, I’m really sorry for my friend. It’s just that it’s been a long ride, we come all the way from Johannesburg and...” And why am I bailing Ntando out?

The man looks at me and I lose all the words I was about to say, it must be my deep voice. I have been mistaken for a man before, I get it from my mother.

Plus the basketball shorts and sweater I’m wearing aren’t helping.

There’s a silver pendant necklace around his neck, with the initials DG. Don’t tell me they

stand for Dolce and Gabbana. It's definitely fake, I have a good eye for these things. Juba taught me well, I can spot fake from a distance.

He sees me and my zoom lenses on his neck and frowns, I frown back because there is no way I will ever let a man intimidate me.

Especially a man wearing corduroy pants and a flannel shirt in this hot weather. Does he have to tuck in?

I don't care much about people's dressing, but this one feels too personal. It's hurting my feelings.

He gets on his bicycle and rides away. Well, he just saved himself from being murdered.

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“Wake up, we’re here.”

The displeased voice sounds far in my dreams,
but wakes me up still. My eyes open to meet
Ntando just as he's ready to nudge me again.

"Are we there?" I ask, looking around.

I'm the only one in the taxi.

His frown tells me how thoughtless my
question is.

"Cashile?" He is always frustrated.

I don't need to be told twice, I exit the car, and
drag my bag from the back. He speeds away as
I shut the door.

My dream was to renovate my father's house,
nothing has changed, it still looks the same.

The main house is surrounded by two rondavels,
one is mine and the other belongs to my brother
Buhlebakhe.

He's the guy exclaiming, "Mami!" at his big age,
29 and a momma's boy. My mother spouts out

of the house, she's running behind Bakhe.

They were informed of my arrival. I kick him when he jumps for a hug and wrap my arms around my mother, she's praising God for my safe travels. She's forever in a pinifa and a doek, she's plump and shoulders shorter than me. My brother and I got our height from my father.

"Where is your Golf 8 GTI? Your father told everyone that you drive a Golf 8."

"Everyone" is the villagers.

"Work has been so busy ma, I was too tired to drive so I took a taxi." I play with the slings of my bag, too ashamed to look into her eyes.

Bakhe laughs, he knows what I have been up to. I will kill him if he reveals my secret.

She places her hands on her hips, "Oh Cashile wami. Why didn't you book a flight?"

She thinks I was living the dream in Joburg.

“I missed you Ma. Where’s dad?”

She laughs, “He took the cows to the river.”

“I thought he would be at the garage, fixing cars. Does he still work there?”

He’s a mechanic, and runs a small garage that generates very little money.

“He took the day off today. Go and freshen up, then come and eat. Khehla help your sister with her bags.” Mah says, walking towards the main house.

Somethings never change, Bakhe is still Khehla at 29?

“Did she leave her hands in Joburg?” Bakhe protests, returning the kick I gave him earlier.

What happened to the special treatment given to us who have been hard at work in Joburg? He follows his mother, I will get my revenge.

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My door is slightly open, Mah must have been cleaning. I push it and lo and behold, I have company.

“Nothando?”

I knew baba told the entire village I was coming, the news should've missed this girl at least.

“Welcome home.” Her eyes seductively scan the entirety of my body as she stands from my bed. I almost lose my eyes at what she’s wearing.

“Nothando, a panty and bra in my father’s house?” I grab a blanket and cover her, it angers her so much that she throws it back on the bed and huffs.

“It’s not a panty.” She twirls, giving me a full view of her thick body. There’s no doubt she’s

gifted in all the right places and I found her attractive once upon a year but not enough to want to smash her.

I was young back then, a little rebellious. I'd seduce girls, get them in the mood, to a point of no return and then call my brother to come finish the job.

They slept with him, and threatened us after they'd been satisfied. I did it for the thrill of it, the adrenaline and power of bringing them to their knees.

I was in a relationship with Nothando when I left for Joburg. I wasn't looking for a relationship, she was just another victim of mine.

I regret making her believe that I was into her. I date men now.

"This is Victoria Secret." Thando says, stretching her thick lips into a beautiful smile

while sensually running her hands over her body.

Why is she insulting Victoria Secret?

That's Mohamed's Secret, I know she bought it at an Indian shop.

"Didn't you miss me, Cashile?"

I dodge her arms coming for my neck and stand on the other side of the bed. She's hurt and confused.

"I thought you missed me just as much."

Nothando says.

She gets on my bed and buries her face on my pillow. I don't even cry on my pillow, it's probably shocked.

I sit and rub her back, and maybe it was a bad idea because she tackles me, flipping me over so she's straddling me.

She leans in for a kiss, I move my head aside

before her lips could touch mine. She's all over me, kissing and touching me. There is only way out of this situation.

Nothando is stubborn, I hope after what I'm about to do, she will blame it on her stubbornness. I flip us over, topping her, then shower her body with kisses. She tries to reach for my lips but that's a no-go-zone.

When I have pressed all her sensual buttons and she's wet and moaning, I make an excuse of going to the bathroom.

"Hurry back." She giggles, squirming and grinding on my bed. She's touching herself and biting her bottom lip.

Yeah neh!

I rub the back of my neck then give her a thumbs up and step out, my brother is standing outside my door. He smiles as he waves a condom in the air.

“You knew she was here to seduce me?” I ask, shocked.

“She’s been in love with you since she was born,” he laughs and enters my rondavel.

I don’t hear a scream, so far so good.

I haven’t been standing here for a second, when Nothando runs out of the rondavel, wearing Bakhe’s t-shirt.

Are they done?

She shoots daggers of anger at me, “You are going to pay for this.”

And there she goes, running out the gate.

“She didn’t want me to touch her.” Bakhe walks out, zipping his jeans. He’s lost his touch.

“She’s going to tell on us.” I tell him, he is not bothered.

He pats my back, “Don’t worry, we are in this together. I have your back.”

That’s good to know.

“Welcome home, dade.” He brushes my head before leaving.

I decide to charge my phone, unpack and bath before going to the main house for dinner, it's still light out.

I have to prepare myself for dad's interrogation when he gets home from work. I can't lie to him but I also can't tell him where I've been.

On my way out, I see a man walk through the gate. He's headed to the main house, his direction changes when he sees me.

I'm confused. Did he follow me here?

“What are you doing here? How did you know where I live?” It's the bicycle guy, and his flannel

shirt.

I could've sworn this man got up and rode away in his bicycle. Am I seeing ghosts? Damn! I knew Ntando killed him when he ran him over.

“Hello Cashile Madlala.”

Oh fuck! It knows my name. I step back, my first thought is to scream but fear is being a bitch right now.

“Look, I’m not the one that ran you over with a taxi. My hands are clean, go haunt Ntando Ngwenya, he’s the taxi driver who ran you over. He stays in Newcastle, Madadeni section one. Caleni Street number 44. It’s a grey house with a black gate, taxi registration number CF 02 GB GP.”

I’m not going down for Ntando’s sins, he’s used to getting away with shit.

“Cashile! Cashile!” My mother is calling me, she’s coming this way.

That's not a name you should be screaming at the top of your lungs. Oh but how I wish I was my name right now, hidden away from this ghost.

"Mbuzo. Kunjani baba? Don't you recognize Cashile? You two used to bath together when you were kids." She's grinning at him.

No way, he can't be Mbuzowakhe Xaba. He was my best friend, male bestie. I was soul and he was body.

I cried for hours the day his father sent him to boarding school, he was 14 and I was 8 years old.

I never saw him again.

He lets out a chuckle, no teeth or smile. I think he's always in pain, or constipated.

"I do Mah, she's the reason I'm here. Nothando came home crying. Apparently Bakhe and KaMadlala wanted to sleep with her." He raises

an eyebrow my way, his anger is justified. But Nothando didn't have to snitch.

Wait a minute! How does he know Nothando?

"What did you do Cashile?" My mother channels her anger at me.

I look around for my brother, and see him climbing the fence next door. The same 29-year old baby who said he has my back is running away.

Judas Iscariot is a saint compared to him.

I need a smoke!

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The journey has begun, like, comment, share and tag a friend.

[03/06, 15:40] T: Character names translation.

*Mbuzowakhe - His questions

*Cashile- Hidden (pronounced with a C like Cebo)

*Buhlebakhe - His beauty

*Juba- Dove

I hope this helps ❤️ If you guys need baby names, you know where to find me 😊

[03/06, 15:40] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 2

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Rule number one, when you come to the village, make sure to stock on booze and cigarettes lest you encounter dire situations. Rule number two, avoid old friends, old flames and bitter crushers.

Coming back to the village was a bad idea. I

should've forced things in Joburg.

“How do you know Nothando?”

He scratches his head, eyes apologetic, like I care who she is to him.

“Nothando is his girlfriend.” My mother clarifies.

I’m not laughing because he has a girlfriend, I’m laughing because Nothando is gay.

“She seduced me, I found her in my room wearing nothing but underwear.”

I’m not done advocating for myself and here she comes, still wearing my brother’s t-shirt.

“Nothando, tell him you seduced me.”

Her eyes almost fall out of their sockets.

She turns to Mbuzo, flapping her non-existent eyelashes.

“Wami, I would never do that.”

She calls him Wami?

I roll my eyes.

“I’m a decent woman, you know me. And I am not into women, God would strike me dead.” She says.

I’m missing a puzzle. When did Nothando become this conniving?

“Cashile, do you know that Nothando’s father is the chief? Spreading lies about her will get our family into trouble.” Mom says.

I’m laughing again.

Was I gone for that long?

“I told my father what you and your brother did to me, he’s going to meet with your father tomorrow.” Nothando.

I don’t care if her father is the chief, or the president. I don’t want my father bothered, I just got back and already causing him trouble.

“What do you want?” I ask.

“Two cows.” She says.

“Fuck no, you are not getting shit from us. If you’re so desperate for amalobolo, ask your man to pay.”

Mbuzo shifts his full attention to me, observing more than I would like, like he can see right through me. Everything I have ever done in life, there’s a command in his orbs. As if he’s commanding me to get on my knees right in front of him. I frown, disobeying this absurd order.

I must be losing my mind.

“Cashile!” My mother slaps my wrist, saving me from Mbuzo’s stern gaze.

“MaNkosi, I will take my leave.” Mbuzo says and doesn’t wait for a response.

“Baba wait for me,” shouts Nothando as she runs after him.

My mother and I look at each other, a second passes before we burst out laughing.

“Baba?” I am traumatized.

“It’s a sign of respect.” She says, laughing.

I don’t understand Mbuzo and Nothando’s relationship.

I put my arm over MaNkosi’s shoulders as we make our way into the main house.

“You know she seduced me? She was wearing panties and a bra and laying in my bed.”

She laughs because she doesn’t believe me, homosexuality is seen as an abomination in this part of the world. So chances are, her father will punish me for accusing his daughter of being lesbian.

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MaNkosi is finishing up in the kitchen, while I change my bedding.

There's a knock on my door, it opens and reveals the traitor.

He leans against the door frame, crossing his arms over his skinny body.

"Yeah slima, where's the blue eye."

This spoilt brat.

"So you bailed on me on purpose." So much for sibling love.

"The Under-taker once hit me, I didn't want history repeating itself." Bakhe says, placing himself on my bed.

"Who's that?"

"Mbuzo, that's what everybody calls him around here. He never smiles, or flinch. I think he died and came back to life, his parents owe us an explanation."

I'm more interested in why Mbuzo hit him, he doesn't want to tell me.

Also, I don't agree that Mbuzo died and came back. Okay, maybe his eyes are lifeless and he walks around with a death stare but I doubt he's a zombie.

Bakhe punches my back, snapping me out of a deep thought.

"I'm a girl slim." I punch him back.

"Okay bafo," he's in my wardrobe now, fitting my caps and spraying my perfumes.

"Why do you have expensive perfume, I thought you were in jail..."

Yoh Bakhe!

"Shhh!" I cover his mouth, he pushes me and I fall on the bed.

My hands are clean, he doesn't have to wipe his mouth like I have a disease.

“You promised never to talk about it.” I keep my voice down, my parents cannot know.

Bakhe shrugs like it’s not a big deal.

“Don’t worry, I have your back.”

Yeah, haven’t I heard that before?

“When are you going back to Joburg? I assume next week, you didn’t bring a lot of clothes.”

Bakhe asks.

That’s because everything I had was confiscated by the government, my house in Sandton and my cars. My bank accounts were closed, and were under investigation for six months before I was sentenced.

I have no regrets whatsoever, I lived my best life.

Juba fell from heaven like manner. I met him at a petrol station where I worked as an attendant, for some odd reason he found me attractive in

my baggy uniform and German cut. At first I thought he was gay because no man had ever approached me.

At work, they thought I was a boy. I had to present my ID for them to believe me.

I didn't have friends. People were afraid to approach me, let alone talk to me.

“Your face and lashes give you away, you are a woman hiding in man's clothes.” That's what Juba told me when I asked if he was gay.

I didn't find him attractive at first, it took me almost a year.

In the month of knowing him, he moved me out of the flat I shared with six other people, mostly foreign nationals, and gave me a place to stay at his house.

I was blown away by his rich lifestyle, he saw my fascination and told me I could have it and more.

That's when the heists topic was dropped on the table, I was sceptical at first. I wasn't earning much as a petrol attendant, and I had money to send back home.

Juba introduced me to his crew, he was the mastermind, the brains behind every deal. As the only girl in the team, my job was to drive the getaway car. I didn't have a problem with changing gears. I knew how to drive thanks to my father.

He owned an old model Nissan 1400, it's notoriously known as ibotsotso because of its shape. I learnt how to drive with it, and as the story goes, Bakhe was made in that car.

Eww!

Our first target was my place of work, we went home with less than 50K and shared it among 5

people. Juba gave me the biggest cut, much to the other's annoyance. Our targets were petrol stations, they were the easiest to rob and we got away with it all the time.

There's a saying, a dog never goes back to its vomit. So we targeted a different ATM two months after my first heist. I don't remember how much we made but I quit my job and got an apartment.

Juba later on introduced me to card identity theft, life changed for the better there after. Along the way, I was stupid enough to fall pregnant. Juba convinced me to keep it and I listened to him because Juba knows best.

I named her Lujulile, Lulu for short. At 3 months, Juba took her to his mother, it was for the best. There was no time to look after a baby, we had work to do.

Our relationship is none existent. She was two

years old when I was arrested.

I was at OR Tambo international airport, about to board an airplane to Thailand. Juba and I had been planning the bae-cation for a month, he was running late by 30 minutes and by the time he arrived, I was in handcuffs and being pushed inside the police van. My charges included, identity theft, trafficking of stolen identities, and fraudulent use of credit cards. The heist issue didn't come up in court, I don't know how it was covered.

That reminds me, I have to call Juba and let him know I arrived.

I'm home, will call tomorrow. I text him instead.

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My father will be home any minute now, I'm excited to see him.

MaNkosi hasn't stopped talking about him. I'm sitting in the kitchen with her and Bakhe, apparently dad's mechanic business has been booming. It kicked off two years ago, he's hired staff and even has an accountant.

I thought they were struggling, the house hasn't been renovated. There is no evidence that they are moneyed.

"Mbali got married last week, her husband is a politician. It was a beautiful wedding." MaNkosi says, handing me a glass of juice. It's my second one, I want something strong and a smoke.

"You should call her and congratulate her." She says.

Mbali is 19, I am not going to congratulate a 19 year old for getting married.

“May her soul rest in peace.” I say, taking a from my juice.

“What do you mean?” MaNkosi looks confused.

“No offence, but I would rather be buried alive than tie myself to a man.”

“That’s actually a good way to put it dade, your soul will be resting in peace one of these days.” Bakhe says.

“What is he talking about mah?”

“Don’t listen to him, you know how he gets when he’s too excited. Khehla, go and check on your father’s goats.”

“They are fine mami, they don’t need babysitting.”

That’s it, I’m going to buy my brother diapers and a pacifier for his birthday.

One stern look from MaNkosi and Khehla turns into an obedient child again.

“MaNkosi, who are you talking...” My father’s voice trails off as his eyes land on me.

Five years, five lousy years – that is how long I have been far from home. When did he age? His eyes are sunken in, there are bags under them. He still wears the same overalls, and same old dirty safety boots.

“I thought you would grow tired of fixing cars.” I offer a smile that’s not reciprocated, he’s frowning instead.

“Who are you?”

There is no way he has forgotten my face in five years when I’m the female version of him.

“Cashile, your only favourite child.” Have I changed that much? Prison food can mess your body.

He frowns, “KaMadlala?”

He needs to relax, it's not that bad.

"You left here looking like Miss South Africa and came back looking like Somizi."

Somizi? What the fuck?

I am the same, nothing about my appearance has changed. I have always been a tomboy, I wear men's clothing and fragrance, and there's a little bounce to my step. But I am a girl, I look like a girl, facially.

He shakes my hand, a smile on his face. A hug would do but that's not him.

It's a few minutes past 7pm, dinner is served and Bakhe is not home yet. Mom doesn't look worried, if she's not worried then he's fine wherever he is.

"We are hosting a New Year's Eve party next week. Mbuzo will drive with you to town to buy

a goat." My father says in between bites of food.
I don't want to be around Mbuzo.

"I doubt Mbuzowakhe will get lost without me,
dad."

He shakes his head, filling his mouth with more
food. He loves his wife's cooking that's for sure,
look at MaNkosi smiling at her man.

"I was supposed to go with him, but I will be
busy tomorrow. I told him you will stand in for
me."

Why would he do that? I haven't rested since I
arrived.

He's done talking, I know he won't tell me twice.
I wait for him to ask me questions about Joburg
but nothing comes. He's quiet the entire meal.

My mother excuses me from the task of
washing the dishes. I retire for the night, I will
start afresh tomorrow.

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Dad wakes me up around 7am, Mbuzo is outside. Are we going to Wakanda or town? Jeer!

I wash my face, put on a tracksuit and a cap and head out. It's a bit chilly outside.

Mbuzo is leaning against my father's car. Where did it come from? I didn't see it yesterday.

"Hello baby." I greet as I walk around the car, and kiss the bonnet. It's still in good condition.

"Hello KaMadlala."

I wasn't greeting him but the car, but it's okay if he wants to be baby.

"That's my car you're kissing. Your father gave it to me."

He's lying.

“I don’t trust a man that doesn’t bleed after being run over by a taxi.”

His squints his eyes, “It almost ran me over.”

“You were on the ground.”

“It was a slight collision, my bike would have been wrecked if the accident was that serious.”

He says.

I don’t believe him, I bet he has a killer headache from that fall.

“I’m driving,” I grab the keys from him.

He snatches them back, I didn’t see it coming.

“It’s my car.”

“It’s my father’s car.” I protest.

He puts out his palm, “Give me the keys KaMadlala.”

His tone makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up, my heart pounds against my ribcage,

making me breathless.

He tilts his head slightly to the left, and raises an eyebrow.

I've forgotten how to move for a minute, the pounding of my heart is louder than the thoughts in my head.

"The keys, Cashile." Another command.

I force myself out of the trance and drop the keys in his hand. Bakhe was right, he's a zombie because, what the hell just happened?

"It's my car now," he's playing with the keys in his hand.

He has a point, my father didn't have to show his love for him to this extent. This was our family car, Mbuzo has a bicycle and I don't see him complaining about it. Why does he have to get this car?

“Baba!” It’s Nothando, walking through the gate. The smile on her face dissipates when she sees me.

She kisses Mbuzo on the cheek, “I’m glad I caught you. We can go now.”

She’s coming with us?

“Why am I here if you have someone accompanying you?”

My question is not offensive, there is no reason for him to frown.

“I don’t need to be accompanied.” That’s what he thinks, if my father says he needs company, then he needs it.

“Nothando, stay behind. There is no space for three people.” He says.

Nothando’s face has turned sour, she’s not getting any cow from me. The only thing she will be getting from me that has four legs is a

dog.

She glances my way bitterly, “You’re a boy, be a gentleman and sit in the trunk of the car.”

This bitch.

I grab the hem of my jersey, lifting it up with my bra and expose my breasts.

“Does your father have these?” I ask.

She gasps, and frowns. Mbuzo clears his throat. He's staring at my boobs with a smirk on his face, probably amused. I fix myself and sit in the front.

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500+ comments... 15 shares...

[03/06, 15:40] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 3

CASHILE

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My father gave us money for the goat, he handed it to Nothando. One day when I get to heaven, God will tell me why I tagged along on this “buy a goat” trip. He and I know I am not having a good time. We bought two goats, I don’t understand why we have to buy them when we have plenty in my father’s kraal.

There is no music playing in the car, just our breathing and the sound of engine running. This car is so old it coughs whenever Mbuzo starts it.

“What’s happening on New Year’s Eve?” He must know, he’s best friend with my father.

“Your father is known to host high profile parties on New Year’s Eve.”

“By host, you mean he pays for them?”

That would be strange, my father does not have

the money to feed a village.

“Yes.” He replies.

“How come I don’t know about that?” Bakhe would have told me, right?

“You never stay long enough to find out.”

How does he know? He was never here when I visited.

“When did you come back to the village?” I ask.

He was gone most of his life, disappeared like the wind.

“It’s been almost three years. You were the first person I wanted to see, so I went to your father’s house with my bags before going home.”

This is the most he’s said in two days. I was convinced he didn’t like me.

“Why?”

Mbuzo scratches the back of his neck, something about my question makes him nervous.

“Because you cried like a baby the day I left, the image of you running after my father’s car while screaming my name lived in my head until the day I saw you.”

He thinks that’s not weird?

“I grew up.” I tell him, offended.

“I know but it was the last image I had of you, so you were always 8 years old in my head. I felt sorry for you. That’s why I came to your house first.”

I don’t know why this makes me feel special.

This is an old car but the radio works perfectly, I turn it on. He’s been listening to Gagasi FM, Maskandi music belongs in 2023. We have to leave it behind when we cross over.

“I am honoured, you have been thinking of me while you were away. Are you crushing on me, Mbuzo?”

A frown crosses his face, I may dress like a boy but I’m a beautiful girl and no one will ever tell me otherwise.

“You had a crush on me,” now he’s lying and that’s so low of him.

“No I didn’t.” The protest comes from the deepest core of my soul.

“You did, you wrote me a love letter once. You also told your friends that we were going to get married.”

Did I? My memory was formatted and what he’s saying was lost along the way because I do not remember.

“I would never, dude, you were 6 years older than me. I saw you as my brother.”

“I was never your brother, I will never be.”

Why is he upset now? The conversation was flowing, I was enjoying his company.

“You need to smile more, people think you were risen from the dead.” I say.

“They do?” He presents a deep frown.

“Yep, they even have a name for you. The undertaker.”

Is that thunder? I look up the sky, there's only one cloud. I guess my ears weren't playing tricks on me, he laughed for real.

“I didn't know you could laugh.”

“I didn't know you were dramatic.” He throws a comeback.

“I didn't know you could talk, I like it. Keep it up undertaker.”

He shakes his head, I wanted to see another smile but he's disappointed.

“So, you and Nothando are a couple huh?” I’m digging for news because the Mbuzo I knew back then would have never gone for the likes of Nothando. Does he know that she also likes women?

There’s a knock on the small back window.

“What are you guys laughing about?” Nothando shouts. The wind must be killing her back there, she’s sitting with the goats.

Mbuzo’s face completely changes, he’s gone back to his indifferent persona.

Mbuzo drives us to eSdangeni, his house. I’m tired and thirsty, goat shopping is not for me. I’m meant to live like royalty but my father does not understand that.

“Why are we here?”

“I need to pick up something for your father.”

He answers.

I would ask him what it is if I cared.

“EMondini is not far from here, I can walk.” My father’s house is merely a walking distance.

“You can’t walk with two goats, it’s too hot.” He says, dashing out of the car to open the gate.

What makes him think I’m taking the goats with me?

He gets back in the car, drives in and parks in the driveway, my eyes are all over the homestead when he tells me to come in.

I’m accepting his invite because I want to see how his house looks now.

I’m looking at what used to be an estate house. It’s surrounded by four 8-corner rondavels.

Mbuzo's father Velaphi Xaba had everything the rest of us could only dream of. He owned multiple stores and restaurants, his wife Cebile

worked alongside him. Together they built a legacy for their children. Everybody was so sure they were set for life.

Right now, I'm looking at what used to be the most beautiful, and biggest estate in the village. The large walls have stood the test of time, I can't say the same about the ranch house. It features eight rooms, the painting is wearing off.

Mbuzo unlocks the door and swings it open, he walks in first. Nothando pushes me aside so she can walk in first. One day—all I need is boxing gloves and a ring, then she will know me.

I step on a floorboard on my way in and feel it flex under my weight. The house is spacious but old. I remember the high ceiling and magnificent layout.

“Wat happened to this place?” It used to look like one of those top billing houses, now it looks

like an abandoned house.

I'm talking to myself. Mbuzo has disappeared somewhere in the house, Nothando is splashed on the old looking couch with her feet up, scrolling through her phone.

There's an old style TV on the room divider, it's one of those with a large screen and big body. I take the remote and press the switch button, it's not working.

What happened to the Xaba's wealth?

"Where are Mbuzo's siblings?" I ask this girl.

He had two brothers who were twins and a sister, the last born. The brothers were older than him, Mhloniphe and Mkhetheni. They were 17 when Mbuzo left the village. His sister Emihle was my age.

"They will be back after the New Year."

Nothando says without looking up at me.

This is the shadiest person I have ever met. I sit beside her, she glances at me and frowns.

“Aren’t you supposed to be well-off? You look poor to me.” She says.

She has declared war with me.

“It’s a good thing I never gave you a chance Nothando, you would’ve been one of the exes I’d wish to be eaten by sharks.”

“I will never be eaten by a shark because I don’t like the ocean.”

She doesn’t get it, does she? I don’t know why I bother talking to her.

“Why did you make a move on me if you’re dating Mbuzo?” Now this conversation is worth my time.

She lets out a deep sigh of boredom. Her attitude stinks, I’m tempted to correct it.

“I don’t want you anywhere near my boyfriend.”

Mameshane!

“Did I give you the impression that I want him?”
I ask.

“Just stay away from my boyfriend.” She snaps
and gets off the couch.

“Nothando, I have no interest in your boyfriend.
He’s not my type and don’t you think you are too
old to be doing this? Fighting over a man?”

Her eyes shift away from me, there’s someone
at the entrance.

“Mbuzo baby, we were just...” She rushes to him
and puts her arms around his waist, her
explanation is left unfinished.

His eyes are on me, his brows knitted in a frown.

“Let’s go.” He says, escaping Nothando’s
embrace and walks out the house.

What is inside that black bag he’s carrying?

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We drop Nothando off first, she is not happy about leaving me with her “boyfriend.” She doesn’t have to say it, it’s evident on her face.

“How did you and Nothando date? She’s also into women, you know?”

He should know, he sleeps with her.

A moment of silence that is not good for my impatience.

“Nothando liked me once, she wanted me to be her girlfriend.” I continue.

“There is nothing wrong with that. We all have a past.” He’s so nonchalant.

“You mean you’re okay with your girlfriend liking other women?”

He looks at me and presents a smile that disappears as fast as it came. His deep set eyes have a thing of digging into my soul, plus

this heavy aura I can't quite grasp.

I don't think he intends on answering my question.

"So I'm not your type?" He says out of nowhere, tilting his head before he focuses on the road.

"I don't have the same taste in men as Nothando." I say.

He bursts out laughing, this is a moment I can't miss. I quickly take my phone and snap a photo, Bakhe must know that Mbuzo knows how to laugh.

He freezes and is frowning again.

"Don't tell me you're camera shy." I tease, looking at the picture I took.

Juba did me dirty with this second hand phone, the picture quality sucks, it is not as clear as I would like.

We're home. A young man is the one to open the gate for us, another runs to the trunk of the car to offload the goat.

"Who are they?" I ask my father as he nears us.

"They will be around until the day of the party." He says.

I'm wondering if he will pay them, I mean, I keep finding out from people that my father, whom I thought was financially struggling is actually sorted in his finances.

"Go help your mother inside, she's preparing lunch." He says.

I would rather chase a chicken and behead it myself. I look at Mbuzo to say goodbye, we sort of bonded in the car. He's not looking at me, I get the feeling he's afraid of my father. The black bag is in his hand, it's not big nor does it look heavy. But I still want to know what's in it.

"KaMadlala?" My father snaps.

He doesn't have to be harsh, it's not like they are exchanging drugs.

I find my mother chopping veges in the kitchen, it's so hot in here.

"Mami." I kiss her as she laughs at my greeting. Bakhe calls her Mami.

"Where is your baby-boy?" I haven't seen Bakhe in ages.

"He came home and left, please talk to your brother. I will die of stress because of him."

Bakhe does whatever he wants, he will never change.

"Does he help dad out at the garage?" I ask.

She wipes her hands on her apron and looks at me.

"No, he doesn't want to fix cars. Khehla has no direction, I'm worried about him. He is not

getting any younger." She's right.

Nevertheless, none of us have direction, we are both at an age where everything in life should be set. But here we are, at our father's house, having failed at life.

"I will talk to him Mah. Do you need help with anything?"

She smiles and goes back to her chopping.

"No baby, relax. Sunday is going to be a big day, you should be resting."

Sunday is New Year's Eve. Why do I need to rest?

"I won't be there." I plan on sleeping that day.

"You have to be there," says my father, walking through the door. He's carrying that black bag.

"Why?" I give him a confused look.

It's just a party, I don't have to be there.

"It's your umemulo. Every girl in our family has

to celebrate her coming of age, it's important. I spent a lot of money on your outfit, you will be there." My father says.

I'm not a girl, I'm turning 26 years old on the 1st of January and I have a child. I must have come to the wrong village where there's another Cashile with the same parents because this is not it.

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500+ comments... 20 shares

[03/06, 15:40] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 4

CASHILE

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“I don’t need to have umemulo baba, I’m 26 years old.”

Is he ageing faster than his age or what? His thinking capacity is terrible for a 53 year-old man. It’s so unlike my father to take such drastic decisions regarding his children, he’s a gentle giant—a man of reverence. Hence I fail to understand this change.

“KaMadlala, you were 21 when you left, and that in a haste. There was no time to organise umemulo, now that you are back home, there is no reason to delay.” When he rubs his forehead like that, he’s exasperated.

Nonetheless, for him to think I was behaving while in Joburg is insane. I’ve always been wild.

I look at my mother, she’s keeping herself busy with the pots, silently telling me to handle my issues alone.

“Then I’m going back to Joburg.” I threaten.

He keeps a straight face, “Go back if you like but as long you are here, under my roof, you will do as I say.” And with that, he leaves the room.

Where is the devil? He left his pubic hair at my house, it goes by the name of Bab’Madlala.

I look to my mother for help, “Mah?”

Nothing!

“MaNkosi please talk to your husband, he’s ruining my life.” If it were someone else, I would have...

MaNkosi drops a plate on the counter, sighing exhaustedly. She’s holding on to the counter, I can’t see her face, but her hunched back tells me she is distressed.

“I will talk to him.” She says and continues cooking. I have lost my appetite.

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MBUZO

He left the Madlala residence in a haste after receiving a call from his cousin Nompilo, there was a robbery at the store, Nonkosi Supermarket. It's the only store left from his father's legacy, the shops and restaurants closed down about three years ago. The deflation took a toll on his father, a tragedy followed thereafter.

Nompilo meets him at the door, hysterical and shaken.

"Did they hurt you?" He asks.

"No, they took the money and looted the shop."

He looks around, this is a second robbery in a space of a month. The supermarket wasn't doing well to begin with, it rarely generated profit. It's their source of living.

Drained from the hardships he's been subjected to since his parent's death, Mbuzo sinks down to his knees.

"We will have to close the shop, completely."

It's shocking news to Nompilo. The shop is their livelihood.

"We can ask bab'Madlala for money." She suggests.

"We still owe him from the last two months, and he bought us this month's stock. I can't keep asking him for money." Mbuzo says.

Bab'Madlala has been a blessing in their life, he's always willing to lend a helping hand.

When Mbuzo's parents died, Bab'Madlala covered all the funeral expenses and went as far as paying for their bills. He took the Xabas under his wing, they haven't died of hunger because of him.

“Those days are long gone, we will manage on our own.” Mbuzo says.

His ego has been bruised many times, he’s done grovelling.

CASHILE

The following day, I stay in my room and turn down every dish my mother offers me. I will go on hunger strike until my father changes his mind. There are moments I feel like the most selfish person in the world. There was a break-in at Mbuzo’s store, I haven’t been to see him. He hasn’t come here as well. Argh! He probably doesn’t care whether I see him or not.

It’s mid-day when a knock on my door distracts

me from my laziness, I don't want to be bothered.

"Co..."

The door opens before I finish the reply, my brother enters carrying two packs of Heineken. He opens my wardrobe, puts the alcohol in and closes it. I haven't seen him in two days, I doubt he was home.

"Your father doesn't want me to drink, he always searches my room. Can I keep it here?"

He looks drunk.

"You will have to share," I tell him.

I need a stiff drink but I don't have money for that, my account has about a thousand bucks. It's not enough to sustain me for a month.

He sits on my bed, there's this thing he does, observe me like a scientist. He's one of the people who can see through me.

“You look ugly frowning, what happened?” He says.

I tell him what his father— our father is up to.

Bakhe is infuriated, he jumps from the bed huffing.

“This is ridiculous, you have to tell them the truth.”

“I can’t. You know how baba is, he will hate me. I don’t want to disappoint him.”

And I don’t have a relationship with my daughter, how will I explain that?

“Dade, you came back home with nothing but a small bag. If your father thought you’re still an OPS then, he’s one dumb motherfucker.” He goes to the wardrobe and takes out two cans of Heineken, and gives me one. I gulp half of it in one go, it’s not too cold but just right.

“He’s our father, show some respect.” I smack

his head.

He laughs and makes a comment about me being drunk already.

“Even when he doesn’t deserve it?” Bakhe asks and takes a long sip from his cider.

I sense bitterness towards our father.

There’s another knock, we hide the alcohol under the bed when my mother asks if she could come in. She looks tired and has bags under her eyes. Her eyes run to Bakhe first, the apple of her eye. I know she wants to ask if he’s okay but she doesn’t.

“Have you spoken to him?” I ask, she looks at me and sighs.

“Your father would never do anything to hurt you.” She says.

This is her admitting that she failed.

“Mami, I need R2000 to register for a course.”

Bakhe breaks our conversation, he can be selfish sometimes.

MaNkosi looks stressed in a flash, “What kind of course?”

“Data capturing.” He says.

This boy is lying through his teeth.

“I will talk to your father, though I doubt he has money. He paid for Mbali’s wedding...”

Bakhe sighs heavily, “Yes I know. Dad always spends money on other people but when his son wants help, he can’t hold me down. Is he even my father?”

Hawe mah!

He needs to choose his words carefully, I don’t want with my mother. She’s hurt by his choice of words. She places her hands on her hips and breathes out heftily.

“Khehla you have to understand, please. Just yesterday your father sent your cousin Mbali R5000, she’s a newly wed, she needs it more. He doesn’t have money at the moment.”
MaNkosi says.

All I hear is baba-money... baba-money.

“When did baba accumulate his wealth? And doesn’t Mbali have a father?” I jump in.

Seriously, when did my father become the male version of Oprah Winfrey? All this is new to me. We were normal class citizens, my father toiled to put food on the table. He was a hardworking man and still is but hard work is not equals to money.

I know Mbali’s dad and my dad are brothers, but yoh!

MaNkosi shoots me a stern gaze, “No one ever questioned you when you came back home after years of living in Joburg.”

“I’m only asking mama. Baba has changed. The bab’Madlala I know would never force umemulo on me. Why is he doing this?”

Yes, we are back to talking about this crazy coming of age celebration. I am not okay.

MaNkosi sighs in defeat, “You kids are going to kill me. Your father knows what he’s doing and it’s for your own good. Just be obedient for once.”

She storms out.

Bakhe hurries to get his cider and finishes what was left. Mine is now warm, I don’t drink warm beverages.

“I want to go and see him, will you cover for me?”

He frowns, confused.

“Mbuzo.” I clarify.

“Go and see your boyfriend, I got you dade.” He lays on my bed with his shoes on and puts his feet up. My bed sheets are now covered in dust.

“Doti, get your feet off my bed.” I push his feet off, he puts them back.

That chuckle he releases is condescending, he’s such a clown of a brother.

“I’m your lifeline dade, treat me like gold.”

Why do I love him? Brothers belong at war, fighting for the country, not in our bedroom turning our lives upside down.

“Tell me something, where are Mbuzo’s parents?” I ask.

“Wow, you’ve been gone that long? They died, after bab’Xaba went broke, he lost his mind and killed his wife before turning the gun to his head.”

Suicide?

“That’s sad. How did Mbuzo and his siblings take it?” I worry about him, he was once my best friend.

“How would you feel if your father killed your mother and himself?” Bakhe asks with lifted brows, he likes being serious for nothing.

“I’ll be back,” I tell him and walk out.

I’m almost out the gate when my father yells behind me.

“Where are you going?”

I turn, heart racing to my chest. I’m too old for this shit.

“I’m going to see Mbuzo, I want to see if there is anything I can do to help.”

He narrows his eyes at me, “If you run away to Joburg, I will find you.”

Where is this coming from?

“I’m not running away we-babo.” I assure him.

“Chief Sibiya and his family are joining us for supper, be home early.” He says.

Nothando will probably be there, she’s Chief Sibiya’s daughter. Lord have mercy.

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It takes me over thirty minutes to get to Mbuzo’s store, I smell like I was dancing in sweat and dust. I walk in to Mbuzo’s cousin mopping the floor, and Nothando cleaning the empty shelves.

The robbers took everything. How low did the Xabas fall? Fate can be a bitch sometimes, imagine going from riches to rags.

Nompilo looks up as I clear my throat in search of her attention. She’s still beautiful and fleshy, we went to the same school. She was two

grades higher and the smartest girl in school. I thought she would be a doctor by now. Doctors don't wear torn clothes, nor do they have old cornrows.

"Here comes the poor girl, joburg defeated you shame." Nothando says, she's on my case for nothing.

"Baby, I was chowing money in joburg, and money was chowing me, or we were chowing each other, but somebody or something was being chowed." I say.

I'm tired of her.

She rolls her eyes, I am not in the mood.

"Nompilo."

A smile spreads on her face, "Hi sisi. Welcome back to Kwanyuswa."

Welcome back' is for people who are here to stay, I plan on leaving this place.

“How have you been?” I ask.

She sighs exhaustedly, I can almost see the burdens she’s carrying on her shoulders. I’ve been here before, stranded without hope. I am here.

“What can we say? God is greater than witches.”

She thinks this is witchcraft.

I have no words, yes I grew up in the village but I can’t recall encountering witchcraft. If I have, then I don’t remember.

I look around the store, the man I’m here for is nowhere in sight.

“Is Mbuzo here?”

“He’s in the back, I’ll tell him you’re here to see him.” She drops her mop and wipes her hands on her dress as she turns to the opposite direction.

“I will find my way.” I cut her trip short. I know my way, I have been here with Bakhe a couple of times in the past. Mhloniphe used to manage this store.

“He’s busy.” Nothando shouts after me, I ignore her and make my way to the back room.

My hearts starts beating abnormally as I stand outside the closed door, something doesn’t feel right. I grab the handle and chills fill my body. I feel my eyes burn with tears, my head conflicts with reasoning. Every ounce of me is screaming for me not to go in there, but there’s something stronger pushing me to open the door.

My hand is shaking as I twist the door knob and push the door open.

“Mbuzo!” I call out.

The first thing I see are feet viciously dangling in the air, my eyes slowly go up to Mbuzo. He’s hanging from the ceiling, fighting his possible

last breath.

“Mbuzo!!!”

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I'll give you my full attention once I'm done with the WhatsApp stories. For now let's continue sharing, liking, commenting and tagging friends.

500+ comments... 20 shares...

[03/06, 15:40] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 5

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MaNkosi is holding her breath as she walks in to her husband counting a stack of cash, he's a bit startled by her sudden visit but quickly covers his shock and puts the money back in a black bag. She recognises it as the bag he was

carrying earlier.

Bab'Madlala clears his throat like there's something stuck there, he pulls a chair and sits frowning at his beloved wife.

"What did I say about knocking, MaNkosi?" His tone is rather harsh.

MaNkosi has a calm spirit, she's never raised her voice at her husband. In front of people, he is "baba" and "dali" in the bedroom when he's buried deep inside her. She worships the ground he walks on, heck she could polish it with her tongue and offer herself as a red carpet for him to walk on.

Born and raised in Eshowe, she never thought love would lead her to the outskirts of Bothas Hill. Bab'Madlala didn't have it all when they were young, in fact it took the Madlalas over 22 years to get their lives together. He's always been a hard worker, worked more than two jobs

to provide for his family.

His garage was supposed to be his breakthrough but that's the thing about life, it doesn't give you what you want, it gives you what you deserve.

But for Bab'Madlala, what he deserved wasn't working for him. He wanted what he wanted, he's a go-getter and that got him where he is today. Business is booming, poverty days are long gone, he's able to provide for his family like a real man. Now he can show his face in the community with his head held high and chest bursting with pride.

"I'm sorry baba, I didn't know you were busy." She's always apologizing for one thing or another.

"What do you want?" Bab'Madlala says.

It's not that his wife's presence annoys him, he's just not in the mood today. He's rather a

little cranky.

MaNkosi steps closer to the bed where he's seated and looks into his eyes.

"Cashile is..."

He raises his hand to shut her up.

"If you are here to change my mind about umemulo, you are wasting your time." He opens a drawer and takes out a file. He does book keeping every 3 hours to make sure the garage is generating enough and no one is stealing from him.

Defeated, MaNkosi changes course of direction, she's on her way out the door when a phone rings. She stops as Bab'Madlala receives the call, he keeps his voice low so it doesn't reach his wife's ears.

"Nonkosi?" Nonkosi is Mbuzo's clan name, he used to address Mbuzo's father with his clan name, now he calls all the Xaba brothers

Nonkosi.

“Don’t worry, we will get to the bottom of this. The criminals will held accountable and dealt with accordingly.” He says, the call ends abruptly.

His sees his wife standing in the doorway, curiosity visible on her face.

“That was MaSibiya,” he says.

“Nothando?” MaNkosi’s curiosity peeks. Why would Nothando call her husband?

“Yes, Nonkosi hung himself. The robbery took a toll on him, may he rest in peace.” He bows his head and says a silent prayer.

Meanwhile, MaNkosi is in shock.

There’s hardly break-ins, robberies, or deaths in Kwanyuswa. People either die from natural deaths, sicknesses, or old age.

The Xaba’s were the first ever to have a

massacre happen to them, it was a shocking discovery to the community. Since the deaths of Velaphi Xaba and his wife Cebile, the remaining siblings faced one bad luck after the other. This robbery is one of them.

“Mbuzo can’t be dead, Cashile just got back. She is going to be devastated.”

Bab’Madlala puts God on hold and stares up at his wife.

“What business does Cashile have with Nonkosi?” That’s not a face of a calm man.

“They are friends, baba. You know that. You sent them to town to buy goats.” She explains.

“I know MaNkosi, I only did that because you gave me a useless son. He can’t do anything right, he’s lazy and contributes nothing to this family. He’s not even man enough to give us a grandchild. Sometimes I wonder if he has balls.”

His words fill her with anger and resentment.

He was once a good father, before the money and fame he accumulated in the community. He was loud about how proud he was of his children, and sang his own praises.

“The Madlalas breed the best seeds.” He’d say.

As hard as times were, he provided while MaNkosi nurtured the family. She was a grade 7 English teacher when they met, working for a private school that was man-owned.

When they got married, he convinced her to leave her job. Love is blind for a reason. MaNkosi hasn’t worked a day since she became Mrs. Madlala.

“Call your church friends and tell them to gather here in 10 minutes, I will cancel dinner with the chief, and gather the neighbours. The Xabas need us at the moment, we are going to pay our last respects.” He gets off his chair and looks

for his funeral suit in his wardrobe.

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CASHILE

His bloodshot eyes meet with mine, there are tears in his eyes he won't let fall down his face. It's been over five minutes since Nompilo and Nothando helped me get him down, which proved to be harder than it looked even with our combined effort. He's unbelievably heavy, it must be his 6'4 height that adds to it. We had to make him stand on the chair he'd used to climb up.

Thank God I got here on time. Nothando was the one to run out and get him a glass of water.

I'm worried about him, he almost died.

He's sitting on a chair with Nothando across his lap.

"I would die without you, Wami. Don't ever scare me like that." She seems to work pretty hard to get his attention, kissing him all over his face and lips. His mouth hasn't moved, he's a robot, and while she caresses his head with one arm around his neck, his arms are laying there, inactive.

He's ashamed of what he did, I see it as he raises his eyes and they clash with mine again.

"I want to be alone," he groans softly, looking visibly upset.

Why did I expect him to say something meaningful? Of course his brain is not working well, he deprived it of oxygen while hanging from the ceiling.

"Kodwa baba..."

He stops Nothando's dispute hallway, by lifting

her off him. She's dumbfounded. Why is she even sitting on a patient's lap?

I notice how Nompilo and Nothando easily obey him without another word said.

"Get out!" His head is lowered, dark eyes cast on me, and jaw clenched.

"No! You want to finish what you started?" I wasn't supposed to stutter.

Yeah Juba has an Alpha aura, he controlled my steps most of the time and my stupid ass obeyed. But this one... I don't know if this is Alpha aura or I'm standing in front of the devil. It's heavy and intimidating, not to mention bone chilling.

"I'm fine KaMadlala. Now get out." Is he telling me or commanding me?

I'm too stressed for this shit, I move to the open window as I take out a loose cigarette from my pocket and light it. One puff makes the world go

round.

And then? Why is he looking at me like I'm using his mouth to smoke?

"Skuif?" I ask if he wants a smoke. His frown deepens.

"You smoke?"

Yep, his parents should have named him Intimidate.

"Yes, I hope you don't mind."

"You're a woman."

"So? Are you sexist?"

The frown is no longer a frown, it's a wrinkle now.

He reaches out his hand after judging me with his eyes, I hand him the cigarette. He takes a long puff, smoke rises in front of him as he exhales. I'm not easily attracted to anyone but damn! Such raggedy and sexiness, sleeves

rolled up to his elbows, button half way done. Angels were going to drool had he died and went to heaven looking like that.

My head is going to places it shouldn't, I clear my throat, bringing myself back to reality.

"Let me drive you to the hospital, where are the car keys?"

He stands, but stumbles back to the chair, clenching his eyes. I jump to help him as he rubs his neck. The rope left a mark, evidence of stupidity.

"No!"

I want to roll my eyes so bad.

"Your brain was deprived of oxygen, so you are not thinking straight. I'm taking you to the hospital, now." This brings him up fast. He looks at me, completely thunderstruck, as if I insulted his entire clan.

“I’m going home,” he finishes my cigarette, fishes in his pocket and comes out with car keys.”

I snatch them, “I’m driving you.”

I lead the way, fast tracking before him in case he stops me. I don’t get why he’s so stubborn.

“Baba!” Nothando runs to him. I look back, her arm is around his waist. She’s helping him walk.

“Why aren’t you helping him, Cashile? Can’t you see he’s still dizzy?”

Because I’m punishing him for acting stupid.

“Are we going to the hospital?” Nompilo asks.

“I’m taking him home.” I say.

“I’m coming with.” Of course Nothando, why not?

He looks at her, “Stay here and help Nompilo.”

Her eyes widen, it’s not what she wants but she doesn’t argue with him.

“Don’t tell anyone about this.” Mbuzo says.

“I already told Cashile’s father,” Nothando says.

She must have done it when she went to fetch water.

Mbuzo says nothing, he leads the way this time.

Nothando watches until we are out the door and inside the car. He’s taken the passenger seat.

The car coughs as I start the ignition. How embarrassing.

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This man is quiet on the way home, but I want to know.

“Why?”

I’m angry with him for thinking taking his life would solve everything.

Life can be a bitch but taking your own life will not amount to anything.

“Why Mbuzo? How could you be so selfish?”

“Selfish?” He snorts. I can’t believe he has the audacity to show arrogance when he’s the one in the wrong.

“Yes! You didn’t stop to think what your death would do to your family. What did you think would happen after we found you hanging from the ceiling? Throw a party?” I should get him arrested for attempted murder.

“You don’t know what I have been through, KaMadlala.”

“I know enough and that nothing can ever justify killing yourself. Why didn’t you come to me? I’m a good listener.”

All he gives me is a sigh.

Nice!

When we get to his home, he goes to the bedroom. I hear the door slam shut. I'm standing in the foyer, with no clue what to do. I don't want to leave him alone, I don't trust him. Maybe there is something in the kitchen he can eat.

I open the fridge, there's a bottle of water in a Cocacola 2litre bottle, half an onion and two slices of bread. The shelves are empty, they own a supermarket. I don't understand this concept.

Why is the kitchen empty?

He doesn't have sugar or teabags, at least there's Oros. Two slices of dry brown bread and Oros is not bad, he will eat while I run to the Spaza shop to get him painkillers.

My phone keeps ringing insistently, the person is not giving up even after reaching voicemail for the second time. I won't entertain it, there's

nothing important I should be doing.

I take the food to his room, the door is closed.

“Mbuzo.” I can’t knock, I’m carrying a plate in one hand and juice on the other.

“Mbuzo!” I knock with my foot.

What is he doing in there? I hope he hasn’t killed himself.

Fuck privacy!

I put the glass of juice on the plate, open the door and storm in. Only for me to crash into a naked man, and we come tumbling down with me on top of him, my lips tightly pressed on his. His eyes are wide open, mine too because, what the fuck!

I quickly move my mouth from his.

“Why did you kiss me?” I yell, it’s shocking.

His face welcomes awe.

“I didn’t kiss you, you kissed me. Why didn’t you knock?”

“I knocked, you didn’t answer. I thought you hung yourself again.” I’m still yelling, only God knows why.

“I was taking a bath.” He argues back.

Oh God! He’s naked and I can feel his ding dong poking me.

Is he getting an erection?

He notices my realization, something dark flashes in his eyes.

I don’t want to know what he’s thinking. When I get up, I slip on spilled juice and fall back on top of him. Damn these Jesus sandals, I should have worn sneakers. This is the most embarrassing day of my life, I will choose getting arrested over this.

“Ralax!” That sounded like a command.

He grabs my waist and lifts me off him, while sitting up. I close my eyes, not wanting to see things I shouldn't.

"I'm dressed, you can open your eyes." He says, moments later.

Boxer shorts without underwear? He might as well be naked.

"I made you something to eat." The bread and juice are scattered on the floor, with broken glass.

"I'm not hungry but thank you."

Silence stretches between us, I'm not looking at him, he's not looking at me.

"Do you hear that?" Mbuzo asks.

Can he hear my thoughts?

"There are people singing outside." He adds.

Oh, it's church melodies. We both rush to the window, there's a crowd of people outside his

gate. My parents are there too.

“What are they doing here?” That’s him, sounding worried.

“I will go and find out, you put on something decent.”

He can’t go out looking like we were doing something the church does not approve of.

My father frowns when he sees me walk out the door, he’s probably thinking his own things.

“KaMadlala, what are you doing here?”

It’s not that shocking.

“What are you doing here baba?” I turn the question around.

Now that I’m out here, it dawns on me that they are singing funeral songs. Sadness is written on their faces, some are crying.

“We came to pay our last respects for Nonkosi.”

My father says.

I don't mean to laugh.

"Mbuzo is not dead, I saved him." I give my father the biggest smile I have ever given him, he doesn't return it. In fact, he looks shocked while the people behind cheer loudly. His face transforms into anger.

I'm confused. Did I do something wrong?

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500+ comments... 20 shares

[03/06, 15:40] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 6

MBUZO

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He's pacing up and down the living room,

worried that people know he tried to kill himself. Cashile comes running in, he looks at her with expectation.

“What’s going on?” He asks.

“My father was misinformed, he thought you died.” She tells him.

This is worse than people thinking you are weak, it’s what they will think when they see him.

“Did you tell him I’m alive?” His eyes are almost out of their sockets.

“Yes, but you look dead. Fix your face, he’s coming.” She irons out the frown on his face, takes out a Zam-buk from her pocket and applies it on his lips.

“Say mba!” She gestures by smacking her lips together.

Mbuzo is confused, hence the tiny pout of the lips which makes Cashile chuckle.

“I’m not asking for a kiss.”

He’s lucky he’s not a yellow bone, his cheeks would be red from embarrassment.

“Nonkosi!” That’s Bab’Madlala knocking at the door.

Cashile fixes his shirt, buttoning it up a little. His eyes are on her, it’s become hard to look away. The last person to care for him like this was his mother, what a mother she was. It was in her blood and she did it impeccably.

He snaps out of his thinking maze when Cashile brushes his shoulders, telling him to go and answer the door. He clears his throat, sighing as he prepares to explain himself to the only man who’s been nothing but good to him. A father figure, Madlala has become.

Mbuzo ambles to the door, Bab’Madlala faintly smiles. His wife is with him.

“Mfana wami. Are you well?”

“Yebo baba, come in.”

The old man never comes in without an invitation.

He steps in with his left foot first, then his right. Takes three steps in and stops. MaNkosi is not far behind, empathy is written on her face.

“I made a promise to your father at his funeral that I will take over from where he left off and be a father to you and your siblings. You know you can come to me when you need to talk.”

He knows, his brothers as well. Bab’Madlala has held his family down, he’s been their pillar since the death of their parents.

A faint nod, “I know baba.”

“Then why did you do something so stupid?”

He’d rather not talk about it but knowing Bab’Madlala, he will not let it go.

“I was overwhelmed.” Mbuzo says, slowly

throwing a look Cashile's way. Since she discovered him hanging by a noose, she hasn't looked at him with pity. He appreciates her for that.

"Come." Bab'Madlala waves him to him, as if calling a little boy.

Mbuzo is hesitant because he doesn't like being controlled, control should only belong to him when he's in a room with someone or people.

A sigh takes over his mouth, his feet work against him as they lead him to the man who has vowed to be his pillar of strength. The father he lost and provider.

Bab'Madlala grips his shoulder and extends his left hand for a shake. They hardly ever shake hands, Mbuzo looks at the hand, there's money in it. A bundle of R100 notes.

What a bombshell! He sends his eyes back to Bab'Madlala, clearly taken aback.

“I can’t take that baba.”

It doesn’t feel right, it never did. In the past, he took the money for his brothers and sister, and their kids. Mhloniphe has one boy, while Mkhetheni has two boys and a girl. His sister Emihle has been the obedient one in this tough economy. It could be that she was raised by their mother’s sister, a firm woman who does not laugh with a child.

“You need it. The kids will be going back to school soon.” Bab’Madlala squeezes his shoulder.

Someone snatches the money from his hand.

“Thank you baba, this money will go a long way.” Cashile says, dipping her index finger and thumb on her tongue and begins to count the notes.

Bab’Madlala is all wide eyes and a pale face, mouth slightly open. If shock was a person, he

represents the word with such flawlessness.

“KaMadlala, that is not your money.” Her father snatches it back from her hand, she’s was on R500.

“Stupid girl. You don’t listen, you do as you please. What, do you think I am your friend? I am your father, you have no respect. What did I do to deserve a child like you?”

A boiling enamel kettle does not compare to how Bab'Madlala is right now. He looks at MaNkosi and she coils under his stern gaze.

“MaNkosi, talk to your daughter. The problem is that I have never raised a hand at her, tell her how well my hand works. I don’t want to hurt her.”

MaNkosi is clothed with shame, she doesn’t dare utter a word.

“We’re going home, take this green fly you call a daughter and follow me.” And with that, he

storms out.

The money? He left with the money.

MaNkosi gives Cashile one look and she knows it's time to go.

"What's his problem?" Cashile asks, she's completely dumbstruck.

"He's your father. Let's go home." She walks out first.

Cashile turns to Mbuzo, "He left with your money."

"It's not my money." He was going to do his uttermost best to reject it.

"I'm sorry. You were hesitant, that's why I took it." She tells him.

He lets out a sigh, "Don't be. You did me a favour, it was going to be hard rejecting your father."

But he was ready for it. If he's going to be an example to his brothers' children, he has to make his own money.

"Give me your number, I will check up on you later."

He snorts because he knows why she wants to check on him.

"I am not going to kill myself. Thanks to you."

His eyes are digging into her soul, he's trying to read her. There's something about her he can't put his finger into, something dark and mysterious.

Cashile hands him her phone, he types in the number and saves himself as Nonkosi, then hands it back to her.

She deletes the name and saves him as Bestie.

"You're my best friend." She says, showing him her screen.

There's no emotion on his face, he remembers those days when they couldn't stay away from each other. His father hated that he was so obsessed with a poor girl who couldn't wipe the snort on her face well. Velaphi tried by all means to keep them apart to no avail.

Eventually, he sent Mbuzo to boarding school. Being away from his son was way better than seeing him with the Madlala tomboy. The girl was confused about her gender from when she was a kid and that raised eyebrows in the village.

Mbuzo is startled when Cashile throws in a hug. "I'm glad you're alive." She mumbles in his ear, the sound of her voice travels down to his pants. His dick jerks with excitement, her touch seems to tingle beneath the surface of his skin. He shouldn't be feeling like this about her.

"Cashile! Yeyi wena Cashile, fusegi." That's

Bab'Madlala yelling from the gate, he came back for her.

They jolt out of each other's arms and look out the door.

"What are you doing to Nonkosi? Are you a cannibal now? Ungumadla 'bantu wena?" Bab'Madlala yells, clearly upset.

Mbuzo frowns at how Cashile is dead with laughter.

"Bye Bestie." She waves him goodbye, and runs out.

Bye bestie? Does that mean he's been friend-zoned?

The house feels lonely once again.

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CASHILE

It's officially New Year's Eve, the day I have been dreading. The first thing I do when I wake up is check my phone for any messages from Mbuzo. I couldn't sleep last night thinking about him. It won't hurt to text him, he must be awake.

Still alive?

Sent.

I'm not going to bath now, I wash my face in a basin and brush my teeth. My head is on my phone, it hasn't pinged. Will Mbuzo ever reply? Is he still alive? Once I've changed into boy shorts and an ingwe vest, I check my phone.

Nothing!

Now I'm worried. That man better not spoil my whole year

There is no one else I can call to ask if he's okay.

I sit on the bed and text him again, this is my last SMS. I should have bought SMS bundles, Telkom is a blessing for those.

I'm not crossing over without you. If you are dead, I will burn down this village.

Sent.

I don't mean I will literally burn it down but I hope my threat works.

My phone rings instantly, it's him. I feel a lump on my throat and swallow it back, not wanting him to hear the shake in my voice.

"Best friend." I answer.

"KaMadlala." His voice is rugged, scratchy and all kinds of mannish. I figure he just woke up, it's 5:45am anyway.

"Happy New Year's Eve. Are you coming to my umemulo?"

"You're having umemulo?" He's surprised.

“Yes, courtesy of my father.”

Mxm!

“Oh wow, I didn’t know. So there won’t be a party?”

Wow! It appears not everyone has been informed about my coming of age party.

“I don’t know what my father has in store for us today, but I guess it will be umemulo/party.”

“And you’re okay with it?”

Why does he ask as if he knows I’ve been up to no good in joburg?

“He’s forcing me.” That’s all I have to say.

He goes silent on me.

The silence is broken by the noise outside, I say goodbye and rush out.

It’s the herd boys, they don’t have to be so loud.

Why is there a hearse at my father's gate?

I head to one of the boys, this one must be around 13 to 14 years old. He's too tall, but his face doesn't lie.

"Hi, what's going on?"

"Ten cows were stolen last night." He says.

I was asking about the hearse at the but...

"What?"

How did no one hear anything? Cows are famous for their loud moos, we would've heard something.

I look at the kraal, it's packed. I'm sure those cows feel crowded by each other. When I left for Joburg, there were 8 cows in the kraal. Now I can't even count them.

"I think they are all there. You should count again." I tell him.

"We've been counting since 4am, ten of them

are missing.”

I feel sorry for my father, he loves his cows.
More than us, now I’m certain.

“What about the hearse? Why is it here?”

He shrugs and walks away.

How rude.

I make my way to the gate, the driver steps out.
I know there is no burial here.

“Kunjani sis wami. Delivery for Bab’Madlala.”

Whaaat!

“What are you delivering? A dead body, or a
coffin?”

He chuckles, “A coffin sisi. He ordered one
yesterday and said it was an emergency.”

But why are they delivering it here? If there was
a burial, everything would be done at the funeral
parlour. I see my father walk out the house with

my mother behind. He's always angry lately, today is understandable. He lost his cows.

"Baba, this man says they are delivering a coffin you ordered. Is it for Mbuzo?" I recall yesterday's events.

A frown comes across his face.

"Baba you ordered a coffin?" My mother asks, I share her shock.

"Why would I do that? I don't know what this boy is talking about. Yeyi nina bafana, where do you think this is? Your father's place. Fusegani man." He loses his cool with the coffin people. The other one is sitting on the passenger seat.

This one looks at the paper in his hand, brows knitted in a frown.

"Baba, your name is on the list. It says you ordered a coffin from us and wanted it to be delivered today."

This confusion is confusing.

“And you came to me? What if someone called pretending to be me? I can get you arrested for defamation of character.” My father says.

“Baba, that’s not what defamation of character is.”

Okhay! I shouldn’t have opened my mouth, he cuts me with his sharp gaze.

“I don’t think anyone would use your name to prank people baba.” My mother steps in, which is a bad idea.

“MaNkosi get out of my sight before I put you inside that coffin. You want to go with these people? Then follow them.”

I pull her back and away from this angry man.

Let him deal with his people alone.

We’re in the kitchen, my mother was in the

process of making porridge. She's always hard at work.

I grab a chair and sit, my job is to watch her while she cooks.

"Where is Bakhe?"

"I think he didn't sleep at home." She says.

That boy is breaking our mother's heart.

"So is umemulo still on?"

Please say no.

"Hai, Cashile. Don't stress me so early in the morning."

That's a yes I guess. I haven't seen the stupid outfit, I'm not interested.

MaNkosi is taking her anger out on her plates and pots, I didn't mean to make her angry.

I'm not looking forward to today, I won't lie.

"Do you need help with anything?" I ask my

mother, a plan to take her back to her happy place.

A plate drops from her hand and shatters to the ground, she's looking out the kitchen window, frozen.

"Mah?"

She runs out the kitchen screaming "Khehla!"

What the hell?

I run to look out the window, I don't see anything. Wait a minute, right across the street. There's an angry mob coming this way, carrying stones, machetes and sjamboks. An injured person is being dragged by his leg. Is that...

Nah! It can't be my brother.

I run out, the hearse people are gone. My parents are on the streets, she's trying to calm the mob down. My father has a sjambok in his

hand. I can't see Bakhe, I have to weave through the crowd surrounding him to get to him.

He's on the ground, there's blood all over him. His face is bruised beyond recognition. He's been necklaced with a car tire.

How long has this been going on?

"Bakhe!" I scream, running to him, two women hold me back.

My brother looks up at me, and grins like a hyena. His teeth are stained with blood. How can he laugh when he could die?

"Baba help him." I shout to my father, he doesn't look my way.

Why is he carrying that thing?

He was never physical with us growing up. Bakhe was treated more like an egg. I'm surprised how my father has switched from the soft gentle giant I know. This man is not my

father.

“Ehlisa umoya baba, he’s your son.” MaNkosi pleads, grabbing the collar of his shirt.

“He’s not my son. A true Madlala would never rob people, this boy has done too much damage in this community. Nonkosi almost lost his life because of him. He stole from the Xabas and will be punished.”

No, not my brother. He might be a lost course, but he would never steal from anyone. That’s my area of expertise.

My mother goes down on her knees, “You are taking your anger out on my son. What did he ever do to you?” My mother screams at baba.

I see Mbuzo dispersing from the crowd, a confused frown on his face. They called him?

I run to him, knowing he will help my brother.

“Mbuzo, they are going to kill him, please stop

them.”

He looks at Bakhe who’s a bleeding mess on the ground.

“What’s going on?” Mbuzo asks.

“We found the person responsible for the robbery, it was Buhlebakhe Madlala.” My father says, pointing at Bakhe with his sjambok.

Mbuzo is angry in a spilt second, he can’t be thinking my brother robbed him, can he?

“Only you can decide what we do with him.” I know this man who just opened his mouth, he stays next door.

“Mbuzo, he’s innocent.” I snap.

Why is he thinking so much? There is nothing to think about.

He turns, I grab his arm and he side eyes me.

“Where are you going? Tell them not to kill my brother.” I’m the one laying a command this

time.

Did I mention how much his frown is starting to get to me? I can't stand it. All hope fades away when he slips out of my hand and disappears into the crowd.

The first scream is from my mother, hands on her head and face drenched with tears. Bakhe's screams of help are not far behind, the mob is having their way with him.

I get on my hands and knees and crawl my way to Bakhe, they will have to kill me too. One thing is for sure, I will never forgive Mbuzo for this.

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6K likes and 500+ comments by 8pm, I will post the next insert.

[03/06, 15:40] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 7

CASHILE

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One thing about mob justice, you insert yourself, you become the victim. I've received a thrash on my back, just one. They know who their target is. Bakhe looks at me with bloodshot eyes. Although on the verge of death, he drags his hand on the ground and holds mine.

"What are you doing Slima?" I don't hear him because of the noise but I read his lips.

He's my only brother, I'm willing to die with him. I can hear my father yelling at everyone to stop. They are focused on attacking my brother, purposely missing me. I want them to attack me as well, that's why I'm here in the cross fire.

Three gunshots are fired, people scatter like ants. The only person left standing is Mbuzo, he

has a gun aimed towards the sky. He fired the shots.

He glances at us as he puts the gun on his waist, runs to my side and holds my face in his hands.

“Are you okay?”

I’m too shaken to utter words, a nod seems to be an appropriate gesture. I’m struggling to collect my breathing. My world seems to be falling apart until his hand starts to stroke my head, eyes fixed on mine.

There’s a command in his eyes, I feel like I should be obeying. I wobble and my knees weaken. I have no idea what is happening, neither do I understand but I’m calm now.

“That’s my girl.” I shiver at his calming words.

“My brother.”

I’m fine, it’s my brother we should be worried

about. This one doesn't believe me, hence he cups my face. I remove his hands and hold them. He's got elegant hands for a man.

"Help Bakhe." I say.

He hurries to remove the tire off Bakhe's neck, while sweeping his gaze towards me, worry spread across his furrowed face.

"I'm fine," I say when I meet his gaze for the umpteenth time.

"I survived death? I knew I had bad luck." Bakhe cracks in laughter.

I can't tell if he's gone crazy or he's dizzy from all the beating.

"You're going to be okay, we'll take you to the hospital." I assure him.

I refuse to believe that my brother would rather die than live.

Mbuzo carries him on his shoulder like he's a

sack of potatoes. We're going to the car when my father comes running from the house.

He also ran away when the gun was fired.

"Where do you think you are taking him?" He's talking to Mbuzo.

"The hospital." Mbuzo says, putting Bakhe in the trunk of the car.

"You're the one who fired the gun?" My father asks. I trace disappointment in his voice.

Mbuzo straightens his back, rising to his full height. He's basically towering over my father.

"The people were going to kill your children." Mbuzo tells him.

"Not on my watch. I was handling it, didn't you see?"

"No baba. From what I saw, the people were not listening to you."

My father sighs heavily and puts out his hand.

“Give me the gun.”

“No.” Mbuzo says.

It comes across as authoritative.

“Is this the thanks I get for taking care of you and your family?”

Not this card, I won’t let him guilt trip Mbuzo.

I open the driver’s door, grab Mbuzo’s hand and push him inside. The reason he allows me is because he wants to get out of here as well.

Rage is latched on my father’s face.

“The party will start soon Cashile. Where are you going?”

Yoh this father birthed me just to kill me.

“It’s not even 7am baba.” I run to the passenger side.

The party can wait, there are more important things to worry about.

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. We are at the hospital. Mbuzo was driving like a maniac. Bakhe will be fine, he just needs to stay under observation for a week. That's what the doctor said.

"My brother will enter the New Year in pain," I haven't stopped complaining. We're in the ward where Bakhe is kept, there are other patients in here.

"Your father is not a man to be crossed." Mbuzo says.

Funny, from what I saw back there.
Mbuzowakhe is not a man to be crossed. The situation would have turned out worse had he not fired that gun.

"You handled everything well, thank you for saving us." He sighs and caresses my cheek.

We are touching each other now? And since when does his touch make me shiver?

“I couldn’t let them hurt you. You are important.” He says.

“Are you okay?” He’s asking again.

I’m drained and tired.

“I’m fine. I have to go home, I have some explaining to do.”

“Your father is upset, you saw him. Why not try talking to him tomorrow?”

He has a point but that old man will come and fetch me, I know him.

Speaking of my father.

“What was in the black bag you gave him that day?” It’s none of my business but curiosity will kill me.

“I don’t know. I got it from the chief, he asked me to give it to Bab’Madlala.” Mbuzo says.

Maybe it's better not knowing.

I hug him to say goodbye, it's becoming a norm to throw my arms around him. His arms wrap around me, he smells nice I must admit. I'm enjoying the hug when my phone rings.
Whoever is calling is against my happiness.

I jump out of his arms and answer my mother's call.

"Mah!"

"Come home. Your father has fallen ill, he's asking for you."

Fallen ill? He looked healthy as a horse when I left. I end the call without saying goodbye.
Mbuzo is looking at me with curiosity.

"My father has fallen ill, he's asking for me."

"I will drive you home." He says, leading the way.

I notice how distressed he is about this,
Bab'Madlala must mean a lot to him.

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Mah meets us at the gate when we arrive, she looks a mess.

She runs to open the door for me.

“How is Khehla? I couldn’t come, your father wouldn’t let me.” She’s distressed.

That doesn’t sound like him, but from what I have seen, it is him.

“Khehla is going to be fine Mah. He will be home before the 5th.”

Relief washes over her face, she’s in tears as she traces her gaze to Mbuzo.

“Thank you for saving my baby, I will never be able to repay you.”

“It was nothing Mah. Bakhe is KaMadlala’s brother, it’s my duty to take care of him.”

Why is he putting it like that? He catches me questionably staring at him and clears his throat. I will never be able to read this man, will I?

“What happened to baba?”

“Suddenly he couldn’t breathe, he’s resting now.” She says.

That’s his punishment for letting people hurt my brother. Mbuzo doesn’t come into the house, even when he’s invited in. He decides to leave.

I head straight to my father’s room. I was hoping he would be asleep.

His face lights up, “KaMadlala.”

He’s not my favourite person at the moment.

“Baba...”

“I have cancelled umemulo.”

Did I say he is not my favourite person? I lied. I

walk further in and stand on his bed side.

“Thank you baba.” I try not to sound too happy lest he finds me out.

There will come a time when I will tell them about my life in Joburg, I’m not ready.

“But the party continues, I have already paid for everything.” He says.

Of course, why would he disappoint his favourite people?

“What about you? You’re not well, and Bakhe is in the hospital.”

“I will be fine, so will your brother.” He sounds so sure of himself.

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It’s around 4pm, people have started to come in.

The party could've been held anywhere but here, where the same people almost killed my brother. I look at every one of them spitefully.

The kitchen is packed with strangers, cooking. I haven't set my foot in there, and I'm starving.

I'm wearing a dress because my mother asked me to, she wants me to look more like a girl today. I'm not wearing a weave, or a head wrap. It's not me.

Mah asked me to help her with her head wrap, we have made use of the sitting room. She's not herself, she speaks when spoken to. If it were up to her, this party wouldn't be happening.

"MaNkosi!" That's my father's voice, strong with a twinge of excitement. I'm lost for a minute until I see him walking out of his room, looking very much alive.

"Baba!" If my eyes have ever wanted to leave their sockets, now is the time.

He smiles, something I haven't seen in a while.

"I feel better, my ancestors will never forsake me." He snaps his fingers as he dramatically turns around.

"Baba, you were almost dying?" My mother confirms.

He laughs, "I will never die. I'm a Madlala, I have people fighting my battles."

That's nice for him.

He lifts his arms like The Rock and graces us with a huge grin.

"What are you two staring at? Get ready for the party, it's the last day of the year. Let's celebrate."

Surely he must be aware that his son is in the hospital.

"Don't be happy baba, people will start to talk because your son hasn't recovered yet." Mom

tells him.

And just like that, his smile is wiped off.

“The boy will be fine, he’s strong like his father.”

He accompanies his statement with laughter.

I will never understand him.

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I’m not in a celebratory mood.

The tent is crowded, men sitting on the ground on one side. The women are on the other side.

Chairs are reserved for special guests. I’m sitting with cousins I haven’t spoken to in years.

I wish Mbuzo was here, he’s the only friend I know. Nompilo came with Nothando, they are sitting together.

My father is sitting with Chief Sibiya. He looks so prim and proper, like a fake BEE. It’s my first time seeing in a suit, he’s even using a walking

cane. Mah is beside him, his arm is around her shoulders.

He has to showcase the perfect family, deep down, I know she's boiling with rage. Her son is nursing bruises in the hospital.

My father stands up, and gestures that someone hands him a mic. One of the young boys runs to him with one.

So unnecessary.

He looks back at my mother, a smile on his face.

"Someone help me tell my wife how beautiful she looks today." He starts.

The crowd hollers in cheers, entertaining him.

"I am the luckiest man alive, no offence chief."

The crowd laughs again.

Chief Sibiya is a single father, his wife died years ago.

Dad turns his gaze back to my mother, she forces a smile.

“MaNkosi, I still remember the day we met. You were the most beautiful woman I had ever seen, indoni yamanzi. I don’t know how you saw iphara and fell in love.”

The loud laughter from the crowd, he’s got them playing right on the palm of his hand.

He proceeds to tell us their love story, I have heard it a thousand times.

“Thank you for blessing me with two beautiful children.” His eyes shift to me, I brace myself for the worst.

“Cashile KaMadlala.” He laughs with his guests, something about my name makes these people laugh.

I’m offended.

“We named you Cashile because you came

unexpected, we were not planning on having another child.”

Simplified, I’m was a mistake.

“We were broke and didn’t know where the next meal will come from. My precious son Buhlebakhe was still on diapers, at three years old.” He laughs, finding a joke to what he said.

“I’m sure most of you here remember how MaNkosi and I didn’t have much, my shoes had holes in them. I would wear the same clothes Monday to Monday. Times were tough but poverty wasn’t going to defeat us. Through my wife’s consistency in prayer and God’s grace, we made it.”

The crowd cheers, this father likes attention. He lifts a hand and they all go quiet, same time.

When is the chief taking over.

“Ntombi kababa, please come and stand here.” He points to the stage.

I look around, yep he's talking to me. Jesus save me!

One of the cousins who didn't even greet me when she arrived, takes my hand and pulls me to the front.

I'm made to sit on a chair, in display.

I want to vanish.

"Distinguished ladies and gentleman. Today I am proud to call myself, Cashile Madlala's father. Look at her carefully, the most beautiful girl in the village."

That's funny.

"My baby has made me proud, with the values and principles she learned from home, she has kept herself pure till this day."

I hope he's talking about my heart, I have a pure heart. I want to adopt children from Africa one day.

“She’s still a virgin at the age of 26. What a great example she is to our children.” My father announces.

Am I the she he’s talking about? Damnit! I’m the “she.”

Earth open up and swallow me.

I’m given a standing ovation, deep down I’m laughing. This is a joke, right.

My eyes browse the tent. They believe him, how stupid is this?

I’m a virgin? Where did I lose my memo?
Because I didn’t get it.

My vagina is as open as jojo tank, I’ve even had a fist put in there.

I judge Juba for his wildness in bed.

“Please give her your blessings, any amount you have.” That’s my father.

These people will never spend their money on

me, they don't believe this story. There's chaos, they are up and leaving.

Why are they coming towards me?

A R50 note falls on my lap. Has God answered my prayers and made money rain from heaven?

I look up... oh, it's Mbuzo. He came, he looks good in jeans and fitting t-shirt.

He smiles, it's barely there. I return his half smile with an awkward one. He goes back to his seat.

No, Mbuzo is broke as it is. I feel bad.

Where's Bab'Madlala? I have to stop this circus, he has to know that I have a child.

A R200 note hits me on the head and slides down my lap.

On second thought, Bab'Madlala can wait. It's not like he will leave planet earth anytime soon.

I'm surrounded by people in a jiffy, showering me with money.

"I have a 10 year-old daughter, you are her inspiration. Thank you for setting an example to our children."

Aunty, I have a four year old. But thanks for your vote of confidence. I give my best Colgate smile, chuckling lightly.

"I can mentor her mah, I have all the time in the world." I'm lying, I don't even have time for myself.

She smiles and makes a R10 note rain on me, my cheeks hurt from fake smiling, only for her to pay me R10?

"You are beautiful Cashile, you look more beautiful in a dress." A man says when the lady clears the way for more people. He takes my hand and puts money in it, I count it and put it in my pouch.

“I will buy another dress with this money, and do my hair. But salons are expensive.” I tell him.

He nods and walks away, I thought he’d drop more money. He’s part of the stingy men association.

I catch a glimpse of my father smiling while bopping his head to the music. If only he knew.

“Cashile my child.” It’s the chief, Nothando’s father.

I wonder who selected him for the role, he looks like Barack Obama gone broke.

“Baba.” I rub my hands together, a sign of respect.

“We are proud of you, you will make a good wife. Thank you for keeping yourself for marriage.”

I kept myself for marriage? That’s a new discovery I didn’t know about.

“Yebo baba.”

He bends over, “Let me see your hands.”

I open my palms, somehow what he sees puts a smile on his face.

“Perfect.” He says, is he giving me money or not?

He gestures for a young man to come to him, this boy is carrying a bag. He unzips it and retrieves money then gives it to the Chief.

“Be blessed, may your womb be blessed. You will bear beautiful children.” He’s dropping the money on my head as he speaks.

This place is better than joburg. I can’t believe I was arrested just because I wanted Mandela notes, the government is selfish. They don’t want us to have money. Who has the last laugh now!

Definitely not me. I don’t know if I’m losing my sight but the man sitting in the crowd next to Mbuzo is Juba Ngwenya. The boyfriend I left in Joburg, he’s smirking while observing me.

This is the right time to die.

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[03/06, 15:40] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 8

CASHILE.

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Juba disappeared somewhere, I know for sure he's still around. There is a reason he came and it must be big. Kwanyuswa parties are a flex, there's loud music. People are drinking and dancing. I have lost sight of Mbuzo too, I hope he didn't leave.

My phone buzzes in my bag, I retrieve it and find

a message from Juba.

Meet me behind the main house. The message reads.

“Mah, I want to use the toilet.” I’ve been sitting with these old people, listening to my father and the chief talk about community things I have no interest in.

“Later KaMadlala.” I wasn’t talking to Bab’Madlala.

Another text comes through, Juba has sent me pictures of me and him, naked in bed. Some are pictures when I was pregnant. There’s one when I was in court, it’s the day I was trialled.

That son of a gun is here to blackmail me, it’s so him.

Chop! Chop baby, I’m waiting. A third text.

“I can’t hold it in baba.” I snap.

I’m not pressed, I just want to find that man.

“It will be rude to just get up while the chief is here.” My father.

I glance at the said chief, he smiles. That’s not how an old man should smile at a young woman.

“But you guys are talking about...”

My father interjects, “You guys? To elders?”

Yoh!

“Joburg has spoiled her, I warned you about sending her away Madlala. You spoiled Cashile, you should have toughened your hand.” Chief Sibya says.

He doesn’t even know me, what is his problem?

“Who are you to talk about me like that?”

The fuck!

“I am your fiancé. This attitude better stay at your father’s house, you will not bring it to my house.”

The heavens are testing me.

Dad takes a glass of whatever nonsense he's drinking and gulps it down. I look over at my mother, she looks like a deer caught in headlights. This is news to her.

"Baba? Is that true?" Mah asks, almost in a whisper.

"It's for the best." He replies with no shame.

"If I wanted to be around an ancestor, I would kill myself and meet my ancestors. I am not marrying a man who has outlived Abraham."

My father is sick in the head.

"Chief Sibiya is not that old." My father says.

Fuck that shit!

Mah stands, slamming her hands on the table.

"Over my dead body. My daughter will not marry this man." She yells, shooting daggers at Sibiya.

There's silence, one of these men has to answer this woman before all hell breaks loose.

I'm waiting for Mah to flip the table and turn this place upside down, heck take down this tent if she has to because that's what I would do for my daughter. But nope, she walks away in a fit of rage.

My father is embarrassed, there's a forced smile on his face.

"She will be fine." He assumes.

I know I'm not leaving without breaking this bond these two have made.

"Why are you doing this baba?"

"Because I want what's best for you. I want you to live a comfortable life." He can't even look me in the eye.

"By marrying me to an old man? You don't care about anyone but yourself, you stopped caring

about us the day you tasted power.”

“You are my blood, you mean the most to me.”

Bullshit!

“Really? Did you slaughter a chicken for me when I came back from Joburg? Not even a goat or a cow, you have livestock more than the number of Solomon’s wives but you didn’t even think of giving me one.”

Two years ago, he would have slaughtered the fattest cow at my arrival. The prodigal daughter coming home would have been a big deal in the village.

I bet you he sings love songs to his livestock. I wouldn’t be surprised if he has named them all.

He wears a frown, like he has the right to.

“Fine, you want a cow? I will give you two, five if it will make you happy. Just do as I say.”

It’s all that hair in his ears, that’s why he can’t

hear me.

“Why? Why are you so desperate for this marriage to happen? Is it money? Did Sibiya pay you?”

“That’s no way to talk to your father.” Sibiya interrupts.

“Askies mhulu Sibiya, your age mates have turned into Hezekiah’s bones in their coffins. Why are you still here? You have lived for too long that you’ve turned into a disturbing sight, it’s okay to die. No one will judge you.”

His eyes swiftly narrow, jaw clenched.

“Cashile!” My father grabs my wrist, it fucking hurts.

I yank it back.

“I’m sorry baba, but your head is buzzing with money. You are so obsessed with it that you’ve forgotten family values, and the love you had

for your children.”

“You are a child, you know nothing.”

Bab’Madlala hisses, glaring viciously.

I smile, “You are right. The only thing this my naïve ass knows is that I slept with Chief Sibiya’s daughter Nothando and I enjoyed every minute of it.”

Mic drop! I leave them picking up their jaws from the ground. Lies work like magic. I will burn down this town if they dare me, and this time I mean it.

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Juba is standing against the wall, scrolling through his phone.

He swallows the entirety of my body in a suffocating hug before I can say anything. My plan was to spit on his face and tell him to leave

without hearing what he has to say.

“I have always loved you in a dress.” His eyes are raking my body. There was a time I loved it when he’d look at me like that but today, I am beside myself with disgust.

“Why are you here? How did you know where to find me?”

He taps my nose with his index finger, “Have you forgotten baby? I’m omniscient.”

Fool thinks he’s God.

“Why are you here Juba? Why did you send me those pictures?”

He smiles, folding his arms over his chest.

“I told you to keep me updated while you’re here, but I got one text from you. Have you found someone else? Are you cheating on me baby?”

I swear if this man does not tell me why he’s here...

“I was in prison for two years, while you were fucking the whole of Gauteng and you have the audacity to ask me if I’m cheating? Awu kahle wena. Why. Are. You. Here?”

A pompous smile flitters across his face.

“It’s your birthday tomorrow, I came to spend it with you my virgin girl.”

He comes for a kiss, I dodge it.

“So mommy and daddy have no idea that you are a baby-mama? I can show them the evidence, and pictures of you in an orange uniform.”

The truth is slowly coming out, he’s here to tarnish my reputation. He wants something.

“I’m listening.” I might as well.

He doesn’t control the vast smile attacking his face.

“I brought your car back. I’m in the process of

getting your house, you can finally have your life back in Joburg.” He says.

“I’m not going back to that life, it sent me to jail.”

“I will protect you this time. We need you back with the team. Chilly was an informer, I had to get rid of him.” He says, and by that look in his eyes, he killed Chilly. That’s how Juba gets rid of snitches.

Chilly was the tech guy, a very nerdy skinny boy who dropped out of school and decided to steal for a living.

“If I’m going to go back to Joburg, I want a real job. You have connections, right?”

He knows when I’m not bluffing.

“Baby, you don’t have to be involved in criminal activities. The only thing you will be doing is driving the getaway car. No more card theft, I promise. You will still get the same cut.” He

sounds desperate.

I'm conflicted, then again, this is my chance to run away from this place. There's really nothing for me here, I have lived without my family, I can do it again.

"When are we leaving?"

When a way to other men's hearts is through their stomachs, obedience paves you a way to Juba's heart. He huddles me in a hug, burying his face in my neck and plants a kiss there.

I hear quiet footsteps and jump out of his arms. I see a shadow moving away, I can't tell if someone was walking past or they were eavesdropping. I hope no one heard our conversation.

"The yard is full, we have to wait until everyone has gone to sleep."

My plan puts a frown on his face.

“It’s New Year’s Eve, these people are not going anywhere. Can’t you just tell your parents that something came up in Joburg?” He thinks that will work?

“You don’t know my father, clearly. Don’t stress, they’ll be gone by 3am, you just have to be patient.” I tell him.

“Fine, I will drive around and come back after midnight.”

He kisses my lips, his hand gripping my ass in the process. I push him off, it makes him smile.

Going back to my old life might be the worst or best decision of my life.

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[03/06, 15:40] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 9

MBUZO

It's not the first time the Madlalas have hosted a New Year's Eve party. He's never attended any of them even when his brother Mhloniphe would plead with him, he's the party animal in the family-- Mhloniphe. Dance like you're about to lose your legs and drink like you just got new lungs, is the motor Mhlo lives by.

Mbuzo is not about that life, he came here because Cashile wanted him to. But she's too busy for him.

He's riding his bicycle out the gate when a reversing Mercedes AMG C63 hits the back of the bike, throwing him to the ground. He quickly picks himself up like he always does when life throws him down.

He's fine, just worried. This is not the first time he's close to being crashed by a vehicle while riding this stupid bike.

Mbuzo looks at the car, jaw clenched. There's no way this person didn't see him.

The driver steps out, angry as hell.

"Do you have a death wish or something?" The man barks angrily in his posh English accent, as he exits the car at a fast pace.

This one is obviously from Joburg, everything about him screams Slay King. He's stylish, tight fitting jeans, a printed chest-hugging t-shirt and white Jordan sneakers.

"You scratched my car." The man inspects his vehicle for any damages before turning his angry face toward Mbuzo.

Mbuzo fails to hide the anger on his face, he is not the kind that walks around throwing punches. His body is made of muscles, broad

shoulders and large hands. One punch would send the slay-king into cardiac arrest. Mbuzo thinks he's arrogant, it's all over him like a bad rush.

"Are you deaf?" The man is looking for a fight.

Mbuzo's eyes dart around the overflowing yard, people are too drunk to care.

"What are you looking for bafo?" He keeps his voice low, as he questions the man in IsiZulu.

"If it's a fight, you have picked the wrong person." Mbuzo adds.

His words are received as a threat by the smartly dressed man who laughs frantically, his eyes darting around in search of spectators.

No one cares.

"Do you know who I am?" The man.

Of course he doesn't, no one at this party knows who he is. Just a guy driving an

expensive vehicle with the Gauteng registration number.

This could go two ways, a fight or a peaceful separation. The latter turns out to be the right choice for Mbuzo.

The wheel of the bike is wracked, Mbuzo tosses it aside, clicks his tongue, and takes off by foot.

The sun is setting by the time he gets home with plans to eat and retire for bed. Like every year, he will be sleeping when everyone crosses over to the New Year. The door was locked when he left, there are voices coming from the kitchen. Laughter and conversation between two males.

He walks in on his brothers sitting around the table, feasting on bread and alcohol.

“When did you get back?” Their plan was to spend the New Year in Newcastle.

“Hours ago. We were just about to leave for the party.” Mhloniphe answers with his mouth full. Table manners is just a phrase to him.

“Where were you?” Mbuzo joins them at the table and grabs the bread. The plastic is empty, he looks at Mhlo because he’s the only one who eats more than seven slices and still has space for more.

“I was at the Madlalas.” Mbuzo says, drinking from Mhloniphe’s bottle.

The twins share a look, there’s an inside joke that has Mhlo laughing his head off.

“Woza 2024! Mbuzowakhe is attending parties now?” Mhloniphe’s head is on the table, he’s failed to control his laugh.

Mkhotheni hasn’t shown a gum or tooth. His smile never shows up even when necessary, he walks around with a ‘don’t fuck with me’ face.

He’s the complete opposite of his twin, his

mannerisms are mostly found on Mbuzowakhe. These two resemble their father. While Mhloniphe is like a toddler high on sugar, his sense of humour is a ten and he's the most charming of the three brothers.

"I went to see KaMadlala, she wanted me there." Mbuzo explains himself.

"Cashile is back?" The question belongs to Mkhetheni.

They have seen Cashile when she would visit the village.

"Yes, but she's leaving soon." Mbuzo says.

"Don't tell me you two rekindled your love already?" Mhloniphe does not take anything seriously.

"Do you ever shut up?" Mkhetheni asks his twin, he gets a shrug in return.

The mood has turned grey thanks to Mbuzo's

long face.

“What’s going on ndoda?”

That’s a tough question Mkhetheni is asking.
Where does he begin to explain?

“KaMadlala has a boyfriend and a child, she’s going back with him tonight.” He overheard Cashile talking to that man with a cheese boy accent.

His phone suddenly rings, it’s Cashile.

“Put her on loud speaker.”

Who else to suggest this but Mhlo?

Mbuzo clears his throat and answers the call privately.

“Hello.”

“I saw you at the party. Why did you leave?”

Now he has to explain himself, which is

something he hates with passion.

“You saw me, so there was no reason for me to stay.” He says.

“Yeah but we didn’t get to talk. Why did you leave before the countdown?” Cashile asks.

The countdown is in 5 hours. Entering the New Year is not a big deal, it’s not like something huge will happen. In fact, January is the laziest, and longest month. No one has energy for resolutions.

“Do you want me there?” Mbuzo asks.

Mhlo makes a mockery sound, finding amusement in what Mbuzo said.

“Of course I want you there.” Cashile says.

“What about your boyfriend? Will he approve of my presence?”

“She has a boyfriend ndoda.” Mhlo says out loud and gets reprimanded like a child with just

a look. He grins at his younger brother and zips his mouth.

Mbuzo decides to take the conversation to the living room. Mhlo is too much of a child to listen to adult conversations.

“What boyfriend?” There’s uncertainty in Cashile’s voice.

He wants to tell her what he heard but she might point an accusatory finger at him. He didn’t mean to eavesdrop, he was walking past when he heard voices.

“I can’t come, my brothers are here.” Mbuzo.

“Is there enough alcohol?” Someone screams next to him, it’s Mhlo. When did he get here?

“Ndoda, do you mind?” Mbuzo chides him like their father would’ve.

It doesn’t work, Mhlo is an untameable menace.

“Tell her we are coming.” Mhlo says loudly, for

sure Cashile heard.

This calls for a sigh, which Mbuzo takes.

“We will be there.” He tells Cashile and takes up another sigh.

“Great, tell bhuti Mhlo I will keep his ciders cold.” Cashile says.

Mbuzo wants to tell her not to refer to him as bhuti. Mhloniphe is a 38-year-old man stuck with a teenager's mental capacity.

That's Mbuzo's opinion.

The call has ended, Mbuzo tells his brothers that he won't go because Cashile might say goodbye for good this time.

“I can't stand to see her leave.” He explains.

“Then stop her,” says Mkhetheni paging through yesterday's ISOLEZWE.

This one is far in the future, his mind is that of a 50-year-old. He's a splitting image of their father, voice, the beard and aura.

"She calls me bestie." Mbuzo says and regrets it a second later when Mhlo is rolled over on his lap laughing his lungs out.

"Serves you right bafo. Aren't you dating Nothando?" Mhlo asks.

There's no answer, Mbuzo doesn't really know what's happening between the two of them.

"What is dating? I have never touched Nothando, I don't know her naked." Mbuzo says, shocking his brothers.

The room is quiet, no one dares to utter a sound until a whistle is heard from Mhlo.

All eyes turn to him.

"Mbuzo and Cashile sitting on a tree.
K.I.S.S.I.N.G." Mhlo sings in his face. He's taken

it upon him to annoy his little brother.

“How childish.” Mbuzo mumbles, pushing his brother off his lap.

Mkhotheni is all faint smiles, crossed legs, and eyes engrossed on the newspaper.

“I’m going to change, can I borrow your underwear?”

That’s Mhlo asking his twin.

“I forgot to wash mine, they are all dirty.” He explains as Mkhotheni questions his mind.

It’s really going to be one hell of a long night.

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CASHILE

It’s around 8pm, I have changed into running shorts and a t-shirt. I spoke to Bakhe, he was

wishing me a happy New Year. The doctor gave him a sedative, he will be in deep sleep when the clock strikes 12am.

“Cashile!”

Shit!

I only came to the kitchen for a drink and some scones. I put the glass down, my water suddenly tastes bitter.

“What is it Nothando?”

She’s been eating lemons, otherwise her face wouldn’t look like that.

“My father is asking for you.” She crosses her arms, eyeing me with so much disgust.

“I don’t want to see your father.”

“I thought you might say that,” says Chief Sibiya appearing from the corridor.

I was wondering why he and my father wore suits today. Sneaky old men. He’s coming

closer, Nothando grabs a hold of his arm.

“Baba,” she looks worried. Like I will steal her father from her.

I think she knows.

“Mama...” Chief Sibiya says.

“I am not your mother.” I cut in, disgusted by the endearment.

We’re literally the same height, me and him. Even if he were young, it would never work. I don’t date skinny men.

“Watch what you say to my father. How desperate can you be Cashile? There are many young men you could choose from. Why my father?”

This girl has rang the alarm.

“What about the herd boys working for your father? They are your type.”

She’s basically saying I don’t have class.

“My dear, do you want me as your stepmother?” I ask, adding an eyebrow raise in order to intimidate her.

Her face crinkles in disgust, “I would rather die.” Just what I thought.

“Then shut up, your potential stepmother wants to talk.”

She gasps and looks at her father, he nods to her then waves her away. This girl is not leaving, her stubbornness reminds me of myself.

“Have you thought about the proposal?” The chief asks.

“You don’t want to marry me, Sibiya. I am not the angel my father promised you.” I tell him.

The smile on his face hasn’t dissipated, it’s creeping me out.

Let me show him something. I take my phone, and open the pictures Juba sent me. His eyes

widen with shock when he sees them. I sit while he scrolls through the pictures on my phone.

“Told you, I’m not an angel. If you want to continue with this marriage, then these pictures will be all over the internet on the night of the wedding. Your career as a chief will be over by sunrise.”

His eyes narrow, I’m getting under that wrinkled skin of his and I love it.

“I don’t take well to threats. Uyadelela wengane.” He sizzles.

That’s the whole point.

“I have nothing to lose, while you on the other hand.”

“Where is Madlala? He needs to put his dog on a leash.” He’s barking with anger as he flies out the kitchen.

Nothando runs after him, I’m glad she’s on my

side regarding this. She's not my favourite person, but that don't mean I want to be her stepmother.

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Bab'Madlala threw the mother of all parties, it's full and that makes it easy for me to hide from him. I avoid going to my room, it's the first place he will look.

I have had two drinks, getting drunk would be a mistake. I saw Mhloniphe with his friends, his twin didn't come and Mbuzo. I am disappointed, I was looking forward to seeing him.

It's almost 12am, people have forgotten their manners and lost their dignities somewhere between beer bottles and maskandi music.

I'm minding my own business, scrolling through my phone when I'm tackled to the ground unexpectedly.

There's a fight between two drunk men, one of them fell on me.

"Blue nation for life." The one who fell on me yells as he picks himself up from the ground.

Confusion hits me like a ton of bricks.

"Uyanya, red nation will win." The other says, but his opponent doesn't like it, he tackles him to the ground and... there's a wrestle.

I'm so annoyed by this red nation, blue nation nonsense. What happened to Ringo, Mafikizolo, Brenda Fassie?

There's thunder, the clouds are slowly gathering in the sky. It looks like it's going to rain. My father will be available for the count down, this means I can stay in my room until everyone leaves. It's 5 minutes to midnight, people are called to gather by the tent.

I head to my room, but I don't make it there. Someone grabs my hand, pulling me with him to the back of the rondavel. It's dark but I see him, he's the only tall man I know in this village. Well, his brothers too.

"You came?" I ask.

He has me backed up against the wall, standing too close.

"I've been waiting for you, KaMadlala." He says, he hasn't let go of my arm.

"What do you mean? I was waiting for you, I thought you were not coming."

He cups my face, "You kept me waiting for three years."

He's confusing me and I can't see what his eyes are saying in this darkness.

"If you ever trusted me once in your life, you will come with me." He says.

“Where are we going?”

“To a safe place where Sibiya won’t get to you.”

I’m not sure I follow.

“You want me to run away?” I ask.

“I want you to trust me,” this trust thing again.

I know for a fact he will never hurt me, I trust him. Maybe I’m an idiot.

“I have a child Mbuzo, I can’t...”

“I know everything. It’s only temporary. We don’t have time. Chief Sibiya is a cruel man, you don’t know what he is capable of. My car is parked out the back, let’s go.” He says.

“I’m going back to Joburg with someone.” I say, not interested in chief Sibiya’s shenanigans.

“Are you now?” I don’t know what tone he uses, but I can’t find the words I was supposed to say.

“Get whatever you need, you have less than five

minutes. We should be out the gate while they are distracted by the fireworks.” Mbuzo says.

I’m in my room in a split second, packing everything I need while Mbuzo guards the door.

He takes my bag and hand when I step out, he’s walking too fast I can’t keep track.

The countdown begins, they are screaming at the top of their lungs.

I let go of Mbuzo’s hand and run towards my father’s kraal. A hand grabs my neck from the back, causing me stop on my tracks.

“Where are you going?” He whisper-shouts, slowly releasing me.

“We’re taking a cow, we’ll sell it.” We will need money.

“The truck won’t carry the weight of a cow, it will slow us down.” He says.

The fact that we need to make money doesn’t

bother him?

“We’ll take two goats then.” I say.

“What for?” This one is afraid of stealing.

“Mbuzo, have you ever stolen anything in your life?

Silence! I thought as much. My father won’t even notice that one is missing.

“Come on, we need the money.” The one I made today won’t last a month.

“3! 2! 1! Happy New Year!!!” The people shouts in jubilation. Fireworks occupy the dark sky.

I open the kraal and grab one goat by its legs, then carry it over my shoulders.

Mbuzo will find me in the car. There’s a small gate we hardly ever use, it leads to the woods. I can see the car parked not far from here, the headlights are on, not too bright.

I’m strong enough to put the goat in the trunk.

There's no rope to tie its legs, we'll lose money if it jumps out.

I sit in the car, and wait. The driver's door opens after what feels like years, Mbuzo gets in and starts the car. He drives past my father's gate, there's loud music playing, people dancing some are still shooting fireworks. I don't know when I will be back, but I will be back.

Juba didn't leave, we drive past the AMG C63 parked a street away from my house. He will forgive me.

We're not far when I hear a sound coming from the trunk.

"Can you hear that?" I ask.

Something is barking, obviously a dog. Mbuzo gives me a brief look. Is he thinking what I'm thinking? I quickly look back, there's a dog in the trunk, barking at my goat.

"You stole a dog?" I ask, my eyes widening.

Who's dog is that anyway? We don't have one at home.

Mbuzo shrugs, "I heard voices, so I grabbed the closest goat.

"It's not a goat, it's a dog, Mbuzo."

I'm running away with a guy who can't even steal a goat. What was it even doing in the kraal?

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500+ comments... 15 shares...

[03/06, 15:40] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 10

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His ringing phone jolts him out of a nightmare, he's sweating and panting, eyes widely opened and darting around the room. When he realises he's safe and sound in the comfort of his bedroom, he releases a sigh of relief.

MaNkosi is softly snoring on her side of the bed. Must be nice to sleep like a baby.

It's 4:30am, the sun will rise soon.

"MaNkosi." He shakes her shoulder.

MaNkosi went to bed before the fireworks last night, she wasn't talking to him. He was hoping for a kiss when the clock struck 12am.

"MaNkosi wake up." Another shake, rough this time. His phone starts to ring again.

"Hello." That's not how you answer the phone but Bab'Madlala can be forgiven, he was being chased by dark shadows in his dreams.

Something like that can make anyone cranky.

“Baba, it’s Mbali.”

Oh! He didn’t check the caller ID.

“Yini Mbali, ufunani?”

“It’s Thabiso baba, he was opening the gate on his way to work and it fell on him.”

Really? Is this a good enough reason to disturb people in the morning?

“Did he catch it?” The disinterest in his voice is palpable.

“No baba, it fell on him.” Mbali says.

Only now he realises that the girl is crying, but why didn’t she call her father?

“His neck broke instantly, he’s dead baba... umyeni wami ungishiyile. Thabiso is dead.” Now she’s uncontrollably crying.

Bab’Madlala exhales deeply, death is such a robber of life.

“Phephisa KaMadlala.” Mbali is his brother’s child, of course he sympathises with her.

“Kodwa Mbali, ngasho ngathi amaPedi ayaloya. I told you that your husband won’t make it two months after the wedding, they have killed your husband my child. Awu kodwa thixo soneni?”

That is one ugly cry he’s doing there, it’s so loud that it disturbs MaNkosi from her beauty sleep.

Mission accomplished. He likes it when they are both awake.

When his eyes meet hers, he turns up the volume of his cries. MaNkosi jumps out of bed, and grabs her morning gown.

“Baba, what’s wrong?”

He cuts her off by lifting his hand.

He ends the call while Mbali is still talking and wraps his arms around his wife. He’s inconsolable and scaring MaNkosi.

“Baba, is it Bakhe or Cashile?” She’s thinking the worst.

Death has a tendency of taking loved ones in January.

“Themba is dead. Ambulele amaPedi uMonna kaMbali.”

Confusion in bold!

“What?” That’s MaNkosi, trying to push her crying husband off her.

“They killed Mbali’s husband, she just got married and now her husband has passed away.” It’s a sad scene. No man in the history of men crying has ever cried like this.

MaNkosi finally escapes the embrace, she’s frowning at him.

“His name was Thabiso, you didn’t even like him.” She says.

This shuts Bab’Madlala up, “He was married to

my brother's child."

Stupid woman.

She agrees, it's really sad.

"I'm going to pee, make me coffee with lots of Cremora and sugar." Bab'Madlala says.

He puts on his flip-flops and walks out whistling
Amagugu alelizwe ayosala emathuneni.

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He comes back 15-minutes later to his coffee and creamy Cremora.

MaNkosi is glaring at him as he walks in from outside, he frowns back.

"What happened? Did Mbali die of a heart break?"

"No, I'm wondering why you are coming from

outside." She says.

He joins her at the table where his tea is placed.

"I felt like peeing under the tree like the good old days."

"Hau, we have a toilet in the house."

"I know MaNkosi, growing up we didn't have flashing toilets. They came with the white people who colonised our continent. There's nothing wrong with going back to my roots." He sips his tea.

She's staring, he shrugs.

"Why do you become irritable when you're hiding things from me?" She asks.

"What am I hiding from you?"

"I don't know baba. The other day I walked in on you counting money, it was as if you didn't want me to know about it. I couldn't even ask you about it, you were scary."

He chuckles lightly, “I’m your husband, MaNkosi. I would never hurt you, you know that. And you are my teammate, I can’t do anything without you.”

She knows. He’s never laid a finger on her, but when bad-tempered, she prefers not to be around him.

“Cashile is still not in her room.” He changes the topic before she asks him questions that will spoil his day.

It was when everyone had left that they realised that Cashile was not around, finding her will be like finding a needle in a haystack.

MaNkosi takes up a heavy sigh, she’s troubled.

“I don’t think she’s coming back, what if she went back to Joburg? I wouldn’t blame her, you sold my daughter to your friend.” She’s not letting this issue go until he fixes it.

“I promise I broke the deal with Sibiya, I no

longer want to be Chief. It's a New Year MaNkosi. I'm a new man. When Cashile comes back, I will find her a job. You know your husband has connections now."

MaNkosi likes what she's hearing.

"Finding her a job won't be easy baba. Our children have bad luck, there's something else we should do to help them." MaNkosi tells him.

"What? The Madlala ancestors turned their backs on us, there is no hope for these children. Bakhe is worse, he doesn't even try to do better. Sometimes you must fight, show the ancestors that you are a man. Bakhe is weak man, weak." He's always bitter towards Bakhe and that frustrates his wife.

"Bakhe is your heir, treat him like gold and he will do great things for you. Besides, it's not his fault. You know the situation."

There's silence at the table, each sipping tea.

Bab'Madlala looks at his wife to find her staring back.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" He asks.

"Thabiso stems from a royal family, his family is rich." MaNkosi reminds him.

Yeah but Thabiso Kgaphola lost it all when he broke Mbali's virginity, her bad luck fell on him and his family disowned him for falling in love with a Zulu.

"She's pregnant with a Kgaphola baby, a royal baby." MaNkosi adds to her statement.

They are silent again and in deep thought.

"Don't mess this up like you did when you got my son beaten up and selling my daughter to that ugly old man. My children are my life."

MaNkosi says.

"Chief Sibiya was very handsome in his youth." Bab'Madlala argues.

They are in the midst of sharing laughter when one of the herd boys runs into the kitchen.

“Yeyi fusegi.” Bab’Madlala yells, the boy stops at the door.

“Is this your father’s house? Go back and knock.”

The boy rushes back outside.

“He’s a child, don’t be rough on him.” MaNkosi tells him.

She’s very motherly and loves beyond limits, it’s just that her children come first. If given a chance to steal a piece of gold from the streets in heaven, she would do it... for her babies.

I mean, who said good girls go to heaven anyway?

There’s a knock.

“Ngena.” Bab’Madlala permits.

The boy appears distraught.

“One goat is missing baba, Spot is also gone.”
The boy reports. Spot is the dog that was put in
the kraal to catch the livestock thief.

This puts Bab’Madlala in a bad mood.

“I knew Spot wouldn’t protect our livestock, the
stupid dog doesn’t even bark when there’s
danger.” Bab’Madlala complains.

His problems keep piling up.

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CASHILE

He brought me to a house in Scottsburg. I
thought we were leaving the province. The
house is not bad though, it was once a B&B
managed by his mother. Business died when
the parents died.

It's a single story with three bedrooms, a kitchen and two bathrooms. No one stays here because there's no electricity, the fuse box was stolen. They haven't been able to afford a new one.

We stayed up all night, on the two seater sofa. It's the only sofa in the house. I was freezing, I didn't bring a jersey with me.

He went out to sell the goat, I hope he doesn't take it back to my father. Mbuzo is a saint, there's really no space for that in this world.

If the world is a bitch, be the bigger bitch.

I'm standing outside, basking in the sun. Why didn't he take this ugly dog with? There's dog poop all over the yard. It comes to cuddle my leg, I kick it. It runs away crying and finds a spot under the sun, sits and stares at me. I can't tell if it's brown or that's dirty, it looks dirty to me. The ribs are visible, nothing but skin and bones,

clearly it's a stray dog.

A car parks at the gate, he's home. The dog follows me as I make my way to the gate.

Mbuzo is taking out grocery bags from the car, I take one from him.

He doesn't look pleased when he looks at me.

"Do you understand the concept of running away?"

"What did I do?" I ask.

"You are supposed to stay indoors."

"It's cold in there," I tell him. "What did you buy?"

"Food and I brought a blanket. The ones here are dusty."

I follow him inside the house, so does the dog.

"Voetsek." I threaten to kick it, it runs back out.

"It's an innocent dog."

That's what he thinks.

"What if it's a monitoring spirit? I'm not taking risks."

He shakes his head as he goes through the plastic bags. I'm out of words as he pulls out a huge packet of dog food and puts it on the kitchen counter.

"Is that for me?" He better not have wasted money on buying that stray dog food.

"It's for the dog." He says.

Like I don't know.

"That thing eats left over pap, and bones, not fancy foods. It even has rabies, one bite and we are dead."

He looks at me like I have no heart.

"It can also be someone's grandmother." I say.

Now he's looking at me like I've lost all my senses.

"Then that grandmother is lucky because we are going to treat her good." He says.

Mbuzo does not take me seriously.

"I forgot a plastic bag in the car, please get it for me." He gives me the keys, Mr. Don't go outside.

The dog follows me to the gate and outside, I get the shopRite plastic bag and... Oops, there's the dog crossing the street. I wonder where it's going. Whoever will find it, will be the luckiest person. I close the gate and lock it. Mbuzo won't even remember there was a dog.

He's lit the gas stove and washing a pot in the sink.

"Why did you buy meat? The fridge is not working." It's going to rot.

"The fridge works, there's just no electricity. I will sell my bike and get people to fix the

electricity.”

That’s too much, I still have money from yesterday.

“Don’t you love that bike?”

He puts the pot on the stove and turns to look at me.

“No, your warmth matters the most.”

Alrighty now!

“If you don’t mind me asking, what happened to your family? You used to have it all.”

He gives me a shrug, I sense I have touched a sensitive issue.

“Everything fell apart when my parents died.” He says, looking dejected.

“I’m sorry for your loss.”

“It’s been three years. I bought Morvite, do you want it with milk?” Mbuzo says.

The water is boiling.

“I don’t eat Morvite, I will have bread and tea.” I say.

He opens a cupboard and takes out a plate, then washes it.

Is he this domesticated or he’s just catering to me to make me feel at home?

“How long are we going to be here?” I ask.

At some point, I have to go back and face my demons.

“You will stay here until Chief Sibiya is out of your case.”

How long will that be? That man paid money to have me.

“I had a missed call from my parents, my mother must be worried. I have to let her know I’m okay.” MaNkosi probably didn’t sleep.

“They won’t die because they don’t know where

you are. You cannot contact anyone, KaMadlala.
At least not for now."

Why is he serious all of a sudden?

"My brother ke? I won't tell him where I am."

His silence must be a yes.

He's staring without saying anything, his eyes are possessive. I don't know what has triggered the look.

"What's wrong now?"

"Who else called?" He asks.

"Juba."

He folds his arms over his chest, lifting his eyebrow. Of course he doesn't know who Juba is.

"My ex. He's probably upset because I stood him up. I blocked his number, I will deal with him when I'm less stressed." I reveal more than I should.

The possessiveness leaves his eyes, he's the soft Mbuzo again.

"I have to go, call me when you need anything."

He says.

"Go where?" I thought we were on the run?

"Home. My disappearance will make it obvious. Your father will not give my siblings a break if he suspects I took you. So it has to be business as usual." He says.

Makes sense, but I have to stay here alone?
There's no electricity, I will die of boredom.

"I sold the goat for 3K, it wasn't much. I will get you a power-bank in town. Nompilo can come and stay with you if you like." He says.

"I prefer you stay with me, for however long this is going to be. But I understand that you can't and please don't trouble your cousin. I will be fine."

His eyes are on me as he takes my hand and strokes my wrist with his thumb, reaching higher towards my elbow. I chase the touch with my eyes, he lifts my chin with his index finger until I'm looking into his eyes. My shallow breath increases.

I'm talkative but when he touches me or looks into my eyes, I lose my words and myself. His touch causes a physical reaction of some sort, he's tearing me to pieces without even trying. Not in a bad way, but... I'm putty in his hands.

"When you say no, I stop." He says.

Um, okay!

"Do you understand?" He continues when the only thing I do is stare into his eyes.

"Yes."

A faint smile crosses his face, "That's my girl."

He lets go of my wrist.

The fuck just happened?

“Eat your food, I will call you when I get home.”

I get a grip on myself and sit on a chair, he places the food before me. Bread with jam and butter, he remembers I liked it when we were kids.

So I’m dealing with two Mbuzo’s. I know the innocent one, the dark one is a mystery I’m yet to uncover. He pats his pockets for the car keys, before saying goodbye and walking out.

Now that the stray dog is gone, I have to sell its food. The neighbours must have a dog. I check on google how much is 25Kg Bobtail.

I almost choke on bread. R640? Haibo Mbuzo! Such luxury for umgoho?

“Where’s the dog?” The voice says behind me.

I turn with my mouth full and shrug, “Maybe it went out.”

“The gate is closed, it couldn’t have jumped.”
Him.

Haibo!

“I will look for it, the poor thing must be scared.”
He looks worried.

“You are not Angelina Jolie, you can’t go around adopting the whole world. I should be enough and we are on a tight budget.” I tell him and he frowns.

“Is she your friend?”

Jesus! I wish Angelina Jolie was my friend.

“Never mind that. Now you can return the dog food.” I stand and grab the package, and hand it to him, plus the receipt. “ShopRite will give you a refund.”

We are not wasting a single cent.

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500+ comments... 15 shares...

[03/06, 15:40] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 11

“It’s about time I buy a car,” Bab’Madlala says.

He’s been complaining about the driver’s slow driving since they left the house. They are on their way to KaNgode where Mbali resides.

MaNkosi is sceptical about the trip, especially because her husband has been smiling and laughing since they heard the news. Chances are they might catch him dancing while everyone is mourning.

“You can’t buy a car baba, people will start to talk.” MaNkosi keeps her voice low.

They are both seated in the back.

“What’s the point of having money if I can’t buy myself a house or a car?” It’s frustrating really, all he ever does is give his money to people. It’s about time he rewards himself for being such a good civilian.

“Do whatever you want, but be prepared to explain to your children.” Her opinion doesn’t matter to him.

“We should visit Bakhe at the hospital.”

Bab’Madlala says.

He’s in a good mood today.

MaNkosi doesn’t let her guard down, this man changes his mind like the weather. She will believe it when it happens.

They arrive in KaNgode, the yard is buzzing with people. There are three cars parked in the yard.

“Looks like his family is here already.” MaNkosi says as they walk through the gate.

“I don’t have energy for drama, why don’t you go in, while I go and visit the Xabas.” Madlala suggests and gets a frown from his wife.

“You can’t leave baba, what will your brother think? And you said we will visit Bakhe.”

“I have a feeling Nonkosi knows where KaMadlala is.”

Bab’Madlala is annoyed, there is no time to express it. His brother is walking towards them.

“Bafo.” Nkululeko hugs him.

“Hau kodwa uThabang, oh Nkosi yami.”

Bab’Madlala sympathises with him.

“Thabiso.” MaNkosi corrects her husband.

Nkululeko is not bothered, he wasn’t good with remembering Thabiso’s name as well.

“I’m going to see Mbali.” MaNkosi says and

goes inside.

“Don’t worry about the funeral expenses bafo, I will take care of it.” Bab’Madlala is a good man. His cup will never run dry.

“His family will take care of the funeral bafo. It’s a relief for Mbali because she’s always wanted his family to accept him.” Nkululeko.

They join the two men drinking tea under a tree.

“Rather give me the money. You know I still want to start that business.”

His younger brother never misses a chance to ask for money whenever they meet.

Bab’Madlala shakes his head, it’s a disapproval.

“I told you to send me the business plan, and quotation. I will start the business for you then you will take over.” It’s a good idea, any lazy person would agree but not Nkululeko. He

wants to do this himself.

“Why can’t you give me cash?”

“Because I love you, and I know what’s best for you.” Bab’Madlala.

This conversation is boring, his mind is not even here. He gets off the chair, Nkululeko stands too.

“I just remembered I have something to do. I will be back for MaNkosi.” Bab’Madlala shakes his brother’s hand and fast tracks to the car.

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CASHILE

Mbuzo seems to know something about the chief that I don’t. I guess I should trust his word. I’ve been cleaning the house the entire day. There was so much dust, it was unsettling.

He hasn't called, and I don't have airtime. The only call I have received is from my father, of course I didn't answer it.

It's going to be dark out soon, and the temperature in the house is starting to drop. It reminds me of days when we'd have load shedding, for some reason the house becomes cold.

I forgot to ask where the candles are. The one we used last night burnt out.

My phone is almost low on battery. I'm walking around the house, closing the windows I opened while cleaning. I leave the curtains open, there's still light outside.

My phone rings in my pocket, it's a private number. I don't answer those but it could be Mbuzo.

"Where are the candles? It's getting dark in here and my phone is low. I thought you said you'll

buy a new fuse? What's..."

Delirious laughter!

This is not Mbuzo's voice. Panic settles in, my heart beats wildly in my chest. I'm such an idiot.

"Baby-mama on the run." He continues with his laughs.

I'm infuriated with myself, I shouldn't have answered the call. I'm about to drop and block the number when he throws in a threat.

"Lulu is at my reach, remember?"

How low of Juba to threaten me with my child.

"You crazy man. What are you talking about?"

He wouldn't dare hurt my child.

"First tell me where you are and who brought you there."

I'm not telling him shit.

"You know how much I hate liars baby. Have

you forgotten what I did to Chilly? You made me wait for you like an idiot until morning. Do you think I have time to play, Cashile?"

Like I will ever take him seriously when he yells like that.

"I have chosen not to go back to Joburg, I'm fine here." I say.

He's suddenly quiet, I know Juba, he becomes a crazy man when he's mad. So chances are, he's calming himself down.

"That's your decision?" He questions with the calmest voice.

"Yes."

He goes silent again.

"Hey Angel, say hi to mommy."

What the fuck? Lulu can't be with him.

My hands are trembling. Juba never wants to see me happy.

“Dada.” I hear a tiny voice over the phone.

My baby, it's my baby.

“Lulu, baby.” She doesn't even know me as her mother, Juba and his mother made sure of that.

“Sorry, my angel can't come to the phone. She's too busy playing with her toys.”-Him.

“Why is she with you? Last night... Juba you were with me last night, where was my daughter? Why is she not with your mother?” I don't have tears to cry, I never do when he's involved.

But I can yell at him as much as I like. He laughs because he loves it when he makes me lose my cool, he feeds on my weakness.

“That shouldn't worry you. What you should be worried about is never seeing our daughter again.”

He reminds me of the time I had to let his

mother take my baby with her, I was manipulated and gaslighted. He knows I'm stupid for him, always have been.

"What do you want from me?"

"I just want to be a family again, I want us working together again like before. I miss us, the power couple we were. Bony and Clyde, gangster love. How can you easily forget, Cashile?"

Who does Juba think he is? He dumped me for two years, and now he's telling me this nonsense?

"I'm collateral damage. You told me this after I was sentenced to prison. I waited for your visits, a letter Juba would have sufficed but you gave me nothing but silence. You let me rot in jail for two years, I used that time to reflect on my life and our relationship. I resented you and eventually it turned to hatred. What do you think

I was doing behind those four walls all those years?"

"No, you cannot blame me for anything Cashile. I had nothing to do with your arrest. You were in handcuffs when I got to the airport, there was nothing I could have done. The evidence against you was too strong, there was no time to buy the cops."

I don't believe him, if he cared, he would have done everything in his power to help me.

"I'm tired Juba, just give me my daughter. I will raise her myself."

"With another man, right?"

What man is he talking about?

"There is no man." I dispute.

"I'm not stupid Cashile, why else would you run from me? I promised you heaven, and you chose poverty. Only a man can make a woman

take such a stupid decision. You will never see Lujulile, I will give her a new mother. She will grow up knowing nothing about you. Don't test me, woman."

This is who he is, always threatening people just to get what he wants.

"Now tell me where you are, I will come and get you." He says.

"I don't get it. Why do you want me back?"

He laughs, "Back? Baby, we never broke up. Now send me the location."

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MBUZO

Mkhetheni is going to an interview tomorrow.

He's ironing his white shirt and formal pants. Mbuzo offered to polish his shoes while Mhlo wastes time on his phone.

"What interview is on the 2nd of January anyway?" Mhlo asks, eyes glued to his phone.

"G4S." Mkhetheni answers.

This gets Mhloniphe's attention, he sits up straight, eyes enthusiastic.

"You'll be working for Cash-in-transit?" Mhlo.

"Yes, it's not a big deal, you know?"

Mhlo laughs about everything, it makes life bearable.

"It is a big deal bafo. When is our first heist?"

His brothers shoot darts at him. Crime is never an option with them. They would rather starve to death than steal. Theft is not in their DNA.

"You will have to look for a job Mhloniphe and help around the house." Mbuzo tells him.

“I will work at the store,” the big brother answers.

“There’s no store anymore, we have to try something different. I don’t want us taking money from Madlala anymore.” Mbuzo.

“You’re right. That old man looks down on us, he forgets who we were in this village.” Mkhetheni jumps in.

They have the Xaba dignity to uphold, and Bab’Madlala has trampled on it whenever he could.

“So, what cake did you buy KaMadlala?” A random question from Mhlo.

Mbuzo’s eyes widen, he drops the shoe in his hand and rubs his head in frustration.

“Ndoda, tell me you wished her a happy birthday at least.” That’s Mhlo.

The twins are staring, waiting for an answer.

“I forgot. I will buy a cake on my way to her.” It’s easy to forget her birthday, they have been apart for too long.

Mbuzo told them about hiding Cashile, it was weighing heavy on his chest, he had to let it out.

“Don’t forget to give her birthday sex. You’re a virgin right?”

“Mhlo! That is none of your business, leave Mbuzo alone.” Mkhetheni is too serious for this life thing, while Mbuzo on the other hand is unbothered.

“Relax, I’m trying to help him. He’s our little brother, if we don’t advise him, who will?”

He really has a point.

There’s a knock at the door, before they hear Bab’Madlala’s voice.

“Nonkosi.”

“The vampire is here.” Mhloniphe makes a comment as they get up and head to the door.

The old man is standing outside, a smile comes to his face when he sees the twins.

“Hau bafana, you are back? Happy New Year.”

They don’t reply, the twins are not his fans. They don’t care about his money and how much he’s helped them.

The three brothers are standing in a line, staring at him.

It’s an awkward moment because no one has said a word.

“Come in baba.” Mkhetheni does the honours.

Mhlo leans against the wall, arms folded over his chest and eyes carefully watching Bab’Madlala.

“One! Two! Three!” Mhlo counts as the old man makes his way in and stops after three steps.

He's the only one who thinks it's weird, while his brothers don't pay much attention to it.

"Have you seen Cashile? She disappeared last night." Bab'Madlala is looking at Mbuzo who shakes his head.

"Would you tell me if you knew where she was?" Bab'Madlala.

"No." Mbuzo's answer comes too quickly.

Useless boy.

Bab'Madlala shifts his gaze to the oldest looking brother.

"Mkhotheni my boy, you tell..."

"I'm not your boy," Mkhotheni interjects.

Strange man.

Now the menace of the three. Mhlo grins like a mad man when Bab'Madlala glances at him.

"Mhloniphe my son..."

“My father died.” Mhloniphe cuts in, wiping his smile away.

What is with these boys today?

It’s getting hot in here, maybe it’s the looks they are giving him. The old man’s eyes run from left to right, right to left. Confusion covers his face.

“Are you boys aware that I made you? You ungrateful rats, I hold the key to your destiny.”

Bab’Madlala is furious.

There’s a laugh, loud and ear splitting. It belongs to Mhloniphe.

“Hau uNkulunkulu wethu wasemhlabeni. Come in baba, come and sit. I will make you something to eat while Mbuzo polishes your shoes.” That’s Mhloniphe, grabbing Bab’Madlala’s hand and pulling him in.

The man’s body tenses, he presses his feet on the ground, balancing with his toes.

“Mana Mhloniphe! mana mfana ka Velaphi.” Bab’Madlala is telling him to stop but it falls on deaf ears. Mhlo keeps pulling him in, it’s a tug and pull competition.

“Mhlo stop it.” Mkhetheni reprimands him.

Mhlo laughs, and applies pressure, he wants to see what will happen if Madlala takes another step into the house. So he pulls harder.

Bab’Madlala is growing tired. All this resisting makes him sweat, his heart is beating loud in his chest. Fear envelops his entire body.

“Come in baba, we don’t bite.” Mhloniphe says, one more pull and the old man’s feet move two steps forward.

“Hayi!” Bab’Madlala screams before falling to the ground and blacks out. The brothers hover over his body, speechless.

“What just happened?” Mbuzo asks.

“I think I broke him.” Mhloniphe.

“You killed him,” Mkhetheni adds.

“Oops! We didn’t ask him where he keeps the keys to our destiny.” Mhlo says.

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[03/06, 15:40] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 12

MBUZO

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He’s parked outside the Madlala homestead, MaNkosi is not home. That’s what they concluded because no one has come to open the gate for them.

“Wasn’t there supposed to be a party today as well?” Mhlo asks, his eyes are glued to the empty yard.

“The birthday girl is not around, maybe they cancelled.” Mbuzo replies.

His big brother looks at him, it’s his fault because he took Cashile away on the night of her birthday.

“You owe me beer then ndoda. It’s the 1st, I can’t spend it sober.”

He doesn’t spend every day sober. There’s always a reason for him to drink.

“Mhlo, focus on the issue at hand. Madlala is lying like a stone in the trunk.”

They have been stuck with him for two hours. The first hour was spent taking him to the hospital, and a doctor’s check-up where he was declared healthy as the doctor himself.

Now they are here, outside his home. They can't take him home with them.

"Can't we leave him outside the gate? MaNkosi will eventually come." Mhlo is good at this thinking game.

However, Mbuzo doesn't seem to think so.

"It's your fault he's in this state. You shouldn't have dragged him in." Mbuzo says.

A laugh slips out of Mhlo's lips as he recalls the look of terror on Bab'Madlala's face.

"But why did he faint? We don't have a dog or anything that might scare people. That madala is up to something, I'm telling you." Mhlo says.

He doesn't get his response, there's a knock on his side of the window. Startled, he sits up and hits his head on the roof of the car.

It's MaNkosi waving at him with her usual sweet smile. The brothers step out of the car.

“Bafana bami. Are you here for the party?”

“Yes! No!”

The yes belongs to Mhlo, hoping the Madlalas might sympathise with him and continue with the party. Mbuzo is just a party pooper. Did he have to say no?

“Mah, baba was at our house and he collapsed.” Mbuzo says.

“Collapsed is to fancy a word to describe what happened to Madlala. He fainted Mah.” Mhlo gives his point of view.

MaNkosi becomes hysterical, tears fall down her cheeks.

“He’s alive Mah. The hospital couldn’t help him.” Mbuzo.

MaNkosi suddenly looks worried than grief stricken.

“This is common, he will be fine. Please take

him inside.” She says, wiping her tears.

“You want us to carry him? Mah, it will be like carrying two cows. I’m not ready for that responsibility.” Mhlo complains.

Mbuzo smacks the back of his head, “We can manage Mah.”

The big brother is not happy about this decision, but who else to carry the man but them?

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CASHILE

I have money, I can request a ride and get out of this place. But what if Mbuzo comes and doesn’t find me here?

I need to chill, he would be here if he cared that

much.

I'm sitting in the dark, with a blanket wrapped around me. My phone is off, the battery died but that doesn't stop me from anticipating a call from Mbuzo.

I want to tell him about Juba and my child, maybe he will offer his help. I can't fight Juba alone, he's stronger than a thousand men and more dangerous. I have seen it.

I didn't give Juba an answer, I know he's fuming wherever he is. Nonetheless, he will never hurt Lulu. His mother would never forgive him and he knows how much Lulu means to her.

Mbuzo is here... I think. I look out the window, there's a car outside. It's not the Nissan 1400 and the man stepping out from the back is not Mbuzo.

What is Mkhetheni doing here? He scares me I won't lie, looking at him is like looking at their

father. He is his father's twin, cold as a winter's night and sour like lemons.

I remember bab'Velaphi very well, he didn't like me much. He hated my friendship with his son Mbuzo. Mkhetheni reminds me of him, my insides grow cold when I see him.

My head starts to entertain thoughts that give me heart palpitations. I can't help but think something bad has happened to Mbuzo because why is the big brother here?

I close the curtain and run to the door.

I swear there was no reason for God to give the Xaba men unnecessary heights. He's looking down at me with his unsmiling face, maybe that's why he doesn't have wrinkles at 38. His face is always tight.

"Hi."

He nods and looks above my head, for the first time I see a crease on his forehead. He's not a

robot after all.

Yes, I'm sitting alone in the dark.

"There are no candles, and they didn't have any at the Spaza shop." I explain.

His eyes trace back to me, "You went out alone?"

Is he shocked or upset? I can't tell.

"I needed candles. Mbuzo left me here alone, he said he'd be back with everything I need. It's been hours, the gas ran out so I can't use the stove. I can't make calls because my battery died." I'm angry and crying for the time since I was left alone.

I have a lot to get out of my chest but I am rambling to the wrong person. He walks in while I'm still talking and sobbing, he's carrying a plastic bag, two small boxes and a chicken licken package. I wipe my tears and follow him to the kitchen where I find him unboxing

rechargeable emergency lights.

“One is for the living room, you will take the other to whatever room you are going to.” He says.

“And the fuse box? Mbuzo said he will get it fixed.”

He tilts his head to look at me.

Should I regret asking a question? I feel like I do.

“It will be fixed.”

He just doesn’t know when.

“There’s your food. Sit down and eat.”

Is that a command?

“I’m not hungry,” I lie.

He looks at me as if he sees through me, then goes back to the light. He presses a switch, it brightens the entire kitchen. I will be blind by the time I leave this place.

“Where is Mbuzo?”

I’m given another look. Yoh, I don’t know anymore.

“He had something to take care of, he will come and see you.”

The news somehow makes me happy. I pull a chair and sit, my appetite is back. He got me sliders and wings, plus Coke.

“I hope he won’t keep me waiting again, I have so much to tell him. Can you imagine that fool Juba called and threatened to take my daughter if I don’t go with him?”

Mhh! This food is nice, I didn’t know I was this hungry.

“He thinks I’m scared of him. My own father doesn’t scare me, who does Juba think he is.”

I gulp down the coke, he should’ve asked for a colder one.

Mkhotheni is staring, blankly. He told me to eat, I didn't know we were sharing the food. I've had three wings and two sliders, I'm still hungry.

"Sorry," I push the box away. It's not my fault I eat like a boy.

He pushes the box back to me and asks, "Who is Juba?"

"My ex-boyfriend, but he says we are still a couple. He's delusional, who knew?"

Mkhotheni turns and walks away, leaving me confused. I run after him, he's opening the door and walking out.

"You're leaving?" I was enjoying company, even though he's half mute.

"There's cupcakes in the plastic bag, it's your birthday cake."

Oh, that. I haven't celebrated my birthday in years, what was the point of celebrating life

while in prison.

“Happy birthday.” He says.

“Thanks,” I guess.

“Lock the doors and don’t open the windows.”

And with that, he walks away. The car he came with left, he’s taking off by foot which makes me wonder if there’s a taxi stop around here.

I lock the door as instructed and go back to the kitchen. He bought me two chocolate muffins with cream, there’s a note inside.

Happy birthday KaMadlala.

It’s definitely from Mbuzo, he’s the only one I know with a doctor’s hand writing.

“But why aren’t you here, Mbuzo?” I spent my birthday alone again.

A larger note would have been nice, I need to know where he is and why he’s kept me waiting for so long. Time is of the essence, I have to

have a plan before talking to Juba again. I'm not going to let that man order my steps like he used to.

I wait for Mbuzo on the couch, with the blanket wrapped around me. The only difference now is there's light.

When I wake up, there are arms wrapped around me. Someone is sleeping behind me, and I'm trapped in their arms.

Of course I'm going to panic.

“KaMadlala.” He says before I accept the chance to scream.

When did he come?

This is not the living room, we're in the bedroom. I don't remember coming here last night.

“When did you come?” I ask attempting to slip out of his arms.

He holds on to me and whispers, “Don’t go just yet.”

I’m not sure I know what’s going on.

“Mbuzo...”

“All my life, I have been dreaming of holding you like this.”

Meanwhile, I’ve been dreaming of a soft life.
Not being in a man’s arms. His face is on the
crook of my neck, fanning me with the warm
breath from his nostrils.

“You’re a thief,” he says.

My heart stops for a second, he knows I stole
from people?

“You stole my heart.” He adds.

“I’m confused, what’s going on?” I ask.

“You still don’t know yet, KaMadlala? Have you
not seen it in my eyes?”

Well, his blank eyes are hard to read.

He jumps over me and lies in front of me. He puts his hand on my waist and pulls me closer while looking into my eyes. I figure he's trying to make me see whatever he wants me to see in his eyes.

“I thought of you every single day. I thought I merely missed my best friend, until I saw you that day after 18 years, walking out of the taxi. I knew then that all this while, I was obsessively craving for you.”

I have no words, that's a big confession.

He presses his forehead on mine and whispers, “I feel like I’m losing my mind KaMadlala, I can’t stay another minute away from you.”

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MaNkosi is usually the first to wake up. Today is not the case, she's woken up by screams of a man. She'd recognize her husband's voice anywhere. It's past 9am, she slept late last night watching over her husband. He was feverish the entire night, and groaning in his sleep.

She didn't think he would make it through the night, it's a relief to hear his voice, even though it's an ugly cry.

"Inkomo zami." The voice again.

She jumps out of bed, and grabs her morning gown on her way out. Bab'Madlala and his herd-boys are standing in front of the kraal, with hands on their heads, and shattered expressions.

She can't tell if the livestock is sleeping or dead, only a few are standing.

As she gets closer, she notices flies hovering over the cows, goats, and sheep.

This is a terrible dream.

“Baba, what happened?” Her voice barely carries.

“I told you MaNkosi, I told you we should relocate to Umhlanga. Look what the witches have done to my cows.” He’s shattered, poor man. His livestock is dead.

MaNkosi looks at him, he can’t possibly believe they were bewitched. In fact, no witch dares to enter these premises. They know better.

“This is bad.” MaNkosi says, disbelief evident in her voice.

“Imfuyo yami. Kazi ngenzeni Jehovah. What did I do to deserve this? I have done so much for the community, and this is the thanks I get?”

The neighbours better be listening, he can’t shout any louder than this. MaNkosi looks at the herd boys, one of them is in tears. She fails to understand the bond men have with animals.

“This is no time to cry baba, get up the boys are watching.”

“My heart is broken mama. How will I ever get through this loss?”

They have lost thousands of money, a single cow is expensive.

She kneels next to him and puts her arms around him, he cries on her shoulder. But this is not mission comfort Madlala.

“You are becoming weak myeni wami, get a grip.” She whispers in his ear.

He looks into her eyes, “How do I fix it? Thabani's death was supposed to mean wealth for us. What is this now? What is this nonsense?”

At least the Angels in heaven call Thabiso by his real name, that's all that matters.

MaNkosi quickly covers his mouth, it's a good

thing the boys are focused on their own crying.

“It’s your fault, I told you not to go to the Xabas.” MaNkosi mumbles softly.

He snorts, “How was I to know that Mhloniphe would be there? His father was dizzy when he named him. That boy has no respect for elders. Not even my son has ever grabbed me by the hand and pulled me.” He’s livid.

Reliving the moment is traumatizing, he was so sure he was going to die.

“Arguing about this will not change anything, there’s been a crack. We have to cover it, what if it affects our children again?” She fears losing her children.

Bab’Madlala looks bored, he’s grieving his cows and all this one thinks about is her children.

What kind of “through thick and thin” is this?

They see Bakhe walking through the gate, he’s

limping and has a bandage around his head. MaNkosi's heart leaps with joy but she doesn't have time to ululate because her husband is heartbroken.

Bakhe starts to laugh when he sees the dead livestock, his father is in need of a shoulder hug. He looks devastated.

"Khehla, you are home?" MaNkosi says.

Bab'Madlala stands and smiles at his son, he's his only heir. No one else will continue the Madlala name but him.

"My son, welcome home. We will slaughter the fattest cow for you and buy you new clothes." He hugs Bakhe for the first time in years.

"Which cow baba?"

The kraal is empty.

Bakhe pats his back, "I knew this year was going to be my year, I didn't think it would start

this early."

His statement shocks Bab'Madlala, he steps back with wide eyes. He looks at his wife for clarity, she's just as confused.

"Happy New Year bazali. Isukile." Bakhe laughs while making his way to his rondavel.

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[03/06, 15:40] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 13

CASHILE

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"Say something... please."

I don't know how to respond to his confession. Yeah we are friends, always have been. But the question is, have my feelings ever crossed the friendship line?

Feeling overwhelmed, I climb off the bed and open the window. The room temperature is changing, it's getting hot in here.

"KaMadlala."

I turn back to him and almost get a fright. How did he get in front of me so fast? For some reason, he appears bigger and mouth-watering. It must be the confession playing tricks with my mind.

I swallow the saliva trying to embarrass me and look away from his dark eyes. God knows he makes me breathless.

"I have nothing to say Mbuzo."

"Did you at least think of me over the years?"

To be honest, only when I visited the village.
Otherwise, I was too busy robbing people.

I was eight years old when he left for crying out loud.

“What do you want me to say?” I ask even when it’s clear what he wants.

He gets into my personal space, I move back but there’s a wall behind me.

“That you will give me a chance to prove myself.”

“You have a girlfriend Mbuzo.”

I have seen women fighting over a man and it’s not pretty, besides, I don’t have long nails to fight a woman and I like my eyes not scratched.

This is why I look away when he looks at me, there’s something in his eyes commanding me give in to him.

“I don’t belong to her, I never belonged to any

woman but you.”

I don’t get what he’s saying.

“You’re a virgin?”

He laughs, he should do it more often.

“KaMadlala, I have never deprived my body of anything it wants. My heart and soul are the problem, they only yearn for you and no one else.”

I feel so dumb right now.

He takes my right hand and opens my palm. There’s a scar in the middle. He’s tracing a finger on it.

“Do you remember where you got this scar?”

No I don’t, I have many scars on my body I have no memory of how they got there.

“It looks like a knife cut, maybe I was helping

my mother cook and..."

He's shaking his head and that stops me from explaining.

"I have a similar scar on the same hand," he says, showing the palm of his hand.

Indeed it's there.

"Why do we have the same scar?" I know it's common for black people to have same scars, like on our knees or knuckles. But this one creeps me out.

"We were inseparable as kids, you followed me everywhere I went. Even to the bathroom. I'd be doing number two and you would be sitting on the floor, talking none stop." He finds it funny.

I find it stupid, what the hell was I thinking?

"Was I obsessed with you?" I ask. It's getting scary now.

He shakes his head, "We were obsessed with

each other.”

Yikes!

“My father didn’t like our friendship, he found it appalling.” Mbuzo continues.

I remember that.

“I was warned multiple times to stay away from you. He threatened to send me to boarding school but that didn’t stop me from seeing you. I was afraid of losing you KaMadlala, we shared the same fear.”

We never wanted to be apart. He was the only friend I had.

“You were my best friend.” I tell him.

“On the day I was sent away, my father caught us in the middle of performing a blood covenant.”

What the fuck is a blood covenant? That sounds like something a witch would do.

“A blood covenant?”

He nods as he takes my hand again.

“Yes. We promised each other that we will never belong to anyone, body, heart and soul. And to always find our way to each other. We made a cut on our palms and shook hands, we sealed that promise with blood. It was the only way it could be effective, that’s what we thought back then.” -Him.

It’s a lot, I don’t know what to think.

Were we so attached that we went to such an extreme?

“Whose idea was it?” I ask, it couldn’t have been mine. I was a smart kid.

The way he’s looking at me... his lips pull a slow smile.

“Yours.” He mumbles.

I guess I was the dumbest kid to ever live in that

generation.

“Did I like you that much Mbuzo?” It’s really hard to believe it.

“We had a connection no one could break. Our fathers had agreed that we shouldn’t be friends, they wanted us apart.”

“My father was not like yours, he was supportive of our friendship. Bab’Xaba was the one with a problem.” That’s how I remember it.

“My father told me that Bab’Madlala was against our friendship.” Mbuzo says, he sounds annoyed all of a sudden.

“You were from a rich family, and we were poor, Mbuzo. Your father had a good enough reason to want us apart. He probably thought we would grow up and get married.” I laugh at the thought.

Why is he not laughing with me? It’s funny. I was only eight. It was wild for his dad to think that far and be terrified by a none-existent

future.

“How come you don’t remember the oath we made?”

How am I supposed to know?

“I was 8, there’s a lot of things I don’t remember.”

He’s not pleased with my reply, maybe that’s why he cups my face and brings his closer to mine.

“You belong to me KaMadlala. Your body.”

He kisses my left cheek.

“Your soul.”

He plants a kiss on my right cheek.

“And your heart.” He finishes, brushing his nose against mine.

The rational part of my brain says this is an innocent declaration, but as his breath touches

my skin, I fail to control my reaction.

My body is on fire.

“Mbuzo, I have a child with another man. Juba wants me back.” Not that I’d take him back.

Mbuzo raises an eyebrow as if challenging my statement.

“You belong to me, KaMadlala. Not even God can claim you, you are mine.”

All because of a blood covenant?

“This can’t be real.” The words escape my mouth in a whisper and leave my mouth slightly open.

His dark gaze is drinking in every inch of me, causing me to tremble under it. The way he licks his bottom lip makes my clit dance.

What the fuck? I haven’t had sex in three years, what is this sudden betrayal? I hold on to him

as he puts an arm around my waist, pasting me on his body, leaving no space for us to breathe.

I never thought being this close to him would make me forget everything outside this room, outside him.

I don't second guess the kiss he gives me even when it starts by his lips crushing against mine. The kiss feels like two worlds colliding, heaven meeting earth.

My heart is violently twisting inside my chest, as his large hands slip under my t-shirt and grab my boobs.

"This feels like a dream come true." His face is buried on my chest as he whispers, then proceeds to sucks my nipples, giving each a turn.

Come on Cashile. Act like a lady, think like a man. Act like a lady, think... shit, I'm definitely

thinking like a man because I'm stripping off his shirt and straddling him. My hands are all over him like chicken pox.

I feel a hand behind my neck, I don't know how he does it but my head is forced upward. He's left my breast and now kissing and sucking my neck.

Things are happening too fast, I'm aroused and I want him.

What I don't understand is this violent beating of my heart, it's making me dizzy. I'm flipped over like pancakes, my hands pinned above my head while he's hovering above me.

He's staring, lips twitching sadistically.

"What?" I'm out of breath.

"This is exactly how I imagined you would look beneath me. You take my breath away
KaMadlala."

Well I want him to take this horniness away, he started it.

I'm attempting to break out of his hold, he's too strong and me not being able to move seems to amuse him.

"Is this your way of murdering me? By making me extremely horny and not doing anything about it?" I'm getting upset.

I haven't been intimate in years mahn.

There's a chuckle, if he has time to laugh, then he has time to scratch my itch.

I finally get my kiss, his teeth are crashing with mine. We're fighting basically, not kissing. He still has my hands pinned above my head, his other hand works on my shorts.

His eyes narrow when he sees my Jokey trunks. I wear man's underwear, it's not a big deal.

He doesn't comment on my underwear, but

pulls them off.

I see him lick his lips, lust has coated his entire face. He rubs his nose across my crotch and smiles.

Men!

I open my legs, letting him get in between them. He's about to go down on me, that's not what I want right now.

I grab him by his broad shoulders, pulling him back up.

"Just fuck me," I plead.

I'm about to die of a heart attack, at least let me have my orgasm before that. Mbuzo quickly raises his eyebrow, and smirks.

"I don't have a condom," he's telling me this while getting off me and taking off his clothes.

Such a wise man!

He stands over me with his dick in his hand and

says “I don’t have any sicknesses.”

“Let’s do it.” Listen to me sounding like a whore desperate for a quickie.

Mbuzo kisses me, lightly.

“My body is yours,” he says, rubbing my clit with his thumb. The moans I release are proof that I am enjoying this.

Perks of being sex starved.

I gasp and wince at his first attempt to breach. It’s been years since I had anything inside me. When he finally penetrates, it feels like I will never taste anything this good in my life. My heart rate increases, my vision blurs. But I fight it, and focus on him and his pounding.

He’s pounding me like I have starved him for years. My moans pick up with my heart rate, I swear it feels like it’s sitting on my throat.

“Mbuzo...” My head is spinning.

Sex should not feel like I’m dying, I want to tell him to stop. That I’m having a heart attack, but I can’t get a word out.

Maybe it’s the hunger, my stomach was grumbling when I went to bed last night. There are tingles in my belly... I feel like a ticking bomb that’s about to explode. My body starts to vibrate, I’m having an orgasm but I can’t enjoy it because of the violent beating of my heart.

“Mbuzo stop,” I desperately tap his shoulders, panting. There are tears in my eyes. He stops and looks at me with concern on his face.

“What’s wrong?”

My body has fallen weak, I feel lightheaded. I’ve had sex before but nothing like this has ever happened to me.

“Call an ambulance.” I say.

I think I'm having a heart attack.

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I'm sorry this is late.

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[03/06, 15:40] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 14

CASHILE

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There was no time to call an ambulance, he dressed me up and drove us to the hospital. I haven't seen him since the doctor took over and chased him out of the hospital room.

I know he's worried, it was evident in his eyes. I'm in a hospital bed, embarrassed to say the least.

I can't even look at these people in the eye, they want to know what happened for me to have a mini heart attack. I'm fine now, but I keep pretending that it still hurts, so I won't have to tell the doctor that I was in a sex marathon.

That time I wasn't doing much movement.

"You are going to be fine."

This doctor does not understand, maybe physically I will be fine. But community-cally? How will I ever look at Mbuzo? He probably thinks I can't handle sex.

I give him a nod and keep my mouth shut. The door opens, a nurse walks in. I see Mbuzo, his eyes are wide and zooming in.

When our gaze meet, he pushes the door before it shuts completely and walks in.

"KaMadlala."

Yoh! I was hoping I wouldn't see him until next

year.

Thank God he gives his attention to the doctor.

“How is she, dokotela?”

“She had a mini heart attack, she’s fine.”

Relief washes over Mbuzo’s face.

“Do you know what she was doing prior?”

Does this doctor get paid to ask these questions?

Mbuzo quickly looks at me, I shake my head. I hope he’s a good liar because I will kill him if he tells the doctor what happened.

“Spring cleaning.” Mbuzo says.

Really? I guess it’s better than the truth.

The doctor looks confused, “What kind of spring cleaning?”

Are there different kinds of spring cleaning?

Mbuzo looks at me again, he wants me to help

him out. I'm not the one who gave someone's child a mini heart attack. He will explain, not me.

"She was taking down the curtains and cleaning windows." Not bad Mbuzo.

The doctor nods, I'm glad it's over.

He writes me a prescription, and advices me to take it easy. That's what I plan on doing, no more sex for the rest of my life.

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The ride back home is nothing but silence, he hasn't looked at me. I give him a star for being a good boy, if he can drop me off then go back to his father's house, I might consider dating him.

He parks outside the gate, I dash out first. My feet are not moving fast enough, I want to bury myself where he won't see.

I'm met with the sound of my phone ringing. It's in the living room, charging on a power-bank.

He eventually brought the power-bank.

It's my mother calling me, she must be worried sick. The least I could have done was tell her where I am.

"Hello."

"Cashile? So you are still alive?"

Dramatic.

"Mah, I'm sorry I didn't tell you."

"Where are you?"

"Joburg, something came up. I had to leave urgently." I have a bag full of unending lies.

"Why would you leave without telling us? What about your father? Don't you care about his feelings?"

"What feelings Mah?" I don't get her.

Mbuzo walks in and comes to stand next to me.
I sit down, he remains standing.

“Your father’s livestock is dead. We don’t know what happened, we found them dead when we woke up in the morning.”

Shame that’s sad.

“How is he?”

“Not okay. Come home Cashile, he needs you.”

He needs me? What will I possibly do for him?
Bring the cattle back to life?

“Mah, there’s no network. We have load shedding.” I shout.

“Cashile...”

“Hello! Mah! I can’t hear you. The line is breaking.”

Tuu! I drop the call.

Mbuzo is staring, “Is everything okay?”

“My father’s livestock died. They don’t know how it happened.”

Maybe it’s for the best.

“Do you want to go home?” He asks.

“And do what there? You said I need to stay here until Sibiya is out of my case. Right?”

He nods, “Yes. There’s something else, I brought you here because I didn’t want you to go back to Joburg.”

He sits beside me and tries to touch my hand. I don’t allow any form of contact this time.

I’m waiting for an explanation.

“I heard you talking to someone on New Year’s Eve. Is he your boyfriend?”

He’s only asking me after sleeping with me?

“He was, we have a child together.”

He looks uncomfortable, that’s not the

expression he gave me when we were in the bedroom.

“Why is he threatening to take the child away?”

This man keeps shocking me. The only person I rambled to was Mkhetheni, I’m guessing he told him.

“Your brother told you?” I confirm first.

“He was worried, this Juba guy doesn’t sound like a good man.”

If only you knew.

“He’s not. Juba wants me to work for him, if I don’t do what he wants, he will make sure I never see my daughter again.”

“How did you lose custody of her.”

I need to know how much he heard that night before I reveal anything, it’s possible he might resent me when he finds out I was the world’s biggest crook.

“How much did you hear that night?” I ask.

“You were dating a criminal. He wants you to work with him again and you were once arrested.”

Jeer! Eavesdropping should be considered a crime.

“Why were you listening in on us? That was a private conversation.”

There is no shame whatsoever on his face, he feels nothing to be precise.

“I was passing by when I heard your voice.”

“You should have continued walking.”

I wanted to tell him myself, not this.

“I’m sorry.”

No he’s not.

He takes my hand, I hate that I’m allowing him to touch me when I’m upset with him. His gaze

continues to make me weak.

“I want to help you get your daughter back, Juba has no right over you.”

“Juba is a powerful man, he can make anyone’s world stop. I don’t want him to hurt you.” I say.

I don’t know why he snorts, the look on his face tells me he is not afraid of Juba.

“We will get her back and he will never bother you again.” He says.

I want to believe him, but I have seen what Juba can do.

His phone rings. There’s a frown on his face, I don’t know what for. Maybe he doesn’t like who is calling.

“Hello.” He answers.

In my head, it’s Nothando on the other side of the line. It’s not okay for me to have these feelings of jealousy.

“Congratulations.” That’s his second word before he terminates the call.

“That was Mkhetheni, he had an interview today. He got the job.” He says.

That’s great, they needed this breakthrough.

MADLALA RESIDENCE

The mysterious death of the Madlala livestock has reached the entire village. It was only the female cows and female goats that died.

Bab’Madlala walks in the kitchen looking like his world is falling apart. He didn’t expect to find Chief Sibiya sitting on his chair and eating food made by his wife.

He looks at MaNkosi, completely astounded.

“I didn’t know chief Sibiya is now the man of the house.” That’s really a strange thing to say. No one says anything, they are staring at him wide eyed.

“Yini nangigqolozela? Why are you staring? Did I forget one of my legs in the bedroom?”
Because really, staring is rude.

“You forgot your trousers,” Bakhe says and throws in a chuckle.

Bab’Madlala looks at himself, he’s wearing a suit with no trousers.

It’s normal, everyone does it.

He smiles as he looks up, “It’s okay, you can tell me that I look nice. There is no need for you to stare.”

He makes a dramatic turn, giggling like a child and ends it with a dance.

“Bakhe mfana wami, this is how we dressed in

our time. Women would line up outside my father's house just to see me. They called me Mkhontowesizwe because I was a stallion in bed." Bab'Madlala says, laughing his lungs out.

He's really acting strange. No one has dared to utter a word, they are staring at him astounded by this new character.

"Mami, I think your husband has lost his mind."

Bakhe reports.

MaNkosi seems to have gotten the memo, tears burn behind her eyes. This is not her husband's usual character.

Bab'Madlala takes his wife's hand and forces her to dance.

"Wangbamba Kwamancane, wangbambel' eduze. Wang'khumbuz' Egoli mama. Ezola."

The kitchen is his, he's dancing his life away, and singing like he's on Idols.

“Stimela Sami sase Zola. Wangbek’ esifubeni weh mama.” He sings, wrapping his arms around his wife. Sibiya has been given a free show, VIP entrance. However, MaNkosi is not cooperating. She’s resisting his efforts to be romantic.

“Baba, let’s go back to the bedroom.” She takes his hand, Bab’Madlala yanks it away.

“Take care of the guest Khanyisile dali wami. I’m going herding.”

Her eyes almost leave their sockets, he hasn’t called her by her name in years.

“The cattle died remember?” Her words put a stop to his trip.

He glances at her with a pained expression.

“We-Khanyo, uthini kahle kahle? What about my goats and sheep?”

She sighs, this is scary. Her husband has lost

touch with reality.

“Baba, let’s go to the bedroom please. I will tell you all about it there.” She’s touching him again.

He yanks his hand away, “Hai, hai hai. The last time you said let’s go to the bedroom, you got pregnant with Cashile. If you want another child, tell me properly.”

He pulls her into a suffocating hug, showering her with kisses.

MaNkosi looks defeated, she’s embarrassed more than anything.

“Since we are here, I have an announcement to make. I’m changing my surname, I don’t want to be a Madlala anymore.” Bakhe introduces.

What is this boy talking about? MaNkosi has enough problems as it is. She sighs, releasing a heavy wave of exhaustion.

“Khehla this is not the time. Can’t you see your father is sick?”

“I’m also sick mami, I was beaten up in his presence then hospitalised.”

Bab’Madlala raises his eyes to him, “Who beat up my son? Tell me my boy, take me to the boy who beat you up.” Bab’Madlala says, throwing a fist in the air.

“Chief, I’m sorry. Can you come back another time, ubaba is not feeling well. And please don’t tell anyone about this.” –MaNkosi.

“No problem MaNkosi,” the chief says, as he stands. He taps MaNkosi’s shoulder on his way out.

“Be strong.”

“Yeyi, why did you touch my wife?” Bab’Madlala takes off his shoe and throws it at Sibiya.

The Chief doesn’t duck fast enough, it hits him

on the head. His eyes bulge.

“Get out of my house Sibiya,” he charges at him. Sibiya runs out the house, eyes wide with fear.

Bakhe and MaNkosi follow behind, they have never seen anything like this before.

“Khehla, where is your sister?” There’s urgency in her voice.

“Huh mami, I’m judging you. Your husband has gone crazy and you’re asking about Cashile’s whereabouts?”

MaNkosi lets out a heavy breath as she grabs his shoulders.

“This is important Khehla. Tell me if your sister is with Mbuzo right now, are they dating? Please tell me, Khehla. Tell me.”

She’s crying a river, it has Bakhe frowning in confusion.

“I don’t know mami. Why are you acting like this?

Take care of your husband and leave my sister alone.” He moves away from her touch.

MaNkosi carries her hands on her head, crying as if she’s standing in front of her husband’s corpse.

Bakhe looks traumatised, “He’s not dead mami. He’s just crazy, relax.”

She answers him with a tongue click.

Bab’Madlala has chased Sibya out the gate. That was a workout and a half. He’s walking back, wearing one shoe and carrying the other.

“Khanyo sthandwa sami, umbonile? Did you see how he ran?” He’s dead with laughter, clapping his hands like a seal.

There are two women passing by, of course they stop and stare because, what is going on with this man.

“What are you looking at?” He yells? Fear comes upon their faces.

He runs after them, they take off screaming. Bab’Madlala screams with laughter as he drops to the floor, wheezing.

Bakhe puts his arm over his mother’s shoulders.

“Mami, should I call a pastor, isangoma. Noma sihlabele amadlozi?”

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[03/06, 15:40] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 15

CASHILE

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Mbuzo has been here for three days, he would go out for a few hours then come back. The fuse box was fixed, we have electricity now but we're broke.

Nothing about this place feels like home, I miss my mother and her home cooked meals. I miss Bakhe and his carelessness.

I haven't heard from Juba ever since we spoke. One thing I know about him is that he doesn't rest. He's looking for me up and down.

Let me check on his mother, she's on line. The last time we spoke was two years ago.

I start by greeting, she reads and goes off line.

Juba told me that he's with Lulu. He knows nothing about taking care of a child.

Sent!

The message will reach her even when she's off

line.

My phone rings, it's my brother.

"Ekse dade."

"Slima! You're still alive."

He laughs, "So are you. Where are you?"

"I'm with Mbuzo."

The laugh.

"You do know that Mbuzo is taken." He says.

"I don't have him tied to me, he can leave when he wants."

"You're playing with fire dade, be careful.

Nothando is not the kind to give up easily."

"I can't understand why she seduced me when I first came here." I say.

Nothando is dodgy like her father.

"She likes you, but likes Mbuzo more. She's a strange girl, just be careful." Bakhe says.

“I will, it’s not like I’m head over heels in love with Mbuzo.”

“Are you sure you don’t love him?”

Love is a strong word. I loved a man once and he betrayed me, I’m not ready to go down that path again.

“He’s got the looks and the personality, but I’m not there yet. Enough about him. How is everyone at home?”

“They are fine. We’re having a funeral this weekend.”

Oh my God.

“Bakhe, who died?”

“Thabiso, Mbali’s husband. But that’s a story for another day, your father is having a funeral for his cows.”

He’s laughing, I don’t see anything funny.

“What’s wrong with baba? You said everyone is

okay.”

“They are, you know how much your father likes attention.” He says.

I am confused really. As much as Madlala likes attention, he would never humiliate himself by having a burial for animals.

“Enjoy your man dade, don’t worry about us. We are enjoying the New Year, I promise you we are moja. Don’t forget to use a condom. Eliminate the element of surprise, don’t let ukshibiza shubaba your style. Scrutinize.” He’s mimicking a coloured accent, then chuckles.

I remember that advert.

What a weird way to tell me to use a condom.

“Voetsek, you’re a bore you know.” I end the call and check if Juba’s mom replied to my text. She left me on blue tick. Why is she ignoring me?

I decide to go looking for Mbuzo. I'm hungry, I don't feel like cooking.

The door to the bedroom is closed. I stand outside, wondering if I should enter. I have seen the way he looks at me, he wants to devour me. I can't deny that I'm sexually attracted to him and want more of what he gave me three days ago.

Much more.

I enter and close the door behind me, he's sitting on the bed, wearing only black Calvin Klein trunks. Now I'm certain it can't be fake, like that piece of jewellery he was wearing the first time we met.

They were once wealthy.

He lifts his eyes, looking at me then reaches out with his hand as if to pull me closer. I toddle towards him, my legs feel wobbly beneath me.

As his arm closes around the small of my back,

I'm no longer in control of myself.

He steers me between his legs and looks at me with so much warmth.

His hands glide my skin beneath the fabric of my top as I snuggle in his embrace, skin against skin. I don't know what I'm doing, I'm in need of comfort and he's here.

So why not?

"Are you okay?" He asks.

He's seen the concern on my face.

"Bakhe said my father is having a funeral for his cows, that's worrying. But he told me that he is fine, I shouldn't worry."

"Then trust your brother, he would tell you if something was terribly wrong. Madlala is probably pranking him."

Nah! Not my father, he has no time to prank people.

“My father has been acting strange lately. Wanting me to marry Sibiya is one of the proofs.” I can never forgive him for that.

“We will get to the bottom of this. Sibiya might be the chief, but your father has the upper hand. People respect him more than they respect the chief. I have a feeling he sold you.” Mbuzo says.

That’s my biggest fear. But it’s never going to happen, I will never marry a man older than my own father.

“I will kill him before he lays a hand on you.” He says.

I don’t want any killings.

“Are you tired?”

Does he have to whisper it in my ear?

“Yes, it’s late.”

I try to break out of his hold, his strong frame holds me steady and secure. It makes me weak.

He leans forward, I meet him halfway, brushing my lips with his. His tongue is seeking entrance, I let him in. Everything feels natural, the tentative touches and careful movements of our lips and hands.

I have never felt such intimacy, it scares me.

My breath sounds rushed, his is no better. His hands caress my skin with a purpose. He gives me a faint smile when our eyes meet.

“Let me have you tonight.” He says, showing me a small smile, his hands running down my ass.

I take the opportunity to explore his body, my hands browsing lower and lower to his crotch.

He’s rock hard.

“That was fast.” I comment on what I’m seeing.

“It’s your fault. You’re bent on seducing me, aren’t you?” His fingers run through my hair, I don’t have hair that he might tug.

"You can't resist me, sir?" I tease.

His eyes darken, his touch shifts from light to rough. My breathing quickens in response to that.

He pushes me towards his erection, not forcefully, just a mere significant gesture letting me know that he's in command.

I drive my tongue down his pelvis, grabbing the hem of his trunks with my teeth. When I grab them with my hand, he pins both my hands with his. I'm stuck, he's turned me into Oscar Pistorius, only I have no hands.

Heat takes over my body at the thought of being so close to his erection, I feel my body vibrate with desperation. With my teeth, I pull down his trunks and smile seeing his shaft bounce into view.

I'm salivating at the pearl of pre-cum touching his tip.

I hear him release the first moan of appreciation as I taste him, swirling my tongue around the head of his rod and down toward the base.

He lets go of my hands and grips the back of my neck, controlling the pace as he presses me further down with every stroke.

Our moans are combined into one, I'm aching for his touch. His pace picks up, he's about to cum in my mouth.

He grunts and pulls me off, his eyes are dark with lust.

"Not yet kitten."

Kitten? Was I that good with my tongue that he compares me to a cat?

"I want you naked." I can hardly recognise his voice.

I pull off my clothes while he watches. He gets off the bed and tells me to sit where he was seated. My legs are open, I don't care about anything. I want him this minute.

"Why are you standing there? Should I finger myself?" I ask.

I'm getting impatient.

"Do it. I'm going to watch."

My breath hitches.

He's not kidding, he pulls a chair close to the foot of the bed then sits and watches me.

Okay Cashile, you want to get laid right.

I bite into my lower lip as I slowly spread my legs, his gaze intensifies causing a shiver to run through my body. I touch my pleasure button, a moan escapes my mouth. When I find the perfect spot that makes my toes curl, I play on it.

“Are you wet?” His voice is a deep rumble.

I nod, closing my eyes.

“Keep your eyes on me and I need to hear your voice.” He says, patiently.

When I open my eyes, he’s leaning over me, and watching closely with hunger burning in his eyes.

“Are you wet kitten?”

“Yes.” I’m panting and squirming to my own touch.

His lips twitch, he’s somewhat amused.

“Call me daddy.”

Ehh! Anything to get the dick.

“Yes daddy.”

“Who made you wet?”

“You.” Sucking him made me wet.

I crown this man a witch. How is he affecting

me so effortlessly without even touching me?

“Show me more.” It’s a command.

Is this what he was learning at boarding school?
His father must come and explain.

He looks at me like I am his, and I feel it. I slip a finger in my opening and feel a rush of heat, his focus doesn’t waver as I continue touching myself. My release is close, I can barely hold it off.

When I slip a second finger, he gets on the bed and kisses my thigh. He shouldn’t have because now I want him more than ever.

“Mbuzo—please.” I wheeze.

“Don’t stop. You’re doing good.”

That’s not motivational.

“Touch me... please.” I want him inside me, his body pushing mine into the mattress.

The wait is killing me.

He lets out a chuckle and grips my thighs, leaning in to kiss my crotch. His body hovers over mine, he runs his nose down my cheek, I arch my neck and our lips meet in a passionate kiss. He's kissing me with rough passion, he's not gentle.

Nevertheless, I love his raving hunger.

He grips my waist with force and I release a moan, running my nails down his back. I feel his tip on my entrance, the pressure of him pushing in.

"You're still so wet... so warm." He breathes in my ear, then grabs my earlobe with his teeth.

My body shakes.

"You're torturing me." I cry out.

He pushes inside me, taking me by surprise.

"Oh God!" I moan.

He pushes deeper in, he feels like everything I want to risk. A past I miss.

“My little kitten,” he says against my lips, biting with the right amount.

I curl my legs around him, my nails are leaving marks on his back. Mbuzo picks up the pace, pounding against me like an unleashed beast.

It’s arousing to see his muscles dancing beneath his skin and his parted lips, the funny facial expressions. I take it all in until he hits my G-spot.

My body trembles and arches, I tightly hold on to him as I cum in waves that have me calling out his name.

I’m still shivering, holding on to him while he chases his own orgasm. His body tenses, he groans and falls on top of me, careful not to crush me.

“You’re amazing KaMadlala.”

What happened to Kitten? I was enjoying being his little cat.

He looks into my eyes and touches my cheek.

"We'll get you a pill in the morning." He says.

Shit! How did we forget to condomize?

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[03/06, 15:42] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 16

MBUZO

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It's somewhere around 7am, he left her sleeping and went home to give his brother transport

money. It's Mkhetheni's first day at work.

Now he's on his way to the B&B, there's a car that's been following him since he left home.

He sees a petrol station and pulls up, then walks in and waits inside. The car following him parks next to his, just as the man steps out with an attempt to run inside the garage, Mbuzo hurries out.

"Why are you following me, Sibiya?"

"Why would I follow you?" Sibiya backtracks to his car, Mbuzo steps closer.

"Careful, I might lead you to hell." -Mbuzo.

Sibiya's eyes shift a little, he quickly regains his confidence.

"Where is KaMadlala?" Ah! There it is.

No one had to drag the truth out of him.

"I will answer your question if you answer mine." It's a bargain Sibiya would be too stupid

to back out of.

“I’m listening boy-boy.” –Sibiya.

Disrespectful piece of shit.

Mbuzo is not put off by the insult. People are annoying, why is there even so many of them?

“The black bag I was to give Madlala. What was in it?”

Sibiya’s eyes widen, his business has nothing to do with this kid.

“You would know by now if it had anything to do with you, Nonkosi.”

A shrug from Mbuzo, “It’s up to you if you’re going to tell me or not. But disclaimer, I don’t like being told no.”

Sibiya is suddenly trembling, he swallows a lump and takes a deep breath. This boy carries a different aura today, too dark for his old shaky knees.

“The money was for Madlala.” Sibiya says.

“I know, get to the point.”

This is new behaviour, Sibiya cannot believe who he is talking to.

Nonkosi is usually reserved, he never dares to talk back at adults.

“What is wrong with you Nonkosi? Are you on drugs? Listen young man, I can help you. We have a community programme that helps young men...”

“What was the money for, Sibiya?” He cuts in.

A deep breath. The old man needs it.

“In a few months, I will be stepping down as chief. Madlala wants the position, but by tradition, my son has to take over. In exchange for the position, Madlala offered me his daughter. I have always had my eye on Cashile, she’s a fine woman...”

“Shut the fuck up.” Mbuzo snaps, revealing a silver pistol on his waist. It’s early morning, the petrol station is empty. Anything can happen and no one will know.

Sibiya takes a deep breath, “You are not like your father. Nonkosi was a very respectable man.”

“I guess that’s why I’m still alive. My respectable chief, from today walk the other direction when you see KaMadlala. You will not think of her, you will not talk about her or even mention her name.”

It can’t be that hard.

“What is KaMadlala to you.”

“Nx Nx Nx.” Mbuzo shakes his head in disapproval. “Listening is a skill baba wesizwe. What did I say about mentioning her name?”

That look can silence a man.

“What about Nothando? You promised my daughter marriage.”

“Do you have that in writing?”-Mbuzo.

For the life of him, he cannot point a day where he sat down with Nothando and discussed marriage or the future for that matter.

Mbuzo hides the weapon, “We are done. You may leave.”

“You said you’ll tell me where KaMadlala is.” Sibiya seethes.

“Are we talking about the same KaMadlala that I know? I hope not because I’m a very, very jealous man. Leave Cashile alone. I’ve given you rules and I certainly hope you will live by them. Now get in the car and leave.”

He’s not kidding.

Sibiya gulps, clamping his jaw. This is not how he thought things would pen out when he began

tailing Mbuzo.

“Your confidence scares me, Nonkosi. Where did you get it?”

It's not just confidence, he's suddenly arrogant. All this, whereas he's been known as the most humbled of the Xaba brothers.

“I have a reason to fight now. I will wage war with anyone that tries to take what's mine.”

That's all Mbuzo reveals.

The staring contest between them is getting intense. Sibiya is the first and only to back out, he gets in the car and drives the other direction.

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CASHILE

Mbuzo is not in the house. I have tried calling him, his phone is off. Maybe he's like my bras and underwear, they go missing all the time.

There's food in the pots, he cooked. I'm not shocked anymore, he's very domesticated.

I don't like eggs, in whatever shape or form. But I eat the ones he made and give him an E for excellent. They taste better than mine.

I'm drowning myself in lukewarm coffee when he walks into the kitchen, I didn't hear the door. He wraps his arms around me, a kiss on my cheek.

"Good morning KaMadlala."

Yoh hai! I check the time on my phone, it's 8am.

"You don't like sleeping, do you?"

Unless he's a vampire, they don't sleep those things.

He sits across from me, his eyes holding a

smile.

“I had to drive home and give my brother transport money.”

Oh yeah, Mkhetheni is a working citizen now.

I can forgive him for leaving me in bed.

“What, did you miss me?”

Yeah right!

“Should I dish up for you?” I ask.

He’s already on his feet and heading to the stove. I see, he’s a D.I.Y type of guy, likes to do things himself. I like that a lot and it’s expected, he went to boarding school and he’s the third boy child in his family.

“How did you sleep?” He’s asking me how I slept after that crazy night we had?

When he turns to me, there’s a smug look on his face. He knows what he did to me last night.

“Where is my morning pill?” I don’t like going on my periods, but I’d choose them over pregnancy. He fishes in his pocket and retrieves the pill, then gives it to me with a glass of water. I take it immediately while he watches.

“You know that doesn’t wash out the fact that you are one flesh with me now.”

I don’t know what he means by that.

“Please elaborate sir.”

His eyes darken, I need to watch what I say to this man.

“What I mean is that we belong to each other now. Together we are perfection.” He says, taking his seat.

“You really are serious about this?”

“I wouldn’t have made love to you if I wasn’t.”

“Made love? That wasn’t love making, you were pounding me like Nigerian yam. Who are you?

Christian Black?"

He frowns, "Who is that?"

Christian Grey's cousin, but he won't get it.

"So, I saw my clothes hanging outside. Why did you wash them?"

My mother would kill me if she were to find out a man is washing my clothes.

"You didn't bring a lot of clothes, I don't want you to run out of things to wear. Plus, I am hosting you, KaMadlala. I will take care of you as long you are here."

Is he trying to get me to fall in love with him? I need to keep my heart sealed, it's too soon.

He's wiping his plate clean, I haven't touched my second slice of bread.

"I have good news, you can finally go back home. Sibiya will not be a problem anymore."

“Is he dead?” I mean, that is the first thought to cross my mind.

“No, I had a talk with him. He’s been taken care of.” -Him.

Sigh!

“You don’t look happy.”

Obviously I won’t be jumping for joy.

“Going back to my father’s house can’t be good news. I don’t like the person he’s become. What about Juba? He knows where I live.”

I can handle Juba that’s a fact, he can’t force me to leave with him. I just... I want to stay here a little longer. I woke up with a change of mind.

Mbuzo takes our plates to the sink, then comes to sit next to me. He takes my hand and pulls me into his lap, his arms wrap around my waist.

“No one is taking you away from me, KaMadlala. You don’t have to worry about that man.”

It sounds like he has a plan.

“I feel like there is more to you than what meets the eye. Care to tell me who Mbuzowakhe Xaba is?”

My brain will crack with all these questions in my head, it’s time I let them out.

His eyes avoid mine, making room for doubt and more questions. Could he be hiding something big from me? He says Sibiya has been taken care of. How?

What does that even mean?

“What do you want to know?” There’s a sprinkle of disinterest in his voice.

“What did you do for a living before moving to the village?”

“I worked for Old Mutual as a regional manager.” He says.

That’s nice, he was rolling in money. The Xabas

have always been lucky with money.

I put my arms around his neck, “Tell me more. I feel like there’s so much I don’t know about you. We’re more like strangers.”

A pucker forms between his eyebrows, he’s silently telling me that he doesn’t want to talk about it. Am I pushing it?

“You don’t feel like a stranger to me, KaMadlala. I can still feel the last hug we shared on our last day together.”

This calls for a laughing marathon. There is no such thing.

“You are kidding right?”

He looks too serious.

“Who said anything about it being physical? It’s all in the mind KaMadlala, and here.” He points at his heart. “This is where I have kept you all those years. My heart refused to forget you, it

remembered everything about you. Your squeaky laugh."

Lies, I laugh with a bass.

"Your candour, your wide smile and that little bounce to your walk."

I'm starting to see a smile on his face as he talks, he doesn't let it all out though.

"You were my brother from another mother." I say.

This wipes out every emotion that was showing on his face.

"That's not how I saw you, you were just my best friend. Gender had nothing to do with it." - Him.

Well I didn't mean to offend him. To be fair, I liked him but I like him magnified now.

He's moved me off his lap, and washing the

dishes. I feel bad, I don't do anything in this house.

"Let me do the dishes, it's my last day today right?" I take the sponge from his hand.

"It doesn't have to be today. This is your home too, there is no rush." He says.

I love it when he speaks foreign. I serve him a smile, he shakes his head when he fails to return one.

He's drying the plates I wash. I'm not ready to fall in love with Mbuzo but he's making it difficult for me to keep my heart fenced.

"Why haven't you called me Kitten today?" I'm curious really, it sounds better than KaMadlala.

I feel his stare and look at him to find him narrow eyed, in a seductive way.

"You want to have sex?" He asks.

I look away because my body is about to betray

me. Mbuzo chuckles as I hand him a plate without giving him a second look.

Bloody Christian Black!

THE MADLALAS

The news of Madlala's insanity has grown legs. The entire village is talking about the upcoming funeral of the dead livestock. It's a crazy theory that those who have not heard it from the horse's mouth refuse to believe.

MaNkosi hasn't shown her face in public. It's a new day, her husband is sleeping like a baby in their bedroom. He had a hectic day yesterday. Laughing and chasing people like a mad man should come with a six digit salary. He deserves to sleep until Jesus comes.

She walks out of the bedroom, locks it and hides the key inside her bra. There will not be a funeral for any livestock today, or ever.

The villagers will think the entire family has gone crazy.

She goes to the kitchen to perform her wifely duties. Bakhe woke up early, got dressed and left with a group of boys she knows as his friends. Today is Thabiso's funeral, he will be buried home in Limpopo. Due to obvious reasons, they are not attending the funeral.

"Knock, knock!"

She's startled by her brother in law at the door.

"Hau Sbari, ngena." Her usual sweet smile comes forth.

MaNkosi is the best sister in-law Nkululeko has ever asked for. He takes a seat by the corner of the kitchen and watches as his sister in-law pours water in a kettle.

“I thought you would be in Limpopo for the funeral.” She starts.

“Thabiso’s family forbid us from attending the funeral. They accused us of killing their son.”

This is the tea she ordered this morning, not bitter Joko.

“What about Mbali? Do they know that she’s pregnant?” She asks.

Nkululeko sighs dejectedly, “Mbali had a miscarriage last night.”

A plate falls off her hands and breaks, she covers her mouth gasping in utter shock.

“Hau! Hau! Hau! Mbali my child. What did she do to deserve this? First it was her husband, and now she’s lost her baby.” MaNkosi can win a contest for the best crier in the world.

“God has turned his back on my daughter.” Nkululeko has lost hope in the God he speaks

of.

Life is dark, there's not even a ray of sunshine.

Tea is ready, it tastes bitter now that she's heard this "terrible news." She spills it in the sink and continues crying as she serves her brother in-law, then excuses herself. Her husband has to hear the good news.

When did he wake up? He's standing on top of the bed, naked. His body is not a sight for sore eyes, he looks like Felonius Gru with a pot belly and flat ass.

"Baba, there's good news. Mbali had a miscarriage." She whispers.

Bab'Madlala is looking at her with bedroom eyes.

"Khanyisile look, a helicopter." He's playing with his penis, spinning it around like a dish cloth.

Her eyes widen, it's gotten worse. She was hoping he would wake up better. He jumps from the bed and she screams, escaping him by an inch.

"Yini Khanyisile? You don't want to play with my helicopter? These are the brakes," he says, grabbing his balls.

Now she's crying real tears, this has to stop.

"Get dressed baba, your brother is here." She's standing in the corner of the room, looking at him like he bites.

"Let's play first, I'm the cow." He gets on his knees and hands. "Ride me, Khanyisile. Ride me, mkami. Moo! Moo! Moo!"

He's shouting and mooing like a cow, MaNkosi runs to cover his mouth. Nkululeko will think they are doing the deed while he's in the house.

He bites her hand, causing her to scream and release him. Bab'Madlala jumps up and blocks

the door when she tries to escape.

“Have you ever seen a handsome cow like me?
Tell me I’m a handsome cow.”

“You’re a handsome cow baba.” Anything to get out of here.

“Would you eat me? Tell me that you would eat me. I’m a delicious cow.”

Why is he yelling?

This is her punishment for all the sins she’s ever committed.

“I would eat you baba.”

MaNkosi puts a smile on his face, she runs out the second he’s distracted and closes the door.

The kitchen is empty, Nkululeko heard them and left thinking they were getting it on. 2024 has been the most embarrassing year of her life.
When is it coming to an end?

MaNkosi sinks on the chair, trying to catch her

breath.

“Kokoko!”

She looks up, there’s a man at her door step carrying a sleeping toddler, with Mickey mouse ponytails. She welcomes him with a sour face.

“Hello. My name is Juba Ngwenya, I am Cashile’s fiancé and this is our daughter Lujulile.”

This is news to MaNkosi, her heart will stop any second.

“I hope you don’t mind, I brought my uncles with me.” Juba points at the old men standing outside the gate, behind them is a herd of fat cows.

MaNkosi hasn’t uttered a word, it hasn’t sunk in to her as to what is happening.

“Vroom! Vroom! Piipiip. Piip-piip! Short left.” It’s Madlala walking around the kitchen naked and

swinging around his helicopter dick.

Oh shit! She forgot to lock the door.

MaNkosi drowns in shame, she's too shaken to move.

Bab'Madlala stops walking when he sees Juba, he steps closer to the open door, swinging his dick.

“Yah mfana, do you want to ride my helicopter? R20 a lift.”

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We have electricity now, it's back to our schedule.

500+ comments... 15 shares...

[03/06, 15:43] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 17

CASHILE

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He's wasted his day with me, which makes me wonder what Nothando thinks about not seeing him the whole day.

Speaking of Nothando, I need to know where I stand. Right now it's all fun and games on my side, I'm enjoying what he's giving me.

While he's fallen deep for me, it's all over him.

He's lying on the couch with me on top of him, wrapped in his embrace. This man smells good, I don't know if it's a manly thing.

It's addictive, the feel of his arms around me.

"When last did you hear from Nothando?"

I hear his heartbeat change, he didn't expect the question.

“It’s been two days, I haven’t been taking her calls.”

The way he says it tells me that he is purposely ignoring her.

“Okay, so what’s the plan? Are we going to share you?”

He stops rubbing my back, I would fall for it and look up at him, but I don’t.

He sighs, then continues rubbing my back.

“I plan on breaking things with her, she is a strong girl. She will be fine.”

That’s really hard to believe, Nothando will not be fine. She loves this man, even a blind man can see it.

“You know there is still time to stop this thing we are doing. You can continue with her.”

This time I give in to the temptation of looking up when he stops caressing my back, he’s

frowning back at me. I have hurt him with my insensitivity.

“You don’t want to be with me?” He sounds hurt.

“I do, but I haven’t fallen that deep.”

I spot a twitch of the lips, “Is this a declaration of your love for me?”

God give me strength.

I get off him, my back is starting to hurt from laying on my stomach anyway.

He sits, shifting too close that I have no space to breathe.

“Don’t you think we are rushing into things? Because I do, what if this is just sexual attraction, a burning desire that will die out in no time.” I say.

It’s possible, sometimes love is mistaken for infatuation.

Mbuzo has decided to wear a frown during the

duration of this conversation.

He's so sensitive when it comes to this subject.

"This is real KaMadlala. I'm the only man who has loved you more than anyone has ever been loved."

I'm overwhelmed really. There is so much and so many people to think about. This thing almost feels forbidden.

"What if I'm not ready for a relationship?"

"Then I will wait until you are ready. I will teach you how to love me, but I'm praying it comes naturally." He says.

I let him caress my cheeks, he leans in for a kiss. He's good at this kissing thing, that's one of the things I will not let go of. Maybe I can enjoy him a little while longer.

He presses his forehead on mine, slightly smiling before giving me a few pecks. My body

is starting to react to every touch and kiss.
I'm afraid it will be hard to be without him.

"Come here," Mbuzo mumbles, pulling me to sit close to him. His arm is around my shoulder, although I am not used to cuddling, I rest my head on his shoulder and savour the moment.

"Come to think of it, I don't like the thought of you cuddling with other women." I mean it as a joke.

He doesn't laugh.

"How long was your longest relationship?" I need to gather as much information as I could, otherwise he will never tell me anything.

"Two years, we were in high school."

That's a long time.

"Any kids planted around South Africa?"

He lets out a light chuckle, "None."

That's good.

"What about you? You met someone and had a child with him. It's not nice knowing another man means so much to you."

He's the possessive type, it's clear.

"Juba doesn't mean anything to me anymore, I loved him once and he gave me a child. I wouldn't trade her for anything."

I hate that I failed my daughter, I can never forgive myself for letting Juba manipulate me into leaving Lulu with his mother.

"I haven't seen my baby in two years. I'm a bad mother, Mbuzo."

"We're all bad at something, God doesn't expect us to be perfect."

Gee! I was expecting him to tell me that I'm the best mother in the world, even though I know I'm not. That's what venting is about, we

comfort each other with lies.

“Yeah but so much time has passed. How will I ever make it up to her? I wish I could turn back time and bond with my baby, I want to raise her myself and give her all the love I never could.”

Lulu doesn’t even recognise me as her mother, she knows my face. But to her “mama” is Juba’s mother.

He takes my face into his hands, kissing my forehead in the process.

“You still can,” he says.

I shake my head, it’s hard for me to agree with him.

“What does your heart tell you?” –Him.

“My heart is bursting with fear.” I tell him.

“Then allow me to hold you down until you are strong enough to take over. Even then, I will not let go of your hand.”

I give him a nod this time. God knows I need someone to back me up when I fall.

My phone is ringing, I snap out of his embrace.

I'm starting to think my mother has an obsession over me, I have many missed calls from her. She was never this obsessed when I was in Joburg, for God's sake I didn't contact them for two years. They had my numbers.

What was stopping them from contacting me?

"Mama?"

"I expect you home in two hours, if you are not home by then, we will disown you."

"Hau Mah, I told you that I am in Joburg. I can't just pack up and leave."

Who pushed her buttons? It's unlike her to be so sour.

"Stop lying to me Cashile. I know you are not in

joburg. Are you with Mbuzo? Your father is sick and you're busy sleeping around, you should be ashamed of yourself."

No, this is not my mother.

I check the caller ID, still the same number.

But why is she acting so strange.

"Mama, why would I lie to you?"

"Why not? It's the path you have chosen, you lie to your parents and do whatever you want. Why didn't you tell us that you have a child and a fiancé?"

How did she find out about Lulu? That son of a gun must have told her.

"Come home, your fiancé and daughter are here."

Shit! Damn that bastard Juba.

"He is not my fiancé mah, yes we have a child but we are over." I argue.

Juba will never have me like that, sure he had my body but that's where it ended.

"Listen to me, Cashile. If we are your parents, if you have any ounce of respect for us, you will come home. 2 hours ntombazana."

The call dies, she hung up on me.

"What is it?" He's been listening attentively.

"My mother wants me home, she's not having it."

"I'll take you, let's not upset her further." Mbuzo says.

That's the thing, she's already upset.

I don't tell him that.

"I won't take all my clothes, I want to come back here. It can be our little cave of escape from the world."

He nods, "I like that."

He drags me into his arms, holding me tight.

“When am I going to see you again? I will die missing you.”

He's so clingy.

“You can come see me tonight when everyone has gone to sleep.”

“I can't disrespect your father like that.” He says.

Does it even matter? My father will be sleeping.

I don't argue, he will decide when he wants to see me.

His eyes are tender as he looks into mine.

“Be patient with me, KaMadlala. I promise, I will give you a beautiful life.” He kisses my temple.

I have no words, I don't know what to think or how to feel.

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THE MADLALAS

MaNkosi finally succeeded in locking her husband in their bedroom, the Ngwenyas have been given chairs to sit under a tree. It's a surprise that they are still here and willing to talk after seeing Bab'Madlala's madness.

Nkululeko came back after MaNkosi called and explained that her husband is losing his mind, hence his strange behaviour.

He was reluctant at first until MaNkosi mentioned the Ngwenyas and that they are here to discuss amalobolo.

The baby is sleeping in Cashile's room while she attends to the guests. The Ngwenyas have spoken with Nkululeko, and come to a mutual agreement. Cashile and Juba are soul mates and they will get married.

She's humming her favourite song while preparing drinks for the guests. Bakhe walks into the kitchen and kisses her cheeks.

"Who are the guests?"

Her smile is so warm, "Your sister's in-laws. Can you believe he's ready to pay amalobolo for her?"

Every mother wants the best for their child, MaNkosi is no different.

Bakhe looks out the window and decides he doesn't like Juba.

"He looks arrogant, and my sister is not involved with him mami. They broke up."

And that just wipes away the smile on her face.

"So? He is the father of her child, they deserve to be together."

Deserve? Does she even know what that means?

Cashile walks in looking lost and confused. The

prodigal daughter is home.

“Mah!”

MaNkosi drops what she’s doing and breaks into ululation while dancing around her daughter. She has never been so proud to call herself a mother.

“My baby, your husband is outside. He just paid lobola, 13 cows to be precise.”

It’s not much compared to the cows they lost.

Cashile snorts, “Juba and I broke up. He doesn’t even love me anymore.”

“Then why is he here?”

Good question MaNkosi.

“Because he hates losing. I broke things with him and he hates that, he’s evil Mah. Please tell them to leave.”

“My baby, men are evil by nature. If you are picky, you will never get married. Do you think

God will send you Gabriel from heaven? Wake up Cashile, life is not a fairy tale.”

MaNkosi has a point, when a door opens, walk in. You will deal with the rest later.

Cashile breaks into tears, her parents are stubborn yes, once their minds are made up, it's hard to change them.

“I am not marrying that man, you can't make me. I'm with Mbuzo now, he's my boyfriend.”

Yoh, yoh, yoh! This child, all those hours of labour and she comes out a disappointment. MaNkosi feels betrayed to say the least.

She goes back to pouring tea in enamel cups, each person has their own plate with five pieces of Marie biscuits.

“Yini iboyfriend Cashile? Do you even know what you are talking about? Mbuzo doesn't even have a chicken, ngisho iphela mntanami. What will he pay lobola with? There is a man out

there who wants to make you an honourable woman and wena you are telling me about a boyfriend. Don't patronise me. Your daughter is sleeping in your room. Go cover your head and put on a dress, then come and help me serve the guests."

Cashile shares a defeated look with her brother, he gestures that she wipes her tears. Tears will not take her anywhere.

"Hurry," MaNkosi snaps, walking out with a tray of refreshments.

Bakhe follows his mother.

"Bantu abadala, I'm Buhlebakhe. The brother." He shakes their hands with a welcoming smile.

He looks at Juba, "Sbari, I'm taking the family snake and monkey for a walk. Let's go, it will give us time to bond as in laws. You can carry Bruno the monkey. He's in my room."

Juba can't believe his ears, his eyes pop out as he looks to MaNkosi and his uncles to see if they heard the same.

"Khehla, adults are still talking. Get out of here." MaNkosi snaps.

These kids will make her heart stop.

"It's okay Mami, I'm sure we don't have to hide the secret from our in-laws. My brother in-law loves my sister, he won't judge us. Our snake is his snake."

"Sna... snake?" Juba stutters.

His uncles are out the gate, all it took was the word snake to chase them. Bakhe narrows his eyes at Juba, why is he still sitting there?

"Yes Sbari, can you see it? She's beautiful neh?" Bakhe asks, squatting on the floor and patting the invisible snake.

"Her name is Jubakazi." Bakhe looks at Juba

with the most innocent smile.

The brother in-law has gone pale, he's trembling as he stands from his seat.

"That's my name," his voice shakes.

Bakhe nods in slow motion, grinning from ear to ear.

"We named her after you, Juba. It's a family tradition. We name the family snake after every man that marries into this family. Her previous name was Nomathemba, we named her after my brother in-law Themba who was married to my cousin sister. But the snake ate him, a week after he paid lobola. She's very jealous, she doesn't like sharing. May Themba's soul rest in peace."

There was never a Themba.

Juba's eyes have never been so wide, he falls to the floor as he staggers back in fear but quickly jumps up.

“Cashile, i... is that true?” Juba turns his questions to her. She will surely tell him the truth.

She nods, “Why do you think Jubakazi is as big as an anaconda? Look at her tail, it goes all around the main house.”

Juba’s eyes follow Cashile’s finger pointing at nothing on the ground. He can taste fear in his mouth.

Nkululeko is out of words, he sighs heavily, throwing himself back on the chair.

“I—I’m leaving... with my cows.” Juba stutters.

Maybe the Madlalas can see the snake because why is Bakhe on his knees brushing something with his hand. Something Juba can’t see.

“Ngwenya he’s lying.” MaNkosi disputes in panic, slapping Bakhe on the head.

They don’t have snakes in this family.

“Don’t listen to her Sbari, this is how they trap all the men that marry into our family. They don’t even last a week, Jubakazi eats them.” Bakhe says.

“Don’t call it that.” Juba shouts, he’s slowly moving towards the gate. His white Jordans gathering all the dust it can.

“Ngwenya wait, it’s not true. Oh Nkosi yami!” MaNkosi is desperate for him to stay.

“Mami no, enough is enough. Last night I didn’t sleep because you forced me to baby sit imfene kababa, at the same time Jubakazi also wanted my attention. I’m tired mami, kuningi and ngiyi-one.”

He’s fake crying, he catches Cashile looking at him and winks at her.

Everything is against MaNkosi, this was her chance to fill her husband’s kraal and make him happy again.

“I will come back with a pastor to get my daughter,” Juba yells, running out the gate.

“Baleka Juba, baleka. Run and don’t ever look back.” Bakhe shouts.

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CHAPTER 18

CASHILE

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I didn’t expect the mini family meeting. My father is the one who likes to host them, I keep expecting him to join us but every time I ask

about him, I am told to shut up.

“You kids have embarrassed me, I’m enough with you two.” She hasn’t stopped complaining.

Uncle Nkululeko is quietly sitting on the couch, I don’t expect anything from him, he’s the quiet type anyway.

“Mami, I did us a favour. Juba is not the right man for my sister.”

Bakhe knows me better than anyone.

“Thula wena. We are your parents, your gods on earth. Only we know what’s best for you.”

Our gods? Now that’s where the problem comes in.

“Mama, I’m sorry for the embarrassment we caused you but Bakhe is right. We can’t accept any guy because he has money.”

She squints her eyes at me, I am yet to see the full extent of her anger.

“I am not a child Cashile, do not talk to me as if I struggle to understand logic. I carried you kids in my womb, if anything, I know what is best for you.”

And I never disputed that, but parents are not as wise as they think.

“I appreciate that Mah, but you and baba act as if I struggle finding love. You keep selling me off to any man who is ready to buy.”

Pain flashes in her eyes, I was trying to make her understand me, not hurt her feelings.

“I said no to you marrying Sibiya. Ngwenya is different, he is the father of your child.”

“That means nothing, I don’t love Juba. And he’s not going to come after what happened today.”

She turns her gaze to Bakhe, “Khehla will fix it. Give him Ngwenya’s number, he will call him and apologize for lying.”

Bakhe chuckles, “I’m not doing that. With all due respect mami, why don’t you marry Juba if you want him to be part of the family so badly?”

I wait for her to deliver a slap on his head, or yell or something... but nothing. All he gets are narrowed eyes.

“I am not your friend Khehla, you are going to fix this mess. I want those cows back, there’s going to be a wedding in this house. Is that clear?”

I give up on this woman.

“I agree mami, there will be a wedding and Mbuzo is a good guy. He will make a great husband, don’t you think?” Bakhe says, winking at my mother.

She’s defeated, there’s no debating with a man who does not care about anything in life. No one can ever affect Bakhe no matter how much they try. MaNkosi sits down and carries her

cheek on the palm of her hand. Why does she get to be the sad one? This is about me, not her.

“Baby, Nonkosi is a good man. But he is not the one for you, your love is not right.”

“Why?” I ask.

It’s not like we are related.

She sighs, “Just listen to me and do as I say for once Cashile.”

“Even at the expense of my happiness?”

“Happiness is just a word, it doesn’t exist. What matters in life is that we do the right thing.” She says.

“Bullshit!” Bakhe coughs the word out, my mother doesn’t catch what he said.

“Where is baba?”

She snaps her gaze at me, narrowed eyes and a puckered face.

“Your father is not feeling well, I am going to check on him.”

She gets off the couch.

“Dada!!! Dada!!!” That’s Lulu crying.

I run out of the house, my mother is right behind me.

“Baby!” She’s roaming outside my rondavel, crying her eyes out.

I scoop her up in my arms, she scream-cries, fighting to get off.

“It’s okay baby, mommy is here.” I’m trying to pacify her but she’s fighting to get off, her ear-splitting screams are heart breaking.

“Give her to me,” My mother snatches her from my arms, and holds her close to her chest. Lulu wraps her arms around her neck.

“I can do it Mah.”

She ignores me and walks away with my baby.

MBUZO

He came home after dropping off Cashile, it's been hours and he's growing impatient by the second. He doesn't know this Juba person but he's rubbing him off the wrong way.

Cashile promised that they are not engaged, he has to take her word and run with it.

"Ndoda where is my bread?"

He's taken out of his thinking zone by Mhlo's complaint, he leaves the couch and heads to the kitchen.

"I ate it." Mkhetheni says unbothered, sipping from his cup of tea.

“I know you ate it. What I want to know is why? I hid the bread because I was going to eat it.”

The twins are at it again, sometimes they fight like cats.

“What’s going on?” Mbuzo asks.

“Your brother thinks he can eat my food because he’s now a breadwinner in this family.”

Mhlo grabs the empty Albany plastic bag, and throws it at Mkhetheni who throws it back at him.

“I just got home from work, tired and hungry. What was I supposed to eat?” Mkhetheni is so nonchalant, he doesn’t seem to care about his twin’s ranting.

“Why are you acting dumb Mkhetheni? I hid the bread for a reason, I wasn’t going to if I wasn’t planning on eating it.”

“Eight slices ndoda? Awu kahle boh!”

“Bhuti, why didn’t you eat four and leave four for Mhlo. You know how he is with food.” Mbuzo intervenes.

“Because I wanted to eat all eight, he hid eight because he was planning on eating all of it. I didn’t do anything wrong.” Mkhetheni replies smoothly.

He’s making his second cup of tea.

Mhlo is not having it, he’s infuriated, maybe too hungry. Whatever it may be, hunger and anger do not go well together. He charges at his twin brother, the cup in Mkhetheni’s hand falls to the ground.

Early supper has turned into a wrestling match, Mhlo is losing the match. They are identical twins, but somehow God thought making Mkhetheni a little stronger was a good thing.

He pushes Mhlo who stumbles back and almost crashes on Mbuzo. This younger brother

steps aside with arms folded and watches as his brothers wrestle each other over bread.

The last time he tried to break off their fight, they turned on him and beat him up for pushing one of them.

Someone is panting, it's Mhlo. He jerks himself out of Mkhetheni's grip, heaving.

They look at each other, then burst out laughing. This is the only time they ever get to see Mkhetheni laughing.

"You two are tiring. Who fights over bread?" Mbuzo grabs a broom and sweeps the mess they made on the floor.

"I'm still hungry, why is there no food in this house?" Mhlo grumbles while throwing himself on a chair.

Mbuzo takes out R100 from his pocket and hands it to Mhlo.

He grins, “Thanks.”

“Go buy tinned fish and 5kg of maize meal.”

That’s Mbuzo, cutting Mhlo’s happiness short.

“Put R50 on top for a cider,” –Mhlo.

“We don’t have money for booze ndoda.”

“I know, I was just trying my luck. When are we opening the store? I can’t stand this life of poverty.” Mhlo sighs exhaustedly.

“I get paid month-end, we can stock up a few essentials.” Mkhetheni says.

“I don’t want us to work at the store anymore, we have been robbed more than once. It’s too dangerous.” Mbuzo tells them.

Mhlo taps Mbuzo’s shoulder, “Mfethu, you once worked at a BDSM club and it paid well. Why don’t you apply again?”

This has Mbuzo sneering, the statement has caught him off guard. His mood instantly

changes along with the atmosphere in the room.

The twins know never to bring this up.

Their younger brother was not himself when he came home after being away for many years. It took time for him to open up and share his experiences. It's a secret the three of them promised to take to the grave.

"Go buy the food, you still have to cook." Mbuzo changes the subject, pushing Mhlo.

They boss him around because there is no serious bone in his body.

"I can't go to the shop then come back and cook, plus it's your turn moreki." He points at Mbuzo.

"I contributed to buying the food, it will be unfair for me to cook as well." –Mbuzo.

They look at Mkhetheni, he takes a deep sigh.

“I just got home from work, I’m not cooking.”

“Then we are not eating tonight.” Mhlo.

His brothers agree with him, they all head to the living room and sit on different sofas. There’s silence, no one is willing to back out.

They hear a grumble, Mhlo’s stomach is complaining.

I guess this declares him the loser because he stands, “Mbuzo boil water for pap. Mkhetheni, cut onion and tomatoes. I don’t want to start everything from scratch when I get back.”

He grabs the car keys and walks out the house.

Mkhetheni glances at Mbuzo, it’s easy to tell that he is troubled.

“Is everything okay?”

They are each other’s best friends, they don’t have friends outside. Except for Mhloniphe, his

wild personality earned him quite a handful of friends.

“This juba person is going to be a problem. Today he introduced himself to her parents as her fiancé.”

“What can I do?” Mkhetheni.

There is nothing he wouldn’t do for his brothers.

“I will figure it out. He’s Lulu’s father at the end of the day, we can’t take her father away from her.”

He’s never met Lulu, but if she’s important to Cashile, then she’s important to him.

His phone rings, he’s receiving a call from Nothando. Guilt flashes through him, he catches Mkhetheni staring but nothing is said.

He knows his brother will not put his two cents when it comes to Nothando.

Mbuzo lets the phone ring. When his phone

buzzes again, he lets out a sigh only to breathe in relief when he sees Cashile's name flashing on the screen.

Are you still coming? I will wait for you. She sent a text.

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CASHILE

Lulu wants nothing to do with me. I think she senses that I abandoned her. I don't know what to think. My mother is the only one able to console her. It's way past bed time, she's bathed Lulu and put her in pj's. My baby is clinging on to my mother, I get that she's motherly and experienced but I want a chance to prove myself.

MaNkosi walks into the living room with Lulu clung to her.

“The baby will sleep in my room.” She’s telling me not asking.

“I can handle it Mah,” I dispute.

“You can’t force a child to like you, give her time.”

Her words hurt, I’m a likeable person. I would understand if she said Lulu needs time to get used to me.

“You think my child doesn’t like me?”

I know when she sighs like that, she’s feeling frustrated.

“I didn’t mean it like that. Go to bed, you will start afresh tomorrow.” She’s taken over from her controlling husband. What is happening with these people?

“Have you heard from Ngwenya?”

Hai, I can't stand this anymore.

"I blocked him. Is it okay if I see dad?" I turn the subject, she will never stop obsessing over Juba. The man will not come back, he thinks we are evil. I'm surprised he left Lulu behind. He will never get her back.

"Your father is not well, you will see him when he is feeling better." I sense frustration in her voice.

"You haven't told me what's wrong with him, is he okay?"

She glares, "Stop asking me all these questions. You will see your father when the time is right, I'm not going to eat him hau."

A tongue click, then she goes back to the bedroom.

I didn't get a chance to kiss my baby goodnight.
I knock at her door, "Mah. I want to say

goodnight to Lulu.”

“She’s sleeping, you’ll wake her up. Go to bed.”

I see we are going to have a problem. How am I going to bond with my child if my mother is like this?

I lock the door on my way out. There’s a car flashing outside the gate. The door opens, and Mbuzo steps out. I texted him about 4 hours ago, he didn’t reply so I thought he wasn’t coming.

I run out the gate and into his arms.

“You came?”

“You asked me to come, so I’m here.”

Well, I wanted to vent to him.

“Where is the little princess?” He asks.

“With Mah, sleeping. She’s been crying the

entire day, my mother is the only one able to console her. She screams when I try to take her."

It hurts to admit, and it's my fault. I could've fought for her back then.

"Children adapt easily, give her time. She will warm up to you, just make sure you're within reach whenever she needs you." He says.

Do I even know how to do that? I have never had anyone depend on me, I'm the last born. My brother has always been the one to look after me.

"I will try, I can't get over her cries though. On the side, my mother is taking her frustrations out on me because Bakhe chased Juba and his uncles away."

I didn't realize I was fuming until now, my hands are shaking. Mbuzo seems to notice because he laces my hands with his.

“Breathe, getting angry won’t change anything.”

He’s right, but I can’t control it.

“Let me try something.” He says, taking out a phone from his pocket.

I’m thinking he is calling someone, but nope, a song comes on. He puts the phone on top of the car and starts moving his shoulders to the beat.

My jaw almost falls, am I with the right Mbuzo?

*Looking in your eyes, I see a paradise...

This world that I’ve found is too good to be true...

Standing here beside you, want so much to give you...

This love in my heart that I’m feeling for you...*

I have never seen a robot trying to dance and sing, I will need therapy after this.

“What are you doing?” I don’t mean to laugh, but he’s so bad at both singing and dancing. I didn’t know he possessed so much courage.

He shrugs, “Putting a smile on your face.”

I’m not smiling, I’m laughing at him.

“You have four left feet, you look like a donkey that can’t dance.”

He gives me a soft smile but doesn’t break character.

*And we can build this dream together, standing strong forever.

Nothing’s gonna stop us now. And if this world runs out of lovers, we’ll still have each other, nothing’s gonna stop us now.*

He's dancing, while snapping his fingers. Foot forward, then back. He throws his arms out, waving them from side to side in tune with the beat before jumping in the air.

This move kills me, I cover my mouth to muffle my laughter.

A hand grabs mine, I'm swung backward, and dipped low then brought to a solid chest, breathless.

He's looking down at me, a soft smile in his eyes.

"You sound like a chicken being beheaded." I say.

This makes him laugh genuinely.

"What happened to maskandi?"

His eyebrows shoot up, "Do I fit the stereotypical bhinca image?"

He doesn't actually, he's quite different from

most traditional Zulu men.

“Nope.”

He scoops me up in a hug, spinning me around. I purse my lips to stop myself from laughing out loud.

When he puts me down, I meet his lips. He’s kissing me softly.

“How are you feeling now?” He whispers against my lips.

“Lighter, thank you.” I’m gone, I have fallen for this man.

He suffocates me in a hug, “You welcome my love. Just promise me one thing.”

“Anything.” Nope! It depends what he wants.

“Don’t tell anyone I sang, not a single soul. Otherwise, I would die of shame.” He’s so serious as he says this, but I laugh.

“My lips are sealed.”

He stares, as if reading me. No man has ever looked at me the way Mbuzo does. I think I have found my worth, it's in him. He's the risk I'm willing to take.

"Like the song says, I will take you to the good times and see you through the bad times. You never have to feel like you're alone, not when I'm still alive." He says.

My heart is full, for the first time I can say without a doubt, I am glad I came back to the village.

We're kissing when we hear the door open. I jump out of his arms to see my mother walking out the house. Lulu is in her arms.

"Where is she going?" She's headed behind the main house.

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500+ comments... 15 shares...

[03/06, 15:43] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 19

MaNkosi hears a set of footsteps, gathers a hand full of soil and hurries to the front. Seeing Mbuzo at this time of the night with her daughter spoils her mood further.

“What’s going on? What are you two doing so late at night?” Judge Judy should be jealous, she’s never interrogated people like this.

“Mah, what are you doing with my baby outside at night?”

Cashile can be a pain in her nipple. Must she question her every move?

“Why do you talk as if you’re the only woman in the world who has ever given birth? My baby this... my baby that? Haibo Cashile!”

It’s not her fault that she’s frustrated, life is testing her and it’s not getting cute.

Cashile takes Lulu from her, “She’s a baby Mah. She shouldn’t be out at night, there are bad spirits.”

MaNkosi sighs as she puts her hand out, “I went to gather soil to bath the child. I forgot to do it when she arrived, you know it’s custom for children when they change environment. Otherwise she will fall sick.” She really doesn’t have to explain herself to her children.

Cashile has no words, an apology would be nice.

“I want to sleep with her tonight, she won’t give me trouble since she’s fast asleep.” Cashile announces.

Stupid girl is ungrateful.

“Fine, do whatever you want Cashile. Isn’t it I don’t know anything about children, I’m not a mother.” MaNkosi drops the soil, she’s hurt by Cashile’s stubbornness.

She looks at Mbuzo from the top of his head to his feet, her usual smile is missing.

“Nonkosi, you are an unmarried man, visiting a single woman in the darkness of the night?

What will the villagers think about us? That we run a brothel?” MaNkosi.

“I was passing by mah, I will take my leave.” He says, giving Cashile a look.

MaNkosi wants to dig their eyes out. Why are they looking at each other like love sick puppies?

Disgusting shit!

“Go.”-MaNkosi breaks their staring contest.

He clears his throat before nodding to her request.

“KaMadlala, I will see you soon.” Mbuzo says, unable to stop himself from staring at Cashile.

MaNkosi needs a bucket, her bile is rising. She might vomit.

“Go in the house.” She instructs Cashile who looks at her with a confused face, then toddles to her rondavel.

The second Mbuzo drives off, MaNkosi rushes into the house. Nkululeko is waiting for her in the kitchen.

“Sisi, is it possible to see my brother now?”

She slightly sighs, these people keep wanting to see her husband. Why today of all days?

“He’s not well, maybe tomorrow.”

“Please put in a word for me, I really need that money to start a business. Times are hard, I can’t even afford to buy bread.”

Is this why he’s still here when he should be

with his grieving daughter, comforting her?

Deep sigh!

“I will talk to him. You will have your answer by morning.”

That's not guaranteed.

MaNkosi wishes him a good night and goes to her room.

Bab'Madlala is still sleeping, the sleeping pills she gave him are working wonders. If only she could keep this up until she finds a solution for his problem.

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CASHILE

The next morning, I'm woken up by a knock on

my door. MaNkosi does not like peace, Lulu is still sleeping. I rush to the door before she wakes her up with her loud knocking.

“Mama!” I whine.

When did she wake up? She’s dressed and ready for the day.

“Where is the baby? How did she sleep?” She pushes her way in.

“Your father wants to see her.” She scoops her up from the bed.

“She’s still sleeping, can’t it wait?” I ask.

What kind of child abuse is this.

“No it can’t wait, I’m taking him to the doctor. He wants to see her before we leave.”

“I get that mah, but Lulu is still sleeping. Please put her down, baba will come back from the hospital, right?”

She looks at me with a heavy side-eye.

“What you are doing is wrong Cashile, it’s never done. First you hid this child from us and took her to the Ngwenyas who did not pay a cent for her. Do you think it’s fair that you hid her from us for four years? Four years Cashile? Do you hate us that much?”

“What? No Mah, I had my reasons. I was going to tell you... look, can we talk about this later? Please put Lulu down. I will take her to baba when she wakes up.”

She exhales sharply, then turns to leave with Lulu. I hate that she still treats me like a child.

Every day in this place, I am more convinced that I made a mistake coming back home.

I find it hard to recognise these people, it feels like it’s my brother and I against the world.

There is no future here, I need to pull up my socks and do something with my life.

Lulu is with me now, I owe it to her to find my

feet.

Having her here feels surreal, it's like someone will wake me up and everything will vanish.

Before I got pregnant, I never gave the thought of having kids a chance. I wasn't even looking for marriage, or anything solid.

Juba and I were having fun dating, I guess it bred results. Now I have to take responsibility and woman up.

After preparing for the day, I head to the main house. MaNkosi is in the kitchen, feeding Lulu porridge.

"Are you here to check if your baby is still alive?"

I'm confused, "Please tell me what I did wrong. This is not you mama, why are you hostile towards me?"

“You disappointed me Cashile. Not only did you have a child and kept her a secret, you allowed your brother to embarrass me yesterday.”

Why is Bakhe afforded grace and I’m crucified?

“Bakhe is older than me, Mah. He should be calling me out on my childishness, not the other way and you know your son, he does whatever he wants.”

“Bakhe is a boy, they mature very late in life. I expected you to act better.”

Kill me now!

I dish up porridge and join her at the table. Lulu is comfortable on her lap, it must be a motherly thing I guess. I am jealous.

“How is baba? What time are you leaving for the doctor’s?”

“Why? You want to bring Mbuzo to the house?”

Ehh! I’m not going to talk to her anymore. She

literally twists everything I say.

“Answer your phone, it’s making noise.”

This woman! It’s not like I’m deaf and can’t hear it ring.

What does Juba’s mother want? She ignored me when I texted her yesterday.

“Put her on speaker.” Mah says.

I wish I could take the call somewhere else but my mother has seen the caller ID.

“Hello.”

“Juba will be there tomorrow to get my granddaughter.” She speaks as if she has a right over her.

“Lulu is not going anywhere.”

“Don’t play with me Cashile, Lulu is my daughter. I raised her, I have sanctions over that child.”
She’s yelling, completely unnecessary.

“You have no right over my baby, Juba didn’t pay damages. Lulu is a Madlala.”

“Oh really? We will see about that. That child will not survive on foreign land. You yourself will come running to me when shit hits the fan, begging me to take her back. Lulu is a Ngwenya, bring her back while there’s still time.”

I can’t believe this woman.

“Is that a threat?”

“Do the right thing, KaMadlala.”

“Cut the phone baby.” My mother whispers. Too late, Juba’s mom has done the honours.

“Did you hear that mah?”

She waves the conversation off, “Don’t listen to her, it’s never going to happen. Look after the baby, I’m going to check on your father.”

She drops Lulu on my lap, surprise, surprise, she doesn’t cry.

Her heart jumps to her throat when she walks in on him stirring in bed. She had no choice but to tie him up, his dignity depends on it.

“MaNkosi.”

“Baba?” She plays it safe, not sure if he is sane.

“Why am I tied up?”

Oh good, he's sane.

“Baba, you lost your mind. For the past two days, you were not yourself. I’m trying to help you heal.”

Bab'Madlala suddenly looks troubled.

“This is all Mbuzo’s fault, he was meant to die from suicide.”

Loose lips sink ships.

“What are you talking about?-MaNkosi.

“The ritual I did to get the Nonkosi wealth needs a sacrifice. Mbuzo was supposed to die that day he attempted suicide. But KaMadlala saved him and ruined things for me.” Such an angry bull.

“Cashile is not at fault baba, she was at the wrong place at the wrong time.” She will always defend her children, no matter what wrong they do.

“I don’t care, she lacks discipline. Look at me, I am not myself anymore. It’s been long overdue MaNkosi, for two years I sacrificed the villagers because I couldn’t bring myself to killing the Nonkosi boys. But the sacrifice is not that strong. One of the brothers has to die.”

MaNkosi is frozen with shock.

“Baba wait! You are telling me that you are behind the death of the village people?”

“Yes. Whenever they accept money from me, they are agreeing to dying.”

MaNkosi jumps from the bed, and runs to open the window. Tears burn her eyes, one blink and she's sobbing.

“Do you know how many people you have killed baba?” Her voice is kept low.

“They were killed by their greed.” Bab’Madlala snaps back.

It has MaNkosi gasping for more air, her body is shaking uncontrollably.

“I don’t know you. What did you do with my husband?”

The said husband is laughing, she holds her breath, hoping he’s not gone back to his crazy-self.

“You know who you married, MaNkosi. You helped me get rid of Xaba and his wife and

attain their wealth. You were right beside me.”

“I was beside you because you tricked me, you said no one will die. I didn’t know your plan would include a blood sacrifice.”

He outsmarted her like he always does.

Bab’Madlala snorts, “You didn’t walk away when you found out. You even helped me separate Mbuzo and Cashile, we have done so much together MaNkosi. Both our hands are stained with blood, don’t act innocent.”

MaNkosi is close to rolling her eyes, sure she’s done her part, probably even more than him. But to kill a nation? He should have let her in on this plan, maybe she would’ve come up with a better solution like she always does when he messes up.

“I don’t want to argue. Help me find a solution. Thapelo’s death has done nothing for me, his blood is weak. It’s because of Cashile, her bond

with mbuzo is too strong. They shouldn't be together MaNkosi, she should have never returned."

Thapelo- Thabiso... potato-potato... data-data.
Same thing, different pronunciations.

"I know, but what can we do? They are a couple now." MaNkosi's report shocks him.

He wants to escape the bed but can't move, he's still tied up.

"We have to keep them apart." He's getting worked up, he panics quickly where money is involved.

"What do you want me to do? I don't think you are well yet. I have to keep you locked up."
—MaNkosi.

"There has to be a sacrifice, I have painted the village red but it hasn't helped. Either I sacrifice my own blood or the Xabas." -Bab'Madlala.

Now he's talking nonsense, "Leave my children out of this baba. I will expose you if anything happens to them."

She means it and he knows it.

"Relax, why do you think I made Mbuzo want to commit suicide? But it didn't work, thanks to your daughter. Those two together are a weapon of mass destruction." He can't fully express his anger towards Cashile, MaNkosi is overly protective of her cubs.

"Forget about Cashile and Mbuzo for now. You said you need to sacrifice your blood, right?" MaNkosi asks.

"Yes, my blood or one of the Xabas and you know how hard it is to kill them." A deep sigh.

Those Xaba boys have made his life difficult, he would be living like royalty if not for them.

MaNkosi sits on the bed, "Your brother is asking for money to start a business. I think it's about

time you give him.”

His eyes almost fall out, his heart starts racing.
No, not his brother.

Kanti, who is the crazy one in this room?

“He’s my brother.” He says with a deadly frown.

Habe! He can never sacrifice his only brother.
He practically raised Nkululeko, it’s always been
the two of them since the death of their parents.
Madlala was a child himself, barely past puberty
and he was toiling hard to put food in
Nkululeko’s stomach.

“Then you will remain crazy until you eventually
die. I don’t care, do whatever you want but keep
my babies out of it, or I will raise hell.”

Bab’Madlala is shocked. What is happening to
his sweet wife?

A sigh leaves his mouth, he’s battling emotions
he can’t control.

"I will do it. I will give Nkululeko the money." He says.

At least he will have his sanity back.

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I'm sorry for the late posts lately. I'm losing my confidence in writing, and it's affecting the story and schedule. Hopefully, I'll bounce back soon.

500+ comments... 15 shares... Let's also like/react on the inserts.

[03/06, 15:43] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 20

MBUZO

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Mhlo didn't come home since he went to buy

maize meal and tinned fish last night. It's almost mid-day and there is still no sign of him.

"Did he at least send a call back?" Mbuzo asks Mkhetheni.

They are seated around the table, drinking tea with fat-cakes. There's no food in the house, the money he gave Mhlo was the last of it.

"No." Mkhetheni sounds dejected.

They should be used to Mhlo's disappearing acts, he does whatever he wants, whenever he wants.

There's sudden loud hooting outside. Kwesta's Ngud' is bursting the speakers. The windows starts vibrating due to the loudness of the music. One look at each other, Mbuzo and Mkhetheni run out of the house in time to see Mhlo driving in with a customised Botso, wing out.

He laughs in excitement as he sees his brothers.

They don't see the joke, so they remain dead serious.

Instead of opening the car door like a normal person, he jumps out the window and greets his brothers with hugs.

"What's going on?" Mkhetheni asks.

"What did you do to my car?" –Mbuzo.

"I pimped your ride mfethu. It makes sense now." Mhlo smiles proudly, as he walks around the car admiring it.

He changed everything on the car. It's dark ruby red now, the tires too fancy for an old Nissan 1400.

He dips his head through the window and turns the volume down.

"Where did you get the money?" Mkhetheni asks.

They are waiting for an answer but Mhlo is

unloading groceries from the trunk. There are more than six Checkers grocery bags.

This is worrying, he's unemployed. Where did the money come from?

"We waited for you last night. Do you have any idea how it feels to go to bed in an empty stomach?" –Mkhotheni.

"I know it too well brother, but relax. I brought boerewors, chicken, beef. Let's have a braai. Choose umayikhethela."

"Where did you get the money?" Mbuzo asks.

"Some piece job nyana. Does it even matter? We have food, I'll call Nompilo. She makes the best pap."

He looks visibly annoyed as he takes the bags and goes in the house.

Mbuzo and Mkhotheni know it will take a lot to get the truth out of him.

“I’m going to work, talk to your brother.”
Mkhotheni says before leaving.

Talking to Mhloniphe will be like talking to a wall, a waste of time.

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He’s lying in bed, hiding from Mhloniphe and the noise outside. The braai was not cancelled because he didn’t want to be part of it, Mhlo invited his friends instead. There’s a party happening outside.

It’s frustrating not knowing where the money came from.

The door opens, revealing his girlfriend. She closes the door behind her and stands with hands on her hips and a crinkled brow.

“Long time no see, Wami.” Her tone is cold, voice a bit shaky.

He hasn't seen her in days, perhaps avoiding her calls wasn't such a good idea. He's a man that tells it like it is, but with this one it seems to be difficult. She's a good woman with a heart of gold, her only crime is that she loves him.

"MaSibiya."

"It's Nothando." Unlike most girls around here, she hates it when he addresses her with her father's surname.

Mbuzo releases a sharp breath as he slowly gets off the bed and in a second is towering over her.

"Why didn't you tell me there's a party? Nompilo invited me, should I bring you a plate of food?"
She takes his hand, he doesn't move an inch.

There's a look on his face that answers all the questions she's been harbouring while in his absence. It's her turn to release a sharp breath, hers is shaky.

“Are you not hungry?” That’s not what she wants to ask him. She’s doing all she can to avoid eye contact, only God knows what she might see in his eyes.

“We need to talk.” He says, pushing his hands into the pockets of his pants, a habit she’s seen so many times.

Nothando immediately breaks down.

The outburst has Mbuzo frowning in confusion.

“Why are you crying?”

She ignores his question by hiding her face on his chest and breaking down in loud sobs.

Well, her clinginess is nothing new. Worry nudges him, he rubs her back whispering comforting words. There’s a soft spot in his heart for her, just not love.

“Nothando, talk to me.”

Tears should have a limit of a teaspoon per day.

This one is going to flood Robin Island with her tears. He catches her when she almost falls, and carries her to his bed and lays her down.

Her body is visibly shaking, something is terribly wrong.

“I’ll get some water.” He says, but Nothando grabs his hand before he can take another step.

“Don’t go,” she takes a deep breath and wipes away her tears.

“I’m sorry, I’m such a mess.” She quickly pulls herself together.

That’s the least of his worries.

“I haven’t stopped crying since the doctor told me I have a year to live.” She says with a dry chuckle before she’s crying again.

“What?”

Nothando looks at him with a pained expression, “I found out a few days ago that I

have a brain tumor.”

He’s at a loss for words, what does he say to her?

“Aren’t you going to say something?”

“I’m sorry, I’m shocked. How? Does your father know?” He asks.

“You’re the only one I have told, I couldn’t bring myself to telling my family that my life has an expiry date.”

Every life has an expiry date, the difference with her is that she knows her date.

Mbuzo settles down on the bed and takes her hand.

“You need to tell your father, how else will he pay for your operation?”

“There won’t be an operation, the doctor said it’s inoperable. I might die if they attempt to remove it.” She’s sobbing again.

He pulls her to his chest.

“Where were you baba? I have been calling you for days, alone and desperate for someone to share my pain with.”

Guilt smacks him in the face, he’s been busy loving another woman. Not that he has no right to live his life.

“I’m sorry.” He says, sounding distant. “Is there anything I can do?”

Nothando breaks out of his hold, to look into his eyes.

“I want the remainder of my days to be the best days of my life. I want to make memories with you, the only man I love. Will you do that for me? Grant me my dying wish?”

Eish! This is a tough one.

“Don’t say it like that, you are not going to die.”

Well, ain’t that a lie!

“I am dying, it’s hard to accept and scary at the same time. But I don’t want to live in fear, the sooner I accept it, the better.”

She hides her face on his chest and tightly holds on to him.

“I don’t want to die baba, I’m scared. I thank God for you, at least I won’t die sad and lonely.” She cries.

His phone is vibrating in his pocket, he makes an excuse of using the bathroom and goes to his late parents’ bedroom. There’s a bathroom in his room, but no privacy.

“KaMadlala.” He’s been meaning to call her, Mhloniphe and his shenanigans distracted him.

“Are you home? I’m coming to see you.”

Oh shit!

“I’m not home.” That came out too quickly.

He cusses under his breath, the last thing he

wants is to lie to her.

“Oh, where are you then? I will come to you.”
Cashile says.

“I’m on my way home, I will call you when I get there.” At least this lie is diluted, he does plan on calling her after getting rid of Nothando. Which is going to be hard to do.

“Okay, I will wait for your call.”

Mbuzo exhales softly, he’s suddenly stuck between a rock and a hard place.

“Kitten.”

There’s silence on the other side of the line. Worry lines form on his forehead, he’s feeling uneasy.

“Are you there?”

“Yes, you don’t normally call me Kitten.”

Because this is serious.

“I love you, promise you will never forget that.”
It’s the first time he’s said the three words out loud.

“If you remind me everyday, then I won’t.”
Cashile says.

“Your presence lightens my burdens KaMadlala.
Don’t ever leave me.”

Her leaving him is the scariest thought right now.

“I won’t if you don’t give me a reason to leave.”

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MaNkosi is hosting an emergency burial society meeting with a group of four women out of thirty members. Two of them are her church buddies, the other two stay in the neighbourhood. There’s going to be a funeral

soon, so she needs to check if the stokvel has gathered enough money to bury her brother –in-law.

Pots are simmering in the kitchen, while they snack on tea and biscuits.

“You still haven’t told us who died.” Phumzile is the youngest in the group and asks too many questions.

MaNkosi frowns at her, “Must you always be insensitive we-Phumy?”

“It’s a common question MaNkosi. What if you want the money for your own personal use? It’s January, we all know things are tough during this time.”

There are head nods, the others agree with Phumzile. Short thick women are a menace to society, look at this one making MaNkosi sweat when the fan is on.

“My husband has a business, we are well-off.

Unlike you, we don't eat cabbage in January.”

MaNkosi sounds defensive.

“Is it true that your husband is crazy?” Gugu and Mphumzile like to team up against her. Why are they even part of the stokvel?

It's about time they are voted out.

“Gugu-we! Udakiwe? I don't remember adding a dash of alcohol in your tea? Don't annoy me.”

“It's not me who's been spreading rumours. People talk MaNkosi, you have to answer them. Your husband's dignity depends on it.” –Gugu.

“Habe! Kanti ulala nawe uMadlala? Why are you so worried about my husband's dignity?” She's fuming mad.

These women have no respect.

There's silence, they know her fierce side and what happens when they press all her buttons. Madlala is off-limits.

MaNkosi shifts uncomfortably on the sofa.

“Whoever is spreading these rumours hates my husband. There is nothing wrong with Madlala.”

There won’t be anything wrong with him when Nkulueko kicks the bucket. They gave him the money this morning, he went home singing praises to his ancestors. Now they have to wait for the news of his death.

MaNkosi is fanning herself with a cushion when she hears her chickens making a racket outside. She looks out the window and sees Madlala running after the chickens, but-naked. The women scream as they shoot up to their feet.

They have seen him. What a nightmare?

“Hawe-Mah! Imihlola ka-James.” Phumzile exclaims, running out of the house. The ladies follow her.

Of course MaNkosi is frozen, completely speechless.

This man was fine when she left him in the bedroom. What has happened now?

MaNkosi snaps out of it and storms out the house with a cushion she'll use to cover his manhood.

“Baba, mana.” She's running after him, but he's too focused on catching a chicken.

Her life is over, the news will reach Azwindini in Venda.

Finally MaNkosi catches up with him and covers him with the cushion.

“No, no. I'm hungry, I want a chicken.” He sulks like a toddler, shrugging the cushion away.

“Baba, come with me.” She takes his hand, looking around to see if there are other spectators.

“No, you will tie me up again.” Did he have to shout?

Gasps! These women are tape recorders.

“Is he wearing underwear on his head?”

Phumzile asks, covering her mouth in amusement.

MaNkosi’s eyes widen, she recognises the underwear. She washed it this morning and forgot to hang it outside.

“Is that my panty?” She whispers harshly.

Bab’Madlala grins, “I look hot neh?”

Hell no!

“You are embarrassing me, baba.” MaNkosi snaps, snatching the granny panties from his head. He holds on to it for dear life until she loses the battle, panting.

“This is my hat, I found it first. Go get yours.” He says, fixing his designer hat.

Trust Phumzile to take a video.

“Awu gqok’ isigqoko, wen’ uyangihlanyisa. Awu gqok’ isigqoko wen’ uyang’gulisa.”

Oh God, he’s singing.

MaNkosi has been subjected to tears, “Baba please don’t do this. Come with me please ”

He yanks her hand away when she grabs his arm.

He looks at the ladies with hands on his hips.

“Did you tell your friends you are married to the most handsome man in the world? I’m sure they are jealous of you.”

The ladies burst out in mocking laughter.

They must be loud because the door to Cashile’s rondavel opens, she steps out rubbing sleep from her heavy eyes.

“What’s the noise...”

“Cashy my baby, come to baba!” Bab’Madlala

waves to his daughter whose eyes widen with shock.

She doesn't take a second look at her father, but screams and runs back inside the rondavel.

"Shame, my baby is shy. Please leave my house, you are scaring my daughter." He tells the ladies.

Shit! When is Nkululeko dying?

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Thank you for the words of encouragement ❤

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[03/06, 15:43] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 21

CASHILE

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I'm packing an overnight bag, my plan is to be away for at least a week. Lulu will come with me. I don't want to be around my parents, not after seeing my father like that.

I haven't left the rondavel, I wish Bakhe was here. My chest is about to explode with all these questions and theories I have.

What the hell did I witness? Is my father seeing those women along with my mother?

Why was he naked?

Lulu is crying, I don't know what else to do to make her stop. I gave her sweets, juice, and chips. She threw them all on the floor. I have resulted to leaving her crying on the bed, her body is covered in sweat from all the crying.

I don't know if taking her with me is a good idea.

I zip my bag and attend to her, she throws a

tantrum when I remove her t-shirt, then points at it.

This is how she communicates when she's crying.

I try to put it back on, she cries louder, shrugging my hand away.

"Lulu, what is it? What do you want?"

She takes the t-shirt and gives it to me, I'm thinking she wants to wear it but nope, the child cries like I'm slaughtering her. Now she's pointing at my bag.

It would be nice if she would stop crying and tell me what she wants.

"You want the bag?" I get a few slaps on my hand.

I don't understand these tantrums.

I give her the bag, it makes her cry louder. She throws it on the floor.

Picking it up proves to be a mistake, Lulu adds to her cries.

I leave the bag on the floor but she doesn't like that, she wails, pointing at the stupid bag.

What the fuck!

"Lulu ufunani? You can speak, tell me what you want." I shout, bad idea by the way. She's screaming for the entire neighbourhood to hear. People will think I'm beating the child and call the police on me.

I step outside of the room before I lose my temper and actually beat her up. Is she possessed or what? I don't understand what is going on. My hands are shaking, I need a smoke.

Dammit! The cigarette is in my bag. I don't know how else to distress, Lulu is still crying in there.

Shit, here comes my mother.

“What did you do to her?” She’s always ready to point a finger.

“Nothing, she won’t stop crying. I don’t know what she wants.” I’m not even done talking, MaNkosi storms into my room and takes Lulu in her arms.

The brat wraps her arms around her, and her cries stop.

I’m the bad guy again, that’s how MaNkosi is looking at me.

“Have you spoken to your uncle Nkulu?”

“No.” We are not that close.

She frowns, “What’s the bag for?”

“I’m going away for two days.” I say and grab the bag from the floor.

“If you are planning on visiting Mbuzo, cancel it. You are not going anywhere.”

Like that’s her choice to make.

“I can’t stay here, I saw my father without clothes. How am I going to look at him?” I need a break from these people.

“I told you that your father is ill, but all you ever think about is Nonkosi. How are you comfortable destroying another woman’s relationship?”

“Mah, Nothando and Mbuzo are not that serious. Futhi I didn’t force him to pick me, he can choose her if he wants, I don’t care.”

“Then make yourself very scarce my child, give those two a chance to love each other.”

Whose side is she on?

“I’m going to bath the child, you’re making supper today. Don’t go anywhere.” She walks out with Lulu.

I’m about close to losing my respect for that woman. I am not breaking up with Mbuzo.

MBUZO

Thanks to Nothando's presence, he's out of his room. She's occupying his bed for the first time since they started dating, she fell asleep while they were talking about the sickness that's threatening to take her life.

There are young man coming in and out of his father's house, the smell of braai'd meat is making him hungry. Mhlo has invited him more than once to join them in the back yard for a party, but he'd rather pass. Mkhetheni won't like it when he learns that there was a party and he encouraged it.

Speaking of the big brother, he storms into the

house carrying his work uniform in a small cross back. He throws the bag on the floor groaning in frustration.

“I tried to stop him, I swear.” Mbuzo lifts his hand in surrender.

Mkhotheni turns his eyes to him, he’s not angered by the party or noise outside.

Well he is but there’s something else.

“Did he tell you where he got the money?” Mkhotheni asks.

“Not yet, what’s going on? Why are you home early?”

“There was a cash-in transit heist yesterday. One of the men working that shift was one of my trainers. There were no survivors.” He sits, exhibiting a loud sigh.

Mbuzo shifts to the edge of the seat, he seems to have an idea what Mkhotheni is thinking.

“Mhlo has an alibi, he was with us yesterday. We only separated late at night.”

“Then where did he get the money to customize a car and buy a month’s groceries?”

–Mkhotheni.

“Only he can tell us the truth, just give him time.” Mbuzo says.

Giving him time is what Mkhotheni has been doing for years, his twin never takes responsibility for his doings, not even for his kid.

The music stops all of a sudden, there’s a police siren sounding outside and commotion. Mbuzo and Mkhotheni head out.

One man in particular has Mhloniphe in a chokehold, another has a gun aimed at him. Bakhe Madlala is here too, seated on the grass with handcuffs on. The friends have gathered in a corner watching in horror.

“Let my brother go Dalisu!” Mkhotheni shouts,

running to the scene.

Dalisu Sibiya is Chief Sibiya's first son and a police officer who is very much respected in the community.

"Your twin is under arrest." Dalisu says as he handcuffs Mhlo and brings him up with him.

Mhlo spits at Dalisu's feet, "I didn't do anything."

"You and Madlala broke into my father's house while he was sleeping and stole from him."

That's a serious accusation Dalisu is spewing out.

Mhlo is many things but a thief.

"Bhuti tell him I was home with you two, tell him." There's desperation in Mhlo's eyes, it makes Mkhetheni weak..

This is his brother, he can't sell him out.

He swallows the lump in his throat and with a

clenched jaw attests that the twin was home last night.

“We were watching movies the entire night.” Mbuzo adds.

“Bullshit! The security guard said he saw Mhloniphe and Bakhe, they tied him up and...”

Mbuzo interjects, “It’s his word against the four of us Sibiya. Unless you have evidence that puts my brothers at the scene of the crime, let them go.”

With a clenched jaw, Dalisu releases Mhlo and Bakhe. The look on his face says he’s not done with them.

He gets into Mbuzo’s space, glaring up at him.

“My father told me you threatened him with a gun. I’m on to you Nonkosi.”

Mbuzo snorts, “Okay.”

Dalisu gathers his men and leaves the premises.

“This party is over, go home.” Mkhetheni says and goes back to the house. He doesn’t have to repeat himself, Mhlo’s friends scatter with their food and drinks.

Mbuzo is disappointed, it’s written all over his face as he looks at Mhlo and Bakhe.

“In the house now,” and that’s an order.

They gather in the living room, Mkhetheni is the only one pacing around. They don’t understand the burden of being the head of the family, he didn’t choose it but with their father’s passing, the responsibility was passed on to him naturally.

He looks at Mbuzo who looks mature on the outside, it’s hard to believe that he threatened the chief.

“We are threatening the chief now?”
—Mkhetheni.

“He wanted my woman.”

That’s a very good excuse.

“He’s a chief.”-Mkhotheni snaps.

“And that gives him the right to take from us?”

“Mbuzo, you need to be careful. Sibiya’s son is a cop.”

“I’m not afraid of him.”

“Yes, we are not afraid of cops.” Mhlo steps in.

He shouldn’t be talking right now. He coils back when Mkhotheni glares at him with a side eye.

“And wena, if you’re going to rob a house, do it right or leave it to the professionals.”

Wait! Mkhotheni did not say that, did he?

“I wasn’t trying to do it right, the plan was to get in, get the money and leave. The rest will see itself.” He shrugs, looking unbothered.

“The Sibiyas don’t make empty promises,

especially Dalisu. He takes advantage of his police badge and creates havoc where he shouldn't. Mhlo, you are going to return that money, I don't care how you do it. We've been living peacefully in this village, why do you want to create enemies for us? If you two want to ruin yourselves, leave me out of it. Next time I will not bail anyone out." Mkhetheni says and leaves the house for some air.

No one goes after him to ask where he is going.

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Mhlo and Bakhe are in the car, playing music. It's been over an hour, Mkhetheni hasn't come home yet. The day is ageing away, Nothando needs to go back home.

She finds Mbuzo in the kitchen, deep in thought.

“Baba.” She taps his shoulder to get his attention.

Mbuzo’s eyes widen, “Why are you naked? My brothers are in the house.”

“I’m not naked,” Nothando disputes.

She has a towel wrapped around her body and a satin bonnet on her head.

“Nothando go and get dressed.” He’s moving away from the hand that’s attempting to touch him.

“I need hair shampoo to wash my hair.”

He frowns, since when does she take baths here?

“Look, letting you sleep on my bed does not mean you can strip naked in my father’s house.”

None of them have ever been naked with a girl here. They respect their parents that much.

Nothando is in tears, “I’m sorry. I feel stuffy so I

thought you wouldn't mind me making use of your bathroom."

"Well I mind."

"Why are you acting like this Mbuzo? I don't even feel like I have a boyfriend, you have been spending your time with Cashile. Are you cheating on me?"

Cheat is a very strong word.

Mbuzo heaves a sigh, this is the right time to tell her.

"I'm not in love with you Nothando."

She chuckles, "Are you breaking up with me?"

"Yes. I don't want to be with you." He's trying to be careful with his words.

Nothando goes to the sink and pours herself a glass of water. She needs to get a grip and go put on some clothes before his brothers walk in.

She empties the glass of water then averts her

attention towards him.

“You are not leaving me Mbuzo. I won’t allow it.”

This is fucked up.

“It’s not up to you. I have made my decision, I don’t have feelings for you. Not the way you want me to.”

The glass makes a loud sound as she puts it on the counter, her father has money. He can buy them more than ten of these.

Nothando makes her way back to him, her arms are about to wrap around him. He steps back and that breaks her to pieces.

“I love you, you can’t leave me for her.”

“Mhlo will drive you home.” He calmly says.

It must be his lack of emotion or the words he chooses but she’s crying.

“You are not dumping me, I’m not leaving.”

Deep sigh!

Mhloniphe walks in dragging his feet, he's been moody since he was told to return the money. He doesn't like it when people govern his life, it's downhill from here on. He will do whatever he wants, it's his life.

He doesn't look bothered by Nothando's half-nakedness.

"Why do I still smell a Sibiya?"

He's never liked Nothando for his brother. She's always been nothing but a fly on the wall.

Nothando squints her eyes, "I'm not your enemy Mhlo."

Mhlo gives her a bored expression, "You'd have to affect me for you to be my enemy."

"Mhlo!" Mbuzo reprimands his brother who frowns in return.

"It's the truth. Are you going to tell me who to like now? Might as well buy batteries and put them on me, Hitler." -Mhlo.

He pours water in a kettle and plugs it. He's not a tea person so this is strange.

"Are you making tea?" Nothando asks, smiling apologetically.

"I'm brewing umqombothi." He takes a pot from the cupboard and puts it on the stove.

He's making pap, his friends didn't leave leftovers.

"Why does your brother hate me?" She asks Mbuzo.

"Go take your bath, Mhlo will drive you home." -Mbuzo.

"I'm not an Uber driver." Mhlo can say anything he wants to Mbuzo, he's the older brother anyway.

“You see baba, your brother hates...”

“Nothando go.” Mbuzo cuts in.

Her stubbornness can be aggravating.

“What about the shampoo?” –Nothando.

“I will bring it.” He says.

She takes her leave and bumps into Bakhe at the door. They share dirty looks, but not words.

“I thought you were dating my sister.” Bakhe says, folding his arms with a death stare directed at Mbuzo.

“I thought so too. Why is Nothando here and naked?” Mhlo adds.

This tag-team is not cute, these two combined are more dangerous than a wild fire.

“I don’t have to answer to you two.” Mbuzo matches their frowns.

“Cashile is my sister.”- Bakhe.

“And she’s my future sister in-law. We have the right to know if you are two-timing her.” –Mhlo.

The only fit response for this ambush is a sigh.

“Mhlo, do you have shampoo? Please borrow her, I will replace it.” -Mbuzo.

“I don’t know if I have it or not, I will check.”

This man is a child.

“Now Mhloniphe, I want her to leave as soon as possible. And please be kind to her, she has a brain tumor. The poor girl has a year to live.” Mbuzo says, Bakhe chuckles.

This sounds like music to Mhlo’s ears.

He grins, “Then why didn’t you say so in the first place? Bakhe, I’ll get the shampoo and you’ll take it to her.”

He turns off the stove and toddles out with Bakhe tailing him.

Their absence gives Mbuzo a chance to call

Cashile. She misses both calls, he sends a text instead.

I'll fetch you, we're going to the B&B.

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Mhlo and Bakhe are back and cooking pap, their friendship stresses Mbuzo. What can a 29 year-old and 38 year-old teach each other?

There's a scream, then a sound of footsteps thumping on the floor. Nothando comes running, she's still wrapped in a bath towel. But her body is drenched with water

"Mbuzo, look at my hair." She shouts, showing him a hand full of hair.

Her head is bald.

"You shaved your hair?" Mbuzo is clueless.

“No, Mhloniphe gave me shaving cream instead of shampoo. I look ugly like Cashile now.”

Mhlo looks at Bakhe, “Donda I handed you a bottle of shampoo. What happened?”

“That’s the same bottle I left on the floor. I didn’t know it was going to turn her into the bold and the beautiful.” Bakhe says.

They bump fists, laughing.

What a bunch of five-year-olds stuck in old men’s bodies.

“You guys are childish. Why would you give her shaving cream?” Mbuzo is wasting his time basically.

“I didn’t do anything. Why would you believe her over me, your brother? Ndoda, we shared a womb.”

Are those tears in Mhlo’s eyes?

“This is serious Mhlo, a woman’s hair means

everything to her. I told you about her condition. Why are you so insensitive?"- Mbuzo.

At the mention of her condition, Nothando starts feeling dizzy. She presses two fingers on her temple, holding on to Mbuzo for support.

"What's wrong?"

"Wami, please carry me to the bedroom, my head is spinning."

"I can carry her, Wami has a girlfriend now. He can't be seen carrying other women." Bakhe offers.

"I will help you ntwana." -Mhlo.

Her brother should have taken his sister with him. What a desperate woman.

Nothando hides behind Mbuzo when they approach her.

"Don't you dare come near me," Nothando says.

They are responsible for her losing her hair.

They might carry her to her father's house if she's not careful, and she's not ready to leave.

"Mbuzo, my head hurts."

There's a loud thud as she falls to the ground. She's fainted, Mbuzo starts to panic.

"I told you guys not to stress her."

Bakhe jumps over her just as Mbuzo is about to lift her up.

"I'll wake her up for you, don't worry bhuti. Your big brother is here." Mhlo lazily says as he heads towards Nothando with a kettle of hot water.

"Is that boiling water?" Mbuzo shockingly asks.

"Pour it on her head ntwana, that's how they do it on TV. I'll hold her legs, in case she starts manifesting." Bakhe squats and grabs her ankles.

Nothando's eyes pop open, she kicks Bakhe

and jumps up screaming, “I’m healed. I mean, I feel fine now.”

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[03/06, 15:43] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 22

CASHILE

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Mbuzo was taking time, so I told him he’d find me at the B&B, I took a taxi. I had to leave that place. My mother wouldn’t let me take Lulu with me.

Her exact words were that I’m going to prostitute myself, but also, Lulu would scream

when I tried to take her.

Bakhe was home and playing with her when I left. He promised to call me if anything happens. I know MaNkosi won't bother telling me anything regarding my baby.

There's a new truck outside, it looks like his but new and extra. The door is open, I walk in and what I see breaks the trust I had for him. It's Nothando, jumping at him with a kiss.

"Mbuzo!" He pushes her off same time as I call his name.

His eyes bulge but the bitch Nothando grins at me.

"What's going on?" I manage to hide the jealousy in my eyes but my voice doesn't get the memo.

"Nothando was leaving." He says, dragging her toward the door, shouting and protesting.

“Mbuzo don’t do this, please.” That’s the last protest I hear.

Why is she even here?

I take a corner to the bedroom, I don’t know why I’m here but I need to think, away from him.

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A while later, I feel him standing behind me. Today he smells like an ash tray, funny I have seen him smoke only once. Even then he handled it like a pro.

I face him with folded arms, “How many of us have you brought here? Is this your fuck house where you bring all your women and order them to call you daddy?”

My anger hasn’t reached great heights yet, that’s why I haven’t told him to go fuck himself.

“KaMadlala.” He glares.

Fuck him. He must think I am an idiot.

“Is this what you meant when you said you will handle it, Mbuzo? You want us to share you?”

“No.”

Fuck him times two and his one word answers.

“Then what? Why were you two kissing? Did you lose something inside her mouth?”

He looks at me, rubbing the bridge of his nose. There is no guilt on his facial expression, just anger as if I offended him. I want to curse him to hell and lock him in there.

“I drove here alone, I didn’t know she was in an Uber following me. She kissed me,” he says.

“Bullshit. Tall as you are, you were harassed by a short woman? Do I look like a fool to you?”

He frowns, “There is no need for you to use that tone with me.”

Is he fuckin kidding me?

Tears burn behind my eyes, the only man I have ever cried for is my father. Now why does this one make me want to break down?

“Uyang’febela Mbuzo.”

“KaMadlala.” He snaps, quietly.

“That’s my father’s name. Call me by my name.” I snap back.

Yeyi, this man does not respect me.

He sighs and lifts his hands, “I get why you are upset.”

“Upset? Is that what you think this is? Ndoda, I gave you a chance to choose her, I made way for you to make a decision. But you made me love you and now you’re bullshitting me.”

“How am I bullshitting you?” He’s asking me udoti.

Fuck him for being so calm.

I look like a crazy woman lashing out at him

“You are going behind my back and dating us both. If I wanted to be part of a polygamy, I would have mentioned it. I don’t share Mbuzo, I can be possessive too.”

His lips twitch, he’s going for a smile but doesn’t bring it out.

“Uhlekani? Do I look like a joke to you? You are a liar, I can never believe anything that comes out of your deceitful mouth. The stupid blood oath, you loving only me all these years.”

Lying piece of shit.

Chills ripple through me at the way his eyes narrow, then a tick of the jaw. It’s not the first time he’s grabbing the back of my neck, I never paid much attention to it. But today, I feel like a puppet and he’s my master ordering my steps.

“Kitten!” His voice is inaudible and firm, his gaze burns.

I should be escaping his hold. Why am I not

moving?

“All the love I have is for you, uyakwazi lokho.”

“I don’t know anything.” I say.

He lifts his brow, “Really?”

I don’t know what that’s supposed to mean, or why I’m breathing fast. It must be because he’s inched too close.

“Please don’t look at me like that.”

“Like what?” His voice is dangerously low.

“Like I should be submitting to you. Like you want to dominate me.” I say.

One thing I fear in life is belonging to anyone who is not my parent, a man in particular. Mbuzo, without even trying has made me realize that I belong to no one but him.

I don’t know how it happened, how I found myself wanting to breathe merely because he exists.

“What if I do? What if all I want is to dominate you? Tie you up and fuck you until you beg for me to stop?” His voice shoots straight to my clit, commanding it to stand at attention.

His hand slowly loosens around my neck, he doesn’t break eye contact as he slides it down to the small of my back.

I’ve lost my breathing pattern, I don’t know if I will ever find it.

I don’t move away when he leans down to capture my lips, I kiss him back just as violently.

My arms curl around his shoulders, he removes them and binds them on my back.

He’s kissing me as if he wants to consume all of me, his hands wandering my body.

I’m lost in the heady kiss when he stops and steps away from me, wiping the bottom of his

lip with his thumb. The eye contact is killing me, but not more than the feeling between my legs.

“Why did you stop?” I’m out of breath.

“Undress for me.” He says, plunging his hands into the pockets of his pants.

He looks different today, very fashionable in a rapper sleeveless t-shirt, tucked in... are those high-wasted wide-leg pants?

They are.

Mbuzo slightly tilts his head when I just stare without moving.

I kick off my pants in a hurry.

“Slowly Kitten.”

Now I know this name comes with authority.

I take my time taking off my t-shirt and underwear, I’m not a stripper or dancer. He will have to forgive me.

I stand with my legs crossed and hands on my back, waiting for him to give his next instruction.

“That’s my good girl.” He releases a low growl, eyes raking my body.

I see his erection straining inside his pants.
Glad to know I make him hard.

“You’re beautiful.” He says, rubbing his bottom lip back and forth.

“Thank you.”

He lifts his brow, “Thank you what?”

I forget easily.

“Thank you daddy.” I say, he looks impressed.

He’s looking into my eyes as he unbuckles his belt and takes off his trousers he’s left in Cashmere boxers that hug his body.

I’m salivating.

Mbuzo backtracks, not breaking eye contact until he is backed up against the wall.

“Come Kitten.”

Should I be turned on by this? Because I am.

I stand in front of him, his hand glides to my back as he kisses me passionately. I return it but he cuts it short.

“You’re allowed to say no.” He says, confusing the shit out of me.

I just want an orgasm bawo.

“Did you hear me?” He asks.

Oh, I’m supposed to respond.

“Yes.”

“Use all your words Kitten, or we stop.”

“Yes daddy.”

The things we do for a dick.

I’m watching as he leans back on the wall and

stands with his legs slightly apart.

“Go ahead, I’m all yours.” –Him.

I love this, I’m taking lead today.

I grab his boxers, he grips my wrist, stopping me.

“Fuck my thigh until you’re warm and wet, and reach your sweet orgasm.”

Did he say wet? Boy, I’m wet as a lake at the sound of your words.

This is new.

I don’t know how to do this, he wants me to scissor his thigh.

He sees my confusion and guides my hands to his thigh, I hold on to it like a tree and stand in between it, then start grinding and humping.

This is different, the pleasure is sending shivers all through my body. My clit is getting all the attention it deserves, with no interruptions. His

erection keeps growing in his boxers, he must be in pain.

Mbuzo curls his hand around the back of my neck, he makes no other form of contact. This is for me, it's my time. I have to grind into his thigh until the heavens call my name.

My breathing starts to pick up, my toes are curling.

My head falls on his chest as I frantically grind against him, my eyes tightly shut. I look up at him, biting my bottom lip to muffle my loud moans.

"Shit." Mbuzo cusses and attacks me with a kiss that doesn't last more than five seconds.

"I love it... daddy." I whimper, grinding wildly, and reach my climax moaning his name. Mbuzo buries his face in my neck, biting into it and leaving wet kisses on my skin.

I'm barely recovered and he's moving me to the other thigh, the one I was grinding is covered with my juices. My knees are weak, I'm having a hard time keeping them rigid.

He gently grabs my neck, making me look up at him.

"Did you enjoy that?"

"Yes daddy."

A ghost of a smile, "There's more where that came from."

His voice will be the death of me. My vagina is still sensitive, but it feels so much better as I grind harder on him. The second orgasm reaches me in a second.

"Don't stop." He says, squeezing my butt with his vacant hand.

And so I continue scissoring his thigh until I'm on my third orgasm.

My knees are not strong enough to hold me up,
I fall like spaghetti to the ground, heaving loud
and convulsing like a fish that's been taken out
of water.

I look up at him and find him staring back. I
smile like I'm high on drug.

"Let me help you with that." I point at his
erection.

He bends down and scoops me up in his arms,
my arms wrap around his shoulders.

"It's all about you today." He whispers in my ear
then kisses my cheek.

I'm placed on the bed, he climbs behind me and
our bodies touch as he drags his hand to the
front to cup my breast.

Silence passes by, this is blissful.

"Are you leaving today?" His question triggers

me.

“Why? So Nothando can come and take my place?”

That was meant to stay in my head.

I feel him tense up, he gets off the bed and heads to the bathroom. I have a big mouth.

Should I get dressed and go home? I don't know if there's tension between us or it's one-sided.

Mbuzo is not the type to easily take offense. He comes back, just as I'm having a debate with myself. Will I ever get used to seeing him naked?

He looks good yes, but it's so weird that he's comfortable walking around in his birthday suit.

His stretches his hand for me to take, “Come bath with me.”

Jesus! We're bathing together now!

This man does not waste time. He's walking in front and I'm just looking at his muscles rippling

as he moves.

When God made men, he made sure to perfect it. These people don't have to work out or wear make-up to look good.

I blame Eve for the trouble women go through just to look good.

The water is warm, I would expect bubbles but beggars can't be choosers.

"I'm coming." I run out of the bathroom and to the kitchen. There was 3kg Omo in here. Where did it go?

I find it on the bottom shelf and run back to the bathroom.

He already looks inquisitive.

"You're doing washing?" He asks as I pour the powder in our bathing water. He's inside, why would I wash in the same water?

Men!

“It’s called improvising. We need bubbles.” I open the tap.

My bubbles slowly start to form, all this time I’m smiling like an idiot and Mbuzo is frowning. Completely judging me.

“How black are you?”

His question cracks me up, “Black enough to do this. Maybe I should get Sunlight dishwashing liquid. It’s stronger than Omo.”

He grabs my hand just as I’m about to run out.

“We won’t stay long, I just want to spend time with you. This soap is making my body itch anyway, sit down before I start scratching.”

I laugh, yeah washing powder doesn’t do well with the skin.

I guess I didn’t think this through.

I get in, we’re facing each other. He’s staring, I’m struggling to keep eye contact.

“What’s on your mind?” He asks.

I’m naked with a man in a bathtub.

“This is rather awkward.” I say.

“For who?”

Ehh!

“Myself I guess, we have never taken a bath together.”

Of course he knows.

“We are a couple now,” he says as if to confirm with me.

“I’m not going anywhere if that’s what you are worried about.”

“I’m not worried.” He says too quickly.

I’m a fast thinker, but this man takes the cup.

“I have a question.”

He lifts his brow, signalling me to ask.

“Why do you become a different person when we’re intimate?”

He rubs the back of his neck, nerves perhaps.

“You don’t like it?”

“Oh don’t get me wrong, I am having the time of my life. It’s... different. In a good way, today was my favourite. My clit thanks you.” I say, dismissing his possible thought of changing in bed. I like him the way he is.

He’s shaking his head, an almost invisible smile on his face. “Ngizokulobola KaMadlala, you will be my wife one day.” He says.

“I don’t think my parents will ever accept our relationship. My mother said something about our relationship being forbidden.”

“She is not the first person to say that. My father was against our friendship, remember.”

I do, but this is different. We are a couple now, a

couple that does everything.

“Do you think we will ever be happy?” I don’t know where the sudden fear comes from.

I feel his hand on my foot, he lifts it and puts my big-toe in his mouth. My jaw drops as he sucks it like a lollipop, his firm gaze fixed on me.

It’s ticklish, I hold myself from giggling.

“I am happy right now. Are you happy?” He asks.

I nod.

“Our happiness depends on us, KaMadlala. Outsiders have no say in how we live our lives. When I marry you, it will be you I share a bed with, not your parents or people. No one will ever convince me to leave you. It’s never going to happen.”

This one is a keeper.

“I want a house in Joburg, I don’t see myself as the rural wife.” I introduce.

“Why Joburg?”

What kind of a question is that?

“I love it there, I had a house in Sandton. It’s a beautiful place, you will love it.”

The reaction was unexpected, a stern look that packs me into order.

“Angiyi lapho.” He lets my foot go and helps me out of the bathtub.

“Hey, we haven’t bathed yet.”

We bath like abelungu now?

“We’ll bath again later, your washing powder has made my body itch. It feels like my skin is on fire.” He scratches his back, handing me a towel to wrap around my body. Mine itches, using washing powder was a bad idea. That shit burns.

His phone is ringing when we walk into the bedroom.

“It’s Mhlo, he’s in trouble.” He says.

I know that look.

“Go, I will be fine.” I will use the time to call my brother and find out how my baby is doing.

He kisses me, I go for a French kiss. Tongue and all, ilamza on steroids and feel him smile through the kiss.

“I love you,” he says.

Well...

I get under the covers and watch him throw his clothes back on without applying lotion on his skin. The Omo water made our skin wrinkle, we look like dried raisins. I hope no one will notice, since he’s wearing a sleeveless T.

“Hey!” I call out.

Mbuzo stops at the door and turns to me with a frown.

“Leave one of your thighs, I promise to take

care of it."

He laughs, winks then leaves just like that.

One thigh nyana, am I asking for too much?

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I'm sorry for the errors.

[03/06, 15:43] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 24

CASHILE

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The sun has finally come out, I haven't been able to catch any sleep. I feel numb to the core. My uncle was a huge part of our lives growing up, he was as present as my father. Losing him has birthed a fear in me, I can't imagine losing

another loved one. God, I can't imagine how my cousin is feeling.

I didn't really care much when she lost Thabiso, so much so that I didn't contact her to send my condolences.

Things are different now, I guess. It's a must that I go there, uncle Nkulu was special to us.

I don't have proper dresses in my wardrobe, I have to borrow from my mother, but she's three times my weight so I don't know how that's going to work.

“Mommy.” My heart dances with joy whenever Lulu calls me mommy. It's all thanks to Bakhe, he got her addicted to Cocomelon and the word mommy and daddy is thrown around a lot on that show.

The problem is that Bakhe is daddy. She's confused because her cartoon friends live with a mom and dad. Bakhe finds it hilarious, he

says it's his chance to be called dad.

I have never asked him why he doesn't have kids.

"Mommy, give me chips." She points at my wardrobe, she knows that's where I keep her puffs. It's all she eats and yoghurt.

I have used imbiza and an enema on her but nothing worked.

She's lost so much weight.

"No nana, you'll eat porridge first."

Her lower lip wobbles, before she's screaming. It's only 7am, too early for her to be awake. I get my phone and play her favourite cartoons, they always work like magic.

"Mommy, mommy look." She's taping my leg, then points at the screen.

"It's Cody." Her grin widens.

Cody is her favourite, maybe because they have

the same skin colour.

Bakhe was a genius to introduce these cartoons.

I've gotten used to bathing her twice a day, she's wearing grey tights with a matching t-shirt. Most of her clothes are pants, I've counted two dresses so far.

"Let's go say hi to gogo." I take her in my arms and head out.

She's carrying my phone in her hand, it's not mine until she gets tired of the cartoons.

My mother is sweeping outside the kitchen, she's dressed in black and looks ready to go.

"Mah!"

Silence!

"Gogo!" Only when Lulu calls her does she look at us.

She smiles brightly at her, drops the broom and takes her from me.

I can tell that she is upset with me. I love my mother, I failed to control my anger.

“Mah, I...”

“KaMadlala.” My father appears from the house.

I haven’t seen him in two weeks, he looks very thin. His beard has grown twice its size.

“Yebo baba.”

“Kunjani?” He says, squinting his eyes at me.

“Fine.” I’m not, something is up.

A deep sigh! Then he looks at Lulu whose focus is on the cartoons.

“How is the girl?” He’s asking me but not looking at me.

“She is fine baba.”

A nod!

I wish to know what he's thinking, his demeanour is scaring me. I know he is not pleased with me when he's nonchalant like this.

"When was she born?"

Shouldn't we sit down for this?

"She's four years old," I answer.

He nods once again.

"She looks like you." He says.

I think she looks like Juba, she has his big ears and round nose. One thing she inherited from my family is thick hair, my mother has more hair than I have ever seen on anyone. She hides it under scarfs of course.

These sighs my father keeps exhaling are giving me a whiplash.

"You have a child Cashile? Where did I go wrong my child? I tried so hard to protect you and your brother and this is how you have turned out." He

looks and sounds disappointed.

I guess he really was sick, Lulu has been around for weeks but only now he's confronting me.

"Things happened in joburg baba. I didn't get the job I went there for, I was struggling. Then I met a man who helped me get a head start. But he..."

He lifts his hand, cutting my confession short. I was ready to tell him everything.

"Your mother told me you were arrested, but we will talk about that later. I want to know why you baptised your mother with water?"

Ehh!

We are here so fast? I look at my mother, I didn't think she would tell on me.

"I'm going to feed the child," she says and walks in the house with Lulu.

"Are you going to answer me?"

I look back at my father.

Why does it look like he's about to hit me?

"Baba?"

He unbuckles his belt, I move back.

"I'm listening, tell me what happened." His voice is stern, I'm shaking in my boots. A whole 26-year-old.

"Baba, I didn't mean to."

He shakes his head, I gave him the wrong answer.

"You are a smart girl KaMadlala. Answer my question properly. Why did you splash my wife with water? Who gave you the right to abuse my wife in her own home?"

Shit!

Backtracking is not helping, he keeps walking towards me.

“I didn’t abuse her baba, I made a mistake. I’m sorry.”

That head shake looks more dangerous than the belt he’s carrying.

“Do you have a house KaMadlala?”

Sigh!

“No baba.”

“You don’t, you do not have a house, neither are you married. When you are married, I will come to your house and empty a bucket of water on your husband’s head.”

Is that what mah said I did?

“I didn’t...”

“Thula!” He swings his belt missing me by an inch.

I’m still shocked when he charges at me. I’m not a good runner but I make use of my feet.

“Vimbani bafana!” I hear my father shout before two of his herd boys appear, each from both corners of the house.

One of them locks his arms around my waist, pinning me on the spot.

“Let me go wena.” I squirm to free myself but my father grabs my hand before I can win against this skinny boy.

“Baba you can’t hit me, I am not a child anymore.”

A belt lands on my ass.

“You will always be a child to me,” another whip on the same spot.

I decide to stand still and take it like a grown-up.

“You. Hit. My. Wife. In. My. House. No. Nko. Si. Will. Never. Be. Wel. Comed. In. This. Home. Stead.”

Every word is accompanied by the belt landing

on my butt, thighs and back. It hurts, he's never laid his hand on me. I'm embarrassed, and can't believe he planned my ambush.

When he's done, he releases my hand.

"We are going to your uncle's house, get ready, the car will be here soon." And with that, he walks back into the house.

These stupid boys are staring and laughing at me.

"Nizonya bafana bami." Teenagers are the worst humans to witness you getting a hiding from your parents. Even worse, I'm four years away from thirty.

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AT NKULULEKO'S HOUSE

Hluphekile has been made to sit on a mattress,

and covered with a blanket in this January heat. There are candles lain in front of her and different women walking in and out of her room to send their condolences. She can barely hear what they are saying to her, some know that they have to raise their voices in order for her to hear them.

She's looks confused, and has been carrying the same expression since the news of her husband's death reached them. He was in taxi on his way to check the location where his business would be located when the taxi collided with a car. Strangely, he was the only one who died in that accident.

Their lives were about to change for the better, Nkululeko was excited about his business. He'd used up all the money and bought stock. Now he's gone, in the blink of an eye and there is not one person who can explain to them why.

Mbali walks in with a cup of tea and puts it on

the floor.

“Mbali! Mbali, your father is gone. Usishiyile ubaba wakho Mbali, he’s gone.” She has a high-pitched voice and shouts when she speaks because she can’t hear herself.

Mbali clenches her eyes, her tears are always on standby since the death of her husband.

“Yes mama, he’s gone.” She barely raises her voice.

Hluphekile grabs her hand, squeezing her face in confusion.

“Don’t cry Mbali. Everything happens for a reason, God doesn’t like it when you cry.”

Mbali nods, and wipes her tears away.

It hurts to see her mother like this, she’s like a child and probably doesn’t understand what is fully going on.

She kneels in front of her and looks at her, “I’m

going to get you juice.”

Her mother nods, showing her a short smile.

Mbali walks out and bumps into a man on the passage. Bakhe had introduced him as Mhloniphe, the brother of that man with a serious face.

“Yoh, this passage is small.” Mhlo says.

He’s standing on one foot while the other is supported by a crutch but has the energy to complain.

“What are you doing here?” Mbali has decided that she doesn’t like him, he’s a snob. No wonder someone beat him up.

“The toilet, I was told it’s the last door.”

There are three doors inside this house, and yes it is a small house. When one walks down the passage, they have to stop and let the other pass. It’s a one way passage.

"That side," Mbali points behind her and walks away.

She has guests to take care of, her aunts are not here yet.

Mhlo thought the house was small? The toilet might as well be a doll house. He has to go all the way in, so he's able to shut the door and do his business.

There's a small basin where he washes his hands, getting out is a struggle for him because of his broken leg.

He limps his way out and finds himself in the kitchen, now he wants something to eat so he can take his medication.

The headache he has was definitely ordered from hell.

It's the girl in black again, she wasn't nice when she asked him what he wanted.

She frowns, “Can I help you?”

“Do you have food? I mean it’s okay if you don’t, I can order something.”

He’s stupid, that’s what Mbali thinks.

“I ordered a bucket of scones next door, they will be ready by 12pm. I’m sure you can wait.”

She says and turns back to her boiling kettle.

Mhlo is not the kind to beg, he goes back to Bakhe and Mbuzo.

They are sitting under a tree with a bunch of men only Bakhe is familiar with.

“Did you get something to eat?” Mbuzo asks.

“They said I must wait until 12pm,” Mhlo says.

He’s very grumpy.

“I can go and get you something at the shops,” Mbuzo offers.

He had a piece where he fixed some old lady's stove and she paid him. More piece jobs have been popping up here and there, something Mhlo wouldn't do.

"I can wait," he says.

But Mbuzo is no longer there, his eyes are at the gate. Cashile has arrived with her parents, there's someone else with them. His uncle, from his mother's side.

He last saw the man the day they buried their parents.

"Finally they are here," Bakhe says, frowning at the sight of his father who looks sane and is well dressed in his favourite suit.

"Can we go now?" Mhlo is bored. I mean, the atmosphere is nice and gloomy but he wants to go home and eat then sleep the pain away.

"We can't leave yet," Bakhe bursts his bubble.

Mbuzo is tempted to approach Cashile, but it's not done. So he remains seated and continues to stare at her. She's wearing dark sunglasses and a dress too big for her body.

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MaNkosi pays the Uber driver and shuts the door on her way out with Lulu in her arms.

"Mbali must be in the kitchen, go straight to her. I don't want you to embarrass me in front of people." She whispers to Cashile as if she is a bad mannered child.

Cashile gives no answer.

MaNkosi turns to her husband, "Baba, I will be inside. Send someone to call me when you need me."

She means when he feels like his demons are

playing tennis with his brains. Bab'Madlala nods and gestures for Mpiyakhe; Mbuzo's uncle to walk in first. It's a small gate, they can't all walk in at once.

"I see Mbuzo over there, I will go and talk to him first." Mpiyakhe says.

Well that's why he's here. Bab'Madlala wants him to have a word with Mbuzo regarding his obsession over Cashile.

There is no such thing as bad timing.

Mpiyakhe walks ahead.

Bab'Madlala stumbles back the second he sets his foot in the yard and almost collides against MaNkosi.

She holds him, "Baba be careful."

He looks at her, his eyes are wide with terror.

"Did you slap me?" He whispers, rubbing his left cheek.

MaNkosi is all things confused.

“I was behind you and why would I slap you?”
—MaNkosi.

“How can you say someone slapped you when there was no one in front of you baba?”

He shoots a dagger at Cashile, fixes his tie and walks back to the gate. Another step into the yard and he feels another hard slap on his cheek that sends him stumbling back and crashing on his wife.

“Baba yini?” MaNkosi’s voice shakes, she’s terrified and thinking the worst.

This man is holding his cheek, his eyes are ready to jump out of their sockets. He’s looking around but can’t see anyone close by. He grabs MaNkosi’s dress, looking fearful.

“Someone slapped me, MaNkosi.” His voice breaks.

A tear runs down his left eye, it must be the pain because he would never cry in public.

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[03/06, 15:43] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 23

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MaNkosi arouses from a deep slumber, gasping for air as if she just escaped a different dimension. Someone is banging her door like a boer policeman from Sarafina . Heat ripples through her body, she looks to the left side of the bed, Madlala is snoring like a baby.

It's dark outside, she turns her eyes to the clock

on the wall. Who's disrupting them at past 3am?

"Baba." She nudges him, there's no movement.

The knock is persistent.

"Baba vuka." She must have nudged him too hard because he releases gas then tosses and turns the other way, mumbling incoherent words.

Only God knows she's slowly losing her patience with this man.

Two weeks later, his screws are still loose. Her name has been dragged and ridiculed in this community.

Even children know that MaNkosi's husband is now rooting for the Sterkfontein mental hospital. They throw stones when they pass by and make fun of her husband's condition. Madlala has become a living legend

MaNkosi has no choice but to grow a pair and attend to the door. The kitchen light flicks on, she tightens the morning rob around her and fishes for the key on top of the fridge.

The knock is just getting louder as she pulls the door open. It's Bakhe, in his boxers. She can't tell if that's tears on his face, or sweat.

"Khehla, what happened?" Her voice trembles beneath her breath.

Her first thought is to check for any injuries on her son.

"Is baba sleeping? Wake him up." He's making his way to the living room, leaving the door open and MaNkosi in suspense.

She dips her head out the door, it can't be Cashile or Lulu, right?

"Is your sister okay?" She's already seeing double, and her hands are trembling.

Bakhe's shoulders slump, "Babomcane has left us."

Unkulunkulu emuhle njalo!

Christmas was a few weeks ago. It must be her birthday then because, what kind of good news is this?

Her knees seem to fail her, she holds on to the armrest of the couch. Bakhe rushes to her side and helps her to the couch.

Her tears deserve an Oscar.

"Oh Sbari! What are you doing to us?"

Two weeks, it has taken him two weeks to kick the bucket. The whole time her husband has been suffering. What kind of a cruel man was Nkululeko?

"Where is dad?" He's looking around, surely that loud knocking should have woken him up.

"Your father took sleeping pills. I will let him

know in the morning." Hopefully, he will wake up better.

"Mbali and aunt are alone. I called Mbuzo and borrowed the car. He will accompany me there."

MaNkosi is not happy about Mbuzo coming here. She was okay with him at first because Nothando kept him busy, she didn't take him as the type that would cheat on his girlfriend.

"It's time your father takes his car back, we need it for times like these." MaNkosi would have never said something like this.

But times are tough now and Mbuzo is slowly ceasing to be her favourite.

The audacity to sleep with her daughter!

Rhaaa!

"I don't care, you people do whatever you want. Dad gave Mbuzo his car like he didn't have a son, now you want to take it back?" He scoffs.

“Who’s you people? I am still your mother, Khehla. I gave birth to you and this is how you talk to me?”

It’s not that deep.

Cashile walks in wearing pyjamas as short as her trunks, her face is still puffy from sleep.

“I heard loud knocking, what’s going on?”

“Babomncane passed on.” Bakhe says.

Just like MaNkosi, Cashile gaps in shock.

“Mbali!” She says, sympathetically.

They are not close but they are still cousins. At only 19 years old, Mbali has lost her husband, her unborn baby and now her father, all in one month.

This can’t be the trials and tribulations the bible speaks of, no human can bare such.

“Imagine losing your husband, your baby and father in one month. I wouldn’t wish such bad luck on my worst enemy.”

Bakhe’s statement puts a frown on MaNkosi’s face.

“You kids don’t know anything about life. I have lived more than you and have seen the worst. Amanzi amancane lento ehlele uMbali.”

MaNkosi says.

Cashile looks at her with a deep frown, something must be wrong with this woman.

“How can you say that Mah? Mbali is only 19, girls her age are discussing the reed dance or their matric dance. And she’s in mourning clothes. Who has ever gone through something so terrible? How can you say it’s a trivial matter?”

“Don’t put words in my mouth Cashile, I didn’t mean it like that. I’m just saying, Mbali still has

us and her mother.” MaNkosi polishes her previous statement and hopes it shines bright enough for them to believe her.

“Mbali’s mother is partially deaf, she has a mental capacity of a child. That leaves the poor 19-year-old with all the responsibilities.” Cashile says.

The house is becoming loud, which is a wrong time to be making any kind of noise. There’s a death in the family, they need to respect the departed.

A car hoots outside.

“Mbuzo is here and I haven’t changed.” Bakhe is frustrated by these two bickering.

“Mbuzo?” Cashile has suddenly become curious.

“I need a ride to babomcane’s and he agreed to take me.” –Bakhe.

“I’m coming with.”

“Yeyi, don’t make me mad wena. Awuyi lapho.”
MaNkosi sizzles, spitting fire balls through her eyes.

“Mbali will need a female there mah.”

“I’m not stupid Cashile, that’s your excuse to be with Nonkosi. Your father is getting better, but that means nothing to you. You’re only worried about Nonkosi’s dick.”

Bakhe exhales sharply, “Mami you’re acting childish now. How can you say that to her.”

“Please ask her why she hates Mbuzo so much. What did he do to you?” -Cashile.

“Nonkosi is not loyal, he cheated on Nothando with you. What makes you think he really loves you?” –MaNkosi.

Cashile shrugs, “I just know.”

And that has MaNkosi cackling, “Once a cheater always a cheater my girl. I have lived long

enough to know how men like Nonkosi think. He will chew you and spit you out in the nearest trash can.”

“Yoh mami, we know that you are an ancestor. Manje must we stop living because of that? Let us make mistakes and learn from them. My sister is back home and happy, let her breathe please.”

Tears find MaNkosi’s eyes, “Are you two ganging up on me? Your mother?”

Do they even know what she went through to give birth to them?

Bakhe sighs heavily, “I’m going to change. Mbuzo is waiting for me.”

He walks out, there is no use talking to MaNkosi when she’s like this.

“Have you told baba?” Cashile asks.

“No, he’s sleeping. Go back to your daughter, we

will see Mbali in the morning."

Yep, the mother hen has made up her mind. No daughter of hers is leaving these premises in the middle of the night.

Cashile walks out with her head hung low. She can count in one hand the number of times she saw Mbuzo in the past two weeks, he's been too busy nursing Mhlo's wounds after he was beaten up by Dalisu Sibiya.

The Sibiya's want their money, and Mhlo doesn't have it. Funny how they demand it from Mhlo and not Bakhe.

She sees him leaning against the car and looks back at the main house to check if MaNkosi is not peeking out the window, before running to him.

His eyes shine with adoration at the sight of her.

“KaMadlala?” It’s almost as if he can’t believe she’s standing in front of him.

Cashile offers him a sympathy smile, “You look thin. What’s wrong?”

It’s clear to see he’s carrying a load on his shoulders.

“Do I?” That’s all he says regarding this matter.
“How have you been? How is Lulu?”

“She’s fine, she doesn’t cry anymore.”

She went from not crying to not eating, but she doesn’t tell him that.

Cashile is going for a hug, but Mbuzo doesn’t catch the gesture so he remains standing like a robot. He realises a second later, then tries to hug her but she’s looking back to see if her mother is not out of the house.

The moment is awkward, it has him clearing his throat.

He's rubbing his nape when their eyes meet.

"That's good. I'm sorry for your loss." Mbuzo says.

He doesn't have a PhD in consoling someone who's lost a loved one, he's been here before. The pain hits you harder than anything you've ever felt.

"How is Mhlo?" She'd rather not talk about her uncle. It hurts, she hasn't cried yet because it feels unreal.

"He's in the car," he points behind him.

There he is, fast sleep in the passenger seat.

"Shouldn't he be resting?" Cashile asks.

The last time she saw Mhlo, he was unrecognizable. Unlike Bakhe, his wounds are taking a lifetime to heal.

"He's the one who woke me up and told me your brother needed a ride. He insisted when I

told him to stay." Mbuzo says.

They are silent again and staring at each other, so much is unsaid. This is not the right time to express their feelings but...

"I miss you,"- Mbuzo breathes, and it suddenly feels like a burden has been lifted off his shoulders.

She attacks him with a hug, almost knocking him down with her. Mbuzo's arms encircle around her waist, he buries his face on her neck and breathes her in.

"I love you," she sniffles.

It's the first time she's declaring her love for him.

He holds her waist, pulling her gently out of his arms. Their eyes lock, he can see tears in hers.

"You are my first love, KaMadlala. There will never be anyone but you."

She means the world to him.

“Cashile!” It’s not like MaNkosi to be screaming like a mad woman.

They jump out of each other’s arms, she’s in their faces in a minute and splashing water on Mbuzo’s face.

“Mama!” Cashile shields him.

“You two ought to be ashamed of yourselves. Your uncle just passed away and you are busy making sexual advances at each other.”

MaNkosi keeps her voice down, the neighbours can’t hear this abomination.

“Mbuzo was only comforting me, you didn’t have to do that.”

“Suka wena,” she pushes Cashile aside and faces Mbuzo woman to man.

“Which language do I have to use for you to understand that I do not want you anywhere

near my daughter?" She's pointing a finger at him.

"I'm here for Bakhe mah, I'm sorry if my presence upsets you." –Mbuzo.

He's not offended by what MaNkosi did, it's common for parents to protect their children.

"Then why are you not waiting in the car? Why are you here touching my daughter?" MaNkosi.

That's her perspective, their hug was completely innocent.

Mbuzo drops his eyes like he always does when talking to her or her husband.

"I respect you Mah, but I feel you need to know how much I love your daughter."

Yeah neh!

"Uthini?" MaNkosi is out of her head with shock.

Who raised this boy?

That's right, his parents are not here to account for him.

He raises his eyes to her, "I am making a promise to your daughter that as long as there is breath in my lungs, I will fight for our love."

Who let the devil out?

Mbuzo gives Cashile a final look and turns back to the car, if anything, he respects her mother.

"Did you hear how he spoke to me and how he looked at you? That boy has no respect, he undresses you with his eyes in front of me."

MaNkosi complains.

Just like her breasts, her eyesight has lost its support structure. She's seeing things.

Having had enough, Cashile clicks her tongue and marches back to the house. She bumps into Bakhe who asks what happened and gets

no response from his sister.

“What did you do to her?” He asks their mother.

“Get the car keys from Nonkosi on your way back, we are taking back the car.” MaNkosi says.

Bakhe exhibits a frown, “I’m not going to do that and you won’t either.”

“It’s our family car Khehla.”

“You should’ve thought of that before you gave it away, don’t involve me in your issues mami.”

She’s his favourite but he’s pushing it.

“Fine, I will take the car myself.” MaNkosi tells him.

“And I will burn it.” Bakhe challenges her with a deep stare.

“Whose side are you on? I am your mother, we are your family not the Xabas. We should be united, and shame the devil.”

Thixo bawo! Her father's side of the family must be dancing at a mountain singing victory songs.

"Mami, you and your husband have shown me that I am nothing in this family. You treat me like a baby, while he treats me like a failure. Why do you think I'm rebellious? It's your fault, both of you have failed us."

Too many emotions dance in MaNkosi's eyes, after everything she has done for this boy... today he stands in front of her and points out her mistakes?

"Take that car back mami and I will set it on fire, try me."

"Khehla standwa sami..."

"I am my sister's keeper mami, I am ready to lay down my life for her happiness. Don't test me, you won't like it when I choose sides. I have nothing to lose."

MaNkosi grips her chest, is this how a heart

attack feels like? She struggles with words while watching her son jump in the trunk of their pimped up “family car.”

The Xabas are going to be the death of her.

Her knees are having a hard time carrying her back to the house. Today is supposed to be a good day, her husband will finally have his sanity back.

She's welcomed by a splash of water on her face when she walks through the kitchen sighing exhaustedly. She's gasping and working overtime to catch her breath while rubbing her face vigorously.

“Cashile!”

Yep! Her precious daughter threw water at her.

“Now you know how Mbuzo felt.”

What? This child must be possessed.

“Are you insane? I am your mother you stupid girl. Where is your respect?” She raises her voice, it’s really not like her.

“Where is your respect for Mbuzo?”

Hawe mah! Thixo’ nefefe!

“I can’t believe I was stupid to stop your father’s plan of marrying you to Sibiya. Look at the menace Nonkosi has turned you into. My daughter would have never done this to me.”

“I never would have agreed to marry him, and do you think Sibiya would have survived a day with me?”

The tone of her voice makes MaNkosi fearful. She gulps, loosening her rob then ties it again.

“Sibiya is a respectable man, his word is authority. Surely he wouldn’t be teaching you

bad manners like that boy. We will call a meeting with the Sibiyas after the funeral, your marriage to the chief will proceed. I'm sorry to do this to you my baby but it's for your own good."

Cashile puts the cup away, "Go ahead, I dare you. I am not that naïve 21-year-old girl who left the village for Joburg. I spent two years in prison and I'm not afraid to go back."

Can MaNkosi's eyes grow any bigger?

"What?"

"Angithi you are Eskom Mah, you've pulled down all my switches. Continue testing me and you will see how crazy a convict can be."

Cashile presses a kiss on her cheek and exits the house.

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[03/06, 15:43] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 25

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Bakhe has come to investigate whatever it is that's happening. His parents are disrupting the peace.

"What's going on?" He asks, taking Lulu from his mother.

"Baba thinks someone slapped him," Cashile is not explaining it properly.

"I know someone slapped me. Whenever I try to enter the gate, someone slaps me."

Well not a good explanation but they get him.

Bakhe looks at his mother, she looks as guilty as Matthew Lani standing on trial. Her eyes are all over the place.

“Mami, are you sure that he’s healed?”

Her eyes widen instantly, guilt evident in them.

“What are you trying to say?” She questions him.

“Your husband was crazy just the other day. It’s not safe to bring him out in public.”

This boy lacks manners, he should be getting those slaps, not Madlala.

“Baba was crazy? How come I’m always the last to know everything in this family?” Cashile says.

MaNkosi smacks her shoulder, “Don’t say that about your father. Show some respect.”

“But it’s the truth, dad was...” –Bakhe.

“I am not crazy, I know what I felt. There is an evil spirit in this yard.” Why would Bab’Madlala raise his voice like that? Now people are staring.

MaNkosi loses all energy.

She should have stayed home.

“Mami, I will take him back home.” That’s so nice of Bakhe but...

“I’m not going anywhere until Hluphekile tells me what she did to my brother.”

Jezus! He can’t keep his voice down.

“Baba don’t.” –Bakhe.

It’s too late. Bab’Madlala has found a stone and is hitting the gate while shouting for his sister-in-law to come out.

“Hluphekile come out and tell me what you did to my brother.”

Dear God!

Mbali is the first to step out of the house, her mother is not far behind, looking confused.

Seeing her in-laws for the first time since the

news of Nkululeko's death hit them, Hluphekile carries her hands on her head and weeps.

This is the part where MaNkosi runs to her and embraces her in her arms. But nope, she's standing outside the gate with her husband who is breathing fire and seeking answers.

"Mama go back inside, you're not supposed to be out here." Mbali tries to help her back but Bab'Madlala's next words finish every strength in her.

"You killed my brother, Hluphekile." He's screaming because he knows her hearing is not that good.

Gasps fly around!

Bakhe and Cashile share a look of confusion, and MaNkosi... well, she is standing beside her husband.

Better this than people thinking her man is going crazy again.

“Bhuti no, I loved my Nkulukelo. He was mine...” Hluphekile cries.

“Uncle, what are you doing? Why would you say that?” Mbali asks.

Just like everyone here, she is stunned.

“Mbali, I didn’t do it. Your father was my husband, he married me and said he will take care of me. I washed his clothes and cooked for him. He said he won’t leave me, but now he’s gone. I didn’t tell him to go, Mbali. I didn’t tell him to go.” She hides her face on Mbali’s chest.

“I know mama.”

“Don’t believe anything that witch says.” Bab’Madlala shouts. “I tried to enter this gate, but something pushed me out. The Madlalas do not practise witchcraft. It must be you Hluphekile, this is a sign that you killed my brother. I will never set foot here until you confess to killing my brother.”

There are mutterings flying around, speculations and doubt have been planted in people's heads. Hluphekile falls to the ground, wailing. Her daughter is at a loss for words.

"Mami stop him or I swear..." Bakhe says, it sounds like a warning but MaNkosi ignores him.

Rather, she taps Bab'Madlala's shoulder and whispers, "Baba you're overacting. Let's go."

She takes his hand and walks with him, he will have to bare whatever it is and act like a normal person. His heart is beating out of his chest, it slows down when he makes it through the gate.

Hluphekile is taken back into the house, Mbali stays behind, glaring at her uncle and aunt.

She will never forget this day.

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It's almost noon, the men are sitting under a tree. They have been served refreshments.

"Why are we still here? I want to go home." Mhlo says to his brother.

His ass is numb from sitting for too long.

"We are part of the community Mhlo, we can't just up and leave." -Mbuzo.

Mhlo exhales and sinks in his seat. The day is going very slow.

"We have to donate towards the funeral, we will start off with R500 per household going up."

Chief Sibiya's suggestion sounds absurd.

"That's a lot of money, haibo." Mhlo disputes.

He doesn't sound bored anymore.

"No one expects anything from your family Nonkosi, we are all aware that you can barely survive."

Who invited Dalisu? Criminals are running free

out there.

“Who asked you mgodoyi?” Mhlo snaps.

“Haibo! Stop swearing in front of adults.” That’s Bab’Madlala reprimanding Mhlo.

“Dickhead started it,” Bakhe jumps in, flashing a death stare at Dalisu.

“Okay boys, this is not the time. Respect Nkululeko please.” One of the uncles says.

It’s not like he wants to be part of this stupid gathering. Who said it’s a must to donate money anyway? Mhlo grabs his crutch and makes his way into the house.

He’s left Mbuzo worried, so he stands and goes after him. The open door leads to the kitchen, packed with women gossiping over tea.

Hluphekile and her daughter are the main topic, these women are convinced that the mother and daughter duo killed Thabiso, the unborn baby and Nkululeko for a ritual.

He clears his throat, not to get their attention.
But he's here, he might as well ask them.

He greets first, "My brother came in here."

"He's in the sitting room." One woman says.

Mbuzo knows when someone is undressing him and these old women are doing just that, it makes him uncomfortable.

He thanks them and heads to the living room, it's empty.

Where could Mhlo have gone?

He feels a pair of arms wrap around him from the back and suddenly, life seems worth living once again.

"KaMadlala sthandwa sami."

The declaration shocks Cashile that she lets go of him and comes to stand in front of him.

“Sthandwa sami?” Her brows rise in question.

It’s not hard to tell that he is troubled.

“Are you okay? Can I get you something to eat?”

A head shake, “Ngiyabonga but I’m fine.”

He doesn’t look or sound fine.

“What’s going on Mbuzo?”

He goes quiet on her then randomly holds her in his arms, he needs the hug. It’s risky, there are people everywhere. Anyone can walk in and find them in each other’s arms.

“Marry me.” He says softly.

Cashile lets go and looks at him, “Why?”

What she means is that it’s too soon.

“I don’t want us to be apart anymore, marry me. I will take care of you and Lulu, I will give you all the love the world has to offer.”

That sounds nice and all but this is the real

world, love has never held anyone down.

Mbuzo's eyes are bloodshot, his eyebrows knitted. She can't tell if he's enraged or hurting.

"Mbuzo what's going on? This is not you. Did my father say something to you?"

"Nonkosi." It's Bab'Madlala, he followed him here.

He grabs Mbuzo's hand and drags him outside.

"And then? Who gave you the right to go into the house?"

"I was looking for my brother." He says.

"Don't lie to me, you went in there looking for my daughter."

Bab'Madlala makes it sound like he's a serial killer.

"Where did I go wrong baba?"

It's about time he asks.

"Don't call me that, your father is six feet under."

Bab'Madlala's response stings.

This is the same man that was always willing to lend a helping hand when they needed one, he took on the role of their father after his death.

What is this behaviour now?

Mbuzo tightens his jaw, his ego is not allowing him to stand here and take every blow

Bab'Madlala gives him, but he's desperate.

He has fallen in love with his daughter, if he's going to have her, then he will need this old man's blessings.

He can't send lobola to an outsider when her father is still alive.

"At least tell me what I did wrong? You and MaNkosi have done a 360 on me. What is my

crime?"

"You have set your eyes on my most priced possession Nonkosi. My daughter is special to me. Now tell me why I would agree to her marrying a man who has nothing? What will you feed her?"

"I will make a plan." Like a real man.

Okay, who tickled grandpa? He's laughing like he will win a prize for it.

"A plan? Do you even know what that is? Your sister stays with strangers because you cannot afford to put food on the table. Your brothers' children are dependent on other men. What could you possibly offer my Cashile? She's a princess compared to you."

Bab'Madlala speaks with pride like he's always done in the past.

"Love. My heart, body and soul. I will love and honour her, she will never shed a tear in her life

as long as she's my responsibility."

All the while, Bab'Madlala is checking the time on his wristwatch. He's growing impatient, this feels like a speech at the parliament.

"Love?" He snorts. "If love is what you bring to the table, then you still have some growing up to do my boy."

That's how low he thinks of Mbuzo.

"You are a good boy Nonkosi but not good enough for my daughter."

Mbuzo should have walked away minutes ago. Love is such a betrayer of men because, why is he still standing here?

"Give me a chance to prove myself, let me show you how much I love KaMadlala and that I am capable of taking care of her and her child."

Truth be told, he's not the first poor man in the world. If others can survive, so can he.

“Tell you what, I will let you marry my daughter under one condition.”

Looks like there's light at the end of the tunnel.

“I want thirty cows, and bring your father when you come to negotiate lobola.”

Or not!

Mbuzo's face crinkles with confusion, “I will contact one of my father's brothers...”

“No, no, no Nonkosi. You are not listening to me boy-boy. I will accept your lobola if you come with Velaphi Xaba alive and kicking.”

Slow breathes usually help, but not in this case. Mbuzo's heart is pounding violently in his chest, his eyes are bloodshot in a second.

“I do not have a father.” His voice compresses, he's holding back a lump in his throat.

The man that always sympathised with him laughs like Trevor Noah's spirit has possessed

Mbuzo.

“Now you get my point. You are an orphan. You Nonkosi boys have no value in this community, leave, or kill yourselves. No one will miss you, I guarantee you that.” –Bab’Madlala.

Mbuzo clenches his fists, his hands are on his sides. There’s an undeniable urge to throw a punch but he can’t, the love he has for Cashile is holding him back.

Bab’Madlala is grinning at him, but it’s short-lived. Someone knocks him down with a flying kick, the foot landing on his chest.

He’s out like a light the second he hits the ground.

Mbuzo turns to his side to see Mhlo breathing heavily beside him, sitting butt flat on the floor with tears flowing down his face. Mhlo never cries, he’s the clown of the family.

Mbuzo doesn’t ask how his brother managed to

kick Bab'Madlala like Jackie Chan while injured, instead he kneels next to him and pulls Mhlo's head into his chest.

"We are not orphans, we are not orphans."

Mhlo's declaration makes it hard for Mbuzo to hold back his tears, but he limits them.

Maybe it is time they leave the village.

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[03/06, 15:43] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 26

CASHILE

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Everything is a mess.

People are dying.

Mhloniphe was arrested because he assaulted someone in front of a police officer.

My father is in the hospital, I don't know how injured he is. I doubt it was that deep.

Mbuzo is not taking my calls.

I'm starting to regret falling in love with him, I wouldn't be in this pain. I don't know what my mistake is, why he refuses to talk to me.

Then there's Juba who keeps calling me and demanding his child.

I know he doesn't have the spine to come here and take her, he thinks we are witches. This is my chance to bond with my daughter, I'm not going to let her go that easily.

My mother is currently looking after her.

The funeral was on Sunday, two days ago. My father did not attended, apparently he's in a

coma. That's what my mother said, which I find absurd. A kick on the chest cannot send a person into a coma.

I've been with Mbali since the day we came here. I have never seen depression and sorrow so visible on a person. Mbali is a walking depression, I hear her cry herself to sleep every night.

Aunt has days when she's out of touch with what's happening. Her brain seems to be protecting her from the trauma. I am not in favour of her condition, but at this moment, it's helping a great deal.

Today is my last day here.

"Dade, is there anything to eat?"

Bakhe is such a typical man.

"Please leave your shoes outside, I just moped the floor."

There's mud everywhere now.

He walks back out, then comes back barefooted with a plastic chair.

I hear him sigh as he settles down by the door.

"What are you making?" He asks.

"Eggs and bread for aunt. Mbali is sleeping."

I serve him his breakfast, he thanks me and digs in.

"How is Mhlo?"

He shrugs, I thought they were friends. I had friends in Joburg I would have slept in a jail cell with, two I considered my best friends until they showed me that our friendship was one sided.

"Talk to your father and ask him to drop the charges. You're his favourite, he listens to you."

I was once his favourite, our father is a different man now. He has other things to worry about, his children are the last thing on his mind.

“Why don’t you talk to MaNkosi? She listens to you.” I tell him.

I don’t want to deal with my mother and her tantrums. The woman acts like I owe her womb rent.

“It’s not as simple as you think Dade, our parents have changed. Something is fishy about baba’s on and off mental illness.” He says.

I would probably have the same speculations had I known that we have a crazy father.

“What is it?”

He’s suddenly deep into thought, I tap his shoulder to get him back.

“I don’t know, I will let you know when I find out.’

Argh!

“In the meantime, you should check on Mbuzo.”

He says.

I have the best brother in the world.

“You support our relationship?” My smile stretches to Mars.

He frowns, “Don’t push it. He’s my enemy because he’s sleeping with my sister.”

Was... past tense. It feels like I haven’t been with him in years.

I get a Tupperware in the cupboard and dish up for Mbuzo, I don’t know how he likes his eggs. He’s always the one behind the stove.

“Don’t put idliso in there, the man is already obsessed with you it’s sickening.” Bakhe says.

God gave me a brother before I was born, so there was still time for Him to revoke his decision and give me a little sister whom I can bully. This one bullies me at every chance he gets.

I look at him, “Is that what your girlfriend did

with you?"

I'm teasing him but he's serious as a thunder storm.

"Did I say something wrong?"

A head shake, "I don't have a girlfriend."

That's sad, "That's because you look like Sid from Ice Age."

He frowns, "And you look like Madluphuthu."

Ouch! That's a harsh clap back.

"You're so annoying Bakhe, that's why you're adopted."

He cracks up, I look away because who laughs out loud with food in their mouth.

"Nice try Dade, I was born before you. You're the one who was adopted, MaNkosi and her husband were struggling to have kids. One day they went to the clinic and came back with a baby."

No way, I wasn't adopted.

"Are you sure?" My heart is shooting lightning bolts.

He laughs, "That was a joke. I can't believe you believed me."

Men are known to be deceiving, and he was very convincing. I almost fainted.

"I spit on your food." I say as payback.

How dare he give me heart palpitations when I'm stressed, I haven't been with my man in days. Does he know what that does to a woman?

Bakhe finishes the last of his food and takes his plate to the sink.

"The food was nice, Mrs. Spit. Asbonge. I'm going to finish cutting the grass, I have plans later today."

He burps in my face and runs out when I attempt to chase him. This is it, the

confirmation that I was given a brother without my permission.

Just like Mbali, aunt is sleeping. Bakhe will tell them where I went.

He's outside, cleaning uncle Nkulu's empty kraal. He didn't have livestock while my father had as many as the ocean. I wish he tasted a good life before his demise, imagine dying before living a soft life?

I would die.

"Why are you cleaning the kraal?" I ask Bakhe.

"I'm raking unwanted grass, and dung." He's covered in sweat for nothing.

"Do you think they will ever be okay? I mean Mbali and aunt? She has to look for a job so she can take care of aunt."

He stops and turns to me, swiping his back

hand over his sweaty forehead.

“Your parents have to help them for now, it’s dad’s fault that babomncane died.” There’s anger in his voice.

“What do you mean Bakhe?”

“It’s complicated, I don’t know. I’ve been sensing some strange energy from your parents. They are up to something.”

They are our parents, but this one likes denouncing them when he feels like it.

“Sensing? Are you a prophet now?”

He doesn’t laugh like I expect him to.

“You know that feeling when you don’t trust a person although you have never caught them doing bad?” He asks.

“Nope.”

“Your parents give me that feeling.” He says.

I'm so confused, I walk into the kraal and move closer. Maybe I will understand what he's saying.

"Are you saying ubaba and Mah are bad people?" I'd believe him if he says yes.

Bakhe sighs, "The day before you were arrested. I had a dream, your father was riding a donkey that had a face of a lion. He was going around the village and people were worshiping him and chanting his name while he threw money at them. Every person that would take the money from his hand would disappear."

That's a nightmare.

"So you're doubting him based on a dream?"

Bakhe shrugs his shoulders, and continues with his work.

"Go to your man before the sun sets, and don't have sex."

Eww! I would smack him if he wasn't my big brother.

"Don't you have R50 for me? I want to Uber."

"Argh Cashile, I have girlfriends to bheja."

I thought he was single.

He digs in his pocket and pushes a R50 note in my hand.

"You're the best brother in the world, I wish there were two of you." My grin doesn't work with him.

"Awu hambe before I take my money back." He says.

I request a ride and leave, worried about Bakhe's dream. What kind of a dream was that?

Dammit, I forgot to tell him there are people coming to fetch the tent.

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MBUZO

Mkhotheni walks in, banging the door behind him. He's in shitty mood again. Mbuzo knows not to ask when he's like this, he will talk when he feels like it.

"Fuckin shit." He cusses, kicking the coffee table. It topples over and crashes to pieces. That was their mother's favourite coffee table, was that really necessary?

"Don't take your anger out on my mother's furniture, we don't have much left." Mbuzo bites his head off.

They might as well be the same age, their maturity is at the same level. But at the end of the day Mkhotheni is the king of the jungle, his word is as authoritative as their father's word was.

He throws himself on the couch, “I’ve been let go.”

“Let go of what?” Mbuzo asks.

“At work, they let me go. That stupid manager said I was standing in for someone that was on leave. He didn’t tell me that when he employed me.”

Great! They have taken ten steps back just when things started falling into place.

“What does your contract say? You can take them to CCMA.”

Well, wouldn’t that be a waste of time?

“I didn’t get a copy of the contract, and I was stupid enough not to read it.” Mkhetheni says.

Heavy silence follows. It’s as if their parents are not watching over them from the grave, everything is falling apart. Mhlo is in jail, they need money to bail him out, or Madlala to drop

the charges.

Their uncle Mpiyakhe disappeared the day Mhlo was arrested.

“I have work to do, we will talk later.” Mbuzo cuts through the silence.

“Another piece job?”

He nods, takes his phone from the couch and walks out. They don’t talk about Mhlo’s imprisonment, they never get to a solution and that stresses them further.

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CASHILE

The trip took longer than expected, I thought I would never get to my destination with how

chatty the driver is. I pay his money and wait for my change.

“I don’t have change sweetheart.”

That’s not my problem.

“Then how are we going to fix this?”

He just stares like I should answer myself. I have been in this situation before, they do this just so they can keep the change. My ride was R24, and I gave him R50. I mean, I’ve had dreams where Tito Mboweni was my father but they never came true.

“The ride can be free if you give me your number.” He licks his lips while eyeing me up and down.

I don’t have daddy issues, so I don’t do old men.

“Okay, give me back my money.”

“Your number first.” He says.

Lord flood this world and take papa Penny only.

I give him the first number that pops up in my head.

God, he's calling it.

"It's ringing," he says.

I fake a smile. I should have pretended to be mute and deaf when I got in the cab.

"They call me Papa action because of my skills in bed." He's grinning from ear to ear.

This boastful type lack all skills in the bedroom.

Am I sacrificing my time for a mere R50? The world has failed me.

"What's your name?" He wants to save the number.

If this was the days of Noah, I would have never agreed to enter the ark.

"Khanyisile."

Damn! That's my mother's name.

This man is wasting my time. He finally gives me back my R50, I run out of the car like it's a matter of life and death

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The gate is not locked, the car is parked in the driveway. I knock and wait for him to open. It's taking forever for him to come to the door.

"Daddy!" I knock again.

The door opens, I almost run out of the yard with my two left feet.

This man is standoffish and it scares the shit out of me.

Uhhh! "Hi."

I don't know if that came out respectful. How do you greet a man like Mkhetheni without sounding like you want to be friends with him?

He nods, it's better than nothing. I hug the Tupperware, my eyes are downcast. I don't know how to act in front of him.

"Your father is not here."

I would never call my father daddy, he's dad or baba.

This is embarrassing. I keep my mouth shut, surely he's old enough to figure out why I'm here.

He clears his throat, "Mbuzo is not here."

Oh! The person I sacrificed my time and number for to an Uber driver is not here?

Nice!

I look at Mkhetheni and nod. Deep down I'm cussing, this is what happens when people don't answer their phones. Mbuzo will get it from me.

"Thanks." I have to Uber back home, I'm not

going to walk in this heat.

“Why are you with my brother?” Mkhetheni asks, opening the door wider.

I am not here for a chat, not with him. He scares me.

“I love him,” I say.

That blank stare.

“We are going through a lot in our family as it is, we don’t need any more problems.”

I know what he means, my father put his twin behind bars.

“And I’m the problem.”

I don’t know why I said that, I should be understanding of their situation.

“I would never hurt Mbuzo. I love him.” We have already established that.

“I know, and I have nothing against you, I just

don't want my brothers hurting. At the end of the day, it's up to me to pick up the pieces. They are my responsibility." He says.

He shuts the door in my face when I say nothing in return. Well, at least the Uber was free.

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There's a truck parked outside the gate when I get to my aunt's house. I see Mbuzo with some men taking down the tent. This must be one of his piece jobs.

I wave when he looks my way, he doesn't wave back.

Maybe he didn't see me, I take the lunch box inside and go to him.

"Hey, take a break. There's food inside."

"I don't have parents KaMadlala, I can't take a

break.”

Oh wow.

“Are you serious?”

I hate how he shrugs, like what he said is nothing.

“Why are you angry with me, Mbuzo? What did I do?”

“Nothing, absolutely nothing.”

He thinks I didn’t do enough to protect him and his brother from my father. His colleagues are staring, I wish he would stop for a second and talk to me.

“I’m sorry for what my father did, he will come around. Give him time.”

He stops and pulls me aside, his face is covered in sweat. It’s very hot today.

“Your father thinks I’m the dirtiest thing to ever cross your path, he is willing to drag my family

name to the ground.” He says with an angry expression.

His phone buzzes before I can get anything out, his face grows into a scary frown.

“What’s wrong?”

He looks at me, “Someone named Papa action sent me...”

He clicks his tongue.

The name rings a bell.

“Doti mani lo?” Oh God, he’s fuming.

I grab his phone before he gets a heart attack. It’s the Uber driver, he sent him a dick pic. Well it was for me, but... I can’t believe I gave him Mbuzo’s number.

“Khanyi, this is Papa Action. I can’t wait to bury this inside you, ngwana papa.” I read the message out loud.

Yoh!

Mbuzo looks disgusted to the bone, he's panting with rage.

"Stop looking at it," he tries to snatch his phone.
I move away.

"Is that a totolozi?" I zoom in.

I swear my pinkie finger is bigger than this.

The dick looks like God ran out of soil and borrowed from next door and they gave him their last option, a black crayon. It's flame grilled but does not look like it tastes better.

"Give me that." Mbuzo snatches the phone and deletes the picture.

"Hey, I was still looking at that."

His eyes widen, "Do you want a canvas and a paint brush? Maybe you can frame it and put it on your wall."

He's jealous of Papa with zero action, that's so cute.

“I would never leave you for a man with a small dick.” I say, putting my arms around him and steal a kiss.

He's not holding me back.

“Do you hear yourself, KaMadlala?”

Oops!

“I mean I will never leave you for any man, with any size dick. You are thee papa action, daddy. The real makoya, can't get, can't tholakala.”

He's got plenty of action this one.

He escapes my embrace, “I need to wash my face, before I go blind.” He says, walking towards the house.

Well, I'm never taking an Uber again.

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500+ comments... 15 shares...

[03/06, 15:43] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 27

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MaNkosi walks into the hospital ward with Lulu strapped on her back, she's carrying fruits in a blue plastic bag. It's the same thing she brought her husband yesterday.

He sighs and rolls his eyes when he sees her and the packages she's carrying, Lulu included.

"MaNkosi, do you want me to put it in writing that I am a patient? I have cravings mfazi, what good will bananas and apples do for me?"

It's the same complaint every day, he wants a Nandos quarter chicken and pap. MaNkosi places the goods on the small table, unstraps a sleeping Lulu and sits down.

"You should come home, I will give you a real

meal.”

He’s so easily taken, either he’s blushing or his face is having a seizure.

“Do you miss me?”

MaNkosi frowns and examines him carefully. Is he sane?

“The funeral is over, stop pretending that you’re sick.” She says.

He sighs as he sits up from the bed and stretches his body.

“Yesis! My back hurts from lying down. I should get paid for being me, it’s a lot of work.” His eyes shift to the baby.

“And then? Why did you bring this demon with you?”

His voice is so loud that Lulu wakes up.

“Don’t call her that baba,” what’s wrong with him?

Bab'Madlala taps Lulu's nose with his finger, his baby talk is not cute. The child looks terrified.

"Hello nunu. Hello nunuza, angithi uyaluma wena? Tell gogo that you'll bite her."

MaNkosi doesn't entertain his stupidity.

"You'll make a mistake one day and call her a demon with Cashile in the room." She says, he doesn't care.

He pinches both Lulu's cheeks, singing "Sizowa nyathela 'madimoni."

Lulu covers her mouth and falls into soft giggles.

But MaNkosi is not pleased with her husband's choice of words, she smacks his hand away from Lulu's cheeks.

"See, she knows she's a little demon."

"She's your granddaughter baba, you can't call her a demon."

“I can call her anything I want because she’s Cashile’s failure. Can you believe she had a child out of wedlock?” He was disappointed when he learned that she mothered a child in Joburg. The apple of his eye turned out to be rotten on the inside.

“It happens, did you think she would remain pure in Joburg?”

Bab’Madlala’s brows knit in a frown, this woman always disputes his word.

“Why do you carry her around anyway, like she’s a monkey?” He says, getting off bed. It’s time to go back home, and fix whatever was broken. The village hasn’t seen enough of him.

“I can’t leave her alone, she’s a child. Plus she’s the reason you were able to regain your sanity the day you woke up tied up. I made you drink her morning pee.”

Bab’Madlala freezes, his eyes are bouncing in

their sockets. This woman did not just say what he thinks she said.

“MaNkosi, what did you just say?”

Talking is tiring, even worse when you have to repeat yourself.

She looks around, they are not alone in the ward.

“You heard me baba. I have heard rumours about a baby’s urine, it has some healing mechanisms. So I tried it, I didn’t know it was going to work.”

Bab’Madlala coughs, folding over and holds on to the bed for support. He’s choking in his own saliva.

Of course, it’s natural for MaNkosi to worry. She puts the baby on the bed and hurries to him.

He pushes her hand away when she starts patting his back.

“So you mean to tell me that I have this

monkey's pee in my stomach." He's exaggerating.

"It's been two weeks baba, it has digested by now."

He gags and heaves till his eyes become red, it's a good thing he hasn't eaten today otherwise the floor would be plastered with his stomach's content.

"What's wrong with you baba?" MaNkosi is done with this man.

"No, what's wrong with you mfazi? Couldn't you give me something else? I would rather drink a cow's urine than..."

"Haike! I don't know what you want from me. You messed up baba, like you always do and I had to step in and fix it as usual."

He's not good at perfection. So what?

"But it didn't work MaNkosi, I was still running

around naked. I drank pee for nothing." He uses his hospital gown to wipe his tongue.

This is really not the place to discuss something so private.

"Ngiyakuzwa baba, habe. Let's go home, Pastor Bhengu is coming to pray with the family."

Yoh, yoh lo mfazi!

He forgets about his need to vomit and straightens his back, and looks at her with serial killer eyes.

"You know sometimes I wonder why I married you. Ah yes, because you were a teacher and very smart. I don't understand what you are telling me now. What possessed you to invite a pastor to pray for me? Me, MaNkosi? Uyangazi mina? Are you trying to expose us? Do you have any idea what the community will do when they learn what we did?"

"If you were a church goer, you would know that

Pastor Bhengu is a pastor with no spiritual discernment. He'd dine with demons and not know it. Remember how you called your sister in-law a witch that day? Then you missed your own brother's funeral? I'm only doing damage control, otherwise people will start to talk." She says.

Bab'Madlala shakes his head after heaving a sigh, this woman will be the cause of his death if he is not careful.

"Fine, but I don't want anyone touching me." He says.

MaNkosi takes Lulu from the bed just as Nothando walks in. Her head is hidden in a doek, she looks thinner than usual.

The elders stare until she breaks the silence.

"Sanbonani." Her knees bend a little as she sends her greeting, it's a sign of respect and it

makes Madlala smile.

“Hau, hau. Dudlu ntombazane. I can’t remember the last time I saw a beautiful woman, My eyes have been blessed.”

MaNkosi’s face completely transforms, she’s close to throwing a pillow at him.

Nothando giggles like a little girl, “Ngiyabonga baba. Kodwa, don’t you see your wife every day?”

He does, she’s here all day, every day.

The smile disappears in a blink.

“I do, so?” He says.

Nothando looks at MaNkosi as if expecting a reaction from her. MaNkosi removes her dirty stare from Madlala and shoots it right at Nothando.

“Where is your boyfriend?”

Ah yes! Bab’Madlala still has his eyes fixed on

her.

A look of pity finds Nothando's face, "He's with Cashile."

She's not about to cry is she?

MaNkosi frowns, like the evil mother-in-law she plans to be to Mbuzo if they ever get married.

God forbid.

"Those two are ruining our family name. Why are they obsessed with each other?" -MaNkosi.

It's not the family name she's worried about, it's her husband's sanity. Mbuzo and Cashile's love is a weapon that destroys everything MaNkosi and Madlala try to build.

"And wena MaSibiya! How is a beautiful, full figured, round faced, and bubbly girl like you defeated by a toothpick that doesn't even know how to put on a dress?"

That's his daughter he's talking down on.

MaNkosi glares at him and says nothing because really, this man will driver her crazy.

"I tried my best to keep them apart baba, but Mbuzo is a very stubborn man." Nothando says.

That stupid boy should be chasing money not women.

MaNkosi's day has been ruined, she tells her husband to go change. It's time to go home.

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CASHILE

He collects his wages in a brown envelope and we take a taxi to the police station. I'm following him everywhere today, I'm done with my duties at aunt's place. Bakhe was just finishing up when we left.

“Stay here, I won’t be long.” He points at a bench occupied by three other people.

“I was hoping to see how he’s doing,” I say and he exhales, looking down at me with a defeated gaze.

Mhlo doesn’t want him here, he’s told me this before. Maybe wanting to go in is a bad idea.

I sit my ass down and watch until he disappears in the corridor. I only have a few hours to spare with him before I go home, my mother said she went out with Lulu. She didn’t tell me where. When I asked about dad, she dismissed me.

I don’t want to care anymore, we are not even allowed to visit him in the hospital.

My phone rings just as the man beside me starts a conversation. Bakhe has perfect timing.

I’m starting to worry about my dressing, as baggy as I look, men still want to get to know me. I don’t even have hair for crying out loud.

I am definitely not a yebo baba woman, and I'd never kneel in front of a fire and stir pap in a three legged big pot.

"Your mother has called a family meeting at 6pm," he sounds irked.

"A family meeting without dad?"

How is that going to work?

"He's awake, she says she was praying for him then he miraculously opened his eyes." Bakhe chuckles.

I hold back mine, I'm more confused than amused.

Our parents feel like strangers more and more every day.

"Okay, I'll be home around five. Please tell me you'll be there, what if they are planning to ambush us?" I say.

That old couple is unpredictable.

“I’ll be there, I want to hear this one. It could be about uncle Nkulu.” He says.

My father missed the funeral, if he wants to address that fact, he will have to talk to his cousins and uncles.

Bakhe ends the call, and this man next to me seizes the moment.

I look at him dead in the eye and whisper, “I killed my husband. Do you think they will give me a lighter sentence if I cry insanity?”

I almost catch his eyes thinking they will fall out, he moves like lightning and finds another seat.

That will teach him not to talk to strangers.

And then?

“Mbali?” She’s hurrying towards the exit, she stops and slowly turns to me. This girl, I thought I left her sleeping at home.

“Hi sisi.”

“What are you doing here?”

“I came to see a friend.” She says, while scratching her head. The nervous look on her face tickles my curiosity.

“At a police station?”

“Yes.” The stuttering.

Now I’m worried, why does she look nervous if this visit is innocent?

“Babe, what happened? Did someone hurt you? Were you here to open a case?”

“No, I’m fine.” She says.

Then why are her eyes hiding so much?

“I came to see Mhloniphe.”

Hold the front door.

They know each other?

“Why? How do you know him?”

She exhales as if I'm annoying her, then grabs my hand and drags me outside.

"I felt bad for what your father said to him the other day, it's not fair that he insulted him and his dead parents then had him arrested."

I get that...

"But how do you know Mhlo?"

"I met him that day sisi. I came to apologize on behalf of my uncle, I feel terrible because everything happened at my house."

Oh I see!

I'm still confused though.

"I have to go, mom is alone."

I let her leave, it is nice of her to think of Mhlo. However, I can't escape this big BUT.

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Mbuzo walks out of the station, he wasn't even in there for more than five minutes. I can't tell if he's dejected, worried or fine.

"How is he?"

"He doesn't want to talk to me. I told him I'm saving money for bail."

Bail was set for R20k. Where will they get that kind of money?

I hold his hand, "It's okay to show emotion you know. Prove my brother wrong."

His eyebrows pucker.

"Show him that you are not Undertaker." I add.

There's the smile I have been wanting to see, it's good to know I am not dating Rambo.

He intertwines our hands, I love how his hand fits in mine.

“We should go, taxis can be scarce this side.”
He says.

I don’t ask where we are going, I’m hoping not to his house where Mkhetheni the bulldog is. He will eat us one day, that one.

“Is your brother home?” I need to be prepared.

“Yes.”

Heavy sigh! Woooosa!

“What’s wrong?” He asks, as we cross the street, heading towards the robots.

“I called you daddy earlier, I didn’t know he would open the door.”

I crown that moment the most embarrassing moment of my life.

He’s laughing, well here’s a scene you don’t see every day.

“He’s forgotten about it, don’t worry.”

How can I not worry?

“It’s not funny Mbuzo. Your brother probably thinks I’m a kinky slut.”

He looks at me and pinches my cheek, smiling.

“Are you not kinky Kitten?”

That Kitten name.

“I’m not, you are.” I would have helped Jesus carry the cross, that’s how innocent I am.

“Do you want me to teach you how to be kinky?” His voice drops to the deepest, darkest pits of hell.

“I am not missing heaven because of you, Mbuzowakhe.”

This one will drag me to hell with him.

I’m in love with his light chuckle. He wraps his arms around me, pulling me into a hug.

“I’m so in love with you Cashile.”

This Cashile name is getting comfortable on his tongue.

“I’m sorry I was cold to you. Sometimes I don’t know how to handle stuff, especially when I’m overwhelmed. I should never take it out on you. I’m thankful my father lived long enough to teach us not to run when the tough gets going. I see how you worry about me, and my brothers.”

His brothers, not so much.

“I don’t know how not to worry about you.”

“And I appreciate you for that, we will be fine.”

He finishes.

I slightly pull away and look at him, his eyes are narrowed. He’s holding back so much emotion.

“I’m sorry that my father put your brother in jail, I really feel guilty.”

“Don’t, it’s not your fault. I think I have been lenient with your dad, it’s time I take what’s

mine by force." He says.

Lost girl alert!

"What do you mean?"

He pulls me back in his arms, his hand slides to my butt cheek. He leans in, I'm ready for a kiss.

"I want to tie you down, allow me to give you my surname." He whispers, pecking my lips a smidgeon.

I'm frozen, staring at his lips that are a centimetre from mine.

"I love you Cashile. I'm basically living for you and I honestly can't see a future without you. Let's get married with or without their blessings."

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BAKHE

An afternoon nap was not part of his plans today but the scorching sun drained the remaining strength he had. He arrives home to an empty house. There's food in the pot, MaNkosi probably cooked before she left.

He dishes up pap, and all three pieces of chicken and sits down to eat. When he's emptied his plate, he leaves it in the sink and goes to lie down on the couch.

The temperature is cooler in here, unlike in his room. Plus there's a fan. It doesn't take him long to fall into a deep slumber and immediately he sees himself standing outside his father's gate under a dark sky.

“Bhengu, Khuzwayo, Zazela. Khabalidaka.”

The voice reciting his clan names sounds familiar. He looks around, there's no one in sight.

“Madlala organethi onetha ngomkhemezelo,
Sishi, Gwegwana.”

The voice gets louder with each passing minute.

“Babomncane?” Bakhe has finally figured out
who it belongs to.

“My boy,” he’s standing behind him; Nkululeko.

Bakhe slowly turns and smiles, “I thought I
would never see you again.”

His uncle is wearing the suit he was buried in.

“I tried to stop him from entering my yard, but
they are powerful together.” Nkululeko says.

“Who?” Bakhe asks.

“I left his money under Mbali’s bed, take it and
burn it.” -Nkululeko.

That’s confusing, “You want me to burn money?
Did you find out that our ancestors are rich?”

“Don’t let Mbali use it. It’s covered in blood, burn

it.” Nkululeko keeps a stern face.

He’s suddenly holding a spear that he throws at Bakhe who’s staring in confusion.

“Fight.” Nkululeko says, firmly.

“Fight what Babomncane? It’s just us two here.”

His heart suddenly feels heavy, there’s a lump in his throat.

“Yilwa Sishi! Ilwa Nodlomo!” He’s shouting with urgency in his voice, eyebrows raised above wide eyes and rage on his face.

“Who must I fight, babomncane?”

Nkululeko points behind Bakhe. As the young man turns his head, he sees his parents naked, standing like statues in a museum.

He suddenly feels a hard slap on his thigh that pulls him out of his sleep. He rubs his eyes and sees his father standing before him, with hands on his hips.

“Why did you eat my chicken?” Bab’Madlala asks.

“Inkukhu? I didn’t chase it, it’s sleeping?” He’s stuck between a dream and reality hence the confusion.

He closes his eyes and just as he falls back into a deep sleep, Madlala smacks his head.

“Yeyi! Wake up, president of SASSA.”

Bakhe quickly sits up, showing signs of frustration.

“What is it baba?” He snaps, glaring up at him with blood shot eyes.

Madlala’s brow creases, “Why were you crying in your sleep? Are you gay?”

Urgh! If only he knew.

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[03/06, 15:43] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 28

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Bakhe left in a haste without saying where he was going. Too bad he's too old to be adopted, Bab'Madlala wouldn't miss a chance to get rid of him.

He's in his room, counting his money. It's his favourite hobby. So far the only thing he's lost is his sanity, and livestock. The money is still where he left it. If he plays his cards right, more money will come in.

He packs all the bundles in a black duffel bag, and notes down on paper the amount.

There's a knock at the door, "Baba."

She's in before he could tell her to enter.

His mood drops like the Canadian weather, it's not nice when people disturb your alone time with your money.

"I didn't say come in." He says coldly.

She's not fazed by his rudeness.

"Where are you taking it?"

Yep! It doesn't help zipping the bag, she knows what's in it.

"To bail Nonkosi out."

Argh! Such a good man.

"I don't get it. Why not drop the charges?"

"MaNkosi please, enough with the interrogation. I am your husband, not your prisoner." He hangs the duffel bag on his shoulder and heads towards the door. MaNkosi is trailing behind him, she refuses to be left in the dark again.

“You have started hiding things from me again, baba.” She’s nagging and Bab’Madlala finds that unattractive.

He stops and turns to her, “I am not hiding anything from you. I told you that I am going to bail Nonkosi out. Why won’t you believe me?”

Because he’s a liar.

“Because I know that everything you do, you do with a purpose. Are you planning on killing one of the boys? You know that’s impossible, their parents are probably fighting from the grave.”

“Oh MaNkosi. You forget so easily.” He laughs and continues on his way.

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CASHILE

The marriage conversation keeps replaying in my head. I couldn't get a word out. Still can't, I'm just so speechless. Marriage is a huge commitment, I'm not sure I trust myself to take care of our love. It won't be just about me, but us as a couple.

He held my hand when we got in the taxi and sat pressed by my side with his hand intertwined with mine until we got off.

Having said nothing about his suggestion must make him anxious.

He pushes the gate open and gestures I walk in first. I am not looking forward to seeing Mkhetheni the brick.

"Hey, where's the bike?"

It's always parked next to the truck. Not only is the bike not here, there's a for sale sign on the truck.

I turn to him with an inquisitive stare.

“Daddy?”

It's as if the term induces some sort erotic motion, his face is suddenly hard, his Adam's apple bops and his eyes narrow in anticipation. Or is it lust?

He doesn't give me a chance to ask him what's going on with the bike and car. But lunges at me, gripping my waist with his large hands and pulls me into him.

My breath escapes in a loud gasp, I'm wide eyed with questions flying around my head when his lips crash with mine in a spicy kiss that instantly weakens my knees.

My clit and I have come to an agreement that this is adult abuse because, what the hell? We are outside his parent's house.

When he pulls away, I'm fighting not to lose my life.

Mbuzo brushes his nose against mine, his lips

slightly parted.

“Don’t call me that,” is said in a breathless whisper.

Okay! I see what it does to him.

I step out of his arms, as wobbly as my knees are. I don’t want Mkhetheni’s dislike of me fuelled.

One of us has to be disciplined and stop this thing that’s going to get us into trouble with his ancestors. Can they see us though?

I know Mkhetheni can.

Who is to say he is not peeping out the window?

“I thought you like it when I call you Daddy.”

A head shake that answers zero of my questions.

He takes up a sigh after swiping a thumb over his bottom lip.

“Unless you want me to ruin you and break your knees.” He sounds so dark and sexy that it hits me swiftly just what he is referring to.

Sex with him is great, we’ve done it once and I am not happy.

I want more.

His stare is too heavy for me to keep the contest, so I move my eyes around and... ah yes.

“Where’s the bike? And why are you selling the truck?”

I’ve killed his semi-happy mood.

“I sold the bike, we’re hoping for a buyer for the car.”

This is my father’s fault. What more damage is he willing to cause this family?

I follow Mbuzo into the house. My heart jumps to my throat at the sight of Mkhetheni on the

couch. He's such an old man.

Should I tell him that people don't read newspapers anymore, except our grandparents?

He puts the paper on his crossed legs and sets his eyes on me.

Breathe girl!

He turns his eyes to Mbuzo, "How did it go with Mhlo?"

"He's stubborn," Mbuzo says, leading me to a couch.

I sit like the visitor I am and stare at the blank TV screen.

"I think we should sell the B&B." -Mkhotheni.

I feel Mbuzo tense beside me, he shifts to the edge of the couch, elbows on his thighs and hands joined together.

"It's the only thing we have left that our mother cherished." Mbuzo.

“It’s also our last option, our brother is in jail. We have to get him out.”

Should I intervene? I feel like I should.

“I can talk to my father and persuade him to drop the charges.” I’m looking at Mbuzo, not Lucifer’s reincarnate, but I can feel his eyes digging into my soul.

“This is a family matter, stay out of it.”

Ouch!

“Don’t talk to her like that.” Mbuzo snaps at his brother.

“What are you doing Mbuzo? Her father is responsible for every wrong thing happening to us.”

That’s true, Mkhetheni has every right to be upset.

“KaMadlala is not her father.”

“She is still a Madlala. These people are the

reason we don't have parents." –Mkhonethi says.

What the!

His declaration gives me the courage to look him right in the eyes.

"What do you mean?" I ask and he scoffs.

"What are you talking about?" Mbuzo asks.

Mkhotheni looks at me like I'm not supposed to be here, this is my cue to leave.

I'm not leaving though, I want to hear what my parents did.

"The day baba killed himself, he had a visit from Madlala."

"Yes, I remember." Mbuzo says.

"Don't you think it's strange that after the visit, baba lost his mind and shot himself then mah?"
Mkhotheni.

Oh my God!

I see Mbuzo nod then he's slowly sighing, "I have thought of the possibility. But what could he have said that made him unravel? Nonkosi was a strong man."

"Nonkosi lost his strength when he lost his businesses, he became a different man. And Madlala was always around, probably convincing him to take his life like he did with you."

It hurts to hear such things said about my father, and I can't even stand up for him. What I might say could solidify Mkhetheni's hatred for my family.

I'm utterly speechless.

"Anyway, after Mhlo's release I'm moving to the UK." Mkhetheni says.

"Sbani's mom?"

He nods, “She’ll sponsor my flight ticket.”

“But she’s married.” –Mbuzo.

This is where I excuse myself and this one is looking at me like I shouldn’t even exist.

“I’m thirsty, is it okay if I make use of your kitchen?” That’s me trying to be extremely polite otherwise Mkhetheni will ask what happened to my father’s kitchen.

Mbuzo cranes his neck to look at me and brushes my hand.

“You don’t have to ask, go ahead. This is going to be your home soon.”

Ehh! Cat’s out of the bag and makes Mkhetheni curious.

I look to Mbuzo, I haven’t even agreed to the marriage and he’s spreading the butter everywhere.

“I want to marry KaMadlala.” He’s so confident

in his speech.

“Okay, then what?” -Mkhotheni.

“What do you mean?”

“You are going to get married, then what? You don’t have anything, Mbuzo. Your bank account is empty, and by the looks of it, things will remain that way for a long time.”

He doesn’t even try to be pessimistic. I believe in light at the end of a tunnel, that’s how I survived jail.

“You don’t believe that things will change for us?” Mbuzo.

“Do I look like I have the strength to believe in anything? Our lives are never changing, we have been on this rollercoaster for years now. Our ancestors don’t care, they don’t even try to help us.” The rage in Mkhotheni’s voice rumbles like thunder. Mbuzo’s similar when he’s mad. Birds of the same feather

“So should I not want a family of my own because we don’t have spiritual guides? I want to marry KaMadlala.”

Seriously, if Mkhetheni was easy on the edges, I would be nipples deep in this conversation. But the way he keeps throwing daggers at me.

“Maybe you should find out if your ancestors are still around.” I say and that gets me the attention I didn’t want.

They are both staring.

“You mean isangoma?” That’s Mbuzo.

“Yes, it’s better than not knowing what’s happening.”

They both seem to be deep in thought. The way Mkhetheni’s jaw ticks, I won’t be surprised if he swears at me.

“Excuse us, KaMadlala.” Mkhetheni says.

I leave my ears behind and head to the kitchen

where I get a glass and pour water.

They'll think I'm focused on quenching a thirst that's not even there, when I'm actually listening in.

"What do you think?" I hear Mbuzo say.

"It's a good idea."

"But who will we consult to? It has to be someone we trust. We can't afford to waste money on someone who will lead us on."

Mbuzo's right, I'll ask Bakhe if he knows anyone.

"We can ask around." Mkhetheni says.

He doesn't look like the type that talks to other people that are not his brothers.

"If we are able to fix whatever is happening. You will cancel your overseas trip right? Sbani's mom is married bhuti, you can't..."

Here we go! The conversation I've been waiting for.

"This is an opportunity I can't pass. And you know she married the old white man for a permit."

Sbani's mom is my role model. Whoever she is.

"You don't love her bhuti."

The anger in Mbuzo's voice.

"Fuck that, you can't leave us. uMah noBaba left, now you want to leave as well,"

"I'm not going to the afterlife, Mbuzo. I will get a job then once I'm settled, you guys will follow."

What? No, he can't take Mbuzo.

"I don't want to go overseas, I'm not leaving my parent's home, and we owe it to our father to rebuild his legacy." Mbuzo says

"Dammit ndoda! Wake up! There's nothing to rebuild. We have been suffering for so long,

there's no hope for us here.”

“But we just agreed to see someone. Things will change. We will force it if we have to.”

I agree with Mbuzo, there's hope.

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It's been too long, Mkhetheni hasn't replied. I hear footsteps and keep myself busy by drinking a second glass of water.

“Cashile.”

I turn, he's leaning against the doorpost with arms across his chest.

He was in a lighter mood when we got here, now he's back to his stone-cold self. These men are carrying the world on their shoulders.

I walk up to him and stand in front of him. He exhales deeply, there's a deep urge to wrap him in my arms.

“Are you okay?” I ask.

He says nothing, his eyes are above my head.

I cup his face, “Mbuzo look at me.”

He looks up instead, I think he’s pushing back tears. I can’t tell.

“Please Nonkosi, please look at me.”

His eyes shift to me, he is holding so much back. There’s a flurry of emotions swirling in them.

“Let’s get married.” I say and peck his lips.

For a second, the corner of his mouth twitches. I think he was going for a smile.

“Why does it sound like you’re doing me a favour KaMadlala.”

“I’m not, I love you. I want to be your wife.” I have never been more sure of anything.

A loud sigh leaves his mouth, he circles his

arms around my waist but my body stiffens.

“Your brother...”

He shuts me up with a kiss, I’m trembling but I kiss him back and break it fast.

“Is this a good time to meet Lulu?” His eyes are shining with love.

“The timing is perfect Mr. Xaba.”

I know for sure Juba will not be happy about his daughter being raised by another man.

There’s a knock at the door. I don’t think Mkhetheni would answer it. Mbuzo tells me to stay put and heads to the door.

“Nonkosi, methlo madala.”

Shit! What is my father doing here?

I almost bump into Mkhetheni in the corridor as I rush to investigate. I presume he’s going to do

the same.

The smile on my father's face vanishes when he sees me. He is standing outside the door, carrying a duffel bag.

"You've really married yourself off Cashile. This is the third time I am finding you here. Are you not ashamed?"

I'm not going to answer and I'm not ashamed of being with the man I love.

I stand close to Mbuzo.

"What are you doing here?" Mbuzo asks him.

"I came to tell you that your brother will finally be free."

I don't believe dad, if anything, he came to boast. He's good at it.

"You could've called, baba. After what you did the other day..."

"Fusegi Cashile, yezwa? I am not a toy to play

with.”

Hau, this father!

He looks at Mbuzo and Mkhetheni.

“I’m going to pay for Nonkosi’s bail.” He says.

“Why not drop the charges baba?” My questions come too quick, not giving Mbuzo and Mkhetheni a chance to speak.

My father sighs exhaustedly, “Does your mother know that you are here playing Umakoti? Who said you must talk when men are talking?”

He’s pointing at me. I have the worst father in the world.

“We don’t want your money.” Mbuzo says.

Dad throws the bag on the floor and zips it open. It’s full of money.

I’ve exhausted my shock bundles.

He takes bundles of R200 notes, removes the

rubber band and starts throwing the money at them.

“Pick it up Nonkosi, you know you want to.”

Now this is one of the thousand ways to die. Mbuzo clenches his fists, his jaw is no different. While Mkhetheni remains calm, this type of calmness is the lethal kind.

“Take your money and leave Madlala.”

Mkhetheni grunts, breathing too fast. They will hurt my father if he doesn’t leave.

Bab’Madlala chuckles, “I’m your only saving grace Nonkosi. Your brother will rot in jail if I don’t step in. Don’t be shy, pick up the money.”

He throws more of it, I stand in front of them. My father’s jaw drops when I grab the bag and throw it on the grass.

“Cashile!” He barks.

I have had enough of this. I get on my knees

and start gathering the notes scattered all over the floor.

“Cashile!!!!” He roars once more, grabbing my hand and pulling me off the floor.

His eyes are red with anger, “Wenzani? Have you lost your mind.”

“Maybe, but I still have my humanity intact.” I yank him away and continue collecting the money, then I’m suddenly pulled off the ground like paper.

He backhands me and my body tumbles to the ground. I’m seeing white stars, but my vision is clear for me to see Mbuzo and Mkhetheni charging at him.

Oh God.

I hear a frightened “Yhiiii!!!!” from my father as he takes off running.

That’s it, we’re getting married and I will do

everything in my power to regain the Xaba dignity. So help me God!

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500+ comments... 15 shares...

[03/06, 15:43] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 29

CASHILE

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Running was absolutely not necessary. He trips and falls before he gets to the gate. It's hard to see my father in that position, no child wants to witness such.

Mkhetheni grabs him by the collar and pulls him up to his feet.

"Touch me, Nonkosi and I will sue you."

Sue? He's suing people now?

There's no response from Mkhetheni, But he's glaring, maybe he's killing him with silence.

Why can't baba be a normal father like other fathers? He's so unnecessary it's tiring for us his children.

"Let him go." Says Mbuzo, he's oddly calm. You'd swear they have exchanged personalities.

"Cashile, look at what they are doing to your father. Are you just going to stand there and do nothing?" His anger is directed towards me.

"There is nothing I can do for you baba. Why don't you tell us why you are here? Why are you so obsessed with the Xabas? What did they ever do to you?"

"Ini?" His eyes become shifty in a second, he hides them from me.

Mkhetheni eventually releases him, my father

staggers back but quickly regains his balance.

He fixes his shirt, it's so unlike him to be smartly dressed all the time. I'm used to the mechanic in jumpsuits.

"You haven't heard the last of me, Nonkosi. Your brother will never see the light of day. I swear on your father's grave."

Jeer! Why can't he keep his mouth shut? What's so hard about that?

"You're wrong baba, Mhlo will be out today because you are going to drop the charges." I say.

He squints his eyes at me, "Why would I do that?"

"I will denounce you if you don't."

Did that come out as a joke? He's dead with laughter.

"Funny girl, you are your mother's daughter."

The smile vanishes, “We’re going home now.”

“I’m not going anywhere with you,” I know my way home.

“Cashile...”

“No baba, you are a bully. With all due respect. You owe Mbuzo and his brothers an apology. Enough is enough. Drop the charges against Mhloniphe or you’re dead to me, I’m pretty sure Bakhe will have no problem following me. You and Mah will be left alone, with no children. You know how she feels about Khehla, she will resent you and you’ll end up alone and miserable.”

He’s affected, it’s all over his face. One person he can’t live without is his wife, this I know for sure.

The sigh he takes must mean something, he turns his gaze to Mbuzo and Mkhetheni.

“I will drop the charges, but don’t think I’m doing

this for you.” He says before grabbing his bag and walking out the gate.

Like I said, I have an unnecessary father. Mkhetheni does not look impressed, I know he’s tired of getting favors from people.

“He left his money.” I say.

It’s scattered all over the ground.

Mkhetheni goes back in the house, I’m thinking that’s him telling us he wants nothing to do with the money.

“What’s the plan?” I ask Mbuzo.

“We’ll burn it,” he says and saunters after his brother.

Are they leaving it up to me to burn it? I’m confused really.

I collect all the notes and head to the back of the house. There’s a braai stand, I have to start the fire from scratch.

My phone rings as I'm about to head inside for matches and gasoline.

It's my brother, this is his second call today.

"I feel blessed. What did I do to deserve so much love from you?"

He scoffs, "Where are you?"

"At Mbuzo's, is everything okay?" He sounds too serious.

"I had another dream. Uncle Nkulu came to me in a dream. Apparently someone gave him money, he told me to burn it because it has blood. I'm on my way to his house."

What he just said feels like a parable, I don't understand a single thing.

"Elaborate slima. I can't interpret dreams." I say.

"Honestly Dade, I don't know what that dream meant. He then gave me a spear."

“Umkhonto?”

“Yes, I was reluctant because why would he give me a spear? When I took it, he told me to fight. I asked him fight what because it was just us two. But he got so angry and said ‘ilwa! Then he pointed behind me. You won’t believe who I saw.”

“Your parents?” I don’t even know why I say this, his tone must have given me a clue.

Bakhe is not the type that takes everything to heart unless it’s family related.

“Yes, MaNkosi and Madlala standing naked like statues. I woke up traumatized, I haven’t been able to look MaNkosi in the eye.”

That’s creepy.

“Dreaming of naked people means shame will be brought upon them,” I say.

That’s what I’ve heard at least.

“I don’t care really. Your father is up to something and I’m going to find out what it is.” He says.

I want to find out with him.

“I believe you, ubaba is not the innocent man he was.”

“Can you meet me at aunt’s place? I want you to help me burn the money.”

Yeyi! Life is a mystery indeed. We’re dead-ass broke but we’re burning money.

I know on my side I can’t keep it, Mbuzo wants it burnt. I don’t want to break his trust in me.

Bakhe on the other hand has no choice, when the dead speak, you listen or a calamity will befall you.

But, “Don’t burn the money, I have plans for it.”

“Cashile no, you can’t.”

“Trust me please, of course I still love money.

But it's not what you think. Just trust me bhut' wami."

He heaves a sigh, "Fine. What's your plan?"

"Let's meet at home thirsty minutes before the family meeting. Bring the money with you."

"I don't know what you're playing at, but I hope it works." He says.

I have no clue either. I'm taking this money as well.

I leave it on the stand and head back inside.

Where did the brothers go?

"KaMadlala." I hear Mbuzo shout from his bedroom.

The door is slightly open, I enter and find him on the bed. He stretches his hand.

"Come sit with me," he says.

I jump on the bed and cuddle next to him.

“Are you happy about us getting married?” He’s brushing my head. My hair is growing, I need to cut it.

“It’s too soon but time does not matter really, as long as we love each other.” I say, he kisses my temple.

“I am aware, but who said marriage should have a time frame? We love each other, that’s all that matters.” He says.

How hard am I going to fall for this man?

“I just want you to know that Lulu’s father will never stop fighting for her.” I’m not trying to scare him, it’s a warning.

“I’m not trying to replace her father, it’s okay for her to have two dads. She deserves all the love in the world.”

I wish Juba can be this understanding.

I straddle him, his face lights up with a smile in his eyes. He holds on to my waist.

“What did I do to deserve a man like you?”

“There’s nothing special about me. I hope you’re not expecting perfection from me, KaMadlala.”

Yoh! What a way to kill the mood.

“Nobody is perfect, but we can have a relationship based on loyalty and honesty.”

I seem to make him frown with my declaration.

“I will never cheat on you if that’s your worry.”

Yes I am worried, has he seen himself? Women stare and drool when they see him. I don’t think Mbuzo is aware just how handsome he is. He falls under the standard of black beautiful men, the Will Smith and Morris Chestnut of this world.

Their father was gracious with his good genes.

“That better be true, I grew up chopping wood. I can chop other things too,” I grab his shaft and

see him grunt nervously.

“What are you doing?” He asks.

“Measuring it, just to see how many pieces I can chop.”

Although he laughs, I see he’s turned on. Let me get off him before a disaster happens.

He pins me on him when I attempt to move, his length is growing.

“I want to make love to you so bad.” He says softly, and I believe him. His eyes never lie.

“Not with your brother in the house. Plus we just buried my uncle two days ago.”

Mbuzo cuts in, “I know but I can taste you.”

He flips us over, so he’s the one on top. I fall on the mattress with a loud giggle. He’s in between my legs. He drags my pants down with him, exposing my nakedness.

I close my legs, “What if I scream!”

“Then make sure to scream my name.” His voice is dangerously low.

“Take it easy on me, I have a reputation to uphold.”

Mkhotheni will think I’m characterless.

Mbuzo winks, then licks my pancake.

My body shudders instantly.

Lord have mercy.

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BAKHE

The dream felt so real he couldn’t delay, so he came here as fast as he could. Mbali is in the kitchen, chopping onions.

He knocks once and walks in.

“Mfethu!”

“Mzala!” She finds him easier to talk to than Cashile. That one has a bitch face, she’s too serious.

“Where is aunt? How is she?” He opens the fridge hoping for something to nibble on but comes across a carrot, half onion and water.

He closes it and nods at her answer when she tells him that she’s in her room.

Bakhe leans against the wall, “Do you know anything about uncle receiving money from someone?”

“Yes, he told me that your dad lent him money to start a business.”

Bakhe’s chest tightens, he tries to stay positive.

“Did he start the business?” He asks.

“He registered one, I think he paid roughly R800. He also bought a truck, It was supposed to be delivered the day he passed away. Till today the

truck company hasn't gotten back to us." She stops chopping and faces him.

Bakhe puts his hands on his head, his eyes are bulging.

"What's wrong Mzala?"

Everything!

"I'm going to say hi to aunt then I'll head home."
He's put two and two together.

The concern on Mbali's face is not wiped away by the look of assurance on his.

"Aren't you staying for supper?"

"And risk you turning it into a worship session?
I'll pass." Bakhe.

"Hey, there's nothing wrong with worship. You should try it."

She's a Jesus freak this one.

Bakhe lifts his hands, "I don't want to patronize

God. It's better I stay away, He understands me you know." He's walking towards her room as he says this.

Mbali is back to her cooking that she doesn't see him enter her room.

Bakhe goes straight for the mattress, he almost loses his mind when he sees bundles and bundles of notes lain on the base.

So Nkululeko really spoke to him. It wasn't just a dream.

Now he's more confused than ever, he knows for a fact that he is not a prophet, or spiritually gifted.

What does all of this mean then?

He pulls out a black plastic bag from his pocket and stashes the money in it, every bit of it.

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CASHILE

Mbuzo parks a few houses from mine.

“I don’t want to go,” I whine.

Time away from him is torture.

“We will see each other everyday once we’re married.”

Mmmh! It doesn’t look like he will miss me too.

“Why aren’t you saying you’ll miss me too?”

“Hau KaMadlala! Is it not obvious? I miss you even when we’re together.”

Liar!

He catches my chin with his finger and brings me closer to him. His lips touch mine, then he kisses me.

I can’t get enough of his kisses.

“Ngiyakthanda yezwa?” He says, eyeing my lips like a predator.

“I love you too.”

I should go before we make a baby in the car,
I’m not ready for another one. Lulu is giving me gray hairs as it is.

He drives away once I’ve made it inside the gate.
My bag is safely tucked under my arm.

I told Bakhe to meet in my rondavel. Good the door is open, he’s sitting on the bed drinking a Castle lite.

“I hope you didn’t use that money to buy alcohol.”

“I have my own money.” Listen to him sounding like a rich snob.

I won’t ask where he gets the money.

“What’s your plan?”

At his question, I retrieve the money my father

left at Mbuzo's.

"And then?"

"Your father came to Mbuzo's place and threw this money at him, then told them to pick it up. He left it behind."

"So you think it's connected to the money baba gave babomncane?" He asks.

"It could be. There's something about it, something sinister. It drives dad insane..."

"And kills people." Bakhe adds.

That's what I fear the most.

"So what's the plan? We can't keep it if it's bad

" He says.

I let him in on the plan, not sure if it will work.

I'm hoping for the best though.

"Back to sender is not going to work, I think you have to use the money for it to take effect."

Bakhe says.

“If it doesn’t work, then we’ll never know the truth. But I doubt that’s how it works, maybe you have to accept the money for the curse to take effect. It’s not a matter of using it, or not. Whether babomncane used the money or not, he was doomed either way.”

I mean, one might give the money to a third person and not use a cent. Does the curse still affect them?

Probably.

Bakhe bites the corner of his lip, nodding while in deep thought.

“Let’s find out!”

We put the money in a bag to make it look professional. I head into the main house first. Lulu is on the kitchen floor playing with toys while mah is behind the stove.

She’s forever slaving in this kitchen.

“Mommy.” That’s Lulu jumping to her feet and running to me. I whisk her up and shower her face with kisses, causing her to giggle.

“Hello baby, did you miss me?” She blushes, hiding her head on my chest.

“She finished her food today.” Mah says. All is forgotten, we’re on speaking terms again.

“That’s great. How are you?” I ask.

She looks happy actually, must be because her husband is home.

“I can’t complain, we thank God that your father is recovered and home.”

Was he ever sick?

Lulu jumps off me and runs back to her toys, I take a sit, my eyes wandering around.

“Where is he?”

“In the sitting room with pastor Bhengu. The prayer session will start any minute now.”

Prayer session? Is this the family meeting she was talking about?

She cranes her head to look at me from head to toe.

“Wear something decent and cover your head before you greet.”

I don’t have a dress if that’s what she means. I make my way to the living room and walk in on my dad and the pastor laughing their heads off.

There’s a young woman sitting across them.

“Remember when Jesus cursed the empty fig tree because He was hungry?” Dad says.

“How petty was He?” The pastor adds and they both crack in laughter.

Christian humor is what’s making them laugh like mad men.

I greet, my father tells me to sit and introduces me to the pastor and his daughter. Khaya is her

name, her cheeks redden when I shake her hand.
A shy PK! Pastor's kid.

"Baba can we talk?" I want to ask about Mhlo"

His face goes sour, "Your boyfriend is on his
way home as we speak."

He means Mhlo. Well that's all I needed to know.

Bakhe should be running in, in 3. 2.1...

"Mami! Mami! We are rich, we are rich!" He's
exclaiming at the top of his voice.

The shock and curiosity in this room.

My father's face grows with anticipation. He
leaves his guests and rushes to the kitchen.

Of course, nothing passes me.

"What's going on?" He asks Bakhe who's
dancing in excitement.

The bag with money is in his hand.

"I won the jackpot on Hollywood bet." Bakhe

excitedly says.

“What? You won? Let me see.” Dad snatches the bag from him, kneels down with it and starts counting the money.

Bakhe looks at me, he’s fighting back a smile.

“My son is rich, he’s rich.”

“Bakhe, we agreed that you won’t say anything. Am I still getting my share?” I complain, to make this believable.

“Share for what? Ave nithanda imali KaMadlala. Let my son have his shine. I knew he’d make me proud one day.” He’s putting up a show for the visitors, that’s why he’s so loud.

My hands are getting sweaty, why hasn’t it worked? He’s still counting the money when it falls off his hands.

His eyes wander around the kitchen, horror evident in them.

I grab my baby from the floor.

“Awu thule Nkululeko! Shut up maan!” My father exclaims, pressing his hands on his ears.

Washa! Back to sender activated.

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[03/06, 15:43] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 30

MHLONIPHE

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Jail doesn't seem so bad from his perspective, yeah it smells but it's one hell of a holiday place

he wouldn't mind visiting.

The prison bars makes a racket, he looks up to see a guard.

"Are you sleeping? You are free to go Sboshwa."

Sboshwa is his mother! The thought crosses Mhlo's mind, but he doesn't let it out of his mouth.

He stands from the concrete floor, a smug look on his face and fixes his hands into the pockets of his jeans.

"What's amusing?"

The guard probably doesn't know that curiosity killed a cat.

"I had a great time, asbonge i-hospitality mhlonishwa." He's thanking the prison guard for his hospitality.

"I know your type, you will be back." –the guard.

Well, that sounds like good news to Mhlo. He

doesn't get to travel or sleep outside the house more often and when an opportunity is presented. He refrains from complaining.

He's whistling as he walks down the dim corridor, his song dies down when he gets to the front desk and sees Mbali.

An expression of annoyance plasters his face, and vanishes as Mbali opens her mouth to speak. He pretends like she's not there, collects his phone and wristwatch from the desk and walks out the station.

"Bhuti wait." Mbali runs behind him, her legs are too short compared to his. She's basically jogging while he's ambling.

"I didn't know you were being released today." Mbali says.

"That's because it's not your business." His tone is as dead as the night.

"I came to..."

Mhlo stops, “To try and convert me into Christianity? I am not interested.”

He was surprised when he got a visit from her the other day. Her explanation was that the Holy Spirit told her to visit him.

His mother was a full blown Christian, her life screamed Jesus very loudly. She tried to get her children into church but her efforts went in vain. The brothers found it hard to believe in the bible and to Mhlo’s ears, it sounded like a fantasy.

A new heaven, streets of gold and a God with magic powers?

What a beautiful dream!

He’s staring into her eyes, trying to intimidate her so she leaves.

“Your eyes...”

“What about my eyes?” He asks.

“I see darkness in them, your aura is just as

dark."

Gee! What a compliment.

Mhlo lifts an eyebrow, "That should scare you. Now run along and play with your dolls. I don't need saving."

"That's not my mission, I just want you to know that..."

Mhlo turns and continues on his way, Mbali doesn't give up though. "My uncle called you an orphan." She's fast walking behind him, unable to keep up.

"So what?"

"He was wrong, no one is an orphan in Christ Jesus. He's a father to the fatherless."

Mhlo doesn't reply but stops and looks at her with a blank stare. She's startled by his sudden pause that she bumps into his chest and kisses the ground with her ass, Mhlo remains standing

like a tree. He curves a brow, hands still in his pockets while looking down at her wincing in pain.

He's not going to lend a helping hand, is he?

Mbali picks herself up and her handbag, she comes face-to-face with this tree sized man.

"You just lost your husband didn't you?"

She looks at him with a shocked expression.

"Careful, people might start talking. Why is a widow running after an unmarried man? Do you fancy me, perhaps?"

She's hurt, he's such a bastard.

Her head lowers, tears fall from her eyes.

Mhlo bends over a little and takes a peek of her tear drenched face. He grabs her cheeks with his fingers when she looks away, forcing her to look at him.

"Are you crying little one?" He sounds

composed, but gives no shit about her feelings.

“You’re insensitive.” She says.

And that puts a smile on his face, he releases her cheeks and straightens his back.

“Go home, strangers are bad people.”

He quickly turns and continues towards the taxi rank without looking back.

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CASHILE

My mother pulls her husband to the bedroom when he struggles to stop himself from screaming. I commend the pastor and his daughter for minding their business.

“It’s confirmed,” I say to Bakhe.

He takes the baby from me and starts playing with her.

His whole demeanour has changed, he’s not the happy-go-lucky brother I know.

“Your father practices witchcraft.” He mumbles.

“Is it witchcraft? I think uthwele, it must be that since uncle died after receiving his money.”

“It’s the same thing Cashile. Now we have to tell MaNkosi, she can’t stay with an evil man.” Of course, we can’t let her stay with him.

What if he sacrifices her as well?

“But where will she go? This is her home, I don’t think she will leave him.”

Bakhe grows worried at my declaration. He sits Lulu on the kitchen counter and starts feeding her a banana.

“We will have to convince her, he will sacrifice

her one day.” He says.

“Do you think that’s where he’s been getting his money? Why hasn’t he upgraded the house, or bought cars?”

He shrugs, “Only he can answer that.”

“I can’t believe he’s our father, at least I’m getting married soon. I will leave this place.” I break the news.

He frowns, “So soon? What’s the rush?”

“Besides the fact that we love each other, your parents are against our relationship. Then there’s Sibiya who already paid lobola for me.”

“It’s too soon, you two only just met. You still have to get to know the guy, can’t you wait?”

I knew he’d have a problem with it.

“I have already said yes,” I tell him.

He looks disappointed in me, he will understand one day.

The pastor's daughter walks in, I can't help but wonder if she's always wearing a smile.

"My father is asking for water." She says, looking at me.

"Cold or..."

"Just tap water please."

There's a clean glass on the counter, but I wash it lest she has trust issues.

Where is MaNkosi? Her guests must be hungry. I don't think the meeting with the pastor will proceed.

"Bakhe please call Mah."

Why is he suddenly quiet? I freeze my task and turn to him, he's staring at Khaya.

Oh God! Brothers are so embarrassing.

"This is Khaya, pastor Bhengu's daughter." I

introduce, but the brother is still frozen.

I nudge him with my elbow, he blinks.

“Hi... I’m banana.”

Jesus please intervene!

Khaya giggles, I’m so annoyed by my brother.

“Nice to meet you banana.” She says, reaching out to shake his hand.

He takes her hand, it’s a firm shake.

“You’re nice Khaya.”

What the fuck?

He blinks and seems to collect himself, “I mean Khaya is a nice name.”

“Thank you,” Khaya says.

This handshake will last the whole year.

“No, thank you for holding on to me tight.”

–Bakhe.

Why is he nervous?

That's it! I break their handshake and hand Khaya the glass of water.

She's walking too slow for my liking, and this one is staring.

"Daddy, give me banana." Lulu taps his shoulder but noooo, Bakhe has forgotten the world exits. The only thing he sees is the pastor's daughter.

I smack his head once she's gone, "Dangerous territory that one. Don't even think about it."

"I'm not thinking about anything," he lies.

I'm about to call him a liar when Mah walks back in, carrying a bible.

"Let's go." She says, and goes to the living room.

Bakhe and I share a look.

"She's mad?" He mutters.

"We will talk to her when the guests have left." I

take my baby and wipe her mouth with a cloth.

Bakhe closes the money bag and puts it on the counter. We still have to burn it.

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I can't remember the last time I went to church. I was a little girl though and my mother would dress me up in princess dresses. I enjoyed it. Bakhe was different, I knew he was a lost course when he started bunking Sunday school and eventually stopped going to church.

"Please call the father of the house," pastor Bhengu says.

More like the wizard of Oz.

Under normal circumstances, Mah would ask Bakhe or me to call dad. But she does it herself, she hasn't looked at us.

Bakhe hasn't noticed because he's staring at

the gospel princess.

Mah comes back with her husband and helps him sit on the couch. His eyes are downcast, he looks like a sick puppy.

“Please start,” Mah says.

The pastor reads from Isaiah 44:22 “I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you.”

I would love it if he would explain the verse but he turns to my father and puts his hands on him.

Everyone shuts their eyes when he starts praying except for me and Bakhe. I don’t like engaging on things I don’t understand.

Why is the pastor here anyway? My father is an evil man, is this to deceive us?

“Thank you pastor, please pray for my children as well. They are very disobedient.” That’s my

mother.

“We don’t need prayer,” Bakhe says.

“We’re completely fine,” I add and my mother’s glare is not killing us fast enough.

“Never mind these heathens pastor, I want to thank you for taking time out to come and pray for me and my family. I’m hoping to see you Sunday at church, please don’t forget to mention me when you’re at the pulpit.” My father says.

The pastor is all smiles even when dad leaves to his bedroom.

My heart starts beating when he comes back with a bundle of R100 notes. Anger flashes on Bakhe’s face.

“This is R10 000, it’s not enough but just to say thank you.”

The pastor reaches out to take it but dad turns to Khaya, he's giving it to her with his left hand. Bakhe smacks his hand before Khaya could touch it.

"I'm sorry, but you don't need that." Bakhe says.

"We actually do my boy, the church is not doing well financially."

"Then pray about it Mfundisi, God will make it rain."

"Buhlebakhe." Mah snaps.

He ignores her, "Thank you for your time."

He's showing them the door, the pastor doesn't look happy about this. Khaya shoots my brother a death stare on her way out, he's not bothered. He shuts the door and turns to dad with a deadly glare.

"How many people have you killed?"

Here we go.

My father's face grows with confusion, "What are you talking about?"

"You were about to hand that innocent girl money, knowing that it will kill her." Bakhe says, fuming.

"Khehla have you gone mad? This is your father."

"Mah, I love you but please stay out of this."

Eish!

"You must be crazy if you think I will stand here and let you speak to your father like that."

Why am I not surprised?

"Do you know what he's into? Wabulala ubabomncane lomuntu. He killed uncle Nkulu." Bakhe has never raised his voice at our mother.

We hadn't discussed confronting dad, but there's no turning back now.

I look at him; our father. There is no remorse or

shock on his face.

“That’s a serious accusation son. Be careful what you say to me, I will not take it lightly.” Dad mumbles as if he’s afraid to speak.

“Are you going to deny that every person you give money to dies? My uncle died after he received money from you baba. We are not dumb, we see what you are doing. Wena baba uthwele, you have an animal that wants human blood in exchange of money. How many people have you killed? Who’s next? Me? My sister? Or mami?” –Bakhe.

MaNkosi does the unthinkable, for the first time in her life, she has slapped her son. I don’t think Bakhe felt it, he glares at her with a ticking jaw.

“That is enough, I am tired of you insulting your father. I am not in favour of whatever it is you two have planned. That money out there, where did you get it? What did you do to your father?”

She's blaming us for his condition.

"We are not capable of doing anything to him mami. We're the ones who should be concerned, your husband is a witch."

"Bakhe is right Mah. Where does baba get the money he has? He had livestock more than the chief." I say.

My mother looks more stressed than dad, he's sitting on the couch, looking around the room. I bet he's seeing uncle Nkulu again.

"Is it a crime for your father to have money?
Why are you against it?"

How is she so gullible?

"Listen to me you two, I want your father sane right now. You broke my husband, now fix him."

She's gone crazy.

"Oh my God, you know don't you?" Bakhe says, narrowing his eyes at her. I'm lost for a second.

“You know about baba’s shenanigans, you know that he sacrifices people for riches and you support it?” Bakhe continues and I get it now.

The look on my mother’s face says she knows.

“Mah?”

It’s not surprising really.

Her face crinkles up as she waves us away,
“You two are sick in the head. I will not allow you to destroy my home. Where do you get this nonsense from?”

She’s not in denial, she knows the truth.

“Mami look at him.” Bakhe points at dad who’s mumbling to himself.

At this point, I doubt he recognises his surroundings.

“It’s your fault, you did this to him. He was fine before you made him touch that evil money.”

She’s yelling.

“We didn’t make him touch anything, his greed did.” I dispute and get a scolding stare from her.

“That’s enough, it’s either you two apologize to your father or pack your things and leave my house.”

This can’t be my mother talking.

I look at Bakhe, he’s nodding. I don’t know if he approves of this or he just doesn’t care.

“I was planning on leaving anyway.” He says.

Where will he go?

My mother’s eyes widen, “Khehla, apologize to your father. You don’t have to leave.”

“I don’t have a father who’s a witch, I don’t know that man. And I am sorry he killed uncle Nkulu, I am sorry that there might be more people who died at his hand. I’m sorry that his blood runs in our veins and I’m sorry that you are married to him. I am sorry mami that your children are

leaving you.” I hear pain in his voice.

“Where will you go? I didn’t mean you should actually leave.” Mah says.

Tears pour down her face. I guess I have to leave as well, it’s not guaranteed that we are safe here.

“I’m leaving too, with Lulu.”

Mah looks defeated, she releases a shaky breath as she wipes away her tears.

“MaNkosi! MaNkosi there’s someone in here. Tell them to leave me alone.” My father shouts, looking around for probably my uncle.

It’s a scary thought, thinking that he could be in here. I don’t do well with ghosts.

He slowly turns to his left then screams in fright, “Ghost!” while falling off the couch and jerks back until he’s hiding under my mother’s skirt.

“Ghost! Help, help!” He keeps screaming.

“Let’s go,” Bakhe says to me and leads the way.

“khehla come back, don’t do this please.” Mah is wailing, she can’t move because dad has a strong grip on her leg.

“MaNkosi tell him to leave, tell Nkululeko to leave me alone.”

I can’t watch this anymore, I follow my brother.

MaNkosi follows us to the door, dad is crawling behind her, crying for help.

Bakhe stops at the door, “Congratulations mami. You have become motherless.”

I walk away first, I can’t take the broken look on her face and my father on the floor crying like a child.

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[03/06, 15:43] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 32

CASHILE

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I thought he would be somewhat sceptical about seeing a prophet, on the contrary, he's more open minded than I expected.

"Are you comfortable here?" I don't know what he means until he emphasizes by moving his eyes past my head.

Following his line of sight, I catch a glimpse of my aunt's house and Bakhe going into his designated rondavel. He must have used the

back gate.

“You two can stay at the B&B, it’s vacant.”

“Aunt is happy that we are here. I don’t want to break her spirit by abruptly leaving.”

I know they feel uncle Nkulu’s absence, having more people in the house lessens that feeling.

“Call me if you need anything, I’m always a call me back away.”

Hold up! Now I know he’s teasing me.

“When did I send you a call me back?” I ask and laugh, although my mind is preparing the comeback of all comebacks.

He smiles as he holds my waist, “Ngiyadlala mkami.”

Mkami my foot!

He better be joking, maybe I should start making use of my call me back messages. I mean they are there for a reason.

“Where is Lulu?”

“She went on a little walk with Mbali. Do you want the introduction today? On the streets?” I ask.

I simply have no idea how these things are done.

“We can do it some other time, there is no rush.” He exhales softly.

His hands are restless on my waist, he keeps moving them up and down basically fiddling with my skin and giving me tiny squeezes. I can tell that he wants to bring me into his arms.

I wrap my arms around him and hold on for a while.

“What happened now?” The question is whispered against my ear.

“Giving myself what I deserve,” I tell him.

It’s a win-win for us both, I know he loves holding me as much as I love being held by him.

These strong arms compare to no one, Mbuzo holds me like he never wants to let go. This man smells good, suspiciously good.

Does he spend money he doesn't have on expensive fragrances?

"Mhh! This feels so good. Holding you like this is a privilege I will never take for granted.
Uyathandwa KaMadlala, yezwa."

Butterflies throw the mother of all parties in my belly, and sends me on dangerous territory. The gone girl territory.

Mama, bamthathile Ucashile! Cashile has been taken by the Xabas, there's no turning back.

"I love you too but we can't stay like this.. My brother is home."

He escapes my arms as if I have turned into a snake. His cartoon eyes browse the yard.

"Cashile, why didn't you tell me?"

Now I'm Cashile. Yoh!

"He just arrived, and he doesn't bite. Relax, Nonkosi. His canine teeth are not that sharp." I tease, my jokes are not funny I guess.

But he's dimly smiling.

"You remind me of your father when you call me Nonkosi. I can just hear him 'Nonkosi bring your father to me if you want my daughter's hand in marriage."

Mbuzo mimics dad's voice.

That's so random and I know he means this jokingly but I can't find it in me to laugh.

My father is ruining my life.

I hold his hand, "I'm sorry that he's put you through so much."

He shakes his head, "Don't apologize for other people's mistakes. Otherwise you will never stop apologizing. Wanting to be a better person

is not hard, people choose to be bitter and mean.” He says.

That’s some lesson I will practise the next time I face my parents.

“What’s going to happen with lobola negotiations since you and your brother moved out?”

Oh that...

“I was thinking we skip the lobola and get married.” For the sake of our peace.

Did I say something wrong?

“We’re not going to abandon our culture, that’s not going to happen. I want you as my wife traditionally and legally.”

“But I left home Mbuzo...”

“You have uncles, your brother. What’s the point of getting married if we won’t follow tradition?”

He has a point but my point is bigger.

“I will talk to my brother then and ask him to relay the message. My parents are not going to be happy.” I point that out.

Mbuzo exhales, he’s going to age quickly if he allows stress to dominate him.

“I will talk to my uncles too.” He says.

Mbali is on her way back, carrying Lulu in her arms. That child bullied her into being carried.

Mbuzo sees them and suddenly looks nervous.

“Is that her?” He asks in a whisper.

“Yes, but you don’t have to meet her today.”

He looks at me, “I don’t want to disrespect your uncle’s house.”

Come on, we’re literally houses away from the house.

“I have something for you,” he says and opens

the passenger door.

A Mr. Price plastic bag.

“I thought of you when I saw this,” he holds it out and smiles when I retrieve it.

“Thank you,” I’m all smiles because this is my first gift from the man I love.

I take a peek inside, it’s a skirt I think.

He thought of me when he saw a skirt?

There must be another Cashile, not me. He deserves a brief hug for effort, he tried.

The hug is meant to be brief but the man holds on to me for life. He’s forgotten that my brother is inside.

Our hug is broken by loud altercation. Mbali and Mhlo are exchanging words. She’s visibly upset and Mhlo is impassive.

“Mbali!”

I can't believe her, people will start to talk.

"What's going on?" Mbuzo asks, frowning towards them.

His brother shrugs, puffing more smoke than I've ever seen. He's a chimney.

"Mbali is a widow, she shouldn't be seen anywhere near a man." I say.

Mbuzo looks at me apologetically, I'm thinking he's putting the blame on his brother.

God knows why Mbali is still talking to Mhlo.

"I have to take her inside, I'm sorry."

"It's okay, send me a call back when you're free." He's teasing me.

I don't have time to laugh. Mbali won't stop talking to Mhlo, and that stresses me out.

Call me a bad bitch for grabbing her hand and

lugging her inside the house.

“Sisi.”

“What are you doing with Mhloniphe?”

She puts Lulu on the floor where her toys are scattered.

“Can you believe him? I asked how he was doing and he told me to F off.”

“Babe, you cannot associate yourself with him or any other man for that matter. What will people say?”

She looks at me like I spoke pigdin.

“You’re a widow.” Do I have to spell it out to her?

A shrug, “So?”

Mameshan!

“Don’t act stupid Mbali, you know what our culture entails.”

This girl cannot be so blond.

She appears arrogance, folding her arms across her chest.

“That’s outdated, Jesus washed me...”

“Do not patronize me Mbali, I will call a meeting with the uncles before you can say Holy Ghost fire.”

This child did not just roll her eyes at me.

“That’s blasphemy.” She claps back.

“Blasphemy is the slap I will give you if you continue with your impudence. Kanti udelela kanje Mbali? You’re so disrespectful.”

A whole six years older than her, and I thought she was humble.

I’d report her to aunt but she doesn’t have the capacity to scold her.

Bakhe walks in, I was ready to go and report to him.

“What’s going on?” He looks between me and

Mbali, child is visibly on fire and it's not the Holy Ghost fire kind.

"Talk to your cousin. She was arguing with Mhlo and says there's nothing wrong with it. Just the other day she visited him in jail, I didn't think much to it but now she's taking it too far."

Well I didn't expect Bakhe to be upset.

"Don't bore me Mbali. My aunt is going through enough, behave yourself. I'm not going to repeat myself, yezwa?" Bakhe is firm in his scolding.

Mbali's expression is that of defence, "I'm not doing anything wrong mzala. I'm just trying to help him deal with his trauma of losing his parents."

That makes no sense whatsoever.

"He lost them 3 years ago. Are you sure you're trying to help or this is your way of dealing with your loss?" I ask.

“It doesn’t matter dade. Mbali stay away from Mhloniphe.” Bakhe says and by the sound of it, he’s not going to discuss this again.

I hope Mbali listens. The people in this community already have something to gossip about thanks to my father accusing my aunt of witchcraft. If Mbali does not behave, they will become outcast.

“I’m going to bath Lulu,” she takes her and walks out.

I hope she uses the time to cool down.

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“Why ungalali ekhaya mfethu?” I ask Bakhe who settles on the couch at the sound of my question.

It’s time he tells me why he doesn’t like to sleep at home.

“I’m a vampire.”

No, he’s an idiot.

I sit beside him with my gift, and rest my head on his shoulder.

“My handsome brother whom I love more than anything in the world.”

“Angifuni,” he’s joking right?

I haven’t asked him anything yet.

I face him, “Listen, I need you to talk to our uncles and tell them that I’m getting married.”

“Your groom is unemployed dade. Inhliziyo will lead you at the feet of rich people, begging for bread.”

I don’t like how he thinks sometimes.

“But also, inhliziyo ayiphakelwa. The heart wants what it wants. Besides, Mbuzo is doing side-hustles.” I say.

“And barely making ends-meet. Can’t you wait? How are you going to survive? Marriage is not a toy.”

You would think he’s been married before.

“I know, I once lived with a man for three years. We were not married but it felt like it. I love Mbuzo, of course it’s too soon and we recently found each other but I love him. I want to be his wife.”

A tear falls down my face, I don’t cry so easily.

Bakhe sighs, “I don’t know, something tells me that the timing is wrong.”

Of course he won’t understand my feelings, he’s the only one I’ve got and I need him by my side.

“Why are you crying?” He’s annoyed by my tears.

“I want to be Mbuzo’s wife.” Now I’m putting up a façade, I’m not that hurt because I know we are getting married, come hell or high waters.

“Sula lezonyembezi dade, they don’t suit you.
Fine, I will call them. Now wipe your tears.”
Does he have to be so snappy?

I grin, clearing my face of any wetness.

“What tears? My brother, I’m fine.”

I hug him but the fly I call a brother pushes me off him so hard that I fall on the couch, hip first.

“Ouch!”

Sudden worry cloaks his face, then he’s shaking his head with a small smile when I burst out laughing.

“You know your father will contest the negotiations? You have a tough battle ahead of you dade.”

Yeah, and that scares the shit out of me.

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THE MADLALAS

When Bab'Madlala said they should go back to the sangoma, she didn't think he meant soon.

They are back at the sangoma's house. It's now or never.

"Go in and sit on the floor." Khathala tells them then goes into the big house.

MaNkosi's mood has been sour since they left thier house, she is not for this decision to sacrifice her only daughter.

But Madlala's mind is free as a bird, he kicks off his shoes and walks in first. He makes space for MaNkosi when she enters but she sits a distance from him.

"Hau, and then? Are you angry or you're losing your beauty?"

Yeah, she's always been a beautiful woman. Her looks were the first thing he noticed when he first laid eyes on her.

"You know why I'm like this baba. I am not in favour of this. Cashile did nothing to us." Her poor baby, if feels like yesterday when she was suckling her breasts and peeing on herself.

"I thought I was the soft one in this situation-ship. Did you lose your spine outside the door, MaNkosi?"

"Why do you call it a situation-ship? We are married."

She would turn this world upside down defending her marriage.

"It's about to be a situation-ship if you don't stop with your cowardice. I find weak women very unattractive, you instantly become ugly in my eyes."

This one thinks he's Mr. Universe.

“Say whatever you want baba, what we are about to do is wrong.”

Bab’Madlala exhales, this is exhausting.

They hear singing coming from outside.

“Quick, sit closer. I don’t want Khathala to think we were arguing.” Bab’Madlala.

MaNkosi has no answer for him, she remains grounded on her place and hugs her handbag in her arms, her lips pursed in annoyance.

“You’re back,” says Khathala as he settles on the reed mat in front of them.

A chuckle from Bab’Madlala, “A happy client, a rich sangoma.”

The statement puts confusion on Khathala’s face, but yeah he’s a young man with a ring on his finger. Clearly he’s married and probably has kids to feed.

So yes, a happy client, a happy sangoma.

Kudos to Bab'Madlala.

"I thought we settled everything. How can I help you this time?" Khathala asks.

"I want to sacrifice my daughter for riches."

Bab'Madlala says with no hesitation that he leaves his wife shocked and fighting back tears.

Khathala looks at MaNkosi then back at the husband, "I know this is not your first time Madlala. Your hands are full of blood, you too MaNkosi. Where is the man who helped you three years ago?"

"It's been so long I don't remember where he stays. He came highly recommended by a friend." MaNkosi says.

"I know and you both travelled to Malawi to meet the witch doctor."

khathala is going around in circles and that's frustrating for Bab'Madlala.

“Can we get to the part where you agree to help us kill my daughter? I want to be able to use my money freely, I want to buy a house and cars. I want to be able to give my son money when he asks.” He goes on to state his needs.

Thankfully Khathala understands, however, he keeps looking at MaNkosi who looks displeased.

“Do you have a picture of her, or a piece of clothing? Even a strand of her will do.”
–Khathala.

Bab’Madlala looks at his wife, he remembers giving her Cashile’s picture.

“Hurry up Mfazi before Jesus comes back.”
Bab’Madlala says.

Wrong choice of words at the wrong place.

“Hayi, ngiyaxolisa dlozi.” That’s Khathala manifesting, his dlozi has come through and is not happy.

He jumps to his feet shouting, “Hayi, hayi,! Thokoza dlozi, baxolele. Forgive them, they don’t know anything.”

By now, Bab’Madlala is standing at the door. His eyes are all out and he’s ready to run at the first sign of danger.

“Phuman! Get out of here now!!!” Khathala shouts while clapping his hands to acknowledge his ancestor.

“MaNkosi get up, he will stomp on you.” Bab’Madlala snaps.

MaNkosi slowly stands, she’s clearly not afraid of Khathala and his angry ancestor.

Her spirit seems down but that doesn’t matter to Bab’Madlala. He snatches Cashile’s photo from her hand and throws it on the floor.

“Thokoza mkhulu.” He says before running out without looking back.

MaNkosi remains staring at Khathala who seems to slowly calm down after sniffing a pinch of snuff.

“Your husband is a stupid man. How dare he utters that name in here.” Khathala hisses in anger.

It was wrong of Bab’Madlala to say Jesus.

“Forgive him mkhulu,” she’s fiddling in her handbag as she says. Then comes out with a different photograph.

“My husband is a foolish man, he thinks I farted those children. Nothing must happen to my Cashile.”

She puts the picture down.

“This is my granddaughter, she’s still young. Four years old. No one will miss her if anything happens to her. I’m sure the ritual will work since she is my husband’s granddaughter.”

—MaNkosi.

“We-MaNkosi, have you fallen in love with isangoma seNkosi? Let’s go home, he’s not interested in you.” Bab’Madlala shouts from outside.

MaNkosi grabs Cashile’s photo and leaves Lulu before rushing out of the rondavel.

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[03/06, 15:43] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 31

CASHILE

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Aunt Hluphekile has welcomed us into her home. Mbali has been great as well, her hospitality is top notch. However, I feel bad for crowding their space.

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"My future husband."

I check the caller ID when he laughs, my Mbuzo does not randomly laugh.

"Hello, Nonkosi is that you?" I have to make sure it's him and not Mhlo, they do sound the same but Mhlo is bubblier than his brothers.

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“She looks like her father. You look like you didn’t get any sleep at all.” I quickly change the subject before I find myself taking a blast to the past.

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“Maybe, I’m going to see a prophet about it. I’ve made an appointment.”

Yeyi! This girl doesn’t waste time. I take a seat beside her, she seems nervous.

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“My church is hosting a conference, they’ll be pastors from different churches coming to preach. One of them is Prophet Alex Ndou.”

She says like I should know who he is.

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She retrieves a pamphlet from it and gives it to me.

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“You’re invited, it starts next week Friday. I want to book a one-on-one with Prophet Alex. It’s the only way to get more time with him.” She says.

Well, I’m not a church person.

“I’ll be there,” with Mbuzo.

“Do you pay for this one-on-one?” I ask.

“You buy a ticket at church. I can get you one if you like, it’s R200 per person. R500 a family.”

She says.

That’s a lot.

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"Yeah, please buy her a banana and lollipop."

She helps Lulu to her feet.

"Carry me," says Lulu, jumping up and down with her arms outstretched.

"No, I'll hold your hand. You need to stretch those tiny legs." Mbali says.

"Bye baby, see you later." I wave at Lulu, she doesn't care about me at the moment. They are going on a trip, that's all that matters to her right now.

My phone rings as they walk out.

“Hey daddy.” I sound too excited, don’t I?

He replies with a chuckle, “That is a dangerous word KaMadlala. Are you sure you want to play around with it?”

“Yes daddy, yes.” I’m going to enjoy playing with this word.

I don’t know what to make of his chuckle, he must be out of words.

“Are you there daddy?” I’m pretty sure he can sense the amusement in my tone.

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I get off the couch and run to the window, the red truck is parked across the road.

“I’m on my way.” I end the call and run out.

I’m not used to checking myself in the mirror

before meeting up with a man, in my head I look fine.

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Mbuzo is standing outside the car with Mhlo, their heads bowed and clouds of smoke hovering over them. Mbuzo is a casual smoker, I rarely see him puffing a cigarette. It's Mhlo I didn't know smokes.

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"I missed you so much Nonkosi."

He half-smiles, pressing his forehead on mine.

"Did you?" His hands are squeezing my butt.

"Yes," I peck his lips.

"I missed you more." He says and puts me down, I wasn't ready.

I love it when our bodies are touching, it's the best feeling in the world.

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His face completely transforms, "You know other men, KaMadlala?"

I can't help laughing, he's jealous of someone I

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"Calm down daddy. My cousin told me about him, he's a prophet. If your brothers are okay with it, Mbali can set a meeting with him."

THE MADLALAS

The taxi drops them at the gate, MaNkosi is the first to exit. She offloads her husband and holds his hand as they walk through the gate. He has bags under his eyes and walking like a pensioner.

"Don't walk fast baba." MaNkosi says.

"I'm not a calf, stop being overprotective. I am fine."

How ungrateful.

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"How are you feeling?"

"Ivukile ingagara, MaNkosi."

He says the boss is back in town.

"How much does that sangoma of yours want in total?" He was there when money was discussed.

Habe!

"R12 000."

Bab'Madlala is about to faint, "That man likes money. I saw it when we walked in that he's

going to rip us off.”

“How is he ripping us off when he helped you? He saved you from Nkululeko and strengthened you.” -MaNkosi.

Bab’Madlala rolls his eyes.

“Anyway, the kids took that money.” MaNkosi says.

“It’s good, it was cursed. I think it’s time we upgrade. It’s about time we change this place. Rebuild and fill the yard with cars.”

He’s such a big-big dreamer.

“We can’t do that, you will die baba. The rules are that if you buy houses and cars, the curse will fall on you.”

“I know MaNkosi. The rules also say I can live like a king if I sacrifice my seed.”

MaNkosi almost gets a heart attack from shock.

“Listen to me, before you speak. We have two

children, losing one won't be bad. It's not like they are good for anything anyway."

And he thinks he makes perfect sense.

"No, not my children. Do you hear yourself Alfred?"

The last time she called him by name was before Bakhe was born. Bab'Madlala should be standing on top of the bed, scolding her but he lets it rest.

"MaNkosi you are thinking with your heart. Remember when we couldn't afford to feed ourselves? We went to bed hungry, everything I touched turned to dust while bloody Nonkosi lived like a king with his sons."

"Was that his fault?"

"Don't tell me that wena. Nonkosi was a greedy man, I asked him to borrow me money so I can start a business and he gave me R100, and said he started his business with only R70. Imagine!"

That was cruel.

Bab'Madlala's heart races in rage when he thinks of him.

"Velaphi didn't owe you anything Baba."

Whose side is she on?

"He owed me his life. We were friends, opening shops in Kwanyuswa was my idea. He stole it from me." Bab'Madlala fumes.

MXM! Velaphi is right where he belongs.

"Kodwa baba, you're even fuming over something that happened before your children were born. Nurturing a grudge is not good, it will grow into a beast and eat you up one day. We have lost or children because of you and wanting to be greater than everyone."

Yep! She's not on his side.

"Okay. But there's no turning back now MaNkosi, we've started already. We might as well

continue.” He caresses her hand and leans in to kiss her lips.

These touches come once in a blue moon. Her cheeks resemble ripe tomatoes as Baba sinks his hand up her skirt and traces his fingers up her thighs. It’s not every day that she’s touched as if she’s fresher than Albany bread.

“Your skin is so warm, Khanyisile my dali.”

Argh Romeo!

“Baba, we are not children anymore. My BP will rise if you continue touching me like this.”

Then let it rise to the heavens. He sinks his face on her neck and pastes a wet kiss, MaNkosi shudders like she’s being struck by lightning.

“It’s ticklish.” She giggles.

“Imagine me tickling you in our mansion, on a king sized bed.” He says, planting more kisses.

MaNkosi is currently reliving her youth, her man

still has it in him to make her squirm like a young girl.

“Baba stop.”

“Okay,” he gets off the bed.

She sits up, and fixes her dress with a frown on her face.

Why did he stop?

“I’m just saying, if we sacrifice Cashile, we can flaunt our money without anything bad happening to us.”

But Cashile is his favourite.

“Why Cashile?” –MaNkosi.

“She’s the one who’s more likely to destroy us. If she marries Nonkosi and bears his children, it’s over for us. We should visit that sangoma of yours and offer him money in exchange for Cashile’s life.” He says.

Desperate times call for desperate measures.

MaNkosi's heart drops to her stomach, "Can't I sacrifice my womb instead? I don't want to lose my children."

He laughs, "It's no longer called a womb when it's been retired for over twenty years."

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500+ comments... 15 shares...CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 31

CASHILE

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We spoke briefly last night. It's crazy how much I miss him, I'm hoping for a moment with him today.

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“Listen to me, before you speak. We have two children, losing one won’t be bad. It’s not like

they are good for anything anyway.”

And he thinks he makes perfect sense.

“No, not my children. Do you hear yourself Alfred?”

The last time she called him by name was before Bakhe was born. Bab’Madlala should be standing on top of the bed, scolding her but he lets it rest.

“MaNkosi you are thinking with your heart. Remember when we couldn’t afford to feed ourselves? We went to bed hungry, everything I touched turned to dust while bloody Nonkosi lived like a king with his sons.”

“Was that his fault?”

“Don’t tell me that wena. Nonkosi was a greedy man, I asked him to borrow me money so I can start a business and he gave me R100, and said he started his business with only R70. Imagine!”

That was cruel.

Bab'Madlala's heart races in rage when he thinks of him.

"Velaphi didn't owe you anything Baba."

Whose side is she on?

"He owed me his life. We were friends, opening shops in Kwanyuswa was my idea. He stole it from me." Bab'Madlala fumes.

MXM! Velaphi is right where he belongs.

"Kodwa baba, you're even fuming over something that happened before your children were born. Nurturing a grudge is not good, it will grow into a beast and eat you up one day. We have lost or children because of you and wanting to be greater than everyone."

Yep! She's not on his side.

"Okay. But there's no turning back now MaNkosi, we've started already. We might as well

continue.” He caresses her hand and leans in to kiss her lips.

These touches come once in a blue moon. Her cheeks resemble ripe tomatoes as Baba sinks his hand up her skirt and traces his fingers up her thighs. It’s not every day that she’s touched as if she’s fresher than Albany bread.

“Your skin is so warm, Khanyisile my dali.”

Argh Romeo!

“Baba, we are not children anymore. My BP will rise if you continue touching me like this.”

Then let it rise to the heavens. He sinks his face on her neck and pastes a wet kiss, MaNkosi shudders like she’s being struck by lightning.

“It’s ticklish.” She giggles.

“Imagine me tickling you in our mansion, on a king sized bed.” He says, planting more kisses.

MaNkosi is currently reliving her youth, her man

still has it in him to make her squirm like a young girl.

“Baba stop.”

“Okay,” he gets off the bed.

She sits up, and fixes her dress with a frown on her face.

Why did he stop?

“I’m just saying, if we sacrifice Cashile, we can flaunt our money without anything bad happening to us.”

But Cashile is his favourite.

“Why Cashile?” –MaNkosi.

“She’s the one who’s more likely to destroy us. If she marries Nonkosi and bears his children, it’s over for us. We should visit that sangoma of yours and offer him money in exchange for Cashile’s life.” He says.

Desperate times call for desperate measures.

MaNkosi's heart drops to her stomach, "Can't I sacrifice my womb instead? I don't want to lose my children."

He laughs, "It's no longer called a womb when it's been retired for over twenty years."

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[03/06, 15:43] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 33

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Bab'Madlala wakes up with a song in his heart lately. Why not when things are finally going to look up?

"Why am I not smelling bacon, eggs, toast and

beans?" He says as he walks into the kitchen.

"That's a recipe for a heart attack baba." That's why she makes him porridge every morning, then tea and scones around 11am.

"Then give me my heart attack. I want to eat like a king today." He takes a seat. That smile on his face has been there for days on end, his cheeks must hurt by now.

"There's only eggs in the fridge." MaNkosi says.

She hasn't looked at him since their visit to the seer, her heart is not at rest. If this man can easily order his child's death without any reluctance. What more is he capable of?

"I will send one of the boys to the supermarket."

He leaves the kitchen whistling.

His mood dies when he sees Sibiya walking through the gate. The day just begun, yesis.

Who is tempting him now?

Bab'Madlala meets him halfway, his eyes narrowed under the blazing sun.

Sibiya greets him with a smile, "My daughter told me that you are healed. Congratulations."

"Ufunani Sibiya?"

That's harsh!

They were once the best of friends and exchanging daughters.

"Are you not going to invite me in?" –Sibiya.

"Not in my house."

"Why? I am your son in-law." Sibiya beams.

He can smile until kingdom come, Bab'Madlala will not return it.

"You promised me the chief's position and never delivered."

"And you promised me Cashile and never delivered. I am here for my wife, Madlala. Bring

her to me.” He tells him and goes to sit on a chair under the tree.

Moments like these need one to own a gun, pity Madlala doesn’t have one.

“Cashile is not here. I’m sure she is rolling on Nonkosi’s sheets. That’s where you will find her.”

Sibiya slowly stands because his back... well old bones aren’t that active, are they?

“You gave my wife to the Xabas?”

“I didn’t give her to anyone, she left on her own accord. Cashile no longer resides in these premises. Your case is with Nonkosi now, not me. Now leave my yard.”

Sibiya’s face crumples in disgust, “Don’t tell me stories Madlala. I want my wife back.”

“Or what?” Madlala spits.

He was Rocky Balboa in his youth days.

“Thought as much,” Bab’Madlala says when all Sibiya does is swallow his saliva.

“Don’t ever come to my house to threaten me, Sibiya. I have the power to make Cashile hate you. One slip of the tongue and the whole town will know that you were behind my daughter’s arrest.”

“You mean we were behind her arrest. Me, you and Velaphi. You tell Cashile what I did and I will tell your wife that it was your plan.” Sibiya defensively says.

“Uyabheda wena. I had nothing to do with it, you and Velaphi came to me and told me that my daughter was involved in crime and the only way to get her back was to get her arrested. You were that desperate to marry my baby. I was against the idea, Sibiya. Don’t you remember that?” Bab’Madlala is seething.

They knew Cashile would be stripped of

everything by the authorities and would have nowhere to go.

“Come on Madlala, the only thing you did was wash your hands. You didn’t try to stop us from reporting her.” –Sibiya.

It actually took over 12 months for authorities to get Cashile. Velaphi was no longer around to see the works of his hands.

Bab’Madlala lifts his hands in defence, “I’m still innocent. You are a sick old man who can’t find a wife on his own, so you go around buying young girls. As long you are still the chief, you will never have my baby.”

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MBUZO

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R1560.

That's how much he's managed to save up.
He's very far from his goal. One thing is certain,
Cashile's lobola is not going to be cheap. That's
if her father agrees to it.

He folds the notes, exhaling lightly and stashes
them back in the wardrobe.

There's a soft knock, Mhlo pushes the door
open and leans on the door post, arms folded.

"Hey, meeting in the living room."

Mbuzo lifts a brow, "What is it about?"

"I don't know yet, he's wearing his serious face."
Mhlo says.

He's talking about his twin brother.

"Which one?"- Mbuzo.

They laugh.

“So you’re really getting married, huh?”

“Getting married is not easy for a man like me. I have nothing ndoda, not even a single cow.”

Their father was rich in livestock, unfortunately, he had to sell them to put food on the table.

“Then take her by force, she’s yours anyway. Besides, you are not the type that asks for what belongs to you.”

Mhlo says.

“She belongs to her parents first. I can’t just take her by force, and do you think our ancestors will welcome her if we don’t do things by the book?” Mbuzo worries too much.

“What ancestors?” There’s bitterness in Mhlo’s voice.

He’s done believing in people who do not even bother to show themselves.

“Mkhotheni is waiting,” he says and walks away.

Mbuzo is left wondering if he should take Mhlo’s advice. He has no money, and no plan. Something’s gotta give here.

He makes his way to the living room. Mhlo was right, Mkhotheni is wearing one of his stern faces.

“What’s going on?” Mbuzo asks, sitting on the couch next to Mhloniphe. Someone is in the kitchen, unless the dishes and spoons are throwing a tea party. Mbuzo frowns at his brothers because as far as he knows, it’s just the three of them who stay here.

“Is Nompilo here?” He asks.

Mhlo slides down on the couch and puts his feet on the coffee table, Mkhotheni kicks them off but Mhlo puts them back on the table.

The twins are at it again, they will never stop until one of them gives up and lets the other win.

To get his answer, Mbuzo goes to the kitchen. His heart dances when he sees Cashile behind the sink.

He stands there, leaning on the doorpost and admires her in silence.

“If I’m dreaming, I don’t ever want to wake up.” He says.

Cashile turns, she’s startled at first then smiles at him. His smile is not wide but it’s there and beautiful. It could be that she’s wearing the skirt he bought her, or he’s just happy to see her.

“Hi.” She says, a bit timid.

“Wow!” Mbuzo manages to get that out. “Can I take a picture? I want this moment to last forever.”

He’s already clicking a few pictures before she

could get anything out. This is the first time he sees her shy side.

“You look beautiful KaMadlala.”

“My boyfriend thought this skirt would look good on me. I thought I should get a second opinion from my best friend.”

“Who’s your best friend?” He chuckles, gripping her waist and pulling her closer. The question and move makes her laugh.

“I’m looking at him. Do you think my boyfriend has taste?”

He pecks her lips, “I think you should marry your boyfriend. Not only can he spot a beautiful woman, but he’s got an eye for fashion.”

He’s not blowing his own horn but this skirt looks good on her, if he says so himself.

Cashile smiles as he leans in for a brief kiss, she rejects it by moving her head away. He

knows how she feels about public display of affection in the presence of his brothers.

"They are in the living room, they can't see us." He brushes his lips against hers and continues to whisper, "I will die if I don't kiss you right now."

She's gently locked in his arms, there's no escape. So she gives in to the slow kiss.

"Stop swallowing each other. We're growing old waiting for you, ndoda." That's definitely Mhlo's voice coming from the living room.

Mbuzo won't let go but Cashile is done here, "Can I go back to my cooking now? I only have a few hours to spare, Bakhe took Lulu to the mall."

"One last kiss, then I will let you go." He says.

She allows him to peck her lips, and that grants her the freedom she's seeking.

The loud twin is complaining, Mbuzo has no choice but to go back to the living room.

He looks at Mkhetheni and mouths a “thank you,” knowing he’s the one responsible for Cashile being here.

“We have to set a date for the lobola negotiations.” Mkhetheni touches the topic Mbuzo has been dreading.

Mhlo snorts, “We’re broke with no plan.”

“My suggestion still stand, we sell the B&B. I found a buyer who is willing to buy it for 40K.”
—Mkhetheni.

“That’s peanuts compared to how much it was.”

“I agree with Mbuzo. We might as well give it away for free.” Mhlo says.

“It’s better than nothing, otherwise the wedding won’t happen.”-Mkhetheni.

“The wedding won’t happen either way. We also need money for the wedding, not just lobola.” Mbuzo says.

This is a tough situation.

“I have a plan.” Mhlo says, deep in thought.

They look at him inquisitively.

“Let’s rob a bank.”

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CASHILE

I don’t mean to eavesdrop, and they tried to keep their voices down but I forced my ears to listen. They don’t have money for lobola.

I’ve always known this, that’s why I said we should do it without lobola but knowing Mbuzo

and how culture conscious he is, he won't allow it. I think a huge part has to do with him not wanting to owe my father anything.

I was shocked when Mkhetheni called me this morning and invited me to a family lunch. Mhlo fetched me with the truck and drove us to the mall where we bought a few essentials. Mbuzo was sleeping when I arrived, and because Mkhetheni was all over the house, I couldn't go to his room.

"The kitchen is yours KaMadlala." That's what Mkhetheni said.

So this guest has prepared rice, beef stew and several colours. It's a Sunday, so why not make Sunday Kos.

Bakhe will bring Lulu once they are done at the mall.

Anyway, I have a plan to get Mbuzo the money he needs. Nothing is stopping this wedding

from happening.

I remove my phone from the charger and unblock his original number. It's been days since I heard from him.

His phone rings and for a second I start having second thoughts.

"Cashile," he answers.

"I'll do it." I say.

"Do what?"

The same man that's been chasing after me is suddenly confused.

"The job Juba, I will do it."

He laughs, "Okay. What made you change your mind?"

"It doesn't matter. I will do this one job then I'm out." I tell him and hang up.

I will fix this Mbuzo, I promise.

“You got a job?”

Shit!

“Nothando? What are you doing here?”

I didn’t hear her coming.

“I walked through the door, it was open. So you got a job? I hope it’s in Joburg.” She rolls her eyes at me.

“What’s in Joburg?” Mhlo walks in, Mbuzo is behind him.

This is bad.

“Jada Pinkett Smith here got a job, I heard her talking to someone named Juba.” Nothando says.

Why did she come here anyway?

I’m afraid to look at Mbuzo but I feel his eyes on me, then my stupid eyes sell me out by turning to him.

The tight jaw, and fire blazing eyes. He's enraged.

Dammit!

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[03/06, 15:45] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 34

CASHILE

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My first time cooking for him and his brothers, and Nothando ruins it with her presence.

“Why are you here?” I have opted to ignore

Mbuzo and his stare down.

Why am I even intimidated by my boyfriend? I need balancing here.

“Why are you here?” Nothando answers my question with a question. “Mbuzo is my boyfriend.” She claims.

I look at the said boyfriend, he’s focused on frowning at me, instead of telling this woman where to get off.

“Nothando is your girlfriend?” I challenge his cold stare.

“She’s not.” Mhlo says, walking away.

I appreciate him for that but I want to hear it from the horse’s mouth.

Nothando puts her arms around his waist.

I will be driven to murder if I don’t breathe, I’m fuming even when he gently pushes her off him.

“I spoke to Nothando. She knows where I

stand.” He’s not saying what I want to hear. And this girl, she’s looking up at him stunned.

“Mbuzo you didn’t say we are breaking up. What about my sickness? Do you not see how much weight I have lost?”

Oh, I wish I was quick to cry like her. I’d win every argument.

“You are not a child MaSibiya. I cannot tell you the same thing over again, I expect you to understand the first time. What we had is over, I cannot be there for you during your last days.”

That’s more like it.

Boyfriend of the year goes to Mbuzo Xaba.

“Can I at least cook for you? I brought groceries.” Nothando says.

I’m really trying not to be offended here.

“Looks like you’re late, I’m done with the cooking.” I tell her.

“Can you even cook?” She sizzles.

That’s worse than swearing at me.

“Go home MaSibiya.” Mbuzo says, while I’m still gathering words to throw at Nothando.

She looks at him, completely astounded.

“You don’t mean that, do you? Mbuzo these are my last days. Are these the memories I’m going to take with me to death?”

I try not to laugh. Nonetheless, she would make it big in the comedy industry.

“You are not dying Nothando, no one is falling for that.” I sound like those mean high school girls. But I’m too annoyed to care, this girl chose the wrong people to brainwash.

“Can’t you see I’m losing weight? I have always been a thick girl, Mbuzo tell her.”

She is losing weight, but not enough for me to buy into her story.

“Show us proof then, where is the doctor’s report?” I say.

But start sweating pins and needles when Mbuzo turns his cold gaze to me.

Does he have to be intimidating?

“We need to talk,” he says.

He’s still upset about the Juba issue, I don’t know how I’m going to defend myself. I’m still entangled in my thoughts when he leaves the kitchen.

“Witch!” Nothando hisses at me.

I don’t like her tone and I won’t justify her insult with a response.

My mind is bewildered as she pulls a seat.

The devil crawled out from hell just to come and test me. I will not fall for it. The plan is to make it to heaven one day.

It seems like time has somewhere to be and it can't stay long. It's moving too fast.

Did I mention I have a spectator? Yes, she's watching me move around the kitchen and set the table. I know she's going to join us for lunch.

The brothers are in the backyard, there's a braai going on that has Mhlo's finger prints all over. That man does not subscribe to boredom, he is a vibe. His brothers would be bored without him.

Thanks to him, they have a substitute if my food disappoints.

"Are you done? I'm hungry?" Nothando says.

I didn't invite anyone, I didn't even take out a plate for her.

I take a variety of sauces to the dining table. When I go back to the kitchen, she has my phone in her hand.

"Why are you going through my phone?" I

snatch it.

“It was ringing.” She sounds defensive.

“I don’t care if it fell in water. Don’t ever touch my phone.”

Is she aware of the privacy she has invaded?

“Whatever.” She waltzes out.

Nxa!

There is a missed call from Bakhe, he also sent a WhatsApp message. A selfie of himself and Lulu. I know he forced my baby to smile.

We’re at church, don’t expect us soon. God before anything.

Nah! He meant to say Khaya before anything.

I know that boy did not go looking for Khaya.

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Mbuzo is the last one to join us at the lunch

table. I saved a seat for him but he chooses to sit next to Mkhetheni. His brothers keep looking at me.

It's not rocket science that they talked about Juba.

This is Nothando's fault, she couldn't keep her mouth shut.

"The food is okay. Not bad for an ex-convict."

The bitch invites an elephant in the room.

I don't have to look at the brothers to know they are staring at me, I keep my eyes on Nothando.

What a nuisance!

God, if you remove this woman from my life, I will preach the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Her eyes run from Mkhetheni and Mhloniphe, I can't stand the innocent look on her face.

"That is not your business, MaSibiya? Why are you still here anyway?"- Mbuzo.

“Thank you for asking, bafo. Who invited you, we-sisi?” That’s Mhloniphe.

My girl is not fazed by the questions, she’s on a mission and nothing will distract her.

“I just think everyone deserves to know that the woman you chose over me is a criminal. I’m talking card theft, heists, fraud.”

Judge Judy is naming my sins one by one.
Where did she even hear it from?

I am embarrassed, not ashamed. Everyone has an ugly past.

“Dade, I just want you to know that I aspire to be like you. I can be your Clyde free of charge.”
Mhlo says.

I smile at his reaction to this, “Thank you Mhlo, I will keep that in mind.”

And Mbuzo? He needs to loosen up, I’m kidding.

“Don’t encourage nonsense, Mhlo.” Mbuzo

chides, like I'm a child who can't tell that Mhlo is kidding.

Is he kidding though?

"Life is too short to be boring ndoda. Live on the edge, rob a bank if you have to." -Mhlo.

The pin drop silence, then the tension that can't be cut with a sharp knife. It mostly has to do with Mkhetheni. Why does he have to be a "dad?"

He's angry.

"I agree Wami. You shouldn't encourage such behaviour. It's so sad that we have to dine with a criminal." Nothando.

"Alright, it's time for you to leave." Mbuzo pulls her chair and grabs a hold of her arm, forcing her off the chair.

"Ouw! You're hurting me." She whines.

I mean I can hold my own, but I prefer not to entertain Nothando. If Mbuzo wants to fight my

battles then, I'm lucky.

"Mbuzo let her go."

Why is Mkhetheni ruining my fun? I'm enjoying the show.

Mbuzo stops, glancing at his brother with a frown.

"We are eating, don't be rude." –Mkhetheni.

Don't be rude? He's actually doing the opposite.

I'm starting to feel annoyed, I want Nothando gone.

"Speak for yourself twin, I'm done eating." Says Mhlo, leaving the chair.

He gives me a look of gratitude, "The food was nice. Thank you."

Then he leaves, right out the door.

I will never understand him, and this woman who just came back to her seat. Such

stubbornness cannot be legal. The government needs to hear about this.

I'm worried, Mkhetheni is staring... at me.

"Thank you for hosting us KaMadlala."

Awkward!

What do I say?

Thank you sir? He does look like a respectable sir?

Ah, there he goes, walking away.

It's me, Mbuzo and Nothando now. This one is eating, and trying to kill me with her glaring eyes.

I glance over at Mbuzo. His eyes are glued to me. I should be getting wet with how he's staring. Am I being seduced unknowingly?

Witchcraft in broad daylight.

He walks up to me, leans down to my neck. I

hold my breath.

“Let’s talk.” He says, taking my hand and dragging me back to the kitchen.

“Why are you talking to Juba?”

Right down to business.

“I heard you talking with your brothers. I want to help.”

Confusion lathers his face.

“Help with what?”

Hawu!

“Lobola.”

The confusion quickly transitions. Is this how he looks when mad?

God, what have I gotten myself into?

“Are you kidding me? You wanted to get money from your baby-daddy to help me with lobola?”

Firstly, saying “baby-daddy” doesn’t suit him. And lastly, I didn’t offer Juba my thigh and kidney.

“I wanted to help.”

“And when did I ever ask you for help, Cashile?”

This is the one time I hate my parents for naming me Cashile. Mbuzo makes it sound like a swear word when saying it.

“We are partners, I...”

“Yes we are partners, you were supposed to come to me first. What did you think was going to happen? I would let you pay your own dowry? What do you take me for Cashile?”

If he says Cashile one more time... I will forget that angry look on his face and... only God knows what I will do to him.

“You are struggling Mbuzo. I only wanted to help, I was going to do one job.”

Yoh, if he takes that frown deeper than it already is, his face will wrinkle forever.

God... the movement of his nostrils, the bouncing chest and... this man is livid.

“Do you hear yourself when you speak? Or you say the first thing your mind offers?” He’s too snappy and I don’t like it.

“Don’t talk to me like that, I am not a child.” I tell him, returning his stupid frown.

Now he looks confused.

“How can I not treat you like one when you insist on acting like a child?”

I am not going to answer him.

He heaves a sigh, and that seems to calm him down.

I think.

“Do you know how hard it is for a man to be unable to provide for his family? I wake up every

fuckin morning and walk out that door with hope that I will come home with something. Every door I knock on does not open. Men younger than me call me a boy because they have their lives figured out, they have the privilege to feed their families. I'm 32 years old Cashile and I have nothing to show for it, all I do is sweat under the sun for nothing, and dodge big cars."

I remember when Juba's brother hit him with a taxi while he was on his bike. I didn't like that.

"I'm sorry."

He shakes his head, not accepting my apology.

"You think I enjoy this? Is that why you want to embarrass me? Doesn't my dignity mean something to you?" He's looking at me with a pained expression.

I have never seen him so vulnerable.

"Mbuzo..." he steps back when I attempt to

touch him.

“What the hell are we doing if you’re going to strip me of my dignity and I have to pick it up from the floor all the time? Tell me Cashile?”

I don’t know what to say, so I drop my eyes. The look in his eyes breaks my heart.

He closes the gap between us, pinning me on the spot with his fiery gaze.

“I shouldn’t have called him. I won’t do it again, I swear.” I brush his cheek, he grabs my wrist, pulling my hand away but doesn’t let go of it.

“I’m not dating an insolent brat. You are a woman, protect my honour and dignity the same way I would protect yours. I am not saying don’t bring anything to the table. I just won’t tolerate you turning to other men for help, not even my brothers. I am your man. Do not assume I am weak when I have run out of options. Respect me, Cashile. I will not tolerate

nonsense.”

He speaks so calmly and yet with so much conviction and authority.

It feels like he’s yelling at me when in actual fact, he’s softly spoken.

I have run out of apologies, I will just wait for him to calm down and apologize later.

Just when I feel like crap, he gently grabs the back of my neck and leans in to my ear. But then I hear footsteps, someone just walked in but Mbuzo doesn’t let go.

“I want you in my room in 4 minutes. Take off your clothes and wait for me, you are not allowed to sit.” There’s something erotic about his tone.

I whimper pathetically and cross my legs together.

TF!

“Did you hear me?” He asks.

My clit goes against my mind and says ‘yes daddy.’

I nod.

He takes one step back, observing me blankly. I see something flashing in his eyes... lust. It's as if he sees right through me and knows that I'm turned on by his little command.

“Four minutes.” He says when I don't make an effort to move.

Why are my knees forcing me to kneel for this man? Is it the command in his eyes?

He leaves the room, walking without looking back.

“What's going on? What did he say?”

Oh, she's the one who walked in? That's jealousy I see in her eyes, if I'm not mistaken.

“Go home Nothando.” I tell her and take my leave.

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Mbuzo is not in the bedroom.

Thought as much.

I can still see the command in his eyes and that forces me to strip naked and sit on the bed waiting.

No, he said I should get on my knees right? Or stand?

Sheesh! My mind has a problem storing data sometimes.

I’m throbbing between my legs when I think back to how he told me to wait for him, naked.

I’m sure he won’t catch me if I touch myself. This wait is torture, it’s been more than five minutes.

I lie on the bed with my legs open and close my eyes. My vagina feels like a volcano against my skin, a leaking Volcano.

I close my eyes and pretend that it's him touching me, but my thoughts are constantly disturbed by thoughts of where he could be.

My first moan comes out when I rub my twitching clit, it needs servicing or else I will die.

I play with it, rubbing it with my middle finger. It takes me a while to start feeling something, but I'm not getting the tore curling feeling I yearn for.

I need him inside me now.

To feel his presence, I take his photograph from the dressing table and put it on a pillow beside me.

He's wearing a tuxedo in this picture, the background looks luxurious. I'm in love with the smile on his face, he looks at peace.

Touching myself while looking at his face heightens every sexual feeling running through my body.

I squirm and whimper on the mattress, my other hand twisting my nipples.

“Mbuzo.” His name leaves my mouth after a moan as I push a finger inside my wet vaginal walls.

“Yes?”

Fuck!

Here's here.

I pull my finger out at a speed of light and jump off the bed. I never hear this man coming...

Bloody Casper the ghost.

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[03/06, 15:45] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 35

BAKHE

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About five hours ago, he was twisting and turning in his sleep. Nkululeko had come to him again.

“I can’t find my brother.” Nkulu said.

Bakhe found it odd, he couldn’t help but wonder if Nkulu was wandering the earth as a lost soul.

Why the dead seeks the living?

“What do you mean, babomncane?” Bakhe curiously asked.

“He’s hidden from me, I can’t see him,” said Nkululeko.

He really wasn't making sense.

"Why haven't you crossed over? Why did you leave us if you will stick around and bother me?"

"My heart is heavy, I can't cross over without avenging my death."

Nkululeko's reply terrified him. Sure it was a dream, however it felt too real.

"Why come to me then? Do I have a gift?" Bakhe asked.

"I chose you to help fight my brother."

The reply wasn't the answer Bakhe was looking for.

He woke up sweating and more confused than ever.

The decision to go looking for Khaya was made the night before. Finding Pastor Bhengu's

church wasn't that hard and spotting Khaya was a piece of cake.

He caught sight of her the minute he walked through the door, she was on stage singing a worship song. Since then, she's been walking up and down the building.

Church is almost over, he takes Lulu and goes looking for Khaya.

He finds her outside sitting under a shade with a group of kids, one of them is reading a verse from the bible.

"Look Lulu, your age mates can read."

Oops! That gets him her attention. All eyes are on him.

Khaya stands to meet his height. The look on her face says she remembers him.

"You?" Khaya says, looking disgusted.

Bakhe has decided that he will not apologise for

what happened at his father's house.

He looks at Lulu, "Lulu sthandwa sami, say hi to your other mama."

Lulu frantically shakes her head, "No daddy, not mama."

Her little protest makes Khaya giggle.

"She's cute, is she yours?" Her smile doesn't waver.

"She's my niece."

This is an eyebrow raising moment, "And she calls you daddy?"

"Yes, and I will forever be grateful to her for giving me a chance to be a father." Bakhe says.

"Why are you here? You don't look like the type that would give God a second look." She says.

"Judging a book by its cover huh? And I don't know what you mean. I have no tattoos, my hair is cleanly cut. I'm dressed well and smell good.

And I'm a father." He points at Lulu with his head.

His charm is working in his favour, Khaya is all smiles and rosy cheeks.

"My name is Buhlebakhe, but you can call me Buhlebami."

"Why are you here, BuhleBakhe?"

Her stubbornness has him laughing.

"To ask you out on a date." He's very blunt.

Khaya folds her arms, "We share a surname."

This is shocking, "Really? You're a Madlala too?"

It would be sad.

"No, I'm a Bhengu. We're from the same clan." She says.

That's disappointing.

"I guess I should look at my family history and pray our ancestors are not related." Bakhe says.

“You know that’s not how it works.” Khaya says.
“If there’s nothing more, I have a class. Excuse us please.”

He doesn’t want to leave, “My uncle recently passed on and I have been seeing him in my dreams. I need deliverance, an exorcist maybe.”

“We don’t do deliverances here.” - Khaya.

Bakhe raises his brows, “You don’t pray for people?”

He takes a seat with Lulu when she doesn’t give him an answer.

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CASHILE

He's standing in front of the closed door, hands on his back and staring at me with his deep set eyes.

"When did you get here?"

"I didn't say touch yourself." He says.

Fuck that! I have never craved for anything in my life than to have him on top of me, having his way with me.

"Maybe it's time I draw up a contract, time we agree on dos and don'ts." He says.

Why is he still dressed is what I want to ask.

"I have to sign a contract for my body? It's my body, I have had it since I was born." I tell Mbuzo.

He walks to a chair by the window and sits with his legs crossed, his eyes fixed on me. I don't shy away so easily but this man makes me shy to the bone.

I drop my head, biting my lower lip to push away the nerves.

I can hear him tap his fingers on the armrest of the chair,

“Come.” He says.

His voice is a remote, it controls me. I take slow steps closer, so close I can smell the sandalwood of his perfume.

I can’t stop moving, I’m so horny.

“Stand still.” He orders.

My body freezes.

“Look at me.”

Slowly, I move my eyes from his feet, past his veiny hands, until I meet his intensive stare.

“Your eyes are only meant for me.” He says.

A soft shiver springs up my spine.

“How do you feel about strong language during

intimacy?"

"You mean b!tch?" I ask him.

Did I upset him with my question? Seems I did.

"I would never call you that." That's him.

That's a relief.

"I'm okay with cuss words," I know how to be kinky.

I spot a tiny smile on his face, "You love being a good girl for me, don't you?"

Did he really say it like that? Someone call an ambulance, I think he just got me pregnant.

"I can be your bad girl if you want me to."

Because I'm down for anything.

He lightly laughs at my declaration, I'm leaking between my legs.

Mbuzo stands in front of me and bends his

neck so that he could meet my lips. He brings his hands up, resting them on the curve of my hips.

“My hands are burning to touch you.” His voice is the sweetest whisper I’ve ever heard.

“Touch me... please.” I plead.

Our lips meet, and our mouths open as if unlocking.

His hands reach from my hips to my breasts, all the way to my back. He pauses, drawing me into him.

I’m gasping for air when he breaks the kiss.

What he does next is unexpected. He uses one of his arms to lift me up, then puts me on the carpet and pins me down to the floor.

He kisses me with passion, then shifts his lips to my neck then my ear. I think he just found my

sensitive parts. I wiggle my toes, trying hard not to giggle.

Mbuzo kisses every spot on my body, licking where he could. From my neck down to the area between my thighs.

I don't believe I have ever been this wet in my life, I'm literally gushing. The stove is on 6.

His tongue worships my p#ssy, I start to think he's never going to stop, and in all this, lose the number of times I cum on his face. But he keeps going that I start to push his head away. It's too much.

"I can't cum anymore." I tell him when his eyes slowly rise to my face.

I don't know what the smirk is for.

"We just getting started Kitten." That tone is meant to kill me.

He removes his clothes faster than lightning

and sits me up with my back leaning on the bed.

“Open wider.” He spreads my legs, while stroking himself.

My focus is on how hard he is.

He rubs my wetness with his hand, and gives it a few slaps. My clit likes it, and my moans put a dark smile on his face.

I take all of him in as he plunges deeper into my walls. I can feel them tighten around his length, and I can feel it growing inside me.

He moans, like he’s enjoying me. His face doesn’t lie, eyes closed and jaw clenched.

I end up laying on my back and taking every rough f#ck.

“Don’t cum.”

How did he know he hit my g-spot?

“I can’t keep it in.”

Mbuzo pulls out and gets behind me, he lifts my leg, then plunges roughly into my walls, taking the pace higher and pounding faster and deeper. I love every minute of it, but I need to cum.

My moans become louder, I'm shaking and crying like a brat.

"Please... let me cum"

Bathong!

I said please, not faster or deeper.

"I'm coming." I shout, he covers my mouth and goes faster than he was.

I'm going to let it out.

Ngeke phela!

"Not yet." He says.

My tears are fuelled, he's behind me and can hear me sobbing from pain and pleasure.

Hai!

I have the right to cum and every orgasm I get will not be used against me by this man because why is he being cruel?

And like he hears my thoughts, he says, "Go ahead. Make daddy proud."

I let loose and release.

Mbuzo covers my mouth, otherwise I would be screaming.

I'm done, he can stop now. He's not stopping, in fact, he grabs my hips and makes me kneel on my hands and knees.

He's in before I can breathe, pumping and pumping.

I count my second orgasm, then the third one minutes later.

I'm tired, it's been too long.

Fuck, the 4th orgasms has me screaming.

I have heard of overstimulation and wanted to experience it once. I change my mind.

This is punishment, I should have known.

I can't breathe. This is a perfect example that good and bad should never mix. Pleasure and pain should declare war against each other.

Mbuzo hasn't cum yet, I know he won't stop until he gets his high.

"Please cum." I plead, dragging my nails on the carpet.

I should get a spanking for bucking my hips to give him more access, it makes him think I want more.

"Please cum... please... I can't... I can't breathe." My voice is losing me, or I'm losing my voice.

Dammit! There's a loss in between.

I think I see all my family members who died before I was born, or it's little stars caused by

my body shaking too much?

Finally, Mbuzo gets his orgasm.

My body falls to the ground, chest first. My ass is still up in the air because this one hasn't pulled out yet.

His strokes have slowed down, he removes it then pushes it back in.

I feel like throwing a party when he finally pulls it all out.

I'm a shuddering mess.

"My little masochist," he says, cupping my breasts from behind while kissing my neck. His sweaty chest is pressed on my back.

"I think you broke my bones." I say, out of breath.

I'm shivering when he frees me, releasing short breaths like gasps.

I didn't realize the power this man has over me

until now, he took me to the deepest parts of hell with him and dear God, I loved the ride.

I'm laying on the floor with my back on him, and he's holding me from the back and breathing behind my neck. My skin is covered with goosepumps.

"What do we say?" He mumbles, biting my shoulder while twisting my nipples.

"Thank you Daddy."

For almost killing me.

I'm too black for this shit.

Mbuzo grabs my cheeks, making me face him and kisses me open mouthed, tongue and all. Then smiles while his face is inches from mine. God he's so beautiful.

"I have been waiting for you all my life." He whispers and pecks my lips.

“Wenzani manje?” I ask what he’s doing when he lifts my leg and taps the tip of his shaft on my opening.

Wait! Why is it moving towards my anu\$? My body tenses, I have an anu\$ of a chicken, but mine can’t lay an egg. It’s tiny.

He rubs my over sensitive clit using his thumb, I’m easily distracted, my head falling on his chest.

“Loosen up, you’re going to love it.” He says, teasing my back hole.

Whoever told him this, needs to be arrested, I am not that kinky.

My hearts is racing as he presses his tip, the pressure of him pushing it in makes me sweat in all the wrong places.

My stomach starts boiling. I do a tsipa, pressing my butt cheeks together. It’s a bad idea because I’m trapping his shaft between my

buns. I loosen my butt cheeks to set him free.

Bhuuu!!!

Did I set something else free?

There's complete silence. Oh my God, please tell me I did not just fart... that it was my imagination.

I can see him from the corner of my eye, he's frozen.

I slowly get up from the floor, sink under the covers on the bed, and cover my head. It would be nice if I wake up next year.

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[03/06, 15:45] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 36

CASHILE

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“How long are you going to hide under there?”

I will not make use of my voice. As far as he knows, Cashile Madlala does not exist.

“It was a joke my love, I wasn’t going to put it in.”

There’s nothing amusing about the embarrassment I have just been subjected to.

“Don’t joke like that then, I wasn’t having fun.” I tell him.

“I’m sorry. Ngiyaxolisa KaMadlala.”

Rhaaa!

The bed moves under me, then I feel him slipping his giant body behind me and tangles

me in his arms. This is one thing I will never complain about.

Whenever I'm with him, he makes me feel like I'm the only person in the world.

"Why are you shying away from me?" He's breathing behind my neck, his hands are fiddling with my stomach.

He kisses the curve of my neck, "Mhhh? Do I make you shy?"

That Mmh sounds like the engine of a tractor, the deep sound weakens my limbs.

"No." I really don't want to talk about what happened. I hope it's loud and clear in my voice.

Kisses are planted all over my face, he puts a hand between my thighs and lifts the one on top, then puts it over his leg. I feel him coming in the hole God permitted, the feeling causes me to moan.

He's breathing in my ear.

"I love you," he whispers, sliding further in. His lips make their way to my shoulder, then my neck.

"I love that you are yourself with me and I can be free around you." He nibbles my earlobe, making me shiver in his strong hold.

"I love you too." I say.

I love him with every cell in my body and I cannot wait for us to be a family. He's going to be an amazing husband and a great father, no one can convince me otherwise.

My mind has packed up and gone on vacation, but my soul and body remain with him, enjoying every piece of him. I feel him in every slow thrust, his soft groans and his hands mapping my body.

I feel his heart. I'm guessing this is love making. We've never done it this slow before.

His groans are getting louder, his thrusts aggressive.

“I love you, KaMadlala.”

Yep! It’s confirmed. He called me by my name, so we are making love.

I tell him that I love him more, we cum together this time, panting and stuck together like glue.

After a while he whispers, “You are going to have my babies.”

Then it dawns on me, “Why do we never use protection?”

I know what my answer is, I won’t even mention it lest I’m labelled careless by the God who sees and hears all.

“Do you want us to start using protection?”

Of course I do.

“I feel like we should, I don’t want to fall pregnant so soon.”

“But I want you to have my children. Plus, it’s late to start compromising. We’re already baking a bun in the oven.” He kisses my back and squeezes my breasts.

I won’t even jump and accuse him of wanting to get me pregnant. I’m a woman, old enough to know what happens when a couple doesn’t use protection.

“I’m not ready for another baby,” there’s no reason for me to lie to him.

He sighs, I sense disappointment in it.

“We’ll get you a pill then.” His voice is down.

Well...

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MBUZO

Exhausted from the sex marathon, they end up falling asleep. Mbuzo is woken up by a soft knock on the door. His eyes find Cashile who's wrapped up in his arms, then out the window. It's getting dark out, meaning they have been sleeping for too long.

The knock pleads for his attention, he grumbles as he gets off the bed, puts on a pair of boxers and answers the door, opening it barely just a crack.

"Ndoda, meeting." It's Mhlo, whispering as if he will wake a sleeping baby with a hearing of a dog.

"Again! What is it about this time?" Mbuzo asks. He wants an answer, but doesn't wait for it. Instead, he shuts the door on Mhlo's face and hits the shower.

He throws on a pair of sweat-shorts, pairing

them with a random tank top and sandals.

The living room is empty, but there's a bonfire outside. He makes his way there and finds his brothers in the presence of Bakhe and Lulu sitting on his lap.

It makes him feel uncomfortable because in his head, Bakhe arrived while he was pumping his sister.

Mbuzo's awkwardness begins to show on his body posture, it also has everything to do with how these men are looking at him.

“Nangiqqolozela yini?” He sounds annoyed.

Mhlo is the only one brave enough to release a soft chuckle, “You look like a retired p0rn star.”

Mbuzo shows him the middle finger, “I’m surprised you know what a p0rn star looks like.”

He sits down beside Mkhetheni and greets

Bakhe with just a headshake.

“Why are we holding another meeting?” Mbuzo asks, diverting his gaze towards Bakhe’s direction. Their meetings never include outsiders.

A sigh comes from Mkhetheni, he shifts to the edge of the seat, joining his hands together.

“I have cancelled my trip to Europe. We are going to rebuild our father’s legacy.”

That’s good news, and a relief to Mbuzo.

“But, we are going to need money to do that.”
—Mkhetheni adds.

“So the plan is on.” Mhlo says, causing confusion.

“The plan?” —Mbuzo.

Before answering his question, Mhlo looks over at the open sliding door and goes to close it.

“Nothando is still around, we have to keep our

voices down.” Mhloniphe says.

Keeping his voice down is the last thing Mbuzo is worried about.

Why is Nothando still here?

Mhlo sits closer, “Robbing a bank is too risky. Robbing cars with money sounds better.”

“Heists?” That’s Mbuzo, he sounds shocked alright.

“We will do it this one time. I know someone from the inside, once he gives us a go ahead, we roll.” –Mhloniphe.

That also sounds risky.

“Why is he here?” Mbuzo asks.

He’s not really at peace with Bakhe’s presence, worse, he brought a child.

Cashile will have his head, liver and kidney.

“Inja yegame. He’s done this kind of work

before."Mhloniphe says.

"I'm experienced." Bakhe boasts.

He's been tying and untying Lulu's micky mouse ponytails. The child has given him a difficult, taxing task.

"You rob banks for a living?" –Mbuzo.

"I target garages, but it's pointless. I never see where my money goes." Bakhe says.

"That's strange, we never see where our money goes. You have 5k one minute, then kaboom, it's not there anymore. And you can't pin point what you did with it." Mhloniphe says.

Their money disappears like it has legs and doesn't want to be part of them.

"Mbuzo." The big brother calls softly. "We're going to be away for mostly three to four days."

With how Mkhetheni is looking at him, he knows that he has Cashile in mind.

“Tell her we’re going to sell one of baba’s properties in Johannesburg and it needs all of us because we’re signatories.”- Mhloniphe.

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Mbuzo takes Mhlo’s suggestion and goes back to bed after strategizing. The sun is gone and is scheduled for tomorrow. They will be driving to Johannesburg, it’s going to be a long drive because Mhlo will be behind the wheel.

He walks in on Cashile engrossed on her phone, she’s wearing his shirt.

He smiles, “You’re awake?”

“What’s wrong?”

Her question makes him frown, “Nothing is wrong. Why?”

“Something is bothering you. Your frown

deepens when you're stressed." She knows him well.

He tells her about the so called deal and that they have to leave tonight. This is the first time he's lied to her, it leaves him feeling like crap.

"But it's late, do you have to leave?"

"My brothers need me, they won't be able to sell without a third signatory. I will be back in two days. Stay here until I get back, bring Lulu. I will leave some money for snacks."

After packing a small bag, he finds something to wear in the wardrobe. Black jeans, a turtleneck with the same colour and black shoes.

Cashile hasn't stopped staring, he's been avoiding eye contact lest she sees through his lies.

She's the only woman on this earth who makes him vulnerable and sensitive.

"Three days is a very long time. I'm going to miss you." She says.

He stops fiddling with the zipper and looks at her with a slight frown on his face.

"Aren't you going to kiss me goodbye?" Mbuzo drags her out of bed, and pulls her into his arms. The bridge of his nose touches hers, he smiles and pecks her lips, his hands sliding down to her butt.

"I will find you here, right?"

Cashile nods, "I'll be here."

The kiss they share is brief, cut short by something falling outside the door.

"What was that?" She curiously asks.

But Mbuzo brushes it off, thinking it's his brothers.

It's not a usual sight to see Cashile sulking, but she is and he finds it funny. He grabs his bag, and takes his leave.

At the end of the corridor, he sees Nothando walking out of the kitchen. She stops and hurries to him, her eyes are red and puffy. Anyone can tell she's been crying.

"Have you seen my purse? I left it in the kitchen, now I can't find it." Her voice sounds hoarse.

Mbuzo scratches his chin, he really doesn't have time for this.

"It's late, don't you think? Should I call your brother to fetch you?"

Somehow his question seems to hurt Nothando, tears trickle behind her pupils. She drops her head and sniffs.

"I will call an Uber after I find my purse. My

money is in there so I can't request until I find it." She tells him.

The only thing he does is nod, then walks past her.

"Where are you going? When will you be back?"
Nothando shouting after him does not stop him from walking.

"Don't start trouble MaSibiya, go home." That's his response before he disappears out the door and joins Mkhetheni in the driveway.

They are dressed pretty much the same, all black from head to toe.

"Where's your twin?"

Mkhetheni clicks his tongue, the twins don't like being singled out. They have names.

They hear an engine revving in the distance.
Zola 7's Mdlwembe is blasting the speakers.

“R50 says that’s him.” Mbuzo says and that has Mkhetheni’s chuckling.

“R100 says it’s him.” –Mkhetheni.

“I guess there are no losers in this bet,” that’s Mbuzo’s retort.

In no time, a VW Golf 3 VRS parks in front of them. A 30 year-old model car.

Only Mhloniphe can be this dramatic.

Their jaws drop when the driver’s door opens and he steps out.

One thing about this song Mdlwembe, it makes you want to change your dress sense, your style of walking suddenly stems from the streets of Soweto.

South African gangster music does not get any better than this.

It even gets better when you play it in this kind of car, no one will dare disrespect you.

If dramatic needed to be explained, Mhlo would match it flawlessly. He's wearing a long black leather jacket, khakhi Dickies pants and white Chucks.

There's a toothpick hanging from the corner of his mouth.

He smiles and waves at his brothers.

Sheesh! Thank God he didn't get a gold tooth, that's what's missing to complete his outfit.

Mkhotheni sighs, "This is a bad idea."

"Just say I look good." Mhlo dramatically turns, the leather jacket flying in slow motion.

"Where did you get the car?" Mkhotheni asks.

It's his job to worry about his brother.

"It's a hired car bhuti, relax." He opens the doors for them.

Bakhe comes running from the house, his outfit is rather different.

Simple jeans and a jersey written Identity in bold. He takes the passenger seat while Mbuzo and Mkhetheni sit in the back.

Mhlo catches a glimpse of his brothers as he fixes the rear view mirror.

“You might wanna buckle up.” he says with a chuckle.

He’s going to be driving at 180.

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CASHILE

I was shocked when I opened the bedroom door to Bakhe, he had brought Lulu and said he’s going with the brothers to Johannesburg. I tried to get information out of him but he wouldn’t bend.

I've changed the bed sheets and given Lulu a bath. It's 7:18pm, I can feed her leftovers from this afternoon or order MacDonald's.

Mbuzo left R500, and said it's for her food.

I don't know if I'm going to use all of it, I feel bad for having to spend his money.

"Mommy look," she points at the cartoon on her pyjama top.

"Who's that, baby?"

"Lulu." She says and starts jumping on the bed.

I will order a kiddies meal, I love to see the smile on her face when she unwraps the toy.

We're going to wait in the living room. I put her down and let her walk on her own.

What the...

Nothando has turned the lounge upside down.

“What are you doing?”

She stops with a cushion in hand and looks at me.

“I’m looking for my purse,” she squints as if throwing an accusation at me.

“Hau! That’s why you’re still here?”

“I don’t know Cashile. You are the only one with a history of stealing. Where is my purse?”

I see what she’s doing.

“Do not start with me, Nothando. Why would I take your purse?”

She frowns, “Tell me Cashile, why did you come back to the village? Was it your plan to take my man?”

“Oh, so this is the issue. You are upset because Mbuzo chose me?”

I can’t believe she is willing to stoop as low as accusing me of theft.

“Awungazi kahle wena Cashile, you don’t know who you’re messing with.” She’s threatening me now.

“Hit me with your best shot.” I serve her with the same attitude.

There’s a sudden knock at the door, too loud it makes me wonder who it could be.

“Aren’t you going to get it? They are here for you.” She says.

I’m confused I won’t lie.

“What are you talking about?”

“I called the police, they will force the truth out of you.” She says.

When did she do all this?

The knock persists, it’s scaring Lulu. She holds on to my leg, I scoop her up. Nothando has decided to get the door.

She’s so confident in her accusation, it makes

me wonder if I'm not being set up.

Her brother walks in with three other cops, a whole SWAT team for the brat's wallet I did not even take.

"Cashile, a report has been made against you."

"I did not take her purse." I tell him.

"Then where did it go? I had R2000 in there that I withdrew today, you can even check my bank notification. There were also bank cards, the credit card my father gifted me on my birthday."

– Nothando.

"I didn't do it okay, I was with Mbuzo the whole day. He's my alibi."

"Where is Mbuzo?" Dalisu asks.

"He went out with his brothers." Nothando answers before I can say anything. "You can check her bag, it's in the kitchen."

She runs to the kitchen, one of the cops follows

her. I have processed everything, this girl even knows where my bag is.

How did I leave it in the kitchen? It was on the couch the last time I saw it. She comes back and gives it to her brother.

I already know that her purse is in there because she planted it.

Dalisu's entire demeanour changes when his hand comes out with a thick red purse. Indeed, there's money and Nothando's cards.

"Nothando planted it in there. This is a trap, Dalisu. She hates me because Mbuzo chose me over her." I defend myself, holding Lulu's head over my shoulder to hide her from all this.

"I'm sorry Cashile, we have to take you in for questioning." Dalisu says.

One of his cop friends takes out handcuffs.

No, no. I can't go back to jail.

“I’m innocent Dalisu. My daughter is here please, you can’t do this.”

I can’t believe she’s accusing me of stealing.

Dalisu is not buying my story.

“Cuff her.” He instructs one of his men.

I hold on tight to Lulu and run back to Mbuzo’s bedroom and lock the door. Lulu has her face hidden in my neck, her arms tight around my shoulders.

“It’s okay baby. I won’t leave you.”

My hands have never moved so fast when dialling Mbuzo’s number. When he answers, Dalisu is banging the door, threatening to kick it down if I don’t come out.

“KaMadlala.” He says.

“Nothando is accusing me of stealing her purse. She called her brother, they want to arrest me.”

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Sorry it's late, load shedding happened.

500+ comments... 15 shares...

[03/06, 15:45] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 37

MBUZO

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They were an hour away when he received a call from Cashile. Mbuzo wants them to turn back around, he's so sure that he can stop Dalisu from arresting Cashile.

They have been parked at a garage for over fifteen minutes, arguing about what to do. They are standing outside the car, smoking their lives away. Mkhetheni went inside to get change for

R200 so they can split it between themselves.

“Take a taxi back, or hitchhike.” Mhloniphe says.

He doesn’t want to cancel the mission.

“Why can’t we postpone? It’s late, I won’t find a ride at this time.” Mbuzo says.

“There are trucks headed to Durban ndoda. KaMadlala will be fine, she’s not being sentenced to death. And what will you do for her there? You don’t have money to bail her out.” –Mhloniphe.

He sounds insensitive, it’s upsetting Mbuzo.

“I don’t want her to spend the night in jail.” Mbuzo tells him.

“I also don’t want my sister in jail, but we don’t have power in KwaNyuswa. The town belongs to the Sibiyas. We are at their mercy, the best thing to do is get the money then we’ll be able to bail her out.” Bakhe says.

“And we won’t get another opportunity like this. Just go ndoda, and be there for her because that’s the only power you have. There’s nothing we can do for KaMadlala.” –Mhloniphe.

Mbuzo is voted out.

“I’m going back, you guys go ahead.” He tells them.

Mkhotheni walks out with four RedBulls and a packet of biltong.

“I had to buy something, they wouldn’t give me change.” He explains when they judge him with their eyes.

They don’t have money to waste, every cent counts until they get their big deal.

Each person gets a drink, Mhloniphe opens the packet of biltong and starts eating. He’s the driver, so he needs the energy the most.

“This should be enough to get you back home.”

Mkhotheni says, handing Mbuzo R70.

Mbuzo nods in appreciation.

Mkhotheni pats his shoulder, “Take care of yourself. Don’t do anything that will get you into trouble.”

Mbuzo nods his answer.

When all is said and done, the three leave Mbuzo at the garage. He has to find a ride back home.

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MADLALA

Jeer!

What other confirmation did he need that the devil is after his life than that dream he had

about Mbuzo and Cashile?

In the dream, Mbuzo and Cashile were sitting on a throne dressed in gold. Bab'Madlala was in rags, kneeling in front of them as if he was their servant.

He woke up around 4am, and cleaned his stomach. He used an anema and douched until his stomach felt empty and clean. Then filled his stomach with imbiza and stuck a hand down his throat, then vomited out all the bad luck the dream represented.

Now he's here, at his brother's house.

He has confidence in MaNkosi's sangoma, Nkululeko can't touch him.

"This house is so small." He says when he makes a turn in the corridor and enters the lounge.

Hluphekile sits down on the reed mat, Lulu leaves her toys and runs to sit on her lap.

“Nakhuya! Look at it run.” Bab’Madlala breaks down in laughter.

No one entertains his comment.

“Where is its mother?” Bab’Madlala asks.

“Mbali tell your uncle where your cousins are.”

“I don’t know where Bakhe is. Cashile was arrested last night.” Mbali says.

This is the news he came for.

“What? Hau Cashile my favourite child, what is happening to your life?” Bab’Madlala exclaims, burying his face on the armrest of the couch.

Mzansi Magic needs to see his acting skills.

Impressive!

“I have been nothing but good to God’s people and this is the thanks I get? What wrong did my children ever do?” He cries louder.

Mzansi Magic for what? Where is Steven Spielberg? This needs to go to Hollywood.

He looks at Lulu, “What about this one? Where was it when its mother was arrested?”

Mbali frowns at how he refers to the child, “Sisi called me and asked me to fetch her at the Xabas.”

Mbali was kicked by a horse on the chest, she’s singing like a bird. Bab’Madlala doesn’t have to work hard to get the answers he needs.

“It’s okay, its father will come for it.”

Mbali looks at her mother, they don’t understand why he refers to Lulu as a thing.

“Mbali, bring water for your uncle.”

Mbali takes Lulu with her to the kitchen.

“Bhuti, there’s no food in this house. Remember the funeral? Yes, it finished that day. But Cashile and Bakhe try to help around. Your children bhuti... they are good people. Very, very

good people.”

Bab’Madlala presses a finger to his ear.

“I am not deaf Hluphekile, you don’t have to raise your voice.”

But she’s partially deaf, she can barely hear herself.

Hluphekile leans closer and shouts, “Huh! I didn’t hear what you said bhuti. Speak louder. I have a hearing problem. You know a long, long time ago, I was not like this bhuti. We live amongst witches.” She shakes her head in disbelief, clapping her hands in the process.

Bab’Madlala rolls his eyes, “Khululeka makoti. I will give Mbali money for bread.”

He wants her to stop talking.

It’s still soon for him to leave, they haven’t seen his outfit. Why haven’t they said anything about it?

Jealous people.

He digs into his pocket and smiles at the R50 he finds there.

“Mbali my child.” He’s shouting like he is the man of the house.

“Baba.” Mbali comes rushing from the kitchen.

Bab’Madlala drags his eyes over her body.

“Nc! Nc! Nc! My brother’s child, why did Nkululeko leave us? Buka uzace kanjani, you are too thin.”

Stress is what’s behind her losing weight, not hunger. But in Bab’Madlala’s eyes, his brother has always been beneath him. So yes, bayalamba. They are neck deep into poverty.

He holds her the money, “Here, go buy bread so you and your mother can eat.”

Lulu hears the words ‘go buy’ and shoots up to her feet. She’s not staying behind.

“Thank you baba.”

Children are so innocent, this one has forgotten that her mother was ill-treated by this father here.

The silence that joins them when Mbali leaves is not awkward at all. In fact, Bab'Madlala feels more at home than he does at his own house, so much so that he puts his feet up.

Hluphekile has nothing to say, she would rather be in the kitchen trying to put together a snack for this man.

“Sit down Hlupho, Mbali will prepare my food.”
He smiles.

Hluphekile sits back down, she's biting her nails. She doesn't know how to act in front of him since that day.

“How are you feeling since Nkululeko left us?”

She sighs and looks down. Talking about her late husband hurts, why is he bringing it up?

“You called me a witch.”

So? Did she die?

Bab’Madlala drops his head laughing out loud, “It was a joke. Kanti can’t you take a joke.”

He knows her brain doesn’t function well.

“I didn’t like it.” Hluphekile.

“Ngithe sorry. I said I’m sorry.” He says. “Now smile for me makoti.”

Hluphekile lifts her eyes to him, a frown on her face.

He smiles to show her how it’s done, in case she’s forgotten.

Hluphekile forces a smile like a child that’s told to smile for the camera.

“Look how beautiful-lite you are.”

She blushes.

He remembers the first time Nkululeko introduced him to her. The world stopped for a second when he saw the light skinned young woman walk through the door.

Her afro bouncing as she walked, perfectly defining gravity. She looked well fed, and fresh from the reed dance.

“It’s a shame you are a crazy woman now, your brain is not complete. Zithi mzala. Kodwa ke, akusazizi ukukhala. There is no use crying over spilt milk.”

He just reminded her that she was once a sane woman. God knows what happened for her brain to stop functioning well.

“Baba, you can’t say that about my mother.”

Mbali is back.

Bab’Madlala doesn’t like her tone.

“Did I lie?” He asks Mbali.

“It’s just the way you said it baba. I will get my mother help.”

Mbali has tickled his ribs, he can’t stop laughing.

“Your mother is beyond help, whoever bewitched her probably died.”

“Prophet Alex will help her.”

The confidence in Mbali’s voice puts a frown on his face.

“Who is that?”

“A prophet from my church, he will tell us what happened to my mother. She’s going to be normal again.” Mbali says.

The horse that kicked her on the chest has to be found and punished.

Bab’Madlala’s head starts spinning, he is not happy about this prophet what-what.

“Where is my change?” He puts his hand out, she gives him.

He stands, and fixes Brentwood pants.

“My beautiful wife cooked dumplings and stew. I will eat at home, you two enjoy your bread.”

He pats Lulu’s head on his way out.

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MaNkosi is not a happy woman today. Her husband left the house in a hurry this morning. He didn’t tell her where he was headed.

Madlala wanting to be independent means he is up to something.

In this house, they eat real food for lunch. They don’t drink tea. Bab’Madlala walks in just as she switches off the stove.

“It smells good,” he opens her pots and takes a long sniff.

MaNkosi frowns upon it, he has never done this before.

"What are you wearing baba?" Her eyes go all over his body.

He smiles, pushing his ass out, his back bending a little and starts walking around like ibhinca. He doesn't want her to miss a single detail.

He looks like he just got a gig to feature in a maskandi music video. Ibhinca has never looked this good.

His outfit is inspired by the young men he's seen around here.

"Gugo 'thandoyo. Ageing is a choice, MaNkosi."

She doesn't understand what he means by this.

"You look ridiculous. Why are you even wearing that?" She asks.

"I'm standing on business." He says, spinning

around like he's seen the young men do.

"What business? You opened a new business baba? The mechanic shop is fine." –MaNkosi.

Bab'Madlala hasn't been to the shop in a while. If he keeps this up, it might close down.

He ignores her and sits down, "I went to see Hluphekile. Hayi shame, uyahlupheka usisi. She's suffering, it's poverty from the gate to the house."

He loves it when people are beneath him. If it were up to him, he would be the only rich man in the world.

"Why did you go there? You know how I feel about that, and you were slapped the last time you entered the premises without my help."

"Nkululeko is powerless. Nothing happened to me. I have more pressing news." He says.

MaNkosi now looks interested, she sits down

for the news.

“Mballi is going to take Hluphekile to a prophet.”
He says.

Just when she thought her day couldn’t get any worse.

“We can’t let that happen baba, they will find out that we are behind Hluphekile’s condition. They will know everything about us.”

Bab’Madlala sighs, “Don’t you think I know that? You have to visit Khathala, I think he likes you more.”

MaNkosi frowns as she studies his body language, something doesn’t add up. This man does not talk or sound like her normal husband.

“Baba, are you okay?”

She means to say, is he having one of his crazy moments?

“Why?” Bab’Madlala.

“Sanibona ekhaya.” Nothando greets at the door.

His face lights up in a second, he stands.

Hau suka madoda, nayi iwalk yebhinca.

He stops midway... one, two step, back kick... one, two step, back kick, then continues to approach her. All the while MaNkosi is frowning at his stupidity.

“Hau, MaSibiya. The most beautiful woman in the world, yazi mangibona wena, ngibona umuntu. Tell me God was showing off without telling me God was showing off.”

What is wrong with this man?

Nothando is all smiles and a blushing face.

“Thank you baba.”

“I don’t like these compliments baba. You shouldn’t talk to Nothando like that, she’s a child.”-MaNkosi.

“Khanyisile, I complimented you until my throat hurt when we were young. Your time is gone, let’s give other people a chance?”

He thinks he ate, he murdered this one and knocked it right out the park.

That’s what the smile on his face says.

“I am your wife. I can’t remember the last time you told me I was beautiful.”

“Beauty doesn’t last.”

He says and looks at Nothando.

“What brings you here my fohloza? Swidi lami lomkhu...”

“Madlala, if you finish those words.” MaNkosi snaps.

“I’m joking MaNkosi, now I must pay a fine to joke with you so you know I don’t mean it heartedly?”

“Your jokes are not funny, respect me as your

wife.”

Umshado ijele for real. Marriage is a jail sentence.

“Nothando baby, tell me what’s wrong? Why are your eyes swollen? I’m sorry I can’t compliment your beauty to make you feel better. Someone might be jealous and kill us.”

He coldly glances at his wife.

“It’s Cashile baba, first she stole my man. Then she stole my wallet.”

This is overly shocking, the world is coming to an end.

Madlala shakes his head in disbelief, “The hearts of men have grown cold.”

A tear rolls down Nothando’s face, “What did I ever do to her baba?”

“Ibambe lapho Minnie Dlamini.” He turns to his wife who is now angrily toiling by the sink.

“MaNkosi come closer, come and hear the disappointment you brought into this world.” Bab’Madlala says.

She leaves her dishes.

“Your daughter robbed Nothando. Can you believe it?”

“Cashile would never.” –MaNkosi.

“You are defending an ex inmate? When I said let’s make children, I didn’t mean let’s try to make children. We tried with Cashile and failed. Is everything okay in there?” He looks down at her stomach.

MaNkosi shows her displeasure, “Cashile is your daughter as much as she is mine. You used to boast about her to anyone who listened. What happened now, baba?”

He ignores her, “Nothando please tell me what happened next.”

“I called the police, she was arrested.” She wipes her one tear.

Bab’Madlala already knows this.

“Did they throw away the key?” He asks.

He’s not aware that his wife has taken a seat, and is crying.

He hugs a crying Nothando, “Phephisa mama. This too shall pass, God will not give you a burden you can’t carry.”

MaNkosi is flabbergasted.

Why is he acting like this?

“I have to go, baba. I came to tell you what happened.” Nothando says, breaking the hug.

I will walk you out.” Madlala says.

MaNkosi stands up so fast, she will not be disrespected in her own house.

“Your food is ready baba, sit down.” -MaNkosi.

“Beautiful women are temporary, food is forever.” Madlala says with a smile and looks at Nothando. He’s impressed with himself.

“Did I say it right?” He asks.

“Yebo baba.” Nothando says.

He deserves a big star.

“You see, I can blend in with the youth. I know your language. Periods.”

“It’s not periods baba, it’s periodt.” Nothando giggles.

“That’s what I said.”

Looks like Nothando’s giggles are contagious, Bab’Madlala can’t stop.

“Uyangichaza wena, I should have met you before I met my wife.”

MaNkosi clicks her tongue as she looks at Nothando. What is it about her that he finds fascinating?

“Come, let’s go to the kraal. You can pick the fattest cow for a job well done.” Madlala says to Nothando.

“What job are you talking about baba?” MaNkosi asks, these two seem to share a secret and she is not in on it.

Bab’Madlala’s eyes run all over MaNkosi’s body like roll-on.

“Go and cut your toe nails my dhiye. Nenyawo ezinomkenke. The bed sheets are finished because of you.” Today he’s noticing her cracked heels.

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[03/06, 15:45] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 38

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He who finds a wife finds a good thing.

MaNkosi has never doubted these words like she does now. It should be more like "She who finds a husband, finds a lifetime of heartache."

A Decision to get married should be played in the deal or no deal game show because there is now way a sane person would go into it willingly.

Maybe she was held at gunpoint the day she married Madlala and as a defence mechanism, her brain stored the terrible memory away.

Stress is what Bab'Madlala has become to her lately. He was okay before Cashile came back from the city of gold.

The only thing the woman can carry on her shoulders is a scarf, not the world bathong.

It's been too long since he walked out the gate

with Nothando, his food has gotten cold and there's going to be load shedding in an hour.

Sitting by the door and staring at the gate has done nothing but stress MaNkosi further.

She gets her ass and starts cleaning the lounge. It's clean, but you can never be sure with all this dust the house accumulates every second of the day.

Deep Breath!

This isn't working, Bab'Madlala took her head with him. He's probably using it to play catch with Nothando because, why can't she stop thinking about him?

She looks out the window for the umpteenth time, all she sees are chickens grazing the yard.

Her chicken is nowhere in sight.

She drops the mop and flies to the couch where her ringing phone is loudly seeking her attention.

Rebecca Malope's Sibong'Uthando comes to a halt as she presses the green button.

"Baba, where are you?" She dreadfully asks, almost out of breath from her little run.

"It's Khathala."

There's a crease on her face as she checks the caller ID, impatience takes over from it.

Khathala is not the man she's been waiting for.

She swallows a sigh and lets a question out in its place.

"Is everything okay?"

And since when do they call each other?

"I have a question before I complete the ritual."

But why are men so slow?

"Makhosi, you haven't begun? I thought you would be done by now."

"I don't think you thought this through, MaNkosi.

It's not going to be as easy as you think. That child has a praying grandmother. I fear she knows what's to come."

Funny Sangoma.

MaNkosi laughs until she loses strength on her knees, the laughter lasted for two seconds but she's spent.

"Is she a prophet?"

"No, just a prayer warrior."

"So? You are a powerful sangoma. Make her weak or something, can't you make her prayers hit the ceiling?"

Honestly, she's tired of thinking for everyone.

"You know there's nothing I can't do. However, your daughter will make a better sacrifice. I'm struggling to get to her though, she has a shield covering her like the child."

Confused would be an understatement.

“How is that possible? Ibutho lakhe lithwetshuliwe. It was captured and removed from her. Where is she getting the protection from?” She asks with a twinge of confusion on her face.

“Her protector, Mbuzowakhe Xaba. Their intimacy is a great threat to your life. You and your husband are set for destruction, those two should never be together.” Khathala says.

This is what she fears the most, probably more than losing her husband to another woman.

“I’m not killing my daughter. Just continue with our plan, we will deal with their relationship later.”

MaNkosi sees her husband walk through the gate, he looks happy as a kid.

“I have to go, I will call you later.”

She drops the call and dashes to the kitchen where she takes the food dished up for him.

Today she's going to baptize him with stew.

She hurries to the door and throws it out.

People die when their hearts stop, but MaNkosi is still standing. Frozen with her eyes on the Air force 1's, now decorated with greasy gravy.

They can't be belonging to her husband, he's a size five.

"MaNkosi!" The voice no doubt belongs to him.

She looks up and... Lord she's going to need help picking her jaw up from the floor.

Madlala is angrily standing behind Juba whose eyes are on his shoes, must be his favourite pair.

"Why did you throw food at our guest?"

Bab'Madlala asks.

"Baba..."

To be fair, she thought it was him and this was her little revenge for disappearing with

Nothando for hours. The scene played perfectly in her head, she was also going to make him sleep on the couch tonight.

“I’m sorry, I was feeding the chickens. I didn’t see you there, ndodana.” Sounds better than a woman scorned avenging her husband.

“Since when do the chickens eat stew?”
Madlala is not letting this go.

“It’s okay baba. I will get a new pair, money is not an issue.” Juba says, sending MaNkosi an understanding smile.

Madlala shows off his adult teeth, “You may take a seat. My beautiful wife will bring you something to drink.”

There’s a chair under the tree, Juba walks like his feet hurt, looking greatly annoyed.

When he’s out of earshot, Madlala pulls his wife into the house.

“What is wrong with you?” He keeps his voice low.

“Where have you been baba? I cooked for you, but you left with Nothando.” Her voice cracks, it’s not cute.

Madlala looks traumatised, “We will talk about this later. Right now, I need to attend to our guest.”

“Why is he here? I thought we will never see him again.” MaNkosi says.

“I was walking on the side of the road when he stopped me. God works in mysterious ways MaNkosi. I explained to him that the children were trying to scare him that day, he understands. That’s why he is here to lobola the demon.”

What demon is he talking about?

She stares, waiting for him to explain. Her patience went to Wits and came top of the

class.

“He’s here to lobola Lujulile, then take her back with him.” Bab’Madlala mutters.

No, what about her plans?

“Baba, you can’t accept his lobola. You have to discuss it with Cashile.”

“Ucashile wani? Awume MaNkosi. Did she consult with me before breaking her virginity? She’s my daughter, I can do whatever I want with her.”

MaNkosi regrets marrying this man, his stubbornness will be the death of her but she prays she survives him because he will take another wife if she dies.

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MBUZO

He arrived in the early hours of the morning but was not allowed to see Cashile.

“Wait for visiting hours.” The police officer said and sent him away.

It’s the following day, he drove to the station first thing in the morning and was told to come back at 3pm.

He arrived at 2:30pm and they have made him wait once again.

When he asked what time are visiting hours, he was told to sit the fuck down and wait.

It’s almost 3 in the afternoon, people keep coming and going, it’s clear to him that these visiting hours have long passed.

Dalisu hasn’t shown face, Mbuzo decides to call Nothando. Her phone rings unanswered.

He goes on WhatsApp and sends a text.

“Where are you?”

There is one tick, her last seen is not visible anymore. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that he has been blocked.

He puts the phone away and with the last dignity he's left with approaches the enquiry desk, the man behind it rolls his eyes and frowns.

“Mfo, I told you to wait. You will be called.”

“Bafo, I've been waiting for hours. Please let me see her.” He's desperate.

“I am not the person in charge here, I was given instructions I can't break. Please go back to your seat.”

He's never felt so powerless. Are all poor people treated the same or is it just him? Gone are the days when the world was their oyster.

They were highly esteemed and put on a pedestal by the community. The Xaba name was respected in KZN at large, and it was so easy to get what they wanted.

Mbuzo slides a R100 across the counter, but keeps his hand there.

The money he's been saving for Cashile's lobola went to petrol and food they might need while in Joburg.

The officer looks at his hand then the money, he's temped.

"Bafo, I'm begging you, ngiyacela Mfethu. Maybe we can work something out." He's never had to grovel to any man.

"Are you bribing a police man?"

Shit! He doesn't have to raise his voice.

Everyone turns to stare at Mbuzo, embarrassed is an understatement.

His jaw ticks, this is not the attention he wants.
He puts the money back in his pocket.

“I just want to see if she’s okay.” Mbuzo whisper-shouts, angrily slamming a fist on the counter.

“Listen to me Xaba, out of respect for your father, I will let this go. Now get out of here, before I throw you in a cell.” The officer says.

Mbuzo heaves a sigh, “I will go, but tell me who do I have to speak to?”

“The Sibiyas are in charge here, no one is allowed to see the prisoner.” The officer says.

Now it makes sense why he’s being denied access to Cashile.

He goes back to the car and calls his brothers.

“How is she?” The question from Mkhetheni makes him sigh.

“I haven’t seen her, they’ve been giving me a run-around since I arrived.”

“Kukhona okushaya ‘manzi.’” Mkhetheni says.

“Yeah, this is starting to sound like a setup. Pay Nothando a visit and do whatever it takes to get KaMadlala out.” Mhlo says.

Mbuzo agrees, in fact, he knows how to put the Sibiyas in their place.

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The sun is setting fast, probably has somewhere to be. Like a date with the Americans.

Mbuzo has been parked outside the Sibiya residence for hours. The place is heavily guarded. He’s counted more than eight guards in the yard. Are they growing gold or mineral?

Not even the president has so many guards.

Nothando is unreachable, he's left a number of messages asking to meet up. Not even one has been replied to.

He's on his forth energy drink and emptied the box of Peter Stuyvesant when the guards start disappearing into a shed three rondavels from the ranch house, after what looks like a maid beacons them.

He steps out of the car, his eyes scan the entirety of the premises while finishing off the cigarette stuck between his fingers.

He's going to need another smoke, he takes a sealed box from the glove compartment and shoves it into his pants pocket.

The gate is locked, but thankfully it's not razor fenced at the top. He easily jumps over and lands safely, his eyes move back and forth, browsing the environment.

He has to tip toe his way towards the open sliding door. There he hears the TV playing, and like a thief in the night, stealthily enters the house.

The woman he's been looking for is sitting on an ottoman, with the coffee table as her footstool.

She's engrossed on her phone and has not felt the presence of the man standing in the room.

Or maybe she has, her eyes slowly rise until she's looking at him in the eyes. Her heart is ready to sprint out of her chest.

Mbuzo wears a smug look, "MaSibiya."

He lightly dips his head in greeting.

"Mbuzo! Why are you in my house? How did you get in?"

"Does it matter?" He pulls the sliding door closed, and turns back to her. She hasn't shifted

or stretched a bone.

“Did you break in? The gate is always locked.”

Nothando stutters, fear evident in her eyes.

“You know how I have a problem with doors not opening for me, silly me has to force his way in.” Mbuzo says, lighting a cigarette.

“You can’t smoke in here, it’s not allowed.” She tells him.

He looks at her with narrowed eyes, “You home alone baby girl?”

Baby girl is new.

There's something about the way he asked the question that sends shivers down Nothando's spine, it's the type of shivers that would give the devil sleepless nights.

Her body shuffles, “There are guards surrounding the premises.”

The fear in her eyes intensifies the smug look

on Mbuzo's face.

"You think I'm here to hurt you?"

The intrusive thoughts are there but he knows how to keep them in check.

Slowly, he makes his way to the coffee table, lifts Nothando's feet and puts them on his lap.

She's jumpy and trembling.

"Relax, MaSibiya." Mbuzo softly says, giving her a massage.

He hasn't broken eye contact, "Do you still love me, MaSibiya?"

That's a trick question, it must be.

Nothando nods.

"I want to hear you say it." Mbuzo says, insistently.

It's normal that she's confused, she has questions but things seem to be going her way

and she doesn't want to ruin it.

"You are the only man I love." Her father even knows that, and is against it.

"What would you do for me, MaSibiya?" His right hand begins to move up her leg.

Goosebumps gather on her skin, her breath trembles and her body takes the form of cement.

She's tense and holding her breath, it's not helping that he has her captive with his stare.

Mbuzo smirks, "Relax."

There's an urgency in his voice that has her taking him serious. He's never touched her like this in their dating days. Nothando falls back on the couch as Mbuzo slowly leans in towards her face. Their lips brush, his hand hasn't stopped travelling up. She jumpily shifts back when it slides under her skirt and up her thighs, her eyes resemble those of a deer.

“Close your eyes.” He whispers and sneers when she obeys without any hesitation.

He grips the edge of her panties as he plants soft kisses on her neck. He’s hovering above her, touching her the way he knows she wants to be touched.

A woman like Nothando is easy to read.

His hand becomes a masseuse on her nether regions, she parts her legs to widen the playing area.

The smirk on his face grows with her moans, she’s a trembling little thing.

When he sees that she’s about to orgasm, he stops and sits back on the coffee table, leg crossed over the other and arms folded.

Nothando’s eyes snap open, “Why did you stop?”

“Would you do anything for me, MaSibiya?”

"Yes, anything. Name it and I will do it without a doubt." She's found her confidence.

Mbuzo bites the corner of his bottom lip, seductively dragging his eyes over her body.

"Follow me then." He gets up and walks out the sliding door, Nothando is not far behind, jogging here and there to keep up with his long legs.

They get in the car, he drives them to a house she's not familiar with and parks outside the gate.

"Whose house is this? I thought we were going to your house." She says.

They have unfinished business Nothando is eager to get into.

A man rushes out of the house, knocks on Mbuzo's side of the window before jumping in the back trunk.

"Who is that?" Nothando asks as he starts the

car.

“An old friend of my father, he’s a marriage officiant. He’s going to marry us.” He says.

Her eyes have done too much widening today, this time it’s not out of shock but excitement.

She looks at Mbuzo with a wide smile,
“Marriage? We’re getting married?”

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[03/06, 15:45] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 39

MANKOSI

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She kept to her promise to call Khathala back. She's in the privacy of her bedroom, waiting for him to answer, which he does when she's about to hang up.

"We have a problem. The little girl's father is here to lobola the child, it will be hard to do the ritual when the Ngwenya ancestors take over."

She says.

"I'm still busy, I won't be long. In the meantime, ask the Madlala ancestors to hand the child over to you. That way we can do what we please with her." Khathala says, he's accepted that she wants her children unharmed.

"I will call you when I'm done." She says, drops the call and plugs the phone in the charger.

MaNkosi knows what to do, it won't be the first time doing this. It's a good thing she printed more than one picture of Lulu. She takes it from under a stack of clothes on her side of the

wardrobe and puts it inside her bra then heads out.

Madlala and Juba are still conversing outside, it's a beautiful night, the skies are clear of any clouds.

This boy should have brought his uncles with him. This is disrespect at its best.

"Is the food ready?" Bab'Madlala asks curiously.

Beer will not fill their stomachs.

"I'm going to catch the chicken, I won't be long." She says in passing.

She hasn't even boiled water for pap, nor does she know what she will cook.

There's a herd boy gathering wood behind the house, MaNkosi asks him to capture the fire-red rooster grazing around the yard and the fattest hen. That rooster is probably working hard to provide for its family, it doesn't know that today

is its last day.

She goes back in the house, gets an enamel bowl and a knife.

She writes Lulu's name and maternal surname behind Lulu's picture and puts it in her bra.

The boy is here, with the chickens. She tells him to tie their legs and puts them in the bowl.

When she walks past Madlala, he widely stares, wanting to see if she is anywhere close to serving them food.

MaNkosi doesn't bat an eye, his eyes land on the bowl with two chickens.

He stretches his neck, zooming in on his chickens.

This woman thinks he's Old McDonald.

"If you cook that rooster..." Sounds like a threat.

MaNkosi continues walking without looking back.

“MaNkosi, that’s the husband. Who’s going to have sex with these hens if you kill their husband? Awu Nkosi yam, eggs are so expensive.”

They have two more roosters, he’s exaggerating.

MaNkosi stops and turns to him, “I will only slaughter the hen baba.”

She continues on.

He sits and offers Juba a beer with a smile on his face.

“Mammals mate baba, they don’t...” Juba stops trying to explain.

Saying the word sex to the father of the woman he used to sleep with feels weird.

Bab’Madlala nods, “Chickens are lucky. Imagine one rooster, having more than twenty wives. I want to be a rooster in my next life.”

Juba almost chokes to death.

Bab'Madlala has left the conversation, he's glancing at the direction his wife took. He thinks she's headed to the spot where they slaughter chickens.

But nope, MaNkosi is using a different location today, the little forest behind their yard.

There's a big tree she uses when she wants to communicate with the ancestors.

She places the bowl on the ground, lights impepho and a candle and starts reciting the Madlala clan names while pinning Lulu's picture and name on the altar she's created.

She introduces herself and who she's married to, then calls upon the impure ancestors.

"This is my grandchild, Lujulile Madlala. Her mother's name is Cashile Madlala, my daughter. I'm asking that you give her to me, so I can do whatever I please with her."

She takes the rooster, slits its throat and sprinkles the blood on Lulu's picture, letting it spread over the altar.

"Here is a sacrifice, drink and be filled. When you are satisfied, give me what I have asked for."

She goes back to the yard, releases the hen and takes the rooster with her. It's the chicken she's going to cook.

Madlala stands when he sees her coming.

"I called Mbali and told her to bring our adorable granddaughter. We are almost done with the negotiations, her father will take her home with him." He tells her.

MaNkosi nods, she's against it though. But it doesn't matter anymore, she's done her part.

Bab'Madlala's eyes grow wild when he sees the beheaded rooster in the bowl.

“You killed the rooster, MaNkosi?”

“It was a mistake baba. It’s dark behind the house, I thought I was beheading the hen.” She says.

Bab’Madlala is not impressed.

“You want me to be chicken bankrupt. You have finished me, MaNkosi.” He’s devastated.

“We have more roosters.” She says and excuses herself.

She still has to de-feather the chicken.

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MBUZO

He hasn’t answered any of her questions and at some point had to tell her that it’s a surprise he

doesn't want to spoil. She's the happiest woman alive, has even turned up the radio and singing to every love song that plays.

"What made you change your mind Wami? You left me for Cashile and..."

The interrogation commences.

Mbuzo keeps his eyes on the road, they are not far from their destination.

"I will tell you everything after the wedding." He says.

It's because he doesn't have answers for her.

Nothando beams, "I still can't believe we are getting married. Where will the wedding take place? I have to invite my dad and brothers. Can I use your phone? I left mine at home."

"You'll tell them after the wedding. Your father hates me, he won't allow it." He says with a puckered brow.

Nothando is fine with it, as long as she will marry this man.

They arrive at the prison where Cashile is held. He drives around, looking for a parking spot.

“Why are we here?” Nothando asks.

“To get KaMadlala out of jail.” He flatly says.

She frowns, “Why?”

“I want us to put everything behind us before we start our lives together. The first step is to get her out of prison.”

He finds an empty parking next to a police van, and looks at Nothando.

“Are you going to do this for me?”

“I don’t see why she has to be let out.” Nothando says.

Cashile belongs in jail, not out here where she can easily take her man.

“MaSibiya, I thought you said you would do anything for me. Has that changed in the last hour?” The raised brow is intimidating.

She bashfully shakes her head.

“Then drop the charges and let KaMadlala go. Her daughter needs her.” He puts his hand on her thigh, and looks into her eyes.

Nothando nods, “Okay but she has to go back to Joburg. My father and Bab’Madlala made me frame her, they will be angry when they find out that I dropped the charges.”

Mbuzo doesn’t look surprised, corruption is a big thing in this country.

“Why?” He asks.

“Baba has an obsession with Cashile, I don’t know what he sees in her. She’s not the first young woman he’s been attracted to.” She rolls her eyes. “I don’t know what her father’s excuse is. But both men are in cahoots. I don’t care, I

don't like Cashile."

He steps out of the car and gets the door for her.

"Nqobani let's go." Mbuzo says to the man in the trunk.

They head inside where Nothando speaks to an officer and withdraws the charges against Cashile.

"Let's go and get married now. I don't have a dress to wear, I have to do my make-up."

Nothando excitedly says.

"It's not going to be a fancy wedding MaSibiya, remember no one should know." He cups her face and stares into her soul.

Nothando smiles.

"Wait here, I am going to tell KaMadlala that I don't want to be her boyfriend anymore." He says, making her extremely happy.

She stands on her toes and leans in to kiss his lips, Mbuzo tilts his head, her lips land on his cheek.

Mbuzo steps back, "Wait here, I won't be long."

"Okay, I will wait."

She watches him walk away until he is out of sight, then finds a vacant bench to sit on.

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A guard accompanies him to Cashile's cell. His heart is beating loudly in his chest, his knees are wobbly but he soldiers on.

There are five women in one cell, he spots Cashile seated on a bench with her head bowed.

Now his heart wants to rip his chest open.

"KaMadlala." He desperately shouts.

Cashile whips her head up, tears gather in her eyes. She's shocked to see him here, she had lost hope in him.

"Mbuzo, you came."

"Open the gate, mfethu." Mbuzo snaps.

The guard is taking his precious time.

The gate opens, he runs in and lifts her in his arms, hugging her in the process.

"I'm sorry it took long to get to you." He says.

"You came, that's all that matters." She tells him.

"Let me look at you." He breaks the hug, looking at her like she's the only woman in the world.

"Are you okay? Did anything happen to you?"

His eyes scan the cell, some of these women look harmless but there's one who seems like she'd stab you if you piss her off.

"I'm fine."

“Do you trust me, KaMadlala?” There’s a seriousness displayed on his face and voice that has Cashile frowning in worry.

“With my life.”

“Then please follow my lead, I won’t let you fall. I promise.” He says and gets an affirmative nod from her.

Worry multiplies on her face when he walks out of the cell, he stops at the entrance and waves at someone to come to him. A man appears carrying a file.

“KaMadlala, this is Nqobani a friend. He’s going to marry us, right here and right now. I don’t want to be your boyfriend anymore, I want to be your husband.”

Her heart drops.

She wants to ask why here, then remembers to trust him.

“Okay,” she nods, inhaling loudly.

“We need two witnesses,” he’s looking at the ladies in the cell.

They understand the assignment and volunteer. Everyone takes their positions.

“Because of the setting and limited time we have, I will not get into much. You can save your vows for later.” Nqobani tells the couple.

They nod in agreement.

“Mbuzowakhe Xaba, do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife?” –Nqobani.

Fear is evident in Cashile’s eyes, even so, she keeps her eyes on Mbuzo.

“I do,” he says, smiling adoringly at her.

Cashile draws in a long shaky breath, the entirety of her body is trembling.

Nqobani asks Mbuzo the name of his bride, he tells him.

“Cashile Madlala, do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband?”

Tears draw down her face as she smiles at her lover.

“I do,” she says.

“What God has put together, let no man put asunder. I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride.”

As Nqobani announces, Nothando appears from the corridor.

“Wami?” She shouts in horror.

The marriage officiant gave an instruction to kiss his bride, Mbuzo attacks his wife with a kiss.

“No, no. What are you doing?” Nothando screams, separating the newly-weds from each

other. Her face is soaked with tears.

“You are mine Mbuzo. You said we’re getting married, you deceived me.” Nothando cries.

“I never mentioned your name. When I said Nqobani will get us married, I meant KaMadlala and me. I thought you understood.” Mbuzo puts his arm around Cashile’s waist, pulling her closer to him.

“What?” Nothando is confused, so is Cashile.

“But I love you Wami...” she pleads.

“MaSibiya, I am a married man. You will get me in trouble with my wife. But thank you for your help.” He looks at Cashile. “Sthandwa sami, one day we will tell our children how MaSibiya helped us get married, angithi?”

Cashile catches on and nods, “Thank you Nothando. God will bless you with a good husband. Unfortunately, this one is off the market.”

They kiss as Nothando breaks down in tears.

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[03/06, 15:45] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 40

MHLONIPHE

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EARLIER THAT MORNING...

He was the most excited about the mission. It wasn't just about stealing but the adrenalin rush. He's addicted to the fast life.

When Mkhetheni was the obedient son and

living under their father's shadow, Mhloniphe opposed with his name and did everything under the sun to get under their father's skin.

Although they shared a womb and breastfed from the same breasts, Mkhetheni has always been a step ahead in life, from grades to school marks and maturity.

Their elderly aunts believed that it was because Mkhetheni was the older brother. With twins, the one who comes out second is known to be the oldest, their parents raised them with that notion.

Mkhetheni seemed to mature faster, leaving his brother behind. He even matriculated first while Mhloniphe was a grade behind.

When their parents lost everything and Mhloniphe couldn't afford his lifestyle anymore, he resorted to taking from the rich with Bakhe as his accomplice.

So taking what is not theirs is not new.

Mhloniphe and Bakhe woke up in a good mood today, their lives are going to change if things go well.

Nestled within the pulsating heart of Joburg's CBD is FNB BankCity. A tourist attraction but for the Xaba twins and Bakhe, it's an opportunity of a lifetime.

Mhloniphe is parked a street away from Pritchard St, in an underground parking, waiting for his informer to give him a go ahead.

He's in a Chicken Licken uniform as a disguise, and feasting on their salty chicken. He washes the salt down with coke as he reaches for his ringing phone.

The expression he makes says he's trying to figure out who could be calling him, it's an unknown number.

Who said only KFC is finger lickin good? Look at him licking the tips of his fingers, he wipes them on his pants and takes the call.

“If you are not the president offering me a job as his bodyguard, fuck off.” It’s 2024, calls are answered like this.

He doesn’t recognise the giggle on the other side of the phone.

“Are you serious?” It’s a female, laughing.

His face crinkles, “Who’s this?”

“Mballi.” She says.

“Mballi who?”

He’s met a lot of Mballis and they all wanted him to shag them, them and every woman he’s met in his fuckboy journey.

“Sis Cashile’s cousin. Have you forgotten my voice?”

He would walk past her had they met on the

road. Still, this one tickles his interest with her Jesus freak lifestyle. It's really surprising that even after pushing her away, she's still here.

"Little one? Is everything okay with KaMadlala?" Mhlo asks.

"Well, as far as I know, she's still in prison. But her father came to take Lulu, I couldn't say no because I have no right over her."

"Oh! Is there anything else?" Mhlo asks.

The phone call is distracting him from the mission.

"I wanted to apologize for what happened the other day." Mbali says.

All is forgotten. He's not the kind of man that nurtures grudges.

"Okay." He hangs up and goes back to eating his food.

The phone rings again, he rejects the call. His

informer might call.

Speak of the devil.

There's a message telling him that the cash-in transit car is moving. Mhloniphe drives out into the road, the cash-in transit vehicle is headed towards Scibono Discovery centre.

He's driving in the core of morning rush, he makes a turn at President St and picks up the speed, keeping a safe distance.

When they get to an empty road, the CIT vehicle stops for a Rastafarian couple crossing the road. The man is using a crutch and his female companion is heavily pregnant.

Suddenly, the woman stops, screaming as she grabs her big belly. It looks like she's having contractions. In a split second, the Rastafarians throw off their rasta wigs while pulling out guns. It's Bakhe and Mkhetheni, they fire shots in the air.

Mhloniphe steps on the breaks and knocks the CIT vehicle down, it topples over like a toy.

“Azishe tsotsi!” Mhlo sings.

It's going to be a good day.

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CASHILE

I am officially Mrs. Xaba, we signed the marriage certificate before we left the station.

My feelings are all over the place, I don't know how to feel about what transpired. I'm overwhelmed.

There's going to be time to digest everything, right now I have to fetch my baby from my

aunt's house.

We're moving in with Mbuzo.

Mbali's phone is off, load shedding was scheduled around this time.

I tell Mbuzo to hoot, he looks at me like I said an abominable word.

"Let's go in, I want to introduce you to my aunt."

Why the looks?

"We're married, you're allowed." I say.

"We didn't do things the right way. I never planned to marry you in a jail cell, but it had to be sooner. Sibiya will not take from my hands, I will kill him if he tries." He says.

Sibiya is a none factor, a dog with no teeth. I'm not afraid of him.

"I know but you can't hide until you've paid lobola, at least meet my aunt." He's my husband, I can't keep him a secret because we

got married without informing the elders.

“My love, let me do the right thing first. I will follow tradition, buy you a ring and give you a proper wedding. I will make an honest woman out of you.”

I cannot describe how much this means to me.

Mbali runs out of the house, she must have seen us parked here.

I step out and open the gate for her.

“Sisi, your father sent someone to come and take Lulu.”

“Mbali no. Why did you let them take her?” I entrusted her with my child.

“I didn’t have a choice, her grandparents wanted her. I couldn’t say no.” She’s crying.

“There’s a reason I asked you to take Lulu, I would have called my parents if I trusted them.”

There’s no way my child is safe with those

people, God knows what they have done to her.

“Sisi wait,” she says as I start to make my way back to the car.

“What is it?”

“Are you still coming to church on Friday?”

Really?

“I don’t know, I will see.” I’m not interested, I was doing this for Mbuzo. He’ll probably go with his brothers.

“But Prophet Alex Ndou won’t be there, he suddenly fell ill.” She says.

I really don’t have time to be asking her what happened to the man I don’t know.

“What’s wrong?” Mbuzo asks, as I get in the car.

“My parents took Lulu, we have to go and get her.” I dial my father, he’s not answering. My

mother as well.

“KaMadlala, you’re trembling. What is going on?” He holds my hand, stopping me from dialling them again.

“Lulu is not safe with my parents, please drive.”

There’s more but there is no way I will tell him that my parents practise witchcraft. Bakhe and I once scared Juba about it, not knowing there was some truth in our joke.

“Mbuzo drive, please.”

I can wipe my own tears.

He steps on it, a frown is evident on his face.

“Are you going to tell me what’s going on? Why you think your parents will harm your daughter?”

Where will I begin?

It’s embarrassing.

I love Mbuzo and his willingness to help me in everything but I can't tell him, not even the look he keeps throwing my way will make me spill.

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I'm so shaken that he follows me when we arrive. The kitchen door is open, my mother is washing the dishes.

"Mama."

Her eyes pop out in surprise, "Cashile."

"Ninjani mah. I'm here for Lulu."

She glances towards the lounge, I'm thinking Lulu is in there with my father.

"Cashile wait," Mah calls after me.

I find my father lying on the couch, watching the news.

“Baba, ninjani? Where is my baby?”

There is no toy anywhere, Lulu’s toys are always scattered on the floor.

“You finally came back home?” He hasn’t looked my way, it’s making me mad.

“Baba not now please. Where is my daughter? Why did you take her from Mbali?”

“You were in jail, so her father came to take her.” He says.

I didn’t hear right. My ears are for decoration sometimes.

“What did you say?”

“Juba took the baby with him. He paid lobola and we gave him back his seed.”

There is no compassion on his face or in his voice.

This father hates me, I just know it.

“Baba you had no right, no right.” I scream.

How could he do this to me?

“Cashile, you don’t speak to a man anyhow.
Especially your father.”

I don’t expect any support from my mother.

“He gave away my baby mah. What is wrong
with him? Does he hate me that much?”

My screaming has Mbuzo running in the house,
he freezes at the door as my father stands with
a frown.

“What is this man doing here?” My father points
at him with the remote.

Mbuzo looks at me, he wants to know if I’m
okay.

I’m in tears because I know Juba. He will never
give me back my child, he’s capable of taking
her out of the country just to spite me.

“My father sold my baby to Juba,” I tell Mbuzo.

“Watch your mouth Cashile. Are you going to disrespect your father in front of strangers?” My mom shouts.

“Leave her MaNkosi, this is the child you decided to give birth to.” He’s victimizing himself.

I feel nothing but hate for him.

I get my phone and call Juba, he misses the first call and takes time to answer the second one.

“Cashile.”

“Bring my baby back, I want my baby.”

“Lulu is a Ngwenya now. You like making a fool out of me, I will show you who’s in charge.”

I know that tone and I don’t want to think what he’s up to. But I have to ask, I will go crazy wondering.

“We can co-parent, Lulu will love having both

her parents raising her.” My negotiating skills are terrible.

“Co-parent, wena? I’m not stupid Cashile, we have had this conversation before. I know you, don’t even try to convince me. You will never see her again.”

I sink on the couch, my heart is racing.

Mbuzo comes to stand beside me, making my father cackle in disbelief.

“Juba, bring my baby. I’m begging you. We just got acquainted, I have fallen in love with her. Don’t force me to live without her.”

I wipe the tears on my face, and give up when they won’t stop falling.

My life has never been rosy, I deserve a break. How much more can I take?

“You’re going to have more with umahlalela wakho. You chose a poor man over me, now

face the consequences.” Juba says.

Fuck!

I look to Mbuzo, he’s curiously staring back.

“Can we talk please. Come back, I’m sure we can...”

“Shit!” Juba hisses.

I don’t know if the phone fell, I hear wheels screeching.

“Hold on, Lulu.” Juba shouts, then there’s a loud crash that stretches longer than the fear engulfing me. There’s a sound of a metal of the car groaning. My world crumbles beneath me.

“Juba! Juba!” I’m on my feet, screaming over the phone.

“What is it?” My mother asks, eyes wide with wonder.

MHLONIPHE

Touch down KZN.

Mhloniphe was behind the wheel, they had been on the road for six hours. There's a bag full of bank notes in the trunk, the mission went as planned. They were almost home, none of them thought they would be involved in an accident.

Maybe he should've listened to Mkhetheni and slowed down.

He struggles with the airbag and manages to push it to one side.

Then scrambles for the other side of the car but something holds him back. His seat belt is still attached. Frantically he searches for the latch.

“Mkhonethi.” He keeps screaming for his brother, there is no response from Mkhetheni. He’s not moving.

Bakhe is crawling his way out of the car.

Mhlo begins to cough from the smoke inhalation, his eyes are red raw and both streamed uncontrollably as he mishandles with the belt.

The seat belt finally comes undone. Mhlo kicks himself out from the driver’s seat and into the back, coughing violently as he moves.

“Bafo.” He presses a finger on Mkhetheni’s pulse points and feels a faint beat.

He jumps out of the car, so he can drag his brother out. He spots Bakhe, standing in front of the vehicle they collided with.

It’s upside down, the windshield of the vehicle collapsed. Both the driving wheel and dashboard, crushed into one mashed mess.

The rear side of the passenger door is savagely torn free from its hinges and the front two wheels are spinning out in the air.

Bakhe slowly sinks to the floor and screams, "Lulu!! Lulu!!"

"What have I done?" Mhlo says.

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CHAPTER 41

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MaNkosi just fainted. No one has attended to her body, maybe because Cashile is too hysterical. Mbuzo rushes to the kitchen to get her a glass of water.

“Come sit down KaMadlala.” Bab’Madlala says, helping Cashile to the couch.

When last was he this loving to her? He hasn’t played the father figure since she came back. He jumps over his fainted wife just to get to the couch.

“Hau KaMadlala, you will give yourself a headache if you keep crying.” He’s wiping her unsolicited tears and fanning her with a cushion.

Just like him, Cashile sweats when she cries. It’s a genetic thing, it was worse when she was a baby. She’d cry until she’s soaking wet, she’s gotten better with age.

“What if she...”

He presses a finger on her lips, “Shhh! Somethings are better off not said.”

That’s not helpful.

Mbuzo is back with the water, he helps Cashile

drink, but Madlala snatches the glass from him with a cold stare. It's his daughter, he will help her drink water.

"Why are you still here Nonkosi? This is a family matter." Madlala says.

Mbuzo's presence will never not irk him.

"He's my husband," Cashile says.

"Ini?" -MaNkosi.

Lazarus has woken up.

They are all looking at her with wide eyes as she stands to her feet.

"Cashile?" Bab'Madlala puts the water away.

He can't believe he wasted his time on a useless child like this, he even wiped her bitter tears.

"Mbuzo and I are married."

Now that the truth is out, Mbuzo sits down

because he can't stand in the presence of his in-laws.

"We're going to look for Lulu." Cashile stands, MaNkosi pushes her back on the couch.

"You are not going anywhere until you tell us what is going on." She demands.

They forget that apples don't fall far from trees, she didn't buy her stubbornness.

"Mbuzo let's go, we will trail Juba." She's headed towards the door.

Mbuzo looks at his in laws and bows his head in reverence.

"Bantu abadala." He says and turns to follow his wife.

"I want my car back Nonkosi." Bab'Madlala is fast-walking behind him.

Mbuzo stops along with Cashile.

"No baba, we need it. We have to go after Juba."

Cashile says.

“I did not say you shouldn’t go, but leave my car.” Bab’Madlala says.

Cashile takes her husband’s hand and drags him with her to the car.

Bab’Madlala is not having it.

It’s not about the car but this stupid marriage.

They are helpless as they watch Cashile and Mbuzo drive away.

“We are dead meat, MaNkosi.” Bab’Madlala says.

“It’s not over until the fat lady sings. They have declared war with us baba, isukile.” MaNkosi says.

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MBUZO

He's lost ways to console Cashile. Women shouldn't have so many tears, it's not right. He's on the road, not sure where he's headed or if the path will take them to the scene of the accident.

Cashile keeps trying Juba's number, it rings unanswered.

Mbuzo's phone rings, it's a call from Mhloniphe. "Please get the phone for me." He tells Cashile, then asks her to put it on speaker.

"Bafo..."

"You are on speaker." Mbuzo alerts him, lest he says something he shouldn't.

There's silence on the other end before they hear a loud exhale.

"We need to talk." Mhloniphe says.

He doesn't sound like the happy-go-lucky guy they know.

His eyes slowly shift to Cashile, he's not sure about the look she's giving him but it doesn't stop him from taking the phone and turning off the speaker.

He slows the car down, "I'm listening."

"We're back, but there was an accident. I don't know how it happened, KaMadlala's ex was driving the other car. The little girl was there..." - Mhloniphe.

Mbuzo's heart drops to the pit of his stomach. His body begins to sweat due to fear. He can feel Cashile's eyes burning the side of his face but keeps a straight face, as hard as it is.

"Mkhotheni is in ICU." It's now clear that Mhloniphe is crying.

Controlling the car has become a mission, his entire body is shaking like a leaf.

Abruptly, Mbuzo parks on the side of the road. His breathing is vastly changing, he doesn't want to scare Cashile so he holds his breath.

"What's going on?" She asks.

She can see the change in his demeanour.

He looks at her, but struggles to keep eye contact. He will tear up if he does.

"I need some air." He didn't mean for his voice to shake.

He goes for the handle, Cashile grabs his wrist.

"Mbuzo, what's going on?"

How does he look into her eyes and tell her that his brother is behind the accident?

"I need some air, don't follow me," a tear falls from his right eye.

He steps out before she sees it and shuts the door.

Cashile is watching as he walks a distance from the car, his steps are wobbly. He walks like a man who's going to collapse.

When he sees that he's far from the car, he keels on the dirt and with his trembling hand presses the phone to his ear.

"Where is the little girl?" Mbuzo asks.

"I don't know, I left her with Bakhe. I had to get out of there with the money before the police got there. I left my brother behind, bafo." He's still broken.

Mbuzo takes a deep breath, tears are knocking. He lets them out, groaning to muffle his cries. The pain is excruciating. It's worse than the pain he felt when their parents died.

He hears the car door open.

"Mbuzo." A worried Cashile calls.

He has to force himself to stand, weak knees

and all.

“Where are you?” Mbuzo asks Mhloniphe as he looks back at Cashile.

“At the hospital, I will send you the location.”

There’s silence from Mbuzo’s side.

“Ndoda, I’m sorry. I was reckless, I’m sorry. We could lose our brother because of my carelessness.” Mhloniphe’s cries are palpable now.

Nonetheless, Mbuzo has nothing to say to him. He hangs up, and immediately masters the courage to face Cashile.

She’s walking up to him, brows knitted in a frown.

She’s never seen him walk with slouched shoulders, what burden is he carrying now?

Cashile cups his face, he drops his head.

“What’s going on?” Cashile asks.

Mbuzo sighs, where will he even begin?

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MANKOSI

Her kind of “love is blind” is not the same as everyone else’s. Yes she believes in indoda and would do just about anything to keep him, but she won’t hesitate to fuck him up if he pisses her off.

She’s kept the angel façade for too long and nothing good has come out of it.

“Yebo sisi. My poor Cashile has lost her first child.” She’s on the phone with her cousin.

So far, she’s reported Lulu’s death to almost everyone in the family. From the Madlalas to the Nkosis. The yard should be buzzing with

people tomorrow morning.

Bab'Madlala brings the onion she asked for and watches his wife in action.

“Kulungile sisi. Tell the family. Yes, it’s a sad day for all of us.”

She finishes the call and makes another one to her stokvel friends. This one is a video call that needs her to cut some onions so her stubborn tears come out.

“Hayi, my grandchild Nkosi yami. Hiii! Hiii! Hiii!” She pulls her ugliest cries, hands on her head and body shaking, these are the most believable.

Her stokvel friends immediately sympathise with her. They ask her questions but MaNkosi does nothing but cry, she’s inconsolable.

Three of them leave the video call, one after the other. She’s clearly wasting their data.

“We are sorry for your loss, MaNkosi. We will

organize the church members, some of us will be there now." She's not sure of this one's name but she loves her idea.

Mankosi's cheeks hurt from fake crying and this onion is giving her a headache. She says her goodbyes and hangs up, then goes to the bathroom to wash her face.

When she comes back, the neighbours are knocking at the door.

Bab'Madlala gets the door, and lets them in.

It's two males with their wives whose heads are wrapped with doeks.

MaNkosi has to start over and cry.

The news has spread like wildfire, that's the thing about the black community. You can't hide anything.

In an hour, the house is buzzing with people singing hymns. She has to make them coffee

even when she's in her grieving state.

The ladies offer to help, but there's food hidden in this kitchen. She watches their every move.

Bab'Madlala asks for a word in the bedroom when he finds her chatting and laughing with the ladies in the kitchen. She's laughing the loudest.

She follows him to their bedroom and closes the door after her.

"What is wrong with you MaNkosi? What will people think when you are laughing like a hyena?" He asks.

"I got carried away." She lightly shrugs.

Bab'Madlala is suddenly suspicious of her behaviour.

"I thought you loved the child. You don't look saddened by her death, you were even fake

crying.

With lifted eyebrows, MaNkosi heads to the wardrobe and takes out a suitcase.

“I have a friend who owns a cottage in Stanger, we can stay there until the funeral is over. You will fake a heart attack, so everyone will think I’m nursing you at the hospital.” She’s neatly packing their clothes.

Bab’Madlala is confused, “Why?”

“Because we killed the child. The sacrifice will not work if we attend the funeral.”

Shut the front door!

His chuckle is the sound of confusion, he doesn’t remember calling a hit on a little girl. Did Khathala perhaps make a mistake?

He snatches his trousers from MaNkosi, and throws them on the bed.

“Ngilalele. What did you do?”

She looks at him, “I told you that my children are off limits but you never listen to me. You think you’re married to an idiot, Madlala.”

Okay, where are the candid cameras.

“MaNkosi?”

“I am tired of sitting back and watching you destroy everything I have worked hard to maintain.” She says.

“Yazi angikuzwa Mfazi. Are you saying that you killed an innocent baby?”

“Whose baby was I supposed to kill? Mine?”

She bursts into laughter.

“You think I would ever let you hurt my children, Madlala?” MaNkosi asks.

Her arrogance has knocked Bab’Madlala off his socks.

This can’t be his wife.

“Ukhulumana ngani, MaNkosi? You suggested that

we kill my brother and I agreed. He was my only brother and I loved him but I sacrificed him for you, for us. Wena you have two children but can't even give up one. You are selfish Khanyisile." He pokes her head with his forefinger.

"Call me anything you want, I don't care. Oksalayo, my children will not die, not when there's still breath in these lungs." She arrogantly bangs her chest, glaring at him with disgust.

"But you'd rather they suffer? You know what we are doing affects them badly. Bakhe is unmarried with no kids, Cashile is drowning in bad luck and will never get a job." Bab'Madlala says.

"As long as they are breathing, and have food to eat." She says.

She is not going to bury her children.

“You don’t think MaNkosi. Lulu died a Ngwenya, the sacrifice won’t work.”

MaNkosi goes back to packing their clothes, she’s lost in deep thought that she misses the look of disappointment from her husband.

“Nkululeko’s death didn’t work for us, and killing Mbali’s baby was a fail. Lulu has to work, otherwise we will use her spirit to make money.” MaNkosi absentmindedly says.

“Umkhovu? Do you hear yourself mfazi? I am not going to nurture a Zombie.”

One thing for sure, he knows how to grate her tits. She corners him, he’s tall but shrinks under her stern gaze.

“Lalela la sphukuphuku sendoda.”

His eyes widen, “Hau hau, MaNkosi.”

“I am done following your lead. You are not man enough to lead a woman like me. I will take over

from here, unlike you, I know what I'm doing."

Bab'Madlala's throat has gone dry, he can't utter a single word.

"Let's go back before they start looking for us. We have to pretend that we are sad so when we leave for my friend's place, it won't raise questions." She says.

He sighs, it's the only thing he can do.

"Baba force your tears, they won't believe it with a dry face."

He makes a crying face, squeezing his eyes. Nothing is coming out.

"Wancho, wancho." She counts 1- 2, 1-2. Opens the door and starts wailing like a widow.

"Hau Kambe senzeni bawo! Why did you cut her life short? Hiiii! Heee!!! hayiiii! Lulu my grandchild!"

She falls on the floor like all grieving African

mothers do, “Lulu cannot leave us. Oooh ndodana kaDavide ngihawukele. Son of David, have mercy on me.” She’s screaming and crawling like she’s in a Rebecca Malope music video.

The ladies help her but MaNkosi throws herself on the floor again, she’s not done crying.

“Lulama has left us.” Bab’Madlala shakes his head in disbelief, as he tries to help his wife up.

He’s always been bad with names.

“Gogo.” The tiny voice calls out.

Their faces instantly dry up as they turn to the door and see Bakhe carrying a bandaged Lulu in his arms. Their eyes pop out.

What did the devil just drag in?

“Seng’khona boCleva.” Bakhe announces that he’s home.

Bab’Madlala shakes his wife’s shoulder and

whispers, “Lead me phela my leader, I am your follower.”

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500+ comments... 15 shares...

[03/06, 15:45] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 42

CASHILE

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I don't know what happened with Mbuzo earlier, he seems fine now. However, judging from the unshed tears in his eyes, it was something deep. Now it's just water under the bridge, like the stress I had over Lulu's wellbeing.

I spoke to Bakhe, she's with him and safe.

He didn't say much, except that he had something to take care of and asked if Lulu could stay with him for a while. He feels she will be safer with him, my worry is "safe" from what?

"Mkami!" Mbuzo softly calls.

I blink myself out of my thoughts and give him my attention. He's behind the wheel, I don't know where we are going.

"Yes," I respond.

We're in March, barely had time to sink into our relationship and we're already married.

I guess we'll tackle everything in the marriage.

"My brothers managed to sell the property. I was hoping to use some of the money for your lobola, but Mkhetheni was in an accident. He's in ICU, I don't know how much is needed for his medical bills."

I put my hand on his knee and give him a

comforting squeeze.

“I’m so sorry, Nonkosi.”

He lets out a sigh.

Even a blind man can tell that he’s troubled, there’s this frown stuck on his face. It’s been there since we got in the car.

“Mbuzo...” I tap his knee.

“I hope my bad mood won’t rub off on you my love.” He interjects.

“No, why would you say that?”

“Because I’m drained, emotionally and spiritually. I do not have any ounce of hope left in me.” He says.

“But hope is the only thing that keeps us going, Nonkosi. Without it...”

“Maybe if I had confidence in my parents, my ancestors and God. It’s so hard for me to practise faith. Your father was right, we are

orphans. Our parents crossed over and forgot about us.”

I put my hand on his shoulder, how do I tell him the opposite when I myself do not know what is going on in the underground?

“God would never turn His back on you. You and your brothers have a destiny to fulfil, something that the devil wants, that’s why he is fighting you.”

He’s shaking his head, I don’t see any hope on him. It hurts to see him broken.

“Mbuzo, God gives the toughest battles to his strongest warriors. You can’t be going through all this for nothing, something is going to give in the end.”

He looks at me briefly with a look of desolation on his face, then sighs.

You can’t force a person into belief, Mbuzo has given up on both God and ancestors.

I keep my hand on his shoulder until we get to the hospital. He's silent as we find our way inside.

Unfortunately, visiting hours are between 12pm and 3pm. We are told to come back tomorrow.

Mbuzo was right about his foul mood rubbing off on me, or maybe I'm just upset that we were not allowed to see Mkhetheni.

I attempt to hold his hand as we walk back to the car, he puts his hands into his pockets. I guess he needs space. He exits first, I stand aside for a team of paramedics pushing in a stroller. The person on the stroller is covered by a white sheet.

I've seen dead bodies live and none of them affected me.

Why am I suddenly sensitive seeing this one? Chills ripple through my body, causing me to

visibly shudder.

It feels like my heart wants to come out past my throat and through my mouth.

“Move sisi.” The male paramedic says, wanting me to make space for them to pass. I don’t know what comes over me, but I grab the hem of the cloth covering the body and pull it.

I don’t know what happens next, I let go of the cloth and sink down on my knees with tears raining down my face.

Juba can’t be dead, he can’t be dead.

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MHLONIPHE

There’s a tree he goes to when he feels

overwhelmed by life and everything in between. It's in an open field, a land that belongs to the Sibiyas. People come here for picnics or wedding pictures. It's mostly peaceful at night, he never finds a single soul. Today, he's got company. He can't tell who the person is until he gets closer.

It's not a surprise to see Mbali here, he thinks he has a clue as to what she's up to.

"Need help little one?" He asks, sinking down on the ground with his back leaning on the tree trunk. He pulls out a packet of cigarette from his pocket, missing Mbali's little jump scare.

She frowns at the sight of him, "I'm fine."

Mhlo nods, while he lights a loose cigarette and takes a long puff.

"Make sure it's tight, first attempts always fail." He says.

It seems she's having a hard time tying the

noose on the tree.

Mbali ignores him.

“And don’t haunt my spot, this is where I come to think. I don’t like ghosts.”

“I’m going to my father and husband when I die.” Mbali snaps.

He scoffs, “Did they die the way you’re about to die? Did they kill themselves?”

“No, an accident.” She says.

She pulls the rope, checking if it’s tight enough to hold her weight, it’s perfect.

Mhloniphe looks up at her, “Then what makes you think you will see them after willingly taking your life? The power of life and death is in your hands but the gods do not approve when you choose to take your life.”

“The gods?”

“Yep. You become a wandering spirit when you

kill yourself." He's not really sure, this is something he once heard.

"That's not true." Mbali disputes, throwing a look of disgust his way.

"Why don't you find out then?" –Mhloniphe.
"Who knows, maybe

you will be less annoying as a ghost."

What an insensitive basta&d.

Mbali's face welcomes confusion and doubt, she stares at him for too long before deciding to sit down beside him, breaking down in tears.

"I'm tired of life, my husband died. I want to be with him." She covers her face with her hands, crying.

"No one is stopping you little one." Mhloniphe casually says.

What an insensitive asshole.

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MANKOSI

Bakhe didn't come alone, his father's cousin Balungile is with him.

MaNkosi and Bab'Madlala have not uttered a word, they need to understand first what is going on before going on defence mode.

"MaNkosi, is this not the child you said passed away?" One of the neighbors asks.

There's confusion among the guests.

"When did I say that?" MaNkosi snaps at the poor woman of God.

"I think everyone should leave, there is nothing to see here." Bab'Madlala says, gathering the cups of tea on the table.

“MaNkosi take the scones and follow me to the kitchen.” He winks at her, MaNkosi gets the hint. They will use this time to escape.

She picks up the tray and walks behind her husband, Bakhe blocks their path.

“Ndodana, are you blocking your father’s path?” MaNkosi is utterly shocked.

“Mami, please sit down. Both of you. No one is leaving this place until you both have been exposed.”

They look at each other, Bab’Madlala looks defeated.

MaNkosi wants to tell him that he’s sweating, and maybe wipe the sweat forming on his forehead because he’s giving them away.

A smile spreads on MaNkosi’s face, she puts the tray back on the table and squeezes herself on the couch among the ladies.

“Khehla, it’s late. Let these people go home.”
MaNkosi says to Bakhe.

She’s trying her luck really, she killed the trust
Bakhe had in her the day she chose her
husband over him.

“Why Mami? You don’t want the neighbours to
know that you tried to kill your own grandchild?”
–Bakhe drops the bomb.

There are gasps, Bab’Madlala’s gasp is the
loudest. His mouth is hanging open, hands on
his head.

“MaNkosi?” He exclaims, and has more to say
but the cold stare from MaNkosi forces him to
swallow his words.

If she’s going down, she will downright take him
with her.

Bab’Madlala turns his shocked face towards
Bakhe, “Why would you say that Bakhe? How
could you embarrass your mother in front of the

community? Do you want them to accuse her of witchcraft?"

He's not helping, MaNkosi decides to stand next to her husband before he sells them out with his stupidity.

"Juba and Lulu were in a car accident. Juba died protecting his little girl, I spoke to him before he breathed his last breath." Bakhe reveals.

MaNkosi claps her hands in disbelief, "Shame Juba. We were eating with him a few hours ago."

"Yes, we didn't want him to take the child. But he threatened to shoot us." Bab'Madlala says.

"Stop lying baba. Juba told me what happened. One of the herd boys told him that Mami slaughtered a chicken and poured the blood over Lulu's picture. He even took Juba to the place where it happened."

No way, this boy is out to get them.

“And you believed them Khehla? You believe that your mother would do something so evil?”
—MaNkosi cries, hiding her face on her husband’s shoulder.

“Who is this herd boy? What is his name?”
Bab’Madlala asks.

They have been accused of many things, but witchcraft? The world is ending.

“Will you two stop? A man died because of you. Not only did you want to kill this child, you killed uncle Nkulu.” —Bakhe.

Louder gasps are heard, the guests are comfortable in their seats now, sipping on tea and dry scones.

If they have to camp here, then they will.

MaNkosi’s crying marathon begins, “Are you also going to blame us for Jesus being

crucified Khehla? Okay ke, we were there. We were part of the people who crucified Jesus.”

Bab’Madlala chuckles, “Do you hear how stupid that sounds? Nkululeko was in an accident, everyone knows that. You hate us that much that you want to tarnish our reputation?”

“Bakhe, why did you call me here? I thought you said you had proof that your parents are witches.” His uncle Balungile says.

“This is the proof uncle B. Uncle Nkulu has been coming to me in a dream and giving me hints. Ubaba and Mami are ritualists, they sacrifice people for riches.”

Someone is in stiches, it’s Bakhe’s father.

“Thula mfana wami before they lock you up in a madhouse.”

He angers Bakhe with his declaration.

“You can fool anyone, but not me. Let’s call a

prophet then, he will tell us if these people are innocent.” Bakhe says.

“What prophet?” MaNkosi asks, glancing at her husband fearfully.

Could it be the man Mbali spoke of?

Bab’Madlala swallows a lump, he’s not going to be caught.

Hell no.

“It was your mother, she wanted to sacrifice my poor granddaughter for money.”

Bab’Madlala points at MaNkosi, creating space between them.

He’s not going to be associated with a witch.

MaNkosi is beside herself with shock, so are her guests. But who cares about them?

What are they still doing here anyway?

“Mina baba? Khehla your father paid a witch

doctor to kill Cashile, ufunu ukuthwala ngani lobaba. He's the reason you are unemployed and your life has no direction. Your father is using the Xaba ancestors to gain riches, he trapped Velaphi and his wife's spirits in a bottle."

MaNkosi sings better than a bird, but Bab'Madlala is not going to clap for her.

"Why are you lying Khanyisile? It was your idea, you are the witch of witches." Bab'Madlala exclaims.

He looks at Bakhe innocently, "It's all your mother's doing son. She bewitched me too, that's why I haven't divorced her. She doesn't deserve to be my wife, or a mother, futhi mphuceni ikuku." He announces that they confiscate her vagina.

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[03/06, 15:45] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 43

CASHILE

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He was my first love, as much as we had our differences, I loved him.

Sure I wanted better and felt betrayed by him, but I never would have wished death upon him.

“KaMadlala?” He sounds panicky as he helps me up from the floor.

I packed myself on a corner while the paramedics pushed Juba’s body away, I’ve been trying my best not to throw up.

My knees are too weak to hold me up.

“I’ve got you,” he softly says, gently whisking me

up in his arms.

I hold on by wrapping my arms around his neck.

“What’s wrong?”

I don’t know if it’s the fact that my head is comfortably resting on his chest or him asking me what’s wrong; that has caused me to break down in loud sobs.

He exhales and positions me, so he gives me a straddle hug and squeezes me in his arms.

“You’re scaring me KaMadlala. What is it?”

“He’s dead.” I let out the first words in my head.

Mbuzo’s body tenses, he slowly pulls back. The tears behind his pupils alert me of what’s wringing in his head. He thinks I’m talking about Mkhetheni

“What?” His voice breaks.

“Juba... Juba is dead.” I rectify my mistake, he sighs, closing his eyes in the process.

“I have to call his brother,” I say.

“Let’s go to the car,” he takes my hand and leads me there.

No one is ever prepared to break such heavy news.

My heart is skipping beats as I wait for Ntando to answer the phone.

“Cashile, kunjani sisi?” He’s shouting, there’s noise in the background.

“Ntando, can I speak to your mother?” I have to yell as well, so he hears me.

“Ngisegoli sisi, I’m in Joburg. What’s wrong?”

Well this is not something to announce while shouting.

“Can you go somewhere quiet please, I need to tell you something.”

“Hold on,” he says before I hear movement in the background. The noise starts to fade until I

hear nothing.

“Sorry sisi, I’m at a party. What do you want to talk to me about? Did my brother reach you? He said he was headed to you the last time we spoke.” He sounds happy, how do I break his spirit?

“Yes Juba arrived and...” My entire body is shaking, the lump in my throat is making it hard for me to speak.

“I knew you would give him a second chance. When are you guys coming back to Joburg?”

“Ntando, Juba is no longer with us.”

A silence stretches, I can hear him breathing though.

“Wh... what?”

My heart is ready to jump out of my chest, this is harder than I thought. I feel Mbuzo squeezing my shoulder.

He nods when I look his way, silently assuring me that I've got this.

I take a long breath, "He has passed away. I don't know how you're going to tell your mother but please don't do it over the phone."

"I don't understand. Juba was fine, I spoke to him this morning. He said he was bringing you and Lulu home. He can't be dead, my brother can't be dead." He's yelling, fuelling my tears.

"I'm sorry for your loss." I say.

"You finally killed my brother, Cashile."

What?

"Ntando..."

"Iso ngeso. An eye for an eye, Cashile Madlala."

He cuts the call.

What is wrong with Ntando? Is he dumb or what?

I look at Mbuzo, shocked out of my socks.

“What?”

“He blames me for Juba’s death.”

“He’s grieving, don’t take it to heart.”

Don’t take it to heart? Ntando is not a child to be making empty threats.

Sigh!

THE MADLALAs

There’s an angry crowd outside the gate,
demanding that Madlala and his wife come out.
Someone in here spread the news via
WhatsApp.

Thanks to her precious Khehla, her good-girl
image has been ruined.

“Mthakathi!”

A vas hits Bab’Madlala on the head, he stumbles back.

“Baba!” MaNkosi catches him before he falls.

There’s fear in her eyes as she inspects the bleeding wound on his temple.

MaNkosi lets out a shrill scream, hands placed over her head.

“They want to kill my husband.”

“Ayighubhe! Outside now.” Whoever this man is, he’s giving orders in another man’s house and that frustrates Bab’Madlala.

He’s still dizzy from the hit though, so he’s having a hard time constructing his words.

MaNkosi looks to their son when they are grabbed by force.

“Khehla help us, we are innocent please.” She pleads.

He should feel sorry for her, she gave birth to him.

MaNkosi is tackled to the ground by some man.

“Mayee! Ngafa Jesu!!!.” She’s exclaiming as they drag her outside like a bag of rice.

“Umfazi wami loyo, that’s my wife. Don’t touch my wife.” Bab’Madlala yells, trying to fight the men pulling him against his will.

They are dragged outside, screaming and pleading for help.

Bakhe didn’t think it would be this hard.

“They are your parents Bakhe, you shouldn’t have done this. Did you see what they did to them? MaNkosi was kicked to the floor, and your father is bleeding.” Balungile says.

He is not in favour of what is about to happen to his cousin.

“I only wanted to expose them. I didn’t think those people would attack them.”

Anger controlled his decision.

He looks at Lulu and rubs her back, she’s slowly falling asleep.

“Go out there and fix it.” Balungile angrily says.

He exhales heavily, “It’s out of my hands baba. The damage has been done.”

Balungile is fuming, what this boy is telling him is crap.

“Don’t be stupid boy, you and your sister will be orphans by tomorrow. Is that what you want? There is a way to fix this without resorting to murder.” –Balungile.

“Baba, they wanted to kill Lulu.” That’s something he can never forgive.

“The child is alive, turn a blind eye if you want blood in your hands.”

Bakhe is confused, who is to say they will repent if he saves them? The noise outside is slowly dispersing. They run out to see the crowd heading up the road, they can't see Madlala and MaNkosi but they can hear screams of help.

Bakhe runs next door, the lady that stays here raised them. He grew up playing with her kids. He asks to leave Lulu there and promises to fetch her later.

Balungile has gone ahead, Bakhe runs after him. Together they try to plead with the mob.

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Madlala and MaNkosi are dragged to the Xaba homestead.

Mhloniphe is arriving on foot with Mbali, no one has time to ask what he's doing with a widow at night.

The noise caused by the angry mob forces Mbuzo and Cashile out of the house.

Cashile is taken aback seeing the state her parents are in. Bab'Madlala is on his knees, MaNkosi is caught in the grip of some funny looking man.

"What's going on?" Mbuzo asks when Mhlo comes to stand next to him.

"It was an act, a drama we planned." Bakhe jumps in front of the crowd, clapping his hands.

"Don't lie boy, we know what we heard." This one was in the house during the confession.

"And you believed it?" Bakhe laughs. "It was all an act for the TV show on SABC 1. We pranked you guys, and it worked."

The noise dies down, there's confusion among the crowd.

"Mami, good acting. And baba I'm sorry you

were hurt during the shooting of the movie. You guys are still getting your cut of the money." He says to his parents.

Bab'Madlala has understood the assignment, he forces a smile through the pain as he stands.

"Hai ak'senani. Fame is pain." He dusts his pants and starts wiping the blood on his face with the sleeve of his shirt.

"Everyone can go home now, the show is over. Thank you for participating, you will all be compensated." Balungile announces.

"Yes, sorry for wasting your time." Bakhe adds.

There are complaints and cold stares but the people still scatter to their respectable places.

He turns to his parents, there are tears in his eyes.

"You did well my son. Yoh I have never cried like

that in my life.” Bab’Madlala pulls him for a hug, but Bakhe pushes him off.

“Tell the Xabas why they are suffering.”

No, this must be a bad dream.

“Bakhe...”

“You heard me baba, tell them what you did to their parents. Tell them why nothing has been going well for them.”-Bakhe.

Mbuzo and Mkhetheni have grasped the seriousness of this situation. They are staring at MaNkosi and Bab’Madlala in anticipation.

“Speak or I will call those people back and let them finish what they started.” Bakhe and his threats are getting annoying.

“Mah, what is Bakhe talking about?” Cashile.

“Thula wena! You married yourself to these people against your family.” Bab’Madlala snaps.

“Leave Cashile alone and tell these people what

you've been doing." Bakhe barks.

His uncle Balungile is not happy about his behaviour, he shakes his head and pats Madlala's shoulder.

There is no way out. Madlala takes MaNkosi's hand, she tightens the hold and sighs. Tears are having their way on her face.

Madlala glances at the Xaba boys, it angers him that he's at their mercy. Velaphi is having a field day in hell.

"I've been living off of you boys." Madlala says and looks away.

Confusion lurks on the Xaba brothers.

"What do you mean?" Asks Mhloniphe with crinkled brows.

Was he not listening?

Madlala releases a loud sigh just to show them how exhausted he is.

“I was tired of living in poverty, so I started taking from you boys. Whatever money you would make, it would come to me. Every good thing that was meant to happen to you, would come to me.”

He's revealing too much, it must be the injury on his head. MaNkosi squeezes his hand not giving anything away.

He gets the message and seals his lips.

“I'm confused, how were you taking from us?”
Mhloniphe.

Sigh!

These boys are just like their father, very entitled to everything.

“Does it matter? Don't be greedy Nonkosi, I have told you the truth. Do you want my soul as well? Take my soul then, Nonkosi. Take it.” -Madlala.

He has every right to yell, he's been through a

lot today.

Can't these people see that?

"What did you say?" Mhloniphe slowly charges at him.

"Yhuuu!!!" Madlala jumps back, covering his face with his arms.

Mhloniphe is one person you don't piss off, especially when you've pushed his biggest red button.

Mbali jumps in front of Mhlo, "Bhuti please spare him. You can't hit an elder."

Her hands are on his chest, he looks at them, then her face, frowning.

"I'm not your brother, little one." He pushes her aside like she's made of cardboard.

Perks of skipping sports day at school, Madlala only runs two steps before Mhloniphe grabs him by the collar of his shirt. He starts choking.

There's chaos, Mankosi is screaming and trying to push Mhlo away from her husband.

"He's killing your father, Khehla." MaNkosi is yelling not only for Bakhe but for the whole world to hear.

Cashile pleadingly looks at Mbuzo, he turns a blind eye. He's as angry as Mhlo, the difference between them is that Mbuzo is more composed.

"You have two options, tell me the truth or I force it out of you." Mhlo sputters.

Madlala lifts his hands in surrender, "The money... the money I gave you. You touching it meant your riches would come to me," he sounds irritated now.

"I can't believe this," Mbuzo scoffs, he pulls his hand away when Cashile holds it.

"There's more, tell them what you did to their

parents.”

Whose child is this? You’d swear Bakhe fell from a tree.

MaNkosi throws a glare at him, stupid boy.

“We held their spirits captive and removed your ancestors from you so you won’t have protection. Your father was a very proud man, and greedy. He hated my Cashile because she was poor, he hated me because I wasn’t in his league. So I went to see a witch doctor.”

– Madlala says.

This is another form of witchcraft.

Mbali looks terrified to death, now is the time to call on Jesus.

Out of anger, Mhlo pushes him to the ground.

“Baba.” MaNkosi runs to kneel in front of him, she caresses his face to check if there’s any more injuries.

“Speak Madlala.” Mbuzo snaps.

These people destroyed their lives, he almost took his life because of them.

Madlala sits butt flat and folds his arms, he's said too much. If he continues, the worst will happen.

“Don't say anything more, I am not going to lose you baba.” MaNkosi whispers to him.

“Why must he keep quiet?” Mbuzo grabs MaNkosi and pushes her away from him. It wasn't that hard a push, but MaNkosi throws herself on the ground screaming.

“Yehhenni! He's killing me, sizani!”

Cashile runs to help her, shocked by Mbuzo.

Mbuzo brings Madlala to his feet, and slaps him across the face. He staggers back only to crash into Mhloniphe who throws a punch that sends Madlala to the ground.

“That’s enough,” Balungile shouts, shielding his cousin.

“Please stop, how is he going to speak when you’re hitting him?” –Balungile.

“It was the devil, he made me do it,” Bab’Madlala cries, spitting a pool of blood, he just lost a tooth.

“Baba don’t speak, you will die if you speak.” MaNkosi is in tears.

“Mah you are making things worse.” Chashile reprimands her.

“The witch doctor made me do it, he told me that your mother was blessed with wealth and it was passed on to you boys. Velaphi hit the jackpot when he married her. The witch doctor told me that the only way to steal her wealth was to sleep with her. So I seduced her, I seduced Velaphi’s wife and we had an affair.” –Madlala.

The silence that follows can't be measured.

"Baba, what are you saying? You cheated on me with Velaphi's wife?" Poor MaNkosi.

He drops his head, nodding.

"Njani? How?" –MaNkosi.

Madlala chuckles lightly, "Have you seen me, MaNkosi? Ngimuhle kabi mina. No one is as handsome as me in this village."

MaNkosi starts crying, real tears this time.

"I don't believe you, my mother would have never." Mhlo shouts, charging at him. But Balungile is hell bent on protecting his cousin.

"You said you wanted the truth, now you can't handle it?" Madlala scoffs. "Even when she died, I went to the mortuary to sleep with her corpse. That was the most powerful ritual by the way. Kodwa I didn't like it."

MaNkosi faints.

Bakhe weeps.

Cashile is on her knees, throwing up.

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I apologize for the late post, I haven't been sleeping enough, so that caused writer's block, my brain shut down.

500+ comments... 15 shares ...

[03/06, 15:45] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 44

CASHILE

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Uncle Balungile decided that enough was enough after my mother fainted. To say I am embarrassed would be an understatement. I

haven't spoken with Bakhe, he had to leave to get Lulu. I'm not sure if he will bring her to me tonight, it's late though. I don't want her travelling at night.

I was in the middle of preparing supper when we heard the commotion outside.

I need to go back to the kitchen and finish what I started. Mbuzo and Mhlo are not in the house, I don't know where they are.

How will I ever face him? He couldn't even look at me.

It's been a long day, I thought taking a bath would help me feel better.

I feel worse.

My clothes are still at Mbali's house, I choose shorts from Mbuzo's drawer and a t-shirt. The clothes are too big, I have to fold the short at the waist.

There's someone in the kitchen, I know it's him.

I find him with Mhlo, sitting in silence, opposite each other.

I stand in the doorway, not sure if I should enter.

Mhlo stops playing with the apple in his hand and lifts his eyes to me. He has bruises on his face.

“Makoti, congratulations. I heard you tied the knot.”

“Thanks,” I smile.

“How does it feel to be married? It’s my brother’s first time.” He taps Mbuzo on the shoulder, he doesn’t move. My concentration shifts from Mhlo to Mbuzo.

I can’t help but notice the air crackling with tension as I stand in the dimly lit kitchen, the scent of simmering tinned fish hanging heavy in

the air. I was in charge of the fish and he was making pap when we were disturbed by the noise outside.

“Am I the only one who’s hungry?” Mhlo breaks the silence.

“I will dish up,” I say, heading to the stove.

“I will check if the windows are closed.” Mhlo says and leaves the kitchen.

Mbuzo's presence looms over me like a dark cloud, his brooding silence worries me.

I can feel the weight of his resentment bearing down on me, suffocating me with its silent accusation. It's a feeling I am not familiar with.

He's still seated and hasn't moved a muscle, nor looked at me.

“You okay?” I ask, washing the plates I'm going to dish up in.

What do I say to him?

Haibo! So he's going to ignore me? I look at him, he looks at me.

"Please tell me you don't resent me for who my parents are."

"Who they are? You make it sound like it's a normal thing."

Yep! I was right, he's upset with me.

"Mbuzo, are you angry with me, or them?"

He scoffs, I'm not prepared to hear what he has to say regrading this matter.

"I asked you a question." I snap. "Because that would be unfair, I had no idea what they do. And I'm sure there's an explanation for all of this. Maybe it's old age, they need help."

I should have known better than to bring up the subject of my parents, but the words spilled from my lips before I could stop them. Now, as I watch Mbuzo's expression darken with anger, I

can't help but regret the choice.

"I can't believe you're defending them, KaMadlala," he growls, his voice laced with bitterness. "After everything they've done to me, to my family."

His words cut me to the core. My parents' actions were malicious, and their foolish attempts to help only served to bring misery upon Mbuzo and his family.

But I can't bring myself to condemn them—not completely.

"Something doesn't add up, I know who raised me. As much as I heard their confession, I can't find it in me to believe it." I argue weakly, knowing even as the words leave my lips that they hold little weight.

Mbuzo's eyes flash with anger, his fists clenched at his sides as he struggles to contain his emotions.

"You don't believe it?" he scoffs. "They destroyed my life, KaMadlala. They destroyed my family, you heard your father. What's there not to believe? Are you that desperate for them to be innocent that you would overlook the struggles we went through? Two innocent people died dammit."

His words hang in the air like a heavy pall, the truth of them echoing in the silence that follows. I can feel the weight of his pain pressing down on me, crushing me beneath its suffocating embrace.

"I know," I whisper, my voice barely above a hoarse whisper. "I know, Mbuzo. And I'm sorry."

But my words fall on deaf ears, lost in the sea of anger and resentment that swirls between us.

"I will do anything, just tell me how to fix this. I will tell my parents to ask for forgiveness, and reverse the curse. Your life can be better again,

Mbuzo."

He turns away, his shoulders tense with frustration as he retreats into the darkness of the living room.

He can't be for real.

I'm trying here.

And as I stand alone in the empty kitchen, the echoes of our argument ringing in my ears, I can't help but wonder if our love will ever be enough to bridge this sudden storm in our lives.

We've barely begun, he's everything to me.

"Mbuzo!" I follow him to the living room, he's standing by the window.

"What's on your mind?" I ask.

Silence.

The tension in the room is palpable, thick

enough to suffocate me as I stand frozen in the wake of his anger.

“They took us under their wing when our parents died and we trusted them like fools. How are we supposed to move on from here, KaMadlala?”

“What they did has nothing to do with us... our marriage.” I say. He’s scaring me.

“But they killed my parents.” He yells, turning to look at me.

“Your parents died of suicide.”

“Come on, KaMadlala. You heard your father, he’s the reason we lost everything. My father fell into depression after he lost his businesses, and eventually unravelled. He killed himself and my mother. And it was your father’s fault, Madlala took my parents from me.”

“Why are you putting it like that?”

“Because it’s the truth.” He shouts.

“Okay then, I can get them to apologize. You can start over, rebuild from scratch and attain what you lost.” I say.

“You think it’s that simple? A lousy apology and everything will go back to normal? Will that apology bring my parents back?”

“I’m trying here, cut me some slack.”

He shakes his head, “I didn’t ask you to try KaMadlala, so don’t waste your time. You’re actually making things worse.”

He hasn’t stopped yelling, I’m so confused. Is he taking his anger out on me?

Did I avail myself at the wrong time?

His words hang in the air like a heavy fog, choking me with their bitterness and resentment. I want to reach out to him, to soothe the storm raging within him, but I find

myself paralyzed by fear of losing him.

"Please tell me what to do, I don't want to lose you." He's not looking at me but he can hear the tears in my voice.

I'm out of options. He's completely closed off.

"Nonkosi, please..." I step closer, closing the gap between us. He opens it further by stepping back.

And then, Mhlo appears in the doorway, his presence a welcome breathing space from the suffocating silence that surrounds us.

"Enough," he says firmly, his voice cutting through the tension like a knife. "This arguing will get us nowhere."

I want to protest, to defend myself against Mbuzo's accusations, but Mhlo's words hold a weight of authority that I can't ignore. He reminds me of Mkhetheni, I'd swear I'm looking at him. Mkhetheni is the one who could diffuse

even the most volatile of situations with a single word.

But Mbuzo is not so easily swayed. His jaw clenches with frustration, his fists balled at his sides as he struggles to contain his simmering rage.

"It's not that simple, Mhlo," he mutters, his voice thick with emotion. "She's a Madlala, they are the reason we're in this mess in the first place."

I flinch at his words, the sting of his accusation piercing me like a dagger to the heart.

"A Madlala? Are you fuckin serious right now? Bhuti, you married me. You asked me to marry you and gave me your surname. I'm Mrs. Xaba." I defend myself.

"You haven't been smeared with inyongo," he says with his teeth gritted.

Wow!

"Mbuzo!" Mhlo snaps.

"Is that how you feel?" I ask.

He says nothing.

"No, that's not how he feels dade."

"No, Mhlo. Don't speak for him, he's an adult and very much capable of speaking for himself."

I want to say more, tell him how much he's hurting me, but the words die on my lips, suffocated by the weight of his anger.

But Mhlo refuses to let the conversation devolve into a shouting match. He steps forward, his expression a mask of determination as he meets Mbuzo's gaze head-on.

"Blaming KaMadlala won't change what happened," he says firmly. "We need to focus on moving forward, not dwelling on the past."

I want to believe him, to hope that we can find a way to heal the wounds that divide us, but Mbuzo's resentment hangs heavy in the air, casting a shadow over our hopes of reconciliation.

And then, just as I dare to hope that we might find a way through the darkness, Mbuzo's next words shatter the fragile peace that Mhlo has worked so hard to build.

"Go," he says, his voice cold and distant. "I can't look at you right now."

His words hit me like a physical blow, knocking the breath from my lungs and leaving me gasping for air.

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THE MADLALAS

Balungile is kind enough to bring them home with him. His wife is immediately sour when she sees them walk through the gate. She's well in her early 40's, and a head taller than MaNkosi. Two dogs approach and start sniffing the guest. MaNkosi, afraid of dogs, runs to hide behind her husband.

"Voetsek!" Bab'Madlala kicks the dog, it runs off whining.

"That's Danger, he's harmless." Balungile puts them at ease.

"Are you sure his name is not Sticks?" Bab'Madlala asks, judging the animal's skeletal form.

The wife approaches, she does not look happy to have visitors.

"Bafo, you remember my wife, MaGumede." Balungile chuckles nervously, patting his wife on the shoulder.

“How can I forget such a beautiful woman?”
– Madlala.

MaNkosi is annoyed as it is, this man is adding to it.

MaGumede forces a smile, “Let me know if there is anything you need. Baba told me that you were coming, I’ve prepared a room for you to sleep in. We will see you in the morning.”

“Thank you,” says MaNkosi and asks for a dish with water and Dettol so she can treat her husband’s wound.

MaGumede tells her to follow her to the kitchen, while she’s in the bathroom getting the dish, MaNkosi goes through their fridge and takes a piece of meat, and hides it in her bra.

MaGumede comes back with the water, Dettol and cotton.

She gives thanks and heads to their designated bedroom. Danger is jogging behind her, she

holds her breath until she's safe in the room.

Madlala is happy to have his own personal doctor. He keeps smiling at her as she dresses his wound.

"Ouch!" Bab'Madlala hisses in pain and pushes MaNkosi's hand away from his head.

The Dettol is painful enough, she doesn't have to add pressure when dressing the wound.

MaNkosi's glare could kill a thousand men, he frowns upon it.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

Bab'Madlala asks.

"Is it true that you slept with her corpse?" She's traumatised, she's been riding his shaft for years and at some point, had it in her mouth.

The thought of it makes her gag, she runs outside the rondavel and vomits everything that

was inside her stomach.

Bab'Madlala goes after her.

“Yini ngawe MaNkosi? Umithi? Are you pregnant?”

“Do you think I would be stupid to be impregnated by you again?”

Okay! The tongue click and the attitude are new.

This is not his wife.

She's possessed.

“Okay, at least take sand and cover your puke. Buka the dog is eating it,” he makes a disgusted face and goes back into the rondavel, appalled by Danger's choice of food.

His wound still needs treatment, but MaNkosi starts making the bed. She takes the two pillows and puts them in the middle to divide the space.

All the while, he's watching in confusion.

“I need water to wash this blood off my face.”
He says.

She changes into the granny nightdress
MaGumede gave her and slides into bed.

Bab’Madlala goes out with a sunlight green bar
and washes his face from the tap outside the
kitchen.

When he gets back, she’s shuffling in bed,
probably finding a comfortable position.

“Kiss-nyana goodnight ke?” He knows he
messed up. MaNkosi does not let a word out.

He understands her anger, maybe it would’ve
subsided when he wakes up in the morning.

He takes off his clothes until he’s in his boxers,
and gets in bed facing her.

“Khanyisile,” he shakes her shoulder.

She’s as stiff as the corpse he once...

Ahem!

What is this new behaviour? They were facing each other the day they got married, why is she showing him her back now?

“MaNkosi...” he shakes her until she responds in annoyance.

“What do you want?”

“I want to do.” He says, brushing a hand down her hip.

Yep, the man is horny. His manhood needs servicing.

MaNkosi shifts to the edge of the bed.

“MaNkosi before we got married, you were told not to starve me in the bedroom. Are you going against elders now?”

“They are all dead, so it doesn’t matter. Go dig your mistress and do it with her. I will never sleep with you again, Madlala. I would rather die.” She pulls the blanket to her side, leaving

nothing for Madlala.

It's hot anyway, he doesn't need a blanket. He lies down and succumbs to a deep slumber.

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"Baba wake up," a voice whispers into his ear.

He opens his eyes and almost gets a heart attack seeing his wife standing in the dark.

"MaNkosi? Are you a witch or something? Why are you standing in the dark, naked?"

"There's something we have to do before sunset." She's still whispering.

He checks the clock on the wall, it's exactly 4am. What is this thing that has to be done at this time of the night?

"MaNkosi, I'm not horny anymore. Go back to

sleep.” He pulls the blanket to his neck and closes his eyes.

“This is important, it’s about Mbuzo and Cashile’s marriage. We can’t let them continue with the marriage. I am not ready to go back to poverty.”

He’s suddenly fully awake, and all ears.

“What is it?”

“Just come with me,” MaNkosi says and grabs a piece of red meat from the bedside table. He doesn’t ask what it’s for, he’s lost on her walking out naked.

“Mfazi, wear some clothes.”

Has she lost her marbles?

“We have to be naked for this to work, take off your clothes.” MaNkosi says.

He’s confused but follows her instructions.

“Are we going to feed the dogs?” Bab’Madlala

asks, following her inside Balungile's kraal. MaNkosi ignores his question because... why would they need to feed the dogs?

She uses a thick stick to dig a hole after handing him the meat.

"Where did you even get this meat?" Madlala asks.

"In the kitchen when I went to ask for water. MaGumede stepped out and I took the chance."

Bab'Madlala chuckles in disbelief.

"What are you doing anyway?"

"Burying Mbuzo and Cashile's relationship. When this meat starts to rot, so will their relationship. They will despise one another." She says, putting her hand out to retrieve the meat.

A dog snatches it from Madlala's hand and runs out the kraal when MaNkosi shouts, "Voetsek!"

“Yeyi Vimba!” Madlala yells.

“Ibambe baba, catch it.” MaNkosi whisper shouts as she takes off running after the dog.

Bab’Madlala is not far behind with a brick in his hand, shouting, “Voetsek Danger, Voetsek.”

The other dogs start barking, alerting the owners that there’s an intruder in the yard.

The door to the main house opens, Bab’Madlala and MaNkosi freeze, almost bumping into each other.

Balungile and his wife dash out, and almost run back inside seeing Madlala and MaNkosi standing in their dark yard, naked.

They are caught red-handed.

Balungile is fuming, “Bhuti? Isbindi... where do you get the audacity to practice witchcraft in my house?”

Bab’Madlala covers MaNkosi’s vagina with his

hand and puts the other over her shoulders.

“Cha-Cha bhuti. We were playing hide and seek, it helps MaNkosi get wet, she’s very kinky in the bedroom. Mbuze, nangu.” He points at MaNkosi with his head.

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[03/06, 15:45] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 45

CASHILE

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I didn’t think he was serious about not wanting to see me. Our first night as a married couple, we slept in separate rooms. It’s morning, I hardly got any sleep. My eyes were glued to the

door, thinking Mbuzo will walk through it.

I don't have it in me to run after someone, not even the man I love. I knew this marriage was rushed, look at us reaping what we sowed.

I head out of the bedroom, hoping to find him in the kitchen or living room.

Go figure!

I'm home alone.

He wants me gone? I will make like a fuckin banana and split.

My aunt's house is quite far from here, I request a ride and head out with just a t-shirt and shorts. Mbuzo's clothes. I will burn them if he does not come for me.

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I stumble towards my aunt's house, my vision blurred by tears. The door swings open,

revealing Bakhe's concerned face. I didn't think he was home.

"Cashile, what's happened?" he asks, his voice laced with worry.

"Wrong question. What you should be asking me is, why did I fucking get married?"

I tread to the living room and throw myself on the couch.

"You're married?" He shouts in the corridor as he shuts the door.

"Where's Lulu?" I just want my baby.

"She's sleeping in Mbali's room. What do you mean you are married Dade?"

Sigh! I narrate the story up until yesterday's drama.

Bakhe's eyes darken with anger, his fists clenching at his sides.

"That bastard," he growls, his voice thick with

rage.

Before he can say more, a tentative knock sounds at the door. Mhlo steps inside, his expression a mixture of relief and confusion.

"Dade, you're here? I went out to buy bread, I thought of leaving a note but..." he stops and entertains a sigh.

"I want to apologize on behalf of Mbuzo. He knows he's messed up, and he's truly sorry."

That's a lie. He would've come had he been sorry.

"Where is he?" If he tells me where Mbuzo is, I will follow him home.

Mhlo hangs his head, "I don't know. But please, let me take you home with me. We can talk things through, figure out what to do next. Mbuzo loves you, Dade."

Bakhe interjects before I can respond, "No, Mhlo.

She's staying here, if Mbuzo wants her, he will come for her.

"But ntwana," Mhlo begins, his voice pleading. "Mbuzo didn't mean to say any of that. He's just going through a rough time right now, we all are."

Bakhe's jaw tightens, his gaze unwavering.

"And I understand ntwana. But Cashile's my sister, and I won't let anyone hurt her like this. Not even family. He said she is not a Xaba, yet he married her. I think they should stay apart until Mbuzo is able to pay lobola and marry her traditionally, just to avoid such things in the future."

I agree with Bakhe, Mbuzo should take responsibility.

He made me feel like an outsider.

Mhlo's shoulders slump in defeat, his eyes filled with regret. "I understand," he murmurs, his

voice barely above a whisper.

I feel a pang of guilt at Mhlo's hopeless expression, knowing that he's caught in the middle of this feud.

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BAKHE

He's in the living room with Lulu, lost in thought of what transpired last night when the sound of a gentle knock at the door interrupts his daydream.

He looks up to see Khaya standing on his doorstep, her face creased with concern. She looks brighter in a yellow summer dress and sandals. Her braids look as new as the sound of his heartbeat.

"Hello, Buhlebakhe," she says softly, her voice tinged with worry.

Well, well. This is a surprise.

Bakhe hands Lulu more toys before rising to greet her.

"How did you find me?"

"I have a mouth," she keeps her voice low. "I came by because I was worried when I didn't see you at church yesterday."

Ah yes! She invited him to worship Wednesday.

Bakhe's heart swells with warmth at the sight of her, his worries momentarily forgotten in her presence.

"I'm sorry, I should have let you know," he replies. "I had some unexpected family matters to attend to."

She nods understandingly, her eyes filled with compassion.

"Is everything alright?" she asks gently, reaching out to touch his arm in a gesture of comfort.

He's shocked that's for sure, the Khaya he spoke to the other day was playing hard to get.

Bakhe hesitates, unsure of how much to share with her. But there's something about her sincerity that makes him want to open up, to let her into his world.

"It's my sister, Cashile," he explains. "She's going through a difficult time, and I've been doing my best to support her."

He doesn't tell her about his father being the village wizard. His witchcraft would make Sis'Maria green with envy.

Her eyes widen in sympathy, "I'm so sorry to hear that," she murmurs, squeezing his hand in reassurance.

She's very touchy-touchy today.

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

His heart swells with gratitude at her offer,
touched by her genuine concern.

"Thank you, that means a lot to me," he replies.

"Just having you here is more than enough."

Yeah, he's said too much.

They stand together in silence for a moment,
his worries lifting ever so slightly in her
presence. He's never had a woman he can lean
on, rely on her strength and understanding to
see him through the darkest of times.

Could she be the one?

Bakhe smiles warmly at her, his heart lighter
than it was before she came.

"You know," he begins, a playful twinkle in his
eyes, "I think it's about time we went on that
date."

Khaya's eyes widen in mock surprise, a playful

smirk tugging at the corners of her lips.

"Oh, really?" she teases, feigning nonchalance.

"I'm not sure I have time for that."

Yep, this is the Khaya he knows. Playing hard to get.

Bakhe chuckles, his laughter bubbling up from deep within him. "Come on," he pleads, his tone playful yet earnest. "I promise it'll be worth your while."

She rolls her eyes playfully, her laughter joining his in the air between them. "Alright, alright," she relents, unable to keep a straight face any longer. "But only if you promise to take me somewhere nice."

Bakhe grins, "Deal," he agrees, his voice brimming with excitement. "I'll make sure it's a date to remember."

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THE MADLALAS

“I told you not to tell anyone about this MaGumede. Why did you inform the Chief? How am I going to defend my brother in that meeting?”

“They were practising witchcraft in my house, I wasn’t going to keep quiet about that.”

“He’s my brother.”

“What about your children baba? Their safety?”

“Excuse me,” Bab’Madlala cuts through Balungile and MaGumede’s bickering.

“Not now Bafo, I’m still talking to my wife.”
Balungile waves him off.

He sits back down next to his wife, the shade is slowly moving to a different direction. They will have to move with it because the sun is

scorching hot today.

“My ears hurt, they have been yelling before the sun came out” Bab’Madlala whispers to Mankosi.

“Your ears should be the last thing you’re worried about. This village is going to burn us alive.” –MaNkosi.

“We survived last night, what if the Madlala ancestors are truly with us.”

MaNkosi dies with laughter, it catches Balungile and MaGumede’s attention.

Honestly, there is no reason to glare at her like she owes them millions for the many times she’s laughed.

“My husband and I are ready to go home.”

MaNkosi says because there is no reason for them to be here after that embarrassing discovery hours ago.

“Yes, thank you bafo for everything.”-
Bab’Madlala.

“But you haven’t eaten,” Balungile stresses and gets an eye roll from his wife.

This one believes in his brother, no one will tell him anything.

“We have food at home, I’m a blessed man bafo. You should see my bank account, I can feed the whole country. On that note, you must come to my house and I will give you some money just to thank you for your hospitality.” He rises to his feet to shake Balungile’s hand, MaGumede slaps her husband’s hand away.

“It was nice seeing you again, you may leave now.”

What a rude woman.

MaNkosi gasps, she has something to say but swallows it.

“Oksalayo, you’re not beautiful.” This coming from the man that was singing MaGumede’s praises yesterday.

“Bhuti, that’s not a nice thing to say to my wife.” Balungile snaps, shaking his head in disappointment.

Bab’Madlala chuckles as he harshly taps Balungile’s shoulder.

“I’m joking, nawe you take things seriously. We are leaving now.” He says, taking MaNkosi’s hand.

“Okay, go well.” Balungile says.

“Do you have R50 for me, bafo? I want to request a cab.” Bab’Madlala says and puts his hand out. There’s an unending smile on his face, it’s that of pride.

“We don’t have money,” –MaGumede.

This woman was given a mouth and she sure

as hell knows how to use it.

Balungile takes a deep breath, he looks at his wife and judges her entire existence with just a look.

He digs into his wallet and gives his brother two creased R20 notes plus a R10.

“I will pay it back as R1000,” Bab’Madlala says.
“Or name your price, any amount of your choice.”

“Baba, we should go.” MaNkosi steps in and takes his hand.

They still need Balungile to request for them. He doesn’t have the app on his phone, Bab’Madlala is more than happy to show him how it’s downloaded. He doesn’t get an opportunity to show off his skills and when he does, he steps up.

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There is no place like home.

“I’m going to bath, make me something to eat. I want pap and meat and a salsa salad. No gravy.” He tells his wife as he kicks off his shoes on the way to the bedroom.

MaNkosi does not respond.

“I want to host a big ceremony for my ancestors, we will slaughter the fattest cow just to honour them and thank them for protecting us. We’ll invite the whole village, it’s going to be a big ceremony. Abakithi have kept us alive.” He says excitedly, he’s forgotten that they have a meeting with the Chief.

He gets in the bedroom and takes off his shirt, MaNkosi has not said a word.

It worries him, it could only mean that she’s still

upset with him. That woman's attitude changes like a chameleon changes colour.

"MaNkosi, did you hear what I said?" He's pauses his movements, including his breathing so he can hear his wife properly.

In the meanwhile, he presses a hand to his ear, they feel blocked.

Hayi, that woman is too quiet maan.

Bab'Madlala decides to go looking for her and finds her in the kitchen, pouring water in a kettle.

"Are you still angry because I sold you out to my brother?"

That's a stupid question, she doesn't even know what it's like to be kinky. Bab'Madlala forces a yawn just to clear the blockage in his ears, he plunges two fingers in each ear and starts twisting them. It's getting worse and uncomfortable.

MaNkosi turns to him and says something but

no voice comes out of her mouth. Her eyes wide with shock.

“MaNkosi uthini? What are you saying? Your mouth is moving but I can’t hear you.”

He can’t hear himself either, but it hasn’t clicked in. He’s too focused on clearing the blockage in his ears.

MaNkosi opens her mouth once again, nothing comes out. Fear settles in, she’s rubbing her throat and clearing it just to get her voice back.

“Yooooh! Hayyi! My wife has become mute. My wife is mute.” He’s exclaiming at the top of his voice, running towards the door to alert the neighbours and ask for help but stops right at the door because...

Hai man!

Madlala plunges a finger in one ear and starts shaking it to clear his hearing.

There's no sound.

"I can't even hear myself. My ears... what happened to my hearing?"

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500+ comments... 15 shares...

[03/06, 15:45] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 46

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They have been sitting in silence for more two hours. How will they tell the neighbours what happened, or explain why one has lost her voice and the other his hearing?

They know the cause, these are the consequences of confessing. Bab'Madlala is

laying on the couch with his legs stretched and his head on his wife's lap.

She's massaging his temples because he cried of a headache.

“Sikhulekile ekhaya!!!”

Who is that now?

They exchange glances, MaNkosi signals that he should keep quiet. But this one never listens to anyone, he gets up and rushes to peep out the window.

It's Balungile and another cousin of his. A man can't stay peacefully in his house with his mute wife.

What an annoying family.

“Bhuti, the door is open. You must be home.”

Balungile and his literal big mouth.

But this one is on MaNkosi. She could've simply closed the door, was she so eager to cuddle

with him that she forgot?

Bab'Madlala looks at her, judging everything he sees on her, then shakes his head and rushes to the bedroom to get a pen and paper. He will need it to communicate.

He passes MaNkosi seated on the couch with her hands and legs crossed, lips pursed like a petulant child.

What a waste of lobola.

Who's going to run around the kitchen preparing food and drinks for his guests?

God bless Balungile and his pure heart, he's carrying two full Checkers grocery bags.

"Hau Bhuti, you didn't have to." He screams, forgetting that he's lost his hearing.

Balungile and the cousin, Mfaniseni look at each other confused. Men don't scream when they speak.

“Why are you screaming?” Balungile asks.

His words don’t reach Madlala’s ears, which reminds him that the gods have been unkind.

“MaNkosi!!!” Another ear splitting scream.

These cousins mustn’t dare, he never applied to be perfect.

Now where is that woman? Just as he takes a step toward the kitchen door, she appears.

No smile, nothing?

Okay!

Madlala points at the grocery bags, she nods at the two elders, takes the bags and rushes back inside.

Madlala wanted to tell her to prepare something for them, why is she moving like Superman?

He points at the stoep, gesturing they sit, then starts typing his sob story on the piece of paper.

He hands it to Balungile.

“We were robbed on our way home. MaNkosi lost her voice while screaming for help. My mistake was standing too close to a crazy woman, I lost my hearing because of her screaming.” Balungile reads out loud, his brows knitting in a deep frown.

Mfaniseni looks up at Madlala with pity in his eyes.

“The world is a cruel place,” he’s wasting his sympathy, Madlala can’t hear a thing.

“What did they take bafo? You had nothing when you left my house, I even gave you R50 for Uber.” Pubic hair of Satan.

Did he even have to write it down in capital letters? Mfaniseni has read it and is all mocking smiles.

“The all mighty Madlala borrowing money? How the mighty have fallen.” Mfaniseni chuckles and

stops when Balungile nudges him.

This is their brother.

Madlala rolls his eyes, he didn't hear what Mfaniseni said, but he knows it was a jab at his condition.

Balungile writes down and shows him, "Don't worry mtaka aunty, we will get you help."

Help would be nice, they don't deserve such a tragedy.

Madlala folds his arms over his stomach and hangs his head to the side.

Shame! He'd kill the part of a poverty stricken African in a UNICEF advert.

What is Balungile writing down now?

"Why is your kraal empty? Where is your livestock?" The note says.

Madlala's eyes widen as he shoots up like he had Morvite for breakfast. He's running to his

kraal, his brothers are right behind him.

It's empty, the little livestock he was left with is gone.

"Hau! Hau! Hau! Ngeke, hau ngeke!" His hands are on his head as he laments. He's mourning.

What kind of a man will he be without livestock?

Balungile is typing, it's making Madlala angry.

Does he have more bad news?

"Don't worry bhuti, uBakhe called to tell us that the umfana kaNonkosi married our daughter Cashile. Your kraal will be full of cows very soon."

First of all, "Whose daughter? She is not our daughter, Balungile. She is mine, mine. I don't remember us mixing sperms and making MaNkosi pregnant."

He's not sharing his cows, whether they come in a form of money or animal.

“Calm down bafo, you don’t have to scream.”
Mfaniseni.

“Fusegi wena!” Madlala exclaims, pointing a finger at Mfaniseni although he didn’t hear what he said.

Mfaniseni covers his ears, this man is loud.

“Do you know what I have been through because of Cashile? The day that girl set foot in the village, everything went south.”

Come to think of it...

“I was the most respected man in the village, I was going to be chief. But Cashile ruined all of that for me, she destroyed my dignity. She stripped me of my manhood, bafo. Isthunzi sami bafo, isthunzi sami.” This really does call for tears, not only has he lost it all. He’s lost his hearing as well.

Balungile is typing...

“Keep your voice down, the neighbours will hear.”

“I don’t care, let them hear how my wife gave birth to a witch. Who knows what KaMadlala has been doing eGoli. What if she was part of a Satanist group and she came back to kill us slowly?”

He really doesn’t have to shout, there must be a way to articulate himself without damaging people’s ears.

Mfaniseni shakes his head in disbelief, Madlala will never change.

MaNkosi comes running with tears in her eyes, she opens her mouth to tell him to stop but only a forceful exhalation comes out.

“Thula wena! My mother warned me about marrying you, she told me you were a witch. I should have listened to her. Look at the results of not listening to your parents, look at me

bafo.” Madlala shouts, clapping his hands in MaNkosi’s face.

“Bafo, this is not the way to do things. You don’t have to wear your dirty laundry in public, people will laugh.” Balungile being the voice of reason intervenes, he’s so good at this typing thing.

Madlala snatches the paper and throws it on the floor.

Oh! The neighbours are here.

Show time!

Maybe he can get away with only a slap on the wrist if it’s proven that indeed there is some sort of witchcraft practised in this household.

“Am I wrong bafo? This woman has a useless womb, useless. Bublebakhe is 29 and with no direction in life, men at his age have three to four children. What if he makes his girlfriends pregnant and eats the babies? That boy doesn’t know whether he’s coming or going. KaMadlala

is a 26 year old witch who joined a cult in Joburg. Uhlazo kimi Jesu wami." Shame, poor man.

He looks at the neighbours to see if they are buying his story and finds them looking at MaNkosi with judgemental eyes, it's working.

And this one? Why is MaNkosi weeping like someone died?

"That's enough!"

It's chief Sibiya walking through the gate, Madlala didn't hear a thing but he's rolling his eyes at his presence.

MaGumede and Bakhe are with him.

This day couldn't get any worse.

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Who invited these neighbours to the meeting? People don't know how to mind their business. They are standing around them, as if watching a bioskop.

Madlala has been casting evil eyes at them, the last thing he wants is his personal matters aired for the world to hear.

MaNkosi is sitting on a reed mat with her head lowered, she hasn't stopped crying. Beside her is MaGumede who has not bothered to pacify her.

Bakhe is seated next to the chief looking like he doesn't want to be here.

"Do you have anything to say, Madlala? Is it true that you and MaNkosi practise witchcraft?"

Madlala reads the words spoken by the Chief from the paper in Balungile's hand.

He scoffs, arrogantly. This man is one to talk after everything they have done together.

Madlala gives Sibiya a deep threatening stare, if he opens his mouth... God forbid he opens his mouth...

Shembe! All hell will break loose. People will lose their positions.

"What do you have to say?" Chief Sibiya says.

Balungile the fastest typist in the world shows Madlala what the chief said.

"My wife and I like to play games in the bedroom, so what if we were running outside naked? It's part of our games. You are not married Sibiya, I don't expect you to understand." This he says with his own mouth.

Chief is suddenly nervous, why are these people laughing?

"There is no proof that there was any witchcraft involved." Chief Sibiya clears his throat. "The case is cancelled, no one will ever bother this family again."

“But we saw them, what more proof do you need?” MaGumede speaks up.

“MaGumede, you do not speak where men are talking. Don’t embarrass me.” Balungile chides her, he will never not defend his brother’s honour.

The chief looks at Bakhe, “Buhlebakhe! It’s your duty to look after your parents, look at the state they are in. Make sure you get them help.”

Bakhe slowly nods, clenching his jaw, the responsibility is too much. He moved out because of their witching ways, no way is he coming back here.

Madlala lifts his hand, like he’s in a classroom. All eyes turn to him.

“Now that my wife is mute, I want to take a second wife.”

Silence follows!

MaNkosi whips her head up, eyes wide and lower lip quivering.

“What?” Bakhe shouts, but his father cannot hear. He doesn’t even look his way.

“Who?” Sibiya asks, of course this is his friend who knows his deepest darkest secrets, he has to entertain him if he wants to remain chief.

Balungile typed the word “who” in less than a second.

Madlala smiles, “I saw a flower in your garden Chief Sibiya.”

Yhehenni!

Chief Sibiya slowly stands, what a quick way to make him angry.

“Baba, you better not say it.” Bakhe is growling with anger, on behalf of his mother of course.

But in Madlala’s head, it’s just him and Chief Sibiya here. The rest of these people might as

well be air, they are invisible.

His smile broadens as he shouts, "Nothando Sibiya."

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500+ comments... 15 shares

[03/06, 15:45] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 47

CASHILE

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I'm here, a place I would like to call home. But my husband has denied me the right to call it my own, he's made me an outcast.

I haven't heard from him in two days, my pride had me staying away and convinced me that he

will call or come to get me.

I'm a fool in love because after putting my daughter in bed, I grabbed my phone, took a cab and came to his house, all that done in the darkness of the night.

Bakhe was against my leaving but I have to talk to Mbuzo. I'm losing my mind not knowing what he's thinking. Marriage is not a toy to be played with, it's a communion, a covenant that should be kept sacred.

The van is parked in the driveway, it's the first thing I always notice when I come here.

My heart is bustling violently inside my chest as I walk through the gate. So much that I feel a vibration on my teeth, I can't seem to calm myself down.

I knock three times and wait while trying to get my heart and head to work together. One is telling me to go back home, the other strongly

agrees with this decision I've made.

"Password."

Who's that?

"It's me, Cashile." I respond to whoever is behind the door.

"Password." The small voice fiercely repeats.

What kind of game is this?

"Bhuti... Mhlo it's me."

He must be playing a prank on me.

The door springs open, a short person in royal-blue PJs is looking up at me in a jiffy, a fierce frown on his face.

"That's my father's name, who are you?"

Oh! It's Mhlo's little boy, I've heard about him but never seen him. He must be around 7-8 years old.

I bend down to his level, what a short little man.

“Hi, my name is Cashile. You are?” I hold my hand out for a handshake, boy does not bother looking at it. He stays true to the frown on his face.

“Cashile, as in out of sight?”

Nice! Very nice.

And that’s not the direct translation I was expecting.

I swallow my pride and reply, “Yes.”

What’s so funny?

He sounds like that ugly hyena from The Lion King and resembles one as he holds his belly and starts stomping his foot. I see laughter is hereditary. Mhlo definitely did a stellar job with this one.

“What is your name, Mr. Bean?” I break his laughter, he looks up at me with a serious face. He’s still blocking the doorway, God knows

when I'll be let in.

"Bandile Xaba." He says with pride, showing me his toothless smile.

Nice name, his parents loved him.

"Nice to meet you, khehla-mfana."

He frowns at my clap-back, "What does Khehla-mfana mean?"

It means you're a boy that looks like an adult, but I conceal the matter from him because I don't want to tap into his resting insecurities.

He is cute though but annoying.

I squeeze his cheeks, "It means you're the cutest kid in the world. Is uncle Mbuzo here?"

"He's in his room taking a bath. Daddy-X is in the kitchen, trying to make me a glass of milk because I had a bad dream, now I can't sleep."

"Daddy-X?" I'm lost.

“I have two dads. Mhloniphe Xaba, my biological father and my step dad, Bruce Dlamini. Daddy-D and Daddy-X.”

Smart kid, is Mhlo okay with this? He looks like the possessive type.

“Uncle Emtee is in the hospital. He woke up today, Daddy-X said we will go see him tomorrow.”

I don’t know who Emtee is, but I know Mkhetheni is the one hospitalised. So he must be talking about him.

Like saving grace, Mhlo appears in the corridor with a glass of milk he was allegedly trying to make. It’s strange seeing him in a night gown and push-ins, he only has boxer shorts beneath the robe.

“KaMadlala?”

“Hi,” I give him a bashful smile and hope he doesn’t start telling me a tale like his son here.

I step in, Bandile shuts the door.

“Your son is cute, ukhulisile.” I compliment him, pinching Bandile’s cheeks. He’s a chubby little fella.

“The glory goes to his mother,” Mhlo proudly says and tells me that Mbuzo is in his room.

I thank him and rush there.

I catch a whiff of Mbuzo’s scent the second I enter, and suddenly feel nauseous. These episodes of nausea have been happening a lot lately, so I carry gum or sweets with me. There’s halls in the back pocket of my pants, I take one and nibble on it. The feeling doesn’t completely go away, but it’s bearable.

Aunt thinks I’m pregnant, I took a test, it came out negative.

I must have inyongo or something and need to

douche.

I can hear the water running in the bathroom, he must be cleaning the bathtub.

My heart is in conflict, contrary with my brain.
Should I go back home, or wait here for him?

But I'm too old to be playing hard to get, we both are. It's about time we talk things through.

I shut the door and walk in. These nerves are going to kill me, dear God.

Demon possession is real because, why am I stripping naked, down to my trunks.

Oh that's right!

Somewhere in my head, there's a loose screw that has tempered with my thinking, making me believe that sex will solve our issues.

But maybe if I can make him remember the chemistry we have, he will forget why he's angry with me.

The silence in the bathroom has me standing at the foot of the bed, I cross my legs and put my hands on my lap, then wait for him.

Time is one arrogant bastard, it's moving at its own pace.

The door handle twists, my heart drops in the acidic liquid in my stomach. Maybe if it burns, I will be freed from heart break.

He walks out, our eyes meet, he freezes. It's clear in his eyes that he didn't expect to see me here... naked nogal.

He's naked too, I struggle to stop my unsolicited thoughts from controlling my eyes, and stop them from tracing every edge of his body.

I walk up to him and smash my lips on his, he takes time to return the kiss. It's not passionate but violent, he hasn't let his tongue inside my mouth.

I know how Mbuzo kisses and this is not it. Just when I let my hands run over his back, he grabs the back of my neck and roughly turns me around, bending me over the bed.

He enters me without warning, I hiss, gripping the sheets, not out of pleasure but pain. Yes I waited for him naked but I wasn't wet.

"Ouch Mbuzo, you're in too deep." I complain about his length choking me and hurting my walls.

"Slow down please, you're hurting me."

What is wrong with him? He's acting like an animal.

He continues pumping until I start to get aroused and feeling pleasure. I can't moan for him, he's rough with me and I don't understand why.

He picks up the pace, he hasn't made a sound.

“Slow down... please.” I plead.

He pulls out and releases his cum on my butt.
Since when does he pull out?

There was no build-up for me, the only thing I felt was a tickle. I didn't reach an orgasm.

He doesn't even catch his breath, he heads to the bathroom. And I am... I don't know, this is shocking to me.

What just happened?

“Mbuzo!” I go after him and find him cleaning himself. “What's going on? What was that about?”

“Why are you here?” He asks without looking at me.

“I haven't heard from you in days. Are you still upset?”

He washes the towel he used and hangs it on the rail, then looks at me.

“Has it been that long? It doesn’t feel like it to me.” He says, walking past me.

He’s being a jerk really and I’m an idiot for constantly following him. I find him removing pillows from the bed, he leaves two small ones, he’s wearing boxer shorts.

“How long is this punishment going to last?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” He’s lying to me.

He stops with the fiddling as his eyes fall on me, and then frowns.

“Where are your clothes? Put something on, or you came here naked?”

“You’re full of shit.” I snap, he scoffs and throws me his t-shirt that was carelessly laying on the bed.

I put it on because the looks he keeps giving me make me feel like a prostitute.

Mbuzo gets under the covers and faces the wall.

Where is my husband?

That man laying there is not the man who promised to love me through it all.

“Turn off the light, I have an early morning.” He says.

I toddle towards the stupid light and fucking switch it off. He shifts to the edge of the bed when I climb in.

I lost my dignity somewhere between falling in love with him and that damn day when I married him. How am I still here, taking this nonsense treatment from him?

It takes me a while to fall asleep, I’m sleeping in one position and can’t even move an inch because... God, I don’t know why.

But he’s stripped me of my freedom in his arms.

It’s past 11pm, I take my phone from under the

pillow and text Bakhe. He's on line.

"How is Lulu?"

"Sleeping obviously. How is everything over there? Do I need to bring a gun?" His reply puts a smile on my face.

"I'm fine, I will call you in the morning." I text back and log out of WhatsApp.

Mbuzo has fallen asleep, unless he's faking those soft snores.

I shift back until my butt is touching him, he doesn't move away.

He's sleeping alright.

I'm such a clingy soul, one day on Judgement day, God will tell me why I took this man's hand and put it over my stomach. This is the only way I can fall asleep.

He feels like a big, comfy teddy bear.

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I didn't think I would wake up to an empty bed.

"Mbuzo!" I call out.

Nothing.

He's distancing himself from me on purpose, I just know it. I feel sticky and dirty, I opt to take a bath before going out to look for Mbuzo. I hop in and out of the bathroom, he bought bathing essentials and lotion. All for men, nothing for me... his wife.

I wear the same clothes I was in yesterday. How do I forget to bring my clothes here?

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There's never anyone in this house, not even the forward kid is here. I make my way to the kitchen to make a cup of tea while opening call

logs, Mbuzo's number is at the top of my list, I called him last night, but he didn't answer. I dial him, it rings unanswered.

He could be busy, I can't even think what he's busy with because he is unemployed. Unless he went to see Mkhetheni.

First time seeing the fridge full, there's everything in here. Eggs, bread, butter, Polony, cheese. Mhlo must have done grocery shopping for Bandile.

I call Mbuzo to ask if I should make breakfast for two or for everyone, he doesn't answer.

My curiosity turns to worry.

Where could he be? The second time I call him, I'm told the number is not available right now.

Right, the kettle is on, I'll make eggs and fry polony while the water boils. I put the pan on

the stove while typing a WhatsApp message to Mhlo, we're not close but he's approachable.

His last seen is 05:00am this morning.

"Hey, where are you guys?" I press send, he goes on line immediately and starts typing in a second.

"Good morning kotiza. Fatcake has sports day at school. Mbuzo went to see Mkhetheni at the hospital. I can call you an Uber if you want to go there."

"Please and thank you." I reply.

I don't think I have enough for a cab.

Why do these eggs smell terrible? They are making me nauseous, it's never been this strong.

I push off the burning cooktop and run to the bathroom with my hand clutched on my

stomach and mouth.

The food I ate last night makes its way up my throat and past my mouth as I wrench and heave inside the toilet until my stomach has been left vacant. I flush and sit on the closed seat.

No, something is not right.

The last time this happened, I found out I was pregnant with Lulu.

Oh God! Am I pregnant?

I can't be pregnant...

A hoot outside comes in the way of my thoughts, it's Mhlo's ride. I quickly do a mouthwash, grab my bag and phone and run out.

It's a female driver, as much as this is a crime dominated country, I still prefer male drivers. This lady nods when I greet her with a smile, I

wasted my time.

I chat with my brother via text until we get to the hospital.

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There's a queue at reception, I have to wait for my turn to sign in. Mhlo sent me the ward number, I find it without a hassle thanks to the kind nurse that directs me.

Mbuzo has no clue that I'm here, his attitude was shitty last night. I wonder how he is today. I'm going to tell him that I think I'm pregnant and we'll do a test together.

The door to Mkhetheni's room is slightly open, I hear Mbuzo's voice inside. He's laughing with Mkhetheni, I didn't know he was awake. He didn't tell me that his brother was awake.

I heard it from Bandile, but I thought he was just rambling.

“We will send people to her father’s house once I get out of here. You have to pay lobola and do right by your wife.” Mkhetheni says.

It’s not hard to tell that he is in pain, he can hardly get a word out.

“No, we are staying away from those people. I told you what they did to our mother.” Mbuzo disputes.

Am I “those people” too?

“What about KaMadlala? You married her, Mbuzo. You have to take responsibility.”

“It doesn’t matter, it was a mistake.” Mbuzo replies.

His answer is enough to send me to a psychiatric ward, strapped in a straightjacket. This is not my first time experiencing heart

break, Juba has done the honours many times than I can count. But this man, somehow my heart feels like it's been ripped out of my chest while I'm breathing, and I'm left bleeding and fighting to survive.

"You don't mean that," Mkhetheni says.

"I do, I regret marrying KaMadlala. If there is one thing I wish I could take back, it's the day I married Madlala's daughter. "

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500+ comments... 15+ shares...

[03/06, 15:46] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 48

MHLONIPHE

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Bandile fell during relay and bruised his knee.
That was the end of sports-day for him.

He's sitting on his father's shoulders as they head to the white Hyundai i10 in the parking lot. It's a second hand car Mhlo bought from an acquaintance for a very low price. It needs a lot of servicing.

"I don't want to go home Dad." Bandile whines.

"You want to go to the hospital then?" Mhlo asks as he offloads him from his shoulder and sits him in the back seat.

"I don't like needles." Bandile sulks.

"We're going home then, and maybe we can get some ice cream on the way."

The bribing works wonders, the child is all smiles. Mhlo straps him up and shuts the door. Just as he turns, he sees Mbali heading his way. His face welcomes a frown when she smiles and waves.

By the time she gets to him, his hands are inside the pockets of his pants and his demeanour is indifferent.

“Bhuti...”

“I’m not your brother.” He interrupts, keeping a straight face.

“Sorry, can you give me a ride home?”

“Why?”

“I’m a cleaner at the school, today was my first day. I just knocked off from work and I don’t have money for transport.” She explains.

It would be rude to leave her after she asked ever so kindly. He tells her to get in the car and scurries to the driver’s side.

“Hi,” Bandile greets as Mbali makes herself comfortable in the passenger seat.

She looks back and smiles at him.

“I’m Bandile. Daddy-X and I are going to get ice

cream. Are you joining us?"

"No!" Mhlo quickly answers.

He's pulling out of the parking lot and trying by all means possible not to return the look Mbali is giving him.

"I love Ice cream, Chocolate is my favourite."

There's sarcasm in her voice, she's purposely testing Mhlo's patience.

Bandile looks at his father with excitement in his eyes, "Can she come with Dad?"

He doesn't want her to tag along, they are not friends and will never be.

"Mbali has to go home Fatcake." Mhlo's reply is enough to ruin Bandile's mood.

He folds his arms as his back slams against the backrest, "You're not fun. Daddy-D would have agreed."

Eyy! This boy.

Mhlo's nostrils flare, he grits his teeth to stop himself from clapping back at his child. Nevertheless, he hates this Daddy-D, Daddy-X nonsense. Bandile is his son and his alone, unfortunately, his mother married another man who is very much present in Bandile's life.

He gives Mbali a brief stare, "What flavour are you getting little one?" Mhlo regretfully asks just to make his son happy.

Ice cream can't make an adult smile the way Mbali is smiling.

"Chocolate." She says and winks at Bandile.

Mhlo sighs at her excitement, "How old are you?"

Another brief stare.

"Nineteen." -Mbali.

His resting face shrinks into a stunned frown.

She's joking right?"

"Seriously little one, how old are you?"

"I'm nineteen." She repeats, confidently.

"I'm seven and a half." Bandile announces, she looks back at him.

"You are the cutest seven and half year old I've ever seen." She says.

On the side, Mhloniphe is traumatized. His eyes rake through her body as if he's never seen her in mourning clothing.

"But you're a widow?" It's more of a question than a statement.

"Thabiso and I got married young, he suggested we get married when I got pregnant. It wasn't planned, we were young and..."

He makes a U-turn, changing direction. The ice cream date has been cancelled.

"I'm taking you home," he whispers so Bandile

doesn't hear.

Mbali is a frozen confusion, "Did I do something wrong?"

"Yes, you're nineteen years old and should not be alone with an old man. We're 19 years apart, you know that? I can be passed off as your father." He's disgusted with himself.

"You're not my father."

With this statement, she's confirmed that she's still teething.

Mhlo scoffs, "I can't believe I've been entertaining a 19 year-old."

"Why do you keep saying that as if I'm a child?"

"I knew you were young, you look young but I didn't think 19. Are you trying to get me arrested or something?" The mode in which he utters makes her tear up.

The argument has made Bandile sad and

confused, he knows when his father is having a serious conversation and that he shouldn't interfere.

"Slow down, you're going to crash." Mbali warns Mhlo.

This is nothing, he's been driving since he was a teenager.

"I can't believe you're nineteen years old."

This one should be home with her mom or at school counting from 1 to 100.

"We're not doing anything wrong, I just want a friend." She sounds desperate now.

Mhlo doesn't reply.

In no time, he's parked a few yards away from her gate and opens the door for her when she doesn't make an effort.

"Get out of my car," he orders gently.

Mbali sniffles, bids Bandile goodbye and climbs

out of the vehicle.

“Stay away from me, little one,” he reaches over the passenger door, pulls it shut and drives off.

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CASHILE

I push the door and walk in.

“Mbuzo.” He whips his head, I’m not sure if that was shock in his eyes, he quickly got rid of it before I could distinguish the distant expression.

He stands, clearing his throat.

“You regret marrying me?”

I don’t know how I’d act if his answer is yes. I

gave this man my heart and believed every word that came out of his deceitful mouth.

His silence is infuriating, the Mbuzo I was introduced to can't be trash.

I was so sure I would spend the rest of my life with him, he convinced me that he was the one. But now... he's so easily cut the string that connects us, like I mean nothing to him.

"I asked you a question." I snap because, why is he just staring and not answering me?

"This is not the time to talk about this, go home KaMadlala."

Go home?

"Which home? Mine or yours?"

He stays quiet, I know this man is talking about either my aunt's house, or father's house.

Entlek, he is taking me for a fool.

"I heard what you said to your brother. You said

marrying me was a mistake.”

He frowns, “Yes.”

Wow!

I take a breather, replaying last night’s events in my head. He fucked me like I meant nothing to him, then quickly went to clean up as if I’d infect him with a disease.

But he’s my husband, and he’s angry. We can sort this out, we love each other.

“Can we talk outside... please?” I plead, sounding like a terrible combination of David and Goliath—strong and weak.

“I’m still busy, I will call you.”

Nah, this sounds like “fuck off” to me.

I happen to look Mkhetheni’s way while accepting a frown, he sees it and probably thinks I was frowning at him. I send my eyes back to Mbuzo, he’s still puckering at me.

“Are you giving up on our marriage?” My voice takes on a whisper.

He goes quiet for an excruciating amount of time.

“KaMadlala...”

“KaMadlala unyoko.” I’m saying this because I’ve seen the pending rejection in his eyes.

His eyes take a predatory expression, “I don’t like your tone, KaMadlala.”

Fuck him!

“What about the promises you made me? I let my guard down, and gave up everything just to be with you. I married you in a fucking prison cell and this is what you do to me?”

“Keep your voice down.” He snaps.

“Yeyi, ungazonginyela wena.” I shout, banging my open palms on his chest till he staggers a few steps back.

I'm not keeping shit down, he bloody wasted my time. Yes, the two seconds we've been married matter. I have loved him like he's the only man God ever created.

And he does this shit to me... me, his wife?

A tight grip on the back of my neck forces me out of my thinking zone, I blink and meet his fierce glare.

He draws me closer to him.

He's breathing fire, I'm convinced he'll hit me.

"Mbuzo let her go. Uyahlanya yini? She's your wife dammit." Mkhetheni orders, I catch sight of the rage on his bruised face. His hand is pressed to his chest, he's writhing in pain.

"Do not talk to me like I am your one of your jail mates, uyezwa?" Mbuzo hisses behind clenched teeth.

"Go ahead, beat me." I dare him.

I yank myself out of this pending GBV when he doesn't make a move.

My heart is in shambles, I've never thought he of all people would reject me.

I fail to control my tears, they fall down like heavy rain drops. I've lost all my strength, I don't know how I'm still standing.

No, my feet don't want to hold me up any longer. They throw in the towel, I grab my knees for balance but end up crouching down while covering my head with my hands and wail loudly.

"Makoti, please don't cry." Mkhetheni says before coughing hysterically.

"Don't call her that," Mbuzo quickly dismisses his brother.

I lift my head, his face is blank. I'm in pain and he's being an asshole.

I wipe my tears and get up, “You are heartless Mbuzo, uyinja yezwa?”

I’m making him angry, if he were Hulk, he would have transformed by now.

“Fix your tone, Cashile.”

“Yeyi, I am not Nothando. Uhambe wrongo kimi bhuti. I swear on your mother’s grave, if I walk out that door, you will never see me again.”

“Maybe it would be for the best,” he blots out and his words hit my heart like a dagger.

But I’m a big girl, big girls don’t cry... not in front of people at least.

I refuse to entertain the tears wanting to do a second round of parade down my face. So I blink them back to order.

“What exactly are you saying to me, Mbuzo?”

“Marrying you was a mistake. I apologize for leading you on, if there’s any way I can

compensate..."

He doesn't get to finish his lousy ass break-up speech, I punch him on his right eye.

"Shit!" I exclaim, gripping my wrist to stop the pain shooting through my veins.

I think I broke my wrist, yet this devil incarnate didn't flinch.

"KaMadlala, are you okay?"

"She's fine," Mbuzo replies while coldly staring into my eyes, before I can answer Mkhetheni's question. I am not fine, I think I twisted my wrist.

I want to scream at the top of the roof, but I can't do it in front of this evil man.

I scoff, "You said you are sorry? Sorry Mbuzo? What the fuck am I supposed to do with your lousy apology?"

"This is a hospital, my brother is not well. Keep

your voice down KaMadlala.”

What the fuck!

“Don’t tell me shit wena. You think you will play with me and I’ll let it be?”

Wonders only happened in Pharaoh’s dreams, not in my life.

I refuse.

“KaMadlala,” Mkhetheni warns, I know he doesn’t approve me talking to his brother in this manner.

He better shut up before I say something that will send him back to cardiac arrest.

“No bhuti, ungijwayela kabi lobaba.” I look back at Mbuzo, “You made me fall in love with you, Sathane. What now? What do I do now?”

I’m tired of looking at that stupid menacing frown on his face.

He releases a sigh and looks away from my

questioning gaze.

“It’s not love, but infatuation. No one falls in love that fast KaMadlala. Why do you think it’s so easy for me to let you go?”

His words set my body in flames. Everything has been a lie... everything. The blood covenant...

‘But I love you’ the words ring in my head but refuse to leave my mouth. I love him more than life itself, I will never love like this again... ever.

“You said we were connected through a blood oath.”

He scoffs, “And you believed me?”

Bastard!

“I don’t know who the fuck you think you are? You wasted my time Mbuzo. Did I ever say I sbwl to be a divorcee?”

Confusion covers his face, “What is sbwl?”

I clap my hands in disbelief, cackling in shock.

“Hee! Kuyophuma isdumbu namhlanje. I’m going to kill someone today.”

Somebody prepare the mattress I’m going to sit on. I’m ready to be a widow. I have a black outfit, a doek and I’m very skilled at peeling vegetables.

“I’m really sorry, Cashile. But my mother would be disappointed in me if I continue with you.

How will I introduce you to her? As the daughter of the man who r@ped her corpse?”

As if I was there when my father was doing all that.

“What does that have to do with me... with us?” I ask.

“We are wrong for each other, the ancestors will never approve. Your father is evil, he killed my parents. He’s holding their spirits captive.” He sounds dumb, really.

“I hear you but you haven’t answered my question. What does any of that have to do with me?”

He tilts his head to the side, thinning his eyes at me, “You’re not stupid Cashile, come on... work with me here. IT’S... OVER!”

Is this Mbuzo talking to me like this?

I laugh, with tears streaming down my face. Yes I’m crying because it hurts and I can’t stop my heart from breaking.

“You thought you could handle dating an ex-convict? Now handle this njandin.” I kick him in his groin, he hisses in pain, kneeling to the floor with his hands gripping his manhood.

“Fuck!” He hisses, glaring up at me with laser eyes that do nothing but piss me off further. I use all the strength I have to slap him on the cheek, he gasps in shock and cusses under his breath.

By the time he grabs my hand to stop me, his cheek is burning and throbbing.

“KaMadlala...” that’s his brother calling out to me as I jump on Mbuzo and start slapping him like I get paid for every slap.

“Nurse! Nurse!” Mkhetheni shouts but the terrible cough is in his way, he falls back on the bed, fighting for his life.

He won’t die, but I will. I will die of shame and heart break. Mbuzo grabs my waist and tries to lift me off of him but I lock my legs around his waist, my arms around his neck, clinging on to him like a monkey and bite his ear.

“Ahhh!”

Yeah, scream mother-fucker.

I will fuck a man up, a-never, I am not the Ntandokazi type.

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[03/06, 15:46] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 49

MADLALA

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Like the food in this house, Madlala keeps disappearing without a word. He's been gone for hours, she can't even call him because... well, whose voice will she use to speak?

It's morning, midday is around the corner and MaNkosi knows he will want his food when he arrives.

She's cooked their last maize meal, and gravy. Last night they had rice and chicken, they ate the last pieces this morning.

She goes out to get a live chicken and finds two in the yard.

Like the livestock, the chickens were stolen as well. It's a crime they can't report, it's not like the police will take them seriously.

If only the herd boys were still around, but they are nowhere to be found. Madlala is so sure they are behind the theft.

Sighing in exhaustion and hunger, MaNkosi goes back into the house.

She hears whistling outside and stands in the doorway.

He's home, carrying Markham bags, obviously full of clothes.

There's no food in the house and he's spending money on clothes?

It takes a second for her to grasp the clothes

he's wearing.

Does this man know he is not a boy?

He stands in front of her, grinning and makes a turn to show her his outfit. He's wearing matching sportswear from the 2000s, looking like he played an old version of Nelly in Kelly Rowland's Dilemma music video.

She thinks he looks ridiculous. No one dresses like this anymore. A dark blue durag on his head with a GAP baseball cap put on backwards.

He's even rocking Nelly's signature plaster on his cheek and a large chain around his neck.

"How do I look?" He will never not shout, as long as he can't hear himself.

MaNkosi frowns.

"Can you believe this basketball jersey cost me R800?"

MaNkosi doesn't know what a basketball jersey

is, all she sees is an old man wearing a blue t-shirt with the number 21 written in bold. He's wearing a white t-shirt over the jersey, in this heat.

"Do you think Nothando will like it?"

Oh, so this is what this nonsense is about. Chief Sibiya didn't even give him an answer that day, he hasn't come to see them since. What makes him think Nothando will agree to marry an old man?

She looks down at his church shoes, those loafers don't match his outfit. He follows her line of sight and chuckles loudly.

"I ran out of money, sneakers are expensive."

Ah Nice, now the whole neighbourhood knows that he'd gone shopping and ran out of cash. This shouting has got to stop.

She called Khathala this morning, then remembered that she's voiceless, so she opted

to text him. he hasn't replied.

Only he can help them now.

"Serve me my food, I came to get more money. I want to eat first before I leave." He says as he walks past her.

The destination is the bathroom, he washes his hands and goes to the kitchen, and takes a seat.

MaNkosi places a plate with pap and gravy on the table.

"And then? What is this?"

Jeez! He doesn't have to scream his lungs out.

She shrugs and points at the cupboards, MaGumede took everything. They have nothing left, the last time they did grocery shopping was over two weeks ago.

These two days have been the worst days of her life, it seems this storm is here to stay.

"When did you realise that there is no food in

this house, Khanyisile?”

It doesn’t feel nice when he calls her by name, to her it’s a form of disrespect.

“This is why I want a second wife, you can’t even take care of your husband.”

Nothando will surely do a better job.

Madlala pushes the plate away, he’s not going to eat pap and gravy. Why is it even white?

“There’s money in the bedroom, I will go back to the mall and buy meat.” He leaves his seat and heads to the bedroom.

He opens the wardrobe and retrieves the bag where he keeps his money.

It didn’t feel this light when he left for the mall.

He puts it on the bed and zips it open... it’s empty.

Okay, no need to panic.

There's more money somewhere in this room, he knows because he never runs out of money. He can't run out of money, as long as Velaphi and his wife are under his control.

He ravages the room, searching the wardrobe like a maniac. When he finds nothing, he flips the mattress over.

There's nothing.

Sweating and panting, Madlala runs out of the bedroom shouting for his wife. They almost bump heads in the corridor.

He's about to speak or shout rather, and sees Bakhe walk through the door.

"Ndodana." He shouts.

Bakhe frowns and presses a hand to his lips, gesturing that his father keeps his voice down.

“Shhhh!”

Bab’Madlala rolls his eyes.

“Don’t tell me what to do mfana wami, I am still your father.”

Bakhe looks at MaNkosi, she’s losing a lot of weight. The bags under her eyes worry him, this is his dear mother. He loves her, despite who she is.

His burning gaze diverts to Bab’Madlala, he’s responsible for tearing their family apart. As if that’s not enough, he’s stressing his mother.

“Khuluma hawu, don’t just stare at me.”

Bab’Madlala exclaims.

Bakhe looks at MaNkosi again because she’s the only one who can hear him.

“That day, you said you kept the spirits of Mbuzo’s parents in a bottle. Did you have anything to do with their death?” Bakhe asks.

MaNkosi drops her eyes, Madlala is drowning in confusion.

“What did he say?” Madlala asks MaNkosi like he will hear her when she speaks.

“I’m here for the bottles, it’s time you release their souls. Nothing will be negotiated and I will not grovel with you people. We can either do this the easy way or the hard way.” Bakhe says.

“Uthini lomfana MaNkosi? Angimuzwa yazi? I can’t hear what he’s saying.”

Well Duh!

MaNkosi looks at Bakhe and mouths “Why?”

He catches on and replies, “Cashile is Mrs. Xaba now Mami. Her father failed to protect her, so it’s my responsibility.”

Madlala sighs, he’s annoyed. “Yoh hayi MaNkosi, angiyizwa lento yakho mina. Weh mfana, can’t you write it down?” Madlala has

given up, he goes to the couch and throws himself on it.

MaNkosi goes to the coffee table and takes a pen and paper.

She writes down, “We threw the bottles in the river.” Then gives Bakhe the paper.

Anger flashes over his face as he looks up at his mother, from the piece of paper.

“Well mami, I hope you and your husband can swim. We are getting those bottles back by fire by force.”

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CASHILE

Someone pulls me away from Mbuzo, their

arms are strongly locked around my waist.

“Kotiza, calm down.” Mhloniphe says behind me. I didn’t hear him come in, or the two nurses fussing over Mkhetheni.

“Everybody get out, now.” One of them shouts, she’s very angry.

Her anger is nothing compared to mine, I am livid.

I look at Mbuzo, he’s holding his ear. I should have bitten it off.

“I said get out before I call security.” The nurse repeats.

Mbuzo glares at me before storming out of the ward I snap myself out of Mhloniphe’s arms and dash out.

“Dade...” he’s right behind me.

Mbuzo is in the hallway, pacing up and down

I walk past him, I'm going home to my aunt. Unfortunately, my mother doesn't care much about me, I can't even go to her with my problems.

"Kotiza wait." Mhlo pulls me back, his hand is on my shoulder, pressing me in place.

This idiot I married keeps stealing glances at me.

"What's going on?" –Mhlo.

"Ask your brother." I say.

I don't want to talk, I just want to be left alone and cry this pain away. Maybe it will lessen after shedding tears.

"Mbuzo?" Mhloniphe grunts.

I've never seen him this serious, today I can clearly see that he's the big brother.

"I'm talking to you, mfethu. Why were you fighting with your wife in there?"

That word!

Mbuzo raises his gaze to Mhlo, how angry can he get?

“I want a divorce, Cashile is having a hard time accepting that.”

Wow! I don’t have the strength anymore.

He walks away.

I start my march down the passage, Mhlo takes my hand and pulls me back to where I was standing.

“Mbuzowakhe.” He shouts.

Mbuzo stops and turns.

“Get back here.” Mhloniphe hisses.

He walks back, it’s clear he doesn’t want to be here anymore.

“No one is going anywhere until you tell me what’s going on.” Mhlo says with subtle anger

on his face.

“I told you, KaMadlala and I are getting a divorce.”

It’s really over and he’s rubbing it in my face without taking my feelings into consideration.

“I heard you. I want to know why? You recently got married, what has caused this conflict?”

“You know why Mhlo, her father...”

“Her father, not her.” Mhlo cuts in. “What the fuck Mbuzo? Is it so bad that you can’t fix it? You’re married for Christ’s sake.”

Mbuzo narrows his eyes at him, “Are you for real? You heard what her father did to our mother.”

“Did he say I was there?” I ask him. “You’re a coward Mbuzo, I was a fool to give you a chance.”

He looks disgusted by the sight of me.

“And you’re a fool to still be here. What? Are you afraid no other man will look at you?” –Mbuzo.

These needles he keeps plunging in my heart
will come back to haunt hi

“I can get any man I want, it’s you who will struggle to find a woman. No woman will ever love you mfana wami, mark my words.” I sizzle.

He clicks his tongue, “Do you hear how disrespectful she is?”

Stupid fool demands respect.

Mmc!

I want to go home.

“Let me go, Mhlo.” I try to escape his grip, he won’t let go.

“Kotiza please, he’s just angry. Don’t take him seriously.”

“Do you also think I’m a fool like your brother here? You heard what he said to me. Why would

you want me to stay with a man who has zero respect for me?" I ask Mhlo.

He scowls at Mbuzo, "I'm the elder in this family. No one is getting a divorce."

Mbuzo snorts, his face tells me he's not happy about any of this.

"Do you have a problem?" Mhloniphe asks.

"This has nothing to do with you Mhloniphe. I don't want Cashile anymore, you can't force me to stay with her."

Shit! Why am I still hurting because of him?

"I don't want either." I snap.

I can't breathe, tears fall tenaciously, they are on a mission to embarrass me. I wipe them away.

There's an unending shatter in my heart. The only witch here is him, he told me he loved me and I fell under his spell.

I fuckin believed him.

Mhlo hovers over him, they are the same height and same built. If a fight breaks, I can't tell who would win.

"I don't think you heard what I said. I'm older than you, it means I'm the man of the house. It is my duty to maintain the Xaba dignity. You will not tarnish our father's name, Mbuzo."

"Well I'm trying to uphold our father's name. We should have nothing to do with those people." The words roll out of Mbuzo's tongue like butter.

Does he know the damage they've done?

"Cashile had nothing to do with it. What is wrong with you? You love this woman." Mhlo says.

Nothing can convince Mbuzo that he loved me, I'm not sure I want him to anymore. Not after

everything he's said to me.

"I will talk to the uncles. We will send people to her family, you will pay lobola and fix your marriage." Mhloniphe says.

I don't want a forced marriage.

"Inkomo zikababa aziwuloboli umbhedo."

Mbuzo coldly shoots.

He said his father's cows will not be wasted on trash.

His words hit straight to my heart, my heart hotspots my abdomen. There's a sharp pain slicing through my lower belly, I press a hand there, winching in pain.

Mhlo harshly pushes him, his back hits against the wall.

"Voetsek, your father didn't leave cows behind. He died with nothing." Mhloniphe growls at Mbuzo.

He's angered him and of course, Mbuzo will retaliate.

They grab each other by the collar, I'm not staying for this. He's dragged me down enough today.

I can't take this anymore, I don't even know how to digest the words he just spoke, or if I will ever forget them.

I'm marching down the hallway when I hear, "Kotiza."

I stop and turn back.

"You're bleeding." Mhlo shouts after me.

I look down, there's blood oozing down my left leg.

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[03/06, 15:46] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 50

CASHILE

Maybe it's because I've seen the blood, that's why I'm aware of the sharp pain shooting through my abdomen. I let out a low scream, folding myself in half.

“KaMadlala.” His hands are on my waist, bloody fool.

I push him off.

“Don’t touch me.”

Mhlo takes over from him, “What’s wrong?”

“She’s bleeding Mfethu,” Mbuzo says.

I don't need him to answer for me.

“Are you on your periods?”

The fool asks.

Mhlo starts shouting for a nurse, his hand is still on my back and I’m still bent.

I know this is a miscarriage, I’ve lost my baby.

Tears do away with me, I let them after fighting to keep them in. I’m not strong enough for this.

This fool is still looking at me, I don’t know what he’s thinking. I don’t even care, I hate him.

A nurse comes after Mhlo has exhausted his voice yelling, this is a public hospital. Sense of urgency does not exist.

“Sisi, what’s wrong?” The nurse asks, brushing my back.

“She must be on her periods,” Mbuzo answers for me again.

I don't know where he gets that nonsense.

I shoot him a glare, I've never wished for laser eyes like I do now.

"I think I'm pregnant." I tell the nurse.

Mbuzo gasps, his eyes slowly widening. He carries his hands on his head as the nurse takes me away. I look back, Mhlo has taken up the same position.

The nurse ushers me into a single room, there's a doctor behind a desk scribbling on a notebook. He looks up and frowns.

"Dr. Nkosana, this lady just suffered a miscarriage." The nurse says.

She's the nurse and knows better, but I was hoping that was not the case, as much as I hate its father, I didn't want to lose the baby.

The doctor tells the nurse to help me to the bed.

“Take off your shoes sisi and lie on the bed.”
The nurse says.

I do as told and lie on my back.

I can't explain how I'm feeling.

It doesn't help that the nurse is staring at me with pity in her eyes.

I cover my face with my palms in order to hide the tears leaving my eyes.

Shielding my weakness doesn't help because I'm sobbing loudly, my body is literally shaking.

“Hey,” it's the doctor's voice.

He's trying to remove my hands from face, I don't let him.

“It's okay, I'm going to help you.” He says.

“No it's not okay. My husband hates me and I just lost my baby.” I wail louder.

It's not like me to cry like this.

“I don’t know about your husband, but there might be a chance that the baby is safe.” He says.

I remove my hands from my face and meet his restrained smile.

“Really?”

He nods.

That’s all I want, for my baby to live.

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THE MADLALAS

“Cashile should have married Sibiya. Everything is ruined now, everything is ruined.” Madlala exclaims.

He's been pacing the lounge for the past ten minutes after MaNkosi explained why Bakhe is here and what he wants.

"This village belongs to me, all these people are under my spell." He says.

Bakhe is not shocked by anything, there's nothing he doesn't know.

"You are not God." Bakhe says.

What a waste of breath, Madlala heard nothing.

His feet hurt from all the walking, but he doesn't stop.

"Those Xaba boys think they still run this place, it's time they accept defeat. Their time ran out, if they continue with that ego their father had, they will die too."

MaNkosi gasps, her eyes almost leave their sockets. She rushes to Madlala and covers his mouth, not only is he shouting, he's confessing.

“Leave me,” Madlala says, pushing MaNkosi.

She sighs and sits with tears in her eyes.

“The car will be here in two minutes.” Bakhe tells his parents.

They are going to the river to get the bottles.

MaNkosi is the least happy, she knows what's going to happen if they take those bottles out of the water. Things are bad, cracking them will seal their fate.

“I'm not going anywhere,” Madlala says when Bakhe grabs his hand to pull him up. He pushes his son and sits back down.

There's only one language a stubborn person understands. Bakhe takes out a gun, MaNkosi and Madlala are on their feet in a second. They willingly lead the way, with Bakhe walking behind them.

He hides the gun when they get outside, lest the

Uber driver drives away.

MaNkosi had mentioned the name of the river, that's where the Uber driver takes them. People come here to pray, wash away bad luck and some do unholy things under the darkness of the sky.

The second the driver leaves, Bakhe retrieves his gun.

They are not alone, not far from them is a sangoma bathing two people in the river. MaNkosi recognises him as Khathala, she wants to tell her husband whose eyes are engrossed on the gun, but she can't speak.

"Right, where do we start?" Bakhe asks.

Of course MaNkosi being the one with working ears, points to their left.

"Move then," Bakhe orders.

MaNkosi leads the way, she's headed to

Khathala's direction. Their eyes meet, she nods at him, Khathala quickly grasps the situation and frowns.

MaNkosi seems to be silently pleading for help.

They walk past him, Madlala is mumbling words that aren't making sense. Bakhe pays no attention to him.

He's mostly focused on the mission ahead that he doesn't see Khathala coming at him with a brick from behind.

He hits Bakhe on the head. MaNkosi covers her mouth, eyes widening in shock.

Her only son, Bakhe is lying on the ground, face down.

Is he dead? She wants to ask.

"Quick, let's throw him in the water."

Bab'Madlala says, grabbing Bakhe's feet.

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CASHILE

I'm pretty sure pain knows me by name at this point. I've been booked for the night, I should be in a ward with other patients but Doctor Nkosana insisted that I be put in a single room when I couldn't stop crying over my loss.

I called Mbali and told her what happened. She insisted on coming over with aunt.

Bakhe is unreachable.

Honestly, I want to be alone.

"Press this button if you need anything," the nurse that helped me says. She's been so kind, I can never thank her enough.

"I will, thank you."

She stops fiddling with my drip and looks at me, the smile on her face is of peace. I want to hide in it.

“Don’t think too much, it’s not good for your health.” She’s been telling me.

I nod because I don’t know what to say.

“Asikho isimo esi permanent. No struggle is permanent, there is a reason you are going through this pain. But trust that God will see you through.”

God?

I’ve never thought of crying out to Him.

“Thanks,” I say.

She tells me to pray and leaves, I won’t even know where to start. Prayer is not for everyone.

The door opens minutes later, I see his tallness first. His brother is with him.

Mhlo has got to be kidding me.

“What are you doing here?” I’m asking them both, I want nothing to do with the Xabas.

“How are you feeling?” Mhlo asks.

My eyes are on Mbuzo, the anger on his face hasn’t dissolved.

“Fine, I want to be alone.” I say.

Mhlo sighs as he comes closer to my bed, the empathy on his face makes me sick. I want nothing from these people.

“I have something for you, dade.”

I was fine with him calling me this, now I’m appalled.

He plunges a hand into his pocket and takes out a ring, it’s gold. I’m sure it was made in the early 90’s.

“This was our mother’s ring, it belongs to you now.”

I laugh because these people think I'm a fool.
Mhlo opens my hand and puts the ring there.
Mbuzo is not even looking at me, he's standing by the door with his hands in his pockets.
“What are you trying to do Mhloniphe?” I ask.
“Mbuzo is sorry, he's...”
“He's standing right there, did he lose his voice or what?” I don't mean to disrespect Mhlo, but he's taking me for a fool.
I am not a child, I know when I'm not wanted.
“Dade, I want you to know that Mkhetheni and I do not condone Mbuzo's behaviour.”
Fuck the Xaba brothers and their fake sympathy.
“I don't want this ring,” I toss it across the room.
Mbuzo quickly frowns at me, he can go to hell for all I care.
“kaMadlala please.” –Mhlo.

“Tell your brother to pick that ring up and shove it where the sun don’t shine. That’s down his ass right?”

Mhlo’s eyes widen at my disrespect. I am not going to respect a man who does not respect me.

“What will your mother say about her ring being given away to a Madlala? You want her to haunt me?” I add.

Mbuzo’s eyes reddens, he wants to speak. I dare him to open his mouth... I dare him.

“I will leave you two to speak.” Mhlo says.

“Don’t leave him here,” I shout after him but he doesn’t stop.

Why does he think it’s okay for me to be alone with Mbuzo after everything?

“KaMadlala...” there it is, he can barely look at me.

“You killed our child.” I announce in a whisper, tears pouring down my face.

His bloodshot eyes widen.

He walks up to me and grabs my shoulder yelling, “Please tell me that’s a lie. Tell me our child is not dead.”

There are tears in his voice. He can cry blood for all I care.

“No,” I push him away from me, “You killed a Madlala.”

He steps back looking defeated, “Why didn’t you tell me you were pregnant?”

“Then what? You would’ve broken up with me in a nicer manner? I begged you like hell, Mbuzo. I came to you so we could talk and fix our marriage but you were too fixated on your dead mother to care.”

He covers his face, shoulders convulsing.

“Wipe those tears, they mean nothing to me.” I don’t feel sorry for him.

“You should’ve told me... you should’ve told me.” He sounds like a broken record.

“Nothing will ever make me forgive you for this, nothing.” I yell.

Just when I think I have heard it all, he wipes away his tears and looks at me dead in the face.

“Your father drank our child’s blood.”

He’s crazy... this man has lost his mind.

“What?” I ask.

No, I’m sure I didn’t hear right.

“You’re blaming me for the miscarriage. How do I know you didn’t sacrifice our baby to your parents?”

It gets worse and I’m done.

I grab the tray on the table left by the nurse and

throw it at him, “Get the fuck out of my life.”

I scream my lungs out.

He ducks but I notice blood on his cheek, he looks shocked as he looks at the medical equipment scattered on the floor.

“Why are you still here? I said get out, get the fuck out.” I throw a pillow at him and whatever I get my hands on. I shouldn’t be crying like this, the doctor told me to stay away from anything that will stress me. The door opens, Doctor Nkosana runs in.

“What’s going on here?” His eyes are on Mbuzo, he looks at me sobbing and seems to figure out what’s going on.

He stands in front of Mbuzo, “Leave before I call security.”

“That’s my wife over there...”

“I don’t give a fuck if she’s your aunt or your

grandmother. She's my patient and my patient is my priority. Get out before I call security." - Doctor.

I know Mbuzo, he likes to take control, so this doctor telling him what to do is pissing him off.

He looks at me, "Don't you think you have taken enough from me, Cashile? I'm going to consult and find out what happened to my baby. You better pray your father had nothing to do with it."

Oh my God! What is wrong with him?

Nkosana drags him out, and shuts the door on his face. I crumble on the bed and cry hysterically.

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[03/06, 15:48] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 51

BAKHE

It's dark. Something is licking his face and leaving slimy liquid on his face. He hums, slowly opening his eyes.

He screams and scuttles back when he sees a dog too close for comfort and it's slimy tongue continuously gliding against his skin.

“Fusegi, fusegi!” Bakhe screams.

Someone bursts out in laughter, he looks up to see his friend Njabulo. They grew up playing together on the same streets.

“Are you okay?” Njabulo asks, pulling the dog

back.

Bakhe shakes his head.

That reminds him... he winces in pain, sending his hand to the back of his head. When he brings his hand back, it's covered in blood.

"Should I call an ambulance?" –Njabulo.

As if it will come as soon as possible.

He looks up at Njabulo, "How did you find me?"

He asks as if the world has been looking for him.

"Your mother called me, she said you were in trouble and needed help." Njabulo explains that he was given the location.

"That witch!" Bakhe mumbles to himself.

He never thought MaNkosi would ever harm him, as much as she's so fixated on her useless excuse of a husband.

Njabulo helps Bakhe to his feet, leads him to his car and drives him to his house.

“I still think you should get that checked. What if you die on me, or something?” Njabulo says, handing Bakhe a glass of water and Pain-blocks.

He takes two pills and drowns them in water, he places the empty glass on the coffee table and leans on the backrest of the couch to rest his throbbing head.

“What happened to you, mfethu?” Njabulo has been asking and hasn’t gotten an answer.

“It’s a long story mfethu,” he’s not about to tell him that his parents are agents of the devil.

He takes his phone from his pocket and starts scrolling, looking for Mhloniphe’s number.

There’s a sudden incoming call, Khaya’s name is flashing on the screen.

Their date is pending, he’s been so busy.

“Bakhe kaKhaya speaking.”

Njabulo chuckles at how he answers the phone, Khaya is giggling on the other side.

“Hey, I didn’t hear from you this morning.”

Well, that’s because he was too busy to think about calling. There’s an incoming call, he checks the caller ID, it’s Cashile.

“Can I call you back later? I’ll explain everything then.”

“Okay, please buy me airtime. I owe Vodacom R30.” Khaya says.

R30 isn’t a lot of money, he did get his share from the heist.

He promises to send it and hangs up.

Cashile has cut the call, so he opts to send Khaya cash-send of R200. She calls him back immediately, Bakhe’s face takes up a frown. It’s not that he doesn’t want to talk to her, he said

he will call her back. Couldn't she wait?

"Thank you but I thought you'd send me more than R500." Khaya says.

"I'm sorry ntokazi, did I give you the impression that I'm rich?"

Because this is confusing, sure he dresses well and smells good but nothing about it screams "Blesser."

"It's fine, you could've told me if you didn't want." She drops the call.

"Hawu!"

"What is it?" Njabulo asks.

"How does this money thing work with women?"

"Your girlfriend?"

"Potential."

"You've been puffing and passing women, you

never gave yourself time to learn how their minds work. Money talks these days mfethu, if you're going to pursue a woman, make sure you have money. Otherwise, forget about it."

"Hawu? Iy'ngane sey'shelwa ngeymali kulamalanga? We're in trouble then."

Cashile is calling.

"Dade?" He answers and shifts to the edge of the couch when he hears her sobs.

"What's wrong?"

"Mbuzo and I fought, he hurt me."

Bakhe shoots up to his feet, headache be damned.

"Where is he?"

"I don't know, I'm in the hospital. I lost my baby because of him."

He sits back down as she explains everything that went down between her and Mbuzo.

Bakhe is stunned, he definitely did not see this coming.

“Send me a picture of yourself crying.” That’s his response after everything he’s heard.

“Why?”

“I want to scare people away.” He says and she chuckles.

“How is Lulu? Please tell her I’m coming home tomorrow.”

“She’s fine, I’m not home. It’s late, call Mbali in the morning.” Bakhe says.

They bid each other goodbye.

Cashile does things in a haste without taking anything into consideration. He believes that is one of the reasons she was arrested.

Marrying Mbuzo this early was one of her many mistakes and she’s too old to be making

mistakes and wanting to learn from them.

“Smoko?” Njabulo asks what’s wrong.

“Do you still have that demonic pit bull?”

His friend is a dog person.

Njabulo laughs, “Yes. He’s tied up in the back.”

“Can I take him for a walk tomorrow?”

Njabulo narrows his eyes in suspicion, “I don’t see why not.”

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CASHILE

“How is my favourite patient doing this morning?”

Dr. Nkosana walks in with these words, carrying a Wimpy package.

“Morning, doctor.”

I feel bad for occupying this room when I’m not really sick.

He puts the Wimpy package on the bedside table.

“I hope you’re not allergic to bacon. I got you a cheese and bacon sandwich.”

“You didn’t have to, I’m going home anyway.” I say with my eyes on the package he’s unpacking, wondering why he would buy me food.

I didn’t even give him details of what happened with me and Mbuzo, he only knows that I have a husband who does not like me.

“I was getting one for myself, the waiter gave me two. She said it’s on the house.” He looks clueless, whoever that waiter is, has a crush on him. I want to make him aware of it, maybe he’ll start noticing the poor girl but we don’t know

each other like that.

I sit up and accept the toast, “Thanks.”

He nods, giving me a refined smile.

“For everything,” I add.

I want to ask why he helped me but I might offend him, some people are naturally kind.

I start eating, not sure how to chew with him staring at me. I guess it’s a habit for doctors to put hands in the pockets of their coats but staring... I doubt it is.

I take three bites and put the food away.

“Are you full?”

Well doc, you’re staring.

“Yes,” I lie.

“I’m discharging you today, do you have anyone you can call?”

I think of Bakhe, but I might inconvenience him

because he will have to Uber here, then we Uber back home.

“Everyone is at work, I will take a taxi home.”

“I will drop you off,” he says.

That will be asking for too much, I can’t expect him to drop everything for me. He’s already done enough.

“Thank you but you don’t have to, I promise I will be fine.”

He gives me a subtle nod, “What about your husband?”

There goes my mood, I’ve been trying my best not to think about Mbuzo.

“I’m sorry, it’s not my place to ask.”

I don’t reply because I agree with him.

“If there is anything you need, please call me.”

He hands me his business card.

“She won’t be needing anything from you.” A voice says as the door is pushed open.

It’s bloody Mkhetheni, in a wheelchair. A nurse is pushing him in here, the man brought his drip and all. What is he doing here looking half past dead?

“Mkhetheni, why are you not in bed?” I am concerned, I have nothing against him.

“I came to see you,” he replies with his eyes cast on the doctor. I’m intimidated on the doctor’s behalf.

“Bafo.” I guess this is Mkhetheni greeting Nkosana.

“How are you?” -Nkosana.

“Alive and here for my sister in-law. Please leave us.” He’s just like his brother, rude as fuck.

Nkosana looks at me and flashes an apologetic smile.

“A nurse will come and discharge you. Take care of yourself Cashile.” He says and leaves without my answer.

I’m annoyed by Mkhetheni’s rudeness.

“He’s my doctor,” I tell him.

“This is not a private hospital, no one has a doctor. He wants you.”

What is wrong with these Xaba brothers?

“Well maybe that’s a good thing since your brother is so sure that no man will ever want me,” I tell him.

He better not be here to defend Mbuzo, I will kick that wheelchair if he dares.

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MHLONIPHE

He woke up grumpy today because his father came to him in a dream and asked for a cow.

The Kraal has been empty long before Velaphi died, he didn't leave any four legged animal behind or enough money to buy one.

Bandile went back to his mother yesterday, Mhlo was supposed to have him for the whole weekend but he made a baby with a drama queen who is used to getting her way.

He walks in the kitchen to grab a snack and finds Mbuzo sitting at the table, and lost in space.

"Ndoda." Mhlo greets, making his way to the fridge. He pops it open, he's hungry but his appetite is on vacation.

He shuts the fridge and then it hits him that Mbuzo didn't respond to his greeting. He's still staring into space.

Mhlo taps his shoulder, “Are you okay?”

Mbuzo blinks himself back to reality and looks up at Mhlo, his eyes are that of someone who just woke up.

Mhlo sighs, he knows what this is about. It's something he doesn't want to talk about.

“What's for breakfast?” He takes the direction of a different topic.

It takes a minute for Mbuzo to answer, “I'm not hungry. Let me go and ask KaMadlala if she wants anything.”

He pushes his chair back and stands, but freezes mid-way. He just remembered, there's no more KaMadlala. There will never be after everything he said and did yesterday.

Mhlo clears his throat to chase away the elephant in the room.

“I'm going to visit dad at the cemetery, do you

want to come?" Mhlo says, carefully studying Mbuzo's expression and gets nothing.

"Why?"

It's a strange question really because, why not? Nevertheless, they haven't been to see them in years.

Mhlo sighs as he sits across him, "Your father came to me in a dream. He wants us to slaughter a cow for him."

Mbuzo's brows shoot up, "Why all of a sudden? They have never showed themselves before."

"Now we know why." He gets up and grabs the car keys on the kitchen counter. Mbuzo is still seated, lost in thought.

"Are you coming?" –Mhlo.

"But why are you visiting him though? It's not like you will find him sitting on his tombstone." Mbuzo questions and states, in return Mhlo

lightly chuckles.

“I know,” he walks out, answering Bakhe’s call.

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There are two freshly dug graves next to their parents’ graves. Velaphi and his wife Agnes were buried next to each other. Their graves have been abandoned for years, there’s so much cleaning that needs to be done.

“Nompilo won’t mind cleaning the graves,” Mbuzo says to his brother.

They are standing in front of the graves.

“Whatever.” Mhlo says, he’s playing with a long stick he plucked from a tree next door their house.

His answer has Mbuzo frowning, “What do you mean you don’t care? Now that we know the

truth, we have to start doing right by them.”

“Like you’re doing right by Cashile?” Mhlo blorts out, causing his brother to suck his teeth at him.

“What is your problem?” –Mbuzo.

“You’re the last person to be preaching about what’s right or wrong.” Mhlo woke up and chose violence today.

His little brother has no come back.

“Please move back a little,” that’s Mhlo gently pushing Mbuzo back.

“What’s wrong?”

Mhlo doesn’t answer, he lifts the stick and whips his father’s tombstone.

“Mhloniphe!” He’s pale with shock.

Mhloniphe goes on a whipping spree, “You killed yourself and took my mother from me. Now you have the audacity to ask me for a cow.”

Thwack!!!

“Ndoda stop it!” Mbuzo tries to grab his hand,
Mhlo shrugs him off.

“Did you leave me any money to buy that cow?”
That’s Mhlo thrashing their father’s grave with a
stick.

Mbuzo gives up fighting him, clearly Mhlo is on
a mission.

He stops when the stick breaks and sits down
panting.

“What was that about?” –Mbuzo.

As Mhlo looks up at him to explain, he sees
Bakhe headed towards them with a pitbull on a
leash. He’s dressed for a funeral, black jeans, a
black shirt tucked in and dark shades. Mhlo
slowly stands, his brows knitted in wonder.

“Madoda.” Bakhe greets.

Their response is delayed because of this dog

barking at them.

Bakhe looks at the dog, then back at them.

“Isn’t that Njabulo’s demon possessed dog?”

Mhlo says this because this particular dog once chased him and Bakhe when they had gone to visit Njabulo.

“It is, Dracula and I are just taking a walk.”

Bakhe says and immediately the brothers find it suspicious.

Who takes a walk at a cemetery?

“Dracula? What kind of a dog name is that?”

Mbuzo and his curiosity.

“He was named after his viciousness.” –Bakhe.

“Yeah, I still don’t get it mfethu. Why would you bring a dog to the cemetery?” That’s Mhlo asking.

Bakhe moves his gaze to Mbuzo, “I wanted my brother in-law to meet him.”

His statement has Mbuzo frowning, “Why would I want to meet a dog? I’m not a dog lover.”

“I know. I spoke to my sister, and you know what she told me?”

Mbuzo gulps, I mean Bakhe is as tall as he is. His broad shoulders are not for show.

“Since you identify as an animal now, ushaya abafazi wena. You hit women.”

“I did not hit KaMadlala.” Mbuzo disputes.

“If I recall correctly, you grabbed her by the neck. Am I right?”

Yuh Bakhe though!

Mbuzo and Mhlo exchange glances, of course they expected Bakhe to retaliate but not like this.

“I thought I should bring Dracula so you can face him, dog to dog.” There’s disgust on Bakhe’s face as he says this.

“That’s not funny Bafo.” Mbuzo utters with a

shaky voice, whoever said a dog is man's best friend lied. This is the devil in a form of a dog, it's restless, growling at the two brothers standing in front of Bakhe.

"I am not your brother, don't call me that." Bakhe snaps.

The leash is loosening, Mbuzo starts moving back, his eyes are wide as saucers.

Mhlo moves to stand behind Bakhe, he loves his brother and would catch a granite for him, getting bit by a dog is not on the list.

A terrified Mbuzo raises his hands in defence, "Sbari, we can talk about this."

"Sbari is your mother that's driving you crazy." Bakhe spits.

He lets go of the leash, Mbuzo turns to run but falls into an empty grave. Bakhe grabs a shovel, hits Mhlo on both knees.

He falls down screaming, “Fuck!”

The dog won’t stop barking at Mbuzo.

“Look at it from the brighter side, I could have shot both your knees.” Bakhe softly says, as he removes his dark glasses and throws them on the ground.

“We’re friends, why are you doing this?” -Mhlo.

“My fight is with Mbuzo, ndoda, you’re just a stumbling block that will try to stop me from completing my mission.” Bakhe says.

“What do you mean?” There’s confusion in Mhlo’s voice.

Bakhe winks before he starts excavating and throwing sand into the grave.

Mbuzo’s screams resonate from six feet underground, “Help!”

“What are you doing? He’s my brother. You can’t bury him alive.” -Mhlo.

He's so much in pain that standing up has become a struggle.

"And Cashile is my sister." -Bakhe.

"Mhlo get me out of here," Mbuzo shouts, ducking every pound of sand Bakhe keeps tossing into the grave.

"I scream, you scream, we all scream for Ice cream." Bakhe exclaims mockingly.

Mhlo is horrified, he's never met this side of him.

"What the fuck Bakhe?"

"Sorry ntwana, I've always wanted to say that," he grins and whistles as he continues to cover the grave.

"Lala ngoxolo, rest in peace msunu KaVelaphi."

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[03/06, 15:48] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 52

THE MADLALAS

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Khathala came like a ray of sunshine on a dark cloud. His house is not big enough to accommodate two more people, nor is his income.

However, he's given them shelter with hopes that in a few days, they will have some place to go to.

"Here, drink some more." He hands MaNkosi piping hot beverage.

Her face turns sour because the strong smell is unbearable.

"I don't need this, I'm fine now." She tells him.

The same concoction she's rejecting is the reason she has her voice back.

"You have to drink more MaNkosi, you are not safe yet. Three cups a day for two weeks."

No one can stand the smell of whatever mixture this is.

MaNkosi shakes her head, it's not that she's saying no. Her heart is heavy because her husband is still deaf.

She looks at Madlala seated beside her with his knees and hands over them. He's representing sadness very well right now. He hasn't said a word since MaNkosi got her voice back.

"What about him? Why can't you help him?" She asks Khathala with tears in her eyes.

“His brother has been haunting my dreams, I haven’t had proper sleep in a week.”

This revelation shocks MaNkosi.

“How is that possible? I thought you handled Nkululeko.”

“I underestimated him, some ancestors are strong. Plus it’s not just him we’re up against. There’s also your daughter and her husband, he got her pregnant. That was enough to break every stronghold, her ancestors are not sleeping anymore. Then there’s Nkululeko, he swore to protect those children from you both.”

“Cashile is pregnant? But how? I did everything in my power to separate them.” She’s more terrified of Cashile’s pregnancy than the ancestors she angered.

“Velaphi broke free because of the seed that was planted in her womb. Everything you ever worked for is destroyed. The ancestors are

angry with you and your husband, it's over MaNkosi. Either repent and ask for forgiveness or your ending will be tragic."

She looks at Madlala, he will be devastated to hear they will never be wealthy again.

"Istezi sami kodwa? I will never have a double storey house. What are we supposed to do now? We can't go back home, my son is after us."

She hasn't been listening, has she?

"I told you to repent and leave me out of it. I'm only helping you with your voice, I will see what I can do with your husband's hearing. That's all I can do, you two are on your own now."

No, Khathala can't abandon her at her time of need. What about all the money she's spent on him?

"You can't leave us in the cold Khathala."

"I have a family MaNkosi, I will die along with

you if I continue with this. You never should have started this war with the ancestors, the person that advised you to kill the Xabas and take from their children, did you bad.”

Madlala lets out a sigh, he’s exhausted and needs his life back, his hearing first.

This can’t be their end, there has to be something they can do to get back on their feet.

“Can’t we take one of the children? I’m willing to do anything, look at my husband. He’s in agony.” -MaNkosi desperately pleads.

Madlala is the love of her life, she’d do anything for him.

Khathala is getting frustrated, he’s talking but she’s not hearing him.

“Why did you seek riches from darkness? Your children were going to be wealthy, they would’ve taken good care of you two.”

MaNkosi shakes her head in disapproval, that's not what she believes.

"Please Khathala, help us."

"I will ask you to leave my house if you keep insisting. I will only help your husband get his hearing back, but we will have to go to the mountain for that. When we're done, we'll go our separate ways. Delete my number and forget we ever met."

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BAKHE

He would have buried Mbuzo six feet under had Mhlo not screamed for help, it took three men to get him to stop. He left the cemetery with Dracula and took him back to its owner.

Njabulo meets him at the gate, he starts laughing as he takes the dog leash from Bakhe.

“Do I want to know where you’ve been?”

“We went for a walk,” Bakhe says, removing dust from his pants.

“Mhlo called threatening to kill my dog. What happened? I thought you two were inseparable.”

–Njabulo.

“I wanted to scare his brother, he hurt my sister.”

“Who? Mkho? He’s a pitbull himself, I don’t see him running because of a dog.” Njabulo ends his sully with light laughter.

“Mbuzo, he married my sister then dumped her.” He speaks through gritted teeth.

“Eish! That’s fucked up. Do you think it’s because of your parents?” -Njabulo.

Where is this one taking this conversation now?

Bakhe frowns, “What?”

“Everyone knows what your parents are, it’s the village gossip.” Njabulo tells him something he didn’t stop to think about.

Bakhe releases a sigh, it’s not a surprise that the secret is out. The villagers didn’t buy his story about them shooting a movie.

He leans against the gate, shoving his hands into his pockets.

“We grew up together mfethu, you know me.”

He’s trying to tell Njabulo that he has nothing to do with his parents’ witchcraft.

Njabulo pats his shoulder, “Don’t worry. No one thinks you’re part of it. What are you going to do now that they are on the run?”

This man keeps opening files.

“On the run?” Bakhe asks with a puckered brow.

“That’s what my mother thinks, she went over there to see MaNkosi and found no one.”

“So she assumed they are on the run?” Bakhe asks.

Really though! Njabulo’s mother is forward.

“She saw you leaving with them yesterday, she said you were carrying a gun. She thought you killed them but concluded they are on the run when I told her that I spoke to MaNkosi last night.”

Njabulo is better than Daily Sun, he should get paid for this.

“You heard her voice?” Bakhe inquisitively asks.

“Yes, was I not supposed to hear her voice? Mfethu am I going to die?” His eyes are wide with evidence of fear in them.

Seriously?

“Relax, I don’t think MaNkosi’s witchcraft goes

that deep. Nothing will happen to you. I'm just shocked because as far as I know, she's mute."

Njabulo looks traumatised, "I will never answer her calls again."

Well, why would she call him?

They conclude their conversation, Bakhe takes his leave.

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On his way to the robots to catch a local taxi to his aunt's place, he makes a call to Khaya.

She answers at second ring, "Yini?"

His brows shoot up, "Is that how you answer calls?"

She sighs loudly, probably on purpose so he grasps how upset she is.

"What do you want?"

“Call me when your father has removed that demon that’s making you crazy.” He drops the call.

They haven’t even kissed yet and this is happening.

His phone rings in a second, he answers and keeps quiet.

“I’m sorry,” Khaya says.

“Why are you moody? Is it the money thing?”

“I thought you’d take care of me.”

“And what will your father do? It’s his job to take care of you, my job is to take care of my wife. You’re not my wife ntokazi, we’ve never held hands or kissed, yet you expect me to throw money at you?” He’s beside himself with shock.

“I just want to see if you will be able to provide for me if we ever get married. If a man struggles to take care of his girlfriend, how will

he take care of her when she's his wife?"

Bakhe has never heard anything like this.

"That's your thinking, not mine. If you're in this for money, then it's better we stop before we go further." He says.

"I'm sorry. I will never ask you for money again."

He's annoyed so he drops the calls.

He really likes this girl and hopes for a chance with her.

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CASHILE

Mkhotheni left my room after telling me a lot of rubbish about how Mbuzo is not himself. How is that any of my business now?

I wish he and Mhloniphe would stay out of this, I don't need them to push me towards a man who keeps pushing me away.

I accepted Dr. Nkosana's offer to take me home and he got me a pair of pants. Mine are blood stained.

When I last spoke to him, he was seeing his last patient. I'm waiting in the reception area.

Here he comes, without his white jacket.

Why is it strange to see a doctor out of uniform? And this one is wearing black jeans, a white tee and a black leather jacket hanging on his arm. I don't know if I'm seeing right but, are those tattoos on his arms?

I stand to meet his height, which is impossible. Most men are just built like giraffes.

He smiles, "Sorry I kept you waiting. You ready?"

I don't get to answer, someone shouting for help pushes back my response.

Curious, I turn towards the entrance to see Mhlo dragging Mbuzo in.

He's injured.

There's a cut on his forehead, he looks like he's been bathing in dust. Naturally I panic, and open my mouth to ask but I meet his eyes, flashes of what happened yesterday come flooding in.

"What happened?" Dr. Nkosana asks.

Mhlo looks at us with a frown on his face.

"He was attacked, can you help him?"

The frowning Mbuzo huffs in arrogance, "I don't want his help."

The fool is injured but rejects help.

"I'm off duty," the doctor says and calls for a nurse.

Two approach us.

“This man needs medical attention.” He says as he takes my hand, of course I’m taken aback by it, but I make a move.

I don’t know why I glance at Mbuzo, his gaze is on our joint hands. Deep down I pray for an expression on his face, something that will assure me that he once cared or still does but there is nothing.

I am hurt, it’s crazy how I fell for his words.

“Let’s go,” Nkosana says.

“KaMadlala, are you leaving? Your husband is injured.” Mhlo says.

I look him in the eye, “I don’t have a husband. I hope your brother will be okay, goodbye Mhlo.”

I let the doctor usher me outside, to his car...

Wait... why is he standing in front of a motorbike?

It's his, he takes a helmet and turns to me.

"You look pale."

"I have never been on a bike before," I tell him.

I don't know how I feel about bikes, I know though they are death on wheels.

"There's a first time for everything, just hold on to me, I won't let you fall."

These words snap me back to the past, Mbuzo once uttered the same.

I need to breathe, I'm not going to cry over him anymore. Damn this lump in my throat.

I blink the tears away and clear my throat, "I will take a cab home."

"Don't you trust me?" Nkosana asks.

"You're a stranger."

He laughs, "Fair enough. But I'm also your doctor."

What do I have to lose? Besides, I need a ride home.

I give him a nod, he faintly smiles and asks for permission to put the helmet over my head.

He gets on the bike and tells me to climb behind him.

“Hold on to me,” he says.

I lock my arms around him.

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I didn’t enjoy the bike ride, I’ve always avoided Gold Reef City for a reason.

I give him back his helmet, my head is spinning.

“How are you feeling?” He asks, his eyes perusing over my body.

“I’m not hurt.”

He laughs at my response.

“Next time I will bring my car to work, in case we meet.”

“Next time? I’m not planning on going back to the hospital.” I say.

“But I plan on meeting you again, your health is my responsibility.”

I’m not about to feel special, it just feels awkward hearing this from him.

“Are you like this with all your patients?” I ask.

He scratches his head, I’m minding his business, aren’t I?

“So what’s the plan? Are you going to fix things with your husband?”

The Mbuzo topic again, I dread it.

“There is nothing to fix, we were married for two seconds. I guess I will divorce him and move on with my life.” The thought weighs on me like a ton of bricks.

“You can get your marriage annulled if you haven’t been married for that long. Your marriage will be erased from a legal perspective, it will be like you were never married.”

That’s what I want, I don’t want to be tied to Mbuzo as the woman he was once married to.

I thank Nkosana for his time and services and head inside.

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The door is open, I hear voices in the living. My aunt conversing with a familiar voice. I knock out of respect because this is not my father’s house.

My eyes must be deceiving me.

What is Juba’s mother doing here? I look at Lulu seated on her lap, my biggest fear flashes before my eyes.

“Cashile mntanami, you’re home.” My aunt stands to hug me.

My eyes widen as I look at her, did she just speak like a normal person?

“Aunty?” She usually yells when she speaks.

She looks at me, her smile is new. The usual confusion on her face is no longer there.

“You sound better, what...”

She gestures that I sit down, it’s disrespectful to stand in front of visitors. I greet Juba’s mother as I take a seat, her face lacks a smile. She returns my greeting with a nod.

“Hey Lulu, mommy’s home.” I say, gesturing she comes to me.

But I’m talking to myself, she shakes her head and hides her face on her grandmother’s chest.

Is Juba’s mom here to take my baby from me?

“She missed her grandmother,” my aunt

expresses with a chuckle.

Juba's mother should be planning a funeral.
Why is she here, stressing me?

"My child, I woke up feeling different today, my ears are not blocked anymore. I don't know what happened, but I feel different. I'm... God has heard my prayers." Aunt tells me, she's in tears.

I sit beside her and pull her in my arms.

"It's a miracle. Where is Mbali? Does she know?"

"Yes, I sent her to buy something for our guest."
She says.

That reminds me. What is Juba's mother doing here?

I glance over at her, she knows I'm curious.

"The funeral will be held this Sunday, Juba would have wanted you there." Juba's mom

says.

Oh!

“Yes, I will be there.”

Why not? He was the father of my child.

“I came to fetch my son’s spirit, so I used the opportunity to come and see you. I went to your father’s house, the neighbours directed me here.” She adds.

I’m listening to her speak while looking at Lulu who is clung on to her. What will I do if she’s here to take my daughter?

“Yesterday I got a call from Juba’s lawyer. My son made you sole beneficiary of his assets.”

“Assets?” I ask.

I know Juba had houses and cars. What other assets did he have? And why would he give them to me?

“The house in Sandton, and his car. I was angry

when I first heard about it but it's my son's dying wish. He took care of me when he was alive and made sure I lacked nothing. Therefore, it's my duty to make sure he is heard. For my granddaughter's sake, I hope you accept."

I can't say no to a free house, I need a start and this might be it.

As I'm about to tell her that I accept, Mbali walks in with her eyes all out.

"Mbuzo is outside, he's asking for you." She tells me.

I jump up and hurry out without a thought to it.

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[03/06, 15:48] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 53

BAKHE

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After much consideration and analysing Khaya's words, Bakhe decided that they should meet and talk over lunch.

But before their meeting, he thought of coming here, to his father's house.

The gate is not locked, they left it open that day. He knocks at the door, no one answers. It's strange seeing this place abandoned like this. The kraal is empty, there's not even a single cow in the yard.

He heads to his rondavel, some of his clothes are still here. He hasn't had time to come and collect them.

How did such a loving home turn into a ghost

town, a strange place he can hardly recognise?

Bakhe locks the rondavel on his way out. His parents' phones are off, he's been trying to call them since his conversation with Njabulo this morning.

One more try and MaNkosi's phone rings and is answered.

"Khehla!" It's her, he sits on the veranda sighing in relief.

"Mami, where are you?"

"I can't tell you."

"I just want to know if you're okay."

"We are fine Khehla, don't worry about us. How are you? I am happy you're alive." She says.

Although he hears the relief in her voice, he doesn't believe her.

"I am fine, tell me where you are. You need to atone for your sins mami, can't you do that then

we start over as a family?”

“We can never start over Khehla, we are in too deep. Your father and I chose this life for ourselves, we have come too far, there’s no chance for repentance.” –MaNkosi.

“What do you mean? What are you saying to me?”

MaNkosi goes quiet on him, he’s a very patient man but today, she is testing his patience.

“You are not a failure Khehla, uyindoda eqotho. A man amongst men, and I am proud of you. Don’t ever forget that.”

His heart almost stops, “What are you saying to me, MaNkosi? Are you giving up on life?”

She doesn’t answer.

Bakhe stands so he can hear her properly, this sitting down business is disturbing his hearing.

“Mami, I asked you a question.” He snaps.

“I never wanted you to suffer Khehla, you and your sister. You might think your father and I were selfish but everything we did was for you two. We wanted the best for you, please tell Cashile that I love her. I love you too Khehla.”

He's panicking, yes they are evil but they are his parents.

“Please don’t tell me that you are going to kill...”

“No, I am not a coward. I would never do such a lowly thing.” She puts him at ease with these words and he believes her.

“Good because I am not going to bury anyone. You two better stay alive, I will not carry your cross when you die. You still have people to answer to.” Bakhe tells her.

One thing he will never do is carry his father’s sins.

“I have to go, your father needs me,” MaNkosi says and hangs up.

That sounded like a lie, he doesn't really care about it, as long as she will not be dying.

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He said to meet in Hillcrest at half past ten, it's 11:15am and there is no sign of Khaya.

He's waiting outside KFC, and starting to feel like an idiot.

Is she standing him up or what?

He takes his phone out and makes another call that will probably grate the last of his balls.

"I just got off a taxi, where are you?"

"Outside KFC," he says.

"I think I see you, you're wearing a black shirt right?"

"That's me," he replies, scanning the crowded mall.

In a second, she appears in front of him.

The church girl in her shows up even when she's meeting up with a potential.

Maxi skirt, a long sleeve satin shirt and wedges.

"Hey," she greets him.

He pulls her in for a brief hug.

"You look nice," he's lying.

Khaya is all smiles, "Sorry I'm late. I should have requested a ride but they are expensive."

"It's okay, you are worth the wait."

He is charming no lie and Khaya is easily charmed so it's a win-win situation.

Bakhe takes her hand and ushers her inside KFC.

"What would you like to have?" Bakhe asks, leading her to the menu section.

"Are we eating here?" She sounds and looks

worried.

“Yes, I see an empty table over there. Let’s grab it before someone takes it.” He walks before her to a corner table.

Khaya is dragging her feet, there’s a look of disgust on her face. Bakhe hasn’t paid that much attention to it, what African does not love KFC?

He pulls a chair for her and tells her to sit.

“What will you have?” He asks.

“I don’t know,” she shrugs. Her eyes are all over the place, as if KFC is a foreign place.

Nonetheless, Bakhe smiles at her, “Am I allowed to choose for you?”

Khaya sneers, “Is this our first date?”

“If you want it to be, then yes.”

Her nose creases, “At KFC?”

“I love chicken, don’t you?” –Him.

“What happened to candle lit dinner at Tasha’s or Potato Shed? You might as well have taken me to an Indian corner shop to buy samosas.”

Breath Bakhe!

This is new to him, he’s never taken a girl on a date. Maybe she’s right, he doesn’t know how it’s done.

“Fine, this can be lunch. Two friends talking over lunch, let’s not put a name to it.” He walks away after his declaration.

Minutes later, he comes back with Street Wise two and pap for himself, and a classic twister and chips for the madam.

“I don’t know if you like spicy food, so I got you the classic twister and coke.” –Bakhe.

Khaya is not impressed whatsoever.

“Can we go to Fishaways? I don’t feel like KFC. I

want a prawn salad”

Is she serious?

He stops opening his meal and looks into her eyes.

“You didn’t stop me when I went to order the meal, I was under the impression that you are okay with this.”

Khaya sulks like a child, “I’m sorry. But I want seafood.”

Today she’s working hard to get on his nerves.

Bakhe heaves a sigh, he’s been through shit the past few hours.

He puts the food back on a tray along with Khaya’s food and stands.

“You want Fishaways? Go to Fishaways, I’m going home to eat in peace.” He says.

He goes to the waiter to ask for a bag, puts the food inside and leaves the restaurant and

Khaya behind.

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CASHILE

He's standing outside the gate and leaning against his car, he cleaned up and looks way different from when I saw him at the hospital.

There's a bandage wrapped around his head.

My feet freeze half way to the gate when I catch a glimpse of his cold face. That pucker between his eyebrows tells me that he's still that heartless man I encountered at the hospital.

God punish me for running out of the house to meet him.

"Can we talk?" He shouts, probably because

seconds have gone by and I am still stuck in one position.

“What do you want?”

He sighs, clearly annoyed.

“I can’t yell, please come closer.”

God knows what he wants.

I step closer, I don’t know what to expect from him. Mbali left the gate open, now that I think about it and probably have gained my senses back, she should have told him that I am not home.

I make sure there’s distance as I stand before him, it feels like I’m standing in front of a stranger.

“Where is your boyfriend?”

I don’t know what offends me, the manner in which he asked the dumb question or those lifted thick eyebrows.

“Why are you here?”

“I want to talk about our divorce and to ask you to leave the village.”

What in God’s name...

“Mbuzo, are you fuckin kidding me? This is my village too, I was born and raised here.”

Yes, I want to leave and that’s the plan but he has no right to decide for me.

“Relax, you don’t have to cuss. I didn’t come to fight with you Cashile, I didn’t like bumping into you at the hospital, this village is too small for the both of us. I think it would do us good if one of us left the village. Since there is nothing for you here, I mean your parents abandoned you. It’s only fair you leave.”

“Says the orphan whose parents killed each other.”

Shit!!!

I don't know how that escaped my mouth. He's looking at me like my goal in life is to hurt him. His eyes water.

I was angry, I didn't mean for those words to come out.

He's nodding non-stop and I'm so confused, I don't know what he's thinking. He is doing a very good job hiding his emotions from me.

"Mbuzo..."

He turns back to the car, opens the passenger door and takes a brown envelope.

"I've been talking to a lawyer, he drew these annulment papers for me. I have signed them, it needs your signature now. Evidence that we were married will be wiped out, it will be like we never met and that's what I want. I'm sure it's what you want as well."

"Yes," I reply too quickly.

It's a lie though, it's not what I want. What I want is him, I want him to turn back time and take his words back. I want the Mbuzo that I fell in love with, the kind and gentle giant Mbuzo.

"Good, then you can go through the papers, sign them and I will fetch them from you." He means it, it's all over his eyes.

I don't get it, what happened between us?

"You will get them from my brother, I am going back to Joburg and not because you said so. I made the decision this morning." I add a little lie, Joburg was far from my mind this morning but maybe it's for the best because we can't stand each other.

Ours is a tough battle, one I am not sure I will survive.

"That's good then, leave the papers with someone else. I don't want to face your brother," he says, plugging his hands inside the

pockets of his pants.

There's a persistent silence between us, I'm looking at him, he's looking over my head.

"So what, are you moving on with the doctor?" He breaks the silence with his stupid question.

Why is he even asking me this?

"You really think I'm desperate for a man don't you?" I ask, completely dazed by his audacity, he definitely ordered it from China town because, what the fuck?

Mbuzo shrugs, of course this is his answer to my question.

Wow, okay.

"Leave Nkosana out of this, he is a good man."

"I didn't ask you." He interjects.

Why do I even try?

I fold my arms over my chest, "Goodbye

Mbuzo."

His jaw ticks, his lashes flap.

"Good bye Cashile, I hope our paths never cross again."

I didn't see that coming.

"You're being an asshole, you know that? I know you hate me, you don't have to rub it in." I tell him.

I turn back to the house and walk through the gate with the damn annulment papers, I cannot for the life of me believe that Mbuzo signed them so easily. It's over, we are over.

"KaMadlala," he calls after me.

I stop but lack the strength to face him.

"Maybe it was for the best you lost the baby. That way, nothing will trace us back to each other."

The bastard!

He isn't worth it, he is not worth my tears. But I can't...

I grab a stone and throw it at him. It hits him on the head, I wanted to leave a permanent scar.

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[03/06, 15:48] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 54

CASHILE

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“KaMadlala!”

I run inside the gate as he charges at me and close it. A love that turns to hate is the most dangerous, it's not right for me to provoke him. I

need to watch my words around him.

My aunt appears from the house.

It's Mbuzo's fault, he shouldn't have roared at me like that.

"Cashile? What's going on?"

Nice, now I have to answer questions I wasn't ready to answer.

I turn to Mbuzo, there's a scoff on his face before he glances at my aunt. Suddenly the scoff makes way for reverence, he joins his hands together and dips his knees slightly as a sign of respect.

"Ninjani aunty." He sounds so innocent and respectful, if only my aunt knew the poison that comes out of his mouth.

"Yebo mfana wami, unjani baba?"

"S'khona aunty, I can't complain."

Nxa!

“We-Cashile!”

I look at her, I have never seen her looking this strict. Her hands are on her waist, I know it's just for effect. She won't do anything to me... what did I do anyway?

“Who is this man?”

Hau! Was she not conversing with him just now?

“Cashile!”

Eish!

“Aunty, this is Mbuzo Xaba.” A bastard.

She looks at him, eyes narrowed as if she's seen him before.

“You're Velaphi Xaba's son?”

“Yebo aunty.” He answers with his eyes cast down.

Why is he even still here?

“Why did my daughter hit you with a stone? And

when did this marriage take place?"

I almost fall on my face.

She saw that? This aunt never peeps through windows, what is this thing she's showing me?

Plus, how did she know about the marriage?

"Who told you we're married?" It couldn't have been Bakhe.

She looks at me like I'm stupid, "Walls have ears."

I look to Mbuzo, hoping he's got an excuse.

"Is anyone going to tell me what's going on?"

—Aunty.

"Nothing aunty," why is she digging for something that's not there.

Mbuzo clears his throat, clearly demanding our attention. He wants me to be the one to answer her.

“Come inside, I want you two to tell me what you did.”

“With all due respect aunty, I can’t come inside your house. It will be disrespectful of me.”

Disrespectful wok’nuka!

“Okay, bring an elder tomorrow around eleven in the morning. You children did something I have never heard of, and since you both are not mature enough to make sound decisions, the elders will do it for you.”

I wonder what this aunty is thinking now.

Mbuzo says his goodbyes and leaves without sparing me a glance.

“What is that?” She points at the envelope in my hand.

“Divorce papers, he signed them already.” I say divorce papers because I don’t want to be

explaining what an annulment is.

Aunt gasps, “Cashile, what have you done to your life?”

I have no answer for her because I myself do not know what I have done to my life.

We have a guest in the house, aunt seems to have forgotten. When we go back inside, Juba’s mother says she needs to go. I have to promise to come to the funeral.

“I would like to see Lulu again.” She says.

How can I keep her from her granddaughter when she raised Lulu?

“You should tell her about her father, do it when she’s sleeping so she understands.”

“I did that already,” I reply.

I’m surprised when Mrs. Ngwenya gives me a hug.

And this child I birthed cries me a river when her

grandmother leaves. Mbali has to take her to the spaza shop to appease her.

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BAKHE

“Short left,” he shouts.

The taxi stops at a stop sign. He walks down the street while chewing on a drumstick. He finished his pap and two piece chicken in the taxi.

As he approaches the gate, a white Chevy Spark parks right in front of the gate. Khaya steps out, she immediately sees him and smiles widely. His mood goes south fast.

“Why are you here?”

“You left me alone at the restaurant.”

That doesn’t answer his question but anyway.

The driver hoots, he looks impatient.

Khaya flashes a nervous smile, “I had no money to come back. Can I borrow R30? I need to pay the bolt driver.”

Money, money, money! It’s all he’s been hearing from her lately.

“Why did you come here if you had no money?” Bakhe asks.

It’s a valid question.

“I want us to talk, please don’t shut me out.”

She pleads, as she runs a hand down his arm.

“I’m not shutting you out, I’m removing myself from trouble. You have high expectations sisi wami and I’m afraid you chose the wrong man to fulfil them.”

She looks hurt by his statement.

The driver hoots again, Khaya grows restless. It's evident on her face.

"Please, I will pay it back."

"I gave you R200, what happened to it?"

"I used it all on important things, please." Her desperation doesn't move him.

He pays the driver because all this hooting is scraping at his annoyance.

The driver leaves. Bakhe opens the gate, she blocks him from walking in.

"I'm sorry, if I offended you." Khaya tells him.

"Do I look like a walking ATM to you khaya?"

"Bakhe..."

"Lalela mfethu, this thing is not going to work. You're a beautiful girl, I'm sure it won't be hard for you to get a boyfriend."

There's disappointment in her eyes, "Okay, I

understand. I'm sorry I bothered you."

It's a sad scene to watch for Bakhe, although she screams gold digger, it doesn't change the fact that he really likes her.

He lets out a soft sigh, "Go home. We will talk, today has been a long day."

She nods, "Will I hear from you again?"

"I said we will talk, didn't I?" He searches for coins in his pocket and luckily for Khaya, he's got R50 to spare.

She takes it and thanks him when he tells her it's transport money.

He doesn't wait with her as she requests another ride, she's on probation.

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CASHILE

Aunt Hluphekile has always been that aunty with a mind of a child, she's always been confused and somewhat out of touch with reality.

I don't know this woman who woke me up early in the morning to prepare for people I don't even want to see.

Mbuzo signed the annulment papers, I don't see why he should bring his family here.

"I spoke to Balungile, he will be here with Mfaniseni." Aunt says as she walks into the kitchen where Mbali and I are slaving away for the Xabas.

"I still think this is a bad idea," Bakhe retorts.

He's been keeping himself busy with feeding Lulu porridge, this child wakes up too early, it

worries me.

“You are a child, what you think can wait.”

That’s my aunt, it’s still hard to believe that she’s healed.

“If my uncles fail to stand in for uDade, I have to take over, aunty. That’s how old I am, I’m sure I am mature enough to do that.” He thinks he’s grown, the Bakhe I know is very much childish.

“Bakhe, I have nothing against Cashile’s happiness. That’s why I want to fix this mess. I’m not forcing her to stay with a man she doesn’t love, there was a marriage and that’s not something to play with.”

“I hear you aunty,” Bakhe says, shoving a spoonful of porridge in Lulu’s mouth.

“Mbuzo doesn’t love me, he never did.” I say.

“How do you know?” She asks.

This thing of placing her hands on her hips.

“He told me.”

“And you believed him?”

Hai Suka! I give up.

She turns to Bakhe, “Have you spoken to your father?”

Bakhe looks at me with raised brows.

He told me last night that they ran when he went to demand that they free Mbuzo’s parents’ spirits.

We haven’t told aunt what’s going on with those two, I think she has every right to know. Maybe we should have a family meeting.

“He’s unavailable and I doubt he will avail himself.” Bakhe answers.

Aunty leaves the kitchen looking defeated.

“Don’t you think we should tell her the truth?”

Mbali asks.

I don't know why she's suddenly seated when we have so much to do.

"She will know when the time is right, aunt will not believe it so easily." I explain.

"There's something I didn't tell you. Juba's accident was caused by your parents, the goal was to kill Lulu." Bakhe whispers the last part.

He's talking to me and I am shocked beyond the word itself.

"Bakhe, do you hear yourself?" I'm trying to get answers here.

They wanted to kill my baby?

He looks at me with pity, "Juba told me everything before he died. That day he went to pay lobola for Lulu, the herd boy told him that he saw Mankosi doing some type of ritual in the forest. She sprinkled blood on Lulu's picture, I

don't know what other voodoo shit she did. Lulu was going to die in that accident, I don't know how she survived."

How could they be so heartless?

I feel my knees getting weak, I need to sit. My hands are shaking, I can't control the vicious beating of my heart.

"Your parents are evil dade, we just don't know how far they are willing to go. Something tells me they are the reason Velaphi Xaba killed his wife and himself, they wanted his riches and probably the only way was to kill them."

I think back to the words I uttered to Mbuzo out of anger, I shouldn't have done that. That was insensitive of me.

"Mbuzo... I said things to him about his parents. I defended our parents and... I have to apologise."

"No, it's best you stay away from Mbuzo for

now. He's not in his right mind." He says and he's right.

"I want them brought to justice, they have to pay for what they did." I say.

I don't care what happens to them anymore, if they are so quick to want to take my child from me, why should I worry about them?

I take Lulu from his lap and hold her in my arms. I could have lost my baby... and Juba... how will I ever look at his mother?

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We're done with the preparations, we agreed for 11am. It's been forty minutes and the Xabas haven't arrived.

"Call him," my aunt says.

I've been calling that man for the past thirty minutes, his phone remains off.

To appease her, I ring him again.

Just as I expected.

“His phone is off,” I tell her, placing my feet on the couch.

I’m tired honestly.

She sighs, I don’t know what the head shake is about.

“It’s a good thing we didn’t marry traditionally. I would have trapped myself, I would’ve been tied to a donkey even in my afterlife.”

“Don’t call your husband a donkey,” she slaps my thigh.

“He’s a goat then,” I say and I’m rewarded with another slap.

She looks at me, “Try his brothers.”

Why is she so insistent?

I don’t want this, Mbuzo’s uncles might chide us

and tell us to fix our differences. But I will be throwing myself in a lion's den, I'd rather be auto-sexual like Kortney Kardashian than get back together with Mbuzo.

I dial Mhloniphe's number and cross my fingers he doesn't answer.

"Kotiza."

Yeah, not in this lifetime will I ever get what I want.

I clear my throat and take a deep breath because aunt is looking at me.

"Hi, how far are you guys?" I say you guys because I assume he's included since he's older than Mbuzo, six years older to be precise.

"I don't understand," I can hear confusion in his voice.

"My aunt wants to see your elders, she spoke to

Mbuzo yesterday and he said he will talk to his uncles.”

“Mbuzo didn’t say anything to me, in fact I haven’t seen him since yesterday.”

He hasn’t seen him since?

“Where are you?” I ask.

“Home.”

That means Mbuzo didn’t sleep at home.

I’m okay, I just need to get used to the fact that he is an ass now.

“Maybe he spoke to your uncles,” I tell Mhlo.

“I’ll call them and find out, I will call you back.”

He hangs up.

I explain the situation at hand to my aunt, she’s not taking nonsense this one.

She wants Mbuzo here by hook or crook.

My phone rings seconds later, I don't know why I thought it's that cow I married out of ignorance.

"Mhlo!"

"No one knows anything about a meeting. Mbuzo didn't relay the message, I'm sorry KaMadlala. Can we reschedule for next weekend? Everyone is busy today."

Mbuzo cannot do this to my aunt, I understand when he's being a shitty person towards me. What did my aunt ever do to him?

"I'm leaving today, forget about it." Yes, I'm dismissing it without aunt's permission. I'm only human and can only take so much.

"What about tomorrow then, or I can come myself?" -Mhlo.

"Mhlo, I appreciate what you're trying to do. But it's over, there is nothing between me and your brother anymore."

This is me saying something I never thought I'd openly say.

I'm done as much as Mbuzo is.

Mhlo has more pleading to do, he's practically grovelling now. I disconnect the call.

“Are they coming?”

“Mbuzo didn't tell them aunty, he's not interested in fixing our marriage.”

Never in my life have I ever been this humiliated.

I take the annulment papers from the table and grab a pen.

“If you sign those papers Cashile, you will see me.” She gives me a threatening look.

I'm still going to sign them, if Mbuzo signed them without hesitation, why can't I?

I put my signature where needed. It's done, I'm officially single.

“Cashile, you can’t do things in a haste. Don’t you love him?” Aunt sounds hurt.

“I do, I will always love him but I love myself more. I am done chasing after him.” I’m placing the papers back inside the envelope as I say this, then hand them to her.

“He’s going to come for the papers, please give them to him.”

“What about you?”

“I’m going back to Joburg. Life in the village has failed me,” it’s time for me to try this life thing again.

Who knows, maybe I will be lucky this time around.

“And your parents? Can’t you wait for them to come back?” Aunt says.

She really wants me to stay here.

“I don’t have parents, aunty. I’m done with them

and I'm done with Mbuzo. I was a fool to believe he loved me, he convinced me that we made a blood oath when we were young and like an idiot, I believed him."

And then? Why has she gone pale?

"A blood oath Cashile? Do you know what you have done? That's the most dangerous thing anyone can ever do." She's yelling, I don't even know why she's freaking out.

Mbuzo lied.

"And you're pregnant with his baby?"

My jaw literally drops.

"Aunty?" I'm so confused.

How does she know all these things?

"Umithi?" She asks if I'm carrying his baby.

"There were two babies, I lost one." I confess with a heavy heart.

She closes her eyes with a pained expression,
this woman knows too much.

How old is she again.

"That man never should've slept with you. He can't be with another woman after that. You better pray he lied about this oath. You don't play with ancestors like that."

What is she talking about?

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MBUZO

He drove to a bar after his altercation with Cashile, and spent the night drowning his sorrows in a beer bottle.

He's woken up by a tap on the shoulder. He lifts

his red-rimmed eyes and frowns at the young woman smiling at him.

“What do you want?” He asks, a burp leaving his mouth before he can finish the question.

“Can I buy you a drink?”

Ridiculous!

Mbuzo staggers to his feet as he finishes the last of his drink.

“Careful,” the lady catches him as if he was going to fall.

Who is this girl?

He looks at her with a deep frown on his face.

“What time is it?”

Yikes! Wrong question.

“Past ten. Come sit.” She’s leading him back to where he was seated.

He looks around the bar, it wasn’t this empty

when he arrived last night.

The lady flags a barman, and orders another glass of what Mbuzo was drinking.

“We start serving drinks at 12pm.” The barman says and goes back to cleaning the table.

Mbuzo is not even part of this conversation, he’s too drunk to be anyway. There he is, staggering towards the restrooms to release a pee that’s been irritating him in his sleep.

When he walks out of the cubicle to wash his hands after doing his business, someone pushes him against the wall and attacks him with an insatiable kiss. This person smells like a woman, he pushes her so hard she almost falls.

It’s the lady from the bar, she’s seductively staring at him. Mbuzo’s eyes run down her body as she removes the skimpy dress she’s wearing. She’s completely naked and touching herself.

She is a beautiful woman, no doubt. Tall and slim, but she's not his type.

Not this kind that throws themselves at men.

This man is not easily aroused by other women but today is a different story, must be the alcohol.

He grabs her, presses her against the wall, and doesn't waste time penetrating her.

She's trying to kiss his lips, but his lets his face play away from hers mouth.

He's fucking her and she's breathing like a generator.

One, two, three... more strokes, she stops moving. Her eyes are closed and her head is on his chest.

Mbuzo panics and quickly pulls out. Her body falls to the ground with a thud.

His eyes become as big as golf balls as he

presses a hand to her pulse point and feels nothing.

There's no way that she's... dead.

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500+ comments... 15 shares...

[03/06, 15:48] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 55

MBUZO

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No one in history has ever sobered up this fast. He pulls up his pants and zips them before checking her pulse again.

“Shit!” He cusses underneath his breath when the realization that she’s dead hits him.

The panic doubles, he checks if the toilet cubicles are empty.

There's no one, it's just him and the dead body.

"What do I do? What do I do?" He's whispering to himself, pacing back and forth.

With shaky hands, he fishes for his phone in his pocket and calls his brother.

Trust Mhlo to answer the phone instantly.

"Wenja! Where the fuck are you?" The anger in Mhlo's voice confuses him because this one is a jolly good fellow, but he's too stressed to entertain it.

"I think I killed someone, what do I do?" Mbuzo reports, eyes fixed on the girl's body.

Mhlo is quiet on the other end, which frustrates Mbuzo.

"Mhloniphe, did you hear what I said? I'm standing in front of a dead girl and I don't know

what to do.”

“Where are you?” Mhlo asks.

Mbuzo tells him that he’s at a local bar.

“I’m in the men’s restrooms.” He adds.

“What are you doing in the restrooms with a girl?”

Mhlo can’t be serious... he’s got more important things to worry about like getting himself out of this trouble.

“Are you coming or not?” Mbuzo snaps, taking his anger out on the wrong person.

“Nxa! Do I have a choice? And I wouldn’t have asked where you are. I can’t believe you can be so stupid. Since when do you go around fucking random women? Are you trying to catch diseases? Please tell me you used a condom.”

Mbuzo growls over the phone, then he’s heaving a sigh. He didn’t think of using

protection, only the brain between his legs was working at that time.

“Save me the speech please and get here fast. I’m in a public toilet. Someone might walk in, I don’t want to go to jail ndoda.” He’s subjected to pleading.

“I wish someone walks in on you and calls the police. How could you do this to KaMadlala?”

Mhlo is bent on chiding him without a care in the world that he is aggravating Mbuzo.

He drops the call before Mbuzo can tell him where to get off.

There are voices coming from outside, he’s not sure how many people are out there. To be safe, he drags the body inside one of the cubicles and locks himself in there with the body.

Indeed the voices he heard were headed in here. The two men are held up in loud conversations,

they must be barmen judging by their discussion that involves cocktails and a busy day ahead.

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He's been sitting inside this cubicle for too long, he's even dressed the body. It was too traumatic looking at her without clothes, he feels bad and blames himself for her death.

Mhlo should be here by now. Just when he thinks of calling him, he hears the door then a pair of footsteps.

“Sfebe, where are you?”

Mhlo is here.

Mbuzo jumps over the body and opens the door, Mhlo's eyes immediately fall on the girl.

He looks up at Mbuzo, a frown forming on his

face and just when Mbuzo opens his mouth to speak, Mhlo throws a punch.

Really, he's not the violent type. It's just that this one deserves it.

Mbuzo is throbbing with pain, and seething but doesn't return the punch.

He needs Mhlo right now.

"Fight me later, we have to do something about this body." He says.

"Let's go," Mhlo takes a step and stops when Mbuzo doesn't move a muscle.

"What are you waiting for? Let's go," Mhlo snaps , frowning at his brother.

"What about her?"

"We can't take her with us ndoda. Look, I would hide a dead body with you but not this one. There are cameras here, I'm sure of that. There is no way we'll drag a body out of here without

being seen or caught, if the barmen won't see us then for sure the cameras will." -Mhlo.

"So what do we do now? I think I killed her, we were... I was..." He can't even say it.

"You were having sex with a prostitute in a public toilet, say it. It's okay, you're disgusting."
At this point, Mhlo is rubbing it in.

Mbuzo sighs, covering his face with his palms.

Mhlo walks out first and Mbuzo has no choice but to follow his brother because really, there is nothing he can do for this lady.

They manage to leave the bar unnoticed, of course it's easy because there is no body attached to them.

Mbuzo gets in his truck, he's driving behind Mhlo's Hyundai. The destination is home.

Mbuzo left his brain back at the bar, the poor

girl will be found and the police will investigate. What if their investigation leads them to him?

How is he going to explain himself? He doesn't even know how she died.

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They arrive at the Xaba residence, he parks behind Mhlo's car while frowning at this one who is opening the door for him and grabbing his collar, forcefully pulling him out.

Mbuzo matches the frown on Mhlo's face.

"Yini..." He's not done with his question and Mhlo is punching him like he's a punching bag.

"Ndoda... what are you..."

Another punch on his right cheek shuts him up.

He stumbles backwards, his back colliding against the truck.

Mhlo is clearly livid and won't stop punching his little brother. But Mbuzo's anger can never, he starts punching back.

The fight quickly becomes nasty, the two opponents are all over the street fighting one-on-one.

When they are both bleeding and panting, they fall to their knees in front of each other.

"What the fuck was that about?" Mbuzo angrily asks his brother before spitting a mouth full of blood and checks if he did not lose a tooth.

He's got a split lip, and a throbbing headache.

Clearly, Mhlo throws mean punches.

"Did you use protection?" –Mhlo.

Feeling ashamed and disgusted with himself, Mbuzo drops his head.

"You are an idiot, Mbuzo. How could you be so irresponsible? Do you even know that girl?"

“I was drunk, I didn’t know what I was thinking.”

He’s only human hau.

“You never think, that’s what. Now you have a dead body on your hands. What happened anyway? Did you push her and she hit her head or what?”

Mbuzo sits on his butt, his brows knitting in a deep frown.

“I don’t know, we were busy and she suddenly stopped breathing.”

Mhlo is utterly disgusted but mostly shocked.

“She had a heart attack?” He asks.

“I don’t know ndoda...angazi.” He shouts.

“Yeyi, don’t shout at me.” Mhlo shouts back only for Mbuzo to glare at him.

He heaves a sigh, “I wasn’t paying much attention. I don’t remember her crying of pain.”

—Mbuzo.

Defeated, Mhlo gets up from the ground. He looks down at his brother, obviously appalled.

“If your semen is found on that girl’s body, you are going to jail for a long time.” Mhlo says with a tongue click, then heads inside the yard.

He’s got a big mouth, which has left Mbuzo feeling like shit and scared as hell.

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NOTHANDO

Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned, or a scorned woman has a fury from hell... whatever that saying is, describes Nothando.

This is her second visit to the witch doctor. Sandla Mpaza, a traditionalist that came highly recommended by a friend from church.

There's a long queue outside, Nothando walks straight to the shabby rondavel because unlike these people, Sandla is expecting her.

"Come in," Sandla says.

He doesn't have to check who it is, he saw her coming before she walked through his gate.

She removes her shoes and enters the hut, it's always dim in here.

Can't he put up lights? And that smell... she's nauseated by it.

She sits on a reed mat placed before the man in a red and black sarong and greets. Her eyes land on the thing hanging around his neck, she can't tell if it's a human tooth or it once belonged to an animal.

"I didn't think you would come back." Sandla says.

"You said to come today," she reminds him and

he smiles.

She looks away, trying not to look disgusted by his ultramel looking teeth.

“What do you have to tell me?” Sandla asks, he knows already what the report is.

“The ritual worked, Mbuzo and Cashile have separated like you said would happen. He spits on the ground he walks on.” She reports.

When she came here with a plan to separate the two love birds, she didn’t think it would work. She had seen their love, and how obsessed Mbuzo was with Cashile.

Her mission was to destroy that love that destroyed her life and here she is, with positive results.

Sandla is proud of his work, “I told you it will happen.”

“Now I want Mbuzo to love me, I want to have

his baby.” Nothando says.

“I told you that is impossible, you will die if you sleep with that man.” Sandla says.

Nothando finds it hard to believe this, if the plan to separate them worked, then this one has to as well.

“Then what was the point of separating them if I can’t be with him?” She asks, raising her voice at the witch doctor.

“You know what you must do if you want him to be yours.” –Sandla.

She knows what he means, the ritual involves sleeping with this man, it’s disgusting but it works on her favour.

Mbuzo and Cashile have separated because of that, Sandla told her it would happen. She didn’t believe him at first, but now she’s convinced that his power lies in his d!ck.

“I will do anything,” and she will try not to vomit while at it.

The old man throws his head back laughing as he stands. “Kazi iyozala nkomon?” He expresses.

Which clearly means ‘what will be the outcome?’

He goes out and tells the clients outside that Nothando is his last client for the day, he has other important matters after this.

They all leave with their complaints and grumpy faces.

Nothando is feeling uneasy and dirty, she felt the same way the first time she came here and had to give Sandla a piece of her cake.

She looks away as he starts unzipping his pants.

“Take off your clothes,” he says.

Her face changes in a second, but she can't do anything about it. She's desperate.

Nothando lies down on her back and pulls her skirt up with her legs slightly open. Tears are rolling down her face, she hates this but if sleeping with this man will give her Mbuzo then it's worth it.

"Cha, dunusa sisi. On your knees." He chuckles, stroking his d!ck.

It's official, she will never look at viennas the same, especially the wrinkled ones.

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[03/06, 15:48] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 56

NOTHANDO

No matter how many baths she's taken, she can still smell him on her.

She's thrown up more than twice, still she feels a strong wave of nausea that won't let her breathe a whiff of fresh air.

Sandla's scent is all over her.

Nonetheless, today is a good day.

She's going to see the love of her life, Sandla said she should and Mbuzo will be putty in her hands the second he sees her. She's been dreaming of this day, and the thought of finally having him is the only thing that's keeping her sane at the moment.

She stands in front of a wall mirror, admiring the off-shoulder blue dress she's wearing. It's

not too long or too short, nor too revealing. Just the perfect size.

She wraps a matching scarf around her head and puts on a pair of pumps.

The perfect Makoti is what she looks like and in her opinion, Mbuzo loves a woman who respects her body enough to wear decent clothing.

She finishes off with lip gloss. There's a picnic basket on the dressing table, it has everything... Doritos, her favourite KFC hot wings, fruits... the works.

Today will be their first picnic together.

Nothando approves of what she sees in the mirror.

"Mrs. Mbuzo Xaba. Sounds perfect," she whispers to herself.

She's ready to head out, she requests a ride

then takes her belongings and goes to wait outside.

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CASHILE

Bakhe left home with the promise that he will be back before the meeting. I have explained to him that there won't be a meeting because Mbuzo didn't bother telling his uncles or his brothers.

He's mad of course and is looking to confront Mbuzo.

I understand his anger, but I don't like it.

It makes him do illegal things and because of

this, I have made a final decision. I am leaving today.

“I’m serious about driving you to Joburg, I’m headed that way myself.”

I’m on the phone with Nkosana. He’s offering to drive us back to Joburg, to be honest, It will be better than taking a taxi.

“Thank you, I will contribute to petrol.”

“Don’t worry about it, I’ve got it covered.” He says.

I saw this coming, I’m still going to contribute. Bakhe has given me R5000 as a start.

I don’t know how long it will last me and Lulu, I will have to get a job as soon as I get to Joburg.

“What time should I pick you up?” Nkosana asks.

“I was going to catch a 3pm taxi, I’m actually ready to leave anytime.” I tell him.

“Then I’m on my way,” he says.

I should go back to my packing then, if that’s the case. I end the call after agreeing on a specific time

Four hands are better than two, I call Mbali and ask her to help get Lulu ready. Her bag is packed. I just need to finish packing my clothes.

Aunt braces us with her presence as Mbali selects clothes from Lulu’s bag and starts ironing.

Lulu is not far behind her, she’s gotten used to aunt and Mbali. I would hate to take her away from them, but I have no choice.

“Are you sure you’re leaving?” My aunt is not okay with my decision.

She helps Lulu climb on the bed, and remains standing.

“I’m leaving aunty, please don’t try to change my mind.”

My answer has her sighing.

“Can’t you wait until the funeral? Going back and forth will be a waste of money.” She says.

She’s right, but I will make a plan.

“I’ll go crazy if I stay here, I’m better off away from this place.” I should add that I keep bumping into Mbuzo and that’s the last thing I want.

“You can come with me, you and Mbali. I will look for a job and take care of you.” I add.

She shakes her head, “I’m too old to leave the village mntanami. You can take Mbali, I can’t leave my Nkululeko behind.”

“I don’t want to go,” Mbali quickly replies.

She’s too forward, she’s burnt her finger with an iron.

“I will go and settle in, and once I’m on my feet, you will come and stay with me.” I’m telling Mbali.

There is nothing for her here, she spends her days following the sun if not Mhlo.

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Everything is ready, we are waiting for Nkosana now. He called and said he’s almost here.

“Do you trust this guy?” Bakhe worries too much really.

“He saved my life and my baby’s life,” that really doesn’t answer his question. But I know he’s asking because he doesn’t want me to leave.

He comes to sit on the couch beside me, Lulu hasn’t left his arms since Mbali put her in clean clothes.

“I’m going to miss you two,” he says.

It's awkward, we don't express ourselves like this. There are days when I'm vulnerable and he's there for me but I'm allowed, I'm his little sister.

"Come with us," I'm taking chances.

I can name a lot of things he despises about Joburg.

"Nice try dade," he chuckles. "Promise you will take care of my daughter."

He means Lulu.

"With my life, I won't let anything happen to her." I say.

He doesn't seem content with my answer.

My phone beeps, Nkosana says he's outside.

"He's here," I announce.

Mbali starts dragging my suitcase, I take Lulu's backpack. She doesn't have a lot of clothes.

“Aunty please take care of yourself.”

She doesn't return my smile, “You are making a mistake Cashile. You made a blood oath with that man, you can't be apart. Lives are at stake.”

She's starting.

“How do you know?” I ask, I don't like that she's scaring me.

“I have seen a similar situation in the past, unfortunately the couple that made the oath passed away before they could fix their differences.”

Hai! Ayikho lento, she just wants me to stay.

“Mbuzo lied aunty, he told me himself.”

“What if it's true Cashile? You don't want the wrath of the ancestors on you.”

Eish!

“Goodbye aunty, I will call you when we arrive.” I give her one last hug and leave her shaking her

head. She will get over it.

Bekezela for what? A blood covenant that might be a lie? Mbuzo can miss me.

Bakhe and Mbali walk us outside. A BMW X5 is parked at the gate.

Nkosana, seeing us, exits the car and helps Mbali push the gate open. After greeting, he takes the suitcase from her and puts it in the boot.

“I thought you said he’s a doctor.” Bakhe says before we get to the car.

“He is.”

“Then why is he dressed like a biker? He looks like trouble, why does he have tattoos?” –Bakhe.

I have no words.

“Nothing will happen to us, I have pepper spray.” This should put him at ease. Instead, he

shakes his head.

Nkosana respectfully greets my brother, he actually looks older than Bakhe.

I do the introductions.

“If anything happens to my sister and niece, I will haunt you down and I will kill you.”- Bakhe.

He watches too much TV this one.

Nkosana nervously chuckles, “I will protect them with my life.”

Well, that seals it then. We should leave.

Bakhe is glaring at the poor man, how do I get him to behave?

“Those tattoos don’t scare me, I know how to use a gun and I never miss.” My brother continues with his shenanigans.

“Okay, I think we should leave now before it gets dark.” I jump in, patting my brother’s back.

We never hug, I kick his leg instead.

“Ouch!” He didn’t see it coming.

I laugh at how angry he’s become, he hugs Lulu and makes promises to come and see her. I doubt he will come.

He looks at me, “Dade, take care of my baby and yourself.”

“You know I will,” I tell him, swallowing the lump in my throat.

I bid goodbye to both Bakhe and Mbali before they head back inside.

There’s a baby car seat in the back, I don’t know if it’s always been here or Nkosana pulled a last minute.

I strap Lulu in before sitting in the passenger seat.

Nkosana looks at me as he starts the car,

“Ready?”

I don't know.

I've always hated goodbyes and this one is the hardest. I'm leaving behind the man I love more than I have ever loved. Living without Mbuzo is going to be the hardest thing I've ever done.

How did my life turn out like this?

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MBUZO

He walks in on Mhlo counting bank notes and shoving them inside a brown envelope. He came to apologize for hitting him back but this big brother's side eye and tongue click stop him.

Mbuzo leans against the doorframe with arms crossed over his chest.

“What are you doing?”

“Cleaning up your mess.” Mhlo says and adds another click.

What Mbuzo wants to know is where Mhlo is taking the money.

“That’s the last of our money, where are you taking it?”

“Did you really think I’d let you go to jail?” Mhlo asks. “I had a talk with one of the bouncers at the bar, they promised to clean up your mess for 10grand.”

Ten thousand rand is a lot of money.

“Ndoda, you dragged me out of that place, we could have cleaned it up ourselves.” –Mbuzo.

“What about the cameras? I am not James Bond, I’m just an ordinary fucked up guy who

has to clean up a murder, something I have never done before.” Mhlo retorts.

“I’m sorry,” Mbuzo mumbles, dropping his eyes in shame.

“Fokof wena with your apology.” Mhlo grunts.

He bumps Mbuzo’s shoulder on his way out of the bedroom.

“Stay in the house, do not go around prostituting yourself, sfebe.” Mhlo shouts before he slams the door shut.

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It’s funny how he’s able to sleep when he’s got a ton of problems. He’s woken up by his ringing phone, Mhlo’s name flashes on the screen and that has him sighing.

He probably wants to scold him again. Sleeping the afternoon away was a better option than

this.

“Yini!” Such an attitude for someone in need of help.

“You need to get out of there,” Mhlo urgently says.

A headache reminds Mbuzo that he shouldn’t aspire to be fish as he sits up on the bed, drinking like he graduated in alcoholism was a bad idea.

He rubs his temples, flinching in pain.

“Did you hear what I said? Get out of there, the police are on the way. One of the barmen tipped them off, they said they saw you with her.” Mhlo is snappy, there’s urgency in his voice.

“What happened? I thought you said you’re paying someone to clean up.” –Mbuzo.

“I was too late, the police were all over the place when I arrived. They have the tapes. Wena cleva

“fucked the bar owner’s wife.”

If this doesn’t get rid of his headache then death will. The news freaks him out so much so that he widens his eyes.

“Don’t tell me you’re still sitting, get the fuck out of that house.” Mhlo growls.

Mbuzo jumps out of bed, he throws on a pair of pants and packs a few bank notes in a duffel bag. He doesn’t know where he will go, but it’s far from this place.

He’s rushing down the passage when he hears a soft knock at the door, it can’t be the cops. They knock like the world owes them money.

Mbuzo dashes to the window and takes a peep outside.

Nothando is standing on his doorstep.

This is the last thing he wants.

“Mbuzo, I know you’re in there. The car is outside.” She shouts.

The only reason he opens the door is because this is the only way out, it’s not for her.

She grins softly, “Hi Wami.”

Mbuzo frowns, “Don’t call me that. Why are you here?”

He walks past her, heading to the car.

Nothando is behind him with her little picnic basket and glossy lips.

“I came to see you, wami.” She tells him.

He opens the door and throws his duffel bag inside, as he’s getting in, she grabs a hold of his arm.

He turns to her, a frown deepening on his face.

“Leave me alone.” Mbuzo says.

“Where are you going? Let me come with you.”

Nothando desperately pleads.

His eyes run through her body as a strong smell hits his nostrils, he smelt it when he opened the door but figured there's a dead rat somewhere around.

Mbuzo presses a finger to his nostrils, making a disgusted face.

"What is that smell?"

She frowns, "I can't smell anything."

Impossible, the smell is too strong it can't be missed.

A smile appears on her face, she makes a twirl, her summer dress flying with her.

"Do you notice anything different about me?"

Nothando asks.

Well, the only difference is the nauseating smell.

"I don't have time for this," he gets in the car.

She grabs the door, stopping him from closing it.

“I still love you Mbuzo, I forgive you for what you did to me. Let’s start over.”

She must be crazy.

Mbuzo scoffs, “I don’t want you Nothando. Don’t you get it? I don’t fancy you, go back to your father’s house.”

Her face falls in shock, eyes wide. It’s as if she can’t believe this is happening to her.

“Go back home.” He tells her as he reverses the car.

She is still standing on the same spot and frozen in what seems to be shock when he opens the gate.

Mbuzo has no time to analyse further. He can hear police sirens, his heart does a backflip.

“Fuck!”

As he drives into the road, four police cars surround him.

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[03/06, 15:48] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 57

NOTHANDO

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“Baba! Baba!”

She runs into her father’s office screaming for him.

He’s behind a desk, typing away on a laptop. His face creases as he looks up at her.

“What’s going on?” He shuts the laptop.

Of course she’s his only daughter, he’s going to worry.

“It’s Mbuzo, baba, they arrested him. What did you do?” Yelling is not the way to communicate with adults.

“Yehlisa umoya Ndodakazi, calm down and tell me what happened.” He’s calm, always is because this is his princess, his only eye.

She takes a deep breath, calming down is a mission.

“You sent the police to arrest Mbuzo. Why are you doing this to him? He’s not with Cashile anymore, please let him go.”

Confusion is what Sibiya looks like.

“I know nothing about Nonkosi’s arrest, I also didn’t know that he’s broken up with KaMadlala.”

"Then why was he arrested kee? Get him out baba, please... I love him." Such quick tears.

She's sobbing uncontrollably that Sibya leaves his desk and rushes to comfort his daughter.

But he quickly draws back, covering his nose.

"What is that smell?" He looks at the picnic basket on the floor and opens it. There's no meat, or anything that would produce such a terrible smell.

Nothando is frowning at his inquisitiveness and look of disgust.

"I can't smell anything," she looks worried.

"There's a strong smell here, it wasn't here before you arrived."

Now she's offended, "Are you saying I smell baba?"

His eyes quickly snap open, he's regretful.

"No, not you. It must be something in the picnic

basket.” –Sibiya.

“Forget about the smell baba, I can’t even smell anything. You have to get Mbuzo out of jail please, do it for me.”

Before he can answer her, the door opens and Dalisu shows face.

Nothando mixes two and two and gets her answer.

“It was you wasn’t it? You had Mbuzo arrested.” She’s squinting her eyes at her brother who looks confused.

“I don’t...” he instantly frowns then covers his nose, looking at his father. “Baba, what is that smell? When was the last time you got your office cleaned?”

“There is nothing wrong with my office.” Chief Sibiya walks back to his table, while Dalisu turns his gaze to his sister.

“Dade? When last did you bath? You smell like a dead rat.” He’s the brother, it’s his job to be blunt.

Nothando bursts into tears and runs out of the office.

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THE MADLALAS

MaNkosi has found herself between lightning and thunder. Khathala promises to restore her husband’s hearing back but the future remains blur. There is no hope for them, they’ve lost the fight to people who did not even lift a finger to fight.

What did Mbuzo and Cashile do?

Nothing except have unprotected sex and now there is a bastard baking in her womb. That little thing in her belly is strong enough to weaken their powers.

She's had it up to her neck, they can never go back to their home.

Her stokvel friends probably know who they are by now, she bets she's the reason they gather over tea and biscuits.

Those witches, they should have better things to talk about like gathering money for funerals.

Speaking of the witches, she's on the phone with one of them, Phumzile.

"I want my share of the money I donated." This is the reason she called this woman, otherwise she wouldn't be wasting her airtime.

"You know that's not how things work
MaNkosi."

“The rules mean nothing to me now. My husband and I moved to a mansion in Umhlanga Rocks, we will not be coming back to the village. I want my share Phumzile.”

And then? Why is she laughing? It’s the ugliest sound MaNkosi has ever heard, she holds the phone away from her ear, sneering at it in the process.

“Nice try MaNkosi, your son has been going around the village telling everyone that you and your husband are witches and are on the run. Angithi you tried to kill your son, you witch.”
Phumzile sounds bitter, she’s always been.

Forget this Phumzile.

How could Bakhe do this to them? Why would he humiliate his own parents? After everything they have done for him, this is the thanks they get?

Such an ungrateful brat.

“Lalela la Phumzile, I don’t care about your gossip. You’re just jealous my husband bought me a mansion in an area with high walls. I want my money, yezwa.”

“You are not getting a cent.” Phumzile claps back, she’s so disrespectful.

“Yeyi wena, ngizok’thakatha mina. Do you know who I am? Uyangazi mina?” Oops!

That must have slipped out... right?

MaNkosi doesn’t take her words back, nor does she try to cover them up.

Phumzile is all laughs, annoying little witch.

“Phum...”

The call dies... Phumzile hung up on her.

This is not happening, Khathala wants his money. How will they pay him for the help he’s given them?

MaNkosi goes back to the kitchen where Khathala's wife is preparing for supper. She hands her back her phone.

"Thank you MaNgwane, I will pay you back your airtime once my money clears, my banker is on it." It's really an excuse, there is no money coming.

Khathala's wife affords her a gentle smile, "Don't worry about it sisi. Here's your food, serve your husband before it becomes cold."

MaNkosi gives her a grateful smile, "Thank you."

She takes the tray of food to the designated bedroom she shares with Madlala and finds him sleeping.

It's been three hours since he laid down to sleep, it's all he ever does.

MaNkosi puts the tray on the bed and fishes for a plastic inside her bra, it contains a white

substance she bought at the market when she accompanied MaNgwane to stock on traditional medicine. The vendor said to put a pinch, MaNkosi feels like it's not enough. Three pinches for herself, and four for Madlala.

She puts the substance back in her bra and taps Madlala's shoulder.

"Baba!" She applies pressure when he doesn't respond.

He wiggles his shoulders, "Yini MaNkosi? Yini?"

He has no idea why she's waking him up, she wasn't this forward when she was mute.

"Your food is ready, wake up and eat." She's written this down.

She pushes the paper to his face and this gets him up in a second.

Pap, his favourite. At least there's beef stew.

He sits with his feet on the floor. It's hot in here,

and the room is small. Madlala spends hours shirtless and in shorts.

There's a small smile on his face as he accepts the food from MaNkosi.

"Kumnandi KwaKhathala, there's always meet."

He really needs to practise keeping his voice down.

MaNkosi takes her food and they eat in silence, he's chewing too loud, it's disgusting.

But she doesn't fault him, it's not his fault that he can't hear himself chew.

Madlala cleans his plate and even licks it.

"MaNgwane can cook yesis, you should ask her to teach you how to cook."

What is he talking about? He's been praising her food for years since they were married, what is this new behaviour?

Is he not ashamed?

MaNkosi takes the plate from him and hands him a wet towel to wipe his hands.

“That won’t be necessary because that was our last mean together.” MaNkosi has written it down just so she doesn’t have to repeat herself like a crazy person.

Madlala squints his eyes at the paper, even though she was a teacher, her handwriting is bad. Madlala thinks he’s not seeing right because of that but the words are clear in black and white.

“What are you talking about?” He questions, a frown wrinkling his face.

“Cashile is pregnant with Nonkosi’s baby. We are powerless now, whatever we try will never work and we owe Khathala around R12 000, we don’t have that kind of money.”

She holds up the note.

“Okay, so why is this our last meal? Are we

fasting?" To be honest, he's never fasted in his life, he would die if he were to fast.

She shakes her head no, she's typing again. Madlala keeps his eyes glued on the paper.

It reads, "I put poison in our food. We are going to die together Baba ka-Khehla."

Baba ka-Khehla? What a waste of pen.

No one confuses him like this old woman, her duality is not cute. Sometimes she's for him, and sometimes against him.

He's on his feet in a second, "You are joking, right?"

His hand is vigorously rubbing his throat, eyes widening at MaNkosi shaking her head.

"Khanyisile! You have killed me, you have killed me, Khanyisile!!!" He's shouting his lungs out as he curls his hands around her throat and starts strangling her. She staggers back, falling on the

bed in the process.

“Ba... ba.” Her voice is strained, she’s struggling to get him off her.

“Who told you that I want to die? Who Khanyisile, who?”

Strength is suddenly drained from his body, it must be the tears falling down his cheeks.

He releases her, staggering backwards as he clutches his stomach and folding over.

“My stomach is on fire, it hurts MaNkosi. Kubuhlungu.” More tears escape his bloodshot eyes.

She writes down, “Let’s sleep baba, we can die in our sleep. We will be together in our next life.”

“Uyanya! Who said I want to be with you in the afterlife? Are you that obsessed with me, MaNkosi?”

“Baba, I love you.”

She uses her mouth to speak, he can't hear a thing. It's not because he's screaming for help, it's his hearing.

MaNkosi gets off the bed and hugs her husband, she doesn't get to rest her head on his chest because he roughly pushes her off of him. MaNkosi comes crashing down, screaming in pain.

Her husband opens the door and runs out screaming, "Bakithi, I'm dying. Sizani! Sizani bo!!!"

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MBUZO

They read him his rights before they handcuffed him and threw him inside a police van. He

hasn't tried to defend himself nor ask what he did wrong. Anything he says will be held against him, so he won't be speaking until he's given a lawyer.

The phone in his pocket has been ringing none stop, it must be Mhlo.

"Can I answer my phone?" He's talking to the skinny cop seated with him.

"You will be given a chance to make a call at the station." The cop says.

Mbuzo grunts under his breath. This police man looks strict, he won't bend no matter what he says.

He was arrested like a criminal which is so unfair, he did nothing to that woman. Maybe he never should have ran and left her there, it's not like he strangled her to death. She just... stopped breathing.

Now when they do find his semen, it will look

like r#pe. He would never fathom hurting a woman like that, or in any way.

He's lost in thought of a hopeless future when he catches a glimpse of Cashile in a BMW X5. They are at a closed traffic light.

Why is she with that doctor?

No way, Lulu is sitting in the back. This could mean...

Are they a couple? Has she moved on so quickly?

He scoots to the other side of the bench and starts banging on the window to get her attention.

“KaMadlala! KaMadlala!”

The noise and banging is too much.

“Yeyi you’re making noise sboshwa.” The officer shouts, pulling him away from the window.

“Umkami lowo, that’s my wife!” He’s

desperately shouting while banging the window.

“Nami Beyonce is my wife, suka lapho bhantinti.” The cop shouts, struggling to pull him away from the window.

“Wait please... let me talk to her.” Just one shrug of the shoulder and the cop is tossed to the side like he weighs air.

This one must not eat amagwinya for breakfast like the other cops.

Angry and heaving, the officer jumps at Mbuzo, locking his arms around his middle and with all his might pulls him back as if Mbuzo will fit through that small window.

“Skhosana, what’s going on there?” The cop on the wheel asks, the one on the passenger seat has his gun ready.

“Cashile! Cashile!” Mbuzo slides the window open, and calls for her.

She turns her head towards him, along with the doctor. Her eyes almost fall off their sockets.

“KaMadlala... mkami...” he lets out a breathless whisper, eyes filled with desperation.

“What are you doing there?” Oh thank God, she’s talking to him.

“I’ve been arrested...” -Him.

Skhosana shows his face, “Ma’am, this murderer says you are his wife. Sorry for the trouble.”

This Skhosana guy speaks to her with so much respect, it must be because of the car she’s in.

She looks at Mbuzo, he sees pity in her eyes but it quickly transitions to blankness as dark as the pits of hell.

Her face hardens, “I have never met this man in my life.”

His heart sinks to the pits of his stomach, she

just denounced him.

The doctor rolls up the window as he drives off.

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[03/06, 15:48] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 58

THE MADLALAS

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The hospital was out of the question, Khathala didn't allow it. He met Madlala before he could run out the gate shouting for help.

Of course Madlala didn't waste time telling him that MaNkosi poisoned him.

It has angered Khathala that this woman wants to leave the world before paying him.

He gave them both something to drink and made them throw up to get rid of the poison.

Madlala is shaken but he's fine, he almost died today in the hands of his wife.

Such a heartless woman.

They are both under observation, MaNgwane; Khathala's wife is told to watch over MaNkosi and make sure she doesn't do anything stupid.

She's sitting with her in the kitchen, with MaNkosi on the small bench looking like Jesus called and said He's coming tonight.

They are always boiling concoctions in this house, she knows that one is for her. Khathala wants all the poison out of their system, they can try killing each other after they've paid his money, every cent.

He walks in, anger on his face. It's not easy

pacifying this man.

The matter happened hours ago, yet he's still angry.

"MaNgwane, can I have a word with MaNkosi?"

"Yebo baba," his wife leaves the kitchen.

"I shouldn't even be talking to you in here, we should go endumbeni." Khathala says and leads the way.

She follows him, dragging her feet. This man is annoying, she'd be in heaven right now if it weren't for him.

MaNkosi sits and sighs.

"What was that about MaNkosi?"

Sigh!

She thought he wouldn't interrogate her.
Wishful thinking sucks.

"I am tired, I want to die."

“Not before you pay me back my money.”
Khathala says.

“We don’t have money, Khathala. What do you want me to do?”

“I don’t care, it’s none of my business. I want my money MaNkosi. If you manage to kill yourself before paying me, I will raise you up.”

She laughs, this is such a weak threat. He’s not that powerful.

“Or I will take your precious Khehla and make an example with him. Do not piss me off mfazi.”

He really sounds and looks angry.

“But everything you did failed, look at us Khathala. We are broke and out of our home, you did nothing. Why should I pay you?”

“Don’t piss me off, mthakathi. You can speak today because of me. Do not test me, you will not like the outcome.” -Khathala.

They are stuck, there is no way out for them.

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CASHILE

What just happened?

What did Mbuzo do?

That cop said he's a murderer, but how? It can't be, yes I've seen his anger and how he can't control himself but... no.

"Are you thinking about your husband?"

Nkosana cuts my thoughts with his question.

"He's not my husband anymore, he gave me signed annulment papers, I signed them before I left."

Why am I sharing too much?

He steals a look before focusing on the road.

“You must feel free, I mean you technically are free now.”

Not when my heart is this heavy.

“I was torn to pieces by a man I was convinced loved me, free is the last thing I feel.”

“Healing takes time, you will be okay.” He tells me and I don’t believe it.

Healing seems too farfetched at the moment.

I’m getting lost outside the conversation, I keep wondering what Mbuzo did.

Maybe Bakhe knows.

I dial his number as I check on Lulu in the back seat, she’s fast asleep.

“Slima sakithi, you miss me already?” That’s a disrespectful way to answer the phone.

I will chide him later.

“Why was Mbuzo arrested?” I ask and feel the doctor look at me.

He must be thinking I’m a fool to be chasing a man who does not love me.

“Mbuzo was arrested?” Bakhe asks, I’m surprised because I thought he knew.

“I saw him in a police van, he was calling for me.”

And I denied knowing him, I have regrets, he looked sad. But I couldn’t just accept him, seeing him again brought so much pain back.

I remembered his hatred and the words he said to me.

He’s glad I lost our baby.

“Where are you?” Bakhe asks.

“We are still on the road,” I reply.

“Good, keep going and don’t turn back. Mbuzo is not your problem anymore. He left you Dade,

don't waste your time on him."

I called the wrong person, I just wanted to know what happened to Mbuzo.

"Can you at least find out what he did? The police called him a murderer."

"Then that's what he is, there is nothing I can do for him. Besides, Mhlo is not talking to me because I almost buried his brother alive."

Bakhe casually says.

I'm stunned really.

"Who? Mkhetheni?"

"Mbuzo, I wanted to kill him for what he did to you." He's still so casual, in his head, what he did was justice.

"You are not serious Bakhe, you could've killed him."

"But I didn't, I'll do it right next time." He says.

I don't know anymore.

“I have to go, stop wanting to know about your ex. He’s your past, move on Dade.”

How can I just go with this stress? What if he did kill someone.

Bakhe has cut the call, I called the wrong person when I called him.

I find Mhlo’s number and call him instead, his phone rings, he doesn’t answer.

“Your brother is right you know, focus on your self and child, and forget that man.” The doc says.

“I just want to know what he did, he’s not a murderer. He couldn’t have killed a person.” I sound defensive, I don’t mean to though.

“It’s normal that you worry about him, he was your husband. And I’m afraid it will be hard for you to move from Nonkosi.”

Did he just say Nonkosi?

“You know Mbuzo?” I ask, he keeps his eyes on the road ahead, staying quiet for longer than I like.

“Who doesn’t know the Xabas? I recognized him and his brothers when I saw them at the hospital. Their father Velaphi Xaba was a business tycoon, he was notorious. You know he sponsored my education when I went to med school?”

Oh, what a small world.

I really don’t see Velaphi doing any of that, he was a cruel man, like his son Mbuzo.

“Then you have been acquainted with his sons, especially Mbuzo. You must be the same age.” I say.

He shakes his head, “I wasn’t that close with Velaphi. I only met him once.”

“Then how did he sponsor your education.”

My phone rings as I ask. It's aunt, what does she want now? We haven't even left KZN.

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MBUZO

Skhosana has a tight grip on Mbuzo's pocket pants, it's so unnecessary because the man is handcuffed, he will not be going anywhere.

There's a Sargent in a police suit waiting for them. A baldheaded man probably in his mid forties, tall and lean. His skin is black and shiny like Kiwi shoe polish.

He examines Mbuzo with a frown on his face and scoffs at how Mbuzo is fighting the officer.

"There is no need for that, let him go." The Sargent says.

Like a puppet, Skhosana obeys the orders.

"Take him in," the Sargent says, still scanning Mbuzo with a curious stare.

"Wait!" A panting voice shouts at the door, they all turn to Mhlo dashing in.

He goes straight to Mbuzo and suffocates him in a hug.

"Are you okay?" -Mhlo.

Mbuzo nods, he's trying to be strong but deep down he's crumbling like pieces of paper.

"Who is this?" -Sargent.

Mhlo turns to him, "Mhloniphe Xaba. This is my brother and he's innocent."

"Your brother is under arrest, he's a murder suspect. There is evidence that puts him at the crime scene with the deceased."

Nxa! Is he a cop or a lawyer?

Mhlo is not well knowledgeable on this criminology nonsense, he doesn't even have evidence to prove that Mbuzo is innocent, just word of mouth and the trust he has in Mbuzo.

"Officer, I know my brother, he would never. He's a good man and..."

"I've seen good kids commit the most hideous crimes and sentenced to many years in jail. Who is your brother?" The Sargent is not having it.

It's frustrating Mhlo, he should have brought a lawyer. Now look at this mess.

He looks at Mbuzo, scratching his head.

"Take this man in." The Sargent orders.

"I will be fine," Mbuzo tells Mhlo as Skhosana grabs his arm.

"You won't, jail is not a vacation Mbuzo. I will

get you a lawyer and he will get you out of this place.” Mhlo promises.

“I saw KaMadlala,” that’s so random of Mbuzo.

“She was in a car with the doctor. She’s moved on Mhlo, so fast.” He grunts, gritting his teeth.

“Hau ndoda, you dumped her njena. You said...”

-Mhlo.

“Skhosana what are you waiting for? Take this prisoner in and book him.”

Skhosana drags Mbuzo away.

“Hey, that’s my brother you’re dragging like a dog.” Mhlo yells at Skhosana who pays him no attention.

There’s nothing he can do for his brother, there won’t be any progress especially because they have no lawyer.

What he needs to do now is find one.

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Mbuzo is taken to the front desk and stripped of any jewelry he has on, plus his cellphone.

He's then taken to a room where there are other prisoners, they are ordered to strip naked and wait.

This is absolutely crazy, he's never been naked in front of other men.

He's taking his time but eventually strips off all his clothes and covers his manhood with his hands, a man in a white collard shirt and Chino pants makes his way in.

"You're going to be searched thoroughly, face the wall and bend over madoda." The man says.

There are grumbles and complaints, some quietly do it. But Mbuzo, hell no. Not when he's naked.

“Did you hear what I said? Face the wall and bend over.” The man says, now putting on white gloves.

“Why? What are you going to do?” Mbuzo asks because this is his first time in jail.

“Who knows what you’re hiding in your ass. Stop wasting my time.”

“You are going to shove your hand in my...” Mbuzo doesn’t finish his question, his jaw clenches in anger.

Nothing has ever gone in his ass.

This man can’t be a doctor, he’s a warden who got his medical license in Jail. What kind of language and abuse is this?

Mbuzo refuses, he’s dominant, always has been. No way will he ever let a man bend him over.

“What are you waiting for?” The rude doctor hisses in his face, only for Mbuzo’s jaw to tick

with anger.

The doctor turns to the door and shouts,
“Sargent.”

A cop walks in, his eyes zooming on all the prisoners that are bent over. Then he turns to the arrogant Mbuzo, looking like his mother named him Stubborn at birth.

“And then wena?”

“He doesn’t want to bend over.” The doctor snitches.

This doctor’s mouth is big.

The cop frowns at Mbuzo before shouting, “Hands on your toes, ass in the air sboshwa, izandla pansi, isinqa phezulu.”

He even says it in Zulu, just in case Mbuzo doesn’t understand English.

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[03/06, 15:48] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 59

CASHILE

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I'm back here, again. Only it's not my house but Juba's house. I remember this place, everything about it. It was my home as much as it was Juba's, I spent more days here than I did at my house.

I remember keeping some of my clothes here, he gave me a closet. It's 7:38pm, we're outside the gate hooting for the gateman to come and open. If I remember correctly, there was always a gateman.

Juba's mom told me that I would find one, he's the one to hand over the keys to the house.

"I don't think he's around," Nkosana exhaustedly says.

He's been driving for over six hours, it's understandable why he's tired.

Lulu fell asleep about thirty minutes ago, I don't plan on waking her up.

"She said he's around, hoot again."

He hoots three times, I check on Lulu in the back seat. She's still sleeping, thankfully.

"Someone's coming," Nkosana says.

He's right, there's a man walking out of the main house. It can't be the gateman, Juba never allowed them inside the house. Plus, what could he be doing in there?

It's private property.

"The gate man wears Chanel?"

Unlike Nkosana, my vision in the dark is a little unstable. It could also be the blinding lights, but I start to recognise the figure headed this way.

“That’s not the gateman, it’s Juba’s brother.” It’s Ntando, wearing a Chanel shirt and matching shorts.

I step out of the car as he walks out the gate.

He smirks, “Usubuile wandonga ziyaduma? Welcome back to Joburg sisi.”

I don’t like the way he says this.

“What are you doing in my house, Ntando?”

He scoffs, “This is my brother’s house. I live here now, it’s my house.”

“Juba left the house to me, your mother told me so.”

I don’t see anything funny in what I said.

“Ma’Oledi is grieving, she doesn’t know what she is doing. My brother’s house will not be

inherited by a slut, unondindwa..."

I cut the rest of his words with a slap, he hisses, charging at me. Nkosana quickly jumps in front of me which makes Ntando laugh.

"Ubhuti wama tattoo, I'm not afraid of you Chris Brown." Ntando pokes the doctor's shoulder.

The bastard has always been disrespectful.

"Give me the keys, Ntando." I demand.

He can't just take my house from me. Is he crazy?

"Ngeke ukubone lokho, forget it. Hamba uyofa." He tilts his head aside and spits as if he's disgusted by my mere presence.

Once a taxi driver, always a taxi driver. He can't even hide it with expensive clothes.

He walks through the gate, presses the remote and all I can do is watch it close.

I have to call Mrs. Ngwenya. Ntando cannot do

this to us, where are we going to sleep?

“Dammit!” Her phone is off.

“I have a house in Parkhurst, there are many rooms there. You can stay there for the night and call her in the morning. She’s probably sleeping, or busy.” Nkosana says.

I blabbered to him about how I bagged myself a house in Sandton.

“I don’t want to inconvenience you, I’m sure there is a B&B somewhere.”

A B&B is better than staying at his house.

“You won’t find one at this time, trust me. Look, I know it’s hard to trust a stranger, you can lock the door when you sleep.”

That’s really a weird thing to say. It’s not that I don’t trust him, it’s... you know what...

“Okay, we’ll be gone first thing in the morning.” I sound stupid because where will we go by

tomorrow? Ntando won't let us in.

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When Nkosana said he has a house in Parkhurst, my imagination failed to show me the type of house it would be. It's beautiful, I see he put his salary to good use.

"Nice home," I say.

I haven't seen the inside yet, he doesn't give me an answer but chuckles rather.

He pulls up next to a Mercedes-Benz AMG GT, I'm not surprised he has a sports car. The man is a biker and has tattoos.

I take a sleeping Lulu into my arms while he gets the bags and leads us towards an already open door.

A woman who could be my mother's age is

standing by the door, she's wearing a pinafore and a warm smile on her face.

"Welcome home mntanami," she hugs Nkosana.

Is she his mother?

"Thank you mah, this is my friend Cashile and her daughter." He then introduces the woman as his housekeeper.

"You can put Lulu in bed, Sis'Rebecca will show you." –Nkosana.

I thank him and follow Sis'Rebecca who is dragging our bags.

The bedroom looks cosy, something out of a guesthouse. White curtains, white bedding and white walls.

I put Lulu in bed and remove her shoes before covering her with a blanket. I check my phone for messages from Bakhe or Mhlo, I'm

expecting to hear something about Mbuzo.

My brother is something else, he is serious about not updating me.

I decide to dial Mhlo, he will tell me everything that's happening.

Sigh!

He's not answering his phone, I'm left with no choice but to leave three missed calls knowing he will panic when he sees them and call me.

I should sleep too, I'm tired. It's been a long drive.

I have to tell Nkosana first, it will be rude of me to go to bed without telling him. He's hosting us after all.

I find him in the living room, sipping golden liquid from a whiskey glass. He lifts his eyes when I clear my throat and quickly gets up from

the couch.

“Are you settling in well?”

“Yes, thank you. The bedroom is lovely.” I tell him as I accept a glass of wine he picks up from the table.

I’m not in the mood to chill and drink though.

“I actually came to say goodnight.”

“Are you not hungry? You haven’t eaten since we left KZN.”

That’s because I’m worried sick about Mbuzo, I can’t stomach anything.

“I will have something in the morning,” I say.

He shakes his head, “Let me make you a sandwich. Something light and small, I will feel bad if I let you go to bed hungry.”

We will stand here debating if I don’t accept his offer.

I follow him to the kitchen where he whips the sandwich while I sip the wine he gave me. A sip or two won't hurt the baby, right? In the meantime, he tells me stories about his school days.

It's intriguing but I'm not here, I keep checking my phone for messages from either Mhlo or Bakhe.

We head back to the lounge and eat while sitting on the couch, to think I was tired a while ago. Now I'm wide awake and not ready for bed.

"That's how I got my tattoos." He laughs.

I didn't catch anything, I was in my own world... a world I have been struggling to get out of since we left home.

I laugh with Nkosana, he would be offended if I ask him to repeat what he said.

He's staring... awkward.

“What?”

“You have mayonnaise there,” he points at the corner of his mouth but he means I have something on the corner of my mouth.

I send my gaze away and wipe the spot, “Is it gone?”

He shakes his head and moves closer, before I know it, his thumb is rubbing at the corner of my mouth. He’s too close and staring into my eyes.

I don’t know what happens next or how his lips met mine. He’s kissing me.

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MBUZO

“How is your behind doing?”

Well, this is a surprise.

He looks up and immediately frowns at Chief Sibiya. He doesn't understand why the chief would visit him and why he's here.

“What?” Mbuzo asks, just to clarify he heard right.

Sibiya smirks, “I heard you refused to be searched by police.”

Oh! That's what he's talking about?

Mbuzo moves closer to the cell bars, plunging his hands inside his pants pockets.

“You look fine to me, I heard you cried like a little girl.”

He heard wrong, but Mbuzo keeps that thought to himself.

“Why are you here Sibiya?”

Obviously, he didn't come because he's worried. Mbuzo senses a hidden agenda behind Sibiya's eyes and smirk.

"I came to check if you survived the search." He adds a laugh that has Mbuzo frowning inquisitively.

"You were behind that search?" Mbuzo asks.

"If you want to put it like that, this is my town Nonkosi. When my daughter came to tell me that you were arrested, the news had already reached me. I have been waiting for a chance to make you pay so, I made some calls and gave instructions to make your stay as uncomfortable as possible." Sibiya tells him.

"Is that why I'm kept with convicted criminals? You have trialled me already?"

"You are a murderer and will be treated like one and no, you have not been trialled yet. Your time will come and I will make sure you spend the

rest of your life behind bars.”

Mbuzo scratches his head, he can’t fathom spending his life in jail.

“I’m innocent.”

He can’t say anything further because whatever he says will be used against him in the court of law.

Sibiya snorts, “I don’t care. I run this place as long as I have money to make things happen, my will will be done.”

“Why?” –Mbuzo.

Sibiya looks confused, “Why what?”

“Why would you do that to me? I have done nothing to you.” Mbuzo sounds defensive.

“You broke my daughter’s heart and took my wife from me, knowing well that I paid lobola for KaMadlala. She was mine, I paid for her.” Sibiya.

“She was never yours to begin with.” Mbuzo

grunts, he's working hard to keep his anger at bay.

"You slept with my wife!" Sibiya snaps angrily.

This tickles Mbuzo's anger, "She was never your wife."

"Was she good in bed? Tell me, Nonkosi. How did it feel to sleep with another man's wife?"

Whoah!

Which train did they take to get here?

"Watch your mouth Sibiya."

Hawe mah! Is he okay upstairs?

Sibiya lets out a chuckle, "You are a stupid boy, you should be worried about getting out of this place, don't you think?"

He is worried, it's all he thinks about.

"There is a way for you to be free. My daughter loves you, I don't know why after you betrayed

her.” Sibiya introduces..

There was no betrayal here, it was an eye for an eye type of situation.

“Marry her and make sure she never sheds a tear.” That really sounds like a threat.

“I would rather rot in jail, I don’t love Nothando. I never will. I have no desire for your daughter.”

Ahem... that was very specific.

Maybe he should have chosen his words carefully, Sibiya is seething.

“I’m giving you one last chance Nonkosi. What is it going to be?”

“Ever heard the saying, indoda uyingcwaba namhlanje k’sasa iphinde ivuke? You know what that means Sibiya? I will rise again, things will change for me. I am not alone.”

Sibiya laughs, “Look around you Nonkosi. You are alone, your wife left you, your parents died

and forgot about you."

One of the things God perfected when He created men was giving them the ability to not give a fuck, even when the situation requires them to be remorseful.

"Boy you are about to have a tough time in this place."

What Sibiya said is not funny, but the chief is dead with laughter. Mbuzo can only watch in silence, this man has influence. Corruption is a hobby to him and when he says jump, people jump.

Sibiya's eyes have suddenly turned red from rage, "You will look good in an orange uniform Nonkosi. Sleep with one eye open."

These are Sibiya's last words before he walks away.

Mbuzo let's out a sigh, if Sibiya is able to control this prison, then his life is about to suck.

"Warden! Warden!" He calls the prison guard that's been doing rounds since he arrived.

The guard appears, the frown on his face is him trying to intimidate the prisoners.

It's not working.

"What?"

"I'm in the wrong cell, I'm not supposed to be in here. I haven't been proven guilty yet."

"Uyaphapha wena, you are forward." The warden says.

Mbuzo doesn't know what the guard means, nor does he take his words into consideration. What he wants is to get out of here.

"I want to speak with the Sargent," Mbuzo commands, the guard laughs.

"You think this is crèche? Nkabi yami, vuka

emaqandeni. That man you just spoke to is in charge here, his word is final.” –Warden.

Mbuzo refuses to believe that this is his fate.
It just can't be.

“Fine, can I make a phone call. I have the right to make a call and I haven’t made any today.”- Mbuzo.

The warden shakes his head, “You don’t listen do you?”

What is he supposed to listen to when his life has been taken away from him?

The guard decides to ignore him and walks away.

Someone taps his shoulder, Mbuzo makes a fast turn. One of his prison mates is holding him a Nokia 3310.

This one looks like he slits throats for a living,

the scar across his face doesn't do justice to his menacing expression.

"Make a call," his voice is scratchy.

A hesitant "thanks," comes out of Mbuzo's mouth. He moves to a corner for privacy, he will get into trouble if he is found with a phone.

The first person he thinks of calling is Mhlo, the phone rings to voicemail. He tries four times and gets the same outcome.

"My airtime ndoda," the prisoner complains.

"Sorry... One last try, I'll replace it." Mbuzo tells him.

"You owe me."

Now this has Mbuzo raising his brows in question, what kind of favour will this man want from him?

He finds himself dialling Cashile's number, the phone rings and is answered just as second

thoughts tell him to drop the phone.

“Hello.”

Odd... Cashile has a deep voice, but not this deep.

“KaMadlala, it’s Mbuzo.” He’s checking if it’s really her.

There’s a stretched silence that irritates him, he doesn’t have much time.

Who is this man that answered Cashile’s phone?

“Hello, KaMadlala? Cashile...”

A woman seductively giggles in the background, then he hears sexual moans of a woman... clearly these people are having sex.

His hands start shaking, his eyes widen.

“Hello! Cashile...what are you doing there? Hello! KaMadlala... KaMadlala!!!” He’s whisper yelling, tears filling his eyes.

The call is disconnected and not because he ran out of airtime, they hung up on him.

His

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500+ comments... 15 shares...

[03/06, 15:48] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 60

CASHILE

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This pregnancy is having its way with me. I will end up puking my intestines out if this continues.

Nausea hit me like lightning the second the doctor pushed his tongue past the seams of my

lips. I ran to the nearest bathroom to throw up.

Now I'm still in here, afraid to go out because I might have to explain why I threw up after he kissed me.

I will blame it on the wine... Yes, I haven't felt nauseous since we left KZN. Maybe it's because I didn't eat anything.

This is worrying, first I starve my baby then I feed it wine.

I'm a bad mother.

There's an air freshener, lavender scent. Spraying it is a mistake I didn't realize because here I am, throwing up again. This thing smells terrible.

I clean myself up, including my watery eyes and leave the bathroom. My feet stop.

That can't be sexual sounds I'm hearing.

Is he watching p0rn? Sounds like it's coming

from a phone speaker. He couldn't have been aroused by a kiss that didn't even go far. I clear my throat, just in case I find him pleasuring himself.

The sounds stop, I walk in. He looks decent but bashful, his eyes are shifty.

"You watch p0rn?"

Shit, that came out otherwise.

Thankfully he finds it funny, I laugh with him.

"I was on line and opened a link by mistake." He throws his phone on the couch and hands me mine.

Why did he have my phone in his hand?

"Did anyone call?" I'm going through the call log as I ask.

"No, your battery is almost dead. Charge it before load shedding."

Yeah, it's on 28%.

He points at a charger on the TV stand.

I head there and charge my phone. Why hasn't Mhlo called yet? There are no missed calls or messages.

I join the doctor on the couch, he hands me the glass of wine. He's refilled it.

"A few sips were okay, I don't want to harm the baby."

His eyes almost widen but he stops them.

"I'm sorry, I can't believe I forgot you're pregnant. You must think I'm insensitive."

My mind didn't even take me that far.

"Not at all, I needed a sip. Just to distress." I've been through a lot, wine helps in easing the burden but once you're sober, it's back to facing your problems.

Nkosana seems relieved.

“I will treat you to breakfast tomorrow, a buffet.”

“You don't have to,” I dismiss.

“Please, allow me. It's my way of apologizing.”

Well since he insists.

Should I ask why he kissed me?

“That kiss...”

“It was a mistake, I'm really sorry. I swear I am not taking advantage of your vulnerability.” He cut in so fast, I'm left with my jaw hanging.

“It's not that deep, I'm over it.” I say.

He looks into my eyes, I don't know what I'm looking at, but he's staring into my soul.

“I don't regret it though.”

I don't know how to feel about this, I don't see him like that.

“Nkosana, I am not looking for a relationship. Yes, my ex-husband hurt me and I'm mad at

him, I want to hate him but I don't. He will always be the only man for me."

It's not going to be easy taking Mbuzo out of my heart, the best thing for me is to stay away from men. I need to get my house back and find a job and school for my baby.

I wish a disappointed looking Nkosana goodnight and head to bed.

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Unemployed people don't set morning alarms. I'm one of them, so my phone ringing means someone is calling me.

I drag my tired eyes open while fishing for my phone under the pillow and check Lulu.

It's six in the morning, which explains why she is still sleeping.

Mhlo finally got my message.

“Dadewethu!” He sounds down.

I have been worried sick, but I can’t tell him that.

“Hey, is Mbuzo still in jail?”

He goes quiet on me, I have to call his name for him to say something.

“He is.”

“What did he do? Is he okay?” I ask, moving away from the bed. Lulu is starting to shuffle, it’s too early for her to wake up.

“Don’t worry about him, he will be fine.”

I knew he would keep it from me.

“Mhlo, I saw him in a police van. I heard one of the cops say he killed someone.”

“Dade, it’s not what you heard okay. You know Mbuzo, he would never do something like that. Into zami lezi, if anyone is capable of murder, it’s me.” He adds a dry chuckle.

It's clear that he is trying to brush me off the conversation.

"You are not going to tell me the truth are you?"

"I did, you really don't have to worry about him. We are the Xabas, oNonkosi, we know how to take care of ourselves."

I sigh at his declaration, he is right though. But I can't help but worry.

"I heard you're in Gauteng, how are you settling in?" He's changed the topic, and I know he is not interested in my life story.

"We arrived last night, we'll be fine."

"Where in Gauteng are you? Maybe I will drop by sometime."

That's the last thing I want.

"I'm sorry, I can't tell you. I don't want Mbuzo to know where we stay. We will never see each other again." I say.

“So it’s over just like that? You’ve really cut ties with us?”

Eish... Why is Mhlo saying it like that?

“You know what your brother did to me, Mhlo. He even said it’s a good thing I lost the baby.”

“He didn’t mean it, he’s regretful.” Mhlo says.

I’m not going to do this.

“I have to go, Lulu needs me.” I lie and hang up, Lulu is still sleeping.

This bedroom has a bathroom, which makes things easy for me. I take a bath and head out of the bathroom in a towel. I change into basketball shorts and a big t-shirt.

I’m making my way out of the bathroom when my phone buzzes with a text message from Juba’s mother.

She’s sent me documents from Juba’s lawyer.

“Ntando is taking chances, take these to the police and get him out of that house. My granddaughter will not be homeless because of his greediness.” The WhatsApp message reads.

This reminds me how Juba was the favourite child, it had everything to do with Juba being the most successful. Ntando is only a taxi driver, a deadbeat father and has different women every other day.

I don't think she knows how Juba made his money.

I send a thank you and promise to call later, right now I have to go to the police station.

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Nkosana is driving me to the police station, he suggested I leave Lulu with Sis'Rebecca but I

don't know her, so I don't trust her.

This man is dressed like he's going to a bike fest, torn black jeans, a black vest and trainers. I thought the tattoos were shocking... nah, there's a cross earring dangling on his one ear and there's a silver chain around his neck.

Is he really a doctor?

"How old are you?" I'm so random it's not nice.

He slightly chuckles, "Thirty six. Why do you ask?"

I was thinking thirty two or thirty but oh well.

"Your dress code is a little..." I lose the word I wanted to say.

"Childish?" He finishes, I shake my head when he gives me a brief look.

He heaves a sigh, "This is me on a nutshell. When you're a doctor, people expect you to dress like one. Who said bikers can't be doctors?"

I already had tattoos when I decided I wanted to be a doctor, they are part of who I am. My childhood and personality, I love them.”

I guess people are different.

At the station, Nkosana does the talking when the officer I speak to doesn't take me seriously.

It must be the clothes I'm wearing.

Two officers escort us to the house in Sandton, the police siren is not necessary really.

It brings Ntando out of the house, there is a taxi parked on the driveway. I bet he brings his wh0res here.

“What is going on?” Ntando shouts as we step out of the car, I have Lulu in my arms. She knows her uncle, I hope this man behaves himself.

“Your mother sent me proof that this house belongs to me, you have no right to be here Ntando.” I show him the documents on my phone.

He frowns, “Aneva, this is my brother’s house.”

“Your brother gave me and his daughter this house.” I tell him.

“Mfo, give the lady the keys. This is private property, you are trespassing.” The cop says.

“I’m not leaving.”

“Haaawu! Kanti there’s no problem mfo. You are under arrest for trespassing private property.” He takes out handcuffs, Ntando quickly glares at me.

“I don’t want it to come this far, officer. I just want my house, then you can let him go.” I step in.

I have nothing against Ntando and I don’t want

him fighting me.

I give him a stern gaze, he clicks his tongue but hands me the keys.

“Thank you,” I say, politely.

“It’s not over Cashile, you had my brother killed by those Xaba boys so you can take over my brother’s property.” Ntando.

“What are you talking about Ntando?” Is he smoking something?

“That motherf#cker Mhloniphe was driving the car that killed my brother, your brother was there too.”

No, that can’t be. Mbuzo didn’t tell me this, no one did.

“Let me tell you something, you better stay away from my brother’s funeral if you know what’s good for you.”

This idiot is threatening me in front of the police.

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MHLONIPHE

“Bakhe is not talking to me ndoda, you’re the only one that can help me.”

Njabulo snorts at his words, “What can I do? You know how Bakhe is.”

He knows very well how Bakhe can be, it’s been two months and he is still not returning Mhlo’s calls.

Mhlo had no choice but to come to Njabulo and ask for his help, he drove here first thing in the morning. They are sitting in Mhlo’s car, parked outside Njabulo’s gate.

“My brother is in jail, I need money to get him out. Bakhe is the only one who can help me get

that money." Mhlo says.

"What do you plan on doing?" –Njabulo.

"I don't know yet. But I have to get money, it's the only way Mbuzo will be free. I haven't seen him in two months."

"Okay, I will talk to him." Njabulo says.

There's hope, one thing Mhlo knows is that Bakhe respects Njabulo and listens when he speaks because this unserious guy is the voice of reason.

Njabulo exits the car, Mhlo drives to the prison where Mbuzo is kept.

His brother hasn't been convicted yet, but he's kept here like a prisoner.

He meets the same warden who has been sending him back for the past eight weeks. He closes the office door and sits.

“You are back?” -Warden.

Someone is happy today.

Mhlo pulls a chair and slowly sits, “How are you sir?”

His voice is soft and gentle, he has to be polite for the sake of his brother otherwise, he wants this man dead.

“What do you have for me today?”

Mhlo is immediately confused, “What?”

“Walls have ears my boy,” the warden says.

Now Mhlo gets it, this warden wants a bribe.

This must be a miracle, he never thought this day would come.

“I will organise something by the end of the day, please let me see my brother.” –Mhlo.

“Your brother’s life is in my hands, if you don’t deliver, I will make the devil jealous of his stay

here.” The warden says.

Mhlo grits his teeth, this man has the nerve. He can’t act out though, he’s at his mercy.

The warden makes a call, a minute later a prison guard walks through the door.

“Take him to see his brother,” the warden instructs.

Mhlo thanks him once and follows the prison guard to a single waiting room.

“Your brother is in there, make it quick. The chief doesn’t know we’re doing this.”

He nods and opens the door.

Mbuzo is sitting on a chair with his head bowed, elbows on the table and hands joined together.

“Mbuzo!” It comes out as a whisper.

Mbuzo lifts his head and Mhlo’s heart drops

into his stomach. His brother is black and blue, his one eye is swollen shut. The corner lip is swollen on the left side.

Rage runs through Mhlo's veins, "What did they do to you?"

Mbuzo stands, a tear falls off the open eye. Mhlo pulls him in for a hug, that's when Mbuzo breaks down.

"My wife is gone....I chased her away." Mbuzo weeps on his brother's chest, it's scrapping every part of Mhlo's heart.

He cups Mbuzo's face, making him look at him.

"What is wrong with me? I'm so confused, I don't understand anything." –Mbuzo.

"I will get you out of here, I promise." Mhlo says.

Mbuzo shakes his head weeping, "No I deserve this punishment. I killed KaMadlala's love for me... I broke her heart and killed our child and I

don't even understand it. I want my love back...
it hurts ndoda... I need her back."

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[03/06, 15:48] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 61

CASHILE

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"You need to set your priorities straight Qashile.
We all have children but you don't see us
leaving work early."

Not only is he the worst boss, he butchers my
name as well.

I was warned against taking a job as a waiter but I didn't listen, only because it's the only decent job I could find with my criminal record.

My shift ends at 10pm, I have to leave early because my daughter is with the baby sitter who has to leave early as well because she has a family to take care of.

"I understand sir, I will find a babysitter." I'm lying, I don't care what he's saying to me.

"Find one or find a new job," he's pointing at me. I hate it when people of a different colour point at me, it makes me feel small.

I leave before his neck turns blood red.

I'm running to the staff room to get my bag when I bump into Ntabiseng, she's a colleague.

"You're leaving again?"

"The nanny is threatening to leave Lulu alone."

"That bitch, fire her and get someone else." This

is her, she's got an unfiltered mouth.

This nanny she's calling a bitch is old enough to be our mother.

"Let's talk tomorrow," I hug her.

She slips R200 into my hand.

"For transport," she says.

"You don't have to, I..."

"I was collecting tips the whole day today, please take this and go home to your child. You can pay me back when you're sorted in life."

She says.

This is one person who's lucky when it comes to getting tips. I only got a R20 today. I have known her for two months, but she takes care of me like a sister.

Something tells me it's the pregnancy, sometimes people randomly love you when you're pregnant.

I give her another hug and rush out before the boss sees me and changes his mind.

An Uber from Rosebank to Sandton will cost me an arm and a leg but I have no choice. There are no taxis and I'm late. The nanny is blowing my phone.

It's ringing again.

"I'm on my way, relax." I snap, she's getting on my nerves.

I hear a male chuckle, "Rough day?"

It's the doctor, I haven't seen him in a month.

He was travelling out of the country.

"Hey, sorry, I thought you were the nanny." I say.

I don't want to be rude by cutting this conversation short but I need to request a ride.

"I'm outside your house, open for me."

He's used to visiting uninvited.

"I'm not home yet," I tell him.

"Where are you? I'll fetch you."

I'm about to answer when I see a white taxi speeding towards me, I run out of the way. It stops, and my world crushes when I see Ntando behind the wheel.

He winks, an eerie expression on his face, then drives off.

Did Ntando just try to run me over?

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NOTHANDO

The Uber driver opened all four windows the second she stepped inside the car, she knew

what he was thinking. It was written all over his face, at least he didn't say anything. Unlike her father and brother and not to mention the love of her life Mbuzo.

Something is terribly wrong, there's a smell coming from her, one she hasn't detected. Over the course of two months, she's had encounters with more than ten men who have detected the smell on her, she's stopped going to church or any public space.

Funny enough, women can't smell a thing.

Now she is here, walking through Sandla's gate with tears in her eyes.

Today the queue has doubled.

"Are you blind? There's a queue sisi, go to the back." Some woman she doesn't know snaps at her when she cuts the line.

The plan was to head straight inside and confront Sandla but these people are not having

it, she has no choice but to go back in line.

The few men that are here cover their nose while looking at her with disgust on their faces.

Nothando tears up, she can never get used to it.

Why is it so full today anyway?

Sandla seems to be getting more customers.

When she came here for the first time, there were three people waiting.

Business is booming.

It takes two hours for the line in front of her to clear up. It's her turn now, she leaves her shoes at the door and walks in.

Sandla smiles widely, "Mehlo madala. Life is going well for you, you didn't stop to come and tell me. You're even glowing."

It sounds like he's joking but Nothando doesn't laugh.

“Nothing is going well for me, Mbuzo didn’t even look at me that day. He said I smell, all men run when I enter the room. My father and brother avoid me all the time.” Her tears come full force.

“Then why didn’t you come back to me? Why did you wait for so long? You were bewitched ntombazane and this person doesn’t want to see you happy. That boy should have proposed marriage by now.”

Her eyes widen, she can’t imagine who would want to see her suffer.

“Who... who did this to me?”

Sandla groans and burps after tossing bones on the floor.

“It’s that woman that took your man, she is jealous of you.” Sandla says.

“I knew it, her parents are witches. It’s not surprising that Cashile is a witch too.”

Nothando exclaims in shock.

“Can you help me? Please... and get Mbuzo out of jail. He’s been locked up for months.” She says.

Sandla chuckles, “You know the procedure now. This time we have to do it twice.”

Two rounds is too much, she can barely take one.

“Isn’t there another way?”

The smile on his face fades, “If you know another sangoma who can help you, then get out. You think this is a game? I’m working here, ntombazane.”

“I’m sorry,” she gets on her knees and starts unbuttoning her skirt.

Sandla laughs, “Kazi iyo zala nkomo ni.”

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MHLONIPHE

He's smoking, sharing a cigarette with Bakhe and Njabulo.

Mbali came out of the house when they arrived, he didn't come for her, but she's leaning against his car, talking to him.

Her mother is not home, that's why she's like this.

His eyes shift from Mbali to a beautiful young woman passing by, a smirk comes across his face.

"Mana lapho ntokazi." He calls the lady, she stops and turns as if she's been waiting for him to call her.

"Have you ever been swallowed?" Mhlo jokingly says, dramatically walking towards the lady

who looks way older than Mbali.

She's his age mate.

Mbali rolls her eyes, she's heard this "swallowed" joke before and knows exactly what it means.

Mhlo wants to shag that woman.

Her eyes trace Mhlo as he approaches the lady and whispers something in her ear. The lady giggles, brushing a hand down Mhlo's arm.

This aggravates Mbali, she marches back to the house.

Bakhe shakes his head, a small smile on his face.

When Mbali disappears into the house, Mhlo checks if she's really gone then walks back to his friends, leaving the woman confused.

"What is going on with you and Mbali?" Njabulo.

"I know I'm the sexiest man alive but she

doesn't have to be obvious about it." Mhlo says and Njabulo laughs. Bakhe finds it boring.

"She's my sister, watch it."

"Oh I am watching it. It must be the walk, do you guys think I should change my walk? I know I walk like a model."

Njabulo cracks in laughter, "Yes wena Naomi Campbell."

Bakhe laughs, "Bonang."

Njabulo dies with laughter, "Pinky girl."

"Fusegi," an irked Mhlo snaps as he walks to the car.

He takes the front seat, Bakhe is on the passenger seat and Njabulo at the back with a friend.

"What's the plan madoda?" Njabulo asks, this is his first job. He needs details so he doesn't mess up.

Mhlo briefs them as he drives.

“No killings Mfethu, it might come back to haunt us.” Njabulo says.

“Are you afraid of taking a life?” Mhlo asks him.

“Every one should, life should not be taken lightly. I am not trying to be a murderer Mfethu. My parents won’t survive if I go to jail. We get the car and we jump.” -Njabulo.

“It’s all for the money.” Bakhe agrees.

It’s Mhlo who is quiet, Bakhe doesn’t care, Njabulo is the one who doesn’t want to be an accomplice to murder.

The drive is not that long, they arrive at Sibiya’s office and wait in the car.

Mhlo has smoked an entire box of cigarettes, he only smokes this much when he's anxious.

He throws a cigarette butt out the window when he sees Sibiya driving out of the premises.

“Azishe madoda.” Mhlo starts the car, eyes glued on a white GLC SUV.

There are many skills he learned in his teenage years, many of them include overtaking cars. It's careless of Chief Sibiya not to have a bodyguard or security escorting him.

However, it's a win for men like Mhlo and his friends. It's dark, the sun set too early today. Winter is around the corner.

It's around past 7pm, he left his brother Mkhetheni sleeping at home. He's currently recovering.

It's a good thing that Mkhetheni takes pills that help him sleep, otherwise he would have had to explain his whereabouts when he should be home taking care of him.

It's just the two of them, Nompilo comes to help around sometimes but she also has a life

outside her cousins.

Mhlo overtakes Sibiya's car once he sees that there are no other cars around. The three men cover their faces with balaclavas and run off out of the car with guns, while the other friend drives off with Mhlo's car.

Sibiya's eyes are wide by the time they get to him, he raises his hand when Mhlo aims a gun at him.

"Out of the car now." Bakhe shouts, pulling the driver's door open.

Trembling and clearly in fear, Sibiya steps out.

"Get on the ground, on the ground njandini."

Mhlo orders, pressing a gun to Sibiya's head.

The old man lays on the ground with his hands raised.

Njabulo takes the driver's seat, Bakhe runs to

the passenger seat.

“Let’s go mfethu.” He calls out to Mhlo.

But Mhlo still has gun pressed at the back of Sibiya’s head.

Njabulo hoots, they don’t have enough time. Someone might drive past here.

“Please don’t kill me, I have a family.” Sibiya pleads.

Mhlo seems to be enraged by his words, he pulls the trigger. The bullet instantly kills Sibiya.

“Amagugu alelizwe ayosala emathuneni.” Mhloniphe sings the notorious funeral song, swinging his hands like a choir master with the gun still in hand.

Njabulo hits the hooter, “Get in the car mgodoyi.”

He’s fuming, this is not what they agreed on. The plan was to steal Sibiya’s car and sell it.

He hoots again, clicking his tongue in the process.

Mhlo tilts his head to the left, and grins at them before running into car.

“What have you done?” Njabulo is all panicky.

He speeds off as if they are being chased by the police. Bakhe is quietly smoking his second cigarettes for the day, unbothered.

“I freed my brother from prison,” Mhloniphe casually says.

“It’s bullshit, we agreed no killings.” –Njabulo.

Mhlo shrugs, “Oops then.”

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[03/06, 15:48] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 62

CASHILE

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He's gone, but I still don't feel safe out here. I rush back inside the restaurant with my heart banging loudly against my chest.

Ntando really tried to kill me.

This is not the first time he's tried this nonsense with me. That idiot, I missed Juba's funeral because of him.

"Oh my, Cashile Madlala, is that you?"

Eish... I don't remember attracting such bad luck this morning.

"Wendy... hi." My voice comes out screechy, not as deep as it should sound.

There is no greater betrayal.

“So, you’re out? When?”

That’s right, the so called best friend knows I was in jail. She didn’t even come to my trial, let alone visit me in jail.

There’s a man attached to her side. Spotting rich men was our thing back then, I was in the business and she was my sidekick.

Juba didn’t trust her to be part of his team, so we worked together without his knowledge.

I last saw her the day before my supposed trip overseas, the one that didn’t happen because I was arrested.

“I got out early... for good behaviour.” Men lie, but I take the cup.

What’s with the smug look on her face?

She looks at the handsome man who has his hand on the small of her back and smiles.

“Really? Juba told me you were locked up for

two years.”

Juba was forward.

“Hawu?” My cheeks hurt from fake smiling.

“It’s good seeing you.” She says.

I can’t say the same about her.

She comes in for a hug, I remember being the same height as her. Today I have to stand on my toes to hug the woman I once called bestie because she’s wearing heals and I have flat shoes on. She smells expensive, looks it too.

I break out of the hug, and check my phone for any messages.

Where is Nkosana? I should have called an Uber.

I wouldn’t be standing here, with this fake b!tch.

“You gained weight. Prison food?” Wendy says, raking her eyes through my body.

“What about prison food?” I ask.

She's taking me for a ride.

I don't get my answer, the woman smirks and looks at this tall man with her.

"Have you met my husband?" They kiss.

I'm holding a candle here.

"His name is Michael, we're married." She flashes a ring on my face, I don't care.

"That's nice, finally you found a man that can tie you down. How many body counts later? You were on 50 and counting two years ago." I'm purposely saying this, ungijwayela amasimba lo.

Her face hardens, the husband creates space between them.

He frowns at her, then walks out of the restaurant.

"Baby wait!" Wendy calls after him, why is she not following her man?

I'm sure she told him she was a virgin.

“Why did you do that? How am I going to explain that to him?” She’s mad at me, I want to laugh.

“Askies baba, it’s nothing pillow talk can’t fix.” I say and it annoys her.

“You think everyone wants to be like you? A loser and a jail bird?”

Oh wow! I didn’t know Wendy hated me.

“Don’t annoy me Wendy. If your granny is a jail bird, don’t go around painting other people with the same brush.” I’m pointing a finger at her, I could get fired for fighting with a customer even when I’m off duty.

I feel a pair of arms wrapping around me from behind, then a kiss on my neck. I’m startled of course because I do not have a man in this city or any.

“Baby, I’ve brought the car around. Asambe.” It’s Nkosana.

I try to relax in his arms, he's still holding me, his chin pressed at the top of my head.

"You're married to a doctor?" Wendy asks, shock evident on her face.

I don't know what she means until I look down at Nkosana's arms. He's wearing the white coat.

"Yes," Nkosana answers before I can.

He presses a kiss on the crook of my neck.

Sigh!

Wendy looks annoyed, "Does he know that you're an ex-convict?"

"My life is not a stokvel, mind your own business." I snap.

What did I ever do to this bitch?

I'm given a tongue click before she walks away, taking the same direction Michael took.

I escape Nkosana's arms and turn to him.

"I was handling it."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to invade. Who is she anyway? She was talking down on you." He says.

"Someone I used to know, she's irrelevant."

"Are you sure? She seems to know a lot about you." Why is he on my case like this?

"Can we not talk about her please? I'm supposed to be home by now."

He frowns, "There was traffic, I'm sorry I'm late."

He's saying that sorry word again. I can't stand it.

I walk past him, leading the way to his car parked in front of the entrance.

He unlocks the car and gets the door for me.

That was not necessary but I get in anyway, he shuts the door and runs to the driver's side.

Nkosana and I were on good terms when he left a month ago. But today I'm annoyed by the sight of him.

"Are you okay?"

I could tell him that I was almost run over by a car but he fusses too much when it comes to me and Lulu.

"I'm late." I reply.

He starts the car and pulls out of the premises.

"I arrived this morning, but I had to go to the hospital. I came straight to you after my shift ended." He says.

"You shouldn't have, I'm sure you have better things to do than spend time with me." I tell him.

The car stops at a red light, he reaches out in the back seat, then his hand comes back with a

bunch of flowers.

“I didn’t know what to get you, I hope you like flowers.”

I don’t.

“Thanks,” I put them back in the back seat.

His brows pucker in confusion, “What’s wrong? You don’t like them?”

“They are nice.”

“Your face says otherwise. Did I do something wrong?” -Him.

“I don’t know what these gestures mean, Nkosana. You buy me gifts and flowers. Last month you paid Lulu’s school fees without talking to me first.”

I don’t like his idea of a surprise, it feels more like an invasion.

“You were struggling Cashile, I thought I was helping.”

“You’re a man, no man in this world would help a woman and expect nothing in return.”

The gifts and flowers are very loud about what he wants.

“I’m not trying to sleep with you if that is what you are saying. I only want to be around you.”

“You don’t know me, we met under terrible circumstances. I was broken and you helped me. That’s all there is.” I say.

“Not for me. It’s far deeper than that, I am in love with you Cashile Madlala and I want to be the man in your life. I want to be the father of your children.”

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MHLONIPHE

“That stupid man is not answering his phone.”
Mhlo kicks a stone as he cusses loudly.

He’s with Bakhe and Njabulo outside
Nkululeko’s home.

They managed to get over 90K for Sibiya’s car,
the warden wants it sent to his account.

They’ve deposited the funds into Njabulo’s
account, he’s the one with the most active bank
statement.

Otherwise, these two have never received a
stable income in their lives.

“Call him again,” Bakhe says.

Mhlo is opening the call log when his phone
buzzes and Mkhetheni’s name flashes on his
screen.

“Bad timing.” Mhlo murmurs.

“Answer it, maybe he’s having a heart attack.”
Bakhe says, puffing a cigarette like it’s his last

time.

“What if that idiot calls?”

“What if your twin needs help?” Njabulo can be a grandpa sometimes.

With a long sigh, Mhlo answers the call.

“Ndoda?”

“You’re not home,” of course, Mkhetheni must always play Velaphi’s role.

“I’m with my friends, I will be there in two hours.”

“Two hours? What are you up to Mhlo?”

Playing Velaphi’s role includes him being suspicious of everything Mhlo does.

“Mbuzo should be a great example, he killed a woman with his d!ck because of this business of sleeping out. Come home now.” –Mkhetheni.

Mhlo frowns when he hears a chuckle coming

from Bakhe, his phone speaker is a little loud.

“Ndoda don’t be boring, I will come home. Do you want me to massage you? I will call MakaSbani...”

“Voetsek! I want you home in an hour Mhloniphe.” The call is ended by the twin at home.

“I doubt that old man is my twin.” Mhlo complains to his friends.

“You’re lucky you come in two, he’s there to set you straight when you go astray.” –Bakhe.

Mhlo snatches the burning cigarette from him and floods his lungs with smoke.

He’s trying the warden’s number again, he answers just as Mhlo is ready to cut the call with a mission to try again.

“The chief was killed, we can’t meet at the

prison. I will send you a location.” It sounds like he’s driving.

“What about my brother? Where is he?” –Mhlo.

“Speak to him.” The warden says.

Mhlo goes through a few second of silence before he hears Mbuzo’s voice.

“Mhlo.”

He heaves a sigh of relief, “Where are you?”

“In a car, don’t be late.” Mbuzo says.

Relief washes over him, his brother will sleep at home tonight.

He’s on his feet, headed to the car. Bakhe and Njabulo have gotten the memo.

“Transfer the money now, I don’t trust you.”

That’s the warden over the phone.

“Uyahlanya, you’re crazy. We’ll do an exchange when we get there.” –Mhlo.

“Look, I’m sure you’re bringing your boys with you. I’m outnumbered, even if it’s just you and your brother. You can ask him, I didn’t bring back up. Why would I rob you knowing you can kill me and hide my body?”

That’s a point he’s making there.

“I will drop your brother and go on about my day. Transfer my money now or I’m turning back and we cancel this whole thing.” -Warden.

Mhlo frowns at it, this man is not playing.

“Fine, if you run with my money and my brother, I will haunt you down like a dog and kill you. You hear me?” –Mhlo.

There’s a heavy threat in his voice.

“I’m not dumb, just send my money. If you’re late, you will find your brother waiting for you.”

The warden says.

Mhloniphe cuts the call, he receives the location

from the warden seconds later.

“Let’s go get my brother bafethu.” He says and tells Njabulo to send the money.

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The GPS has led them to a secluded place, it’s a farm and there’s a car parked under a tree.

Its headlights are on.

“Why are his head lights on? Is he trying to attract people?” Njabulo complains.

“Something is wrong, there’s no one in the car and the doors are open.” Bakhe says.

They cautiously get out of the car, taking slow steps towards the vehicle. They should have seen two figures by now but there’s no one, could be because of the darkness.

“Something is wrong,” Bakhe murmurs, carefully observing what’s before them.

As they get closer, they see a man lying on the ground.

“Fuck!” Mhloniphe hisses, running to inspect. In his head, he’s thinking it’s Mbuzo.

His heart relaxes a bit when he sees that the man on the ground is the warden, there are two bullet wounds on his stomach, and he’s bleeding a lot.

“Fuck! Where is my brother?” Mhloniphe shouts, running to check inside the warden’s vehicle and behind it.

There is no Mbuzo here, he stomps back to the wounded man.

“Where the fuck is my brother?” He barks.

The warden coughs and blood spews out of his mouth.

“Khuluma!” It’s fear of losing his brother that’s riling Mhlo up like this.

“Dalisu... Sibiya.” It takes a while but the warden reveals.

Dalisu Sibiya is not the answer these people are looking for.

“What about him?” –Mhlo.

“He found out about the deal we made... you killed his father. That’s what he said.” The warden slowly answers, the more he speaks, the more blood he loses through his mouth.

The three friends look at each other, it’s impossible that Dalisu could’ve known. They were careful, they even cleaned the gun that killed Sibiya.

“You bastard, what did you tell Dalisu?” -
Mhloniphe

“Nothing.” This man is dying but Mhlo keeps

yelling at him and Bakhe is searching his pockets. He finds the warden's wallet, and a Capitec bank card inside. It has the same account number they transferred the money into.

"Where did they take my brother?" Mhlo asks the warden.

"What's the pin number?" Bakhe throws in his own question.

"Is the money still there?" - Njabulo.

The warden winces in pain, his eyes are slowly shutting. The three friends panic, Mhlo grabs the back of his neck, forcing his head up so he keeps his eyes open.

"Tell me where Dalisu took my brother?" He yells because Bakhe is also asking for the pin number using the loudness of his voice.

"Dalisu took him away from the village... you will never see him again..." The warden can barely

speak at this point, his eyes are completely closed. His breathing shallow but they don't care, one wants his brother, the other two want the warden's bank pin.

"Open your eyes, wenja. Tell me where my brother is."

"The pin number mfethu, uyafa lomuntu. This person is dying." Bakhe stresses.

Too late, the warden has stopped breathing.

"Shit! And the money is gone, just like that."

Njabulo.

Bakhe puts his hands above his head, "The money mfethu, he died with our money."

"Yeyi! Don't tell me about the money wena, my brother is gone."

Bakhe frowns, "Are you going to eat your brother wena?"

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[03/06, 15:48] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 63

CASHILE

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I would kick myself in the face if I were to date another bad boy, yes I said bad boy because, why is a doctor's body riddled with tattoos? He's a biker and wears black.

Nkosana is a Juba but without the crime.

As ambitious as I am, I never saw myself falling for someone like Juba. Circumstances led me into his arms, he was never my type.

Now, what could possibly lead me into Nkosana's arms?

Of course I want my children to have a father, no child deserves to grow up without one.

I was hoping he wouldn't drive in, and we'd maybe talk about his feelings tomorrow, but he's walking with me into the house.

"Sisi... Lulu is sleeping in her room. I'm sorry I can't do this anymore." The nanny welcomes me with these words.

I'm confused, "I'm sorry I'm late ma. Work was hectic." I have to lie to make myself look professional.

This woman came recommended, nogal. Now she's giving me attitude.

She looks at Nkosana standing beside me, her face crinkles a bit.

She thinks I was out with a man, I can just tell.

"I have a family too, my husband doesn't want me to do this job anymore. The children are

always home alone, they need help with washing their school uniform and homework, plus I have to cook before my husband comes home from work. I'm sorry you will have to find someone else.”

Words of a kept woman, her husband sounds controlling. It can never be me, whatever man thinks he can control me can miss me on the patriarchy.

I feel Nkosana's hand brush the small of my back, he gives me a subtle nod as I look up at him.

Well, not that I needed his permission, “I understand mah.”

I give her the R200 I got from Ntabiseng.

“I will request a cab for you, I am sorry to have kept you waiting.”

I request for her and tell her she can wait outside, the driver is two minutes away.

Nkosana offers to walk her to the door while I go check on Lulu.

My baby is growing up and I am missing out on so much, waiting tables is taking a lot of my time. It's not even worth the pay.

I need to find a 9-to-5, something that will work for me and Lulu. I need to be here to see her grow.

I still can't believe that I have an entire house, I love it. It was my home as much as it was Juba's, I spent more days here than I did at my house.

Some of my clothes were kept here, Juba never got rid of them. I found them where I left them.

The house has two floors, the second floor contains the bathroom and bedrooms. Juba's bedroom is where I sleep, Lulu has her own room.

Funny how the bedroom still smells like him, his clothes are still here. His mother hasn't come to collect them.

I hop into the shower and take a quick one, minding Nkosana who is still in the house. It's not a lie that he is a good man, well-mannered. I acknowledge his intentions, but will I ever be able to love again?

My heart can never belong to anyone but Mbuzo.

Thinking of him, I find myself scrolling through pictures of us on my phone.

I have more pictures of Mbuzo alone than us together. He did not love the camera, most of these pictures were taken while he wasn't looking.

What a beautiful man God created, it's a shame his heart doesn't match his face. His skin colour

does though, fuck... that man has a dark heart.

But I worry about him, more than I would like.

What hurts the most is that he doesn't care for me, the baby we lost and the one I'm carrying.

"Cashile," a knock at the door kicks me out of my thoughts.

"I'm coming," I tell Nkosana and listen to his footsteps treading off.

I receive a call right after.

Fear engulfs me when I see Mkhetheni's number flashing on my screen.

"Bhuti."

Why am I nervous all of a sudden? This is the man I boldly told to stay out of my business back at the hospital. I don't want to be in his bad books though.

“KaMadlala.”

Now I know... it's the serious tone.

I take a deep one, “Is Mbuzo okay?”

I hate myself for worrying about him.

“I called to check on you. I heard you left the village.”

My parents are probably aware of it as well by now.

“I did.” I say.

“How have you been? We worry about you.”

Mbuzo is not included in that “We” that one cares about no one but himself.

“We are fine.”

“We? Who else is there with you?” –Nkosana.

“My daughter.” I afford him the respect he commands.

With him it comes naturally. He doesn't have to

force you to respect him, it's part of him.

"How is the little one?"

"Naughty and spoiled, I swear she was sent to this earth to make my life hell."

He chuckles lightly, never in my life have I heard Mkhetheni laugh or seen him smile.

"It's her job to take away your peace, wait till she turns five and six." Him.

"There's more?" I thought this was a stage.

Another chuckle. Mmhkay!

"You haven't seen anything yet. But be patient with her, she is a child."

I hear him, I really do. I can't wait to meet a seven year old Lulu, how will her voice sound like? Will her mannerisms still be the same?

At the same time, I don't want her to grow up. I have to cherish every moment with her.

“I was just checking up on you, take care of yourself.” That’s it, the conversation is over. He’s ended the call, he didn’t even mention Mbuzo.

My hair is growing, the last time I had long hair was in high school. I should start growing it, a change would be nice.

I’m hit with the smell of curry as I step out of the bedroom. Nkosana can’t be cooking at this time of the night.

I find him behind the stove, wearing an apron.

He gives me a onceover, “Hey I hope you don’t mind. I was hungry, there is nothing to eat in the fridge.”

He could have ordered, I’m sure KFC or McDonald’s is still open.

“What are you making?” I ask.

He opens the simmering pot of stew to show me.

“Smells good,” I pull a chair and sit.

I will not be helping him with anything, I want to sleep.

There’s a sudden knock at the door.

“I will get it,” Nkosana says.

I’m already up and heading to the door, “It’s fine.”

I can’t expect him to cook and open the door for me. Who could be knocking at this time of the night?

Pulling the door, my jaw drops.

“Thulisiwe?”

Her face lights up as she grins widely at me, my smile is not that wide. I’m thinking why she’s here with Wendy of all people.

“I didn’t believe it when Wendy told me you were back.” Thuli says.

I introduced Thuli to Wendy back then, we became the best of friends. I don’t know how Wendy grew to hate me, all I know is that she used to compete with me even when I wasn’t competing.

“It’s late, don’t you think?”

“I’m sorry, it’s just that I missed you so much I couldn’t wait to see you.” Thuli says, reminding me that she had moved to Cape Town before I went to jail.

“But how did you know where to find me?” I ask.

“Juba’s mother told me you inherited his house, I saw her at his funeral.” That’s Wendy.

I don’t like her.

“It’s good to see you again, is it okay if I come back tomorrow? We should hang out and catch

up.” Thuli adds.

I look at Wendy. Yep, she doesn’t want to be here.

“Tomorrow would be nice,” I want them gone before Nkosana comes out.

Thuli holds out a fruit basket, “This is for you. I didn’t want to come empty handed, and I didn’t have wine so...”

I take it, “Thanks.”

We’re now stuck in silence, I want to shut the door so bad.

“Okay, see you tomorrow then.” Thuli says.

“Tomorrow.” I match her smile.

Wendy rolls her eyes at me, why did she come if she didn’t want to be here? I shut the door the second they turn to walk away.

I leave the basket on a table in the hallway and go back to the kitchen. He's still cooking and doesn't ask me who was at the door. I won't be telling him either.

"How was your trip?" I ask.

He closes the pot and comes to sit opposite me, when he looks at me, he makes sure to look into my eyes.

"All work, no play. Being a doctor is not all rosy."

He says.

I can imagine, at least he has a career. Some of us have to wait tables for doctors in restaurants.

"Sebenza baba." He laughs at my reply.

"I missed you though, you were all I could think about."

"Nkosana..."

"Please..." he takes my hand as I'm about to stand, his eyes are pleading with me. He stands

to meet my height.

“I’m not playing you, my feelings are legit. I wouldn’t be here if they weren’t.”

“You’re a friend, I don’t want to lose that.” I tell him.

“It’s fine, I can be your best friend and your man. Trust me, I’m a pro at multitasking.” He suddenly has a bright smile on his face.

I catch the joke but I don’t laugh.

He’s still holding my hand and staring into my eyes.

“It’s been two months since I left my husband and...”

“There is no record that you two were married, so technically, you were never married to anyone.”

I don’t know what he’s trying to do by reminding me of the sad truth, I would have loved to stay

married to Mbuzo, the good Mbuzo.

“You’ve built walls around you, Cashile. At some point, you will have to break them down and let someone in.”

I pull my hand from him, “I don’t need a man.”

What is it with men thinking women can’t live without them?

“But your children need a father...” He is following me to the living room and sits on the couch next to me.

“Don’t tell me what my children need, Nkosana. Do not even talk about them, I am doing fine on my own.” This is me trying to set boundaries, my children are off limits.

He sighs and proceeds to take my hand again, “I’m sorry. My intention is not to get you upset. I’m... It’s just that I can’t imagine my life without you, Cashile. I don’t know when this love crept into my heart, I don’t know what to do with it.”

At least that's his worry, soft problems. I don't know what to do with his confession.

Love? Love hurt me and I'm not strong enough to go through that again.

He cups my face, making me look into his eyes.

"You're afraid aren't you?" He mumbles, his eyes scanning my entire face. I can't tell if that's love I see in his eyes, or pity.

"I've been hurt before Nkosana, I can't go through that again."

"Not all men are the same, there are good men out there Cashile. I would like to believe that I am one of them, let me in and I will be the best man you've ever known."

"But I don't love you, you're my friend."

He kisses my nose, "Let me teach you how to love again."

His lips are already coming close to mine, I hold

my breath and close my eyes when he brushes his lips against mine.

I allow the kiss, slowly sinking into his embrace.

“Stop biting my mommy.” I jolt back at Lulu’s words, she’s crying her eyes out.

“Baby...” I stand to take her but she runs to Nkosana crying, grabs his arm and bites him.

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[03/06, 15:48] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 64

BAKHE

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They left the warden’s body where they found him. It’s close to midnight, but they are having a

braai in Mhlo's back yard.

It was Bakhe's idea when Mhlo suggested they come here. Mkhetheni is sleeping and Mhlo has kept the sliding door closed to clog the noise from reaching his twin brother.

Bakhe is chatting to Khaya on WhatsApp while flipping meat and sausages on the grill top. She's sent him a selfie that puts a smile on his face. Their relationship is going strong, two months in and he couldn't be happier.

'Send me more. You're allowed to flood my phone with your pictures you know?' He replies.

She replies with laughing emojis and asks if he's in bed already.

'I'm with my friends, we're having a braai.' His text reads.

She leaves him on read and goes offline, he's not bothered because he wasn't really expecting a reply from her.

“I was able to reverse the money, are we splitting it between us?” Njabulo asks. He’s leaning back on a garden chair, drinking beer.

He looks at Mhlo... bad timing. The man is pacing up and down while on the phone.

Bakhe gestures that Njabulo waits, he needs to take Khaya’s call.

“Chommie.”

It started with her, she calls him chommie. The name grew into him.

“Who else is with you there?”

Bakhe can tell by the sound of her voice that she is not a happy person.

“You don’t greet anymore?” He asks, swallowing back the irritation scraping at him.

“Are there girls there? Chommie please go home, Njabulo and Mhloniphe are always seen with girls. I don’t trust them. I wouldn’t be surprised if Mhlo introduced you to one of them.” She says.

Hawu Shembe!

Bakhe hangs up, he rejects her call when she calls again.

There are moments where Khaya decides to piss him off.

Mhlo is done with his calls, he looks defeated.

He’s been calling every dirty cop he knows, it’s only a handful of them and none of them know anything about Mbuzo and Dalisu’s whereabouts.

“Don’t you think you should tell your twin what happened?” Bakhe asks Mhloniphe when he

lets out a tongue click.

Mhlo grabs a bottle of Black Label and drowns himself in it. A burp follows right after.

They went to the prison where Mbuzo was kept, he's not there or any of the police stations they went to.

It's as if his brother disappeared into thin air.

Njabulo throws a look at Bakhe, Bakhe shrugs.

He's also out of options, clearly Mhlo is worried about Mbuzo.

"I can ask my mother to ask around, nothing ever misses her." Njabulo is trying really, there is no reason for these men to look at him like he's lost his mind.

"Your mother ndoda? What will you say to her?" Bakhe asks in irritation.

"Why would you ask your mother?" –Mhlo.

There's a scoff on Njabulo's face, "My mother is

cool okay. We tell each other everything.”

Hawe mah!

Is there even such a thing? That’s the facial expression on Bakhe and Mhlo’s faces.

“By everything, you mean you tell her what you get up to?” Bakhe asks.

Njabulo nods, downing the last few sips of his beverage. Bakhe abandons the meat on the braai stand. Mhlo is on his feet as well, slowly approaching a confused Njabulo.

“Ndoda, does your mother know that we hijacked the chief’s car?” Mhlo slowly questions and gets another casual nod from Njabulo.

When the hell did he call his mother?

His eyes slowly widen at his two friends, they are looking at him with so much anger.

“You’re an idiot.” Mhloniphe murmurs, shock is palpable in his voice.

“Hawu ndoda, why would you swear at me? Ngenzeni?” –Njabulo.

“You’re an idiot mfethu, everyone knows your mother is the village gossip. How could you be so dumb?” Mhlo is yelling now but Njabulo cannot be yelled at like that.

He stands with anger in his eyes, “That’s my mother mfethu, you won’t like it if I spoke about your mother like that.”

“Does she know that we killed Sibiya?” Bakhe questions, he’s already started his smoking marathon.

Stress does not do him well.

Suddenly, Njabulo is put on the spot. His eyes run from both Bakhe and Mhlo, he sighs loudly as he grabs another bottle of alcohol.

“Speak Njabulo.” Bakhe snaps.

This is really bad.

A nod is all Njabulo produces.

“The fuck does that mean, is it a yes or a no?”
Mhlo shouts, charging at him. Bakhe holds him back.

“It slipped okay, I didn’t mean to tell her that part.”

Jizas Njabulo!

Mhlo overpowers Bakhe, he jumps at Njabulo and lands with a sickening punch on Njabulo’s face.

The meat is burning, Bakhe grabs a bowl and starts dishing up. M

Meanwhile, Mhlo and Njabulo are all over the place exchanging punches. Njabulo backs out first when he’s kicked in the stomach, he raises his hands in surrender.

“Hade ntwana, I’m sorry.” He’s heaving.

“Do you know what you have done? Your

mother couldn't keep her mouth shut, what we did reached Dalisu and now he has my brother." He's defeated, tears fall from his eyes.

He turns away, wiping his face.

There's a pained expression on Njabulo's face, "I made her promise not to tell anyone. She would never risk me going to jail."

Mhlo whips his head back to him, "Then how did Dalisu know that we killed his father? You heard what the warden said, Dalisu knows. He fucking knows."

"Eish madoda." That's Bakhe with a mouth full of meat.

He offers Mhlo beer, he needs to distress otherwise the pain will suffocate him.

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CASHILE

It's taken me two hours to put Lulu back to sleep. Waking her up for crèche in the morning will be a mission, it's past 12am. I think I'll call in sick at work and spend the day with her. And I need to find a live-in nanny.

Heaven knows what I'll pay her with.

Nkosana walks in from outside carrying the flowers he gifted me, I forgot them in his car.

I was in the middle of dishing up, he cooked, I presume he wants to eat.

“Sthandwa Sami.”

I glance at him, he laughs.

“Ngiyadlala, but I can't wait for the day where you'll finally be mine.” He says.

“You'll never give up will you?”

“My heart controls me, it’s hungry for you Cashile.”

I turn back to the pots, “Ngaze ngavelelwa bakithi. I don’t know if you’re ambitious or stubborn.”

He laughs a lot this one, he’s carefree.

“Why do you say that as if it’s a bad thing, I’m just a man standing in front of a woman, asking her to let me love her.”

“And I’m not Julia Roberts, that line will not work with me sir.”

His laugh is a bit louder this time, he puts the flowers in water and takes a seat at the table.

I serve him his food, it’s my house and I’m hosting the guy. I hope he’s not getting ideas.

Oh God, he is.

He looks into my eyes, taking my hand into his.

“I can’t wait to have these moments together.

With you.” He says softly.

This present moment is awkward for me. I claim my hand and get my food, and sit across from him.

The only thing I can stomach after 12 am is a burger and chips. Not rice and beef but I feast anyway.

Men eat fast, this one falls under that same category “Thank you, the food is nice.” He compliments me.

“You cooked.” The credit goes to him not me.

“So what are you going to do about Lulu and work?”

“I have no choice but to get a nanny, I was thinking a live-in nanny. I work long hours, my boss will fire me if I continue leaving work early.”

“Then come work for me, you’ll be my assistant. I have a private clinic in the South of Joburg. Work is a lot, I’m barely keeping up.” He says.

Working as his assistant would mean seeing him every day.

Yoh hayi!

Am I ready for that.

“I never mix business with pleasure, I won’t bother you during working hours.”

“You’ll bother me after work?” I ask because that’s what I’m sensing.

He gives me a faint smile then stands with his empty plate and takes it to the sink.

I’ve had enough myself. Nkosana takes my plate from me.

“Let me take that, I’ll do the dishes.”

Haibo! How?

“It’s late, you should go.”

He better not be thinking of sleeping over.

He grabs a dishcloth and wipes his hands. Then stands in front of me, his hands run up and down my arms.

“Consider my offer, you’ll be making enough to pay for Lulu’s school fees and a live-in nanny.”

That’s what I want, to earn enough so I can take care of my daughter.

He pulls me in for a hug, I push him off as an image of Mbuzo flashes in front of my eyes when I close them.

He frowns, “What’s wrong?”

I don’t know, I suddenly have an urge to call Mbuzo.

“Something is wrong.” I say, only to realize that I’m struggling to breathe.

I hold on to the kitchen counter for balance.

“You’re hyperventilating, come sit.” He ushers me to a chair and tries to direct my breathing but I can’t , it feels like there’s a truck sitting on my chest.

“Mbuzo... I have to call Mbuzo” I push Nkosana out of my way so I can get to my phone on the counter.

Nkosana sits me back down, “You’re pregnant remember. You need to calm down for the baby’s sake.”

I’m crying, and can’t control my tears. My entire body is trembling, my heart is thudding loudly in my chest.

“Something is wrong with Mbuzo,” I push past Nkosana, running to my phone.

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MBUZO

He's faced so many challenges in his walk of life, this one tops them all. Dalisu hit him with the barrel of a gun after commanding him to exit the warden's car. He was not given a chance to defend himself, the second his foot hit the ground, Dalisu struck.

He woke up at the back seat of a police car with his hands cuffed. Dalisu is driving, there's a man on the passenger seat, Dalisu referred to him as Bonga. These people are armed.

They haven't said much to him, nor answered his questions. He wants to know where they are taking him.

"Are you going to kill me?" Mbuzo asks.

Dalisu looks at him through the rear view mirror, "Your brother killed my father. So why not settle the score."

This waste of space is obviously talking about Mhlo, Mkhetheni is not about that life.

"Your father was a coward," Mbuzo replies.

"Says a dead man." Dalisu chuckles.

His reply is so simple but it weighs heavy on Mbuzo. God knows he doesn't want to die.

He looks at Bonga on the passenger seat, scanning his eyes over him.

That gun on Bonga's waist is screaming for Mbuzo to take it, he's been pondering upon it for the past hour but has no clue what he will do when he finally takes the gun.

"You Xabas will pay for my father's death. I will kill you first and leave your body in the bushes for animals to feast. Then I will go after the twins, your sister next and finally Cashile. I am going to have my way with her before cutting her to pieces. Her body parts will make me a lot of money." Dalisu says and shares a laugh with

his friend.

It pisses Mbuzo off, he wants to clap back but, what good will that do?

While they are caught in laughter, Mbuzo reaches forward and snatches the gun from Bonga's gun holster.

Bonga feels the touch, he turns with wide eyes to confront Mbuzo but Mbuzo pulls the trigger, the bullet goes in between Bonga's eyes. He falls to his death.

Panic washes over Dalisu, everything happened so fast. The car hurtles from side to side, he's unable to control the steering wheel with a gun pressed to his head.

"Stop the car motherf#cker." Mbuzo hisses.

"I'm a cop, you won't..."

"I didn't ask for your resume, stop the fuckin car." Mbuzo orders.

Dalisu heaves a sigh, “Fine but put the gun down first.”

“You are in no position to negotiate Sibiya, pull over or your brains will be scattered all over this car.”

The car begins to slow down, an angry Dalisu is stealing glances at him in the rear view mirror.

Their eyes meet, he knows Mbuzo will kill him the second he steps out of this vehicle.

“If I’m going to die, I’m taking you with me. Fuck you Xaba.” Dalisu steps on the accelerator and speeds off the road, driving the car towards the cliff of a bridge.

Mbuzo’s eyes pop out, the ground is too far from up here. They won’t make it.

“No!” Mbuzo’s hands fly to grab the steering wheel but Dalisu hits him with an elbow and drives the car off the cliff.

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[03/06, 15:48] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 65

MHLONIPHE

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It's two days later, they haven't heard anything from Mbuzo. Mkhetheni has been briefed, he's not happy that Mhlo kept things from him.

There's someone at the door, Mhlo gets up to get it.

"Ndoda, what is this now?"

Njabulo's eyes wander around, he appears nervous.

“Can we come in?”

A frown forms on Mhlo’s face, “Ungazobheda wena. You bring a witch doctor to my father’s house and ask me to let you in? Do I look like a fool to you?”

“Yehlisa umoya ntwana, I am not here to fight you. I came to fix things, I messed up and this is me rectifying my mistakes.”

Mhlo’s frown deepens as he looks at the old man in a sarong, their mother would have never allowed a sangoma into their home.

“Uzothwala ngathi wena? You’re here to take riches from us, you’re too late. Madlala beat you to it.”

Both Njabulo and the seer look offended.

“Mhloniphe!” Mkhetheni calls behind him, he tilts his head, glancing at his brother with a side eye.

“Awuhloniphe abadala, can’t you see he’s an elder.” Mkhetheni snaps, his words make Mhlo whip his head towards him.

“He’s a sangoma.” Mhlo snaps back.

“It doesn’t matter who he is, you show respect when talking to elders.” Mkhetheni tells him, a twinge annoyance now loud and evident in his voice.

With a sigh, Mhlo turns back to the men at their doorstep.

“I respectfully ask you to leave my house.” He puts his hands together as a sign of respect but his face is glinted with rage and hatred.

Izangoma make him uncomfortable and Madlala’s confession has everything to do with it.

“Ndodada, I see where your anger comes from and I understand. I do not fault you for your behaviour, you have suffered enough.” The

sangoma says but his words anger Mhlo further.

“What do you know about my suffering wena?”

“Mhloniphe, move from that door and let them in.” Mkhetheni says.

Mhloniphe is hesitant, his angry eyes shift to Njabulo. He brought this man here.

“This is Ngwemabala, he is a seer. My mother recommended him after I spoke to her.”

A loud scoff from Mhlo, he points at Njabulo, “Wena udlala ngami nja. Your mother again?”

The nerve!

“I know but it’s not what you think. Ngwemabala will strengthen you and remove Sibiya’s dark shadow from you. When he’s done with you, the police won’t even take your case seriously.”

Njabulo says.

Mkhetheni pushes Mhlo aside, “You may come in baba.”

He gets a frown Mhloniphe, he doesn't care about.

Njabulo and Ngwemabala enter and are led to the living room, they share a couch. Mkhetheni shares a seat with his twin.

"Get them something to drink," he tells Mhloniphe.

They are the same age, he's such a bully.

That's what Mhloniphe is thinking as he toddles to the kitchen with a clenched jaw.

He comes back with two bottles of Black Label, one he puts in front of Ngwemabala, another he sits with it and starts drinking.

Mkhetheni's hard stare does not move him.

"What would you like to drink baba?" Mkhetheni asks Ngwemabala.

"Cha-cha ndodana, I am okay. I'm here to work."

There's a loud burp coming from the uncultured

swine, Mhloniphe.

What a brat?

“Where are the elders of this house?”
Ngwemabala asks, eyes fixed on Mkhonethi.

“This is my twin brother, we are the eldest in this house hold.” Mkhetheni replies with a slight frown.

“Your parents are not here.”

“My father killed my mother, then himself.”
There’s bitterness in Mhloniphe’s voice.

“I know, everything was shown to me the second I walked through the gate. It happened here, in this room. Your mother was sitting where you are seated, your little brother was on the floor and she was massaging his head. They didn’t see your father coming, he walked in with a gun and shot her twice on the chest.

Your father looked at him in the eye, apologised then shot himself."

Mhloniphe slams the beer bottle on the table and storms out.

Mkhotheni is having a tough time as well but he stays.

They never talk about that day, more especially because Mbuzo convinced them he forgot about the events of that day and moved on with life.

"Sorry about that, he has a hard time accepting what happened." Mkhotheni apologises on behalf of his twin.

"I will check up on him." Njabulo goes after Mhloniphe.

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He finds him outside in the garden, smoking.

“Ndoda.”

“Why did you bring him here?” Mhloniphe asks, he’s facing the wall.

“I wanted to make things right, I don’t want us to go to jail. I messed up mfethu, I’m sorry.”

Mhlo turns to Njabulo, his bloodshot eyes are wet with unshed tears.

“I wasn’t home that day, I was out shagging some girl whose name I didn’t even know. While my father was...” He pauses, puffing more smoke into his lungs.

Bless his lungs!

“On my way in, I tripped on my father’s body, then I saw my mother on top of Mbuzo. I was so confused, I couldn’t figure out what happened... there was so much blood. I remember calling out to Mbuzo and my mother,

I was desperate for them to answer me that I moved her body from his. She was cold, sometimes I feel that coldness in my hands."

He takes a deep breath, sending his eyes skyward to get rid of the tears wanting to show his weakness.

"Mbuzo's eyes were open, he was blinking. I checked his pulse, he was breathing. When I helped him up, I noticed he had no wounds on him. What would you do if you witnessed your father kill your mother then turn the gun on himself?"

"Eish!" Njabulo scratches his head.

"What do you call it? Shock paralysis? That's what happened with my Mbuzo, he was laying beneath his own mother's dead body for hours. He felt her body getting colder and heavier but he couldn't move... he didn't move. What more confirmation do you need that the woman you

have loved your whole life is dead?"

"I thought Mbuzo was out of town when it happened?" Njabulo.

"That's what he believes, he underwent therapy. Some hypnosis shit, they made him forget. He wanted to forget the images that haunted him. There was no other way, Mbuzo tried to kill himself several times. He said our parents were haunting him."

He's on his third cigarette.

Njabulo taps his shoulder, "We should go back inside. Ngwemabala has more to say."

"Isangoma mfethu? What possessed you?"

Mhlo is still not buying this seer business.

"I told you mfethu, stop being stubborn and accept his help."

He doesn't like this at all, but he goes back inside.

Ngwemabala is burning impepho; incense.

Mhlo looks at Mkhetheni in disapproval, but his brother gestures that he calms down.

“There are people whose paths are dark, no matter what they do in life, nothing ever works. Everything you touch turns to dust, it’s not because that’s how God made it. There are people behind your failures. Jealousy makes people do unspeakable things. When you’re sleeping at night, there’s someone chanting your name, wishing bad luck upon you and cancelling your destinies. Nina Bafana already know who is responsible for your failures.”

“Yes.” They agree in unison.

Ngwemabala nods.

“This yard is empty, it’s a playground for witches. You boys are not protected. Your parents are supposed to be in the yard, but their

spirits are lost.” Ngwemabala says.

“Yeah, some fucker trapped their spirits in a bottle.” Mhlo utters and a slap from his twin lands on his shoulder.

“We can fix that, amanzi amancane.” He says there is nothing too hard for him.

“Velaphi came to me in a dream, he wants a cow.” Mhlo laughs, it’s a genuine one.

It’s news to Mkhetheni.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Then what?” Mhlo replies, there’s no hope for this one.

“I will need everyone here, your brother and your sister. Especially your brother, he’s been living with the burn of your mother’s death for years. He blames himself, he thinks he would have been able to stop your father.”

Mhlo and Mkhetheni exchange glances.

“Mbuzo does not remember what happened, he went to therapy and they made him forget.”
Mhlo says.

“Is that what he told you?”

They nod.

“He remembers everything, every detail of what happened that day. He didn’t want to be a burden to you, no wonder he lied.”

Ngwemabala says.

That can’t be, all these years Mbuzo carried the burden alone.

They did a lot to put the past behind them, even went as far as fabricating a different story of what happened that day, just so Mbuzo can get over his trauma.

“He’s such an idiot, why did he lie?” Mhlo is angry all over again.

“Where is he?” Ngwemabala asks.

“We don’t know.” Mhlo says and narrates the story that took place the past few days.

Ngwemabala closes his eyes, he’s silently praying.

“Your brother was 14years old when he made a blood oath with a girl, he calls her KaMadlala.”

The twins frown in confusion, they were never told about a blood oath.

“Cashile Madlala, she is the daughter of the man who bewitched us.” Mhlo says it plainly, no sugar coating.

“They were married, Mbuzo broke the marriage after finding out what KaMadlala’s father did. He slept with our mother’s corpse.” Mkhetheni reveals.

“That oath was a promise to the ancestors and because Mbuzo initiated the oath, it’s his

responsibility to see it through. Now people have died because of his negligence.” Ngwemabala says.

“What negligence?”

“Sex with a woman the ancestors know nothing about? Their wrath fell on her, she died because of that.” The seer answers.

“The bone gang is bipolar, they don’t know what they want. What a fucked up bunch of dead people.” Mhlo says.

“Mhloniphe...”

“Ayi leave me alone.” Mhlo cuts his brother short.

“I’m going to help you, I’ll remove the dark cloud hovering over you and the bad omen. Then connect you with your ancestors.” Ngwemabala tells them.

“What about Mbuzo? You said he has to be here.

We don't know where he is, are you able to see him?" Mkhetheni.

The seer sighs, "A car he was in crashed. I can't sense or see him. It's quiet, it's as if he's no longer part of this world."

Mhloniphe shifts to the edge of his seat, with his eyes wide.

"What are you saying?"

"Your brother crossed over."

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CASHILE

I feel lightheaded as I open my eyes. Nkosana faintly smiles at me, he's standing at the foot of the bed with his arms crossed.

"Hey sleepyhead." He walks to my side.

“What’s going on?” Confusion has settled in.
How did I get here?

“You collapsed that day,” he says, adding more to my confusion.

“That day?”

“Yes, you’ve been out for two days.”

That’s impossible.

“Nkosana tell me you’re kidding. What happened to me?”

“You fainted while running to get your phone, I gave you a sedative.”

Shit! I remember wanting to call Mbuzo... Oh my God, Lulu.

“My baby...” I push myself up but I fall back feeling lightheaded.

He’s attempting to help, I push his hand away.

“Your body is still weak, take it easy.”

“Where is my daughter? Bring her to me.” I’m shouting because how could he let me sleep for two fuckin days? I have a child for goodness’ sake and I’m pregnant.

“Lulu is fine, I got her a nanny. You’ll meet her...”

I can’t believe this man.

“I want my daughter now.” I snap, dragging myself out of bed, he holds me up.

“Do not touch me, Nkosana.”

“Okay, I’m sorry, I will bring Lulu. Just relax, lie down and relax... for the baby’s sake.”

He leaves me in bed and walks out.

Lulu must be terrified, two days is too long. Nkosana walks back in with Lulu in his arms.

“Mommy,” she’s smiling widely with her arms stretched out.

I take her in my arms and embrace her, my eyes running to the woman walking in after them.

“Are you okay baby?”

She nods, “Lulu ate pizza and chips.”

She loves junk food.

“Who is she?” I’m talking about the middle aged woman standing next to Nkosana.

“This is Princess, she’s Lulu’s nanny.”

“You got her a nanny without my approval?”

“You were unconscious Cashile, I didn’t know what else to do. Lulu is a girl child, it made sense for me to get someone.” He says.

I’m still not happy.

“It’s nice to finally meet you Miss Madlala, I have experience in childcare. When you are feeling better, we can go through my CV.”

I don’t answer her, so much is happening at once. My head is spinning.

Nkosana excuses her, she leaves the room.

“Princess will make you something to eat.” He says.

I don’t feel hungry but I have to eat for the baby and take my supplements.

“Have you heard anything from Mbuzo or his brothers?” I ask.

“I know someone who works at the prison back home, he was a patient. I called and spoke to Mbuzo. I told him what happened to you and that you were worried about him.”

“What did he say?”

He drops his eyes, shaking his head.

“Nkosana, what did he say? Is he okay?”

“Yes, he’s fine. I’m sorry Cashile but he didn’t care, he said you are not his business anymore.”

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[03/06, 15:51] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 66

CASHILE

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“How do I look?”

I don’t know about assurance coming from a four-year-old. Her answer is a giggle before she gives me a thumbs up with a big smile on her face.

“That’s what you said about the last four dresses,” I whine and sulk like she usually does. Her giggle sounds like music to my ears.

I’m not sure if this dress is appropriate for a business dinner. Nkosana said to look elegant.

This is as elegant as I can go. My belly is bulging.

I'm six months into my pregnancy, three months into my baby weight.

I don't like what I see when I look in the mirror, this is not how I'm supposed to look.

This baby reminds me of Mbuzo each time it kicks, it feels so surreal that Mbuzo lives inside of me. Many days I lay awake at night, thinking of him.

Mhloniphe told me that he left the village, he didn't tell them where he was going.

I guess he really wanted to completely erase me from his memories. He's probably seeing someone, there is no way a man like Mbuzo would stay single.

I don't talk to the twins anymore, their numbers don't go through when I call them. Bakhe says they are fine, they have rebuilt their father's

home. The B&B is up and running again, they even started a company.

Life is going well for the Xabas. I am happy for them, I wish things were different for me as well. I'm just an assistant for Nkosana, the pay is good though but...

Sigh!

I don't remember how and when I accepted his proposal, I woke up one day and we were dating and going on dates.

Tonight is one of those date nights, we have to leave at 5pm and I'm running late.

I'm not sure about this dress, I love the colour. Black makes me look a bit thin.

Lulu said it's nice, Thuli might advise me better than a toddler, I video call her.

"Mfazi." She answers, her smile is natural. It

comes unprovoked.

We grew closer in the past four months, Wendy and I tolerate each other for Thuli's sake.

"Lulu approves of this dress." I say.

"Where is my little munchkin? Move to the side, before you crack my screen." I know she means this jokingly, it's who she is. But with this baby weight I'm gaining and the hormones playing with my emotions, I can't help but push back tears.

"Hey Miss Fashionista, how is my Lulu today?" - Thuli.

"Fine," Lulu shyly says, she's too occupied jumping on the bed to care about conversing with Thuli.

"You look cute in that dress, Mfazi. Put on a weave, your afro needs styling and we both know how that's not your department." She says.

Maintaining natural hair is a lot of work, sometimes I want to cut it. But Nkosana says I look more like a woman than a man, he likes long hair on a woman.

“You don’t think the dress is too short?”

“I would say cut it a bit, to make it shorter. Pregnancy is not an audition for old age. You look hot friend, with your cute baby bump.”

I trust her judgement, she’s the most stylish person I know.

The door opens, Nkosana walks in.

Thuli’s face transforms, she is not his fan.

“I have to go friend, shout if you need help.” She says this while glaring at Nkosana.

“Nice to see you two Thulisiwe.” Nkosana sarcastically says, but Thuli rolls her eyes and ends the video call.

He looks at me from head to toe, then goes to pick Lulu up from the bed. They have grown close, Nkosana wants her to call him dad.

I'm not even sure this relationship will last, we haven't even slept together and he's moving too fast.

I don't want Lulu to call him that.

"How is my little fairy doing today?" He's spinning her around, she loves it when he does that.

"Careful, she just ate. She will throw up all her food." I say.

"Then we'll give her more food, right Little Fairy?" Nkosana continues to spin her, she's giggling. But I wish he'd stop.

"Nkosana?"

He stops and puts her back on the bed after showering her with kisses. He gives her my

phone to keep her occupied.

“Are you ready?” He asks, standing behind me. I look at his mirror image.

“I’m almost ready, I just need to wear a weave.” I didn’t put on much make-up, I’m not comfortable with it yet.

He’s taking me to a work function business dinner.

“It’s as if you intentionally make me not want you.” He says.

I don’t know where that’s coming from.

“Excuse me?”

“Your dressing has become worse.” He adds, I think I heard a tongue click.

“What is wrong with what I’m wearing?”

“What are you even wearing, Cashile?”

Jesu! This man said wear a dress and that’s

what I'm wearing.

"It's a dress Nkosana, like you said."

"Well, I can see your tits and your ass is too exposed."

Looking at myself in the mirror, I see nothing wrong with what I'm wearing.

"I'm pregnant, my nipples pop out sometimes and my ass if out because I'm gaining weight."

"Maybe you should stop gaining, it's not healthy for the baby. I told you that we are going to a business function. My colleagues are respectable people. They will think you're too slutty for me"

"Says a man with tattoos all over his body.
Since when do you tell me what to wear,
Nkosana?"

This is new really, he's never acted like this in the months we've been dating.

“I’m wearing a suit, my tattoos are covered. And I’m not telling you what to wear, I just want you to represent your man well. Baby, I’m in the waiting list for a promotion. My boss has to believe that we are a respectable couple.”

He puts his arms around me and sinks his face in my neck.

“I love you, please change that dress. I will see you down stairs.”

He looks at my outfit again, shakes his head and walks out of the bedroom.

Well I never...

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THE MADLALAS

“Mayee! Amadolo bakithi!” MaNkosi grumbles and moans as she steps out of the taxi, she’s old and her bones are not in sync with her spirit anymore.

She takes Madlala’s hand and helps him out, then proceeds to push the door closed once they are safe on the ground.

The taxi drives off, leaving them standing in front of their house. Madlala sniffs, then drops his head as he covers his eyes.

“Why are you crying baba?”

“I am overwhelmed MaNkosi, I never thought we would be back here. I can’t believe it.”

She turns to the house, tears glint behind her own pupils.

They left Khathala’s place this morning after paying him half of the money they owed him. MaNkosi finally got her stokvel money, it wasn’t much. Just R12 000. Khathala let them go

because... it's R12K.

Madlala has his hearing back, life should be rosy from here on.

"I wish our kids were here to welcome us home." MaNkosi's comment instantly ruins his mood.

She might as well have farted while he's eating.

"Awume nawe! We don't need ihlongandlebe to welcome us in our own home." He says his children are rebels.

They are the most ungrateful kids he's ever met.

How do you birth someone and they turn their backs on you just because he tried a little magic.

No one said anything when Harry Potter did it, is it because he's white?

"Baba you can't say that. We are alone, this yard should be buzzing with grandchildren."

"That's not a problem, we will fill it with

children.” There’s a proud smile on his face. She doesn’t want to know what he’s thinking, then again, curiosity killed a cat. She’s no cat but death will snatch her if she doesn’t ask.

“Whose children?”

“Mine, I am still fertile. My balls are full and working just fine.”

He bangs his chest like a gorilla, a proud smile curving his parched lips.

“Hau, really?”

“Yes, I still plan on marrying Nothando, she will be your sister wife.”

It’s perfect, they are going to be best friends and have a three some every now and then. Finally, he will be respected in this village.

“Do you think Nothando would want to marry a crazy man like you?”

Yehheni!

Who is this short woman calling crazy?

The main door of the house opens, Bakhe walks out. Balungile and Mfaniseni are behind him, along with Mbali and her mother.

A proud smile finds its way on Madlala's face, MaNkosi is crying tears of joy.

"Look MaNkosi, they came to welcome us home."

"I see baba, I thought there was no one."

"My son would never turn his back on us. MaNkosi, we made a real baby. Look at him and his chubby cheeks. Hawu ununuza bakithi, umfana kababana." He's grinning from ear to ear, but Bakhe is not about that life.

"I know baba, Bakhe is the one who will take care of us in our old age." MaNkosi is all smiles.

"Why are you standing outside the gate? People

will think you've started with your witchcraft tendencies." Bakhe just had to ruin the mood, his words wiped their smiles off.

"Nxa, doti womfana. Stupid boy." Madlala mumbles, frowning at the son he was proud of seconds ago.

MaNkosi opens the gate and walks in, she freezes before taking any more steps.

"Yini manje?" Madlala asks what's wrong, walking through the gate as well.

His eyes widen, he stops.

"Hawe Mah!" Madlala exclaims. "Nkululeko? What are you doing here? You are supposed to be dead."

MaNkosi breaks down crying, "A ghost."

It can't be that Nkululeko is standing in front of them.

“What are you talking about Madlala? Nkululeko is not here.”

Who brought Mfaniseni and his big mouth here?

Madlala fires a dirty look at him.

“Are you calling me a liar Mfaniseni? Or you think I’m crazy?”

“Baba calm down, that’s not what he meant. What uncle is saying is that uncle Nkulu passed away months ago, he is not here.” Bakhe clarifies.

“Then who is that man looking at me? He looks like my brother, and he’s laughing at me.” He points at nothing, Bakhe and his uncle follow his line of sight and see nothing.

“I got this place cleansed baba, and invited the ancestors in the yard. The uncles helped, you were nowhere to be found.” Bakhe says, they are not listening.

Their eyes are on Nkululeko, it's funny how it's just the two of them who can see him.

"He's going to kill us," MaNkosi cries.

Madlala breaks down in laughter, "Nkululeko can't touch us. We killed him, mkami. A ghost can't kill the living."

"What?" Hluphekile is going to have a heart attack, an ambulance is needed ASAP.

MaNkosi laughs out loud, she claps hands with her husband as she joins in on the laughing marathon.

"We killed him baba, he's dead."

Madlala taps MaNkosi on the shoulder, he's having a hard time speaking because he's laughing too much.

MaNkosi can't control hers as well.

"Remember when I killed Thabiso?" Madlala laughs the words out, making MaNkosi laugh as

well.

Mbali almost falls to her knees, this can't be true.

Balungile and Mfaniseni are speechless, Bakhe is fuming with rage.

"Hayi baba. You are so funny." MaNkosi says.

They have become breathless due to intense laughter.

"And... and wena Khanyisile killed..." Madlala is pointing at Mbali, while trying to control his laughter. "Mbali's baby, you killed her baby. Argh shame ngo-Cocomelon kaMbali." He doubles over with laughter, holding on to his knees.

His stomach hurts from the intense laughter.

Mbali cries uncontrollably. Her mother holds her in her arms.

"Hawema! Uthini ngo Velaphi nomkakhe? What

about Velaphi and his wife? I killed two birds with one stone, give me my trophy bandla.” Madlala says, convulsing with laughter and falling on his knees.

MaNkosi joins him, “Hawu umyeni wami bakithi. My personal comedian, abakuyeke Trevor Gumbi.”

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500+ comments... 15 shares...

[03/06, 15:51] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 67

CASHILE

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Nkosana needs to look up the word stubborn in the English dictionary, google or encyclopaedia.

I'm pretty sure he will find my name and ID photo next to it.

I'm done, and walking out with the same dress he disapproves of. Today, I want to see those colleagues who think less of a woman because of what she has on.

I am not what I wear, tonight, he will learn that the hard way. Princess is giving Lulu a bath, it's good that she doesn't see us leave because she will scream until we come back.

I don't want to subject my baby to that.

He's leaning against his car, hands in his pockets. He stands up straight when he sees me, the look on his face says he is not impressed.

"I thought we spoke about this dress."

"You spoke and I listened but I was too upset to hear you." I say.

“Cashile, if we are going to do this, then you need to dress properly.”

“By dress properly you mean long dresses with sleeves? Because that’s not me. Go to the Mormon church and get yourself a woman who will cover up according to your liking. That’s not my style.”

“Ass and cleavage out is your style? You’re basically naked.”

“Don’t even start with me, Nkosana.”

He frowns, “But I explained the importance of this dinner party.”

“And I heard you loud and clear. I am not dumb, I know what an inappropriate dress looks like. I know I look decent, I actually look hot. It’s not my fault your insecurities can’t handle it.”

I stand in front of the door, and wait for him to open.

“Open the door,” I say.

He shakes his head then opens the door for me.

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We've arrived, I've been to fancy places with Juba. This is one of them, the setting is breathtakingly beautiful.

We are welcomed by a butler who takes our coats and my handbag, I ask for my phone.

Nkosana is walking closely beside me, his hand is on my back.

We're approaching a group of gentlemen in tuxedos, standing at a bar and chatting softly in between sips of golden drinks. I spot ladies in formal wear as well. I look better than most of them, I don't know what Nkosana's problem is.

“Those are my boys, we studied in Cuba

together.” He introduces before we get to them.
“Nice,” I say.

“They talk too much, you don’t have to talk to them.”

He’s mad, it will be rude to keep quiet when people are talking to me.

They see Nkosana and make a lot of noise, boys will be boys. It suddenly sounds like a Soweto stokvel party. Some of them look younger than Nkosana, this man I’m dating is thirty six years of age.

Then the church was quiet.

They are staring... at me.

“Hello.” I wave, I see genuine smiles and jaw drops.

Should I tell them I was a boy in my past life?

“Hello!” One handsome gentleman takes my hand and kisses the back of it.

There’s seven of them, I count them as they all take turns in kissing me

Nkosana looks uneasy, he needs to relax. These men are well behaved, they are the perfect gentlemen.

“So you are Cashile, we have heard a lot about you.” This one on my left introduced himself as Eric.

“Did Nkosana hold you at gun point and forced you into a relationship?” I forgot this one’s name, he’s also appealing to the eye.

I laugh with all of them, I don’t remember all their names.

They are the most talkative bunch.

“Okay, that’s enough. You peasants are suffocating my woman.” Nkosana says, pulling

me away from the bar area.

I was having fun.

I feel his hand on the small of my back, “Did you see how they were looking at you?”

“Yes, I found nothing wrong with it.”

“They were undressing you with their eyes.”

He’s seeing things.

“I’m a woman, I know when a man is undressing me with his eyes. Those gentlemen were simply appreciating a beautiful woman.”

He sucks in a deep breath, “You don’t get it do you? That’s why I don’t like you dressing like this because I know how it wrecks men’s minds.”

“Just say I wreck your mind when I dress like this, so you start to think every man is looking at me the way you do.” I know he’s highly

attracted to me.

He sighs, “That’s not the point, okay. I don’t like your dressing. It makes you look like a sl@t.”

I will show him a sl@t.

“It makes me feel sexy and stop using that word with me, I don’t like it.” I tell him.

“So what you are saying is that you will continue dressing like that whenever we go out?”

I’m trying to find myself, I love wearing short dresses as much as I love wearing trunks.

“What I am saying is that I will continue wearing the way that makes me feel comfortable. You will never dictate how I dress Nkosana, if you think that’s ever going to happen, then you have found yourself the wrong woman. My body is not a group project, we don’t get to decide what I wear. I get to decide what I wear.”

He sighs, nodding to nothing.

“I see,” he puts his hands in his pockets and walks back to the men we were with.

It’s whatever.

I’m going to enjoy myself and dance the night away.

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NOTHANDO

“I’m tired baba, I want to be with you. I can’t live like this anymore.”

Sibiya is six feet under but she believes he can hear her.

“Will you accept me when I join you? I want to find peace baba. I was stupid and sold my soul to the devil because I was desperate for a man

who couldn't acknowledge my existence. Now that old witch is everywhere, I can't get rid of him."

She breaks down, the Nile river is not big enough to contain the tears she's cried over the past months.

She puts fresh flowers on her father's grave, says her last words and makes her way to the Jeep she inherited from her father.

The thought of going home drains her to the ground, the Sibiya home has become a ghost town of sort.

She's alone, her father died and her brother disappeared without a trace.

She's become an orphan and a loner, her friends don't visit her anymore. Her father had another son, he's older than her. But that one lives overseas with his wife.

They don't have a relationship.

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She finds herself stopping outside the Xaba residence, the gate is open. There are two cars parked in the driveway, SUVs.

The house looks new, the brothers renovated it when they got back on their feet. At least that's what she heard from people, she hasn't been here in months.

She steps out of the car and walks through the gate. Her body is shaking, this is a bad idea. She's not even sure what she will do when she gets in there.

Will she meet Mbuzo? She's been locked up in the house that she's not up to date with current affairs.

Here goes nothing.

She knocks, and waits.

“Who is it?” She can’t tell whose voice that belongs to.

Mhloniphe and Mkhetheni have the same voices, although Mkhetheni’s carries so much authority.

“Nothando.”

She hears an “Eish” thereafter.

The door opens, a tall figure is hovering over her.

Nothando looks up at him then drops her eyes in a second, it’s better this way because she won’t have to see the look of disgust on his face.

“What are you doing here?”

Mhloniphe has never liked her, the feeling is mutual.

This man put shaving cream in a shampoo, nevertheless, her hair has grown since then.

“Is Mbuzo around?” Nothando asks, taking steps back.

The last thing she wants is another man telling her that she stinks.

“What do you want with him?” Mhloniphe really doesn’t have to be intimidating, it’s making her sweat.

“I need to tell him something, it’s about Cashile.” She’s fiddling with her fingers, still hasn’t looked up at him.

“What happened to KaMadlala?” There’s panic in Mhloniphe’s voice, will these people ever stop caring about her?

Nothando dips her eyes at him, then at the floor.

“I want to speak to Mbuzo.” She is adamant, what she has to say is only for Mbuzo’s ears.

“You should know what happened to my brother. Your brother abducted him then killed him, he’s dead.”

The news shatters Nothando, she raises her eyes with tears already pooling down her skeletal face.

“No.” It’s barely a whisper, her lower lip quivering.

Mbuzo can’t do this to her, he can’t die and leave her.

“W... when?” She can hardly get a word out now.

“That has nothing to do with you.”

Mhloniphe lacks remorse, she understands... more especially because it was her brother who murdered Mbuzo.

“Now say what you wanted to say and leave.”
The insensitive bastard says.

But nope, this is Nothando’s moment. She

wants to cry for the only man she has ever loved, the man she sacrificed her soul for and she wants to do it here and now.

She squats on the ground, covering her head with her arms and wails.

Now tears are something these Xaba boys fear, Mhlo walks back into the house leaving her balling her eyes out. The idiot has shut the door.

A few moments later it opens, the only way she can tell that this is Mkhetheni is because of the different clothes. They have different taste in fashion, considering what Mkhetheni wears falls under the term fashion.

“MaSibiya.” Mkhetheni helps her up, she pushes him away once she’s on her feet.

He’s frowning in confusion, “Are you okay?”

How can she be? She just found out that the

man of her dreams is dead.

“I sold my soul to the devil just to be with Mbuzo.” Eyy!

She doesn’t give amafakhi anymore, let the whole world know, she couldn’t care less.

“You what?” That’s Mhloniphe appearing from the house.

“I knew Mbuzo would never love me, so I went to see a witch doctor.” Her sob story is really what it is, a sob story.

Wait till they hear what she had to do to get Mbuzo to fall in love with her.

She reacts a minute later to Mhlo’s scoff, he’s annoyed.

“Nawe Nothando? What’s with this village and witchcraft?”

“I had no choice, I was desperate for Mbuzo to love me. The seer told me that he’d separate

them. He did some ritual, which included me sleeping with him." Shame has her dropping her face.

The twins do not look shocked, they have seen and heard the worst in their walks of life.

"You slept with the witch doctor?" Mkhetheni asks, she nods with her eyes cast down.

"Let me guess, the ritual worked. That's why Mbuzo and KaMadlala broke up." Mkhetheni asks, but Nothando shrugs her shoulders.

"I think so, it was supposed to make Mbuzo love me and loath Cashile. But he couldn't stand to look at me."

Mhloniphe suddenly looks like a ticking time bomb.

"What did KaMadlala ever do to you?" Mkhetheni asks.

"She took Mbuzo away from me, I don't regret

separating them. She shouldn't have come back to the village, it's her fault Mbuzo is gone. It's her fault I turned to a witch doctor. She should have stayed away." Her tears are gone, she's exhibiting anger now.

"Do you hear what you are saying MaSibiya? Don't you have any regrets? You ruined the lives of two people, Mbuzo is gone because of your selfishness. KaMadlala lost her baby because..."
–Mkhotheni.

"Cashile deserved it, it's her fault she lost her baby. Why did she come back to the village? She acted like a prostitute and threw herself at my Mbuzo..."

Mhlo roughly grabs her by the throat and tightens his hand around it, she's choking and wheezing for air

"Mhloniphe," Mkhotheni is attempting to unlock

Mhloniphe's hand from Nothando's neck. But it might snap if he continues to interfere.

"Mhloniphe let her go," Mkhetheni softly pleads but Mhloniphe tightens his hand, his fingers are digging into her neck.

Her eyes roll to the back of her head, she's slowly losing consciousness.

"Dammit Mhloniphe, let this woman go now." He whispers like a patient parent, funny how that chases away the demon that possessed Mhloniphe to do such an inhuman thing.

Nothando's skeletal body falls to the ground, she's coughing herself back to life.

"Go home MaSibiya." -Mkhetheni.

"I can't go back there, I have no one. People hate me, all my friends turned their backs on me. My family is dead."

Mhloniphe sucks his teeth at her.

“You can’t stay here, we have no place for you here.” –Mkhotheni says, helping her to her feet. She holds on to his t-shirt and cries on his chest.

It has Mhloniphe laughing, this woman cannot be serious. Mkhotheni is frozen a second before he detaches her from his chest.

Nothando looks up at them both, they don’t look disgusted like all men who come in contact with her.

Which makes her wonder, can’t they smell anything? It’s easy to tell that Mhloniphe is holding his breath, he looks like he’s about to faint.

He’s been taking slow breathes since she arrived. Feeling ashamed, Nothando steps back, creating space between them. They notice by how she hugs herself.

Mhlo breathes out the breath he’s been holding.

“I’m tired of pretending, what is that smell? Yini,

ubhoshile?" -Mhlo.

Mkhotheni shoots him a death stare, this one respects anyone with two feet.

"Yini mfethu? She smells like rotten boiled eggs, futhi let me call the police. She needs to get arrested for this." Mhlo takes out his phone.

Mkhotheni is shocked, "For smelling?"

"Yes, water has never killed anyone. I'm also reporting her for bewitching my brother. She thinks she's God, playing with people's lives."

Mhlo replies while dialling the cops.

Nothando falls at his feet, "Mhloniphe please, I will do anything. Don't humiliate me like that, you can't tell anyone please."

Mhloniphe bows down before Nothando, "Why are you kneeling at my feet Somandlakazi? You're the royal one here, queen of d!cks. Angithi you are Nothando Mbhebheni Sibiya, wena. Udunusela izangoma just to destroy my

brother's life. Wena wendlovu, isilo sama sende ashwabene."

King of wrinkled balls.

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500+ comments... 15 shares...

[03/06, 15:51] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 68

MHLONIPHE

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Ngwemabala knows his job, this is something they can never deny. Life has changed for them since the seer's visit months ago. They were able to renovate their home, the B&B is up and running again. Life is moving slowly but surely.

Mkhotheni suggested that they take Nothando to the seer so she can get help, and because Mkhotheni didn't want to drive alone with Nothando, he's dragged his twin brother along.

"Can you drive a little faster?" Mhlo says to his twin.

Whatever possessed him to agree to this trip must be rebuked.

He's on the passenger's seat, the window is widely open. He needs to breathe because Nothando is not doing his nose justice in the back there.

The smell seems to worsen by the second.

"Ndoda stop driving like an old man, faka amafutha." He's getting annoyed.

"Don't annoy me wena, this is the fastest I can go." Mkhotheni claps back.

Mhloniphe clicks his tongue.

“Sometimes I wonder if we’re really twins. Why do we have to help this girl? You heard what she did to Mbuzo.” Mhlo is not happy about Mkhetheni’s decision to take Nothando to Ngwemabala.

“Everyone deserves a second chance.” Argh shame pastor Mkhetheni.

Mhlo side eyes him, “Have you ever met a witch ndoda? They lack remorse, those people continue practising witchcraft from beyond the grave.”

“I am not a witch, my only mistake was loving Mbuzo.”

Mameshane! She’s still talking, after everything?

“MaSibiya is right, give her a chance ndoda.”

Ayy Mkhetheni!

He needs help.

“I am not giving anyone a chance, my brother is

gone because of her." Mhlo heaves a sigh after his complaint, he puts his head out the widely open window. There's not enough fresh air coming in.

"We will find Mbuzo, I told you to think positive." Mkhetheni says, giving Mhlo a onceover.

Nothando's face lights up, "I thought you said Mbuzo passed away."

Mhloniphe quickly sneers at his twin.

"Somethings are better kept in the family. Now she's going to go around spreading the news." - Mhlo.

"So he is alive?" Nothando excitedly asks.

For months, they made everyone believe that Mbuzo died when in actual fact, they have no clue what happened to him or where he is.

Dalisu is missing as well.

No one answers Nothando, she keeps her

questions to herself and sits with her arms across her chest.

Just as Mkhetheni turns to look at Mhlo, someone runs in front of the car.

“Watch out!” Mhlo exclaims in shock.

The car abruptly stops.

“Who the fuck is that?” Mhlo asks, eyes fixed on the girl frozen in front of the car. She’s clearly trembling with fear, her face wet with tears.

“That’s Cashile’s cousin.” Nothando answers.

Rage coats Mhlo’s face, he storms out of the car, grabs Mbali by the hand and violently pulls her aside.

“Ouch!” Mbali cries, squirming in his hold.

“What the fuck is your problem? Are you trying to kill yourself again, little one?” He snaps.

More tears stream down her face, “I just found out that my uncle killed my husband, my father

and my baby.”

His brows knit in a frown, “You had a baby?”

This girl surprises him all the time, first he finds out she’s a young widow. Now she’s a widow and a mother?

“I was pregnant, and had a miscarriage.” She drops her head on his chest, her hands curling on his t-shirt and wails. “They killed my family.”

Mhlo frowns, his jaw ticks in rage. It takes him a while to wrap his arms around Mbali’s waist and lifts her up in a tight bear hug.

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CASHILE

I thought I’d have fun, I want to go home to be honest. Nkosana is sulking, the man has been giving me a cold shoulder. I bet his friends have

noticed.

I'm sitting at a table with snobbish model C's.

We have nothing in common, these are educated women. Some are doctors, some married to doctors and have something going on for themselves.

"We arrived last night from Paris. Eric wanted to fly us to Switzerland, I had to remind the husband that he's got surgeries to do." This is Eric the surgeon's wife, I forgot her name.

The other four ladies laugh in English, I don't see anything funny.

"What about you Cashile? What do you do for a living?" She's talking to me?

Great!

Why are they looking at me like that now?

"Like you clean people's houses?" Eric's wife asks, judging me with just a look.

“That was a joke, right baby?” Nkosana says behind me, and places a kiss on my cheek. I didn’t see him coming.

This man has not met Cashile Madlala.

“Baby these are my new friends, I can’t lie to them.” I say to Nkosana and turn to the women.

“Nkosana is a little ashamed of my profession. I am a house girl, I clean rich people’s houses for a living. If you girls need a helper, I’m here.”

Their faces change, I’m suddenly not welcomed here.

I look at Eric’s wife, “Take my number. 083...”

She makes a facial expression I can’t decipher.

“I think my husband is calling me.” She says, then leaves the table.

Her minions also scatter with their glasses of wine.

“What was that about? Are you trying to ruin my

reputation? Why would you tell them that you're a helper?" This man is quick to anger.

"Relax baby, I was joking. It's not my fault they can't take a joke."

He draws a long sigh, eyes browsing the crowded restaurant.

"Let's go sit for dinner," he walks with me to the table set for ten, some are already seated.

Nkosana hands me the menu, I'm starving. I want something filling.

"What are you going to have?"

I show him a meat platter, "I'm famished. I think I will also order a burger and chips."

"You can't order a burger and chips." He says dismissively.

"It's on the menu, why can't I?"

“Order something lighter baby, you will eat to your heart’s content when we get home.”

Hehe!

“I don’t have a burger waiting for me at home, Nkosana.” Why am I even whispering when he’s getting on my nerves?

“Okay, we will pass by McDonalds or Burger King. Just order something decent for now, they will think you eat like a cow baby, you’re already gaining weight.” He’s whispering all this nonsense to me so his lavish friends don’t hear.

“I am pregnant in case you forgot, besides, you asked me what I want to eat. I told you, now it’s a problem.”

I hate it when he sighs like I’m the problem.

“We are having a conversation Cashile, you don’t have to be upset. Your tone is getting harsh.”

“Are you teaching me how to talk now?”

“No, I’m teaching you manners. This is not how to act in front of people, especially people like my friends. They are doctors and CEOs.”

Fuck him and his friends, he thinks I give shit about them.

I nod and wait for the waitress to get to me.

“What would you like sisi?” She asks with a smile.

Argh, nonos maan. Such a beautiful woman.

“Hi dali. Do you have pap on the menu? I didn’t see it here.”

All eyes turn to me, they can go jump.

“Yes, we have pap. What would you like it with?”

“Amasi please. I would like two plates of pap. One with Amasi and the other with spinach.”

“We don’t have sour milk but I can make a plan

for you, I will talk to the chef. Is creamy Spinach okay?"

"Just make it without cream and put peanut butter in the spinach." I tell her.

"Cashile!" Nkosana whispers, I can hear annoyance in his tone.

He's probably thinking what his high profile friends are thinking. I see it on their faces.

"Wait baby, I'm still ordering." I push his hand off my lap.

"Sisi wami, do you have Mageu? I'm from the village born and raised and today I miss my mother. A cup would make me feel better."

These snobbish ladies giggle. I don't care, I'm going to be myself today.

"No we don't, but we have juice. Which one would you like?" She's such a kind waitress, I'm going to tip her.

“Orange juice is fine.” If I wasn’t pregnant, I was going to order umqombothi but I doubt they have traditional beer here.

Nkosana thinks he’s better than me, ordering steak and a salad. Fool.

“Can we talk for a minute?” He whispers to me as soon as the waiters leave our table.

His friends are mumbling words I can’t hear.

“I want to eat first, we will talk when we get home.” I don’t bother whispering my reply. I want his posh friends to hear.

He clears his throat and shuffles in his seat, he’s going to be strong.

I start a conversation with Eric because he’s sitting next to me, I like him. He’s a cool guy.

“How far are you?” He asks.

“Five months, going on six.” I rub my belly,

smiling to myself.

The baby hasn't kicked today, sometimes it goes days without kicking. It's always scary for me because I start thinking the worst.

"Pregnancy suits you, you should have seen Ruth when she was pregnant." He laughs.

So his wife's name is Ruth, she's staring at us right now. Maybe it's because I'm also laughing.

"If you want to do a photo shoot, contact me. I know someone, who knows someone." I know he's lying.

"Eric, come sit next to me." Ruth says, shooting daggers at me.

Eric is not my type.

"Not now honey." Eric brushes her off, she's going to explode.

I feel Nkosana grab my hand, then his breath on my ear.

“Are you trying to hurt me by flirting with Eric?”

I yank my hand back, I’m not going to talk to him.

Our food arrives, this lady is such a sweetheart.

I thank her, wash my hands and start with pap and spinach.

“At least use a fork,” Nkosana hands me a fork.

“Thanks baby,” I put the fork back on the table and continue eating with my hands.

The pap is extremely hot, I’m sweating.

“Yesis, this pap is hot.” I say out loud while kicking off my heels. I take my weave off and put it on my lap.

The women stop eating and look at me with wide eyes.

They haven’t seen anything yet.

I eat with one hand and fan myself with the

other.

“Cashile, your bra is showing.” Eric’s wife hates me, I just know it.

I turn to Eric.

“Can you tuck my bra inside my dress?” I ask Eric, as I push my shoulder towards. It’s just a bra strap.

He smiles nervously but does it anyway.

Nkosana puts his cutlery on the table and sits with arms crossed.

“Are you full?” I ask while shoving a hand full of pap inside my mouth.

I have seen angry men, this one is red with anger.

“You’re hurting me, Cashile.” He mumbles to me.

“I will buy you ice cream on the way home. You’ll be okay.” I tell him.

Shame, these are warm ups.

I gulp down my juice and... oops! I didn't mean to burp.

"You don't have table manners." Eric's wife says, her lady friends agree with her.

"Sorry black Barbie." I apologise.

They look at me like I was part of the crew that sentenced Mandela to twenty seven years in prison.

"Stop eating like you're starving, I'm never taking you anywhere." Nkosana whispers.

"Are you going to eat that?" I point at the steak on Nkosana's plate. He side eyes me and says nothing... so childish.

I take a piece of steak and eat.

"Will you at least eat properly, the food is not going anywhere?" Nkosana.

Now he doesn't keep his voice down.

“Maybe she grew up poor.” One of the ladies says.

I look at her while chewing steak, I shouldn’t have taken a big bite.

“You’re right, my family and I used to eat from one plate. Sometimes we would go days without food and go haunting for birds.”

“You ate birds? Oh my God!” Eric’s wife shockingly says.

“Best meat I’ve ever tasted.” I say.

Nkosana moves his chair back, I can see he wants to stand. If he thinks he’s going to drag me out of here, he has another thing coming.

I tap Nkosana’s shoulder, “Baby please pass me the toothpick.”

He got a toothpick because he ordered steak, he frowns at me before slowly passing me the toothpick.

There is nothing disgusting about picking my teeth, otherwise the restaurant wouldn't have included one.

Nkosana stands, "We should go."

I haven't eaten my pap and sour milk.

I wash my hands, stand, "I have a wedgie, please take it out for me."

He looks away when I push out my ass towards him.

Ohho! I take it out myself, then run the same hand over my nose. These people pull disgusted faces as if they never have their underpants caught between their buttocks.

Nkosana's eyes are bloodshot, I cup his cheeks and lean into his ear.

"Call me a slut again and I will show you your mother."

I grab my weave and heals from the floor and

walk away, bouncing like the boy I am while taking out the stubborn wedgie. I'm never wearing female panties again.

"Is that really your girlfriend?" That's definitely Eric's voice, he sounds amused.

"She's so embarrassing." One of the women comments.

Mission accomplished then.

"No... she's... my cousin." I hear Nkosana stutter.
I'm his cousin huh!

You know what? I'm not done with him.

I turn back around, time for round two. I'm going to finish what I started.

His eyes widen in panic, he runs to me yelling,
"Let me take you home mzala."

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[03/06, 15:51] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 69

MHLONIPHE

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“This is absurd, tell her to get in the back and I will drop her off at her father’s House.”

“What if she k!lls herself when she gets there? Look at the state she’s in.” Mhlo points over at Mbali.

Mkhotheni doesn’t understand that he needs to do this. He himself has no idea why, but he feels obligated to take care of Mbali.

“Mhlo I understand your generosity but that girl is a widow, you’re not allowed anywhere near

her.”

He throws a look at Mbali who’s leaning against the car, her head bowed and tears occasionally dripping to the floor.

Mhlo follows his brother’s line of sight, his jaw ticks again.

There’s something about her tears that’s not treating him well.

“I’m taking her home with me, wena go with Mbhebheni to the seer. I never wanted to tag along anyway, you forced me.” Mhlo says.

“I did not force you, I can’t be alone with her in the car. What if makaSbani finds out? She will think I’m seeing other women.”

Mhlo lightly chuckles, it’s mocking.

“Wele lami, you’ve been shagging other women in her absence. And chances of your baby mama moving on in America are likely very high.

Take my advice, find a woman to love. Indaba yakho and Sbani's mom ended the day she boarded that flight to the US." He's very blunt, there's no time for nice words with cherries on top.

Mkhotheni sighs.

Why is he frustrated?

"I'm calling an Uber." He takes out his phone from the pocket and begins tapping at it.

"Thanks, Little one and I will go back with an Uber. Wena no NomaRussia take the car." Mhlo says and briefly looks over at Mbali. Will her tears ever end?

"The Uber is for her, what's her address?"

Hai Mkhotheni maan!

"She's a widow, do you know the bad omen that will fall on you? You just got cleansed not so long ago." Mkhotheni explains when Mhlo

frowns at him.

“There’s no bad omen, it’s not like I’m sleeping with her. And don’t tell me about cleansing, we hijack cars just to put food on the table. We’re not clean.” Mhlo.

“It’s different and you know it’s just to get a head start. We’ll stop once we’re back on our feet.” Mkhetheni.

Mhlo shrugs, “Still. Just go, I’m taking Mbali with me.” He turns back to Mbali.

“Fine, she better not be sleeping in our house.” Mkhetheni and complaining.

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The Uber drops him and Mbali off at his house. Mbali was hysterical, he couldn’t let her go just like that.

He lets her walk through the gate first, she

enters and stops behind. When he turns, he almost bumps into her and frowns at her clumsiness but stops when he sees the tears on her face.

Mhlo sighs, he's not used to any of this.
Comforting a crying woman.

"Come," he takes her hand and takes a step but Mbali is frozen on the spot with her head bowed.

Must he beg her now?

"What is it Little one?" He's irritated.

"You said never to come to your house."

Haibo this child!

"I brought you here, you didn't come on your own accord. Your life is not a movie, stop acting. Let's go inside, so I can make you something to eat."

She does look like she needs a plate or two.

He hasn't seen her in months, avoiding her

wasn't so hard. Today just happened by chance.
“Sit over there, I will see what's in the kitchen.”
Mhloniphe says and leaves for the kitchen
before she can say anything.

There's nothing much really, they only buy groceries when they have to cook. It's a “wash and wear” type of thing.

There's some leftover grilled steamed bread and stew from last night, he warms it up and takes it to her with a fork.

“Thanks,” Mbali says.

She doesn't eat immediately, there are tears in her eyes. She hasn't stopped crying since they left.

Mhlo sits on a different couch, he looks at the plate, then at her.

“Eat little one.” He says softly, and gestures by

pointing at the plate with his head.

Mbali places the plate on the coffee table, “I’m not hungry.”

She’s crying again, covering her face with her hands. Mhlo lets out a sigh, under any circumstances, he’d be running away from this situation.

“Should I call your mother?”

She shakes her head.

Then she should stop crying.

“Something else to eat then?” He’s growing impatient.

“No,” Mbali says, weeping louder.

She rests her head on the armrest of the couch and sinks into sorrow and more tears.

Mhloniphe releases a long sigh as he stands. He joins her on the couch and grabs her wrists, the plan is to remove her hands from her face.

“Little one.” He mumbles softly, gently removing Mbali’s hands from her face.

“Look at me,” he says.

Mbali reveals her tear drenched face, “It hurts... my heart is broken... and I don’t know what to do.”

That’s an ugly cry right there.

“I know, I know.” He grabs her by her waist, lifts her up and sits her on his lap—his arms tightly wrapping around her. He’s rocking her back and forth, her cries seem to elevate. She’s inconsolable and hysterical.

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CASHILE

“What the hell was that?”

Yoh, I thought he'd wait until we leave this place, then scold me.

I look around the parking lot, we're not alone. There are people coming and going.

“Are you sure you want to do this here? Considering isdima sakho and stuff.”

He frowns, “I'm serious Cashile. Why did you embarrass yourself like that?”

“Embarrass myself? Baby, the mission was to embarrass you. I don't care about those people and what they think. You made me feel cheap and bad about myself, Nkosana. I'm gaining weight because I'm pregnant and you should understand that because you're a doctor.”

“I never said gaining weight was a bad thing,” he sounds defensive.

“Oh really?”

“Yes, I would never body sham you. Baby, I love you.” He comes for my hand, I shift back.

“I don’t think you know what love is. You’re always bringing me down with your words, you’re insensitive and uncaring. I don’t even know why I gave you a chance. Why am I with you Nkosana, huh?”

“Because you love me, we love each other.” he says. “Cashile you’re my...”

I cut in.

“I love you? How can I love a man who does not respect me? Didn’t your parents teach you manners?”

His face transitions into a frown, I think I pressed the wrong button. He walks away, he’s headed back to the restaurant. I don’t think that’s a good idea after what I did in there.

“Why are you walking away now?”

He stops and turns back, “Because you don’t respect my opinion. Cutting me off while I’m still talking is you saying my point of view is irrelevant. If that’s the case, then there is no need for me to be here. When you don’t respect my opinion, then I don’t have time for you.”

Yoh!

That was a mouthful, I feel tired on his behalf.

“That’s not what I was doing, whenever I’m with you, I become defensive because you’re always attacking me with harsh words. You don’t respect me, Nkosana.”

He tilts his head, deepening the frown on his face.

“What about what you did in there? There was nothing respectful about that.” He says.

“Fine, maybe we don’t respect each other. We should break up then.”

His eyes widen, “Why? What did I do?”

“You know what you did. Look, this relationship is starting to bore me. I am not happy with your constant nagging about my weight and how I should dress. We don’t value each other, I don’t want to be in a ‘each man for himself and God for us all’ type of relationship.”

I can’t go through another crappy relationship.

“I’m sorry, I will change.”

Yeah, that’s what they all say. He takes my hands into his and kisses my palms.

“I will improve my behaviour, just don’t leave me. I’m not like you Cashile, I was abandoned by my parents. Maybe I don’t know how to treat a woman, you are the first woman I have ever loved.”

Oh, he’s never told me this. I would have treaded lightly.

“I didn’t know, I’m sorry.”

He shrugs, and sighs in sadness.

“Yeah, my parents decided I wasn’t worth keeping. So they left to an orphanage.”

That’s a sad story.

“I want to go home.” I tell him.

“Okay, I will drive you home. We can talk tomorrow, today has been a long day.” He says, leading the way to the car.

Tomorrow I will break up with him nicely, since he didn't grow up like me

My phone rings on my way there.

I haven’t spoken to Mbali in months, sure I stayed with them but we are not close. She never got back to me about moving to Joburg.

“Hello.”

“They killed Thabiso and my father.”

She’s crying.

I guess she’s found out the truth, I don’t know how to handle this.

“Mbalí, where are you?”

“I’m with... Mhloniphe.”

Her reason for not wanting to come to Joburg.

“Does aunt know you are there? You can’t be crying at a man’s house and your mourning period is not over yet. Please tell me that Bakhe is there as well.”

She goes quiet on me.

“Mbalí!” I snap

“We are not doing anything wrong, I swear. He almost ran me over with a car, I think he felt bad so he brought me to his house.”

At this time of the night?

Nkosana hoots, he looks impatient. I gesture that he waits and turn away from his frowning face.

“Go home Mbali.”

“Mhloniphe will never take advantage of me, he is a good man. Just like bhut’ Mbuzo was. It’s so sad that he died.”

Why is she changing the topic?

Wait a minute...

“What did you say?”

I’m sure I didn’t hear right.

“I said Mhlo is a good man like...”

“You said Mbuzo died?” I cut in hastily.

Mbali is quiet again, my patience is dying. I will follow it if she doesn’t speak now.

And Nkosana is starting to annoy me with all that hooting.

“Mbali tell me where Mbuzo is.” I scream, tears quickly cover my vision. I feel my body shaking, I can’t breathe properly. It’s as if someone is clogging my breathing pipe.

“Sisi... he’s... Mbuzo died months ago. I thought you knew.”

This is heart break all over again, he will never stop breaking it.

“Mbuzo...” his name trembles out of my mouth.

Why is he so cruel?

Why would he die just like that?

Why didn’t anyone tell me? I missed his funeral, I...

Someone snatches the phone from my hand, Nkosana stands in front of me with rage on his face.

“Mbuzo again? When will you ever get over that man?” He slams my phone on the ground. In the

same space, a sharp pain ripples down my back and rushes to my lower abdomen. I clutch my belly, bending over and crying in pain.

I immediately feel Nkosana's hands on my back. "F#ck, you're bleeding." He says in panic.

My eyes pop out in shock and panic as I put a hand in between my thighs, there's a warm thick liquid... blood.

I can't lose this baby too.

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[03/06, 15:51] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 70

CASHILE

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Why do hospital rooms have blinding lights? I squint my eyes and browse the room, I'm at a private hospital. Nkosana better be covering the fees, I didn't ask to be brought here.

The ride to the hospital is vague, I was in pain and under a lot of stress. I remember Nkosana injecting me and my brain going to sleep. Now I'm waking up the next day in the hospital.

“Hi.” Nkosana softly says, standing from the chair he was sated on. He's in his doctor uniform.

“Before you say anything, I called Princess and spoke to Lulu. She's fine, Princess will take her to school.”

I get him but this thing of sleeping away from my baby... I honestly don't like it.

“What day is it?”

I don't trust him with these doses since he made me sleep for two days.

He gently smiles, "Relax, it's the next day. You were sleeping for less than eight hours."

I'm not relaxed, I hold my belly.

Fear is not a nice thing.

"The baby is fine, relax."

If he says relax one more time...

"Are you my doctor? I want to speak to a real doctor."

Did I mention how I don't trust his emotions?
Last night was not a good night, we broke up.
Well I broke up with him and he didn't want us to break up.

"Are you serious? Should I laugh?"

"I'm dead serious Nkosana, I don't think it's safe for you to be my doctor considering that..."

“Are you doubting my profession, Cashile?”

Kwasuka lokho!

“Can I speak to a real doctor insist, raising my brows at him. He nods, scoffing in surprise.

“I’m sorry, I mean another doctor. I know you would never put my baby and I at risk, it’s just that there are emotions involved and...”

“I will have you know, your situation is not life threatening. Bleeding during pregnancy is normal.” He says, sounding offended, probably by my choice of words.

“Not the way I bled. There was so much blood.” I tell him.

“Why would I lie to you? You stress too much, Cashile. I have been telling you from day one to take it easy.” He sighs, pushing his hands inside his coat. His eyes are narrowed, I see stress on his face.

“Oh, so now it’s my fault? Dude, you smashed my phone on the ground...”

“And I’m sorry, it’s just that I heard Mbuzo’s name and I snapped.”

He thinks that makes sense?

“So next time you will snap and hit me, right?”

His eyes widen, he’s suddenly offended.

Well, offense is taken, not given.

“I would never lay my hands on you, Cashile.”

He sits on the bed, exhaling once again.

I don’t want him near me.

“I’m afraid that I will never win your heart, you blatantly refuse to get over Mbuzo. We have been together for over three months. But we haven’t been intimate yet. You won’t let me touch you. Am I doing something wrong?”

“I’m pregnant.”

We had this topic two weeks after we started dating. He knows how I feel about it.

“So? Is that some kind of disease or something?” The way he asks this is very angering, I must say.

“I won’t sleep with you while I’m carrying Mbuzo’s baby and we broke up, it will never happen.” I tell him.

I will never change my mind about this.

He blinks, seemingly hurt.

“Why are you obsessed with him?” He snaps.

A male doctor walks before I tell him shit, this one is wearing scrubs. I think he can sense the tension in this room.

“Cashile right? Forgive me if I pronounced your name wrong.” He chuckles.

I force a smile, I can feel Nkosana’s eyes on me. Can he go and be angry away from me?

The doctor opens what I'm guessing is my file,
"We ran some tests and results show that you
took abortion pills."

THE MADLALAS

"And then wena? Waneka amasende eshlalweni
sami?" That's Madlala, asking Balungile why
he's sitting on his favourite couch.

Bakhe and Mfaniseni are on the two seater
couch.

"Don't you people work? I can't even fart in my
house, ngithi ngivula ifridge, you are there." He

stands in front of Balungile.

No one but him ever sits on this chair.

“Uncle, that’s baba’s chair.” Bakhe says.

Balungile being the good boy he is, moves to a different seat.

Madlala sits, crossing one leg over the other.

“What are you people doing here?” He asks, running his eyes through all of them.

Balungile clears his throat, shifting to the edge of the seat. Madlala squints his eyes at him when he attempts to speak, Balungile looks away.

Madlala is so brave because Nkululeko is not bothering him at this moment.

“Baba, we came here to let you know that your garage burnt down last night.” Bakhe says.

“So?” Madlala shrugs.

It's perfectly clear that he doesn't care about that shop, it hasn't been running for a long time now.

Bakhe frowns, "I thought you cared baba. You loved fixing cars."

"Exactly mfana wami. I loved fixing cars, money changed me. You know nawe mos, money changes a person. Give me money and you will never see me again."

"Money is the root of all evil, you became a witch because of money." Mfaniseni will never not have a big mouth.

"So? Were you going to pay me had I chosen a different profession? I can be anything I want to be. You don't complain when people become doctors and presidents. Poor Madlala dreams big and people suddenly have a problem." He says.

These people are getting on his nerves, really.

They came here to judge him.

Bakhe and Balungile exchange looks, it's bad.
Madlala has lost it.

"There's nothing to do but take them to a mad house." Mfaniseni is brave to make such decisions in another man's house.

Does he even have a house of his own?

"Take who? To where?" Madlala asks, frowning at his cousin.

"You need help baba, you are a danger to society and yourself."

This boy is not mannered.

"How dare you say your father is a danger? Who did I kill? I am living my best life with my wife. I am not going to a mad house."

"Baba please..."

"I said I am not going there." He snaps. "I want to see my baby Cashile. Take me to her."

"Khohlwa, forget it." Bakhe is suddenly agitated, he's shaking his head with a scowl on his face.

Madlala frowns at Bakhe, "And then wena? I said I want to see my daughter, take me to her. What is your problem?"

"You are not going anywhere near my sister."

"KaMadlala was born because I am fertile, I have sperms that know how to do their job. I'm not like you stabane ndini, ngiyindoda ephelele. I have children, two and I'm still going to give birth to more children. What about you? Show me one evidence, just one evidence that you are a real man." -Madlala.

Silence from Bakhe.

"Bafo no, you don't talk like that." Balungile politely scolds him.

"Don't tell me what to do in my house bafo. This boy is my son, I gave birth to him. But he can't even give me a single grandson, he's a disgrace

to the Madlala name.” –Madlala.

“That’s not a thing to say to your son.”
Mfaniseni adds.

“But am I wrong? The Madlalas are not infertile.
Why is he the only one without a child?” -
Madlala.

“It’s your doing bafo, you made your son
infertile.” Balungile shouts.

“Yeyi, ningazongibhedela mina. Don’t make me
mad, am I holding his pen!s captive or did I suck
his test!cles dry?”

Madlala is on his feet, yelling and pointing
fingers.

“I told MaNkosi not to name this boy
Buhlebakhe. What kind of a name is Buhlebakhe
anyway? My son has become gay because of
that. Istabane lesi, show me that you are a real
man. If you can’t have children with a woman,
then pick a dog from the streets. I don’t care, at

least I will know that my son is capable of making anything pregnant, even if it's an animal."

Bakhe is too calm for such a heated conversation. He slowly stands and walks out of the house without looking at anyone.

Balungile and Mfaniseni are shaking their heads in disapproval.

"You can't see Cashile, you can't see Cashile. Is Cashile his daughter?" Madlala complains his way to the kitchen where he finds MaNkosi cooking.

"Mas'khozi, give me water, I'm thirsty. That boy made me talk too much." Madlala says.

She frowns at him because, why would he call her that?

"Bakhe left, he ignored me when I asked what

was wrong.” She says, she doesn’t appear bothered though. Her head is half present, half away.

Madlala lets out a sigh, this woman talks too much.

He gets his own water, then goes out for some air just in time to see Nothando walking through the gate, he smiles widely.

“Baba,”

“Hawu suka madoda. The mother of my future children.”

Why did he have to be born in 1960? There was absolutely no reason for God to rush his birth.

“Ninjani baba.”

A wide smile appears, he’s rubbing his potbelly and chuckling to himself. His shy side has come out, or is he blushing?

“I’m fine ntokazi. To what do I owe this pleasure?”

“I don’t know if you have heard baba, my father passed away months ago.” Nothando reports.

Hayini!

Bab’Madlala puts his hands on his head and sobs like he’s lost his mother all over again.

“Baba!” Nothando pats his back to console him.

Madlala rests his head on her chest and weeps like a child.

“God why? Kodwa why bawo?”

“It’s okay baba,” she sounds confused.

Madlala can tell but he doesn’t care, he’s been wanting to press his head on this chest.

She had a busty chest back then like a pillow from Sheet street, now she’s as hard as pillows from Aziz. But Madlala doesn’t care, this is a beautiful woman and he’s lucky to be in her

arms right now.

Nothando terminates his happy place by gently pushing him off her.

He drops his eyes, “I’m sorry ntokazi, I got carried away. How could Sibiya go just like that?”

Nothando has become emotional, she wipes away a lone tear.

“It hasn’t been easy baba,” she says.

“God take us all, why did you leave us behind? We can’t live without Sibiya.” Madlala continues, he’s too caught up in his own feelings to care about Nothando.

When tears refuse to support his fake crying, he wipes his dry face and looks at Nothando.

“I’m sorry my lavo, what were you saying?”

He couldn’t hear her through all that crying.

“Nothing baba,” she says.

His eyes run all over her, there's a stink he can't shake.

"Did they cut water kini?" He asks.

Nothando presents a frown, she's utterly confused.

She's about to answer, but nope, Madlala is too busy talking. He looks over at the house.

"MaNkosi! We-Khanyisile!" He shouts for his wife, she appears through the kitchen door, her apron covered in flour.

"Yebo baba!"

"Prepare bathing water for Nothando. Ngathi akuhamanga kahle." He says, throwing his head to the side and spitting.

"Yebo baba," MaNkosi giggles and runs back into the house.

"I don't need bathing water baba." Nothando says.

“Don’t worry dali, we have detol and baby powder. You will be smelling like a new born baby when I’m done with you. Then we will talk about our wedding.” He takes her hand and drags her towards the house.

He stops when he hears shouting, the noise is coming from behind the house. He runs with Nothando in his grip and finds Bakhe pouring petrol around the main house. Balungile and Mfaniseni are pleading for him to stop.

“Then you say I’m crazy. What is this boy doing?” Madlala asks.

Seriously, this boy Bakhe needs a hiding.

Bakhe calmly turns to him and empties the remaining petrol on Madlala.

Nothando yanks her hand away in fright and runs for her life. Madlala is wiping the petrol off his face, it burns like hell.

He can hear Balungile and Mfaniseni begging Bakhe to stop. When he opens his eyes, Bakhe has a burning lighter in his hand. His eyes are bloodshot with rage.

“Wenzani?” Madlala’s voice shakes.

“I would rather be fathered by a dog than a man like you.” Bakhe says and throws the burning lighter at Madlala’s feet.

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500+ comments... 15 shares

[03/06, 15:51] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 71

BAKHE

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Nothando approaches with a bucket full of water and empties it on Madlala. The fire hadn't gone up to his knees.

It was a close call, but she's angered Bakhe with her forwardness. He glares but says nothing to her.

MaNkosi comes running and goes straight to her son to check if he's okay.

Trembling, Madlala drops to his knees crying, "Cishe ngafa."

He keeps saying.

"Bakhe, don't play with fire. You will hurt yourself, Khehla. Let mami see." She starts blowing his fingers.

But Bakhe's gaze is on his father, his anger hasn't been quenched. Madlala's words are on repeat in his head.

"Oh my baby," MaNkosi cups his face.

Bakhe gives her a brief look with furrowed brows, “Who is my father mami?”

Her eyes widen with shock.

He doesn’t care, he needs the truth now because there is no way that Madlala is his father.

“Kehla what are you saying?”

He looks back at Madlala, “This man cannot be my father. No father treats his children like this. Tell me who my father is and I will go look for him.”

“Usuyahlanya Kehla? You are insulting your father.”

“Yhii! Yhii! Cishe ngafa.” Madlala is lost in a near death experience, his hands are on his head and he’s shaking.

“Ngiyahlanya mami? Am I crazy? You people do not know the amount of damage you have

caused. I have to start from scratch at the age of 30 Mami, while my age mates are far in life.”

“Ndodana, life has no time frame.” Balungile and always wanting to be good as his name says.

“Cha unkel, don’t give me a motivational speech. We all know why my life is the way it is. This man thinks I can’t have kids, he thinks I am not man enough to make a woman pregnant. Tell me why I should have a child when I have nothing to offer it? Why should I bring a child into this world to suffer? It’s not that I’m infertile, no woman has ever carried my child for more than three weeks and it’s his fault. He kills my babies.” He sniffs, but there are no tears in his eyes—just anger.

“Bakhe, lower your voice. You do not speak to an elder like that.” Balungile says.

“Ubaba does not deserve my respect. Yasin, I

quit. I quit this family and everything that has to do with it. If it wasn't for uncle Nkulu, I would change my surname." He clicks his tongue and walks away.

"MaNkosi, cishe ngafa yooh!" Madlala is still in shock, but Bakhe doesn't care.

He calls Mhloniphe on his way to catch a taxi, there's a lit cigarette between his fingers.
Mhlo's phone rings unanswered.

Bakhe calls Njabulo instead.

"Ntwana."

"Where is Mhlo?"

"Home I think, is everything okay? You don't sound good."

"Ngi sharp mfethu, sho." He hangs up and flags an incoming taxi.

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MHLONIPHE

He wakes up entangled in the same bed sheets with a petite young woman. The last time he woke up in the arms of a woman, he became a father nine months later.

He's always been part of the fuck-boys association after that, not that he gave up on women after Bandile's mom. He just wasn't looking for love.

Now this... this feels different and wrong, he's more than half her age.

"Little one."

You don't whisper if you want to wake someone up. But here's Mhlo, speaking underneath his breath.

Her head is resting on his arm, she must have

been sleeping on it for hours because it feels numb.

“Little one wake up,” he projects his voice this time.

Mbali shuffles a little and turns while still in deep sleep.

She lands too close to his face that their lips touch.

Mhlo’s eyes bulge, he’s freaked out and his heart does a tiny jump, but he doesn’t move. This is awkward, he should have jumped out of bed.

Mbali mumbles in her sleep before her orbs slowly open, she looks at him with squinted eyes.

Slowly, Mhlo moves his lips from hers. He doesn’t go too far though, they are still breathing in each other’s faces with their eyes locked.

He finds himself caressing her cheek and leaning over to press his lips on hers, a tingling sensation runs through his body. Mbali closes her eyes as he slowly works his way to a gentle kiss. His lips moving against hers with soft urgency.

His arms wrap around her, pulling her close. They are lost in the moment, everything else has ceased to exist.

Eventually, their lips begin to part. Mhlo's eyes are bulging again as if he was possessed when he kissed her.

He hastily sits up from the bed, "Get ready, I'm taking you home."

"Mhlo..."

"Why did you sleep here anyway? I told you not to fall asleep." He interjects, irritation evident in his voice.

He's out of bed and pushing his feet inside his

morning slippers.

“Today is my last day of mourning.” Mbali says like it’s important he knows.

He side eyes her, she’s sat up from the bed.

She is a beautiful young woman, mourning clothes and all. But what they just did can never be repeated.

“Get up little one.” He begins walking towards the bathroom and stops at the sound of her voice.

“I don’t have to stay away from you anymore.”

Mhlo swiftly turns to face her, “Do you think that’s why I told you to stay away from me? Because you’re in mourning?”

“Yes, am I wrong?”

He scowls, “Little one, surely you remember our conversation from the day I chased you out of my house. You are a child, I don’t know what

you think will happen between us but whatever it is, cancel it. I am not the man for you.”

He proceeds with his walk to the bathroom and shuts the door behind him.

He takes a quick shower, the plan is to take Mbali back to her house before 10am.

When he comes out of the bathroom, she's made the bed and seated on it.

“I will bath at home.” She tells him, he shrugs and walks out of the bedroom.

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CASHILE

“You tried to induce a miscarriage.” The doctor says.

He should be asking, not telling me because, why would I want to kill my baby?

“I have no reason to be taking abortion pills doctor? I don’t even know what they look like.”

He’s looking at me suspiciously. I’m not sure if he is allowed to be judging me, still, I’m innocent.

“Pregnancy is not easy and...”

Is he continuing with his assumptions?

“Awume doctor, don’t even go there. I love my baby okay, I would never.” I snap at him.

This doctor thinks I tried to kill my own baby.

“Run the tests again.” Nkosana orders, throwing daggers at him.

He looks equally upset.

“It must be from the food you ate, then.” The doctor says.

“I was at a work function at a restaurant. The food was prepared by a chef.” I tell him.

“Those people don’t know you, it’s not possible that someone in the kitchen put the pills in your food.” Nkosana says.

I don’t care at this point, I want my baby to be fine.

“Am I going to lose my baby?” I ask the doctor.

I can’t even imagine the thought.

“No, but the baby is at a risk of gaining development delay when it’s born.”

I am not a fan of doctors, can’t he just explain everything at once without me having to gasp in shock and dig him for clarity?

“Please tell me that is not a bad thing.”

“It means the baby will have a hard time staying balanced, it might have difficulty holding its head or neck steady.” Nkosana explains.

I refuse to accept that, not with my baby.

“Is that guaranteed doctor? I can change my diet and exercise, please, there must be something you can do to prevent that.” I plead.

“It’s not guaranteed yet, it’s a good thing you came in earlier. Chances are very slim, just watch what you eat.” -Doctor.

I have been watching what I eat. I can’t imagine who would want to hurt my baby.

The doctor tells me I can go home, then exits the room.

“I will go to the restaurant and investigate.” Nkosana says.

“No one knows me there, I don’t think that’s where I was drugged.” It’s impossible, it was my first time at the restaurant after many years.

“We don’t really know that and we have to look

at all possibilities. Did you prepare your own food today?" -Nkosana.

I see where he's taking this.

"You think Princess did it?" I ask.

He shrugs, "I don't know. But we have to look at all angles."

Princess is a sweetheart, she's never given me a reason to doubt her. But I won't argue with this man, I'm not in the mood really.

Nkosana sits on the bed and rubs my belly.

"The baby will be okay," he says.

I should believe him since he's a doctor but he's not talking to me as a doctor but someone who has feelings for me.

"Can I borrow your phone? I want to make a call back home."

His face changes, "Who do you want to call?"

“Mbuzo’s brother, I need to know why they didn’t tell me about his death.”

I had every right to know, I was married to the man.

“My phone is in the car,” he stands. “Get ready, I will drive you home. I brought you changing clothes, they are in there.”

He points at a room divided by a curtain.

I push myself to a sitting position, “You owe me a phone, Nkosana.”

I still can’t believe he broke my phone.

I don’t know exactly what that sigh means, but I spot regret in his eyes.

“I’m really sorry I acted that way, I will buy your phone today.”

He better.

He helps me out of bed and takes me to the room. I change into a maternity dress and

sandals. Not my style of dressing, pregnancy will humble you for sure.

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I'm not in pain or anything, but this man is holding on to me as if I will fall. It's a long way to the exit, but I can make it on my own.

"Wait here, I'll bring the car around." He says and leaves me by outside the door. The car is parked too far from here.

"Thembalami." That voice... it has my heart jumping in my chest. My breath catches as I slowly turn and...

Oh my God, it's him.

He's smiling at me, I hesitantly smile back because, how is he here? He looks expensive, a collard white shirt that does justice to his biceps, black tight fitting formal pants and

white sneakers.

He looks alive and healthy and... is he glowing?

I'm staring at him in total shock, his smile widens as he starts walking towards me while waving.

My hand slowly goes up, I'm hesitantly waving back. I can't believe I'm looking at the father of my child right now.

He's alive.

His eyes move past me along with his body, my eyes follow his movement as I turn my head to see where he is headed. He opens his arms and some stylish, Faith Nketsi wannabe throws herself in his arms.

"Hi baby," I hear her say.

But why was he looking at me?

He died and came back cross eyed because, how did he not see me when he was looking

right at me?

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[03/06, 15:51] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 72

CASHILE

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“Mbuzo!”

He’s walking away with her in his arms, giggling and whispering God-knows what to each other. He’s never held me like that...

Relax Cashile, this is no time to be jealous. I need to find out what is going on.

“Mbuzowakhe Xaba!” I lift my voice this time, taking careful steps towards them.

Why is he not stopping? It’s as if I’m a ghost in the land of the living.

I’m so confused, if he were Mbuzo, he would have turned when I called out to him.

“Nonkosi wait.” I yell, sounding stupidly desperate.

Thank God, I’m the only one out here, people would think I am not well upstairs.

He stops with his lady friend and turns.

Dammit, I know Mbuzo and that frown on his face. That’s him, the father of my child.

The lady is frowning too, they both look confused.

“Stop!” I wave them over, picking up my pace.

I’m trying not to look jealous of how she’s clinging on to him like he’s the best thing since

90's R&B music.

I'm breathless by the time I get to them, I swear
I will never let a man get me pregnant again.

I don't remember his aura being this heavy.

His mere presence makes the hairs on the back
of my neck stand, my heart begins pounding
against my ribcage.

His eyes are staring into me, I knew what I was
going to say but suddenly, I'm speechless.

We're looking at each other—me with wonder
and him... well he's cold and indifferent.

"Can we help you?" The lady asks, showing me
her perfect white teeth.

Nxa!

Is that Chanel Coco I smell on her? That
fragrance is the price of my salary.

She's wearing a black figure-hugging jumpsuit,
their shoes are matching. I mentally roll my

eyes because, what the actual fuck?

“Hello!” The lady waves her hand in my face.

Shit! I was staring.

I look at Mbuzo, he looks just as confused and inquisitive as the lady in his arms.

“Why did you stop us?” She asks.

I don’t look at her, I’m here for this streetlight with muscles.

“Mbuzo, you walked past me like you don’t know me. I know we ended on a rough patch but have a heart ndoda. Are you still bitter?” If he is, then this would be the longest grudge ever.

His eyebrows kiss, “Do I know you?”

Did he just...

“Is that a trick question?” I chuckle nervously.

They look at each other in confusion, then at me.

“I have never seen you in my life ma’am.”

Ma’am? I don’t know if I should laugh or walk away.

“Does Cashile Madlala ring a bell?” I ask.

The blank stare Jehova!

“We were once married and...”

“No, sisi. You are mistaken, this man is my fiancé. He’s not who you think he is.”

I don’t look at her because I am not talking to her.

“Mbuzo, you know me right? Tell her.” Fuck this desperation in my voice.

He shakes his head, “I’m sorry but I have never seen you before.”

He turns and is walking away with her.

“The last time I saw you, you were behind a police van. How did you get to Joburg?” I shout

after them.

He stops and looks back at me, she's staring too.

She clearly hates me.

"Ma'am, I have never seen you before." He says.

"That's exactly what I said to you when you were in the police van. This is payback right? You're trying to hurt me, aren't you?" I ask him.

The frown on his face deepens he looks irritated.

"We-sisi, I do not know you. I am not who you think I am. Leave us alone before I call the police."

"Yeah, this is harassment." The lady jumps in.

I hate how she's looking at me.

They turn back and begin walking away, my stomach drops. I'm frozen on the spot, looking and feeling like an idiot. I swear that is Mbuzo.

A car hoots behind me, I turn and see Nkosana's car driving this way. He stops in front of me, I get in.

"What happened? Why did you move from the spot?"

I'm not going to tell him, he gets worked up when I mention Mbuzo. I will have to call Mhloniphe or Mkhetheni and tell them that their brother is alive.

"Who were those people?"

"They wanted directions to Mall of the South." I lie through my teeth.

He makes conversation on the way home, but my mind is too occupied with thoughts of Mbuzo.

A call from Thuli breaks my trail of thoughts, she's calling on his phone. It's on his lap.

He looks at me, then shrugs his shoulders.

“Why is she calling my phone?” He’s irked.

“You broke mine remember?” I answer.

“Let me make a stop at the mall and get you a phone.”

That’s the nicest thing he’s ever said to me thus far. I’m going to do a sim swap as well.

I take his phone and answer Thuli’s call.

“Mfazi!”

“I’ve been trying to get a hold of you, please tell me that you are okay.” She sounds worried, I guess she’s been informed.

“I am fine, I’m on my way home.”

“And the baby? I was at your place, Princess told me what happened.” She adds.

“We are both fine, don’t worry about us.”

“What happened to your phone? I thought we

were friends, Cashile. Why would you keep something like this from me? I worry about you, okay."

I know she does.

I apologise a million times, I am not keeping things from her on purpose. There's just so much going on in my life right now.

"How about you come over my house, we'll watch movies and talk." I don't feel like company but Thuli's presence is refreshing, she is that friend I can always count on.

"How about you come over mine, Lucas is bringing the brat over today. I want to be here when he arrives." She says.

I have never met a woman who calls her child "brat." Lucas is her baby daddy. They are co-parenting.

"Okay, see you later then." I hang up.

This one keeps stealing glances, he's pulling in at The Zone's parking lot. I hide his phone under my thigh.

"Are you coming with?" He asks.

"No, you go ahead. I will do a sim swap at home."

He takes his wallet, opens the front and back windows, then leaves.

I immediately dial Mhlo's number, I know it by heart from the days I would call him and be sent straight to voicemail.

"Hello!" He's answered.

"It's Cashile."

He goes quiet, which proves to me that he's been avoiding me on purpose.

"Did you block my number? I haven't been able to get through to you."

Silence!

Anyway, "Mbuzo is alive. I just saw him but he denied knowing me."

"He's alive?"

Oh, now he can speak?

"Yes, what happened to him, Mhlo? Why did you guys keep things from me? You probably know that he is alive and that he is here. Why am I being kept in the dark? Why would you make me think that he died?"

I'm upset actually.

"I didn't do that, dade. Mbuzo disappeared months ago, we didn't know where he was and I didn't tell you because I was afraid you'd be stressed. It's not good for the baby." He says.

I won't even ask how he knows about the baby, it's my bad luck that he's best friends with my brother.

“So, what’s the next step? Are you going to come and see him?” I ask.

“Did you get his number?”

“No, he didn’t even give me the time of day. I thought you should know that your brother is alive and he’s pretending to have forgotten me,” I snort because I still cannot believe the audacity that man has.

“There’s probably an explanation, he would never deny knowing you.”

Yeah right and I know who created God.

I’m not stupid.

Eish!

Nkosana is coming back, I make Mhlo promise to call me when he arrives, then disconnect the call.

Nkosana gets in and hands me a plastic bag with a new phone inside.

“That was quick.”

“There was no queue,” he’s frowning as he says this while looking at his phone.

“Who was on the phone?” He asks.

“No one.”

I put it on the seat and focus on opening my new phone.

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We arrive home, he wants to come in with me.

“I have a date with Thuli,” I say and he looks disappointed.

“You said we will talk today.”

“I know, Nkosana but my friend needs me. I will call you,” will I really?

“What about Princess? We still have to ask her about the abortion pills.”

I get him but I also feel like this is an excuse to come in.

“I will deal with Princess, I don’t want to put her under pressure. That’s how she will feel if we’re both interrogating her.” I tell him.

He sighs and leans in to kiss me, I look away, his lips land on my cheek.

“I love you,” he says.

I nod and exit the vehicle, he waits for me to get in before driving away.

Princess opens the door for me and smiles,
“Sisi, I was worried. Welcome home.”

“Thank you, Princess,” I stride in. “Where is my baby?”

“Crèche, I can go and get her if you like.”

“No it’s fine, don’t worry about it. Can I talk to you for a second?”

She's suddenly worried.

"The doctor found traces of abortion pills in my system, I didn't take them. He thinks someone must have put them in my food."

God, I feel bad for doing this.

"And you think it was me?" There's sadness on her face.

"I'm only asking, Princess. I almost lost my baby."

She drops her face, is she crying? Oh God, she's crying.

"It wasn't me, sisi. I would never do that to you, you have to believe me."

I think I do, I don't want to interrogate her further.

"It's okay, it's just a check-up. You can go back to work."

I head to my room and take a bath, once I've freshened up, I call the call centre and request to do a sim swap which doesn't take me long.

I text Thuli, she says she's at a hair salon. We should meet there, I wanted to wait for Lulu then take her with me.

I will fetch her from school myself, that's what I tell Princess before leaving.

I'm taking a few days off from weaves, my head needs to breathe. I just need to deal with these unruly cornrows.

I have a car, but I'm not driving it. I don't know why getting into Juba's car triggers a moment I wasn't present in. His accident— somehow I'm afraid I will crash if I drive his car.

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I pass by KFC and buy myself a Zinger fully

loaded box meal, with extra zinger sauce. The hotter, the better.

I find Thuli at the salon, the hair dresser is almost done installing her weave.

“Mfazi!” Thuli greets. “You look like there’s a storm coming. What did I say about leaving the house looking like a hobo?”

I laugh as I take a seat, funny how today I am not offended.

“At least I’m wearing a dress.”

“You still need to slay that pregnancy, you’re a beautiful woman, Cashile. Start showing off.”

I don’t feel beautiful though.

“I’m doing my best,” I say, with my mouth full.

KFC has its days when it tastes really good and today is one of them.

“Don’t you want to do something about those cornrows? I will pay for you.” Thuli says.

“What?” I ask.

“Do you have natural hair?” Her hair dresser asks.

I nod.

“Dreads would look good on you.” The hair dresser says.

“No thanks, I am not a fan of hair pieces.”

“I mean dreadlocks, lock your hair. They will look good on you.” She continues.

“Eww! That’s gross, don’t listen to her mfazi. You’re a boy already, we don’t need to make it worse.” Thuli interrupts.

But you know what?

“I will do it.” I say, it will be less of a hassle for me. I don’t really care about hair.

Thuli’s eyes go into shock, she won’t understand.

“You’re lucky I love you, or I would have disowned you.” She says.

We spend hours in the salon, dreads take hours to complete. I take numerous bathroom breaks that annoy the hair dresser, at the same time keeping Thuli posted about me and Nkosana.

I don’t want to tell her about Mbuzo yet, she knows there was a guy but I never told her who.

“I never liked his ass, but you can’t leave him.”

What does she mean I can’t leave Nkosana?

“I thought you would be happy.” I say.

“I’m thinking about you babes, I just think he’s afraid of losing you to your past that’s why he’s acting the way he is. You said it yourself, he grew up without parents. Maybe he’s afraid of rejection.” Thuli says.

I am beside myself with shock.

“Nkosana is a lot of work, I’m too pregnant for his drama.” I’m looking at her through the mirror, she’s sitting behind me, next to a little girl who’s waiting for her turn.

“You’re too pregnant to be single, who is going to service you when you have an itch down there?” She gives me a naughty smile.

“What are sex toys for? I will service myself.”

She laughs, along with the hairdressers.

“A spiritual spouse?” Thuli says.

“There’s no such thing as a spiritual spouse,” the lady doing my hair says. Her friends agree with her.

I agree as well.

“What if I’m thinking about Maps Maponyane while f!ngering myself? Does that mean he’s my spiritual spouse?” I ask Thuli.

“That’s not how it works, you simply attract

demons when you m*sturbate. You're having sex with demons." She says.

I find it hard to believe it.

"Then that demon must be doing one hell of a good job," I say and cause chaos with laughter.

These ladies are loud, and it's a full house.

Thuli smiles, while shaking her head.

"I'm serious babe, you need emotional support from the other gender while pregnant. Who's going to feed your cravings in the middle of the night when you can't get out of bed?" -Thuli.

I sigh, she's making this hard for me.

"And you do know that at some point, you will need a d!ck inside of you. I've been pregnant before and when you're h0rny, you need the real thing." She continues.

I can't believe we're having such a conversation in front of a kid.

The door is pushed open, I see the tall figure
then his face.

It's Mbuzo with that lady of his, she's laughing
at something he whispers in her ear.

Mxm!

Are they always so clingy?

His eyes meet mine, he frowns, I frown back. He
looks at the lady and kisses her cheek, she's
giggling. I'm going to throw up.

“Lona!” That's Thuli, hugging the slay queen
Mbuzo walked in with.

What is going on?

“You made it mzala?” Thuli asks, with a wide
smile.

“Mzala as in cousin, or friend?” I ask Thuli.

She looks at me, Lola's smile disappears when

she sees me. She remembers me from earlier.

Thuli puts her arms around Lola, "Cashile, this is Lola my cousin and her fiancé Joshua."

No way!

"Joshua as in uncle Joshua Door?" I ask.

But his name is not the shocking part, Thuli actually knows them?

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I tried to make the chapter short and failed dismally, that's why it's late.

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[03/06, 15:51] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 73

CASHILE

“Who is this?”

I've never been annoyed by anyone in my life like I am with this woman. Seriously, does she have to give me that look?

“This is Cashile, my best friend. Didn't I tell you about her?” Thuli says.

For a second there, I am not okay with her talking about me to this woman.

“No,” Lola says, eyeing me disgustingly.

Thuli notices, “What's wrong? You two know each other?”

“Yes,” Lona says.

I don't know why I look at Mbuzo, he's seated on the visitor's chair with a magazine on his lap.

He lifts his eyes to me, is he always going to be frowning?

“Your best friend thinks Joshua was her man, she harassed us earlier on at the hospital.” - Lona.

Harassed?

I find myself laughing out loud.

Salon gossip is a thing, it’s dead quiet in here. This hairdresser lady has turned down the radio.

“Cashile, is that true?”

“Are you seriously asking me that, Thuli? Do I look like the type that would go around harassing people?” I innocently ask.

“Then what was that back there?”

Hau this Lona chick!

“I recognised Jay-Jay over there and...”

Mbuzo’s eyes narrow at me, while Lona snaps,

“That’s not his name.”

“Sorry, Joshua. I recognised Joshua, he looks like the man I was once married to.” I say this while looking Mbuzo in the eye.

As for that frown on his face, I don’t know.

“Well, it’s not him. People look alike, look it up.” Lona says with an attitude. Not only is it in her voice, but all over her body.

She’s too pretty to be this mean.

“Not him. There can only be one Mbuzo, I know him okay. I have seen that man’s nakedness. He’s been inside me more times than I can count.”

Her eyes widen, she charges at me. Thuli holds her back, Mbuzo is on his feet in a second and pulling Lona back.

“Calm down, thembalami.” He says, caressing her cheeks.

“Did you hear what she said? You’re my fiancé, that’s...”

“Lona please, stop. Cashile is pregnant, handle with care.” Thuli says.

She can be dramatic, I know I can be ten times dramatic. I spin my chair around to show them my pregnancy, while my hands rub my belly. I can’t help the smirk on my face.

“Handle with care, darling.” I say to Lona.

“Cashile!” Thuli chides me, giving me a scolding look akin to the one my mother used to give me. I feel his eyes on me and turn mine to him. Only to find him staring at my belly, when he feels me staring, he quickly looks away.

“Sorry babe. You know me, I don’t like it when people make me feel like my mind is not working right. I know what I know, this man is not Joshua. He’s Mbuzowakhe Xaba, born and raised in KwaNyuswa. We were once married

and..."

"That's enough, you're upsetting my fiancé."

Mbuzo says, still holding Lona back as if I will practise martial Arts on her.

"Mfazi, how come you didn't tell me about him?"

What is Thuli asking me now?

"I've said bits and pieces, I just didn't want to dwell in the past. This man hurt me in the worst possible way."

He doesn't look at me, his eyes and hands are all over Lona.

I think I'm done here, I will throw up my food if I continue watching them.

"Let's go to another salon." Mbuzo says to Lona.

"No baby, you already paid. I will stay, I won't let her get to me." Lona says.

I look at Thuli, she doesn't look impressed.
She's frowning at Mbuzo and Lona.

They are holding hands as they stride to sit down, stupid me is watching them through the reflection of the mirror. They are too lovey-dovey, too much PDA.

I look away, it's not easy seeing him with another woman.

It feels like our breakup was just yesterday.

Thuli comes closer and whispers, "Babe, are you okay?"

"Yes, why wouldn't I be?" I ask.

"You have unshed tears in your eyes."

I'm not crying, I don't even feel emotional.

"Usisi is pulling my hair, it hurts." I make an excuse because I don't know why there are tears in my eyes.

I am over Mbuzo, I've been over him. At least I think I am.

I want to prove that he is still alive, that the man over there is none other than Mbuzo.

"Are you sure that's him? The man you were once married to?" Thuli mumbles.

The people in here have gone back to minding their business.

"I know him Thuli, I know how his presence feels like. I would recognise him even in my sleep. It's him, I have no doubt about it."

"But Lona has been with that guy for a while now, over six months I think." She says.

"This whole six months I was with you mfazi and you never told me about him." I confront her.

"That's because I didn't know who he was, I only met him two weeks ago at a family gathering.

Lona introduced him as her fiancé.” That fiance word gets to me.

“What does he do?” I ask, my eyes on Mbuzo.

Their hands are intertwined, I can’t make sense of what’s happening.

Is he really in love with her?

“He’s into Crypto wha-what. I’m not sure, I don’t pay attention to people’s men.” She says.

I sigh out loud in an attempt to get rid of the heavy feeling in my heart.

“Listen, how about I invite Lona and Joshua for dinner at my place tonight. You will come along too but I won’t tell her. That way, you will get a chance to talk to him.” Thuli says.

I don’t think I want to be in the same place with those people, the way this Lona person is all over him, is disturbing.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea. I didn’t sleep at

home last night, Lulu must be feeling neglected.”

“Then bring her with, she will play with the brat. Come on, it will only be for a few hours. It’s the only way you can find out the truth, I doubt Joshua will say anything with Lona around. I will create an opportunity for you too to be alone. You can bring Nkosana just for control, so you don’t seem like a crazy stalker.” She lightly laughs.

The thought of being alone with Mbuzo in a room makes my stomach churn.

“Done.” The hairdresser says.

She’s plaited the dreadlocks, I can’t tell if they are thick or not.

“The rows are a bit soft, I figured you’re pregnant so let me tighten it. My grandmother says a pregnant woman should never plait her

hair, you are tying your pregnancy.”

Says the woman who convinced me to braid my hair. Money truly is the root of all evil.

“It’s not bad mfazi, we’ll just work with a weave for now. I don’t want you looking like a pregnant boy.” Thuli says, actually making me laugh away the stress I’m under.

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THE MADLALAS

MaNkosi is hard at work in the kitchen, making seven colours as per her husband’s request. Balungile was kind enough to give him money for groceries.

“There are people coming,” is what he said to her.

A few have arrived and have been made to sit under a tree with drinks and snacks, Nothando was also invited. The theme is black.

“Don’t dirty your clothes MaNkosi. People will talk, you need to look presentable.” He says to her, hugging her from the back.

MaNkosi blushes, it’s not every day where her husband shows his romantic side.

“You still haven’t told me what the occasion is, baba.” She closes the pot of Chakalaka and turns to face him with a smile on her face.

“It’s a surprise,” he taps the bridge of her nose with his finger.

She giggles like a high school little girl.

“I’m going to check on the preparations.” He tells her then walks out.

He’s in the little forest behind the house with

some boys he gathered from the neighbour, excavating a hole big enough to fit a human.

“Dig further bafana, I want it at least three feet deep.”

Measurements are not his thing, he’s not sure how deep is three feet. His ancestors will tell him.

“Hello!” Someone shouts from the front of the house.

“Don’t stop,” Bab’Madlala tells the boys, then goes to check on the guests.

Balungile and his wife are the last to arrive.

“Bafo, welcome.”

They don’t do hugs, but Madlala throws his arms around his brother.

Is he sniffing? Something must have gone into his eye, he’s rubbing them with his head bowed.

“What’s wrong Madlala?” Balungile asks.

“Losing a child is not easy bafo, MaNkosi and I are grieving.” He says.

Balungile and MaGumede glance at each other.

Who has died now?

“You lost a child? Who?” Balungile asks.

“I will be back,” Madlala says.

He’s going back inside the house, goes straight to the bedroom.

There is a big picture frame of Bakhe on the bed, he walks out with it pressed to his chest.

MaNkosi is with him.

“Can everybody gather behind the house?”

Madlala announces, takes his wife’s hand and heads to where the boys were excavating.

They are done digging the hole, it’s not as big as he wanted but it will make do.

“What is going on Bafo?” That’s Balungile, sounding confused.

“Are you going to perform a ritual in front of us?” Balungile’s wife hates being here and she’s not hiding it.

Madlala chooses to ignore them, he looks back at Nothando.

“MaSibiya, please come stand next to me.”

Nothando joins him, she has no idea what is happening, but she’s comfortable around him.

She stands on his left hand side, MaNkosi is on the other side. Everyone is facing the empty hole.

Madlala holds Bakhe’s picture up and starts a song at the top of his voice.

“Amalanga awafani, lojika nalevili. Iyho, iyho mma. Umdali ubhekile, izolo bewu nathi, namhla awusekho. Kuyomele si’adapt impilo entsha. Usathane unemilingo, nami

ukewangilinga.”

It's a funeral song.

Shock hits everyone, MaNkosi realizing what's going on and laments.

“Cha baba, no. Not my son, you can't do this to my son.” She's screaming like a mad woman.

“Bafo stop this madness, Buhlebakhe is not dead. What is this?” Balungile shouts.

“He is dead to me and to the Madlala family. You heard what he said bafo, he denounced me and the family name. He is dead to me and we are going to bury him today.”

“This is an abomination, you are going to bring bad omen upon the child.” Balungile's wife says.

Her arms are around a hysterical MaNkosi.

Madlala is frustrated, these people don't get him and they never will.

“Listen here, all of you. Today is Buhlebakhe

Madlala's funeral, we as a family are going to bury every memory we have of him inside this hole and we will move on with our lives like he never existed."

There's chaos, and grumbling and mumblings.

"Angeke! Not my son, I will not let you do this to my son, Madlala." MaNkosi is beside herself with rage.

But she's talking to the wrong person, he doesn't care. He turns back to the hole and continues singing.

"Wababiza bonke uNoah. Wabakheli' nqanawe, wathi imvula iyeza." (Noah gathered them all. He told them he built an ark. He said the rain is coming.)

"I want a divorce," MaNkosi says.

This puts a stop to his bad singing.

"What?"

“You have killed me, baba. There is nothing left of me, how can you bury my son while he is still alive?”

“Alive where, MaNkosi? Bakhe is...”

MaNkosi walks away crying before he finishes his sentence, the women go after her.

Well, that was quick.

They haven’t grown old together and she’s giving up just because of a small funeral. These men are judging him, he judges them back with a stare.

He looks at Nothando, “Awufuni sidlale ubaba no mama. MaNkosi will be our domestic worker.”

That’s a strange way to propose marriage, asking her if she wants to play house.

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[03/06, 15:51] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 74

BAKHE

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He's the kind that laughs first in a room full of people and makes people laugh without even trying. His extroverted personality has helped him through the toughest times, he's been able to hide so much behind it.

But today he crumbled, the man he's loved and looked up to from the day he was born reduced him to nothing and diminished the little ounce of hope he had for his family.

Killing his father wasn't planned, he'd never make his sister an orphan and his mother a widow.

It irks him that his heart chooses to be this good.

Nkululeko hasn't visited him in a dream, it could be that his parents have been exposed and Nkululeko is currently basking in his quest for revenge. It's clear to everyone that Bab'Madlala and MaNkosi are losing their minds.

He walks through the church building with a duffel bag hanging over his shoulder. Khaya is not hard to spot, she's cleaning the chairs in the auditorium with the help of other young women.

As much as she's judgemental and sometimes gets under his skin, she's the light he needs on a cloudy day.

Today of all days, he sees her differently

There is something about the way she laughs that makes him happy. He could watch her like this forever and never get tired.

Their eyes meet, he waves and she waves back,

then makes her way to him.

“This is a surprise,” her smile is bright, but Bakhe fails to return it.

“Do you have a moment?”

Her smile fades, it’s the tone he used that has her worried. She curtly nods.

They exit the building, Khaya has her eyes on the bag he’s carrying.

“What’s with the bag? Are you donating clothes to the church?”

That’s not who he is, nothing is for free in this world.

He exhales lightly, “You’re a great woman.”

This doesn’t sound good, his indifferent expression is not helping either.

“Chommie, wh... what is going on?” She asks.

“I’m leaving.” Bakhe quietly says.

“I don’t understand.”

He lets out a sigh as he moves his gaze away from her, this is not easy. However, he thought about it long and hard after the incident with his father.

“I’m leaving KZN.” He says.

The shock on Khaya’s face, “Okay... I’ll speak to my father then pack my bags.”

There is urgency and fear in her voice, her eyes are watery.

She touches his arm, her eyes are engrossed in his.

“You are not coming with me,” he says.

Women and wasting tears!

“Bakhe, did I do something wrong?” Khaya asks.

“No, you did nothing wrong. It’s me, mfethu. I am not stable enough to be in a relationship, I need to fix myself and my life. I want to be the

best man I can be.”

She steps closer, eliminating the space between them.

“We can do that together, Bakhe. Don’t leave me like this.”

Bakhe shakes his head, he’s not okay with the tears in her eyes but doesn’t make an effort to wipe them away.

“I need you to understand mfethu, I need to do this.” He doesn’t need her permission but it makes sense that he tells her first.

Khaya is reduced to more tears, he pulls her in for a hug.

It’s short, when he lets go, she’s wiping tears from her face.

“Can I wait for you?” Khaya asks.

“Live your life baby girl, I don’t want you to miss out on anything because of me.” He says.

He kisses her on the forehead, then turns and walks away.

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CASHILE

Nkosana was waiting outside Lulu's school when I arrived, we didn't agree in him fetching her from school.

He's trying hard to keep something I want out of. It's not in me to be mean to a person because their presence is no longer needed in my life, but this one is pressing my buttons.

"Should we go get ice cream?" He asks.

We're weaving through 4pm traffic, I'm sitting in

the back with Lulu. She's mumbling a bunch of gibberish stories I can't seem to puzzle together. Something about her teacher making her stand in front of the class because she pinched a kid, the other kids laughed at her and Lulu is not happy about it.

"Yes!" That's Lulu agreeing to the ice cream Nkosana is offering.

"It's almost supper time, ice cream will spoil her appetite." I burst her bubble, I believe his as well. I meet his gaze in the rear view mirror, he looks like a rained puppy.

"Maybe next time then," and sounds like one too.

We're home, the car is facing the gate.

He wants to drive in.

"Thank you for the lift," I push the door open and step out first, then help Lulu as she jumps

out.

“Bye uncle,” she waves excitedly.

Nkosana smiles, “Goodbye Your Highness.”

She hops towards the open gate.

“I went back to the restaurant to enquire about that issue regarding the abortion pills.” He starts a conversation just when I’m trying to avoid him.

“Anything?”

“There were three chefs working that day. I think it will be easier to find everyone that worked in the kitchen since they were hired by the hospital.”

That’s good news, I wonder who would want to terminate my pregnancy.

“Thank you, I appreciate your help. You let me know how it goes.” I feel my brows rise as I speak.

Nkosana nods, he's staring.

"You look beautiful, can I take a picture?" He says.

He'd interpret wrongly if I agree.

"Mommy, come." Lulu calls from inside the gate.

"Maybe next time, I have to go." I bid Nkosana goodbye and rush inside. He doesn't drive away until we are standing in front of the door.

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The door opens just as I'm about to unlock.

"Princess, is everything okay?" I'm asking because she never opens the door for me.

"You have a visitor sisi," she says.

Why is she scaring me?

I'm about to ask who it is when Juba's mother

appears in the passageway.

“Mrs. Ngwenya?”

This is the worst surprise.

She looks at my belly, then at Lulu.

Do people know they won’t die if they announce their arrival?

“Grandma!” Lulu exclaims in excitement, running into her arms.

She lifts her up, and suffocates her in a hug.

“Grandma? What happened to gogo?” Juba’s mom asks.

Lulu used to call her mama, it took me almost a lifetime to teach her that she’s gogo, not mama.

“Teacher Langa said gogo is grandma in English.” Lulu explains.

“Oh, I see. You speak English now?”

Lulu shyly nods.

“Okay, princess Lulu. Did you miss grandma?”
Mrs. Ngwenya asks.

Another nod, confident this time.

“This big much,” Lulu emphasises by stretching her arms sideways.

They have a bond I can never match, I get jealous sometimes but it also calms my heart that my baby has a grandmother who loves her.

I wish my mother wasn’t the person she is, I loved MaNkosi more than life itself. I still do, but I can’t have her around us. She doesn’t have our best interest at heart.

I call Princess and ask her to prepare something to eat for Juba’s mother.

We sit in the lounge, Lulu is on her lap.

“How are you?” She’s looking at my belly again.

It’s a norm to rub it.

I don't understand that smile thingy on her face, is it of suspicion or what?

"We're all fine ma," I'm praying she doesn't ask about the father of my baby.

I've told her before that I'm expecting, but refrained from giving too much details.

"I didn't know you were coming today."

"It was a spur of the moment decision. Lulu is turning five in two months, I want to be present for the preparations." She says.

She's going to be here for two months?

Yoh!

"A party mah? I was thinking we could do something small, buy a cake and sing to her. We can throw her a party when she turns the big seven." That's what most people do.

"Five is the perfect age to throw a child a party."

She says.

I don't want to argue with her, mostly because I have to get ready. Thuli said dinner is at 7pm.

"Have you heard anything from Ntando?" She asks, randomly.

I shake my head, "It's been months, I've forgotten about him."

Yes, I went to complain to her when Ntando kept stalking me. That man appeared everywhere I was.

"That's good then, I told him he will deal with me if anything happens to my granddaughter. You are Lulu's mother, I will do anything to protect you."

It's not that I'm important to her, it's Lulu she worries about.

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Princess got Lulu ready for dinner, it's a chilly night which is strange because we are in November. I chose jeans and a jacket for Lulu, I'm wearing a figure hugging dress.

Thuli said I should wear a weave and makeup because I can't be looking like a guy in front of people.

I strap Lulu in the backseat and get on the wheel, I have to drive today because we might be home late.

I don't trust cabs at night.

Mrs. Ngwenya gives me a bunch of road safety rules before we leave, I doubt she's ever driven a car.

We're fifteen minutes late, dinner started at 7pm. We arrive at 7:17pm.

I text Thuli after parking the car, she comes out

with a glass of wine in hand. Is she ever not slaying?

“Hello, aunty.” Lulu waves up at her.

“How is the most beautiful girl in the world doing?” –Thuli.

She’s always flattering my baby, I wait for their moment to end before asking if her guests are here.

“Everyone is in the dining room. I didn’t tell them you were coming.” She says.

My heart does something in my chest, I’m suddenly nervous. What am I going to say to him?

“But girl, you sure know how to be fashionably late.” She’s admiring my outfit.

I smile, “I feel blotted and have terrible heartburn.”

“I will get you a glass of milk, let’s go in.” She

takes Lulu's hand as we walk in.

"Kumkani is watching TV in the lounge, go ahead baby. Aunty will bring your food." Thuli says to Lulu.

Kumkani is her 8-year-old son.

My baby looks up at me for confirmation.

"Go baby, don't jump on the couch." I say, she jogs her way to the lounge.

"Why did you and Nkosana come separately?"

Hiabo! Nkosana?

"He's here? I didn't tell him about the dinner."

How did he know?

"That's strange, he was the first to arrive."

Someone calls out Thuli's name, it sounds like Lona.

"We'll talk later, let's join them." Thuli says.

I take a deep breath and walk behind her. Funny how my eyes find Mbuzo first, he's sitting next to Lona.

I can't for the life of me stand their closeness.

He looks at me first, then Lona glares my way. Her face changes in a flash.

"What is she doing here, cuz?" –Lona.

"She's my best friend, now we can eat." That's Thuli being her dramatic self.

Nkosana comes to greet me with an unexpected kiss on the cheek.

"You look stunning," he whispers into my ear, his hand sliding down to the small of my back.

I will ask him later how he got here.

He pulls a chair for me, I'm sitting across from Mbuzo who is trying hard not to look my way. Lona intertwines their fingers, he kisses the back of her hand.

Yeah neh!

Nkosana takes a seat next to me.

Sigh!

The table is set with a selection of dinner treats, arranged with the precision of a five-star restaurant.

Trust Thuli to go all out.

“Mbuzo!” I’m greeting because this one doesn’t know how to greet.

Lona places a manicured hand on his chest,
“It’s Joshua. Josh if you find it hard to pronounce his name.”

I roll my eyes at her, then feel Nkosana’s hand on my back.

“Baby, don’t you think it’s strange that Joshua looks like one of the Xaba boys?”

I look at him with a slight frown on my face, for a doctor, he is slow.

And why is he babying me?

“You also believe he’s a look-alike?” I ask Nkosana.

“I’m not a scientist but I know it’s common.”

I’m surrounded by ignorant people.

I look at everyone at the table, “You know what’s funny? It feels as if all of you are trying to convince me that I’m crazy. I know what I know and you people can’t tell me otherwise.”

There’s awkwardness at the table, Lona scoffs.

“Cuz, you should get your best friend evaluated before she gives birth. How will a crazy person take care of a child?”

“Don’t you dare mention my child. You don’t know shit about me, sisi.” I snap.

“I know you’re crazy.” She claps- back.

“Well, do you want to know what I know? I know that the man sitting beside you doesn’t love you,

one word from me and he will leave you like yesterday's newspaper." I confidently express.

This is a lie because Mbuzo made it clear back then that he wants nothing to do with me. I just wanted something to stand on.

She frowns and looks at Mbuzo who is looking at me with a pucker between his brows.

"Baby, did you hear what she said?" Lona.

"Baby, why are you doing this?" Nkosana says to me.

"Don't call me baby wena. Why are you even here? No one invited you." I snap at Nkosana.

He looks embarrassed.

He clears his throat and pulls up the sleeves of his sweater, revealing his tattooed arms.

"Thuli, is this what you called us here for? To be embarrassed by your so called best friend." -
Lona.

“There is no so-called best friend here, Cashile is my friend and I don’t appreciate you guys hinting that she’s lost her mind.” Thuli says.

“Now, can we all calm down please? Dinner is getting cold.”

She adds, sighing in frustration.

“I will stay if you tell her to stop all those crazy things about my fiancé.” Lona says.

“You people are trying so hard to make me think I’m crazy, I won’t let it.” I say.

“No one is doing that, baby.” Nkosana says.

I don’t want to hear his opinion.

“I can prove that this man is who I say he is.” I tell them, opening the palm of my hand.

I know Thuli said to wait until I’m alone with him but I’m so worked up, I can’t wait.

“You see this scar, he has the same scar in the palm of his hand.” I’m looking at Mbuzo.

His eyes narrow at me.

“We made a blood oath when we were young,”
I’m taking chance because he once told me that
the blood oath was a lie.

“That’s a lie, I know Joshua’s body like the back
of my hand, he has no scar.” Lona says.

I don’t care what she says at this point.

I look at Mbuzo, “Show them Mbuzo, lift your
hand and show them the scar.”

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[03/06, 15:51] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 75

BAKHE

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He can't leave without talking to his best friend first, Mhloniphe has been the twin he never asked for.

Their personalities are similar, they cause havoc wherever they make their presence known. At times they fight like enemies. But he loves him regardless, he'd never trade him for anything.

The taxi drops him at a stop sign, he walks the rest of the way to the Xaba home. The door is open, he can hear an argument coming from the living room.

The twins are at it again. They are both seated on the edge of the couches, across each other, while exchanging words, irritation visible on their faces.

"I can't believe you let her sleep over after I said no." That's Mkhetheni.

"And I can't believe you took Mbhebheni to the

seer after I said no,” Mhlo always has an answer for his brother.

Mkhotheni squints his eyes at him, this looks like it’s a serious matter.

“We couldn’t leave her to suffer, Mhlo. I wouldn’t wish something like that even on my worst enemy,” and Mkhotheni always has a reason for doing something.

Mhlo lifts his hands, chuckling lightly.

“See, I also wouldn’t wish tears on my worst enemy. That’s why I helped that girl.”

Mkhotheni lets out another sigh because, why does Mhlo have to be this difficult.

“What did Ngwe say?” Mhloniphe asks.

“Who’s that?” -Mkhotheni.

“Ngwemabala.”

“I don’t know, I left her there,” Mkhotheni.

He leans back on the couch, his brows creasing together. Bakhe drops his bag on the floor, goes to the kitchen and comes back with an open beer.

Mhloniphe sees the bag on the floor, “And then? Are you coming with us?”

Bakhe sits, “Where are you going?”

“Joburg, Cashile found Mbuzo.” Mhloniphe tells him.

“That motherf*cker has 9 lives.” Bakhe says, absentmindedly.

“You look like you lost your favourite toy. What’s up?”

Mhlo’s question is not as simple as it sounds, maybe in his head because he suddenly gets an urge to break down and spew what’s in his heart.

“I’m tired mfethu,” this is a start.

They never expose their vulnerabilities.

“Did something happen?” Mhloniphe asks.

Mkhotheni gives them privacy.

“I almost killed my father today,” Bakhe says, downing the beer in his hand.

“What did he do this time?”

It’s no secret that Madlala is always up to something.

“That man hates me, mfethu. I don’t know what I did to deserve a father like him. He’s right, I’m a disgrace. I’m useless and can’t do anything right.” His jaw is clenching, showing ridges of anger.

“It’s not your fault ndoda, Madlala doesn’t like anyone. I don’t think he even likes himself. He’s just a selfish man who feels like the world owes him something. You don’t have to beat yourself

up because of him.”

Mhloniphe could be right, but his words don’t wipe away the feeling of being unwanted. Bakhe has never felt more alone than he does now. A father’s love and acceptance is something most men take pride in, but not Bakhe.

How do you take pride in something you do not have.

“It’s best I leave this place and start over somewhere.” Bakhe says with a long sigh.

“Where will you go?” –Mhlo.

For the first time since their conversation began, Bakhe looks into Mhlo’s eyes.

“I don’t know, as long as it’s far away from this place.” –Bakhe.

Mhlo exhales, he suddenly looks as troubled as Bakhe.

“Come with me to Joburg, there are many

opportunities there.” That’s not a lie, Joburg is not called the city of gold for nothing.

Bakhe lets out another sigh, “The funny thing is that I know he’s responsible for my familiar but it’s hard for me to put the blame on him. Ngikhathele mfethu, I’m tired.”

“Then come with me to Joburg, you will decide what to do when you get there.”

He ponders upon Mhlo’s request, maybe Joburg is the place where he will find his peace.

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CASHILE

“Let’s see your hand bhuti,” I say.

He’s just staring blankly.

Lona takes a glass of juice from the table and drinks, then looks at Mbuzo with a frown on her face.

There's silence, everyone has their eyes on him.

"This is ridiculous, we are leaving." Lona stands, pulling Mbuzo's hand with her.

"Don't you think he should show us his hand first?" Thuli curiously says.

I'm also eager, I hope I'm right because in terms of dress code, he looks nothing like Mbuzo.

This one is the rich version.

"It's okay Lona." Mbuzo calmly says, his eyes still glued on me.

He's stretching out his hand towards me, my eyes pop out as I scan his palm. I stand to get a closer look.

"And?" Thuli is as inquisitive and impatient as I am.

I take Mbuzo's hand for closer inspection.

"Don't touch him." Lona snaps, pulling his hand from mine.

I grab his hand back, "Girl, I have done more than just touch this man. He's cum inside me more than once and loved doing it."

I don't know, but I see his lip curving to the corner, or it could be my imagination because he's straight faced again.

"I don't see anything," Nkosana says.

I don't see it either and maybe it's been too long that I forgot which hand it was on.

I go to him and take his other hand, shivers ripple through me. I see them on his skin as well, he locks eyes with me while opening his palm.

"Cashile, stop it. There is nothing there."

Nkosana says.

I don't know what his problem is, we broke up.

"There you have it, he's not who you think he is."

Lona snatches his hand from my grip.

I'm at a loss for words. How is it possible? This man is Mbuzo.

"Baby, you need to stop. Why are you obsessed with him?"

This one will never stop calling me baby.

"I am not obsessed with him." I snap.

"This whole thing you are doing screams obsession."

"You don't know what you are talking about Nkosana. What would you do if you were told I died then you meet someone who looks exactly like me? Would you ignore it and move on?"

"I for one would want to know why the person looks like the man I once loved." Thuli answers.

"Exactly, this is what I'm doing. Now tell me

how to ignore the elephant in the room and I will gladly do it, I will walk away from this and never talk about it again."

Lona and Nkosana are doubting my sanity, it's clear as water.

"This is the chance, it's been proven that Joshua has no scar. Now let it go and leave us alone." Lona says, she's holding his hand again.

"Guys enough yoh! The food has gotten cold." Thuli chirps in when I open my mouth to speak.

She silently pleads with me that I don't say a word.

"Stress is not good for you, friend. Have you forgotten what happened last night? You almost lost the baby?" She reminds me.

But that's not the reason I bled.

"It wasn't due to stress, the doctor found traces

of abortion pills in my system. Someone tried to kill my baby.”

Her eyes bulge, “Oh my God, Cashile. Is it Ntando? Is he still trying to kill you?” Thuli angrily asks.

“No, I haven’t heard from him in months. It was something I ate. What confuses me is, who could it be? Princess makes my food, I doubt it’s her. She’s worked for me for over six months, she had many opportunities to terminate my baby. Why would she start now? Besides, I started bleeding after I ate at the restaurant.”

“Do you think it’s someone at the restaurant?”
—Thuli.

“We are suspecting it,” Nkosana answers.

In his head, he thinks we are still a couple.

“Tomorrow I’m going to interrogate the chefs and cooks.” He continues.

“You think it was a chef who did it?” Lona scoffs, rolling her eyes.

“Who else would it be?” –Nkosana.

“Chefs are professionals and passionate about their work. Why would that person risk their career for someone like her?” She points at me with a fork.

“Lona is a chef too, that’s why she’s defending chefs. Don’t mind her.” -Thuli.

Oh really!

She looks more like she takes Instagram pictures for a living.

“What do you think about Cashile’s situation, Lona?” Thuli asks, maybe wanting a chef’s opinion.

Lona shrugs, “Like I said. What Chef would risk their profession for her? What motive would they have? Unless, she’s harassing them as

well.”

Yeah no! I will never have a proper conversation with this woman.

“Someone is jealous of you, more likely a friend.” Mbuzo speaks.

I was starting to wonder why he speaks less.

“Baby, don’t talk to her.” Lona whispers to him.

She can’t be okay, mentally.

The man sitting next to me rubs my back, “I agree with Joshua, you need to look at your list of friends.”

Somehow, it feels like Nkosana is rubbing the Joshua name in my face.

“Hey, I’m her only friend and I would never. Her pregnancy is my pregnancy,” Thuli says, with no ounce of defence.

But I can’t seem to get the fact that Lona is a chef out of my head.

“What about you Lona? Where were you last night between seven and eight pm?” I ask.

“Are you serious? I didn’t even know you until this morning. And if I did and had beef with you, I don’t think you would be worth risking my job for.”

Yeah right! I know the likes of her. They are not only possessive, but dangerous.

“Lona wouldn’t hurt a fly, she’s Christian.” Thuli says.

“With that attitude?” I laugh.

This woman has a stinking attitude.

Thuli laughs with me, “Looks can be deceiving. You my friend are looking at a virgin, she’s saving herself for marriage.”

She grabs a glass of wine and takes a long sip, trying hard not to laugh.

But I can’t help it, it’s hard for me to believe that

Lona is all of those things. My eyes shift to Mbuzo when Lona starts caressing his cheek.

“God is the centre of our love, that’s why our relationship is strong. Joshua and I went into fasting and praying before our first kiss. Same thing before he proposed.” -Lona.

My eyes water from all the laughing, I can’t see Mbuzo as this person. Scar or not, I know it’s him. Can he even spell Jesus?

“What’s your problem?” Lona snaps.

“Sorry, just thought of something funny.” I lie.

“Let me guess, Joshua is also a virgin?” I will die of curiosity if I don’t get an answer.

The man raises his brows at me, I’m not intimidated.

“Cashile, I don’t think that’s any of your business.”

Who is Nkosana to scold me?

“No but I also want to know, Joshua is awfully quiet.” Thuli comes to my rescue.

“It’s his personality, he doesn’t talk much.” Lona, madam speaker says. “But to answer your question, yes he is also a virgin.”

I nearly fall off my seat laughing.

“Cashile!”- Nkosana.

Thuli is also laughing, why is he chiding me alone?

Mbuzo stands, his gaze on Thuli, “Where is the bathroom?”

“Go up the stairs, first door on your left.” She directs him.

I don’t know why he looks at me before walking away.

“Don’t mind us cuz, we’re just having fun. Hayi kabi.” Thuli tells an angry Lona.

“But I’m not having fun at all. We’re leaving

when Joshua comes back, I don't think it's okay for us to be around this woman." She looks at me, I am not bothered.

Lulu runs into the dining room, her face covered in creasy oil. She's a messy eater. Kumkani is toddling after her.

"Mommy, he said I'm his girlfriend." Her eyes water as she points at Kumkani.

Crèches are not as innocent as they look. What does this child know what a girlfriend is?

"She's lying." Kumkani defends himself.

Yoh, how do I explain this?

Here goes nothing!

"Baby, you are his friend who is a girl." I tell her, I'm not sure she understands, she looks confused.

"Can't I just be his friend? I don't want to be his

girlfriend.”

Yep! I said it.

Looks like teacher Langa hasn’t covered the boy-girl topic. I notice a stain on her t-shirt, she says Kumkani spilled gravy on her.

“You can use my room to clean up, there are wet wipes in the bathroom” Thuli says.

Nkosana stands with me, “I will come with you.”

I shake my head, why is he embarrassing me?

He looks disappointed as he sits back down.

Mbuzo walks back in before we walk out... that frown of his appears. He looks down at Lulu and his hard face softens.

She shyly waves at him, he waves back, his mouth stretching into a simple smile. They never got acquainted back then.

Why does he never talk?

Is he really Joshua or Mbuzo?

“Baby, let’s go home.” Lona says, standing from her seat.

That woman controls this man, the Mbuzo I knew was a leader not a follower.

I walk away, I don’t think I want to witness him leaving with her again.

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I’ve cleaned Lulu up, the stain is stubborn. I should have brought changing clothes.

“Can I go play with Kumkani?” She’s jumping up and down, while looking up at me.

Juba was this impatient.

“But he made you cry,” I thought we were mad at him.

“He’s my friend.” She defends him.

Kumkani walks in, “Sorry Lulu for calling you my girlfriend. You can be my boyfriend if you like.”

Lulu smiles, nodding.

I guess in her head, it’s okay because Kumkani is a boy.

I’m never getting involved in their business.

“Have you eaten?”

She nods, “Aunty will give us dessert.”

Aunty is Thuli’s house help.

“Okay, go play with your friend then and play nice.”

They run out, hand in hand.

“No running in the house.”

I shout after them with an attempt to go check if they are still running or not, but I freeze when he appears in the doorway.

He walks in and slowly shuts the door.

I don't know what to think—why he's here.

My breath catches, he's towering over me.
There's a soft stare in his eyes.

The baby kicks, it's been so long that I'm startled a bit and gasp while putting a hand on my belly. He looks down at it, then slowly puts his hand above mine.

The baby kicks again, harder this time.

I'm glancing into his eyes, confused as hell.

He looks into mine, the stretching silence between us is getting louder by the beat.

I push his hand off my belly, "What are you doing here?" I ask.

We're alone in Thuli's bedroom, is it even okay?

He catches me off guard by smashing his lips against mine. He's kissing me, his hands caressing my cheeks.

I pull away, breathless.

“Joshua...”

“Call me daddy.” He whispers against my lips.

What the f*ck!

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[03/06, 15:51] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 76

CASHILE

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“Kitten,” his voice is quiet and gentle. He kisses me again.

I pull away, my lips can’t function when I’m confused.

“Is it really you?”

He gives me a curt nod.

Everyone tried to make me feel like I was going crazy and failed dismally, but this man did not even work hard for it and here I am, feeling like I have lost my mind and will never recover.

“Mbuzo?” I whisper, my voice trembling.

He slightly nods, his hands are still on my cheeks, softly caressing.

“I don’t understand,” after working so hard to prove that he is Mbuzo, this happens?

“I have so much to tell you,” he says.

“I’m listening.”

His hand curls the back of my neck, as he draws me closer to him. I’m instantly taken back to the past.

“Not here, right now I just want to be with you. God, I have missed you like crazy.”

A confession of love— it's making me emotional.
I don't know how to feel about this.

"Where have you been? What happened to
you?"

"I will tell you everything in due time, I just need
you to trust me."

Trust? That's too much to ask.

I chuckle in astonishment, "Trust? After
everything we have been through, you are
asking me to trust you?"

Why is he even still holding me?

I try to squirm my way out of his grip, he
tightens the hold.

There's sudden loud music blasting downstairs,
my phone pings. It's a message from Thuli.

"Make sure you have as many orgasms as you
can, I've got you covered." Her text reads.

She thinks we're having sex.

“Did you not miss me, sthandwa sam?”

I did, I didn’t... I don’t know.

“You hurt me,” I remind him, putting my hands on him to push him back but they land on his hard torso.

My breathing is picking up, this is too intimate. There’s sexual tension between us.

“I’ve dreamt of this moment every night,” he murmurs.

I find myself burying my face in the crook of his neck, and breathing him in. He smells different... rich... masculine and dominant.

His hand on my neck, he brings my face closer to his and captures my lips, almost knocking the breath out of my lungs.

It's a teeth-clashing, lips-biting and tongues-wrestling kind of kiss.

He breaks the kiss, “After you there’s you. It’s

always been you, it will always be you.”

His hand is beneath my dress, massaging my nipple.

My body is shaking like a leaf, it’s been so long, maybe that’s why.

He’s shown little sexual advances but I’m wet and thinking about him in all the wrong ways.

The look in his eyes, it’s as if he knows what I’m thinking.

“I’ve thought about you a lot, and almost went crazy missing you.”

He’s the one doing all the talking, I’m under his spell.

Mbuzo attacks me with a kiss, his one hand sliding down to my panties and all the way to my clit.

I release a strangled moan, it’s been so long since I’ve been touched like this.

But... this can't be appropriate.

It's not!

This is Thuli's bedroom, heaven knows what she gets up to in here with her man.

He's looking at me, while rubbing my clit as if he wants to see how I react to the touch.

I hate that he's staring because I've become weak and vulnerable and it's clear for him to see.

"Always so warm." That's him, bringing his face closer to mine just to whisper this.

My knees are weakening, I hold on to his shoulders. I feel an orgasm coming, it's far but yet so near.

My body begins to shake, he picks up the pace but hastily stops when the orgasm starts to travel through my veins.

I'm thinking, this man never finishes what he

starts but he disappoints.

His eyes have grown smaller, he grabs my butt cheeks as he goes down on his knees.

His fingers are roughly digging into my flesh, at the same time he's pulling down my underwear.

I'm gasping for air, trying to stop my brain from going on vacation.

But it leaves me just as Mbuzo hangs my one leg over his shoulder, his hand is rigid on my back, holding me steady so I won't fall.

I almost scream when he starts to work on my vag!na with his tongue, he's licking and sucking me. I'm holding on to his shoulders.

The slurping sounds are getting louder, so are my moans.

The stimulation is too much, I want to scream with pleasure.

I can't take it anymore, my knees give in and I

find myself sitting on the floor with his unsolicited help.

To think he would stop, nope.

He lays me down on my back and works his tongue around my nether regions.

My first orgasm in months comes in waves, I cum in his face but he doesn't stop.

He's sucking me and I'm f#cking his face.

Somehow it seems to give him more control, he holds my hips down surely to stop me from moving.

Since I have no control over my hips, I grab his head, pressing him on my p*ssy. But this one wants total domination over me. He removes my hand and intertwines it with his.

I feel his tongue separating my folds, he spits on it then sucks me before plunging his tongue inside my walls.

“Oh God!” I scream, the loud music being an advantage.

All of me is vibrating, I’m reaching the finish line. He’s driven me over the edge and I’m about to fall off.

The orgasm hits me like an explosion, my body is convulsing violently.

Mbuzo quickly looks up at me, the smirk on his face screaming pride. It has everything to do with my body shuddering none stop.

My vag!na feels overly sensitive, I rub it but he removes my hand and replaces it with his, using his fingers to viciously rub me.

I let out another scream, digging my fingers on the carpet as another wave crashes over me.

“Oh God! Mbuzo!!!” It’s another provoked cry leaving my mouth.

I've come three times, it's enough. He ghostly smiles when I hold his hand and push it away from my vag!na.

God, I'm spent.

Mbuzo wears that pride look again, then leans down to place kisses on this uncontrollable thing that's between my legs. He disappears into the bathroom, leaving me vibrating like an overloaded washing machine. In a second, he walks back in with a towel he uses to wipe me.

My p#ssy gets another kiss before helps me put my panties on me like I'm a child.

That was a lot, I'm sane now and my brain is back from wherever it had gone.

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He's standing in front of me, we're silent and

staring at each other.

Now that I have my strength back, I knee him on the groin. He folds over, grabbing his front while wincing in pain.

“I hope that hurts worse than the pain you put me through.”

He’s on his knees, looking up at me with a strained facial expression.

“I never meant to hurt, I regret it all. I know I can never take back the words I said to you...”

“Do you have any idea what I have been through, Mbuzo? I lost a child because of you.”

He drops his gaze.

“Look at me,” I snap. “I want you to look into my eyes when I tell you that you killed our baby.”

Tears run down my cheeks, a miscarriage is a throbbing wound that stays with you forever. I will always think about my baby. Questions like

“what if...” will always linger in my head.

“You’re pregnant.” He mumbles, looking at my belly with confusion.

“What? You think I lied about losing the baby?”

His eyes snap wide open, “Cashile... please... please don’t tell me that you are carrying his baby.”

There’s a twinge of pain in his voice.

Men and their egos!

“Unfortunately for me, you are the only man I will ever love.”

Relief washes over his face, he wraps his arms around my waist and kisses my belly.

I feel the little traitor kick in my womb.

And then... this one?

He’s crying with his head resting on my baby bump.

“Twins?” He asks, lifting his eyes to me.

I nod, this moment is too emotional.

I wipe my tears and look away from him, he's never cried like this in front of me.

“My angel, I'm so sorry. Ubaba uyaxolisa mntanami. Your twin is an angel now, they will always watch over you. I love you and I'm sorry I stayed away from you for so long.”

Mbuzo breaks down, while continuously kissing my belly.

I can't be subjected to such emotional wreck while pregnant, tears love my eyes.

It takes a while for Mbuzo to stop crying and get back on his feet.

“How is Lulu? She looks taller than the last time I saw her.”

I remember the day we were standing outside

aunt Hluphekile's house and I was all over him, and he was loving on me. Mbali and Lulu we're arriving from the spaza shop.

I should have introduced them then.

We both freeze at the sound of a soft knock at the door.

"Mfazi, don't be disgusting. Let go of that man, there's a next time. People are starting to wonder where you are." It's Thuli, sounding amused.

The music has stopped.

"We have to go back," I tell him.

His arms trap me in a hug, "Don't pull away. I haven't had enough of you yet."

"The owner of the house has spoken." I pull away from him and walk out first, so not to raise suspicion.

I'm halfway down the corridor when he pulls me

by the waist and traps me against the wall, he smashes his lips against mine. The kiss is fast and passionate, this is risky. Anyone might see us.

“Mbuzo,” I whisper against his lips.

He slowly pulls out of the kiss, “You know you’re safe in me, with me and around me,” he whispers.

Then looks at me for what seems like a long while and proceeds to walk ahead of me.

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I check in on Lulu just to pass a little time, so it doesn’t seem like we were together. I don’t know what Mbuzo is up to, he wants me to trust him.

Lulu is in the play room with aunty and Kumkani.

When I walk in the lounge, everyone is on their

feet listening to Lona speaking.

As expected, she is clinging on to Mbuzo, he looks at me, I look away.

“Where have you been?” Nkosana mumbles. I don’t tell him.

“I was his first kiss,” Lona continues, placing a kiss on Mbuzo’s cheek.

At this point, I don’t know if I should laugh or feel sorry for her.

“Anyway, we have to go. Let’s pray for safe travelling mercies.”

Is that even a thing?

She takes Mbuzo’s hand, then Thuli’s.

“Cuzy, me and God are kind of not in a good space right now.” Thuli is sipping her wine as she says this.

“I will pray, don’t worry. It’s late, who knows what spirits are lurking out there. Besides, Josh

and I never do anything without God." -Lona.

So we're forced to join hands.

Mbuzo takes my hand, Lona lets go of Thuli's hand and comes to stand in between us. She doesn't want me touching him.

"Join hands," she says to me.

Do I have a choice?

I reach out, and she holds my hand with just a finger. Does God know she's a heathen b!tch?

Nkosana is on my other side, I spot Mbuzo looking at our joined hands. He looks away when our eyes meet.

That's a jealous man right there.

"Father God we thank You for this night, thank You for family and friends. Thank You, Father God for giving us the spirit of tolerance and because of that, we are able to tolerate the devil.

But mostly resist him because he is always lurking around, looking for whom he may devour.”

I thought she was praying for safe travels, where does the devil enter here?

I open one eye and find Thuli’s one eye open as well, she smiles and points her head towards Mbuzo.

He’s looking at me, I shouldn’t be feeling this kind of excitement. He bows his head and closes his eyes.

“Proverbs 31 says ‘Who can find a virtuous woman, whose worth is far beyond rubies, the heart of her husband trusts her.’ Thank You Father God for helping me become a Proverbs 31 woman.” -Lona.

Where is this prayer going?

“Father God, thank You for love, Father God. Father God, You made Eve from Adam’s ribcage,

to protect his heart."

Why does she keep saying, Father God?

I'd freak out if someone keeps calling my name after every word.

"I will always protect Joshua's heart. Father God, I present my future husband before You, not only does he want to date me, but he also wants to marry me. He is my Jacob, I am his Rachel. He is my Boaz and I am his Ruth, he is my Abraham and I am his Sarah."

Okay, she's talking about the bible kind of love.

God is probably taping his foot impatiently waiting for her to finish.

I open my eyes because why is Lulu giggling loudly during prayer, and when did she get here? I'm taking her to church on Sunday.

She's running to Mbuzo.

"Father God, may you continue to bless our

relationship Father God. Give us the strength to resist the devil and he will flee from us." I feel Lona squeezing my hand.

So I'm the devil in this case.

And then?

What is this child I birthed up to? She's standing in front of Mbuzo and Lona, looking at their joined hands.

Father-God's prayer is cut off by Lulu separating her hand from Mbuzo's. Her eyes snap open, she looks confused and annoyed.

Lulu takes Mbuzo's hand, she's pulling him towards me and he's letting her. All that muscle only for a child to pull him like he weighs nothing.

Lona looks like she's going to bite my baby's head off, I let go of both her and Nkosana's hands.

“Lulu, what are you doing?” I ask.

She puts Mbuzo’s hand in mine and smiles up at him.

“Uncle, are you going to kiss my mommy again like you did in the village?”

Father-God kaLona, have mercy!

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500+ comments... 15 shares...

[03/06, 15:51] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 77

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Madlala is standing by the bedside, watching MaNkosi in deep sleep. It’s night time, the woman has not even boiled water. He’s hungry and has no idea how to work his way around

the kitchen.

“MaNkosi,” he shakes her awake and waits.

Her eyes pop open, a frown quickly jumps on her face.

“Vuka mfazi, I called your sister and told her that you are on your way.”

Actually, she owes him airtime he used to call her sister.

“Why would I go there?”

She looks lost.

“Hau mfazi, you said that you want a divorce. So I am making things easy for you, I already packed your bags.” He points at a suitcase by the door.

Why is she laughing now?

“Yini?” Madlala asks, frowning at his wife.

“You want me to leave my home?” She dies of

laughter.

“This is my house, it belongs to me. You are no longer wanted here, MaNkosi.”

She rolls on the bed, wheezing with laughter.

There is nothing more frustrating than this, Madlala loudly sighs. Maybe this woman has lost her mind, no one acts like this, especially a respectable wife and mother.

She sits up and looks at him, “Angiyindawo, I am not leaving.”

Shut the front door!

Her confidence makes him sweat.

“Yes you are, my brothers agreed with me after you embarrassed me in front of everyone. You asked for a divorce in front of my friends and family. Do you know how embarrassed I was?”

She of all people should be on his side.

MaNkosi cackles, “I don’t care about your

feelings anymore Madlala. I will do what I want, when I want. This is my home too, you can't... actually, you won't make me leave." She gets off the bed, slides her feet inside her morning slippers.

"MaNkosi..." Madlala shouts.

She's walking out on him, he goes after her and finds her channel hopping. She's put her feet up on the coffee table.

"MaNkosi, your sister is waiting for you. Take your suitcase and leave." He stands in front of the TV.

"What right do you have to claim my house?" He asks.

"I gave you more than thirty years of my life. I washed and cooked for you all those years, and cleaned up after you. Today you are a father because of me. You owe me."

Eyy, this woman.

She's suddenly a tough nut to crack.

"Okay, ngiyakuzwa. I'm hungry, you haven't cooked."

It's getting late and it's past dinner time, she should be preparing his bath water around this time.

"There's no reason for me to continue cooking for you, we are separated and will be soon divorced."

What is this woman talking about?

"But you said you are not leaving." He says.

"I did, we are going to be roommates. Each person washes their own clothes, we take turns in cooking and cleaning the house."

Abomination!

"Imihlola ka James! That will never happen." He exclaims.

"Fine, then you die of hunger because I'm not

going to cook for you.”

Oh my God, she’s serious.

Madlala sits, and heaves a sigh. It frustrates him that her focus is on the TV when he’s talking to her.

“Fine, I hear you. Cook today, and I will cook tomorrow.”

He will never be seen dead behind the stove.

MaNkosi laughs, she’s acting really strange. He doesn’t like it.

“MaNkosi, you are scaring me. I think we should call the pastor so he can pray for our marriage.”

They definitely need divine intervention.

“There’s going to be load shedding in less than an hour, if you don’t cook now, you will go to bed hungry.” She tells him.

The arrogance.

Madlala opens his mouth to speak, then stops. His head is empty, he doesn't know what to say or do at this point.

Cooking can't be that hard, he's seen MaNkosi do it. She's always creating magic in the kitchen.

He makes his way to the kitchen, the stove is empty—the pots are packed away.

Where does he start?

It's not supposed to be this hard, is it?

He goes back to the living room and finds her laying on the couch, with her feet crossed. The remote is resting on her stomach.

"Kanti who took out lobola between me and you? I paid for you mfazi."

MaNkosi cackles and continues to watch TV.

CASHILE

When Lulu first came to stay with us, she was withdrawn and spoke less than it made me believe she was introverted. I don't know if I should blame her forwardness on her new school.

Nkosana scoops Lulu up, "Princess Lulu. This is not the uncle from back in the village."

"Don't lie to the child, Nkosana." I take her from him and put her down, she's taller than any normal four-year-old and heavier. My belly won't let me carry her for more than a minute.

"My baby recognises this man, do not play with her head." I add.

Mbuzo clears his throat, I don't know what that look is for. He thinks because he made me cum, I will go along with his lies.

Lona comes to take Mbuzo's hand, says goodbye to her cousin and they head to the door hand-in hand.

Yeah neh!

She walks out first, he looks back at me before he disappears out the door.

"Let me drive you home." That's Nkosana.

I tell him that I brought a car, I am not in the mood to speak to him tonight.

I hug Thuli, "Babe, thanks for dinner. I will call you tomorrow."

"Lulu can sleep over if she likes." Thuli says.

I am not a fan of sleepovers.

"Her grandmother is around, she will kill me if I leave her here." I say.

I wouldn't leave her even if she wasn't.

I take my baby and leave, Nkosana is driving behind us. We lose him along the way. Lulu has fallen sleep in the back seat.

I was going to give her a bath when we get home, I guess it's cancelled now.

My phone buzzes with a message. The number is not saved, only when I open it do I realize that it's from Mbuzo. He wants me to meet him at his house in fifteen minutes. There's a location as well.

I will go, I have decided. There is so much I need to know.

First, I drive home. Mrs. Ngwenya is still awake. She wants to sleep with Lulu tonight.

This works to my advantage.

After tucking Lulu in, I take a long bath.

My phone keeps ringing, he's growing impatient.

I won't answer and I will go to him without answering his call.

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Two hours later, I'm parked outside a high gate.

"This must be the house." I murmur to myself, unsure though.

But it must be, I used the live location to get here.

I'm parked in front of what looks like a two-storey house with arched windows and a concrete driveway.

The gate slides open, then I see him walking out of the house. He's wearing grey sweat shorts and nothing on top.

He walks around naked now? Joburg changes people.

I drive in, he opens the door and helps me out of the car.

“Sthandwa sami,” he says, leaning in for a brief hug.

He’s always smelt good, but this is different.

“Is everything okay? You were not taking my calls.”

On purpose.

“You left five missed calls, I was starting to think you’re obsessed.” I answer.

He glances up at me with a hint of surprise.

“If obsession is love, then yes, I am obsessed with you.” He says.

“Mmhhh!” I look at him, long enough.

He’s staring back.

God, how am I intimidated by Mbuzo? This has never happened before. He rubs his chin, deepening the stare.

I chicken out first.

When I look up, he's smirking and leading the way to the house.

"Is your girlfriend around?"

He doesn't give me an answer, I'm following him to the kitchen.

"Would you like something to drink?" This he asks while opening the fridge.

"Do you have chicken? Preferably wings, very spicy wings."

I ate supper but I'm hungry again.

He closes the fridge and looks at me.

"I can order them," there's a smile on his face as he takes his phone from the counter and begins to scroll through it. I will not be stopping

him.

“They will be here in thirty minutes.”

That’s too long.

“Would you like a house tour?”

Is there even time for that?

“It’s late, maybe next time.” I’m honestly getting tired of standing.

“Okay, let’s go to the lounge.” –Him.

He’s poured me a glass of juice I drink in sips as I follow behind him to the lounge.

My eyes scan every corner, there are no pictures on the wall. Pictures make the house a home.

“Is this your house?”

He nods.

I’m shocked of course.

When? How?

“Did you remove pictures of her because I was coming?”

“There are no pictures of her,” he says.

I can’t think properly with him sitting too close to me.

“And she is okay with it?” I ask.

“Yes. Can we not talk about her?”

Hau!

I sigh, and lean back on the couch. His eyes are on me, is he ever going to stop staring?

“You look different,” he says.

“I’ve gained weight, it’s the pregnancy.”

“No, that’s not what I mean. The Cashile I know was a tomboy, you’re different now and I like it.”

“People change, you changed as well.” I tell him.

He goes quiet on me.

“So tell me why you’re pretending to be

someone you're not?"

He immediately looks uncomfortable.

"Can you trust me?"

Yoh, he's asking for too much now.

"Everything that's happened between us was a conspiracy. The breakup, the words I said to you..."

I laugh because, what the hell is he saying to me?

"You breaking my heart was a conspiracy?"

The fool nods.

"I didn't mean any of the things I said to you, it wasn't me."

"Okay, you have a twin?"

Because that would be the only explanation.

His jaw clenches as he exhales, "I wasn't myself. Something was controlling me, I could feel it."

And I wasn't able to control myself, my blood would boil when I'd see you. I couldn't understand what was happening. I didn't want to hurt you, but I couldn't stop myself. Each time I'd open my mouth, vile things would come out."

I'm sitting here, baffled to say the least.
There is no way that what he is saying is true.
He tells me why he was arrested.

So the blood oath was real.

I don't know how to feel about him sleeping with another woman before our divorce. I am angry, but I let him continue.

"The car fell in the river. Dalisu couldn't unstrap his seatbelt, he drowned. I was able to swim up, I collapsed on the river bank and woke up in the hospital a week later. I don't know who found me, the nurses said someone brought me to the hospital and left before giving their details."

He's been through the most.

"Where is your scar?" I ask him, taking his hand to check and oh my God, it's there.

"Mbuzo?"

"I hid it, I didn't want you to blow my cover. I knew you'd want to prove my identity."

"What cover? Are you on a mission or something? And how did you know I was coming to the dinner?" I can't help but wonder, it suddenly feels like I'm sitting next to a stranger.

There's a door bell, it must be my order.

"Story for another day," he says as he heads to answer the door.

He comes back with a KFC packet and gives it to me.

"I'll get you a plate." He leaves for the kitchen.

I'm offended by the twenty four wings bucket.
Grateful but very much offended. I don't eat this
much.

When he walks back in, I'm already feasting.

He brought more juice and watches me eat until
I can't eat anymore.

I have question, so many questions but it's
almost 12am. I don't want to get home in the
wee hours of the morning.

"I have to go." I stand from the couch with great
difficulty.

I'm full and can't breathe.

"Are you not sleeping over?"

He must be joking.

"I have a house, and a daughter who's waiting
for me."

"I will drive you back early in the morning, I want
to spend more time with you. I missed you

greatly." He's touching me, not a good idea for a pregnant woman whose hormones are not loyal.

"Mbuzo..."

He buries his face in my neck, biting into it. My body betrays me when he licks my skin while squeezing my ass.

There will always be undeniable chemistry between us, and I'm afraid it will be the reason for my downfall.

His hand is on my throat, softly caressing. His lips touch mine, he's kissing me with so much passion.

I allow my hands to roam on his muscled body, he feels buffer and broader around the shoulders.

When his hand glides up my thighs, I moan into his mouth and let him tongue kiss me.

The feeling of his erection straining against my

lower abdomen intensifies my arousal and I feel my underwear soaking.

“I haven’t forgiven you...” I say, accepting another passionate kiss from him.

“I don’t deserve your forgiveness.”

I should be agreeing with him but here I am, releasing an aroused moan.

He’s pushing against me, until I’m lying on the couch, on my back.

“Wait,” I push him off of me.

He’s confused but watches as I get on my knees on the floor. This position feels more comfortable. He pulls my panties down to my knees, then kisses the flesh on my ass.

“I’m wet, just enter.” I sound frustrated.

I haven’t had s*x since... since him.

He chuckles lightly before I feel his tip attempting to push in, the pressure makes me

wince. I bite my lower lip and push my hips back as to give him more access.

“You’re so tight and warm.” He groans and my stupid body shudders.

Traitor!

He’s in, I can’t describe the feeling of having him inside me again. When the first round ends, I avail myself again because, why the fuck am I still hOrny?

He shows me stars on the second round, I cum calling out his name. Force of habit.

We both fall on our backs, right on the carpet.

“That was amazing, I missed being inside you.” He says, coming in for a kiss and a cuddle.

I sit up, “I have to go.”

I’m on my feet, putting on my clothes.

“You’re not staying?”

I thought we spoke about me not sleeping over.

“I can’t stay over, we are not back together.” I tell him.

“I don’t understand.” There’s confusion in his voice, he sits on the couch and covers his manhood with a cushion.

“We are not in a relationship Mbuzo.”

He frowns, “But we just...”

“Had s*x and I submitted myself to you.” I finish his sentence but he still looks confused.

“Yes.”

“Anything to get the d!ck baby.” I say.

If he thinks I will stay because he made me come, he has another thing coming.

“Why are you talking like that? This is not you.”

I don’t think he knows me at all. He doesn’t know the hurt Cashile, he only knows

KaMadlala.

“You’re right Mbuzo, I haven’t been myself since I lost one of my babies, I don’t think I will ever be myself.”

Shit happens! What can I say?

“Can we please talk about this? I have so much to tell you, nothing is as it seems Cashile. We just made love, we...”

“Hey ndoda, I’m pregnant and h0rny most of the time and you have the merchandise.” I pat his shoulder.

His frown deepens, he almost seems offended.

“What are you doing?” He asks.

“This is for a job well done, your s*x game is improving.” I take my purse from the couch and take out R100, then throw it at him.

“I will add R100 next time. Don’t call me, I’ll call you.” I take my hot wings and leave his house.

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CHAPTER 78

MBUZO

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He's spent so many months thinking of a way to get back to the woman he loves, the only thing hindering him was the shame he felt for how he treated her.

Last night was the closest he could ever get to heaven, he didn't think she would come when he messaged her. Then again, she's always been the unpredictable type.

Everything was perfect, he wanted to take time with her and make love to her the whole night, but she wanted it quicker.

He understood because pregnant women have the patience of a toddler and hormones of a teenage boy.

Round one was amazing, round two even better, he was ready for round three until Cashile changed on him. He didn't see it coming.

Of course his ego took a hard blow, he is a man.

He hasn't seen or heard from Cashile in a day. She is not taking his calls and it's driving him crazy.

After breakfast, he goes out to the balcony for a smoke. It helps him clear his mind. There's still no messages from Cashile, she must have blocked his number.

He sees a car pulling up at the gate and heads out to check who it is. Mkhetheni is on the wheel, he hoots. Mbuzo goes back inside to open the sliding gate. When he walks back out, Mhloniphe is exiting the car before it parks.

Mbuzo faintly smiles, he can't believe it's been so long since he saw the twins. Mhloniphe is sensitive when it comes to his brothers, he's crying.

"Uyakhala manje?" Mbuzo.

Of course he's crying, he thought he had died. Mhloniphe drops his head, sobbing. He gets a pat on the back from Mkhetheni.

"Nonkosi." Mkhetheni humbly greets.

Mbuzo has a lump in his throat

It's an emotional moment as the brothers share a group hug.

"How did you know where to find me?" Mbuzo

asks.

“KaMadlala gave us the address.” That’s Mkhetheni.

They head to the living room where he serves them drinks and tells them how he survived Dalisu Sibiya.

“Those Sibiya’s have serious problems, if it’s not the father and son, it’s the daughter.” Mhlo looks better now, the beer has everything to do with it.

Mbuzo becomes a breathing confusion, he lifts his brows at his brothers. They clearly know something he doesn’t.

“MaSibiya didn’t take the break up well, she went to a witch doctor and sold herself to him just to break you and KaMadlala up.”

No one can tell this story better than Mhloniphe,

he adds spices and sauces that leave Mbuzo pale white.

He's so upset, he needs some air. The twins follow him to the balcony. The twins sit, Mbuzo remains standing.

Mkhetheni is not a smoker. He tolerates these two ash trays because... well, as if he has a choice.

"I should have stayed away from Nothando, it's my fault she did all that." He's regretful.

"Have you met KaMadlala?" - Mkhetheni.

"Yes, she wants nothing to do with me."

Go figure!

"You broke her, ndoda, it would be a miracle if she forgives you." - Mkhetheni.

He knows.

"I'm going to do right by her, I will make it up to KaMadlala even if it takes me a lifetime. Noma

sengilele ngiphupha ngaye, she's all I ever think about. I can't imagine life without her." Mbuzo says.

"Where is she now?" –Mkhotheni.

"Work I think."

"Then why are you here? You should be running after her, pleading for her forgiveness."

"I tried, but she won't let me in. She's not taking my calls."

"Let me guess, you tried to have sex with her?" It's so like Mhloniphe to ask that.

Mbuzo nods.

It's not like it's a bad thing, couples do it all the time.

"KaMadlala is different, she's not going to run into your arms because you slept with her." Mkhotheni says, he's speaking from the little he's observed from her.

“I know, help me contact the uncles. I want to pay my dues. KaMadlala is still my wife, we never got to finalized the annulment. I want to give her a proper wedding.” -Mbuzo.

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The day wastes away, it's almost dark. He's cancelled work because his brothers are here. They have a lot of catching up to do.

Braais are their thing and when an opportunity to have one presents itself, they grab it with both hands.

Mhloniphe is in charge of the meat, Mkhetheni is being himself on the chair with a bottle of beer in hand, seated next to him is Mbuzo.

He's given them a rundown of what he's been doing the past couple of months until the

moment he met Cashile.

“I run an on line business.” This is his answer when they ask how he accumulated so much wealth in a short amount of time.

Mhloniphe laughs, “On line business? I thought you would say you’re back to working in a BDSM club. You should consider it.”

“That part of my life is over, I did it for the money. KaMadlala should never find out about it, I don’t want her thinking less of herself when we’re...”

Oops! He almost revealed his bedroom shenanigans.

The twins get it, Mhlo chuckles. Mkhetheni has become uncomfortable.

“We target businesses, specifically white owned. Law-firms, banks. We sell them insurance and get them to invest.” -Mbuzo.

“You know the government will find you out and you can spend time in jail. You’re about to become a father ndoda, your focus should be on getting KaMadlala back.” The voice of reason, Mkhetheni speaks.

“I’m building a legacy for her and my children, I know how it’s like to suffer. I don’t want my children to go through what we went through.”

“I hear you, but this is too risky. What will happen if you’re arrested? KaMadlala will have to step up as a mother and father to that child.”

No seriously... Mkhetheni needs to become a pastor and go preach to his congregation because what he’s doing here is not working.

Mbuzo nods, “I will stop once I have opened businesses and invested my money.”

He has it all figured out, it’s a perfect plan.

“What about the Lona chick? Are you going to keep her around?” Mhloniphe.

“Of course not, I have to find a way to break things off with her. She’s my business partner, we started this business together. One mistake and she will sell me out.”

They laugh at him.

“So she knows too much?” Mhloniphe asks, joining them on the chairs with a lit cigarette.

“I once broke it off, then I was picked up by the police, claiming I was being investigated for fraud and money laundering. She dropped the charges after I apologized.”

They laugh harder.

“Good luck Romeo.” The twins speak at the same time.

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THE MADLALAS

Nothing can ever convince him that the woman he married is not a witch. What other proof does he need than the harsh treatment he's had to endure from her?

A man can survive without food for three days, after three days, he starts getting closer to his grave. Madlala knows his time is near, he can feel it with each breath he takes.

The sun has gone down when he wakes up from his afternoon nap, the house smells like freshly baked scones.

His mouth waters and his stomach roars, MaNkosi has baked. She's been very stingy with the food in this house as if he is not her husband and did not feed her ever since they got married.

Madlala rushes into the kitchen, she's sitting at

the table, sipping hot piping tea with two scones on her plate.

“You baked, mkami.” His smile used to make her weak in the knees.

Why is it not taking effect today?

Okay, she’s still not talking to him and that’s okay. It’s a couple’s squabble, it will pass.

He drags a chair and sits, then licks his cracking lips.

“Please make me tea, my beautiful wife.”

There goes one of the scones, right into MaNkosi’s mouth. Is she trying to commit su!cide or what?

“MaNkosi!” If this scone does not choke her today...

MaNkosi downs it with tea, it’s taking forever for her to swallow the darn thing.

There must be more in the oven... he goes to

check.

Nothing!

The baking trays have rust, the oven is cold, there are no signs that it was used today.

He opens the cupboards and drawers.

“How come there is no food in this house?” The last time he checked, they had groceries.

MaNkosi has only been cooking for herself and starving him only because the only kitchen skill he has is holding a spoon.

“When did you buy groceries?” She’s on her second scone, half of it is gone.

As she sips her tea, Madlala runs to her and snatches the scone from her hand. It’s in his mouth before she can blink.

“Why did you do that?”

“Do you think it’s fair that you are starving your husband?”

Who does she think she is?

MaNkosi shakes her head and finishes her tea.

“I’m hungry,” he says, pouring himself a glass of water to down the dry pastry.

“Where did you get the scones?” He asks.

“At a funeral.” She’s been attending funerals just to eat the food there, Madlala finds it disgusting and degrading.

“Who died this time?”

She ignores him.

Whatever! He doesn’t care.

He fills the kettle half full and boils water.

There’s a full pack of Five Roses teabags, but no sugar.

“Where is the sugar? The container was full yesterday.” This can’t be happening.

Is this woman feeding the village with the food in this house?

“MaNkosi, I’m talking to you maarn!”

Yelling is not good for his weak body, he’s suddenly feeling dizzy and holds on to the counter.

MaNkosi gets off the chair and goes to answer the knock at the door.

“Hello Mah!” She greets with a smile on her face.

MaNkosi’s forehead crinkles, “Do I know you?”

“I’m Khaya,” and Khaya is dragging a suitcase.

“Is it okay mah if I stay here with you?” She says when MaNkosi frowns at it.

“Why? What happened to your father’s house?”

–MaNkosi.

“Nothing. I spoke to my father, he agreed that I

come stay here for a while.”

Ehh!

“Your reason is what?”

“Bakhe is special to me, I want to take care of his parents.”

Randomly?

Unprovoked?

“So you are Bakhe’s girlfreind?”

“Yebo mah.”

Ah yes, she’s always wanted a daughter-in-law. This one looks like she can cook and scrub floors.

Now she can smile back, “How have you been my child?”

“Good mah!”

“Is Khehla okay? Oh Nkosi yami!” Of course she’s always expecting bad news. Who knows

what Madlala is planning on doing to her children?

“Bakhe is fine mah, he left the village last week.”

What! No way! Khehla left without informing her?

Madlala pulls the door wide open, “Where did he go? Give me the address.”

Hehehe! This man cannot be real.

“No, you stay away from my son.” MaNkosi says.

“He’s my son too, I want to tell Bakhe how you have been treating his father.” Madlala says.

This is getting awkward.

“Is it okay if I come in? I would like to speak to you two.” Khaya says.

They let her in, two men in suits enter after. MaNkosi and Madlala are confused but show their guests to the living room.

“This is Pastor Alex and that’s the Bishop.” The Bishop does not have a name?

“What are they doing in my house?” MaNkosi asks.

They lost Madlala at ‘Pastor’ he’s too hungry for this.

“Bakhe didn’t tell me why he was leaving the village, but I spoke to his friend Njabulo. He told me everything mah.”

What is everything?

“He told me that you and baba practice witchcraft.”

Psst! As if she never knew.

“He also told me that Bakhe and his sister felt abandoned by you two. No one is perfect, I am not here to judge you. If you would allow me, I would like to help you change your ways. Bakhe

and Cashile deserve better parents.”

What a comedian!

MaNkosi snorts and looks at her husband, he’s just sitting there, staring into space with a fist pressed to his cheek.

“Continue!” MaNkosi says, it sounds like a threat.

Khaya rubs her hands together, she’s clearly nervous.

“Pastor Alex and the Bishop are here to pray for you.”

The scones she ate must be blocking her ears, I mean that’s how dry they were.

“Why should we allow that? And how are we sure that these people are real pastors?”

MaNkosi asks, she’s slowly losing her cool.

“They are real Pastors mah, I have seen the power God bestowed upon them. Please do it

for your children, and yourselves. You two have lost everything, your children hate you. Who is going to take care of you in your old age?"

Madlala sniffs and wipes his wet eyes.

"It's okay baba, you're not alone anymore."

Khaya.

It's not okay, he's hungry... this one wouldn't understand, not until she has a wife who starves her.

"We're going to start with prayer." Pastor Alex stands up with a bible in hand.

Mankosi swallows, is this man supposed to look this serious?

"I will read from the book of John 3 vs 16. For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."

Yoh! Yoh! Yoh! Haise!

Madlala is falling asleep, ManKosi looks bored to sin.

It doesn't stop the pastor from praying.

"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned but whoever does not believe in Him is condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only son."

"Amen." –Khaya.

"I also have a son, I never believed in him. My stomach would be full if I did." Madlala absent mindedly says.

They go through a second of silence.

"I am not here to judge you but to show you the light. Jesus died for the sins of the world, so

that through Him, there might be sin no more. If you believe in Jesus, He will save you from your sins.” Pastor Alex says.

Curse this day!

MaNkosi heaves a sigh, she is not invested in this. Neither is Madlala, his empty stomach is doing all the thinking.

“We will pray for you first sir, then you will get a chance to surrender your lives to Jesus.” Pastor Alex hands his bible to the Bishop and stands in front of Madlala.

“Jesus said, ‘In my name, they will cast out demons. They will lay their hands on sick people and they will heal.’” Pastor Alex starts praying at the top of his voice.

It gets Madlala’s attention, “Why is he yelling at God? Are the windows in heaven closed?”

Khaya looks defeated, this is not going to be as easy as she thought.

But Pastor Alex proceeds, placing his hands on Madlala's head.

Now this man doesn't like to be touched, he yanks Alex's hand away and stands up too fast, he almost faints. Did Jesus feel like this fasting in the wilderness?

"Bishop come and help me, the demon is coming out."

Say what now!

The men of God press their heads on Madlala's head.

"Come out of him in the name of Jesus." Pastor Alex yells.

Madlala tries to run, but Alex hits him with a two-kick. He falls on his back, crying.

"Mamayo!" He's squirming like a dying worm under these men's grips.

“MaNkosi, tell these people to let me go.”
Madlala shouts.

He’s feeling hot flashes, so he starts ripping his shirt off.

He feels under attack, hence the need to fight.

“Pastor, he’s stripping naked. The spiritual husband is coming out.” Khaya exclaims.

“I am not a spiritual husband.” Madlala cries out loud.

MaNkosi’s eyes pop out when Pastor Alex takes out his belt and starts whipping Madlala.

“Out in the name of Jesus!” Pastor Alex yells, belting the man all over his body.

“Why are you beating him?” MaNkosi shouts in horror.

“We’re beating the demon, your husband can’t feel anything.”

“MaNkosi, I am not a demon. I am not a

demon.”

The belt lands on his back, “It’s stubborn. Leave this man, you demon from hell.”

Madlala bends, screaming in pain and rolling on the floor.

Then everything stops... he's fainted.

“Hawemah! My husband, you've killed my husband.” She's on her feet, hands above her head and voice above the roof.

“He's fine Mrs Madlala, the demon is holding him captive. Bring me cold water.” The pastor says, he's run out of breath.

MaNkosi refuses to leave her husband alone with these people.

Khaya runs to the kitchen.

“I am not going to put my husband in a coffin, do you hear me? There will never be a grave for my husband, you people are going to eat him.

You will eat him.” She can’t fathom the thought of burying the man she loves, six feet under nogal!

Khaya is back, she empties the water on Madlala’s face.

He wakes up gasping for air as if he was jolted out of hell, his eyes are wild and red rimmed.

“Speak, how many are you inside this man’s body? Khuluma demoni!” Pastor Alex doesn’t give him time to breathe, he’s holding the belt up in the air.

Madlala’s eyes have never been this wide, “I am not possessed, I fainted because of hunger and pain.”

His voice trembles.

Pastor Alex doesn’t believe him, he rolls up the sleeves of his shirt

“Bishop call for backup, we have a stubborn

demon to cast out. We are going to be here the whole night.”

Madlala starts crying.

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CHAPTER 79

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“Baba.”

What does this devil-sent want this time?

Madlala winces in bed, moving is a struggle. His body is aching, it feels like he was playing rugby

last night and dribbled all over the place.

“Go away.”

“Your food is ready baba.”

Now she wants to poison him, as if sending those pastors to beat him up was not enough.

Madlala forces his painful body into a sitting position.

“Ngena.”

God knows he will live to regret this.

She walks in carrying a tray of food, his stomach roars. He eyes the scrambled eggs and bacon, there are two slices of toasted brown bread on the side and fried tomatoes.

She made him tea as well, with milk.

“Sawubona baba.”

He draws her body with a cold look.

Mameshane!

She's even wearing a doek and a long dress.

"Did my invitation to my son's wedding get lost at the post office, perhaps?"

Khaya is confused, "Wedding baba?"

"Hayi, kanti ngiyazibuzela nje. Uyakotiza in my house, hayi cha. Isibindi unaso we-ntombazane. Unamandla Dade, You have a liver shame."

Demedi maarn!

She's one brave lady.

This food smells like it was made by chefs in heaven, he can't stop looking at it.

He licks his lips, "I eat eight slices."

He crosses his arms.

It will take Jesus coming down from heaven for him to forgive this stranger.

She smiles.

Hasn't she gotten the memo? There is nothing

to smile about here.

“I will make more bread, first I’ll bring water so you wash your hands.” She places the tray on his lap.

His smile is slowly finding its way to his face.

“Is this what they call breakfast in bed?” He flips the bacon over, it’s made to perfection. Crispy and dry.

Where is MaNkosi?

She must come see what other mother’s children are doing.

“Yebo baba, I will go and get your water.”

Khaya leaves the bedroom.

Clean hands for what? Madlala digs in, it’s finger lickin good.

Khaya finds MaNkosi in the kitchen, she smiles.

MaNkosi clicks her tongue at her, looking at her from head to toe.

“Sawubona mah, did you sleep well?”

Yeah neh!

With a disgusted look on her face, MaNkosi opens the pan with bacon.

“Why is there a pig in my pot?”

This girl continues to test her patience.

“I went to buy groceries mah, I thought you and bab’Madlala will like some bacon.”

Key word: Groceries.

MaNkosi opens the cupboards, her cupboards have never been this full. It looks like it’s Christmas inside the fridge.

“What job do you do?” She must be an accountant because... what the heck!

So much food?

There's even meet and Viennas, plus Russians.

"I'm unemployed mah, I borrowed the money from my father." Khaya says.

Does it even matter where she got the money? She could have even sold umlenze, MaNkosi doesn't care.

"I brought baba his food, I just need to get him water to wash his hands."

MaNkosi is sneering again, "Don't tell me that you gave him food without my permission."

This is confusing for Khaya, "I don't understand. Was I not supposed to give him food?"

MaNkosi sucks her teeth, she still doesn't like this girl.

"What was that thing you and your pastors did to my husband? Huh?"

It was a traumatic night MaNkosi will never forget.

When it was her turn, she made sure to sit still and not fight the pastors until they were done praying over her. Madlala was still laying on the ground, heaving and shaking with weakness.

The pastors left with promises to come back and check on them.

“I asked you a question ntombazane.”

Khaya looks at her and smiles, “I was doing the Lord’s work mah.”

The Lord’s wo...

Hebbana! Does this girl know who she’s dealing with?

Khaya takes a broom from behind the door, “Please give baba water for his hands, I’m going to sweep the yard, the sun is hot today.”

“Yey wena, come back here.” MaNkosi shouts after Khaya.

CASHILE

“I love you mommy.” Lulu throws her arms around me after I help her out of the car. She’s early for crèche but I’m late for work.

“I love you more my Angel.” I give her a kiss on the cheek, then gesture for teacher Langa to take her. The woman’s eyes are above my head.

Who is she looking at with her mouth hanging open like that?

“Do I also get a hug?”

Fuck!

What is he doing here?

Lulu suddenly becomes shy, yet there’s a

simple smile on her face as she slowly wraps her tiny arms around Mbuzo's long legs.

"How are you baby?"

"Fine," her head is dropped.

He's not that intimidating my baby, what he is, is a fool.

"You're growing taller every day, what is mommy feeding you?"

"Oats, yuk!" She sticks her tongue out and this tall fool chuckles.

"Then oats are not bad at all, look at how tall you are. If you continue eating your oats, you are going to be as tall as me one day." He taps the bridge of her nose, she giggles.

"You are too tall, uncle. My friends will laugh at me."

She can't be at the age where she worries what people think.

Mbuzo wishes her a good day, I give my baby one last hug and walk her to teacher Langa.

And this one?

“Yini Mbuzo? You are stalking me now?”

The frowning, dear God!

“You are not taking my calls.”

“And that’s a sign that I don’t want to talk to you, leave me alone.”

I walk past him, I don’t have time to be arguing with a grown man.

“Cashile wait,” he stops me from opening the door.

“Ngiyacela sthandwa sami, can we talk?” His fingers brush my arms, making me shiver.

I hate him for that?

“We have nothing to talk about, you said what you needed to say back in the village.” I push

him aside and get in the car.

This man thinks I'm his fool, he thinks I will let him near me because of what?

Why did God make men?

Oh, yeah! Something about multiplying.

Here's another man calling me, I have a good mind not to answer his call. But he's my boss.

"I'm on my way."

"You said that forty minutes ago." He's exaggerating.

"I had to take Lulu to school, I'm on my way."

"Couldn't you ask her grandmother to do that? Cashile, I'm running a business here."

As if the hospital will go bankrupt because Cashile is late.

Yhu, huh ah!

I drop his call because he has nothing relevant

to say except to complain.

The traffic adds to my frustration, this cannot be my day.

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It's around nine when I arrive, Nkosana is going to have my head. There's no one outside, to show that work has started.

I almost scream when someone grabs my hand and starts dragging me towards the opposite direction.

"Mbuzo, what are you doing?"

I can't believe he followed me here.

"Where are you taking me?"

He doesn't say anything, he's pulling me towards his car.

He opens the back door, "Get in."

He's lost his mind.

"Are you kidnapping me now? Is this who you have become?" His eyes skate over my body from head to toe and I feel my cheeks burning.

"Get in the car, Kitten."

"Yes, Daddy."

Shit!

He freezes for a moment, his eyes locked with mine.

This is witchcraft, how did that come out of my mouth? I didn't mean to say it, but it's out there and by the looks of it, it has an effect on him.

It's all over his face,

I find myself stepping inside the car.

"Scoot over," he's in my face, hovering over my body that I slowly start to fall on my back. He doesn't stop leaning in until he's fully inside, then shuts the door.

I'm beneath him, trying to stop myself from breathing too loud.

God, tell me why my legs are open.

His body is hard against mine, I can feel something hard poking my thigh.

There's an ache between my legs as I reach down to feel this thing poking me, my slutty hand decides to stroke it.

Mbuzo growls in my ear, slightly flinching and grinding his erection on my thighs.

He's hard.

"It's all you, Kitten. Only you have this power over me." He's nibbling my ear, I lose control of my body. There is no doubt, I will not be able to control myself after this.

"We're in public, Mbuzo?" My voice comes out as a whisper.

He runs his eyes over my entire face, they stop

on my mouth. I don't know why my lips separate.

"It's okay, I've got you." He says.

A subtle gasp leaves my mouth when he pulls up my dress, my eyes are glued to his but I hear the sound of his belt.

Then, I feel him entering me. He's sucking my neck, that's going to leave marks but it's the least of my worries right now.

"I'm not going to lose you again." He says, plunging himself deeper.

"I am not yours to lose." I moan, sinking my teeth on his shoulder, my nails running down his back.

"That's not what your body says, you're trembling under my touch." His fingers are tracing my skin, barely a touch. Maybe that's why I'm trembling, maybe it's because of his slow deep strokes or his shallow breaths on my

ear.

“Don’t get it twisted, I am not in love with you anymore.” I’m losing control of my breathing.

He looks at me with fire in his eyes, as if he’s waiting for me to submit myself to him. I already have, what more does he want?

“I’m going to get you back, KaMadlala.”

He brushes his lips on mine, I’m actually kissing him back. I cannot believe myself.

This is so, so not me. Sex in a car.

But I have fallen weak, it feels right. I always want things with this man...things I don’t understand, like this moment. But nothing he’s done so far has made me want to forgive him. Although his strokes are perfect and teasing my G-spot, directing me to my climax... I can’t find it in me to look past the things he did to me.

“You’re my good girl, Kitten.” He picks up the

pace, slamming into me. I can't control my moans, nothing matters at this moment. The only thing on my mind is coming.

"Mbuzo..."

He glances at me, "So, so perfect."

He pecks my lips, then trails his lips down to my neck. He's keeping his deep strokes on point, just faster and he's hitting every angle.

My body is buzzing, the orgasm has taken over. It keeps coming in waves. His hand glides up my inner thigh, it doesn't stop until his fingers touch my clit.

He darkly growls against my ear at the feel and begins to rub me.

"Cum for Daddy Kitten." He whispers, and removes his hand, only to thrust in me deeply.

I buck my hips, locking my legs around his hips.

I use the heel of my feet to push him down, deeper into me. My legs unlocked when the climax multiplies, crushing into me wave after wave.

Mbuzo's moans skyrocket along with his strokes, he's coming same time as me.

I don't know how the sound of his deep growls makes me cum again.

I'm spent when he pulls out, he's looking at me. I shy away, I hate him.

"That's my good girl." He places a kiss on the crook of my neck, where my skin burns. It's all that biting he was doing.

"Get off me," I'm strong enough to speak now.

The darkness in his eyes makes me regret my words.

He fixes my dress before pulling up his pants.

My underwear is wet, I can't wear it. The car smells thick of sex, it's an arousing stink.

"Quit your job," he says, fitting his tall-self on the seat next to me.

I must still be stuck in orgasmic glory, I think I'm hearing things.

"Sorry, I thought you said I must quit my job."

He doesn't laugh with me... he's serious.

"Forget it, why must I listen to you?"

"There's something dodgy about the doctor."

He says, brushing my thigh. I smack his hand away.

"Is he into illegal business?" That's what dodgy is to me.

"No, but he's with you to get to me. I don't know what I did to him, I'm still investigating him."

They know each other?

“Why would he want to get to you? What did you do to him?”

His brows rise, “Nkosana does not have good intentions towards you. He’s going to hurt you just to get to me. I know I’m the bad guy in your eyes but you have to listen to me, KaMadlala.”

“I don’t have to do anything you say, Mbuzowakhe.”

The eyebrow thing again, it comes with a tilt of the head this time.

“You just came at my word.” The fool looks proud of himself.

“I’m pregnant, you can’t blame me for anything. And this is a no strings attached situationship, there is no us.”

His face gives off a scoff, he’s silently calling me bluff.

“I will take care of you, I can give you anything

you want. You don't have to work for him anymore." He says.

"You still haven't told me what Nkosana did, give me a reason why I should quit my job and depend on a man who will leave me without a thought to it."

He's that man.

I will never forget what he did to me.

He looks apologetic, as if I care.

"It will never happen again, I promise."

"Your promises mean shit to me, you can't just come back into my life and expect me to leave everything and follow you. You lost my trust, Mbuzo."

I'm startled by the knock on the car window, it's Nkosana and Lona.

Shit!

I forgot about work.

“I need to hide,” I’m panicking.

I can’t afford to lose this job, I can barely maintain the house and Lulu’s school fees.

Mbuzo is so calm I want to punch him. Nkosana keeps knocking, Lona is trying to open the door, as if we owe them an open door.

Thank God for tinted windows, I’m sure I can hide in this big car.

Nkosana is going to fire me, I’ve been a b!tch towards him, he won’t have mercy on me.

“Mbuzo do something,” I snap.

“What?”

Nxa!

“Stop asking me nonsense and fix this, I’m two hours late for work.”

His eyes narrow and he calmly whispers, “What am I going to do about that dirty mouth of yours Kitten?”

Fuck!

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[03/06, 15:52] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 80

CASHILE

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It looks so awkward as he jumps in the front seat with his long legs. He starts the car and reverses, making sure not to face Nkosana and Lona.

“What are you doing?”

He’s driving off.

“You said to make a plan, this is the best I can do.”

He can never take me seriously.

“I have work, Mbuzo and my car is back there. Nkosana will know I was at work.”

“Yeah but he won’t know you were with me, unless you want me to tell him.” He’s glancing at me through the rearview mirror.

“Says the man who can’t tell his fiancé his real identity. What is she doing there anyway? How did she know you’d be at the hospital?”

“I don’t think she was there for me, she didn’t know that I’d be there. I followed you remember.”

Rhaaa! Brave aren’t we?

“Ithini indaba yenu vele? Did you ask her out on

a date? How did you meet?"

I want to know their story.

He sighs, it's not the answer I want.

"You want me to give you a chance, then you will tell me everything."

The glare in the rearview mirror, I maintain eye contact.

"I don't know how I ended up in Joburg or who brought me here. I woke up at South Rand Hospital and couldn't remember who I was. A week in, I met Lona. She was doing a catering job for the hospital staff that day. They were having a party for one of their staff members. She was persistent in talking to me, although I wasn't interested. I was confused and desperate to remember who I was. She visited me almost every day and brought me food."

So he had another woman taking care of him, must have been nice.

“I can’t tell you how our relationship began, I guess she was the only one I had. She then introduced me to a business idea she had, an on line business. Two months in, I started to see a woman in my dreams. Her face wasn’t clear at first, then slowly, you started coming into view. You were the first person I remembered KaMadlala.”

Yippee! I will throw a party later.

“Then why didn’t you go back home? Why did you let your brothers think you were dead?”

“I don’t know, I wanted to come home but I couldn’t face anyone after what I had done to you. I guess I was ashamed.”

“So you decided to hide in Joburg like a coward? You hid under Lona’s skirt.”

I don’t know why I’m angry, but I am.

I see his jaw tick, I’m tickling him the wrong way.

“I used my connections to find you, that’s when I found out you were dating the doctor. So I watched you from a distance, while investigating him.”

“Okay, what did you find out about the doctor?” I ask.

“His parents died in a house fire when he was 17, he has a criminal record.”

That’s not shocking, his tattoos are suspicious.

“You think he killed his parents?” I know it’s what he’s thinking, it’s his thing.

“I’m not sure yet. I found a picture of him posing with my parents, he was wearing a graduation gown.” He stops at a red light, I still don’t know where he is taking me.

My phone has been going crazy with calls from Nkosana.

“Your father sponsored his tuition.” I tell him, he

whips his head back.

“How do you know?”

“He told me, he once called you the Nonkosi boys.”

He looks shocked.

“Did he tell you anything else?” There’s a sense of urgency in his voice.

“No,” I don’t know what Mbuzo is up to.

I can only hope it’s nothing that will harm me and my babies.

He drives on, “We should start going to church.”

I laugh because haibo!

“What? I’m not as perfect as Lona?”

“Don’t do that Cashile, don’t twist my words.”

Nonsense!

I look out the window, he’s annoying me.

“I want us to be protected from any form of witchcraft.”

Wow Mbuzo!

“Is this about my parents? You’re still there?”

This is a touchy subject, I hate to tackle.

“It’s about us, me, you and our children. We were victims of witchcraft, Nothando went to a witch doctor to break us up.” He says.

“What do you mean?”

I’m really lost here.

“How I behaved towards you, the coldness and hate. It was her and her witch doctor.”

That b!tch!

I should have known.

“Have you done anything about it?”

I want Nothando to pay for destroying my life. I lost my baby.

“I found out about it recently.” He says.

I want her to pay still.

Mbuzo stops the car and glances back at me.

“An apology will never be enough. But I want you to know that I am sorry, I will apologize forever if I have to. I have never doubted my love for you, or yours for me. I love you, KaMadlala. I will love you till the stars fall off.”

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He’s driven us to Lulu’s school.

“Spend the day with me, KaMadlala. If you say yes, then we’re taking Lulu with us.”

Yoh!

He wants to play happy family.

“I have to go back to work and explain myself

and Lulu is in class.”

“She’s in crèche, they haven’t started learning ABC yet.” He’s smiling.

Ohhoo!

“What do you have in mind?” I ask.

“I don’t know, we will go where the wind takes us.” He says.

Why am I agreeing to this?

It must be that explicit moment we had in the car, he’s got me playing in the palm of his hand.

I take my underwear and hand it to him.

I want to slap the smirk off his face.

“Put it in the glove compartment and I need to clean up first. I am not fetching my daughter like this.”

He runs his eyes over my body with a naughty smile. He knows what I’m talking about.

His scent is all over me.

“I can drive you to my place, you can bath there.” Mbuzo offers

I will take it, I won’t be comfortable walking around smelling like s€x.

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We get to his house, I tell him to wait in the car because I know what will happen if he follows me inside.

It’s easy to find the main bedroom, I strip naked in the bedroom. I don’t want my dress wrinkled, otherwise, I won’t have anything else to wear.

Half way in my bathe, I hear the bedroom door, then the softness of his footsteps.

Shit! I forgot to lock the door.

I wait, while preparing cuss words to throw at him if he enters. I told this man to wait outside.

Jeer! I know it's his house but come on.

The footsteps again, then I hear the door open and shut. He's gone, now I can bathe in peace.

I find a white dress on the bed, it's my size. I won't even ask how or where he got it, I'm comforted though by the fact that Lona is smaller than me, so it's not hers.

He's leaning on the car when I come out, and smiles.

"You don't have a mirror in that house." I complain, who doesn't have a mirror in the house?

"I used to see an old man staring at me in the mirror, I removed them." He says.

That's creepy.

"Your car has mirrors," I tell him.

"It's not the same," he chuckles and opens the

passenger door for me.

“You look beautiful.”

I don’t reply.

We’re on our way to Lulu’s school.

This one won’t tell me what he has in store for today.

Am I really doing this?

“How is the baby?” He reaches out to touch my belly and keeps his hand there.

If we get into an accident because he’s driving with one hand!

“Fine.”

“When is your next ultra sound, I want to be present.”

“Two months from now.” I don’t give him the date because I don’t want him there yet.

Nkosana has never come to any of my

appointments.

“Is it a boy or girl?” Mbuzo asks.

“I want it to be a surprise,” I tell him.

“It’s a boy.”

Hau, prophet Xaba!

“It’s a girl,” I say just to break his ego. It doesn’t work, he’s grinning.

Nkosana is calling me again, I put my phone on silent. I will talk to him tomorrow.

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Bakhe arrived a week ago, I want him permanently staying with me but he thinks it’s inappropriate because this was once Juba’s house.

It’s not like Juba and I were married, he’s not an

in-law, if that's what he's worried about.

Lulu and I got home around 9pm last night and because of Mbuzo, I woke up tired. I made it clear to him that buying me and my daughter lunch is not an apology. He has to prove himself, show me that he really is sorry.

I won't accept anything less.

Mrs. Ngwenya woke me up too early today.

Never ask an African mom to wake you up at a certain time, they will wake you up two hours earlier.

It's Saturday, my baby has no school but I have work. Bakhe promised to take her to the Zoo, I wish I could be there but I already missed work yesterday. Today I pick a pair of jeans and a round neck top that hides the stupid hickeys Mbuzo put on me.

He's so childish.

I wear a weave because Thuli recommends it.

My phone beeps, it's 8am, perfect timing for my salary to click in.

Wait a minute!

There must be some sort of mistake.

"R5000?" Where is the other 5k?

I will sort it out when I get to work.

"Mfazi, did you order a to-go hot chocolate?"

That's Thuli yelling, she just arrived. Sometimes she eats breakfast here. I know Wendy hates me wherever she is, I have taken her friend away from her.

I'm going to throw up, I know that's my brother she's talking about.

I leave the kitchen with her water and... yep, she's drooling.

I narrow my eyes at Bakhe who's seated on the couch, he has no business entertaining Thuli's silliness with that smirk on his face.

"Ewww, he's my brother." This should get her to stop but not Thuli, she's lusting over my brother.

"Don't even think about it, he farts in his sleep."

I hand her the glass of water.

"I bet it smells like cinnamon."

Jesus, you know my works. I have tried!

Bakhe chuckles, "I didn't know my sister has beautiful friends." He's standing up to shake Thuli's hand.

That's not a handshake, the man kisses the back of her hand.

"Ntokazi!" He's making soul-snatching eye contact.

Thuli fakes fainting, "A zulu man from the village? Fresh from the village? Yummy."

These two haven't even looked my way.

I'm going back to the kitchen to get my lunch box, I will throw up my breakfast if I stay here.

I walk in on my phone ringing.

I don't take his call, a message comes through right after.

"I won't hide you anymore, I am willing to risk it all. Everyone will know that you are mine and I am yours."

Another promise I am not going to dwell upon.

It's still so hard for me to trust Mbuzo, I don't know if he's in my future.

"I'm leaving, kiss Lulu for me when she wakes up." I'm telling my brother, he waves me away.

I trust him not to mess with my best friend or all hell will break loose.

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I start by the finance department, it's a building not far from the hospital. It also belongs to Nkosana, there are about five people working there.

"Hello sisi," I greet the lady.

There are two more ladies sitting behind desks, it's a big office shared by the five employees.

We exchanged pleasantries before I state my case.

"I think there has been a mistake with my payment, I only received half of my salary.

"There hasn't been a mistake Cashile, Dr Nkosana approved it. He said that will be your pay from now on."

What?

There's still going to be debit orders, I will have

nothing before the week ends.

“When did he do that?”

“Yesterday.” She says.

That son of a...

What am I going to do with R5000?

I thank the lady and drive to the hospital.

Mhloniphe brought my car last night, Mbuzo is too young to be sending that man around.

Nkosana is not in yet, I work half day on Saturdays. I hope he will arrive before 12pm.

I sit behind the desk until it's time for me to clock out and that's when he arrives. He doesn't even look at me as he walks past my desk. I know he's angry because of what happened yesterday.

I have an explanation, I fell sick when I arrived and took a cab home to rest because I was too dizzy to drive.

Sounds perfect.

I need to talk to him about my leave. I applied last week and he hasn't approved it yet.

I knock and enter, he's writing something on a note pad.

"Hi, I wanted to remind you to approve my maternity leave. I sent the form last week."

He told me to apply early because it might not get approved. Apparently, there are board members that oversee these things.

Such a liar.

"Why do you want to go on maternity leave?"

Is that a trick question?

"I'm pregnant, I will be giving birth in less than three months."

"There's so much work to do, I can't approve the leave."

“I will need time off, Nkosana.”

He hasn't looked at me.

“If you have time to sleep around, you have time for work, I'm sure.” He says.

“What are you talking about?”

He stops writing and looks at me, anger fills his eyes.

“Did he give you those love bites?”

Eish! I thought I covered them well. I place my hand on my neck.

Nkosana squints his eyes, “How do you look yourself in the mirror after sleeping with another woman's fiancé?”

What?

“I saw you last week, you drove to his house at midnight and had s€x with him.”

He saw me?

“Were you following me?”

I can't believe this man.

He sneers, “When did you downgrade to prostitution, Cashile?”

Fuvk him!

I grab the laptop on his desk, and throw it at him.

The fool's ducking skills are quite impressive.
The laptop hit the wall and broke. I missed.

“That's going to come out of your salary.”

He's fvckin mad.

“Uyinja Nkosana yezwa? First you cut my salary, then you disrespect me. What do you want from me? You think you are better than me, wena?”

The door opens abruptly, Mbuzo walks in—behind him is a guy in black and white

uniforms. He's a car salesman, his badge says so.

"KaMadlala," he's greeting.

"What's going on? Who said you can come into my office?" That's Nkosana, breathing fire.

Mbuzo looks at me, his fingers brush my collarbone.

"What are you doing?" I snap.

He's being inappropriate at my work place.

He looks at the man, "You see these marks?"

What the fuck!

He's showing them the hickeys he put on my neck.

"I want a Bentayga exactly this color, is it possible?" Mbuzo says.

"Yes, we have it in different shades of red." The man replies but this one shakes his head.

“I don’t want any red, I want this exact color. It’s for my wife, a symbol of my love.” –Mbuzo says, pointing at my hickeys.

I’m not sure what color they are, but this is absurd.

He’s buying me a Bentley Bentayga? Specifically same color as the hickeys on my body. I mean, that car is expensive.

Yoh!

“Personalize the number plates.” Mbuzo continues.

I look at Nkosana, he’s sweating pearls. I’m still confused.

“What should the plates say, sir?” The guy asks.

Mbuzo shifts his gaze to me, “KITTEN.”

He answers the man.

I hear a thud, Nkosana has fallen on his seat with shock on his face.

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[03/06, 15:52] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 81

BAKHE

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“If it’s not you dragging me to Zoos, it’s Mkhetheni dragging me to izangoma.”

“It’s bonding Saturday with Lulu.” Bakhe says.

“Bonding Saturday? You arrived just yesterday, now you have bonding Saturdays?”

Bakhe laughs, he loves fathering Lulu.

Walking around the zoo has been tiring for Mhloniphe, this is not his idea of fun. But Bakhe seemed to enjoy time with his niece.

He'd tell her the names of the animals and even go as far as making their sounds which Lulu found funny.

It's hours later, they are spent. They sit on a bench, watching play with a ball.

"I'm going to miss her," Bakhe randomly says, his eyes fixed on his niece.

"You're leaving?"

"I'm looking for a place to stay, I can't stay at my sister's boyfriend's place."

It just doesn't feel right and he's not comfortable knowing the house was a handout.

"What boyfriend?" Mhlo and his defense mode.

"Her ex, he left the house to her. It's big enough to accommodate my entire family but I'm just

not okay with staying there.”

Oh, the dead ex!

“Mbuzo is doing some on line business, it’s actually working out for him. I can get him to put you in.” Mhloniphe says.

“Your brother is still skating on thin ice, I can’t work with him until I know for sure that my sister has forgiven him.” He’s not holding a grudge, it’s a family thing. They have to look out for each other.

Mhloniphe seems to find his statement funny.

“Those two are back together, didn’t KaMadlala tell you?”

This is news to Bakhe, as far as he knows, Cashile still hates Mbuzo.

“I should have known,” Bakhe says with a sigh, then feels a fist on his back.

Mhloniphe though!

“Yeah, they are still married by the way. Just don’t try to get involved in their issues, you’ll get left behind while they are kissing and making up.” Mhloniphe has a point.

Mbuzo and Cashile would turn on you faster than a merry-go-round.

“Lulu come play this side,” Bakhe yells after her. She’s chasing her ball down the crowded park. His phone rings as he stands, it’s Khaya.

“I’ll get her, answer your call.” Mhloniphe takes off after Lulu.

“Hello!”

“Bakhe, when are you coming back?”

He has nothing to come back to.

“Why are you calling me, Khaya?”

“Your parents are suffering, they don’t have food. You should see how thin your father is.

Can you send money?"

He clicks his tongue and drops the call, she can't be doing this to him.

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CASHILE

"What do you mean wife?" That's Nkosana.

"You didn't tell him, Kitten?"

Can he not call me that? It's really inappropriate right now.

"Tell him what?" I ask Mbuzo, his arrogance is so loud.

He puts an arm around my shoulder and pulls me closer, then kisses my cheek.

"We're still married."

That can't be true, I remember signing the papers.

"That's impossible because you are Joshua, Lona's fiancé." Nkosana is on his feet again, raising his voice at a nonchalant man who clearly is not affected by his anger.

"Allow me to reintroduce myself."

This is so dramatic, he has his hand extended towards Nkosana.

"The name is Mbuzowakhe Xaba, and this woman right here is Mrs. Mbuzowakhe Xaba. My one and only love." The last part he says while making eye contact with me.

I'd be lying if I say I'm not confused about the whole marriage thing.

"So you've been lying to all of us? To Lona? If you really are Mbuzo, how are you able to afford such an expensive car?" Nkosana.

Mbuzo's eyes grow thin, "Do we know each other?"

Okay, he's changing the subject.

"What?" Nkosana stutters.

"This is the first time looking into your eyes and I am sure I have seen those eyes before."

Should I give them a moment? Some privacy maybe.

"We met at Thuli's house, otherwise you look like the jerk my Cashile was married to."

–Nkosana.

His Cashile?

"I'm not your Cashile," is he okay in the head?

He ignores me, he's still glaring at Mbuzo.

Mbuzo takes my hand into his, I let him because if I had to choose between the two of them, I would choose him.

“My wife... is not yours mfethu.”

“Don’t call me mfethu, I am not your brother.”

Nkosana growls.

Hau, did he have to shout like that?

His chest is bouncing, his eyes are red with rage.

He faces me and seems to calm down, “Cashile, I thought you said you signed the annulment papers. If this man really is Mbuzo, then he’s lying to you about the marriage. Have you forgotten what he did to you? The things he said to you?” Nkosana.

He sounds hurt, like I ripped his heart out of his chest.

“I did sign the papers, we’re divorced or... annulled.” If there is such an expression.

He’s shaking his head, this man who just ordered an expensive car for me.

“I’m telling you, Mbuzo. I left the papers with my

aunt, didn't you fetch them like you said you would?" I mean... he was ready and desperate to get the annulment done.

"No, I didn't."

I'd ask why but, what difference will it make?

He's here, he wants "us" again and I'm... I'm not sure I can trust him with my heart.

"He is lying to you, Cashile. Do not believe anything he says." Nkosana snaps.

"Are you done my love? We should talk about this at home, not in front of strangers." -Mbuzo.

He walks with me out the door and the whole time I feel Nkosana's eyes drilling my back.

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The car salesman leaves after Mbuzo dismisses him. We're at my desk and I'm packing up.

“You can’t afford a Bentayga. And why are you buying me a car?”

This is a bicycle man, when did he get here?

“You’re my wife, I can buy you anything you desire.”

I’m still shocked by this wife thing.

“If you say that again, I will stab you with this pen.”

He smirks, “Sorry wifey.”

I charge at him, the plan is to stab him on the chest. He grabs my hand and locks his arms around my waist.

He’s a breath away from my face. The truth is he looks like he can afford the car, I’m just having a hard time believing it.

Wait a second!

“Uthwele Mbuzo?”

“What?”

“Please don’t tell me that you went to a sangoma and sold your soul for riches.”

A frown, “I told you what I do, I work with a group of Nigerians...”

Oh yeah!

“Ngazile, I knew it. You went to the marine kingdom.”

He laughs and kisses my cheek, “I don’t need the devil’s help to make money. I’m a Xaba, wealth runs in our veins.”

That’s boastful.

I escape his embrace, people are staring.

“We’re going back to the village, there’s a ceremony we need to do for our parents.

They’ve been released but now we have to do a cleansing. The twins couldn’t do it because I wasn’t around.”

“Oh! When are you leaving?”

“Today.”

And he’s only telling me now?

I’m not upset.

“You’re upset?” He reaches out to touch me, I shift back.

“We’ll only be gone for a week.”

Even worse but it’s fine.

I’m ready to go home and see my daughter.

Why am I even still here?

“Go, your absence will give me a chance to find a husband. I’ll be married when you come back.”

Listen to me, as if finding a man is easy.

“Then he’ll die,” Mbuzo says.

Is he a killer now?

“I doubt you’re capable of murder,” I tell him.

“No I won’t be the one to kill him. Because of the blood oath we made, if any of us sleeps with anyone else, they die.”

I want to laugh but I’m more concerned.

“You’re kidding right?” I ask, he shakes his head.

That look on his face says he’s speaking from experience. He slept with someone and they died.

“Let’s go grab lunch and I will tell you everything.” The opportunist says.

“I don’t want to eat anything right now.”

“Do you want to eat me then?” He asks, raising his brow, amusement coated on his face.

I roll my eyes at him.

“If I was your favorite food, would you eat me?”
There’s a smirk on his face, when did he become this guy?

“Really?”

He laughs, “Ngiyadlala mkami. I’m kidding.”

I’m failing to stop the smile on my face.

“Work is over, now it’s time to play. Come away with me.” –Mbuzo.

I wonder who told him that I have all the time in the world.

“Bakhe took Lulu to the Zoo, I promised to join them.” I’m lying, they should be home by now.

“Then we’ll join them together, I love spending time with Lulu.” He’s trying to soften me, it’s not working.

“You do know that I don’t have to see you every day right? Or ever because according to my knowledge, we are nothing to each other.”

“Then let me update your knowledge a little bit,” he puts his arm around my shoulders and pulls me to his chest.

I look up at him, he's looking down at me.

"We are married, I am your husband and you are my wife. We need to spend as much time as we can together because baby, I'm addicted to you."

He's so corny.

"You can let go now, this is my work place."

"Work is over, and I'm your husband, this is normal. Ask any married person."

I'm slowly giving up on this man.

"Now let's go get your car." He takes my handbag from the table and holds my hand.

There's a smile on his face as we walk down the corridor, why am I so easy on him? No, seriously. This man has it easy in life, I can't let him think he's off the hook just like that.

I pull my hand away and fold my arms, he looks at me with that stupid smile on his face.

Nxa!

In fact, “I can carry my own bag.”

I snatch it from him just as my phone alerts me that there is a message.

It’s Nkosana telling me not to leave because I’m working overtime today.

Another one comes through a second later, he’s transferred 30K into my account.

What the f*ck!

“What is it?” Mbuzo asks.

But there’s someone calling my name, I turn back to see Nkosana running this way.

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Having Khaya around is not as bad as MaNkosi

thinks. She's quite helpful around the house, MaNkosi hasn't lifted a finger today. This girl has been doing everything a perfect housewife can do.

Moreover, Madlala is happy.

He's having his third meal under the tree, courtesy of Khaya. She walks into the kitchen, Khaya is scrubbing pots with steel-wool.

There really is a God, look at him showing off.

"Mntanami, you don't have to do that. I was going to wash them tonight before bed." It's a lie, she had no plans of touching those pots.

"I don't mind mah, please don't worry about it."

Pots are the last thing MaNkosi is worried about.

"Where is your father in-law?"

Eh! Eh!

This is better than winning the jackpot on

Hollywood bet.

Khaya shows her biggest smile ever, “He’s eating outside, mah.”

“You’re spoiling him, he’s going to gain weight if you keep this up.” She’s cackling to herself, Khaya shies away.

“It’s my job mah. You are Bakhe’s parents, it’s my job to take care of you. Besides, I have to practice now before Bakhe and I get married.”

That Bakhe did not even pay an egg for her.

“Hau!” –MaNkosi.

Now she’s pushing it, but MaNkosi is not bothered.

“Did he tell you when he will be back?” MaNkosi asks.

Khaya shakes her head, her face welcoming a frown.

“And then? What happened now?”

“Bakhe is not taking my calls, I left so many missed calls, but he hasn’t called me back. The last time I called him, he cut my call.”

Those tears came way too fast.

MaNkosi pats her shoulder, a hug is something she is not going to be getting.

“I’m sure he’s busy, he will call you back when he has time.”

“I hope so Mah, because I’m scared. I don’t want to raise this baby alone.”

“What?” She’s getting old, her hearing is a bit sketchy.

Khaya lifts her eyes to her, “I didn’t want you to find out this way Mah. I couldn’t tell Bakhe because I didn’t want to stop him from leaving. He said he wanted to find himself, I just couldn’t come in the way of that.”

“Find himself? Is he lost?” MaNkosi is confused.

Khaya shrugs because, how will she explain this?

“Don’t worry, Bakhe will come back and take responsibility. I promise you, he will marry you.”

There is nothing Khaya wants more than to be his wife.

“Let me speak to your father in-law, he will bring Bakhe home.”

Father in-law... such a beautiful statement.

MaNkosi walks out with a reed mat and lays it beside her husband. He’s cleaned his plate and left no crumbs.

“Khaya is pregnant, you have to bring Bakhe home.”

Madlala shakes his head, maybe it’s because of her choice of words.

What does she mean “have to”?

“Do you hear what you are saying, MaNkosi? That boy must come home because a woman is pregnant? Is she going to die if he doesn’t?”

“She’s carrying his baby, they have to get married before she starts showing. We can’t have a single, pregnant woman around. People will start to talk. I have had enough of this village’s gossip.”

“Then send her to her father’s house, I am not going to disturb my son just because a woman is pregnant.”

MaNkosi stares at him for too long until he shrugs with a questioning frown playing on his face.

“This is your chance to make things right with your son, Baba. Khaya is a good girl, see how well she is taking care of us. She will make a great wife to Khehla and good mother to our grandkids.”

He's not disputing that, it's just...

Sigh!

"How do we know that the baby belongs to Bakhe? The boy hasn't been able to conceive, why now?" Madlala.

MaNkosi is tired, they are conversing but it feels as if he's not listening to her.

"Hayi, akusenani. I have nothing else to say, you never listen to anyone." –MaNkosi.

That's a big accusation, an offensive one.

"I am not going to run after that boy and I will not force him to marry anyone." He's always been stubborn but it looks like it's getting worse.

"Talking to you is pointless, I can't believe I wasted my breath." She gets up and takes his empty plate.

"Bring me a pillow, I'm so full I'm going to lie down a bit." Madlala says, laying down on the

reed mat she was seated on.

That's all he knows, eating and sleeping.

She almost crashes into Khaya on her way in.

"Sorry mah," her eyes are suspicious.

"Were you listening to our conversation?"

MaNkosi asks, placing the dirty plate in the sink.

"No mah, I was coming to ask if baba needs anything else."

"Get him a pillow in my room, he's taking a nap outside." She tells Khaya.

Like a good little girl, Khaya rushes to their bedroom to get the pillow and hurries outside. She finds Madlala snoring, if only she could kick that big head of his.

Who is he to decide if Bakhe should marry her or not?

Stupid old man.

She's about to nudge him awake but something stops her. There's a snake behind him, her eyes almost fall off. She holds her breath and slowly begins to backtrack.

"Wentombazane!" MaNkosi calls.

khaya turns back, leaves the pillow on the veranda and enters the house, shutting the door behind her.

"Yes mah?"

"Take out the chicken from the freezer, there's going to be load shedding in two hours. Start preparing supper."

khaya smiles widely, "Yebo mah."

She does as told, then begins to wash the dishes in the sink. Her eyes are out the window, she's looking at Madlala with a smile on her face.

The snake is slithering at his feet with its head lifted, then it attacks, biting him on the leg.

Madlala jumps, a heart wrenching scream leaving his mouth.

“Inyoka! A snake, a snake!” He’s screaming painfully.

“Baba no, no! He’s been bitten by a snake.” Khaya cries, the plate in her hand falling to the floor.

She’s the first to run out crying, MaNkosi is right behind her, confused and terrified.

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[03/06, 15:52] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 82

The poison had spread all over his body by the time the ambulance arrived. They didn't see the snake, or MaNkosi didn't see it rather.

The only evidence she has that he was bitten by one are his screams of help and Khaya's declaration.

"He's not going to make it." The doctor's words still echo in her head.

She has called a meeting with his brothers. Not everyone could make it, but two is more than enough.

She hasn't cooked for them, or served them anything to quench their thirst. The sun is blistering in the sky, they might pass out from dehydration.

But MaNkosi is not bothered, she's sitting on a reed mat, with tears in her eyes. Her husband is dying.

"The doctor said he won't make it." She tells them.

"Hau, isono bakithi."

She looks at Mfaniseni, "Isono? You people have to do something."

"What can we possibly do MaNkosi? He's in the care of doctors, none of us are that qualified to treat him."

Is Mfaniseni making a joke at a time like this?

What a bunch of high school dropouts!

"Your ancestors turned their backs on my husband."

"What are you talking about, MaNkosi?"
Mfaniseni asks.

"Do I have to spell it out, bhuti?"

“No, you can't blame the ancestors for Madlala's evil heart. He chose witchcraft because he was a greedy man.” Mfaniseni argues.

He's the only person in the Madlala clan who is not afraid of standing up to MaNkosi and her husband and it frustrates MaNkosi to the core.

“There's a difference between greed and ambition, my husband was ambitious. He had a vision, and knew what he wanted in life.”

It's one of the things that made her fall for him in the first place.

“We all had dreams and aspirations, don't act like he's sspecial” Mfaniseni continues to dig his early grave.

“He is special, he's different from you people. You can have dreams and goals and be lazy, my husband acted. He got up and did something to get what he wanted. That is what sets him apart

from you people, from the entire Madlala clan.”

Mfaniseni laughs, turning his eyes toward Balungile who hasn't uttered a word yet.

“Is that how he fooled you into witchcraft, MaNkosi? By convincing you that it was to better your lives? Madlala destroyed your life, look at you, you have nothing. Your children are gone from you, you lost your career. Madlala will die and leave you to die alone.”

Then he says they are evil, what is this nonsense he's saying to her?

“I would have to agree with bhuti. The ancestors did not turn their backs on Madlala, he turned his back on them.”

It's over, MaNkosi loses all hope. Not Balungile too, he's the one she'd hoped he'd understand.

She looks down, shaking her head in disbelief. Tears are close but she doesn't allow them to fall down. She needs to be strong for her

husband.

“The only reason we did what we did was because the ancestors have never been there for us, from day one. We were suffering, no one wanted to help, not even these stupid ancestors of yours. They turned on us while we still believed in them.” She tells them.

“You have no clue what you are saying, MaNkosi. You will bring bad luck to yourself and the family.” Mfaniseni says.

She raises her head, “What is the worst they could do? We've lost everything, now my husband will die too. You people better do something, slaughter a chicken or something and tell those damn ancestors not to dare take my husband or all hell will break loose.”

Their eyes widen, “MaNkosi?”

This is an abomination.

“I said I want my husband alive.” She snaps and

stands from the reed mat.

There's so much anger visible on her face as she glances at them.

"There's the kraal, you can use it. The ancestral hut is over there, if the kraal is not suitable. Get those dunderheads you call ancestors to get up from their lazy asses and do their job right."

She walks back to the house, leaving them thunderstruck.

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BAKHE

He's back from the Zoo, but about to head out. Lulu is sleeping in her room, it's been a long day. He's getting ready to take a shower when his

phone rings.

Khaya is trying to get herself blocked. He sits on the bed and answers.

“I thought you understood when I told you that I need time away, do you want me to block your number?”

Sniff!

“Ukhalelani?” He worries a lot about other people.

“Your father is dying, Bakhe.” Her cries elevate, his heart drops.

What nonsense is this?

‘What are you talking about?’

“Njabulo told me your story, what your parents did to you and your sister. I thought I could help them become better people, so I moved in with them...”

“You did what?” He cuts in.

This girl never ceases to amaze him and it's always been in the worst possible way.

"I just wanted to help, I can change them Bakhe... I can make them better people for you, then you can come back home"

That's never going to happen. He can't go back home, he will never heal if he does.

"I'm not coming back Khaya, take your things and go back home. Lying about my father's health is a bad strategy to make me come back, don't play with my feelings like that."

"It's the truth, Bakhe. Your father was bitten by a snake, call your uncles if you don't believe me."

What is fate trying to do to him?

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CASHILE

I'm so tired of Nkosana, he's starting to feel like a fly I can't get rid of. What annoys me is that I need this job, it's better than waiting tables.

I barely made much from that job. Maintaining the house is expensive, I have bills to pay, school fees, food and it's just me.

Then there's Mbuzo, I really want to trust him and let go. The last time I fell, he didn't catch me. I was left heartbroken and lost a baby.

How do I fully let go this time? What if he doesn't catch me again?

Will I survive the second fall?

"You sent me 30K, what is it for?"

I feel Mbuzo tense beside me.

"It's what you'll be getting paid every month."
Nkosana says.

I don't understand him sometimes.

“That's a lot, I'm just an assistant.”

“I have promoted you to my personal assistant,
I'll have the contract drawn.”

What?

I want to argue this because there's a high possibility that it's coming from a bad place, he's probably competing with Mbuzo.

“Thank you, doctor, Makwande la othathe khona.”

Haibo Mbuzo!

And I thought he'd be unhappy about this.

Nkosana's face turns sour, “Why are you thanking me? The salary is Cashile's, not yours.”

“We're married, we celebrate each other's achievements. Tell him baby.” Mbuzo says, putting his arm around me.

I've heard that iGoli changes people. It seems to have swallowed the Mbuzo I knew because,

what in the 'iGoli- eligola- amadoda' has happened to him?

I'm not complaining, I love his growth.

"Cashile, everyone is working overtime today. The hospital is scheduled for three operations, I will need you here." Nkosana says, ignoring my husband.

Did I say my husband?

Sheesh!

"My wife has already clocked out," Mbuzo says.

I'm still not used to the wife word.

Again, Nkosana ignores him. He takes my hand to pull me away from Mbuzo.

"Don't touch her!" Mbuzo pulls me back, his demeanor has completely changed.

"What is your problem?" -Nkosana.

"Don't you ever touch my wife if you know

what's good for you."

People are staring, it's clear that these two want to fight.

"Can we not do this here?" I tell them.

This is draining, really.

I put my hands on Mbuzo's chest, making him face me.

"It's okay, you can go. I have to work."

"You don't have to work for a jerk like him, I can take care of you."

I give him a look, we spoke about this.

I stand on my toes and press my lips on his. His arms wrap around me as he deepens the kiss.

I'm pregnant, my hormones are not disciplined.

I break the kiss, he cups my face before I can get away.

"I love you, call me if anything happens. I'm

always a call away, sthandwa Sami."

I nod.

Nkosana is still staring, he should've walked away.

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I hate working for a private hospital.

We have offices on the first floor. Medical department where all medicines and hospital equipment are on the forth floor. Patient wards and operation theatres are on the second and third floor.

The first thing I do when I get to my desk is call Bakhe.

His phone is off.

I call Juba's mom instead.

"Mah, are they back from the Zoo?"

“Yes, your brother brought Lulu home and left.”

“Please put Lulu on the phone.”

She laughs, “She was knocked out when they arrived, he said she ate too much.”

Hearing her voice would've put me in a better mood than the one I'm in.

“I'm working late today, I'm not sure what time I will be home. Please tell her that I love her before bed tonight.”

“I will my child, take care of yourself.” She says.

“I will... don't let her watch TV for more than thirty minutes. Please give her warm milk before bed, it helps her sleep. No candy or fizzy drinks.”

“Okay...”

“And remind Princess to give her a bath before bed.”

She heaves a sigh, “I know Cashile. I'm her

grandma remember. Now stop worrying and go back to work."

Eish!

"Okay mah, kiss Lulu for me. I will see you later."

I end the call and start looking for the files that Nkosana needs.

It's always easy for me to find patient files, I always put them in one place.

This is rather frustrating, I know my work. Why is it so hard to focus today?

My colleagues don't seem agitated like I am, overtime means more money.

The receptionist drops a KFC package on my desk an hour later, she says it's for me. There's also milk and fruits in a Woolworths package.

Mbuzo calls me.

“Drink the milk after eating the wings, it cures the diarrhea.”

I'm embarrassed, but it's no secret that hot wings upset your stomach.

“Thanks for the food. Have you guys left yet?”

“Yes, we're driving home right now.”

My heart drops.

“I'll speak to my brothers, maybe we can shorten the days. I'd hate to be away from you for a week.” He says.

“Don't worry so much about me, my brother is around. Have you spoken to Lona?”

Where did that come from?

But I want to know though.

“Yes.”

“And?”

“She wanted to come with,” he says.

Obviously he said no and the twins would never allow it.

“You told her about us?”

I'm not going to share him with a slay queen.

His silence answers my question.

“What are you waiting for, Mbuzo?”

“I will do it when I come back, you're left defenseless with me gone.”

He thinks I can't hold my own.

“I can take care of myself, wena fix this thing. I'm not going to fight another woman for you like I did Nothando. You're worth it but it doesn't go that deep. My children come first, I'll always choose them over you. If I feel like you and your problems will put them in danger, then I will leave you, Mbuzo.”

He's quite again.

“Did you hear what I said?”

“Yebo mkami, I heard you. You and the kids will always be safe with me, I will give you the life you deserve.” He says.

That better be a promise he intends to keep.

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It's 8pm, some of my colleagues have clocked out. I'm waiting for Nkosana, he's doing surgery in the theatre.

Oh here he comes, I take the files I found and stand.

“My office, now.” He walks to his office without looking at me.

I know it's been a long day but, is the attitude necessary?

I follow him to the office, he's drinking water.

“I only found six out of the twelve you said I should look for.” I put the files on his desk.

He's headed to the door, I'm thinking he's going out but he closes the door and locks it.

"What are you doing?"

His face has changed, he looks scary.

"Nkosana?"

He takes off his scrubs, it happens so fast that by the time I run to the door, he's completely naked. He pushes me back when I grab the door handle, I almost fall.

"Nkosana!" I look away from his nakedness.

"Look at me," he shouts. "Look at me and tell me what he has that I don't."

"You're insane, open the door now."

"Why did you choose him, Cashile?"

This is about what happened earlier.

I can't even scream, there's no one out there.

He begins to stroke himself, "I'm going to show

you that I'm also a man, just like him."

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CHAPTER 83

MBUZO

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Their car broke down, they had an option of getting to a garage or boarding an airplane.

The latter seemed to be the better option, and quicker. They arrived about an hour ago and rented a car, Mbuzo is the one driving.

Mkhotheni is on the passenger seat and

Mhloniphe in the back.

“The house is a different scenery, it looks different now.” Mhloniphe tells him.

“You renovated?” He asks.

“If life doesn’t want to give you money, then take it by force.” That’s Mhloniphe’s excuse of stealing to give himself a better life.

“It’s not different from what Mbuzo is doing.” Mkhetheni says.

“The only difference is that Mbuzo makes millions in a month,” Mhloniphe adds and laughs.

They love being on his case, he laughs with them this time but it’s not heartily. His head is all over the place, specifically back home with Cashile. He tried calling her after they landed, her phone was off.

“It’s going to be a long week if you’re going to

stay sour like that.” Mkhetheni comments, seeing the look of dejection on Mbuzo’s face.

Mbuzo fixes on his seat, he’s deep into thought as he briefly turns his gaze to Mkhetheni.

“I was thinking we could do everything over the weekend, I can’t be away from KaMadlala for too long. She’s pregnant.”

Mhloniphe chuckles, “Her due date is far, relax, you won’t miss the birth.”

“I’m just not comfortable leaving her alone with the doctor.”

Something about Nkosana makes his skin crawl, he can’t put his finger to it.

“The doc?” –Mkhetheni.

“Yes, don’t you think he looks familiar?”

“I don’t have time to be looking at other men,” Mhloniphe is stupid.

“I think he does too, I swear I have seen him

before. He gave me bad vibes when I met him in KaMadlala's hospital room back then."

—Mkhotheni says.

"Could he be a demon?" Mhloniphe must sit down.

He's seated, but he needs to sit down.

"Be serious Mhlo, KaMadlala said our father sponsored his tuition. That's not all, I found a picture of him and ubaba. Nkosana was wearing a graduation gown." Mbuzo tells them.

"He probably went to the graduation because he paid for it." Mhloniphe says.

"Maybe baba has pictures from that day as well. We should check the storage." Mkhotheni tells them.

They all agree to do to that when they get home.

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CASHILE

How did I get myself into this mess? I swear, I didn't see this coming. He was busy with an operation, who knew that the whole time, he was harboring anger.

I think of my phone, it's in my bag.

"Don't do this, Nkosana. You are not a bad man."

"What is so special about him, huh? Mbuzo always gets everything and I'm left with his crumbs. Not anymore, not this time. You are mine Cashile."

He sounds like a deranged maniac.

"Don't you think that should be a mutual agreement? I'm an adult, who is capable of

deciding who I want and it's not you Nkosana."

"I'm a man too, I can give you what he can."

"You're toxic and insensitive towards my feelings. How am I supposed to let a man like you near my children?"

Besides that, I never loved him and never will.

"What about Mbuzo? He hurt you and broke your heart, he killed your baby."

"Don't talk to me about my husband, our relationship is not a national anthem, stay out of it." I tell him.

His obsession with Mbuzo is getting out of hand, I should have seen this from the beginning. He is not obsessed with me but with Mbuzo.

"Why do you hate him so much, anyway? What did he ever do to you?"

His nose flares, he's always so angry.

“I don’t just hate him, I loathe him. He took everything away from me, my birth right, my parents. I lost everything because of him and his brothers.”

“You’re not Jesus, Nkosana, stop speaking in riddles and parables. What are you talking about? What did the Xaba brothers do to you?”

He grabs my cheeks with his fingers, pressing them until I’m whimpering in pain.

“That’s for me and the Xabas to sort out, their time is coming. I will make them kneel in front of me and beg for mercy.”

He’s scaring me, although I know that they are capable of taking care of themselves but then again, I have no idea what Nkosana is capable of.

The dark tattoos, the criminal record. It all spells danger.

“That will never happen, the Xabas will never

bow down to you.”

He scoffs, “Yes they will and you are my perfect weapon.”

“You want to use me to destroy them?”

He smiles at my question, “I have always liked your smartness. Beauty with brains—my kind of woman.”

Idiot.

“Sorry, you’re not my type and I’m taken.” I say, he makes me sick.

He’s hovering over me again, he grabs my face and forces a kiss.

“You think this is a game, don’t you?”

“My life can never be a game to me, I will never forgive you for this—never.” I yell at him.

“You will one day when we’re married.”

Is he fuckin serious?

“I will never marry you, bastard.”

“But you will, you will leave Mbuzo for me. That will be my perfect revenge, he won’t see it coming.”

He’s downright delusional. There even a smile on his face.

“What the fuck did Mbuzo do? Why do you hate him so much?” I yell at him.

He grabs my face again, it hurts this time.

“Maybe I should put something inside that little mouth of yours. You talk too much.” He says.

I send my eyes down, he’s touching himself again.

“Maybe you should put on some clothes, I’m not afraid of that thing.” I tell him.

His eyes darken, “Oh really?”

He rips my shirt, it tears on the shoulder. I don’t make a sound or flinch, but it’s terrifying, he’s

treating me like I'm some cheap prostitute.

"If you touch me, you will die."

He finds my statement funny.

"Physically, I'm stronger than you, Cashile. It's just us on this floor, I can do to you as I please and there is nothing you can do to stop me."

"Who said I'm going to stop you? If it means you're going to die, then go ahead. Do it."

His eyes widen, his grips gradually loosens.

"You're going to kill me?" He asks, pulling a slow smile.

Let me let him in on a little secret.

"You want to know why I keep choosing Mbuzo?"

The smile fades.

"Because love is choosing him over and over,

even when he fucks up, I will keep choosing him. In my next life, I will still choose him. No one comes close to that man, not even you.”

“Shut up.” He growls.

I’m not going to shut up, I will give him the answers he’s been seeking.

“It’s not just because I love him, but you see, Mbuzo and I made a blood oath when we were young. A promise to always love each other. Who knew that the ancestors were part of that oath?”

He looks bored, he probably thinks I’m telling a story.

“So? What does that have to do with everything?” He asks.

I wish he would put on some clothes.

“Because of that oath, we can’t sleep with other people, they die.”

He drops his head laughing, “Nice one. You think I’m stupid?”

I’m tired of standing, I sit down, he pulls me back up.

I push him to get him off me, and he stumbles back.

“Didn’t you hear what my husband said? You don’t get to touch me, Nkosana.”

I’m fueling his anger.

“Why are you doing this to me, Cashile. We dated for months, I treated you good and not once did you want to give me some. Mbuzo comes back and his d!ck is already buried inside you.”

“Deep! You forgot the word deep, and very deep yazi. It’s so big it chocks me. I’m lucky to be alive after being dick-tamized by that man, he knows his story shame. With that thing between your legs, I know you would’ve disappointed.”

I mean, it's not bad. It's the average size, but that's something I will never tell him.

"You are heartless Cashile, you know that?" His eyes water.

"I must have gotten it from spending too much time with you, what was I thinking?"

His eyes squint as he nears me, "I'm going to take it by force today. It's for all the times I loved you, and helped you when you were in need. You owe me," he's rubbing my breasts. I'm disgusted by his touch.

But, "Come since you want it so bad."

His face lights up, "Really?"

"Yes, I will give it to you willingly. And don't worry, I will give you the best funeral. What colour coffin do you want? Are you covered with Avbob or Clientele?"

The joy on his face has gone away, he looks

rather worried now.

“What funeral?”

“I thought doctors were the smartest people in the world. Let’s recap... the blood oath... death. But it’s your death, I’m just saying, be prepared to go and herd ducks in the afterlife.” I tell him.

God, I don’t even know if this will work. I hope Mbuzo was telling the truth about the blood oath.

Nkosana snorts, “You’re bluffing, there is no such thing as a blood oath.”

“Then come, Nkosana.” I take off my clothes and leave the bra and panties on.

“Come, I’m not wet yet but it’s nothing we can’t solve.” I twist my nipples to get myself aroused because his d!ck is not doing it for me.

And if he’s going to put it in me, I’d rather be wet because he’ll hurt me.

“Which funeral song would you like? You want seven colours or gourmet dishes, since you're a doctor and all?”

His eyes widen and his d!ck softens and falls.

I put my arms around his neck and press a kiss on his cheek, he gasps in fright and pushes me away.

“What happened baby-boy? Why aren't you hard anymore? You want to have sex with me so bad, then come and get it.” I sit on top of the table and open my legs.

“Come and enter the pit of death.” I say, slapping my p#ssy.

He picks up his pants and puts them on, “I'm okay sisi. I never liked sex anyway, it's demonic.”

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[03/06, 15:52] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 84

CASHILE

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I don't know if that's regret or fear I see in his eyes. You never know with this man.

"I quit," I tell him as I put my clothes back on.

"Why? What did I do?"

Wow! He really has lost his mind.

"I man done here, Nkosana. You stay the hell away from me and my child, is that clear?"

He tries to touch me, I backtrack.

“Cashile, don’t tell anyone about this. I might lose my medical license.”

“You didn’t think of that before you tried to force yourself on me?” I’m appalled by his audacity.

His eyes are wild, you’d think he’s on drugs.

“Look, I’m sorry. I don’t know what I was thinking. Just... don’t tell anyone. Don’t tell Mbuzo, he will report me and...”

I can’t believe I’m hearing this.

I fold my arms across my chest, maybe it’s an act of arrogance, “Mbuzo will be the first person I tell about this.”

I push him out of my way.

“Cashile wait.” He’s right behind me. “Let me drive you home. I will get you a new shirt on the way and wings.”

He sounds desperate.

“If you follow me, I swear I will do the worst.”

He stops, his eyes are coated with desperation.

My hands are shaking, only God knows how I pulled that off, I didn’t think it would work. I grab my bag and run to the car.

I’m never coming back to this place.

I keep looking over my shoulder as I rush down the parking lot, the security guard looks at me like I’m crazy.

“Sisi, is everything okay?” He yells from across the lot.

I give him a thumbs up, there is nothing he can do for me. I just want to go home and hug my baby.

I lock the car doors as soon I’m safely in, my phone is off. How did I forget to charge it?

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The second I get home, I take a quick shower and change into track pants and a t-shirt.

Lulu and Juba's mom are sleeping in her room.

"Princess, where is my brother?"

She jumps from the couch, her eyes popping out of her sockets. This is why I didn't see her when I arrived, kanti she's sleeping on my sofa.

This is what she does when I'm not around, sleeps on the couch while watching TV.

"Sisi, when did you come?" The guilty look on her face is not necessary.

I won't shout.

"Where is my brother?"

"He was smoking outside the last time I saw him, is everything okay?" She says.

What will I tell Princess? We are not close to be

sharing our life problems.

I head out and find Bakhe smoking in the backyard, he's staring into space.

"Is it safe to come closer?"

He turns his head towards me, then drops the cigarette and steps on it.

"Slima sami, you're home." He smiles, it's not fully.

I know my brother, something is wrong.

"Did you see how ugly you look with that long face?" I ask.

That was meant to be a joke.

"What's wrong?"

"I got a call from Khaya, she said your father was bitten by a snake. Apparently he's dying."

No, not my father.

He's the strongest man I know.

“Tell me she was joking.”

He shakes his head and heaves a loud sigh, “I spoke to uncle Balungile. He confirmed it, he’s dying.”

“Bakhe...”

It can’t be true.

He catches me as my knees give in, and helps me to a bench.

“Pregnant people are too dramatic, please tell me that is the reason you almost fell.”

I want to laugh because he’s trying to make me laugh but I can’t.

“Dade, don’t waste your tears on that old fool.”

He sounds bitter and hurt.

“He’s our father, whether he’s the devil or not. He’s still our father.” I tell him.

I know what my father did and a huge part of me will never forgive him, but I can’t force

myself to stop loving him. I share more good memories with him than bad.

Bakhe looks way from me, “I don’t care if he dies. It’s about damn time anyway.”

“You don’t mean that Bakhe.”

“I do, maybe our lives will finally change for the better without him around. The least he can do when he dies is become a good ancestor and make us rich.”

That’s not funny, but I find myself chuckling.

He glances at me with a subtle smile, “Do you want to go and see him?”

“I’m pregnant, I don’t know if it’s safe. They are our parents but we can’t deny who they are and I don’t want Lulu near them.”

I feel bad for saying all this.

“You’re right, I will go and make sure he really dies.” He says.

“You don’t mean that,” he’s just hurting that’s all.

“I’m tired Dade, the reason I came here was to find some sense of freedom. Now there’s this? I have to go home and see those people again? I’m not ready.”

“Then don’t go, we can communicate with them through the phone.” I think it’s better that way.

“What if he dies? We’ll have no choice but to go back.”

He’s right.

“But I don’t think they are that powerful anymore. Take leave from work, we will leave tomorrow night.” He says, unknowingly taking me back to the scene that happened at work.

I clear my throat, it catches his attention—he’s looking at me.

“I quit my job.”

“Why?”

“Nkosana is a crazy man, he’s obsessed with Mbuzo and is using me to get to him.”

“How so?”

“I think he knows the Xabas from the past, apparently Mbuzo and the twins did something to him. He locked me in his office today and...”

“Cashile!!!”

What the...

That sounds like Nkosana calling my name.

Bakhe frowns in confusion, “Who is that?”

“Cashile open the door... open the door baby.”
He’s banging my door, I rush to the front before he wakes my baby.

“Nkosana, are you in sane?”

He faces me, eyes red and teary. He’s still wearing his scrubs, is this man drunk?

“Baby... I’m sorry, I don’t know what came over me.” He takes my hands into his, Bakhe pushes him off.

There’s a strong smell of alcohol hovering around Nkosana.

“What is your problem man?” Bakhe asks, glaring daggers at him.

“I need to speak to Cashile.”

“Maybe tomorrow, you’re drunk. I will not let you near my sister.”

Nkosana shifts his eyes to me, his body is visibly shaking.

“I’m not leaving until I speak to Cashile, she wants to leave me. I can’t allow that.”

“You’re drunk Nkosana and you’re making noise, people are sleeping.” I snap.

When did he become this crazy person?

He takes a step towards me, Bakhe stands

between us.

“Dade, what is going on here?”

Gee!

Bakhe looks strict, he doesn't have to give me that scolding look.

“Nkosana and I once dated, but I broke it off before we could... you know.”

I can't say it to my brother, and the way he's staring into my eyes is not helping.

“No, I don't know anything. What happened? Why is there a crazy man at your doorstep?” – Bakhe.

He's going to make me say it, is he?

“I couldn't sleep with Nkosana while pregnant with Mbuzo's baby. Also, I didn't love him so I broke it off. But he's not over it, he locked me in his office today with an attempt to force himself on me.”

I knew this would happen.

Bakhe has tackled Nkosana, he's straddling him, throwing sickening punches. Nkosana fights back by throwing a punch on Bakhe's left eye, he falls off and... Oh God! He's going to bruise my brother's face.

"Nkosana stop it!" All I can do is scream from a distance, I can't get close, they might punch me.

Bakhe elbows Nkosana's face, it gives him a chance to get on his feet. He begins to kick Nkosana on the stomach. I cannot for the life of me, stand violence.

"Bakhe that's enough." I snap at him.

The door opens, Princess and Mrs. Ngwenya come out looking shaken and worried.

"What is going on here?" Juba's mother shouts.

I'm about to answer when I see Lulu behind her.

“Mommy!” She extends her arms towards me, I rush to her and lift her in my arms. She clings on to me like a spider monkey.

“Get out of here, before I kill you.” Bakhe growls at an injured Nkosana, I wish he didn’t have to say the word “kill” out loud.

Nkosana gets on his knees, his teary eyes find me.

“You don’t understand, Cashile. They always choose him, no one ever chooses me. Even you couldn’t choose me. I’m cursed, I’m cursed.”

Who is this “they” he keeps mentioning?

Bakhe snorts, “Newsflash ndoda, we’re all cursed. Now leave!”

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MBUZO

They get home and head to the storage room behind the house, it's where some of their parents' things are kept.

"Does the light still work?" Mbuzo asks, reaching in the dark for the light switch.

It still works, they haven't been in here in a while. There is so much dust and cobwebs.

"You guys can search, I will wait outside." Mbuzo says, turning to walk out.

Mhloniphe pulls him back, "Spiders don't eat people."

Mbuzo is afraid of spiders, why do they even have eight legs anyway?

It was so unnecessary for God to take it that far.

Mkhotheni is already at work, flipping things over and opening boxes.

"Anything?" That's Mbuzo, asking from the door.

“Look at this, it’s a picture of you as a kid.”
Mkhotheni is dead with laughter.

“Let me see,” Mhloniphe snatches the photograph and laughs too.

It can’t be that funny.

Mbuzo puts his fear aside and enters, he takes the photograph from Mhlo.

There is nothing funny here, he was a cute kid.
He’s seated on the grass, on top of a towel,
beside him is another baby his age.

“I think you were four or five months there.”
Mkhotheni says, digging for more pictures.

“I have never seen this picture. Who is this?”
Mbuzo asks, pointing at the baby next to him.

Mhloniphe takes the photo, “I have never seen it either.”

He hands the picture to Mkhotheni, “Maybe it was baby from next door.”

He flips the picture around, there are numbers there.

"Your date of birth is written here. There are names too, Mbuzowakhe Xaba and Mbusowenkosi Xaba." Mkhetheni continues.

Mbuzo's eyes widen, "What the fuck does that mean?"

The twins look at him in utter shock, "You have a twin."

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[03/06, 15:52] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 85

CASHILE

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I'm currently staying with my aunt and Mbali, although Mbuzo wanted us at the Xaba homestead. I'm not going back there, not until he does what is needed to be done.

Bakhe and I arrived last night, we're going to see baba today.

He's not out of danger yet; my father that is. The doctors were able to vacuum some of the poison from his system, they don't know why he's not getting better.

MaNkosi is not doing well, I know for a fact that if her husband taps out, she will follow. She loves him that much.

I'm not going to lie, my heart breaks for them.

I can't imagine losing the person you have lived with for more than thirty years, waking up in the morning and they are not there anymore.

How will she adjust?

Lulu has been rather clingy lately, she refuses to leave my sight. She won't even go anywhere with her uncle. Mbali had to take her to the tuck-shop just so I could leave without her seeing me, I hope she's not screaming her lungs out.

We've come to see my father, Mbuzo is with me. He insisted, I can't believe he's changed so much. Dad looks bad, I don't see him surviving this.

"There is something I didn't tell you kids."

I hope it's not another confession.

"I'm not a bad person, I just aimed too high." He says.

There's silence, even my mother hasn't said a word. Bakhe is standing at a corner, looking like he doesn't want to be here.

"I did bad things to get what I wanted, not only

did I hurt the Xabas, I killed people in this village as well.”

Ai baba!

Is this the right time for this?

“You should save your energy baba,” I tell him, he shakes his head.

“Let me confess before I die, my time is near.”

I don’t like the way he says that, it’s as if his time really is near.

“I wanted to be rich, so I went to a man in Malawi. I don’t know where the money was coming from, but I would wake up in the morning and there would be money in the wardrobe. For me to get more, I had to sacrifice a soul. The only way was to give out money to people by hand. Everyone that took my money was basically signing their death certificate.”
Baba says.

This is shocking, he's a serial killer.

I look over at Bakhe, he's listening attentively.

"Many villagers died because of me. I gave Mbali's husband money for the wedding, a week later he died. My brother Nkululeko died too because of me, Velaphi and his wife."

I feel Mbuzo tense before me, maybe I shouldn't have brought him. The last time he heard my father's confession, he turned on me.

"I put suicidal thoughts in Nonkosi's head and made him kill his wife and himself. The witch doctor told me that I was going to benefit from their death," he says.

I hold on tightly to Mbuzo's hand, I don't want this to change us.

"How did you get a hold of their spirits?" Mbuzo asks.

This feels like a bad wrong turn movie and I will

be slayed again for my father's evil ways.

"I took soil from their graves and took it to the witch doctor," my father says.

I wish he would stop, we know that he did evil.

"Velaphi was not a bad person, he was just a proud man." Baba says.

I squeeze Mbuzo's hand to check if we are still okay, he looks down at me.

Okay! Nothing seems out of the ordinary.

"I don't know what went wrong, everything I did was for you two, my children. Then the hunger for money and power got to me, I became selfish and put aside the most important people in my life. My beautiful children."

This is the father that raised me, the man who was selfless and full of compassion. Although he'd boast about his children, he had respect for

people and was respected in return.

He looks at my brother, “Buhlebakhe, ndodana. Your name represents everything beautiful in life, everything you’re supposed to get. I’m sorry I failed you, you once looked up to me and I didn’t live up to your expectations.”

Bakhe’s jaw is clenched and eyes red with tears.

“Will you ever forgive me? I don’t want to go to the next life without your forgiveness. I will make up for every bad thing I ever did to you.”

He seems genuine.

“Nonkosi, I’m leaving my daughter in your care. If you ever make her cry, I will haunt you mfana wami.”

I believe him, he’s capable of haunting.

Mbuzo doesn’t even stress a smile.

“You’re not dying baba, relax.” I tell him.

Why is he so dramatic? He probably has more

days left.

His focus is on Bakhe, it bothers him that Bakhe doesn't bat an eye.

"Ndodana, ubaba is leaving, are you not going to wish me a safe journey." He's starting to joke again.

"Baba don't speak like that, you are not dying. You will live until you're 90." My mother chides him with a firm stare.

I wish what she's saying was the truth, but it doesn't look good. He's pale, his eyes are yellow and his lips are parched.

"Bakhe," he calls.

Bakhe refuses to look at him, my brother is holding back tears. I know him.

"Find a good wife and marry her, you will have many children. I will make you father of all nations."

Not that from a dying man.

I laugh, Bakhe finally manages a smile. It's not strongly there, but it's visible enough.

A tear falls off his eye when he looks at dad.

"You taught me how to ride a bike and how to tie a tie and my shoelaces. I was hoping for a second chance with you baba, I want us to start over." Bakhe says, he's trying so hard not to tear up.

Mbuzo squeezes his shoulder, this type of contact makes a man break down.

Baba shakes his head, "It's too late for me, my brother is calling me. Don't you see him over there?"

He points towards the door, we don't see anyone.

"Hawu ngeke, hayi umyeni wami. Not my husband." My mother wails with her hands on

her head.

“Voetsek Nkululeko, voetsek!”

Well, that's not necessary.

“MaNkosi, it's fine. My time has come, it's okay.” Baba says.

I can't hold it in anymore, I join my mother in crying. Mbuzo pulls me into his arms.

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It's been a few days since my father's confession, he's still holding on by a thread, anytime is still time.

Mom is taking care of him at the hospital, there is really nothing Bakhe and I can do. We haven't gone home, our father's home.

I'm afraid, I know Bakhe is too.

Anyway, I'm worried about Mbuzo, the discovery that he might be a twin has him troubled. At the moment, it's nothing but assumptions, there is no one to tell them the truth or lead them to it.

Their father's brothers are not exactly people they can run to for help, let alone answers.

The ceremony is this weekend, last Sunday was not a long enough day, especially since they arrived in KwaNyuswa Saturday night.

It's supposed to be a small gathering, with the brothers, their cousin Nompilo and sister Emihle. But none of these women are here.

Emihle is in the middle of exams, Nompilo has been paid lobola for by some boy from KwaMashu.

Today Lulu and I are at the Xaba homestead. Mbuzo says it's imperative that I attend the ceremony since we are married.

I don't know about that, ancestors don't care about laws. They are only focused on tradition and since I fell pregnant before we got married, he has to pay damages. He still owes them lobola.

I should be running up and down the kitchen, helping their aunts and cousins prepare food for tomorrow.

But I'm pregnant and pregnant women have privileges. My privilege has me sitting on the couch and stuffing my face.

"Uncle Mpiyakhe is at the gate," Mhloniphe says in passing, he's heading outside to open for him.

This is the uncle they have been waiting for, the one they are hoping will tell them the truth.
Where the other twin is.

I haven't seen Mbuzo in over an hour, he's preparing outside with his cousin brothers. I heard there's going to be a goat and a cow

slaughtered tomorrow.

The delivery guy should be on his way.

“Dade, this is uncle Mpiyakhe.” I see him, and he’s drunk.

“Hello baba,” I greet respectfully.

He burps, “How are you my child?”

“Sit down uncle, I will get my brothers.”

Mhloniphe says and leaves me alone with his drunk uncle.

This is just great, where was I going?

I need to check on Lulu, she’s playing outside with the other kids.

“Excuse me,” I drag my heavy-self and hurry out.

I spot Lulu in the backyard, they are playing on the lawn.

“Lulu,” she stops running, her eyes find me and

she runs into my arms.

“Mommy come meet my friends.”

“I already met them, baby.” I’m lying.

I’m too bloated and tired to be introducing myself to kids.

“Are you hungry?”

“Nope,” she shakes her head.

“Okay, come and tell me when you’re hungry.”

She starts giggling, her gaze is on someone behind me. I turn and see Mbuzo making goofy faces, should I tell him he looks like a monkey doing that?

“You look like a monkey,” Lulu beats me to it.

He laughs and picks her up, only to spin her around.

“She’s going to throw up, don’t spin her so much.”

He stops, "You worry too much mommy."

I want to roll my eyes at his statement but Lulu will copy.

"Do you want to see a cow?" He says to Lulu.

"Nope," this thing of shaking her head like that will give her a headache.

"What about a goat?" Mbuzo asks.

Another headshake from Lulu, "I want to see a unicorn."

Yoh, this is the part where I go back inside.

"A unicorn? Are they real?" Mbuzo acts confused, he knows they are not real.

"Yes silly," Lulu replies. "Can you buy one for me?"

"No!" I put a stop to her daydreaming.

"Why not mommy?" -Mbuzo.

This man must not try me.

“Because I don’t want her to be disappointed when the unicorn doesn’t arrive.” I tell him, I hope he works with me here.

The only unicorn Lulu will be getting is a stuffed animal.

“Baby go and play with your friends,” I rub her back.

Mbuzo places a kiss on her cheek, “We will talk about that unicorn later, okay?”

She nods and runs back to her friends the second he puts her down.

“What’s wrong wifey? You don’t want to be unicorn’s granny?” He locks me in his arms, and buries his face on my neck.

“I’m too young to be a granny.”

He chuckles, “You’d make a fine granny though. Grandma bae.”

Sometimes it worries me when he speaks like

this, it just reminds me that he's spent too much time in Lona's presence.

"Call me grandma bae again and you will see what I do to you," I warn.

He's not even bothered, his lips are busy on my neck.

"I'm pregnant, Mbuzo. Stop playing with my hormones." The last thing I want is to walk around with a throbbing clit, in front of his family for that matter.

"I can fix that for you, baby."

Yeah, this baby word comes to play a lot lately.

I'm comforted by the fact that Lona was thembalami and not baby.

Why do I keep thinking about her?

His lips move to mine, I shift my head back.

"Do I have permission to kiss you?" He whispers close to my lips.

Sigh!

How can I say no to that tone?

I hope no one is looking.

We share a kiss, his hands start to wander.

“Mbuzo!”

Shit, Mkhetheni!

I pull away too fast but this one won’t let me go,
I hide my face on his chest while he speaks to
his brother.

“Uncle Mpiyakhe is here,” Mkhetheni says, then
I hear his footsteps tracking away.

“You are not disciplined, Nonkosi.” I tell Mbuzo.

He pecks my lips, “Tell that to Juju.”

“Juju?” I’m so confused.

He points down to his manhood, he’s got a
boner.

“Nonkosi junior.” He says.

I walk away first because, what is happening with him? I’m the pregnant one here, with the raging hormones.

He catches up and holds my hand as we walk into the house. I was hoping not to be part of the meeting. We sit on the same couch, Mhloniphe and Mkhetheni are on different seats.

Uncle Mpiyakhe has been served more alcohol.

Will he be able to speak?

“We’ve told him about the photograph, he knows the story.” Mkhetheni says.

It’s crazy to think that Mbuzo could be a twin.

Twins are hereditary, so I’ve heard. Probably there are twins in their family tree, could be okhokho.

So there is a possibility that I will have twins again with Mbuzo, since it’s in the family.

We're all looking at uncle Mpiyakhe, waiting for him to swallow his beer. Is he ever going to stop burping?

"Your father had an affair, his mistress fell pregnant and died after giving birth to twins. Velaphi wanted to keep both babies, but Agnes, your mother said he can only keep one and give the other one away or she will leave him. He kept Mbuzo, and gave away Mbuso. Can I have another beer now?"

Hayibo this uncle!

So Mbuzo is not his mother's son? What a way to find out your entire life has been a lie.

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[03/06, 15:52] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 86

CASHILE

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This uncle is dodgy, there was absolutely no reason for him to break such news in an insensitive manner. The fact that he is drunk can't be classified as an excuse.

He's an elder, their father's brother. He has no shame, who do they lean on when the only link to their father is such a disappointment?

I can hear Mbuzo's ragged breathing, he's fuming.

"This man is lying!"

Mbuzo barks at his uncle and points a finger at him.

“Will you give me another beer if I say yes?”

Yoh, hai!

“Uncle this is not a joke, we want the truth. We were six when Mbuzo was born, shouldn’t we know if he was born from another woman who was not our mother?” Mkhetheni asks.

“You were six, not sixteen. And your mother was a thick woman, there was no telling if she was pregnant or just fat.”

He is so rude.

Mbuzo shifts from the couch, he’s wiping his hands on his thighs. It’s nerves, I can’t imagine how he’s feeling.

“Who was she then? Who was the woman you claim to be Mbuzo’s mother.” –Mhloniphe.

“A woman nje, Caroline Mbatha was her name. He loved her shame, as much as he loved Aggie.” He chuckles and finishes the last drops

of what's left in the bottle.

We're waiting, impatiently.

That burp again—disgusting.

“My brother was a charmer, he looked like you boys. All of you, tall and handsome. URambo wasemzansi. And women loved him, they fought over him. He believed in polygamy and Caroline was the perfect woman for him.”

He's angering the brothers, it's not what he's saying but how he's saying it. I bet in his head, he is convinced that Caroline was the one for his brother.

“That's not true, our parents loved each other. There is no way in hell ubaba would have fallen for another woman.” The defense in Mhloniphe's voice is loud.

My worry is on this man sitting beside me, he hasn't said a word and that's just scary.

“Yeyi wazi fokol wena. You were a baby, I was there. I saw everything, Velaphi introduced me to Caroline. He was different with her, almost like a teenager. She brought out the best in him. When she fell pregnant, he paid lobola. He was planning on marrying her, unfortunately, Agnes found out when Caroline was almost due. She put her foot down when he proposed the idea of a second wife.”

He shakes his head like Agnes had no right to say no.

“My poor brother was heartbroken, Caroline died a few minutes after giving birth to this boy and his twin.” He points at Mbuzo with a beer bottle.

That's hectic.

“Agnes was heartless, she made my brother choose between his sons. She gave him an ultimatum, take one twin or none. She

threatened to leave him if he didn't agree, the twins were separated."

So Velaphi chose a woman over his son? I have heard it all.

I expect the brothers to stand up for their mother, but no one dares to open their mouth.

"Where is the other twin? How can we find him?" Mkhetheni asks.

The uncle shrugs, "My throat is dry from all the talking. Can I get..."

"Khuluma wena maan! Where is the twin?"
Mhloniphe barks.

He's scaring his uncle.

"I don't know, his grandmother took him in but she died a few years later. She made sure to give him up for adoption before her death, all of that because she blamed my brother for her daughter's death. Velaphi didn't know where

she had taken the boy.”

“Do you know where we can look for him?”

—Mkhotheni.

The twins are doing all the talking, Mbuzo is quiet.

“No.” He stands and makes his way to the kitchen.

He’s going to get another beer. I give up on him.

Mbuzo gets up as well, he’s headed towards the door.

“Where are you going?” I ask, pulling myself from the couch.

He doesn’t answer, I have to chase after him.

“Mbuzo, uyaphi?” He can’t drive when he’s angry like that.

I catch up before he gets to the car and pull his

hand, he pulls away.

His eyes are bloodshot, there are tears behind his pupils.

“Not now Cashile.” He snaps.

“At least go for a walk, you can’t drive in this state.”

He frowns, “Are you telling me what to do now?”

“No but...”

“Then get out of my way and stop suffocating me,” he turns back to the vehicle.

Then stops and marches back to where I’m standing. He attacks me with a kiss, I’m chasing my breath when he breaks free.

“Ngiyaxolisa sthandwa sami, I will never speak to you like that again. Ngiyaxolisa mama.” He presses his forehead on mine and pecks my lips.

“Please don’t leave me, I love you.” He whispers.

I cup his face, “I won’t leave, I’m here.”

He glances at me, “I need some time... I will lose my mind if I stay here.”

I understand where he is coming from, I’d be going crazy as well.

“Go, just take care of yourself.”

He nods, pecks my lips then jumps into the car and drives out. I hope he remembers to clear his mind while driving, accidents are prone to happen to angry drivers.

I’m startled by my phone ringing, MaNkosi is calling me.

“KaMadlala!”

“Mah?”

“Please come home.”

Eish!

“I’m busy mah.”

“Busy with what? Your brother and sister in-law are arguing. I don’t know what to do anymore, he wants to hit her.”

Wait, I will address the arguing part later.

Sister in-law?

“Which sister in-law, mah?”

“Khaya of course, she’s pregnant with khehla’s child.”

So that makes her my sister in-law? Hai this woman.

“Bakhe would never put his hands on a woman, Khaya is safe Mah. I’m sure it’s nothing serious.”

“Were you there when the fight started? I know what I’m talking about Cashile, get here now before Khaya loses her baby. Khehla won’t listen to me.” She hangs up.

My mother likes exaggerating.

I don't want to take Lulu to that house, she might not be safe there since they wanted to kill her.

Here comes Mhloniphe, he looks like a mess. This man's lungs will give up on him one day. I ask him to take me to my father's place, he doesn't mind.

Lulu is not happy when I separate her from her friends, I can't leave her behind. There is no one to look after her.

I strap her in the back seat and take the passenger's seat.

"How is the baby?"

Well, I saw the small talk coming.

"Growing."

"Boy or girl?" Mhloniphe asks.

"We don't know yet, I want it to be a surprise."

He laughs, “A gender surprise? What’s so special about that? As long as the baby is healthy, right?”

“Yeah but I guess it’s just for the thrill of it.” For me, it’s the anticipation.

“I guess... tell me about the doctor. Who is he? Where is he from?”

“You mean Nkosana?” I ask, strange how he’s suddenly interested in knowing about him.

“Is that his name?” He asks.

“Yes, I don’t know much about him. Only that he was adopted and his parents died.”

He hums.

“So he was adopted?”

Where is he taking this?

Wait a minute!

“You don’t think he’s Mbuzo’s twin, do you?”

No way, they don't even look alike.

"I'm thinking outside the box, something is fishy about that man."

"Don't you think they would be identical, or have similarities?" I have been in Nkosana's presence for months, I would have spotted the resemblance.

"Ever heard of none identical twins?" He asks.

He's actually scaring me, I don't want Nkosana related to Mbuzo. It would be... no, it can't be.

"We're here," Mhlo drags me out of my thinking.

I ask to leave Lulu with him in the car, I don't want her stepping into that yard.

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I can hear the yelling from here, Khaya's voice is the only one that can be heard.

This girl has been MIA since we arrived, strange because she was hands-on around here when we were in Joburg.

Sis hasn't been around to confirm her pregnancy story.

The door is open, I walk in on Khaya on her knees, crying.

"What's going on?"

Bakhe turns to me, there are tears on his face.

"This girl says she saw the snake before it attacked your father, she saw it and went back into the house." Bakhe explains.

I am out of my head with shock.

"Khaya?"

"He didn't want Bakhe to marry me, I'm sorry, I don't know what came over me." She's making noise with that ugly cry.

My mother looks defeated, I'm surprised she

hasn't attacked her.

"I did it for you Bakhe, for us. It's fine if he dies, we can be..."

She doesn't finish talking, he has his knee pressed down her throat. She's struggling to breathe.

"I know you're looking for something to take your anger out on but not like this Bakhe, not her." I tell him.

He doesn't even bat an eye, how do I convince him to stop?

"Mah?"

"Yeyi, don't involve me." She crosses her arms on her chest as she looks away.

Bakhe is going to kill Khaya if he's not stopped.

I run out of the house, only Mhloniphe can get through to him.

"Bakhe is going to kill Khaya, hurry." There's

urgency in my voice but this man is just frowning at me, smoking like it's not clear that I'm panicking. Lulu is in the driver's seat, pretending to be driving.

"Mommy look, I'm a taxi driver." Lulu yells in excitement.

"That's good baby."

Mhloniphe laughs, this man has no sense of urgency.

"Did you hear what I said?"

He's so nonchalant, "I heard you dade. What did she do to him? Bakhe doesn't attack people for no reason."

It's all that smoke that's making him crazy.

"She just confessed that she saw the snake before it bit my father and walked away."

"Argh shame." He speaks with a cigarette stuck between his lips, I can't with this man.

“Mhloniphe, come on. My brother will go to jail if you don’t stop him.”

“I’m behind you, go ahead.”

He’s lying, he doesn’t want to interfere. I go back inside because I’m clearly wasting my time here.

Khaya is on the ground, beneath Bakhe. She’s slowly losing consciousness. My mother hasn’t lifted an eyebrow, she’s not getting herself involved.

The only thing left to do is call for help.

Where is my phone?

I think of dialing Mbuzo, but by the time he arrives, Khaya will be dead.

Veins are visible on Bakhe’s forehead, my brother rarely lets anger consume him. What this girl has done... oh God, he will never be the same again.

“Bakhe, she’s not worth it.”

Oh finally, Mhloniphe is here, he gives Lulu to me.

“She’s not worth it mfethu.” Mhloniphe repeats.

It’s as if he is talking to a wall.

He cups Bakhe’s face, making him face him.

“She’s carrying your child. Don’t do this, you are better than your father.”

Bakhe clenches his eyes as he lets Khaya go, tears voluntarily fall down his face.

“I’m tired mfethu, when will I catch a break? Mina uNkulunkulu uyang’zonda, he hates me. I have tried to be a good person all my life but what good has that done me?”

“Everything happens for a reason bhuti,” I tell him, he shakes his head.

“Ngconco ngife once, I might as well die. I can’t take it anymore, I can’t live like this anymore.”

He's loudly sobbing.

Mhloniphe pulls him into a tight hug, "I know how you feel ntwana, you're not alone. I'm here."

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[03/06, 15:52] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 87

BAKHE

He asked for time alone with her, there are things he needs to know, things he can't

understand. She was once a good person.

How did it get to this?

Bakhe walks into his old rondavel, she's sitting on the bed with her head bowed. There's a five finger print on her left cheek, courtesy of MaNkosi.

"Here," Bakhe says, handing her a glass of water.

She drinks and puts the glass on the bed, Bakhe takes it and puts it down.

"How far are you?" He asks.

"Three months," her voice is a whisper.

He scratches his head, yeah they were together for about two to four months. But they did it once, it was so long ago.

"How did this happen mfethu? We only did it once and used protection."

Khaya lifts her eyes to him, she's quick to cry.

“You are the only man I ever slept with, it’s your baby.”

“I’m not disputing that, I’m only curious as to how it happened.”

She keeps quiet, he needs more than silence.

“Fine, let’s go to the hospital to do a pregnancy test.”

Her eyes shoot up, “But why? I did two tests and they came out positive, I am pregnant.”

“Then you won’t have a problem going to the clinic for more tests. Unless you are hiding something.” He says.

She sighs and nods.

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Mhloniphe has driven them to the clinic.

The nurse took Khaya's blood and tested her urine, they are in the office waiting for the results.

"She seems confident man, maybe she really is pregnant." He says to Mhloniphe, then looks at Khaya. She hasn't spoken since they arrived.

Mhloniphe shrugs, "Let's wait for the results."

It makes sense why Mhloniphe is over protective, Bakhe hurts easily. His heart is sensitive.

The nurse arrives with the results, "Would you like me to give you results alone?"

He's talking to Khaya, she shakes her head.

"No, I want the father of my baby present."

Her words make his heart skip a beat, being a father is something he's never sat down and entertained but it was always at the back of his head. The little news that khaya shared has

given him so much hope for the future, finally he will have something to live for.

“The results came back negative, you are not pregnant.” The nurse says.

Bakhe’s face falls, along with everything he’s ever believed in.

“What? No, no, no. Take the test again, I’m pregnant. I know I’m pregnant, take the test again.” She’s yelling at the nurse.

“We tested your urine and your blood, they both came back negative. You are not pregnant.” The nurse confirms.

Tears stream down Khaya’s face, “Please... there must be some kind of mistake.”

“Enough!” Bakhe quietly says.

“Bakhe, she’s lying... I’m carrying your baby.”

He stands while she’s still talking and walks out, Mhloniphe tracks after him. Khaya reaches

Bakhe first, she wraps her arms around him from the back.

“Bakhe, I’m sorry. Don’t go please, we can make another baby. I love you, you can’t leave.”

This is more exhausting than anything.

“Let go of me,” Bakhe calmly says.

“Bakhe...”

“Yeyi mfazi, detach yourself from my friend.” Mhloniphe says.

She slowly unlocks her arms from Bakhe, he turns to face her.

“It’s over mefthu, don’t call me. Do not text me, do not look for me. It’s over between us, and stay away from my family.” He’s reached his breaking point.

Khaya wipes her tears but more keep coming.

“I love you... don’t make me live without you.” Her voice trembles.

“Why did you lie about the pregnancy?” Bakhe asks.

She drops her eyes, “You left. I knew you were not coming back, it was the only way to make you come back to me.”

Desperate times call for desperate measures.

“How long were you going to keep this up? The belly was bound to grow, how long were you going to keep this charade? What about the birth of the baby?”

“I hadn’t thought that far yet, I was actually hoping you’d marry me and we’d try for a baby. Eventually, I was going to make you a father.”

He snorts in disbelief, “Get out of my sight before I kill you.”

He’s so calm in his command, yet Khaya is petrified. Her body is visibly shaking.

“I love you,” she pleads.

He might as well be talking to himself, Bakhe turns and proceeds walking down the corridor.

Khaya takes off after him, Mhloniphe stops her.

“Are you deaf? Stay the hell away from him or I will make you,” he’s pointing a finger at her.

“Please tell him that I’m sorry,” there’s desperation in her voice.

Mhloniphe is evidently disgusted by her, he gives her a tongue click before going after Bakhe. He finds him in the parking lot, standing against Mhloniphe’s car.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m leaving,” Bakhe tells him.

“Okay, I will see you tomorrow then.”

He’s invited to the ceremony.

“I’m leaving the province, I’m not going back to

Joburg either.”

Who said you can’t run away from your problems? Maybe he will be the first man to do so.

Mhloniphe looks worried, “Where will you go?”

“I don’t know, I don’t want anyone knowing my whereabouts. I will end myself if I stay here, mfethu. It’s best I leave, I don’t know what’s going to happen to my father but I have said my goodbyes.”

“I hear you mfethu,” Mhloniphe says.

This is the end of their journey.

“Tell my sister that I am sorry, I would say goodbye to her and Lulu but I know she will convince me to stay.”

Cashile has that effect on him, they have a tight knit relationship.

“Do what you must ndoda, as long as I know

you're alive." –Mhloniphe.

They share a brief hug, Mhloniphe gives him the car keys to his car and a bank card.

"I can't take this."

"I will feel better knowing you are sorted, there's enough money to last you six months in there. You're my little brother, it's my duty to make sure you are okay." Mhloniphe says.

"Thank you," –Bakhe.

They say their goodbyes before Bakhe gets in the car and drives away.

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CASHILE

Who goes away the whole day and doesn't call

to say he is okay?

Does Mbuzo understand that I am pregnant and stress is not good for me at this stage in my pregnancy?

I haven't bothered to call him, one thing I have learned throughout our journey is never run after a man.

The last time I did that, he showed me my mother. It's getting late, Lulu and I should get going.

We're leaving for Joburg tomorrow after the ceremony, I don't want to stay here for too long. I haven't told Mbuzo, he can stay longer if he wants.

I'm in the living room, feeding Lulu. She's such a lazy eater.

Mhloniphe walks in, "Hey."

"Hey, where is Bakhe?"

I thought they would come together.

He sits, “He left after finding out that Khaya lied about the pregnancy.”

Damn!

That girl is not sane.

“Where did he go?” I ask..

“He wouldn’t tell me, but it’s not Joburg. He said to tell you that he is sorry, he’s fine though. He just needs to find himself.”

I honestly do not know what to say, so much has happened in our lives. I don’t blame Bakhe for his selfishness, no one will think for him.

“Maybe it’s for the best he left, this place and its people were too toxic for him.” I tell Mhloniphe.

I can only hope that Bakhe keeps in touch.

“Where is Mbuzo? Is he back yet?”

I’m annoyed again just by thinking about that

man and his disappearing acts.

“I haven’t heard from him the whole day.” I tell Mhlo.

He looks embarrassed, “I’m sorry. I will call him and ask where he is.”

He starts searching for his phone.

“No, don’t do it at my expense. I’m not going to chase after Mbuzo again, besides, he still needs to earn his forgiveness. I’m only here because he needs support, not because everything is back to normal again.”

“I think you two should have a proper wedding, he needs to pay lobola and marry you outside prison.” He’s laughing.

“I don’t know about such a commitment, Mhloniphe.”

“You’re already married, so why not?”

“Mbuzo has a lot of growing up to do, he needs

to fix himself before he fully commits himself to me and my children. His girlfriend Lona is still in the picture, there is a lot going on I don't want to be involved in."

I would rather be called selfish.

Uncle Mphiyakhe stumbles his way in, he's been drinking the whole day. I'm sure the only time he's sober is when he's sleeping.

"There is someone looking for your brother outside." He says and throws himself on the couch.

"Who is it uncle?" Mhloniphe asks.

He hasn't gotten his answer yet and there is a woman dragging her suitcase in. I feel my blood boil and I get an instant headache.

"You?" Lona says, seeing me sitting on the couch.

"How did you find this place?" I ask her, this is

the person that refused to believe that Mbuzo is not Joshua.

“I came to see Josh.” She says.

“How did you find this place?” Mhloniphe asks.

“I did my research, where is he?” Lona.

Her attitude is appalling.

“There is no Joshua here, sisi. Go back where you came from.”-Mhloniphe.

She smiles as she looks at him, “Oh my God! You look like him, are you his brother?”

She hasn’t met them yet?

“Please call him and tell him I’m here.” She sits down with her legs crossed and starts taking selfies.

Now I see that she is purposely ignorant, she knows who Mbuzo is. Why is she forcing things?

I take Lulu with me to the kitchen, she's done eating.

My phone rings, he's finally calling.

"Your girlfriend is here." This is how I answer the phone.

"Who, you?"

Very funny.

"You know who I'm talking about, Mbuzo. Lona is here, where are you?"

"What is she doing there? How did she find me?"

He's asking me nonsense.

"Where are you? I'm leaving, the next time we see each other will be in Joburg."

And I'm not playing.

"I'm on my way to Joburg," he says but I am not sure I heard right.

“Please repeat that.”

What about the ceremony? That’s the only reason he came here with his brothers.

“I’m driving to Joburg, I figured out who my brother is. I’m going to see him,” he says.

I’m still confused, it could be shock. What is this man saying to me?

“Who is it?” I ask.

“The doctor,” he says.

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[03/06, 15:52] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 88

The call from the hospital came in around 4 in the morning. The nurse said her husband wanted to see her, she didn't waste any time.

She arrived at the hospital thirty minutes later, with her heart violently thudding against her chest. It had everything to do with the fact that the nurse didn't specify as to why the call was urgent.

The trip to the hospital felt long and heavy, all she could think about was her husband dying.

It's a nightmare she can't fathom.

She takes a deep breath, then enters his room. His eyes are closed, in fact, he looks too peaceful.

Tears!

She wipes them away and starts shouting for the nurse.

“We-nurse! Nesi maan!”

Where is that short shit?

The nurse appears, frowning and all.

“What?” This one didn’t get it all this morning.

“My husband is dead, why didn’t you tell me? Awu Nkosi yami? Kodwa ngenzeni Jesu? My life is over, it’s over.” She carries her hands on her head, wailing like a widow.

The nurse looks at her from head to toe, “Does that look like a dead body to you?”

MaNkosi takes a second look, his chest is not moving. His skin is pale, he looks like he’s been in a freezer.

“He’s alive?” She softly asks, wiping the stupid tears away.

“Yeah, hau!” The nurse says.

“Hawuu! Oright nesi! Nawe you should have told me. Indaba uyathithiza maan.”

She goes to sit on the chair and holds Madlala’s hand, it’s warm. The nurse leaves after a long sigh of exhaustion, MaNkosi cares nothing about.

“Myeni wami, I’m here.” She rubs the back of his hand.

He slowly opens his eyes and scans the room.

“Where are my children?” That’s one dejected looking man.

“They are not here, baba.”

Madlala sighs, a tear escapes his eye.

“Bakhe was here, I heard his voice. He sat with me for hours,” he says.

“That’s impossible, Khaya told me that he left. He’s gone,” MaNkosi explains. But Madlala is not having it.

“I know my son’s voice, I felt his presence. He was here, he held my hand and told me he loved me, he came.”

Well, that doesn’t sound like Bakhe. He’d never declare his love for his parents.

“My son,” he’s crying.

Confused is what MaNkosi has become. Yeah he’s not afraid of crying, but what is this?

“MaNkosi, what have we done? We’ve lost our children, ingan’ zethu, MaNkosi.”

“We haven’t lost them baba, they are still alive.”

She doesn’t get it.

“Then why do I feel so alone?” He asks.

He’s making her cry as well.

“Nkululeko won’t leave me alone, he wants me to go with him.” Madlala says.

Nkululeko has become a thorn in the flesh,

there must be a way to deal with him.

“Don’t follow him baba, he just wants to kill you. He’s jealous because he’s dead and you’re not.” She never liked Nkululeko, he’s a problem even in death.

“Take me home, MaNkosi. I need to take a bath and wear the suit I wore on the day of our wedding.”

MaNkosi’s heart drops, this can’t be it.

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CASHILE

There was no reason for me to stay at the Xabas, Mbuzo left without telling me. So I took

my child and came back to my aunt's house. Lona was still there, I don't know what's going to happen when Mbuzo comes back from Joburg. He called last night, I didn't answer.

I have the right to be mad, he called me to his house then left without informing me.

He claims that Nkosana could be his twin brother, it's what I feared. I don't want Nkosana related to my children.

It's 6am, I woke up an hour ago, my heart racing. I just don't have the zeal to get out of bed, not only that, today feels like a gloomy day.

Mbali and Lulu are still asleep, I leave the bedroom in search of something to eat.

"Morning sisi," aunt says.

She's behind the stove, stirring porridge.

Go and sit down, I will bring your food."

I can't argue with that, "You're the best aunty in

the world.”

She laughs and waves me off.

I check my phone as I settle down on the couch, I have a message from Bakhe. He’s fine and will call me when he’s settled. There’s also a message from Mbuzo begging me to answer my phone.

The only time I will speak to him is when he shows his face here. Does he even know the mess he left behind? I bet Mhloniphe has informed him that his girlfriend is around.

After breakfast, aunt brings me the annulment papers. She’s been holding on to them.

“He didn’t come for them, you see how fate works?”

If what Mbuso and I went through the past months was fate, then that’s just cruel.

“You should burn them,” she adds.

She's more than happy that we are not divorced,
I am not about to count my chickens before
they hatch.

"I'm not going to do that aunty, I will talk to him
about it first."

Her smile dies, "But you two have sorted out
your differences. You're back together right?"

"I don't know, I'm not sure. I guess, it's just..."

"It's just what?" She interjects.

Elders think a man apologizing is enough for a
woman to forgive and forget.

"I still wake up in the morning with his words
echoing in my head."

Confusion covers her face, "What words?"

"Everything he said to me back then," I tell her.

I don't know about that sigh she just took, I
know though that she is about to advocate for
Mbuzo.

“But that’s in the past, the problem is that you didn’t have a proper wedding. You needed elders to guide you and tell you the dos and don’ts in a marriage. A man is always right mntanami.”

I didn’t know I had a funny aunty.

“That’s a good one aunty, but don’t ever say that in public. People will genuinely laugh at you.”

Haibo, a man is always right in which world?

“Listen to me wena and you will never be a divorcee in your life.”

“So you’re saying even if he cheats and disrespects me, I should stay?”

“Yes,” there was no reason for her to project her voice.

“Times have changed aunty, women don’t tolerate patriarchy anymore. There are plenty of fish in the sea.”

The way she looks at me makes me want to hide and never show my face again.

“This is why the divorce rate is skyrocketing, it’s this crazy mentality. Men are not fish, God left them in charge of us women. He left us in the hands of Adam and our job is to be submissive and treat them with respect. Treat a man like a god and he will love you right.”

I have heard it all.

Where is uncle Nkulu? I want him to tell me what he did to my aunt.

“What about Adam? He has a role to play too, so why is he not doing his job? Why is he not protecting Eve and treating her like she came out of his rib?”

She exhales, “You are not listening to me, Cashile.”

“I am aunty, I’m just failing to understand why I must tolerate nonsense from a man because he

was the first creation? Soze, you can miss me on that. If he cheats, I will sleep with his brother and marry his father.”

Her jaw drops, “Joburg has ruined you my child.”

“It’s called wisdom, an eye for eye.”

My phone rings, saving me from this dreadful conversation.

I’m thinking it’s Mbuzo but nope, MaNkosi is calling me.

“It’s Mah.” I tell aunty.

They are not on speaking terms, she is still angry at them, which is justifiable because they killed her husband and son in-law.

“It could be about your father, answer it.” Aunt says.

Maybe she’s right, otherwise, why would

MaNkosi call so early in the morning?

“Mah!”

“You need to come, it’s your father.”

I don’t like her tone, something has happened.

“Is he...”

“No, he wanted to come home. He wants to see you, Hluphekile and Mbali.” She says.

That sounds like he’s dying.

“Okay, let me speak to aunt.” I say.

“I’m about to give him a bath, come in an hour or two. I will be done.”

“Okay.”

“KaMadlala,” she says as I’m about to hang up.

“Yebo mah.”

“Your father loves you, you know that right? We love you, and your brother so much.”

She's being weird.

"I know," I want to tell her I love her too but that's not a norm.

I can't speak for my aunt, she might not want to go.

"Everything okay?" Aunt asks.

"Mah took baba home, he wants to see us all. I think it's time."

Her face changes, "It's about time."

Is she not the woman who was preaching forgiveness a while ago?

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THE MADLALAS

She prepared water for him and gave him a bath,

then put him in the suit he wore on the day of their wedding. She freshened up as well and wore the dress she wore on their traditional wedding. It's a little tight around her bust but not uncomfortable. She's wearing a doek and a matching scarf around her shoulders.

There's not much in the house, but with whatever she could find, she prepared a meal for him. He's always loved pap and beef stew and no one cooks it better than her.

MaNkosi prepares the table, then goes to fetch him in the bedroom.

"Baba, the food is ready. Should I bring it here?"

He looks at her with adoration in his eyes, "You look beautiful, Khanyisile."

Argh!

When was the last time he made her blush like this?

“I want to sit at the table with you, one last time.” He says, pushing his body up.

MaNkosi helps him out of bed, his legs are wobbly and it takes a minute to lift each leg but he makes it to the kitchen with her help.

She pours water in a basin, kneels before him so he could wash his hands.

The gesture puts a smile on Madlala’s face, he hasn’t seen her on her knees in a long time.

“Remember the first time you knelt before me?” He speaks slowly, there’s not enough energy in his body.

“The day you paid lobola, my aunt told me to bring you food and kneel when I serve you.”

Madlala laughs lightly, “You were the most beautiful bride I had ever seen. I knew then when you smiled at me that you were going to give me the most beautiful children. And you delivered, mkami.”

It's lunch time, not a time to cry.

MaNkosi wipes her tears, she puts the basin away and joins Madlala at the table.

"Let's pray," she says, taking his hand.

They say grace, before they start eating in silence.

MaNkosi sniffs.

"Yini? Why are you crying?"

"Lutho baba, I'm just emotional because we're spending time together."

"For the last time." Madlala adds, she cries openly.

"You will be fine without me, MaNkosi. You're a strong woman."

And that she is, but MaNkosi doesn't want to be a strong woman. Life without this man is meaningless.

She kneels for him when she gives him water to wash his hands, she puts the empty dishes in the sink then helps him back to bed.

“Call my children and my brothers,” he says.

“I have called them, everyone is on the way.”
She presses a soft kiss on his forehead.

“I’m going to wash the dishes, wait for me,” she says.

Madlala frowns in confusion and gives her a weak smile.

“I will be here, mkami.”

There isn’t much to clean, she sweeps and mops the house after washing the dishes.

Now the house looks and smells like a chilled Sunday morning. MaNkosi unlocks the kitchen door and opens it a smidgeon. When she walks back into the bedroom, Madlala’s eyes are shut.

He looks pale, his face is covered with sweat

and his face is pinched as if he's in pain.

"Baba?" Her heart has dropped.

"Mhh!" He responds without opening his eyes.

She lays down on her side of the bed, with her shoes on and puts her head on his chest. Just like the good old days.

"Ngihamba nawe baba. I'm going with you," her voice is shaky.

"I'm crossing over, MaNkosi. You can't come where I'm going." It takes him forever to finish speaking and when he does, he's panting.

"Ngifa la ofa khona, I die where you die." She insists.

This has Madlala slowly opening his eyes,
"What did you do?"

He's softly spoken, no traces of panic in his voice. MaNkosi lifts her head, her eyes are bloodshot, face drenched with tears.

She pecks his lips, then rests her head back on his chest.

"Ngiyaxolisa myeni wami. I am sorry, I did it because I love you. I can't live without you," she says softly.

Madlala sighs, he knows what she's done.

"I put it in the food, we won't feel pain. We will just fall into a deep sleep." Her voice breaks, it doesn't take long for her to start sobbing.

One thing about MaNkosi, she knows her way around plants, even the most poisonous ones.

There is no panic on Madlala, he's disappointed though. It was okay if one of them was leaving, not both. Their children will become orphans, it's not what he wants.

If he knew she was going to poison their food, he would've stopped her.

"I'm worried about our children," he tells her,

tears burning the corners of his eyes.

He wants to put his arms around her but all strength has left his body. It feels like he's slowly drifting into a deep sleep, one he will never wake up from and he can barely keep his eyes open.

"MaNkosi," she doesn't answer. "Khanyisile."

Silence!

Her body suddenly feels heavier on him, he can't hear her sobs anymore.

She's gone.

His heart breaks, he breaks down. He was supposed to be the first to go, not his beloved wife.

This is what his greed has bred.

"Ngiyaxolisa mkami. Till we meet again, MaNkosi." He eventually succumbs to an eternal sleep.

If it wasn't for him... if it wasn't for him and his greed.

Akuhlanga, lungehlanga!

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[03/06, 15:52] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 89

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“Sikhulekile ekhaya.”

That's Khathala asking for permission to enter the Madlala residence. It's collection day.

It's been too long since they paid him the 12k,

such a small amount of money does not last a month.

When no one comes out of the house, Khathala walks through the gate. With him are two men, taller and bigger than him.

It's just for control, in case Madlala and MaNkosi refuse to pay him back.

What used to be a homestead occupied by many livestock, is now a ghost town. At least there's one chicken grazing the yard, it's better than nothing.

"Madlala!" He knocks, the door is slightly open. That means there's someone in the house.

When he's knocked three times and gotten no answer, he pushes the door and enters. There's a sudden heaviness on his shoulders, chills ripple through his body.

Something is wrong.

He sees a woman sitting on the couch, her back is turned to him, he can't really tell who she is.

"MaNkosi!" He calls, treading lightly towards the living room.

Why is she not acknowledging him?

"MaNkosi, I'm here for my money." He says, picking up his steps.

If these people don't pay him back this time, he will turn them into zombies.

He touches her shoulder to shake her so she looks at him, she's cold to the touch. His body shudders as he lets out a gasp.

MaNkosi turns her head towards him and smiles. Khathala's eyes grow as wide as saucers. He stumbles back in shock, his mouth releasing a choked breath.

"A ghost?" He mumbles to himself. She's no longer part of this world.

MaNkosi slowly turns her head back to where she was facing.

Something falls out of the blue, the sound comes from the bedroom. Khathala whips his head back to check, when he looks back at the couch, MaNkosi is gone.

“MaNkosi can’t be dead,” he says to himself.

His two minions walk into the house, thinking he called them.

They follow Khathala to the bedroom, where he finds MaNkosi and Madlala in bed.

“Dammit!” Khathala cusses.

He checks both their pulse points and sighs.

“We have to get out of here. Bring this man with us, these people owe me. I will get my money, no matter what.”

At Khathala’s instruction, the two men carry Madlala out of the house and put him in the car.

They leave the door as they found it; open.

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MHLONIPHE

It's the day of the ceremony, Mbuzo is not taking his calls. They can't do this ceremony without him, all three brothers have to be present.

There are aunts and cousins around but he has a faint case of OCD, especially when it comes to making his own food.

His brothers are an exception.

Right now, he needs a strong cup of black coffee.

His mind is focused on the task, when his

phone rings. He glances at the caller ID, noting the unsaved number. But he knows who it belongs to. He hasn't heard from her in a while.

With a slight smirk, he answers the call, already anticipating the attention he would receive from her.

"Hello?" He keeps his tone cool and aloof.

"Hi, Mhloni..." comes Mbali's voice on the other end, her tone soft and hesitant. "It's Mbali."

He knows it's her and this is the first time she calls him by name. Mhloniphe's smirk widens slightly at the sound of her voice, it's good to hear that she is still alive. The girl was prone to suicide.

Another fact is that she can't resist reaching out to him, no matter how much he distances himself from her.

After all, he is Mhloniphe—charming, confident, and irresistible.

“What can I do for you, Little One?” He asks, his voice dripping with arrogance.

“I was thinking... since you’re back, I was wondering if you’d like to grab a bite sometime, catch up?”

Catch up on what? They have nothing to catch up on, he didn’t give her the chance to build memories with him.

“I miss you,” she confesses.

Of course, she misses him. Who wouldn’t? But he has more important things to focus on than entertaining her little girl crush.

“I appreciate the offer, Little One. But I’ve been quite busy lately, and I’m not sure when I’ll have free time.”

He has all the time in the world and none for her.

“Okay,”

There’s a hint of disappointment in Mbali’s

voice, but Mhloniphe pays it little heed. After all, there are plenty of other women vying for his attention. Women, not little girls.

“Well, maybe some other time then.”

“Perhaps,” Mhloniphe replies noncommittally, already losing interest in the conversation.

“Take care, Little One.”

As he ends the call, he can't help but chuckle to himself. It's always amusing to see how easily she falls under his spell, but he can't entertain her little girl crush.

“Anything from Mbuzo yet?” Mkhetheni asks, walking in the kitchen. He heads to the fridge and takes a bottle of water.

“No, his phone is off, I spoke to KaMadlala though, her father is dying. I think she wanted me to relay the message to Mbuzo, and I did.”

–Mhloniphe.

Their moment is interrupted when Lona walks into the room, dressed in nothing but Mbuzo's shirt, her demeanor casual and unconcerned.

Mhloniphe's eyebrows shoot up in surprise, his spoon freezing midway to the coffee jar.

“Madam, what are you doing?” He asks.

Lona shrugs nonchalantly, her lips curled into a lazy smirk.

“Just getting some breakfast,” she replies.

Mkhotheni's eyes widen in shock, his gaze flicking between Lona and his brother in disbelief.

“But... but you're not wearing any clothes,” he stammers, his cheeks flushing with embarrassment.

Lona rolls her eyes, as if their reaction is beneath her.

“Relax, boys. It's just a shirt,” she says dismissively, pouring herself a cup of coffee without a care in the world.

“That's my cup,” Mhloniphe tells her.

She faces him, as she takes a sip and seductively licks the tip of the cup.

The eye contact makes Mhloniphe uncomfortable, “I thought she was Christian. Usisi ka Jesu.”

He exchanges a bewildered glance with his brother before speaking up again, his tone stern.

“Lona, in our culture, it's not appropriate for a woman to walk around half-naked, especially in front of men who aren't her husband.”

Lona scoffs, waving off his concerns with a flick of her hand.

“Your culture, my culture... it's all so outdated,” she retorts, her tone dripping with disdain.

“I’m a modern woman, I do what I want.”

Mkhetheni shifts uncomfortably in his seat, his unease growing with each passing moment. He is basically the father of the house and this is one level of disrespect.

“You’re a guest in our home,” Mkhetheni protests weakly, unsure of how to handle the situation.

Lona simply shrugs, “And I appreciate your hospitality,” she says breezily, taking a sip of her coffee as if nothing is amiss.

“But that doesn’t mean I’m going to conform to your outdated notions of propriety.”

“Propriety? Uthini kahle-kahle losisi?” Mhloniphe asks his brother, she’s out here throwing English words around.

“You do know that our brother is not Joshua or Isaac. His name is Mbuzowakhe Xaba, he is married to Cashile Madlala. You are nothing to

him.” Mhloniphe tells her, just to get that out of the way.

“He hasn’t said anything to me, I’m here for the man I have been dating for over five months, my fiancée, and I’m not leaving until Joshua tells me himself who he is.”

Yoh, this girl!

“What’s for breakie?” She pulls a chair and sits. Mkhetheni and Mhloniphe exchange a helpless glance, realizing that their words are falling on deaf ears.

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CASHILE

I called the hospital on our way here and they

confirmed that my father was discharged, he wanted to die at home.

I thought we would arrive to church people singing, that's what happens when someone is about to kick the bucket. MaNkosi would've invited her church people to come and pray for her husband.

But the yard is empty.

I leave the car parked outside, right behind a familiar car. Bakhe is sitting on the veranda with his head bowed, I thought he left.

"Please carry Lulu in your arms," I ask Mbali.

My trust issues are sky high, MaNkosi might take her footprints and do some funny business with them.

The first person my brother greets is Lulu as he takes her from Mbali.

"I thought you left," Mhloniphe told me he left.

“I wasn’t that far, I think I heard uncle Nkululeko telling me to turn back and come home.” He says.

“You heard my, Nkululeko?” Aunt curiously asks.

“I’m not sure, I was deep into thought so I’m not sure if it was his voice. But I didn’t waste time, I drove here. I haven’t been able to knock or go in since I arrived.”

“Why is that?” I ask.

Bakhe sighs, turning his gaze to the main house.

“I wanted to go in, but something is not right. I’m terrified.” He says.

“Of seeing your father, Khehla?” I tease.

He doesn’t even spare me a smile.

“The door is open, do we knock or go in?” Aunt asks.

“Let’s go in,” I say, leading the way through the kitchen entrance.

“Mah!”

It’s so quiet in here, the TV is usually on. Mbali and aunt head to the living room, while I go check the bedroom. The door is open, I can see it from here.

“Mah! Baba!”

I have to alert them, since their door is open. Who knows, maybe she’s dressing him?

Why is she not responding to my call? As I tread closer to the door, my heart begins to race in a way that leaves me feeling dizzy.

My mother is laying on the bed, I thought she said baba was home?

“Mah!” I shake her leg.

That’s odd, she’s cold.

“Mama,” I shift to the head of the bef, her eyes are closed. “Mah, we’re here. Wake up.”

I pat her face, it’s cold as well.

This is not normal, she's motionless on the bed, her eyes closed and her chest still. Panic grips me like a sin, my hands trembling as I shake her desperately.

"Mah! Mama, wake up! You called us, wake up now."

But she doesn't stir, doesn't respond to my desperate pleas. The realization hits me like a ton of bricks—she's gone. My mother is gone, and I don't know what to do.

I'm panicking as I press a finger to her pulse point, there's nothing.

No, no, no.

"Mama! Mama vuka." I scream, as I shake her body.

There's no life to her, my mother... she's... she's...

I'm hysterical, sobbing uncontrollably as I cling

to her lifeless form, begging her to come back to me. And then I hear the sound of footsteps rushing into the room.

Bakhe takes in the scene before him, his eyes widening in shock and horror as he sees our mother lying on the bed. Without a word, he rushes to the other side of the bed to check on her

“She can't be gone,” I choke out between sobs, my whole body shaking with grief.

“What happened to her?”

“Mami, vuka. It's me uKhehla wakho. Stop playing with us and open your eyes.” His voice breaks, tears cover his face. He doesn't wipe them away.

Aunt and Mbali come running in, they find us desperately trying to wake her up.

“Mommy!” Lulu cries, it’s because I’m screaming.

Aunt pushes Mbali out of the room, “Take the child outside, she’s not supposed to see this.”

Lulu releases a piercing scream the moment Mbali runs out of the house with her, “Mommy! Mommy!”

I cover my mouth to muffle my cries. I’m scaring her.

“Mami please... please mama wami.” Bakhe cries uncontrollably, his head resting on her chest.

Aunt pulls me away from my mother, “Come with me, my child. She’s gone.”

Those words... no, she can’t be dead.

Then it hits me, she said dad was home.

“Baba, she said my father was home.” I kneel and look under the bed, there’s no one.

I run out of the room and to the living room, yelling for my father. There are women entering the yard, wearing head-wraps and scarfs around their shoulders— next door neighbours that were not here when we arrived.

They look distraught, Mbali and Lulu are in the car. I can hear Lulu's cries from here, I don't know whose cries are the most excruciating. Hers, or Bakhe's.

"Mami, why? Why!" He keeps repeating, my brother is crying like a child in there.

I want to go back but I need to know where my father is, I'm losing my mind with worry. The hospital said he left with his wife, then where is he? He was too weak to have left on his own.

I can't see clearly with the tears pouring out of my eyes and it frustrates me, I'm so confused.

Did he die and was taken to a morgue?

What is going on?

“Where is my father?” I yell, carrying my hands on my head in defeat and breaking down in sobs.

I feel my aunt’s arms around me, from behind.

“Phephisa mntanami, I’m sorry.” She’s shushing me.

“Ubaba no Mah bas’shiyile! They’ve left us. Kodwa yini Nkos’yami.” I wail.

My knees weaken, aunt and two other women catch me before I fall. And in the same space of time, I see a ruby red Bentley Bentayga parking at the gate.

He’s back!

I’m on the floor, slowly losing consciousness and all I see are his long legs, running through the gate—towards me and my visions darkens as I fall into a blackout.

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[03/06, 15:52] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 90

CASHILE

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I slowly blink my eyes open, the harsh fluorescent lights of the hospital room causing me to squint. My head feels heavy, and there's a dull ache throbbing behind my temples.

As I try to sit up, I feel a hand gently restraining me, and I turn to see Mbuzo sitting beside me, his expression filled with concern.

He really came, for a second there, it felt like I was dreaming.

"KaMadlala, you're awake," he says.

His voice is tinged with relief.

"How are you feeling?"

Confusion clouds my thoughts as I struggle to piece together what happened.

"What... what happened?" I mumble, my voice hoarse and weak.

His expression darkens slightly, he takes my hand in his. The look on his face makes my stomach turn.

"You collapsed at home," he explains gently.

My heart races at his words, the memories start flooding back in. I remember... the sight of my mother lying lifeless on the bed, the panic and despair as I realized she was gone—it all comes rushing back with painful clarity.

“My mother,” I gasp, my voice catching in my throat.

“Where is she, Mbuzo? What happened to her?”

Tears well up in my eyes as I wait for his answer, the fear and grief is overwhelming. I can't stand it. Mbuzo's expression softens as he reaches out to comfort me.

“Sthandwa sami, I'm so sorry,” he murmurs.

The sadness in his voice throws me in a dark place, she's really gone.

I shake my head, knowing what he's about to say next.

“Your mother... she... she passed on. Yobe KaMadlala, my condolences.”

The words hit me like a physical blow, the pain of loss washing over me from scratch. I bury my face in my hands, unable to contain the sobs that wrack my body as I mourn the woman

who brought me into this world.

This is my reality now, I've lost my mother.

Mbuzo holds me close, in a comforting
embrace as I grieve for my mother.

"Where is Lulu? How is she?"

"She's with your cousin and Bakhe, the doctor
said you can go home as soon as you wake up.
The baby is fine," he brushes my belly.

"What about my father? He was discharged
from the hospital but he wasn't at the house."

"We're still looking for him. I'm sure he's fine."

"How do you know that, Mbuzo? You saw him
last time, he was on the verge of dying."

He has no answer for me.

How will we find my father? Where is he?

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MHLONIPHE

It's mid-day, the house is alive with activity. Aunts bustle around the kitchen, their voices mingling with the sounds of pots clanging and spices sizzling as they cook up a storm in preparation for the ceremony. Uncles gather outside, their laughter loud as a drunkard's laughter in a shebeen. They might as well be in one, uncle Mpiyakhe is the most drunk.

Mkhotheni is among them, he is such an old soul and blends in like a glove. Mbuzo texted, he's around but will arrive late.

"Ndoda, you're the father figure. Go in there and tell that girl to leave." Mhloniphe tells his brother.

“I tried, the only thing left to do is to manhandle her and drag her out of this place.” Mkhetheni answers, his breath smells like alcohol.

“Fine, I will see what I can do. I’m going to call Mbuzo, we need to start.” –Mhloniphe.

“Do you think we should postpone? KaMadlala needs him.” Only Mkhetheni would put other people above anything.

“We’ve been waiting for this day for months, I’d be damned if I let Madlala take it from us like he took everything else.” –Mhloniphe.

His phone is charging in the lounge, he makes his way there and finds Lona on the couch, she's engrossed in taking selfies, her attention focused solely on herself.

She doesn't even notice when he enters the room.

Mhloniphe watches her from across the room, his irritation growing by the second. This is a family gathering and Lona's obvious disregard for their traditions rubs him the wrong way.

"Can you please go back to your house?" He asks, his tone firm.

"This is a family gathering, you have no place here."

But Lona just shrugs nonchalantly, as if his words mean nothing to her.

"I'll leave when Mbuzo arrives," she says and leaves the room.

Mhloniphe's frustration reaches a boiling point, he dials Mbuzo's number.

After a few rings, Mbuzo picks up, his voice coming through the line. "Ndoda!"

"Where are you? This girl can't be here during

the ceremony and the uncles are complaining.”

“I asked you to tell her to leave, why is she still there?” He sounds frustrated.

“I have an idea, how about you come home and smash her. Don’t you think it’s about time she kicks the bucket?” He’s not even kidding.

“I’m not going to sleep with her, Mhloniphe. I will not cheat on KaMadlala.”

What a bore!

“It’s not cheating, we can call you James Pipinator Blond.”

Mbuzo clicks his tongue, “Just get her out of there. I’m on my way.”

“What time will you be here?” Mhloniphe asks.

There’s a brief pause on the other end of the line before Mbuzo responds, “I’ll be home in a bit.”

Mhloniphe nods, even though Mbuzo can’t see

him.

“Alright, hurry up so we can do this ceremony and get it over with.”

As he hangs up the phone, he notices movement out of the corner of his eye and turns to see Lona standing nearby, a curious expression on her face. His suspicion rises as he wonders how much of his conversation she overheard.

Could she have heard him telling Mbuzo to sleep with her?

“Were you listening to my conversation?”

She shrugs casually, as if it's no big deal. “So what if I was? It's not like it's a secret or anything that my man is coming home.”

Mhloniphe narrows his eyes at her, “Your parents should have called you Scefe, hayi chasi. I'm enough with you.”

She waves him off with a dismissive gesture,

“Relax, bhuti. I wasn't trying to spy on you or anything. I just happened to overhear.”

He makes his way out of the living room, annoyed to the core.

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Mbuzo arrives on foot, the Madlala homestead is not that far from their home. Mhloniphe and Mkhetheni meet him at the gate.

“How is everything?” They are asking about Cashile and her family.

He heaves a long sigh, “You need to call Bakhe. He is not doing well.”

Mhloniphe nods, he hasn't called because he has no clue how to comfort a grieving person.

“What about KaMadlala?” Mkhetheni asks.

“She is not doing well, I need to go back. When is the ceremony starting?”

“Since you’re here, we can start then you go back.” Mkhetheni says.

“Okay, I’m going to greet the elders.” –Mbuzo.

“Wait, what about the doctor? What happened?” Mkhetheni asks.

“He denied everything, according to him, we are not related.” Mbuzo reports.

“So you got the wrong man?” Mhloniphe.

“He’s lying, I could see it in his eyes. He hates me, I took KaMadlala from him.” Mbuzo says.

“KaMadlala never belonged to him, she’s always been yours.” Mkhetheni is such a sucker for their relationship.

“You should do a DNA test, it’s the only way to know the truth.” Mhloniphe says.

“But how will we get his DNA?” –Mbuzo.

“I think uncle Mphiyakhe would be able to recognize him,” Mkhetheni says.

“Do you have a picture of him?”

Mbuzo frowns at Mhlo’s question.

“Just check on line, he’s a doctor with his own hospital, he must be on google.” Mhloniphe adds.

And in deed, the doctor is on google.

They call Mpiyakhe to where they are standing, he staggers his way there. His relationship with alcohol is one for the books, you’d never see the man without a bottle in hand.

Mbuzo holds the phone up, “Do you know this man?”

Mpiyakhe zooms in, eyes narrowing in curiosity.

“That’s Velaphi,” Mpiyakhe says.

He’s not helping to be honest because Velaphi looked like these three boys, nothing like the

doctor.

“Uncle take a good look,” Mkhetheni says.

Mpiyakhe zooms his drunk eyes in, “Who is this? He’s got traces of my brother.”

“That confirms it then, the doctor is your twin.” Mkhetheni says.

“This is fucked up, the man hates me. He’s holding some kind of grudge I know nothing about.” That’s Mbuzo, voice filled with worry.

There’s a car pulling up outside the gate, they don’t recognize it. So they wait and watch as the driver steps out, it’s Nkosana.

“Motherf*cker!” Mhloniphe mumbles in shock.

“He played you,” Mkhetheni says to Mbuzo.

Nkosana doesn’t acknowledge the brothers, he greets Mpiyakhe and asks to speak with him in private, leaving the brothers in wonder.

They are disrupted by Lona screaming, she's arguing with an aunty carrying a chicken.

"Get that thing away from me," she yells.

Mbuzo takes a step towards them, Mhloniphe pulls him back.

"I will sort it out, your job is to only break up with her."

He approaches them, Lona looks terrified.

"What's going on?" Mhloniphe asks.

Lona snorts and rushes inside the house.

"Aunty?"

"I asked her to help me slaughter the chicken and she swore at me," the aunt explains.

Mhlo is not close with his aunts, but they are family. Just because of fear of a chicken, Lona disrespects his aunt?

"Please help me slaughter this rooster, I have to

cook it for supper.” She gives him the chicken, he promises to do a stellar job.

Mhloniphe takes the rooster with him to his room, when he comes out, the chicken is hyperactive and keeps bopping its head, trying to jump off his arms.

“Mbuzo...” he walks into the bedroom and stops right at the door, Lona is laying on the bed, wearing nothing but underwear. This could only mean that she’s seen Mbuzo.

He quickly looks away just as Lona jumps and covers herself with a towel.

“What are you doing on my brother’s bed?”

“Get out!” She sounds annoyed.

Mhloniphe walks out, banging the door behind him.

He bumps into Mbuzo in the corridor, he’s on his way to the bedroom.

“KaMadlala called, she wants to see you.” He lies.

Mbuzo frowns at that, he just got home from Cashile’s place.

“But you said to come for the ceremony.” He’s checking his phone as he says this.

“She needs you now, you need to start keeping your promises Mbuzo. Go now,” Mhlo is pushing him towards the exit.

“Why are you carrying a chicken? And why is it so active?”

“I gave it some viagra tablets.” An overdose is what he gave it.

Mbuzo frowns at his answer but doesn’t take him seriously.

“Mhloniphe...”

“Go, I will call you when we’re about to start.”

He makes sure to accompany him to the car

and watch him drive off.

Now, what to do with Lona?

“Where is Mbuzo going?” Uncle Mpiyakhe asks, from across the yard. He’s still sitting with the arrogant doctor who refuses to mingle with the brothers.

“I asked him to go and get us more beer.”
Another lie coming out of Mhlo’s mouth.

“Your aunt wants you to slaughter the rooster, she wants to cook before it gets dark. Why is it still alive?” –Mpiyakhe.

“No man wants to die horny, uncle.” His answer puts a frown on Mpiyakhe and Nkosana’s faces, he pays them no mind and heads back to Mbuzo’s room.

He opens the door, throws the chicken on the bed and grabs the key from the door. Lona screams and jumps from the bed, running towards the door. The chicken is running behind

her, clucking loudly. Mhlo quickly steps out and shuts the door, then locks Lona inside with the chicken.

He can't tell who's screaming louder, Lona or the rooster.

"There are condoms in the drawer, practice safe sex." He walks away with the key.

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[03/06, 15:54] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 91

MHLONIPHE

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He volunteered to go to the shops and buy beer. The day is slowly getting old, Mbuzo should be on his way home now. It's been long since he left.

The ceremony was supposed to take place before 12pm, but so much has happened today.

He's driving through the busy streets when his attention is suddenly drawn to the sight of Mbali talking to a man on the sidewalk.

Her house is not far from here.

A pang of jealousy shoots through him as he watches them, his grip tightening on the steering wheel.

Without thinking, he slams on the brakes, bringing the car to an abrupt stop by the curb. Ignoring the honking horns of irritated drivers

behind him, he jumps out of the car and strides over to where Mbali and the man are talking.

“Little One,” he interrupts Mbali’s laughter. Mbali turns to him, surprise flickering in her eyes.

“What's going on?” Mhloniphe demands, his voice laced with a hint of possessiveness.

“Mhloni, what are you doing here?”

A frown grows on his face as he looks at the tall scrawny man.

“This is Tshepang, my brother in-law. He came...”

Mhloniphe ignores her explanation, he reaches out to grab her arm and pulls her away from the man.

“What are you doing?” She squirms.

“Who is that man, Little One?”

“My brother in-law, I told you.” There’s

annoyance in her tone.

“Then why does he look at you like he’s about to eat you?” He mutters, struggling to hide the intensity of his emotions.

Mbali jerks away from him, “That’s ridiculous. Tshepang is Thabiso’s brother, cousins actually. He would never.” She retorts, her voice rising with frustration.

“You can’t just come here and drag me away from someone without any reason.”

“Okay, why is he here? Who sent him? Is he going to replace your late husband?”

That’s what’s done traditionally.

“He came to see me, that’s all.” Mbali sounds offended.

He chuckles, folding his arms.

“How old is he?”

“Twenty-seven,” she says.

“So a 27 year-old man came to visit you? Where are the aunts or an uncle to show the normality of this? Because I refuse to believe that a man as old as him would visit a young woman unless he wants something.”

Mbali is suddenly uncomfortable, she looks at Tshepang. He’s waiting for her, irritation visible on his face.

“What’s it to you? You’ve been ignoring me, you don’t want to see me or talk to me. You’re a hypocrite, Mhloniphe.”

He feels a surge of guilt at her words, he's overstepped his bounds, clearly. But before he can apologize, he's overcome by a sudden impulse.

Without warning, he leans in and presses his lips to hers in a desperate kiss, his actions shocking both himself and Mbali. For a moment, time stands still as they stand there, locked in a

moment of unexpected intimacy.

As they pull away from each other, Mhloniphe is left reeling, his mind spinning with a mixture of confusion and desire. Mbali stares at him, her eyes wide with disbelief.

“What was that?” She breathes.

He opens his mouth to respond, but no words come out. He's not sure what just happened, or why he felt compelled to kiss her. All he knows is that in that moment, nothing else mattered except the electrifying connection between them.

He gets into the car, and speeds off.

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CASHILE

I've been made to sit on the mattress, as if I am strong for this. I don't even know how to hold my emotions together, how will I handle this burden?

Uncle Balungile said my mother's sister will be sitting with me on the mattress. She hasn't arrived yet.

I haven't seen my brother, no one has seen him. I'm worried and scared that he will drive off and leave me to deal with everything by myself.

A soft knock gets my attention, Mbuzo walks in. He's so tall, he has to bend his neck as he enters.

He shouldn't look at me like that, look now I'm tearing up.

I look away, wiping my tears.

I feel his arms around me and hide my face on his chest.

“You can cry it all out, I will be here.”

I don’t want to cry, I’m tired.

I pull away from him, he sits on the bench by the door.

“Please find my brother, no one has seen him.” I tell him.

“I saw him outside with the other men, he’s been looking for your father.” He says.

“Has he found anything?”

“Not yet, we think he ran from the village. There is no trace of him.”

I shake my head, “No, my father would never leave the village. He loves this place.”

And there is no way he could have left, he was too ill.

“It’s a thought, KaMadlala. No one disappears without a trace, and that’s what your father has done.” He says.

“Then find him,” I snap.

It’s not him I’m mad at. I’m just so tired of everything that’s been happening. I can only carry so much.

“We will find him, don’t worry yourself a lot about your father. Let me carry this burden for you, sthandwa sami.” Mbuzo says.

I appreciate him for this.

“I just want this to be over, if baba is dead, then he has to be buried with his wife.” I say.

“What about my sister?” It’s aunt Lizzie, my mother’s sister.

She walks in and suffocates me with a hug, she’s sobbing loudly. I swallow the lump on my throat but the tears are stubborn. They fall down my face.

“You poor thing,” she wipes my tears away, then

looks at Mbuzo.

“Aunty, he is my husband. Nonkosi.” I introduce.

Mbuzo shakes her hand.

“Your mother told me that you got married, is it true you married my daughter in a prison cell?”

She’s killing Mbuzo with a look.

“Where’s uncle Mzi?” I ask, to lure her away from my marriage issues.

It’s not her business.

“Outside, what’s this thing I hear that your father is missing and you want to bury him next to my sister?”

I don’t have the energy to explain.

“We think baba passed away as well, maybe he fell in a ditch or something.” I reply.

“There is no ditch, Cashile. Your father killed my sister and ran.”

“Aunty!”

“Don’t aunty me, Saturday we are going to bury my sister. She has been through enough with that witch, Madlala. Now you want her body to stay cooped up in the fridges while Madlala is living his best life? Not on my watch. I’m here now, I will take care of everything.”

Not her, not this. The woman is a dictator.

“My boy, please leave us. You are not supposed to be in here, you two are not married traditionally. The only time you will come near my daughter is when you have paid what is due to her.”

Breathe!

Mbuzo stands and leaves the room, this woman just chased out my support system. I’m not going to talk to her until the funeral is over.

There’s a knock, Nkosana appears and takes a seat.

“KaMadlala, my condolences.”

Yoh!

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MHLONIPHE

He's back to check on his victim, it's quiet in there.

He knocks.

Silence!

“Is it safe to come in?” He knocks again.

Silence!

“What's going on?” Mkhetheni asks, making his way toward him.

This tree better not ruin his plans.

“What are you doing outside, Mbuzo’s door?
He’s not around.”

Yeah, yeah! He knows that Mbuzo is not around,
he’s the one who sent him away.

“I was checking up on, Miss Lona.”

Mhloniphe’s answer is eyebrow raising.

“Miss Lona? Since when are you so respectful?”
Mkhotheni and his twenty-one questions.

The headmaster position would suit him well.

“You have a problem when I misbehave and
when I decide to be nice, you become
suspicious. What do you want from me,
twinny?” –Mhloniphe.

Mkhotheni clicks his tongue, “You’re up to
something, Mhlo and nothing with your name
on it ever goes right.”

He’s not about to deny that.

“Okay fine, I spoke to Lona and she agreed to

leave. She asked me to take her to the airport.”

“You’re lying, you’re going to sleep with her, aren’t you?”

Now, who does Mkhetheni take him for?

Mhloniphe laughs, “She wishes. I know I’m all that and a heartthrob but don’t take me so lightly wele. I know my type and Miss Lona is not the one.”

Mkhetheni stares for a while, before deciding to walk away.

Now, where was he?

He takes out the key from his pocket and opens the door. And there she is, on the floor. Either she fainted from exhaustion or fright.

The rooster is curled up in the corner of the room. The drug must have worn off.

“Hola sex champion, did you have fun?” Mhlo

strokes the rooster's back, it clucks, making barely a move.

"You're exhausted, you naughty thing." He chuckles.

His gaze turns to Lona, he goes to check her pulse.

She's alive of course.

The knock at the door has him lifting his gaze in surprise.

"Bhuti, mama is asking for the rooster." This is one of his cousins, he's not sure of her age. She's probably in Mbali's age group.

Her big eyes are on Lona, she looks terrified.

"Nah, baby girl fainted because of a chicken imagine." He has to explain before this child blows things out of proportion.

The girl nods in confusion.

"Lokhunja, there's a gown in the wardrobe.

Please take it and put it on her.” He says.

She rushes to the wardrobe and takes out a black morning robe. She manages to dress Lona.

“Tell aunt that I’m on it,” Mhloniphe tells her.

She takes off with the instructions.

He picks up Lona and takes her to his car, he goes back for her bags and the rooster. On his way out, he bumps into the aunt.

“Siyaphi isishebo, Mhloniphe?”

“Aunty, I’m just going to get something at the garage.”

“Then, where are you taking the rooster?” She does not look impressed.

“For a walk,” he hurries out, leaving her asking more questions and yelling out for him to come back.

He makes it out the gate and into the road

without his twin brother seeing him.

Minutes into the drive, he stops at a secluded place.

There's a truck parked on the side of the road, he pulls up behind it and meets the driver halfway.

"Sorry, I'm late Fannie." Mhlo says, it's also his way of greeting.

"No problem, where is the package?" The man who goes by the name Fannie, asks.

Nothing about him screams "Dodgy" in fact, he looks like a family man. Potbelly, innocent face on top of a chubby body.

Mhloniphe heads to the back of his car and carries an unconscious Lona out. He puts her in the truck, right at the back where there are bags of rice and sugar.

His phones rings, it's a call from Mbuzo.

"Where are you?"

"Taking out trash, what's up?" Mhloniphe asks.

"The ceremony is about to start and come back with that rooster. Aunt is complaining." The rooster should be the least of Mbuzo's worries.

"It ran away ndoda, I'm bringing KFC." He hangs up.

"What's the plan?" Fannie asks.

"Drive her to Joburg, and leave the rooster in there. It will keep her asleep the entire road." Mhloniphe says, he means she will keep fainting each time she wakes up and sees the rooster.

He hands Fannie a piece of paper with an address on it.

"That's where she stays, if she regains consciousness, tell her you found her lying on

the side of the road and helped her. Just don't explain too much and don't stay too long. Drive away while she's still confused."

Fannie nods, "You got it."

"You can keep the rooster when you've dropped her off and give your wife one drumstick."

—Mhloniphe.

Fannie chuckles, "Consider it done. May I ask why you're doing this? What did the poor girl do to you?"

Mhloniphe chuckles, "Nothing, just cleaning the country."

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[03/06, 15:54] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 92

CASHILE

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I wanted to wait until we find my father. I wanted them buried next to each other, it's what my mother would have wanted.

But Cashile never gets what she wants.

Aunt Lizzie took charge of everything and said my only job was to sit on the mattress. That was her telling me that my opinion doesn't matter.

It's been two days since we buried my mother, she's gone, we will never see her again.

I will move on with my life and have more children who will never meet the woman that gave birth to me.

It hurts, I was hoping for a second chance. We were once a perfect family, we didn't have much but we were happy.

The funeral was packed, villagers came in numbers. I thought they came to pay their last respects, but no—they came to vent and spit on her grave.

It was a painful thing to watch, my parents killed a lot of people because of their greed.

Bakhe didn't take it well, with the help of Mhloniphe, he chased them away with a gun.

I don't know how word got out because my father's confession was in the family. I suspect uncle Mfaniseni, he's bitter.

Uncle Balungile believes that dad is alive, I don't know about that. He didn't see him when he was on the brink of death.

Everyone went back home, aunt Lizzie is still around. She's not a Madlala but she thinks she will get a cent from the Xabas.

That's what she is waiting for.

Juba's mom arrived the day before the funeral and took Lulu to a guesthouse she's staying at, she said it's not right for a child to be around death.

I find Thuli in the kitchen drinking tea and scones.

She gives me one look, "I can't believe you cut your hair again."

She screamed when we arrived from the river yesterday after the burial. I shaved my hair off. I wanted to cut a small area at the back but aunt Lizzie said to shave it all off. It's part of tradition.

"We will have to get a very expensive weave on

the day of your wedding.”

I pour myself a cup of tea and dish up four scones from a 10L bucket, aunt Lizzie baked them the day before yesterday.

“What wedding babe? I’m already married.”

Did I say something funny?

She opens a chair that’s next to her, I take a seat.

“Mfazi, we’re the same. That man married you in a prison cell, first you spend years in jail. Then he has the audacity to propose and then marry you behind bars. Hai suka maan.”

I shouldn’t have told her about that.

“It was an emergency,” I think it was.

Mbuzo had a plan to get Chief Sibiya to leave me alone and it worked.

“That’s such a fancy excuse, please tell me that you are not making excuses for him.”

“I’m not friend, he’s trying. He bought me a car.”

She keeps laughing at everything I say.

“You let that man get away with everything, Mfazi. Don’t be too soft on him, men are like dogs. You let things slide and they get comfortable, he needs to fix this.”

She is not having it.

“I will talk to him,” I say and she looks at me like I’m planning a murder.

“You will do no such thing, let him think for himself. He approached you, didn’t he? Then he needs to approach you again, without you planting ideas in his head. Mbuzo owes you a proper wedding.”

I do deserve a wedding, but now that my parents are gone, I don’t know if I will be able to celebrate.

Her focus fades, she’s typing on her phone and

laughing.

“Lona is asking if I’ve seen or spoken to Mbuzo.” She laughs out loud.

Apparently Lona was shipped to Joburg, Bakhe told me that Mhloniphe was behind it.

He will never grow.

“Will she ever get over Mbuzo?” I’ve lost my appetite, Lona stirs my insecurities.

“Don’t worry, I will make her get over him.” Thuli says.

I don’t get a chance to respond, my phone is ringing.

It’s Juba’s mom.

“Hello.” I answer.

“Why didn’t you tell me that you’re married?”

Is this why she called?

“I didn’t see a need,” it’s not like my life is her

business.

She's Lulu's grandmother, that's the only link we have.

"You didn't see a need? Don't you think as Lulu's grandmother I deserved to know that my granddaughter has a stepfather?"

"No because it's not a big deal. It was bound to happen anyway, Juba and I broke up long ago."

"Lulu was with me when you and my son ended things, she wasn't exposed to every man out there. Have you ever considered her safety?"

This is bullshit that she's asking me. Who told her that I'm married anyway?

"Mbuzo would never do anything to harm her."

"And how do you know that, Cashile? I will not let you expose my granddaughter to danger. Juba left you that house because of Lulu what is he going to think when you let men into his

house and in his child's life?"

She's starting to piss me off, I'm too pregnant to be arguing with a stubborn woman.

"What is your point? What are you trying to tell me?"

"I'm taking her back, I will keep the house. You can go and start a family with your husband, Lulu belongs with the Ngwenyas—her real family."

I put my cup down and stand from the seat, my body is suddenly on fire.

"You're not taking my daughter from me," my voice is low.

I'm trying not to panic.

"We will talk about this when you come, goodbye." She hangs up on me.

I should have seen this coming.

"What is she saying?" Thuli asks.

“She thinks Mbuzo will hurt Lulu, somewhere in her head, she is convinced that stepfathers are bad.”

“That’s baby-grannies for you and this one is worse, she feels entitled to Lulu because she raised her.”

Thuli is right.

My mistake was allowing Juba to take my child to his mother. Mrs. Ngwenya doesn’t know me, if she tries anything stupid, I will take my baby and split.

She will never see her again.

“I have to go and take Lulu before she tries anything that might cause my heart attack.”

I won’t be settled if I don’t get her now.

“I will drive,” Thuli takes my car keys and heads outside with her hand bag.

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“So, a Bentayga huh?” Thuli says, admiring my car for the umpteenth time.

“He gave me hickeys and ordered a car same colour as the hickeys.”

It feels like it happened centuries ago.

“Hhayi, he’s dramatic shame.” She says.

If that’s dramatic, then he can be dramatic all he wants. I’m not going to stop him.

“Let’s go for a drive,” Thuli says.

“Not today friend, I have to go and get Lulu from Mrs. Ngwenya. Maybe when we get back.”

Only God knows what that woman wants from me, she said she’d only stay with Lulu for a day. Now she’s telling me stories?

“You worry too much, she’s her grandmother.

What could she possibly do to Lulu?" -Thuli.

This one knows nothing.

"Have you watched Khumbulekhaya? Juba's mom is obsessed with my baby, she thinks Lulu is hers. There are limits, Thuli, and that woman crosses all of them."

I can't let my guard down around her.

Thuli nudges me, "Look here comes Love-bite."

I follow her line of sight, she's referring to Mbuzo. I try not to laugh because she can be stupid sometimes.

"Let him hear you call him that."

"What will he do to me?" She doesn't lower her voice, Mbuzo hears her. "Are you sure about him, Mfazi? Look how he's looking at you, ngathi he will eat you up and chew the bones. I think I'm going to throw up."

I laugh, he looks at me like he's ready to strip

me naked and bend me over. It's clear to almost everyone around us. But Thuli doesn't just observe, she zooms in x10.

He lightly frowns at her, but his gaze quickly moves to me. He greets me with a kiss on the cheek.

Thuli makes a gagging sound, she always looks at Mbuzo like she vomited him and is about to flush him down the toilet.

She's yet to meet a man, I will give him the same treatment she gives my man.

"There's a tent over there, please don't spoil my appetite." She gets in the car and shuts the door.

"What's wrong with her?" Mbuzo asks.

"You're married to her best friend, she's not supposed to like you."

My answer confuses him, "Is that a good or bad thing? Should I be worried?"

“No, it’s completely normal. You should look like Skomota in her eyes.” I say.

“Skomota? Hawemah KaMadlala! That’s a compliment njena.” His arms wrap around me.

“Yeyi!”

Thwaaa!

Mbuzo jumps back like I just bit him, his eyes are behind me.

Someone hit his arms.

“What are you doing?”

It’s aunt Lizzie, the weapon formed against me in human form.

“Ninjani aunty?” He greets, head slightly bowed and hands joined together.

“When are your people coming? We’re ageing waiting for you.” Aunt Lizzie says.

“We just buried mah, it’s too soon to talk about

lobola and damages.” I tell her.

“Next week should be appropriate then, if my daughter gives birth before you pay your debt, you will never see her and the child.”

Mbuzo doesn’t take it as a joke, aunt has angered him with her threats. Maybe it’s because she’s not kidding.

“I assure you aunty, I will do the right thing.”

Yep, his voice has changed. He’s mad.

“You can go now,” she folds her arms, giving him a stare down.

Mbuzo looks at me, he’s here for me and we haven’t even spoken yet.

I nod, then immediately send him a text telling him where to meet me.

He bids aunt goodbye, and walks out of the premises.

“That boy is taking chances.” Aunt says,

heading back into the house.

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MBUZO

They are not on speaking terms with Nkosanaa and he doesn't know why. In fact, Nkosana is not talking to any of them, but he sleeps and eats in their house. Had it not been for uncle Mpiyakhe, he would be long gone.

The ceremony went well last week, Velaphi and his Agnes have been brought into the Xaba premises to bring luck, wealth and protection.

Things should start looking up for the Xabas, maybe for once, they won't have to steal to make money.

“The ceremony wouldn’t have happened without

me, I deserve a reward for being the best uncle in the world.” Mpiyakhe tells the boys.

They are gathered in the living room, Ngwemabala has come back with a message from the ancestors.

“We’ll buy you more beer,” Mkhetheni jokes, causing everyone to laugh.

Everyone but Nkosana, yeah, he’s here alright and hasn’t said a word to anyone since he arrived.

“What will I do with beer?” Uncle Mpiyakhe asks.

The boys are shocked.

Mbuzo laughs, “Don’t you love beer?”

Mpiyakhe chuckles, he’s blushing.

“I love beer so much but I also love cars, I will pick one car from the ones parked outside and fill the boot with beer.” –Mpiyakhe.

“What will you do with a car, uncle?” Mhloniphe

asks.

“Drive it, don’t be greedy. You have plenty of cars.”

“Can we start, I have places to be.” Nkosana snaps in annoyance.

He’s snapping at the wrong people, they don’t take shit.

“The problem with this man is that he thinks we owe him something. Why do we have to tolerate him, anyway?” Mhloniphe claps back, throwing daggers at Nkosana.

“He’s your brother,” Uncle Mpiyakhe tells him.

“So? No one likes him, he’s full of shit.”

—Mhloniphe adds.

And that just annoys Nkosana, “You don’t know anything about me. You think because you grew up with a silver spoon in your mouth, you’re better than me?”

“I am better than you, that’s why I grew up with a silver spoon in my mouth.” –Mhloniphe.

“Bafana this is not the right time to argue,” Ngwemabala jumps in.

“Tell that to this fool who thinks the world of himself, this is my father’s house. I have every right to be here, this house is my birth right.” Nkosana says.

“Says a reject. We don’t have to hear from you, just because you were rejected we must walk on eggshells? You’re just a bastard child with no good upbringing.” Mhlo keeps serving him but this time, his words hit Mbuzo as well.

They were both born from Velaphi’s mistress.

Nkosana is on his feet, standing head to head with Mhloniphe. Uncle Mpiyakhe stands between them.

“You two better sit down before I take out my belt.” He means it.

Nkosana sits down first because Mhloniphe refuses to back down.

Now that everyone is settled.

“Your father came to me in a dream, he is not happy.” Ngwemabala reports.

“What is it now? Can’t he just rest in peace?” Mhloniphe asks with a sigh.

Mbuzo scratches his head, a frown pulling at his face.

“What have we done? I thought the ceremony was to please him, he wants more?” He asks.

“The discord between you boys will cause a tragedy in the family, you have to get along. Forgive and live in peace.” Ngwemabala.

There’s always one thing after another with the ancestors.

“The boys can get along, it’s not hard.” Uncle

Mpiyakhe looks at them all, they avoid eye contact.

“Mbuzo, are you willing to make up with your brother?” Uncle asks.

Mbuzo shrugs, “Whatever, I have no problem with anyone.”

He looks at Mhloniphe, “Wena?”

“Why don’t you ask ink-boy? He’s the one with a problem, not us. We were all getting along before he came.” Mhlo says.

Uncle Mpiyakhe turns his gaze to Nkosana, “Mbusowenkosi! You have to forgive your brothers.”

There’s laughter, it’s Mhloniphe and Mbuzo.

“Forgive us for what, uncle?” Mbuzo asks.

“It’s not our fault that baba didn’t like him and abandoned him.” –Mhloniphe.

“That’s not a nice thing to say, Mhlo.”

“But it’s true, now he’s standing on top of his grave, forcing us to like the son he kept from us. It doesn’t make sense at all.” Mbuzo answers.

Uncle Mpiyakhe is defeated, this was a good day to drink but these boys stopped him. This meeting does not need a sober mind.

Mkhotheni looks at Ngwemabala, “Did he say what tragedy will befall us?”

“All I know is that whatever will happen, will divide you boys.” Ngwemabala.

Now that shuts them up.

“I’m willing to let go of everything under one condition.” Oh, the prodigal son speaks.

“What is it?” Mkhotheni asks Nkosana.

“I want Mbuzo to divorce KaMadlala and let me marry her and adopt the child she’s carrying.” Nkosana says, laying his card on the table.

Uncle Mpiyakhe chuckles impressively, “That’s

simple, problem solved. As'phuzeni bafana, let's drink."

Mhloniphe laughs the loudest before his face turns cold, "Let's kill him and send him back to sender. Back to his father, uyasinyela uVelaphi."

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Nontuthuko Kwanele Ndlovu's second sponsored insert from yesterday.

500+ comments... 15 shares...

[03/06, 15:54] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 93

MBUZO

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This has got to be a joke, then again, Nkosana

is not laughing. He's glancing at Mbuzo expectedly. After all, he's the only one with the answer that he needs.

The brothers are sitting across from him, their expressions a mixture of disbelief and outrage.

"Well?" Nkosana says to Mbuzo, completely ignoring Mhloniphe's disrespectful retort.

Mbuzo clenches his fists, struggling to contain his anger. He's been doing so well with keeping this anger thing at bay, now this happens?

Curse the devil!

"You want me to divorce my wife and hand her, and my child to you?"

Nkosana nods, graciously.

"Not only that, you will hand over your house in Joburg. The cars you own and everything that has your name on it and undo this blood oath nonsense you made with her. KaMadlala and I

will do our own.”

Since when is Cashile, KaMadlala to him?

He turns to Ngwemabala. “Is it possible?”

Ngwemabala hasn’t had time to process the question, hence the delay in answering Nkosana. He’s not God, he’s not certain what is possible or what’s not.

“Basically, you want Mbuzo’s life?” Mkhetheni asks.

The answer is in plain sight, in black and white.

“I don’t want Mbuzo’s life, I want everything my father deprived me of. He chose Mbuzo over me...”

“You’re delusional, Nkosana.” Mbuzo snaps.

“He’s insane, you two don’t even look alike. How are we sure that you are the twin?” Mhloniphe adds.

Nkosana smirks, his arrogance very much

palpable.

“I have pictures of us together when we were toddlers, I don’t know how you looked as a baby but I’m pretty sure that was you. Our father would bring you with when he’d visit me at my grandmother’s. He’d take us out and capture every moment. I believe that was done without your mother’s knowledge?”

The question is directed to Mhloniphe.

“And you know this how? Because your grandmother told you? What if she was also delusional like you and obsessed with the Xabas? My father was a big deal back then, a big shot. Everyone wanted a piece of him, even old hags.” Mhloniphe has one insensitive heart.

He knows how to get under Nkosana’s skin.

“Say whatever you want, I don’t care.” Yes he does. “It’s not up for debate. If you want to avoid tragedy, you’ll do as I say.”

He is after all stubborn.

Mhloniphe leans forward, his voice laced with contempt.

“You’re not Velaphi, Nkosana. You don’t get to dictate our lives.”

Mkhotheni nods in agreement. “We won’t let you tear our family apart for your own selfish desires.”

“We will find a way to appease ubaba,” Mbuzo adds.

Nkosana’s smirk widens, he’s so unfazed by their objections.

“You can try to defy me, but you’ll only bring ruin upon yourselves. You heard what the seer said, now the choice is yours.”

Mbuzo’s jaw tightens, “I will never agree to your terms. I won’t sacrifice my family for your twisted version of justice.”

Mhlo and Mkhetheni stand in solidarity with their brother of course, their determination mirrored in their sturdy gazes.

They have heard it all and this takes the cup.

Uncle Mpiyakhe walks in, in time as Nkosana rises from his seat. He'd gone to the kitchen to get beer, these boys are trying to send him into an early grave.

"Suit yourselves. But don't come crying to me when tragedy strikes. Who knows, maybe it's one of your kids... KaMadlala's unborn baby or KaMadlala herself who will meet a tragedy. When that happens, it will be on you people." - Nkosana.

With a final sneer, he turns on his heel and strides out of the room.

But he's not leaving, not under Uncle Mpiyakhe's watch.

The old man rushes after him, his eyes wide

with urgency and drags him back.

“Mbusowenkosi, don't go. We can work this out as a family.”

Nkosana turns to face him, “There's nothing to work out. These people have made their choice, I am willing to compromise but they are too selfish to do that.”

“Compromise? Ungazos'bhedela wena, you're talking crap.” Mhloniphe snaps.

“Let him go, he was never meant to be part of this family.” Mbuzo says.

Mpiyakhe's gaze shifts to Mbuzo, his eyes pleading for understanding. He wants to close this chapter and drink his beer in peace.

“Mbuzo, think about what you're doing. There are plenty of women out there. You don't need to sacrifice your family for one woman.”

Hawemah!

Mbuzo's jaw tightens, he shoots up to his feet and closes the space between him and his uncle. "Do you hear yourself, munt' omdala? You're telling me shit, maan."

He's barking in his face, uncle Mpiyakhe staggers back, fear clear in his eyes.

"Don't fight me, Ndodana. I'm just trying to help my late brother fix his family."

"Your late brother is the reason for this feud, he created this mess because he couldn't stand up for his children. Now he wants us to wipe his shit? Ufuna sim'sule umdidi? That's bullshit." Mbloniphe has no respect for the dead.

Mpiyakhe gulps down the beer, and empties it. He's too old for this.

"I won't abandon my wife and child for anyone, Uncle. Not even for Nkosana. He can go back where he came from, we don't need him."

Mbuzo says.

“Let him go,” Mhlo says, waving Nkosana away.

Mkhotheni nods in agreement. “We'll find another way, one that doesn't involve tearing our family apart.”

Argh! He's so family oriented.

Nkosana clicks his tongue and walks out. Uncle Mpiyakhe looks between them, his shoulders slumping in defeat.

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CASHILE

I trusted Mrs. Ngwenya with my daughter, the whole time I'm thinking they are close by as she had told me. Only to find out that she took Lulu to Newcastle with her.

I didn't pack anything or told anyone that we're driving to Newcastle. Panic took over when we got to the guesthouse and she wasn't there.

Thuli didn't even ask questions, she told me to put the address on GPS and hit the brakes.

Now we're here, parking outside the gate. The kids playing outside run to the car, I see my baby among them. She's the tiniest of them all, her clothes are dirty. I don't know if she was playing with soil or bathing in it.

"Mommy!" Her face lights up.

I pick her up and squeeze her in a tight hug.

"I missed you so much, did you miss me?"

"Yes, granny said we will stay here now. Did you bring your clothes?"

That granny is testing me, there she is, walking out of the house.

"Say the word and I will drive to Makro and buy

a shovel and latex gloves. I know how to get away with the perfect murder.” Thuli mumbles to me.

I hope it won’t come to that, Mrs. Ngwenya seems determined to keep my baby with her.

I walk through the gate with Lulu still in my arms.

“You came?”

What does she think?

“You didn’t tell me that you were going to bring Lulu to Newcastle.”

“This is her home,” she says.

I put Lulu down and tell her to go play with her friends.

“Why is she dirty like that?” I’m not happy with any of this.

Mrs. Ngwenya sighs, showing me that I’m annoying her.

“That’s how children play, let her be.” She turns to walk back into the house.

“Just say the word,” Thuli whispers.

I gesture that we go in, I am not leaving this place without my daughter.

We find her sitting on a two seater leather couch, it’s one of those with recliners. Thuli and I share the three-seater.

“Your communication skills are quite shocking, Mrs. Ngwenya. I trusted you with my daughter.”

“Why do you speak as if I will harm her? She is my granddaughter.” She says.

“But she’s my daughter first, it doesn’t matter that you took care of her when she was an infant. I nurtured Lulu in my womb, I gave birth to her. I am her mother, not you.”

Her eyes narrow, “What about me? I’m the one who spent sleepless nights taking care of an

infant that you abandoned, Lulu is the age she is today because of me.”

“I didn’t abandon my daughter, Juba manipulated me into giving her up.”

I wouldn’t be surprised if they planned it together.

“Because you were not ready to be a mother, you were unstable.”

That time I had never met or spoken to her, yet she concluded this.

“I’m not here to argue, I came to get my child.”

I keep saying my child because I want it to click in her head that Lulu is mine.

“But why Cashile? Can’t you just let her be? She is happy with her grandmother, Lulu is a Ngwenya.”

So she keeps telling me, I was not even there when my parents gave my baby away to these

people. Otherwise, I never would have agreed.

Princess walks in, carrying a tray with glasses of juice. What is she doing here?

“Princess?”

She puts the tray on the coffee table, her eyes cast down.

“Hi sisi,” she greets.

“What are you doing here?” She’s my helper, the last time I checked.

“I needed help with Lulu, so I asked her to accompany me,” says Mrs. Ngwenya.

“Without informing me? I asked you to housesit my house, and you came here without my knowledge?”

“Hhayi Cashile, I thought Princess was Lulu’s babysitter. So there is no problem if she is here.”

This mother must not shake my hormones.

“I pay her salary, she works for me. I had every right to know about this.”

“You’re right Mfazi, they owe you an explanation these two. Anisho, niyalalana? You two know each other naked.” Thuli says, earning herself a glare from Juba’s mom.

“Uyadelela wena, doti. You’re disrespectful.”
The old woman sizzles.

But Thuli shrugs, taking a glass of juice. One sip and she slowly puts it back down, her face turning sour. I know she’s a champagne and wine type of girl.

I’m pregnant, I have no choice but to drink juice.

The glass is halfway to my mouth when Thuli snatches it from me and hands it to Princess.

“Drink,” Thuli orders.

Princess’s eyes widen with shock, “Sisi?”

“Do you think your mother could ever birth

someone like me?" Thuli snaps.

I'm confused, why is she talking to Princess like that?

"Thuli..." I stand to meet their heights.

"Drink the juice, Princess." Thuli repeats with a resting bitch face.

This girl can be intimidating, but she's also not impulsive. Something has happened, she wouldn't just turn crazy on someone for no reason.

"What is going on?" I ask Princess, she shrugs.

She's trying so hard not to look at Mrs. Ngwenya. I glance down at Juba's mom, she shifts her gaze from me.

I smell fish!

"There is something in our drinks," Thuli says.

Oh my God!

“Princess?”

“It’s not true sisi, it’s just juice.”

“Then drink it,” I snap.

Princess puts the glass on the table, her hands are trembling.

“Are you going to speak or should I call the police? They will have this juice tested.” I say.

Her eyes widen as she points at Juba’s mom, “It’s her. She told me to spike your juice like I did last time.”

I slowly sit back on the couch because I will die from shock any minute now.

“What?”

“She wanted you to lose your baby, and your life in the process, so she can keep Lulu.” Princess confesses.

Juba’s mom looks unbothered.

Mrs. Ngwenya is behind the attempted miscarriage?

“So you are fvcking each other, vele? How long have you known each other?” Thuli asks.

I’m still in shock when Thuli says to me, “Call my lawyer and tell him I want it as tight as possible.”

“What?”

“My prison uniform, Mfazi.” She says, grabbing Mrs. Ngwenya by the legs and throws them on the couch, forcing her on her back.

The next minute she’s sitting on the old woman’s stomach and screaming, “Friend get a dustbin bag, I need two seconds to strangle this b!tch.”

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[03/06, 15:54] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 94

CASHILE

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The only reason Princess is able to pull Thuli off Mrs. Ngwenya is because she's thick bodied. I was ready to sit back and watch the show.

"Don't touch me, wena." Thuli barks, she looks ready to attack Princess.

"Call the police," Mrs. Ngwenya coughs, dragging her body from the couch. Her eyes are all out, face pale with fear.

"If we're getting arrested, then we're taking you

with.” I tell her.

“I didn’t do anything, Princess is lying.”

“But you didn’t say anything when she accused you seconds ago.” Thuli says.

“Out of shock, of course. Why would I want to hurt the mother of my granddaughter? I love Lulu, I would never want her to become an orphan.”

I know she loves Lulu, way too much. That’s why she is obsessed with her.

“I want the truth, I almost lost my baby because of you.” I say.

She reaches for her phone on the table, “I’m calling the police.”

“You keep singing the same song, call the police. Before they get here, I would have moped this floor with your face.” Thuli grabs her by her hair, Mrs. Ngwenya screams.

“Stop it, you’re hurting my granny.”

Shit!

Wasn’t this child playing outside?

“Mfazi, I thought the door was locked.” Thuli whispers to me.

I’m more concerned about Lulu, I try to take her but she runs to her grandmother crying.

This woman is turning my baby against me, and she’s on the phone with the police.

We’re all going down today, I hope she’s not planning on using my child as an escape goat.

“The police are on the way,” Mrs. Ngwenya announces after her call.

“Good, we also have a case of attempted murder to open.” Thuli says, taking a seat on the couch.

She grabs the remote and changes the Mzansi Bioskop channel to TLC.

“Let’s go, Thuli.” I don’t want to be arrested in front of my daughter.

“But we didn’t do anything, she’s the guilty one.” Thuli is stubborn.

I hear police siren.

Were they around the corner or what?

My heart races with fear, Thuli and I exchange nervous glances. I thought she was the bravest. Mrs. Ngwenya gives Lulu to Princess and tells her to take her to the bedroom.

She goes outside to meet the cops, we’re tailing her in case she lies to them.

When the officers step out of their cars and approach us, I swallow hard.

I’m suddenly nervous.

“We’ve received a report of an assault,” one of them says, his tone stern.

“I called you, these two girls attacked me in my

home.” This old witch.

“We'll need both of you to come down to the station with us for questioning.”

Thuli steps forward, “We're innocent! This woman poisoned our drinks.”

“She's lying officer, I'm just a frail old woman who is trying to raise her granddaughter. Miss Madlala came...”

“It's Mrs. Xaba to you, bitch.” I interject.

She gives me a stare down.

“You should tell them how you and Princess secretly put abortion pills in my food. I almost lost my baby.”

The officers exchange a skeptical glance, clearly unconvinced by our story.

Thuli holds up one of the juice glasses, I didn't see her grab the glass when we walked out of the house.

“Have this tested if you don’t believe me, this drink has poison.”

I see Mrs. Ngwenya grow nervous.

The officer takes the glass, “We’ll let the authorities sort this one out, for now, we will take you two because the old woman laid a complaint.” One of them says firmly, motioning for us to follow them to the police car.

This doesn’t make sense at all, how is it her word against ours.

This is injustice.

How could they not believe us? How could they arrest us when we’re the ones who have been wronged?

I refuse to let that woman get away with what she’s done, I’ll do whatever it takes to protect my baby.

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I had an option to call Mbuzo, but Mkhetheni seemed like a better option. He's not talkative, so this could be our little secret.

I'm lying to myself, he will force me to tell the husband. Mbuzo will freak out when he finds out I was arrested, the last time I was behind bars, he punished Nothando in the worst possible way.

We're in the cell, watching Mkhetheni converse with the officer.

"How long is his tongue?"

I have the worst choice in friends, what is this?

"What?"

"Just asking for a friend." Thuli answers, she's undressing Mkhetheni with her eyes.

"I better not be that friend." I tell her.

She puts her hand out, "Give me money."

“What for?”

“Mfazi, just give me money.”

“They took our belongings, remember? What do you want the money for?”

“I want to tip that man for being so fine,” she says.

Lord have mercy!

“Not Mkhetheni, Mfazi. He gives off Hitler vibes, he looks like the type that has sex with the lights off and under the covers. I doubt he moans.” I’m lying.

I have never observed him in that way.

Thuli laughs, “Do I look like I’m complaining?”

We’re in jail for heaven’s sake.

“I think he has a wife, they call her MakaSbani.” She has to back off after this.

“I can be MakaSbani 2.0.”

I shouldn't be laughing like this.

He's done talking to the officer, he looks at me and I feel like hiding behind Thuli.

The cop opens the gate, Mkhetheni doesn't have to say anything, one look is enough for us to walk up to him.

"KaMadlala!"

Thuli trips and falls on his chest, I know that was planned.

"Oh, sorry. My body is so weak, we've been locked up without water and food." She's all over him, this is embarrassing.

I'm never taking her anywhere.

Mkhetheni looks at me confused and worried, "How long have you been in here? I thought..."

"Thirty minutes." I confirm nothing but lies, and earn a glare from Thuli.

She'll be strong.

He gently pushes her off of him, "Am I taking you home or to your father's house?"

He asks as if his home is my home. I told him over the phone that I want to tell Mbuzo, myself that I was arrested. He will come to me fuming if he hears it from someone else.

"My father's house," I tell Mkhetheni.

I'm tired, I need a nap.

"I don't mind going home with you," Yoh Thuli!

This girl better shut up, she sounds so thirsty and I know she doesn't care. Mkhetheni is not even there, he gestures that we walk ahead of him. Thuli pulls out her Naomi Campbell side.

Sigh!

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THE XABAS

It's the next day, Mhloniphe has set up the living room for a party. He's invited his friends, Bakhe and Njabulo.

They are having a BBQ, steaks, sausages, and ribs. It's a social activity the brothers are accustomed to, a tradition of sort that allows them to bond over food and drinks.

Beer and Whiskey... check!

Music... check! Mthandeni is on the speakers.

Mhlo has created a lively atmosphere for the party, it has taken him almost the entire day to prepare.

“Neighbors will start to think we are uncultured and undisciplined. There’s always a party or something going on here.” Mkhetheni

complains as he joins them in the backyard.

Mhloniphe said it's a social gathering, they still don't understand what it's for though.

"You know your twin, he always has a reason to party." Mbuzo.

"I'm moving in with you boys," that's uncle Mpiyakhe.

He's so wasted, there is no telling he will last the night.

"I have no complaints, life is too short not to party." Bakhe's comment puts everyone in a foul mood, they look at him with sympathy.

He shows them a middle finger, they laugh.

A car pulls up at the gate, Nkosana steps out.

"The VIP guest is here," Mhloniphe announces.

His brothers look at him, he shrugs.

“I’m not even going to ask,” Mkhetheni says, sounding defeated.

Mbuzo heaves a sigh, “Whatever this is better not backfire on you, Mhlo.”

When Nkosana approaches them, Mhloniphe greets him with a warm smile.

“I’m glad you could make it,” Mhloniphe says, gesturing for him to take a seat.

Nkosana eyes him warily, taking a seat next to Mkhetheni and accepting beer from Bakhe.

“Why did you call me here? I hope this isn’t an attempt to convince me to change my mind.”

Mhloniphe shakes his head, “No, it’s not that. I wanted to apologize for my behavior. I know we don’t see eye to eye, but I realize now that our family’s well-being is more important than our differences.”

Nkosana raises an eyebrow, his skepticism

evident.

“And what brought about this change of heart, Mhloniphe? Is it because of our father's warning?”

Mhloniphe nods, “Partly. But mostly, it's because I don't want to see our family torn apart. I don't want to risk a tragedy happening to any of us. We have children, ndoda.”

Nkosana considers his words for a moment, his expression unreadable.

“You expect me to believe that you're suddenly willing to let bygones be bygones? Mbuzo will give up everything for me?”

Mbuzo clicks his tongue and goes inside the house with his beer. A real tragedy will happen if he stays here.

What is his brother up to?

Mhloniphe nods to answer Nkosana, “Yebo. I

know it won't be easy, but we are willing to try if it means keeping our family safe."

Nkosana studies him for a long moment, his gaze searching. Finally, he nods in reluctant agreement.

"Very well. But don't think for a moment that you can play me."

Mhlo smiles, "We won't let you down."

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As the night wears on, the atmosphere in the house grows increasingly lively. Bakhe's mood has changed for the better, laughter fills the air as they share stories and jokes. Mbuzo seems to be reserved, he's here because Mhloniphe begged him not to go.

Bakhe serves them shots, "Here's to brotherhood."

“To brotherhood.” They all say in unison, clinking glasses and take shots before moving to the lounge.

They gather around the couch, each with a bottle of beer in hand. Uncle Mpiyakhe has fallen sleep on the sofa, there’s an empty bottle on his lap.

“How many women have you slept with?”

That’s a random, strange question Mhloniphe is asking Mbuzo.

Mbuzo shrugs and focuses on smoking his cigarette, he doesn’t want to be here.

“Bakhe?”

Bakhe laughs, Mhloniphe and Njabulo laugh with him. They know how many women each have slept with, if fuck-boy had a face, they would be it.

“Mkhotheni?”

Mkhotheni takes a sip of his whisky, “Sex is spiritual...”

Bakhe and Mhloniphe are dead with laughter before he finishes talking.

“Okay Father-Theresa. You know Mother-Theresa is sucking white balls in Europe?”
–Mhloniphe.

Mkhotheni is no longer offended, he’s come to terms with the fact that his brother needs psychiatric help.

Mhloniphe looks at Nkosana, “What about you, doc? What’s your body count?”

“I don’t know, I lost count. I was a ladies’ man back in the day, a heart breaker. In varsity, I had five girlfriends. I named them according to the days of the week, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.” Nkosana says with pride.

Bakhe laughs, “You were shaging all the days of

the week and resting on weekends, gabhadiya?"

Nkosana nods, a simple smile on his face.

"Okay, Mr. Casanova." Mhloniphe says, taking a glimpse at his wrist watch.

"Now that we have cleared that there are no virgins in here. Boys, I've got something special planned for tonight," Mhloniphe announces with a mischievous grin.

"Here we go," Mbuzo knows it can't be good.

"I've arranged for some dancers to come and entertain us."

The room erupts into cheers and applause.

There's a sudden knock at the door, Mhloniphe attends to it. Half naked plus-size women enter the room, their voluptuous figures drawing all eyes to them.

Mkhotheni's expression darkens.

"I can't believe you'd bring women into our

father's house," he mutters, disapprovingly.

Mbuzo nods in agreement, his brow furrowed with concern.

"Cashile wouldn't be happy about this. I should go."

Nkosana eyes the dancers warily, "I think I will leave too. This isn't my scene."

But Mhloniphe raises a hand, "Wait, guys. It's just innocent entertainment. There's nothing wrong with having a little fun. Why are you all acting like virgins? I thought we cleared the air."

Manipulative bastard!

The brothers reluctantly agree to stay, no man likes to be called a chicken.

The music starts and the dancers begin their routine.

Uncle Mpiyakhe must have smelt a woman, he's awake and is already on the dance floor, his

face buried in the chest of one of the women. Bakhe leaves the room with two strippers.

One of them approaches Mbuzo, “Hi handsome, enough looking. Don’t you wanna touch?”

Her hands are all over him, he frowns at the poor woman. His phone rings, he fishes for it in his pocket.

Cashile has good timing.

“My wife,” he shows the lady the caller ID and walks out the balcony.

What a tough man to please.

The men lean back on the couch, watching the strippers do their thing. Surprisingly, Mkhetheni hasn’t left the room.

Mhlo taps Nkosana’s shoulder, “Enjoy ntwana, you’ll get used to it. We do these kind of parties every month.”

The doctor looks terrified, “Every month?”
“Yes, a man must get laid,” Mhlo says. “This is nothing, wait till we throw an orgy party. The boys are not shy, we know each other naked and stuff, nothing hormo. It's how we love each other.”

He causes Nkosana to choke on his saliva and create space between them.

“I want to show you something.” He taps his shoulder, and gestures that Nkosana follows him to his bedroom.

He's reluctant but Mhlo drags him along.

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They walk in on Bakhe and two strippers in thongs and no bras, giving him a strip dance. He's sitting on the bed, watching them with lust

in his eyes and a lit cigarette between the seams of his lips.

“Bhut’ tlof-tlof.” Bakhe says to Nkosana, puffing out smoke.

The ladies glance at Nkosana, he trembles at the sight of them. His eyes running through their bodies, he’s never been with an obese woman before. Where will he even begin?

He releases a shaky breath when one of them blows him a kiss.

There’s plus size, then there’s Norbit’s wife Rasputia.

“Fuck no, I’m not going to be part of this.”
Nkosana turns back around, Mhloniphe pulls him back.

“What is it? I thought you’re a player.”

“I am... I was... but...” he’s stuttering.

Mhloniphe puts his arm around Nkosana's shoulders, "Then come and play. The ladies are ready."

The doctor's eyes shift to the ladies, they are sensually moving their bodies and seductively looking at him.

He shifts back when one approaches him, Mhloniphe handcuffs Nkosana to the lady's wrist.

"This is Candy." Mhlo introduces. But Nkosana is on panic mode.

"What are you doing?" He asks with a shaky breath.

"When was the last time you got laid?" Mhlo.

He stutters his answers, Mhloniphe laughs.

"Are you afraid of women?"

Nkosana scoffs, "No. I'm a ladies' man."

"Then you will love Candy and Ivy," Mhlo says.

Candy twerks for the doctor, everything vibrates, “Hey lover boy, I have an itch between my legs. I want to sit on your face.”

Nkosana’s eyes widen, “Hell no. Are they strippers or sumo wrestlers?”

“Relax Ghost yama Nyobi-Nyobi.” Mhloniphe tells him to calm down.

Candy pushes him on the bed and straddles him, Nkosana feels a crack. His lungs are not getting enough air.

“I’m not a Ghost of anything, I’m a doctor. A respectable doctor.” Nkosana shouts in horror, his heart is about to stop.

He’d rather be in a theatre room, operating a patient.

Mhlo and Bakhe head to the door, he panics.

“Mhloniphe wait... You can’t leave me with them, I don’t want to die.”

Mhlo winks at him, “Bathathe mshayi wesinqa.”
(Show them what you got, s€x freak.)

“Please, bhuti wami. Don’t leave me here with them, I will die.”

“Good luck, Mafela ekhekheni. Owner of the days of the week.” Bakhe gives him a thumbs up.

“Don’t forget to go deeper, Sewing machine.”
Mhloniphe adds.

Candy is already twerking on his face, Ivy is pulling his pants down.

“Help!” Nkosana cries.

Mhloniphe laughs, “Don’t worry, Candy will be gentle. I can’t say the same thing about Ivy.”

Ivy has a taser, she uses to tase his thighs, sending Nkosana screaming like a girl.

His muscles will be sore for a day or two.

Candy moves up to his face, he holds his breath

as her ass slowly lowers down to his face.

Mhloniphe smiles, “Ithi Malume and I will end this.” (Say uncle.)

Nkosana gasps, Candy’s ass is brushing against his face as she twerks on him. His soul almost leaves his body.

“Malume... I’m a virgin, I’m a virgin please, spare me.” Nkosana shouts before Candy is finally sitting on his face.

Mhloniphe laughs, “Idla indunu mntasekhaya.”

He walks out with Bakhe.

(Eat a\$ little brother.)

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[03/06, 15:54] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 95

MHLONIPHE

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“They didn’t even do anything to him.”

He’s always defending himself to his brothers, Mkhetheni especially because this one is Velaphi reincarnated.

They are in Mhloniphe’s room, Nkosana is still on the bed, whimpering like a sick puppy.

“Get those cuffs off him.”

Yeah, and Candy is still cuffed to him.

Mhlo doesn’t move because, who is Mkhetheni to tell him what to do?

“I’m not going to repeat myself, Mhloniphe. Release him and get these women out of the

house, the party is over.”

Yoh this old man.

Mhloniphe drags his feet towards the bed while retrieving a key from his pocket.

“You’re too dramatic ntwana, I thought you said you were not a virgin.” This he says while releasing Nkosana from Candy.

Nkosana takes a vow of silence, it’s taking him forever to get off the bed. His body hurts all over.

“What are you people still doing here? Get the hell out of my house.” Mkhetheni calmly tells the ladies, they scatter out of the bedroom.

“You didn’t have to snap at them,” Mhloniphe tells his twin.

“I don’t want to hear anything from you, Mhloniphe. Those women violated this man, you could get arrested for...”

Mhlo cuts him with a laugh, he's got to be kidding, right?

"Why are you the one who's hurting? Nkosana is not complaining."

That's it! Mkhetheni gives up and walks out of the room.

"He's right, you know?" Mbuzo tells him, but there's a smile on his face.

"I don't care," Mhlo says.

He's got to be the most insensitive person in the world.

"I don't want anything to do with you people, anymore." Nkosana says.

It's taking time to put on his clothes, that Ivy woman went hard with the taser.

Mhlo taps his shoulder, it's more like a slap that has Nkosana wincing in pain.

"I hope there are no hard feelings between us, I

was merely trying to show my brother a good time.”

Nkosana escapes his touch, “I’m done with you people. You’re sick, all of you. Stay the hell away from me.”

He storms out, angry as hell.

Mbuzo lifts his brows in question, “When will you grow up?”

“Forever young at heart.” Mhlo grins.

“Had I known this was your plan, I would have been here to take a video.” Mbuzo exclaims, chuckling lightly.

His statement puts a smile on Mhlo’s face, he sits on the bed, heaving a long sigh.

“I want him out of our lives, I hope after today he will forget the Xabas exist.” –Mhlo.

“You know that’s impossible, he is a Xaba.”

Mbuzo tells him.

“That means nothing, we were doing okay without him and we will continue to be okay. Velaphi can miss me on his dictatorship. We will find a way to appease him only because we don’t have a choice.”

“I think we should see someone else, someone who is not Ngwemabala. Maybe they will have something different to say. I don’t understand why our rival with Nkosana will cause a tragedy.” Mbuzo.

Mhloniphe nods, “You’re right. I’ll have a talk with Njabulo, these are his things.”

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BAKHE

He would have left the day after the funeral but he stayed because his father is still missing. It's been too long and there is no sign of him, had he been dead, they would have found his body by now.

He's gathered his belongings, this time he had time to pack properly. Most of his things are back in joburg, but it's nothing valuable.

Today marks the day he leaves this god-forsaken village that turned his life upside down.

Cashile finds him sitting alone on the porch, his expression distant as he stares out into the distance.

She approaches him slowly, "Doti! What are you thinking about?"

He forces a smile, standing to meet her height because with that big belly, it will take her the whole year to finally sit down on the stoep..

"Your father," he says.

Cashile sighs, “Do you think he’s still alive?”

Bakhe shrugs, there are so many things he doesn’t know. Like what the future has in store for him.

“People don’t just disappear. My guess is that he got better and ran.” It’s the only explanation that makes sense.

“But he loved MaNkosi, he wouldn’t.”

“He loved her yet he was willing to take a second wife, your father was obsessed with Nothando. He wanted her as his wife.”

This is news to Cashile, her face turns sour.

“It’s a joke, right?”

“You were too busy looking into Undertaker’s eyes, you missed a lot.” He says, Cashile laughs.

“Mbali told me that Nothando left the village, it’s been weeks. Do you think dad went after her?”

The thought drives Bakhe crazy, “He killed our

mother so he can be with Nothando?”

His mind is taking him far, now.

“No, I don’t see him hurting mom. If he wanted to marry another woman, he would have, and then brought her here to stay with him and MaNkosi.” Cashile says.

“These things happen Dade, you can never fully know a person.”

It would make sense though, Madlala fetishized Nothando.

“But I find it hard to believe that,” Cashile sticks to what she believes in.

Bakhe has different views though, “I’m done looking for him. I’m leaving.”

“But you don’t have to go,” there’s a twinge of hurt in her voice. Bakhe fixes his gaze on the horizon, his thoughts elsewhere as he wrestles with his decision.

“I have to, Dade. If I stay, I might never leave. Your father is nowhere to be found, and I can't keep waiting for him. What if aunt Lizzie is right? He's living his best life while we're out here worried.”

“I might never see you again? What about Lulu? And I'm going to be giving birth soon.”

Bakhe sighs and brushes her head, “I'll come back, I promise. But for now, I need to go.”

Cashile reaches out to squeeze his hand, it's a silent gesture of support.

“I understand, just promise me you'll be careful. “You know me, I can take care of myself.”

“I can come with you if you don't mind,” a voice comes from behind them. They turn to Thuli standing in the doorway.

Bakhe smiles, “I don't mind.”

He's kidding, but Thuli might just take him up on

the offer and follow him to the ends of the earth. Cashile knows this, that's why she grabs Thuli by the hand and pulls her back into the house.

"I need help with something" she says when Thuli complains.

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Just as Bakhe is about to head to his rondavel for his things, he spots Khaya walking through the gate.

"Turn back around, now."

"Chommie, please," she pleads, her eyes brimming with tears.

Bakhe's jaw clenches as he struggles to contain his emotions.

"What do you want, Khaya? I have nothing left to say to you."

Khaya steps forward, “I know I messed up, Bakhe. I know I hurt you in the worst possible way. But I’m sorry. I’m so, so sorry.”

His hands ball into fists at his sides, “Sorry isn’t going to fix what you’ve done. You put my father’s life in danger, and you lied to me about being pregnant. How could you do that to me?”

Tears stream down Khaya’s cheeks as she reaches out to touch his arm. “I was scared. I made a mistake, a terrible mistake. But I love you, and I’ll do anything to make things right.”

But he recoils from her touch, his heart hardened against her words. “It’s too late for apologies. You’ve broken my trust, and I can’t forgive you for that.”

“Something is wrong with me, I have accepted it and I booked myself into mental institution. I’m going to get help.” She tells him.

“Good for you, I hope you are not doing it for me.

What we had is over, I'm not going back there."

With that, he turns away from her, leaving her standing alone.

If he needed a reason to leave, Khaya is it. He knows that he can't stay, not when the wounds she inflicted run so deep.

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MBUZO

He opens the door for Cashile. He can see the exhaustion etched on her face, her smile is distant.

"KaMadlala," he says softly, enveloping her in a comforting embrace.

He can't visit her at her father's house, her aunt

will kill him if she sees him there.

“You have to come with me,” she takes his hand and begins to drag him outside.

“Where are we going?”

“Mrs. Ngwenya is not answering my calls, she has Lulu.”

Confusion forms on his face, Juba’s mother is supposed to be taking care of Lulu while Cashile attends to family matters.

“I will explain in the car, please come with me.”

“Let me drive,” he takes the keys from her and gets the door for her before he takes the driver’s seat.

“When were you going to tell me that you were arrested?”

Cashil’s eyes widen in surprise, “Who told you?”

He takes a deep breath, “I heard from Mkhetheni that you were arrested. Why didn’t

you tell me, Cashile? Why did I have to find out from someone else?”

“Because I knew this is how you’d act, Mkhetheni was not supposed to tell you.”

Mbuzo shakes his head, “He’s my brother. We don’t hide things from each other.”

“My bad then for trusting your brother. It’s not like I wasn’t going to tell you, I just didn’t want you to hear from some else.”

“But you called him to come and help you. I thought we’re supposed to be a team, but you kept this from me. How can I trust you if you don’t trust me enough to confide in me when you’re in trouble?”

“Trust? You’re the last person who should be talking about trust.” Cashile spits.

This is not what he had in mind when he started this conversation. She has a short fuse lately.

His expression softens slightly, “Just promise me that you’ll never keep something like this from me again. You’re my wife.”

“Unfortunately,” she murmurs.

He gives her a brief stare, she’s upset and it might take a while to lighten up her mood.

“What happened with Mrs. Ngwenya?” He’s now calmer.

“She found out that I’m married, now she wants to take Lulu from me. That bitch.” She sizzles.

He’s heard her cuss before and it’s never pleasing to the ears. Cashile tells him how Princess and Juba’s mom conspired to kill their baby, and everything that went down yesterday.

“Why didn’t you call me, before going there? Lulu would be with you right now. Do you think I would let the woman take your daughter, just like that?”

He would fight hell for Cashile and Lulu.

She glances at him, a frown on her face.
Nothing though, comes out of her mouth.

It's four hours later and after many bathroom breaks, they arrive in Newcastle. The gate is locked, Mbuzo hoots.

"I don't think there is anyone, there. Let me call her," Cashile says, dialing her number.

"And?"

"It's sending me to voicemail," there's panic in her voice.

She opens the door and steps out of the car, while Mbuzo hoots once more. Cashile is right, there is no one at home.

He glances at her, she's pacing up and down with the phone pressed to her ear. Mbuzo takes a jacket from the back and dashes out of the

car.

She looks back at him when he puts the jacket over her.

“Get in the car, it’s chilly out here.”

“Why is her phone off? Princess is not answering hers.” Her voice trembles.

“Can I help you?” Shouts an old man standing by the gate next door.

They both turn to him.

“Ninjani baba?” Mbuzo greets as he shifts closer to him.

“Yebo ndodana.”

“We’re looking for the woman that stays here.”

“She packed her things and left. The house is for sale, look.” The old man says, pointing at a FOR SALE sign plastered on the wall.

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[03/06, 15:54] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 96

CASHILE

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“Is there a way we can contact her? Her number is unreachable.”

“My daughter has her best friend’s number.”

The old man says and goes into the house.

“It’s going to be okay,” Mbuzo says, pulling me in for a hug.

But it doesn’t feel like it.

My daughter, my baby has been taken from me by the one person I never thought would bring her harm. How could this happen? How could I have let this happen?

The old man is back with a piece of paper, he hands it to Mbuzo.

“Siyabonga baba,” he gives him a R50 note before the man goes back into the house.

I take a peek at the piece of paper, “This is Princess’ number.”

I don’t understand, how is Princess and Juba’s mom best friends?

“This means they have always known each other.” -Mbuzo.

He’s right but...

“I met Princess through Nkosana, he hired her for me because I couldn’t get a babysitter for Lulu.”

“Did you interview her?”

“Yes, and everything checked out. Mbuzo, I’ve been with her for over six months. I left my daughter alone with that woman.”

Fuck!

How did I let this happen?

“You said she spiked your juice?”

“Yes, I didn’t drink it though. Thuli was the one who detected a funny taste, she took a sip and she knew. We gave it to the police, they said they will have it tested. It might have been spiked with abortion pills again.”

He shakes his head, clearly not agreeing with me.

“Princess said Mrs. Ngwenya wanted to kill you and the baby, there was probably poison in there. I will follow up on the test results.” He says.

This is all so scary, all I ever wanted from that woman was my child. Why would she be vile and heartless?

Mbuzo notices my discomfort and embraces me, I feel suffocated. I need to breathe.

“What am I going to do? This is all my fault, I trusted her.”

“Calm down, KaMadlala. Mrs. Ngwenya loves Lulu, her battle is with you, not the child.”

I don't care, she tried to kill me and my child. That means she's not mentally stable, that witch is capable of anything.

“We will find her,” he says.

South Africa alone is a jungle. Where will we begin?

“I have a question though. Where did Nkosana get Princess? Was it through an agency?”

I can't think that far, it's been so long.

“I don’t remember, but he gave me the impression that they are familiar with each other.”

“Son of a bitch!” Mbuzo hisses, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“What is it?”

He’s not answering me, he retrieves his phone from his pocket and starts scrolling through it.

“Mbuzo!”

Can he not see that I’m panicking?

He rubs my back, “I just need to confirm something.”

That something must be about Nkosana and Princess.

God! Who did I let into my home?

“Shit, his number is off.” He hisses.

“Who?”

He looks at me and all I see is pity.

“What is going on? Please tell me you don’t think Nkosana has my baby.”

“It’s possible,” he says, continuing to scroll through his phone.

“But Mrs. Ngwenya has Lulu, she has no relation with Nkosana. They have never met.”

As far as I know.

“You told me that you don’t have much knowledge of Nkosana. What about Mrs. Ngwenya? How much do you know?” -Mbuzo.

I don’t know much about that woman, except that she’s Juba’s mother. I don’t even know her first name or where her husband is.

“Mhlo, there’s a problem. I think Nkosana took Lulu, I can’t get through his phone.” He’s talking to Mhloniphe on the phone.

A sharp pain slices through my abdomen,

stealing my breath and sending waves of agony rippling through my body. I double over, clutching my swollen belly as another contraction grips me.

Such merciless torture.

“Mbuzo,” I gasp, my voice trembling with pain and fear.

“Something is wrong.”

Mbuzo's eyes widen in alarm, his hands urgently supporting my body as he rushes me to the car.

“We need to get you to the hospital,” he insists.

Panic hits me when I hear the frantic worry in his voice.

“We can't risk anything happening to you or the baby.”

His words slice through me like razors, I can't lose this baby too.

He's careful with me as he helps me get in the car, I see him wince in pain and clutching his stomach.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing," he closes the door and runs to the driver's side and drives in speed.

With each passing moment, the pain intensifies. The journey to the hospital is a blur, he keeps looking back. I'm afraid we will crash if he continues, but I'm in so much I can't get a word out.

"Hang in there," he keeps telling me.

To be honest, I'm struggling to cling to consciousness through the haze of pain.

I'm barely holding on when we arrive at the hospital, I'm rushed into the emergency room.

I keep calling out to Mbuzo through the chaos

of the medical team swirling around me. The doctors' voices are a distant murmur and I'm going crazy with worry. I lost one twin, I can't fail this one as well.

"What's wrong with her?" Mbuzo asks the doctor, his hand clasped tightly in mine.

"How far is she?" -The doctor.

He looks at me with a puckered brow, "Six months, almost seven."

He sounds as if he's confirming with me, I nod vigorously.

"She's in labor, it's too soon. We'll have to delay the labor, just to give the baby more time to develop in the womb." The doctor says.

That's all I want.

"Please do whatever it takes, please," Mbuzo implores. "Do anything you can to save them both."

I cling on his hand.

Bad luck always seems to follow me.

Maybe I'm not meant to be a mother, or to have his children. If I lose this baby as well, I will give up on our love. I will walk away from Mbuzo, the pain is unbearable. I won't survive it the second time.

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It's been one hell of a week, from partaking in the stupid ceremony, to accepting Mhloniphe's invitation to a dumb party.

Had he known that the man was setting him up, he wouldn't have bothered.

He's traumatized, not even his past girlfriends have sat on his face. That fool Mhloniphe is so childish.

He's on the luxurious deck of a cruise ship, Nkosana stands tall, his gaze fixed on the horizon.

"Mbuso."

With a frown on his face, he turns to the voice calling out to him. It quickly dissipates and a smile replaces it when he sees her. It's Mrs. Ngwenya, holding a little girl tightly by the hand.

"I told you never to call me that," he says.

She hugs him, her expression covered in a veil of satisfaction.

"Your mother named you Mbusowenkosi, don't insult my cousin's memory." She says.

He looks down at Lulu, "I trust everything went according to plan?" Mrs. Ngwenya nods, a predatory gleam in her eyes as she gazes down at the child beside her.

"Yes. Lulu is here, safe and sound."

His lips curl into a friendly smile when he reaches out to pat Lulu's head.

She's in tears, "I want my mommy."

Nkosana pays no attention to her.

"Well done, Aunty. With Lulu in our possession, Cashile will have no choice but to willingly come running to me. For the first time ever, someone will choose me over Mbuzo, he will never win against me."

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[03/06, 15:54] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 97

CASHILE

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The doctor recommended bed rest. Any mistake and I give birth before I reach full term.

I want to be home, back in Joburg... with my daughter, but I'm here, at the Xabas.

"Slowly," Mbuzo says, guiding me into bed.

"I'm fine," I tell him, sounding a little snappy.

It's just... he's been fussing over my health from the time we left the hospital. He makes me feel guilty for almost losing the baby, and when he does this, the guilt multiplies.

He stands up straight after tucking me in, I look away from his gaze.

"Don't look at me like that."

"How am I looking at you?"

“Like you feel sorry for me, I don’t need that right now.” I say.

Entlek, his presence is making me angry. I want him to get out of my sight.

He sighs, it’s because I’ve been snapping at him.

“I will get you something to eat.”

“I don’t need...”

Sigh! He’s gone, I wanted to tell him that I don’t want to eat.

I should be out there looking for my baby, not laying in this bed.

There’s a knock, Mkhetheni and Mhlo walk in.

Mbuzo has told them what happened because they are looking at me with the same pity he had.

“Dade, how are you?”

I don’t want to answer him.

“Are you in pain?” –Mkhotheni asks.

I shake my head, I’m really trying not to cry but their questions put my hormones and me to war and I fail.

“Shit!” Mhlo cusses.

I can’t control my tears, I lie down and bury myself inside the covers. My sobs are loud, I don’t even know why I’m crying. I feel so sad and heavy burdened.

The door shuts a second later, they are gone. I can’t feel their heavy presence anymore.

I sit up and get my phone, then search for Thuli’s number, she’s at my father’s house. I text her, telling her not to worry, I’m staying over at Mbuzo’s.

Her response finishes my strength, ‘Spank Mkhotheni for me.’

I delete the text, she will never be normal. I don’t

have messages or texts from Nkosana or Mrs. Ngwenya. Their phones are still off.

Mbuzo walks in with his eyes out and full of worry.

Where is my food?

“What’s wrong?” He cups my face.

They told him I was crying.

“Nothing, I’m fine.” I lie with tears on my face.

My phone rings, no one wants me to cry in peace. He takes it from the bed and checks the caller ID.

“Who is it?”

“Private number,” he looks suspicious of the person calling.

“Do you think it’s him?” I ask.

“Could be, should I answer?”

“Give it to me, he might hang up and never call again.” I snatch the mobile.

“Hello,” I answer.

The person clears their throat.

“Cashile!”

Hau!

“Can you speak up? How will I hear what you’re saying if you’re going to speak like you stole someone’s voice?”

Seriously, today is not the day. I’m breathing fire.

The person laughs and I immediately know who it is.

“You always have a smart mouth.” He says.

“Where is my child, Nkosana?”

One thing I will not do is grovel to this man. Mbuzo is suddenly alert, he’s typing away on his phone. I know he’s talking to the detective that’s

been assigned to the case.

“Don’t worry she’s...” -Nkosana.

“Don’t tell me what to fuckin do, Nkosana.

Where is my child?”

Mbuzo frowns, I don’t know if it’s at my outburst or he’s angry on my behalf.

“Lulu is fine, you will see her again. Remember when I said you will willingly leave Mbuzo and come to me?”

This man is fucking trying me, he’s scraping the wrong scab wounds.

“It’s hard to remember anything you say when all I think about is Mbuzo whenever I’m with you.” I say.

This should fix him.

“Say whatever you want to make me feel small, it’s not going to work Cashile. In the end, I will have the last laugh.”

I don't know how Nkosana thinks he will win this time, when he became a loser from birth.

"This is what's going to happen, you will file those annulment papers you have in your possession and in four days, I will send you the address of where we are. You will travel alone, if I smell a cop, I'm slitting throats. There will be a marriage officiate when you arrive, he will marry us. You will also give me permission to adopt the baby you're carrying." He says.

This is what I get for getting involved with people I don't know. When you ask God for something and he makes an example with you, this must be God demonstrating what happens when you trust people.

Mbuzo is nursing anger like I have agreed to all of Nkosana's demands.

"Do you have a death wish or what? Even if I marry you, it will never work. The blood oath..."

“We will find other means until we sort it out, we have to because I will want you to touch me. I think a bl0wjob will do for now, yes, you will give me a bl0wjob.”

When is the world ending?

“You son of a bitch, I will kill you when I get my hands on you.” Mbuzo grunts, trying to take the phone from me.

I knew he'd say something before we find out where Nkosana is. I was handling it.

I yank my hand from Mbuzo's grip.

“Why would you marry me, Nkosana? I don't love you, I will never love you.” I say before he insults this man beside me, and they start arguing over the phone.

“It's fine, my love will be enough to hold us down. Don't you get it? I can't live without you, Cashile.”

“Then why are you still alive?”

“What?” He sounds confused.

“You say you can’t live without me, then die already. Why aren’t you dead yet?”

Mbuzo rubs my thigh, he’s trying to calm me down for the baby’s sake, clearly.

“That’s not funny, you never take me seriously, Cashile. How long are you going to drag me down?” Nkosana asks.

I force laughter, “You don’t love me, you love the idea of taking over your brother’s life. You want to be Mbuzo so bad you can’t even help it.”

“Shut up,” he spits.

“You will never be him, even if you two were a carbon copy, I would still be able to tell you apart. You know why? Because Mbuzo is a real man, you’re just a photo copy of him. The buy one get one free we don’t need. You will always

live under his shadow.”

“You’re saying all this just to stroke his ego, you can’t fool me, Cashile.”

Yoh, Haise!

“You’re stupid, Nkosana. Velaphi showed you that you were not enough by choosing Mbuzo. Are you sure that you want your brother’s seconds? Including me? Instead of building from scratch, you want Mbuzo’s leftovers.”

The call dies, the fool hung up on me.

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NKOSANA

The ship is about to sail, Mrs Ngwenya has managed to put Lulu to sleep. She’s getting

ready to exit the ship.

“I will meet you in Cape Town in a week,” she tells Nkosana.

He looks at Lulu sleeping on the bed, “Are you sure she’s not going to give me a hard time? I think you should stay.”

He’s never had to babysit in his life and his relationship with Lulu hasn’t been a Disney fairy tale.

“I have a life here, I can’t pack up and leave just like that. I have things to sort out first.” Mrs. Ngwenya says.

He sighs worriedly, then again, he has no choice but to take her word for it. Although a stranger, she’s his mother’s cousin.

“I can trust you with her, right?” She needs to make sure Lulu is safe with him.

“Believe it or not, I love her like she was my own.

I will take care of her, you don't have to worry.” Nkosana says.

She smiles, “Your mother and I didn’t have a relationship. She was just a cousin from Durban, I think I only saw her less than five times in my life. You know how cousins can be.

Nonetheless, I am happy you reached out to me. I hope that one day, I will introduce you to the rest of the family. You and my son Ntando will get along very well.”

Nope! He is not interested in knowing the rest of the family.

He’s met Ntando, it’s that fool that almost run Cashile over with a taxi.

Nkosana fakes a smile.

His entire life is in Joburg, that’s where his adopted parents lived, it’s where he grew up. Going back to KwaNyuswa was part of his plan to get what his father took from him.

Velaphi thought paying for his education would wipe out all the years of neglect?

Stupid man!

Nkosana knew nothing about his mother having relatives, this woman came up when he was looking into Cashile's life.

Okay, she had a daughter with a man named Juba. He dug further into Juba's life just to be safe and that's when he found out that Mrs. Ngwenya is a distant relative.

Talk about God smiling down on you. Mrs. Ngwenya losing Juba was perfect for Nkosana.

All he had to do was approach the long lost aunt and narrate his sob story, the Xaba brothers killing Juba was the cherry on top.

Mrs. Ngwenya agreed to help him when she heard who killed her precious son.

They didn't meet by chance, or coincidence. In

fact, he couldn't care less if she doesn't return. Everything is coming together perfectly, what's left is for Cashile to join them.

"Are you sure she won't wake up now?"

Nkosana asks just as Mrs. Ngwenya is about to leave.

"I gave her more than enough cough mixture, she will most probably wake up tomorrow morning. And she's a heavy sleeper, don't worry about her."

That's a relief, the last thing he wants is some little terrorist terrorizing his life.

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Mrs. Ngwenya is gone, it's 7pm. He plans on having dinner in the room since Lulu is sleeping.

He checks on her, she's fast asleep. He has enough time to go out and get food.

“Uncle!” The demon is awake.

He sighs heavily, pushes the door shut and turns to her with a fake grin. She’s rubbing her tired eyes.

“When are we going to mommy?”

Not anytime soon.

“Next week,” he answers.

“I want to see her now. Where is my granny?”

Her eyes scan the room.

“Grandma went to buy you sweets, she will be back tomorrow.” He’ll have a king sized bed in hell by the time he’s done answering her questions. The lies coming out of his mouth; brought to you by the serpent that tempted Eve.

Lulu’s eyes land on his phone charging on the table, she jumps off the bed and takes the phone.

“I’m calling mommy.”

Nkosana jumps for the phone and snatches it from her hand.

“No, we are on a ship. Calls are not allowed, the ship will sink.” Nkosana says.

“No it won’t, you were talking to mommy on the phone.” Lulu’s voice rises to the clouds.

Nkosana sighs, where is that bottle of medicine? It looks like it’s going to be a long night with this child.

“Can you shut up for two seconds? You are giving me a headache.”

“Why are you mean?” Lulu asks, her bottom lip quivering, she’s close to tearing up.

Nkosana opens his mouth to speak but Lulu beats him to it.

“Is it because no one likes you?” She asks.

Jesus Christ!

“How old are you? Are you not three?” No child

should have this much vocabulary.

Lulu lifts her hand, “I’m turning five. Grandma is going to throw a big party for me, I will invite all my friends. You are not invited.”

Nkosana grits his teeth, “You talk too much, shut up.”

It’s a good thing he doesn’t have hair, otherwise he would have pulled it out.

He takes her hand, “Let’s go get food.”

Maybe that will shut her up.

The dining area is packed, he chooses to eat out in the buffet, close to the pool. There are waiters at their service, he gets a burger and chips for Lulu with strawberry milkshake.

Maybe he won’t need to drug her, she’s quietly enjoying her burger and chips.

There’s an old white couple sitting close by,

they are staring at Lulu inquisitively. Nkosana is confused, he glances at Lulu but can't see what's fascinating about her.

Lulu sees them and smiles with food in her mouth.

"Eat properly, people are staring." Nkosana says, he's assumed that's why they keep staring.

But the couple looks fascinated.

Lulu swallows and drinks her milkshake,
"Teacher Langa said tattoos belong to the devil.
Are you the devil?"

The terrorist has begun.

The couple chuckle.

"She's so cute? Is she yours?" The blonde woman asks.

"She's with me, what do you think?" Nkosana coldly answers.

These people are too nosy, if it wasn't crowded,

he would change tables

The lady taps her male companion, “Look John, isn’t she cute?”

John smiles, “She is.”

“We should adopt one or two.” She adds, smiling widely at Lulu.

Nkosana is offended, “This is not an apartheid museum or a zoo. Mind your own business.”

Jeer! Talk about nosy people.

The couple frowns at his rudeness and continue eating their dinner.

Lulu is struggling to bite her burger, it’s too big for her.

“Here let me help you,” Nkosana cuts it in half.

Her eyes water, “Is this how you’re going to cut mommy’s throat if she doesn’t choose you?”

He almost loses his eyeballs, “What?”

The lady chokes in her drink, John is frozen with shock.

“She’s playing, too much TV.” Nkosana explains to the white Gagasi FM.

Wasn’t this child sleeping when he was on the phone with Cashile?

God please let this little demon keep her mouth shut the whole night.

Lulu sips her milkshake, “What’s a bl0wjob?”

Nkosana almost falls off his seat.

“Lulu ssh!” What is wrong with her?

“No don’t tell the child to keep quiet. Baby speak, he won’t do anything to you. Did he touch you where he’s not supposed to?” The lady has her longneck stretched to their table.

Lulu looks confused, she looks at Nkosana, he puts his hand on his lips, gesturing she keeps quiet.

“Don’t lie to the people, Lulu. You’re going to get me in trouble.” He says.

Tears cover Lulu’s eyes, “But I’m not lying, you said you want a bl0wjob.”

“Security, security!” John jolts up and snatches Lulu from the chair, her milkshake falls off her hands, the lady is on the phone with the police and by the time the security gets to them, Nkosana is jumping off the ship, reviving the black Chad Le Clos in him.

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[03/06, 15:54] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 98

CASHILE

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Mbuzo thinks they can trace Nkosana's call, I think that only works when you're on a call with that particular person.

He left me alone in his bedroom, I have no idea what is happening, if there is any news.

I called Ntando earlier on, asking if he's heard from his mother. It turns out they are not on speaking terms, he wasn't pleased to be hearing from me though.

The door is open, so people come in and out as they please.

Uncle Mpiyakhe stands at the door, smiling at me.

"My condolences, I heard about your mother."

He speaks as if we've known each other for years.

I smile, and thank him.

He walks in and rubs my back, the stench of alcohol coming from him is nauseating.

Why is he here?

Where is Mbuzo? I hope he didn't send his uncle to come check on me.

"Sorry nana yezwa. You're not the first person to lose a parent and you won't be the last, it's the way of life. You just have to be strong and continue with life."

I can tell he means this in the most sincere manner, he just doesn't know how to articulate himself. Or it's the alcohol talking.

I nod, I think he should leave now. I am not in the mood for company.

He's smiling at me, like a proud father—I guess.

I fake a smile and lightly shrug.

"Unjani uSqalo?" He asks.

“Sqalo?”

He looks at my belly, “Sqalosendaba, he is the reason you and Mbuzo can never be with anyone. There was a blood oath, a woman died, and you and Mbuzo are walking weapons of destruction.” He laughs, it’s not funny.

“My baby’s name will not be Sqalosendaba and no, he’s not the reason the blood oath strengthened. The ancestors like playing games with our lives, we were kids and didn’t know what we were doing. There was no reason for them to take it that far.”

I’m still not sure if it was my ancestors or Mbuzo’s, what they did was downright cruel.

“If the ancestors are behind this death by tlof-tlof saga, then my brother has nothing to do with it, he didn’t like you.” He grins.

I don’t care about Velaphi.

“Look how beautiful you are, it’s a pity my

brother didn't like you. You would have made a good daughter in-law."

Does Velaphi's death make me a bad daughter in-law?

"Why did he hate me, uncle?"

I don't remember much about Velaphi's hatred for me, I remember though that he was a cold man.

"You were a threat to his wealth, my child, plus you were poor." This laughing business of his is starting to annoy me.

"How was I a threat to his wealth?" I ask.

"Will you buy me beer if I tell you?"

How can I say no when he's asking nicely?

"Yes."

He sits on my bed, he's so comfortable around me it makes no sense.

"Mbuzo must never know what I'm about to tell you, no one else knows but me. The other person who knew is six feet under." He's whispering and scaring me in the process.

What could be so bad that Mbuzo should not be told?

He takes a long breath, as if preparing himself to deliver bad news.

"My brother and sister in-law were in love yes, but another reason he married her was because she came from a family of wealth. It was in her blood, she was one of those people who didn't have to work hard for anything. Money followed her."

To put it lightly, she was one of God's favourite people.

"You can never have enough money, my brother wanted more, so he went to someone, a powerful witchdoctor who made sure that no

other witch doctor or sangoma would ever see the curse Velaphi put on his son.” He says.

Rhaaa! I knew Velaphi was not innocent.

“That’s when he found out that you two were soulmates who will bring his empire to the ground.”

“How so?” I ask.

He shrugs his shoulders, “Why do you think a 50 year-old man like Mbuzo does not have children?”

I try not to laugh because I’m still confused.

“Mbuzo is not fifty, he’s in his thirties.” I say.

Uncle waves me off, “The twins are fathers, they have children except for Mbuzo. He was not supposed to father a child. That was the deal Velaphi made with the witch doctor, you were the only one who could break that curse and Velaphi hated you for that.”

I was just a child, how could he have had so much hatred for a child?

"All that because he wanted more money?" I'm appalled, really.

He nods, "Money makes the world go round."

That's bullshit, money makes people evil.

"My brother knew about the blood oath before it was performed, that's why he sent Mbuzo to boarding school. But it was too late, there was no turning back. The next thing he could do was continue to keep you two apart, so with the help of your father, he got you arrested."

I feel a wave of heat rush through my body, it must be hunger making me hear things.

"Uncle, did Mbuzo tell you about my arrest?"

I'm trying to make sense of what he's saying, it's hard to grasp everything. My father and Mbuzo's dad had me arrested?

“No he didn’t. I know all this from Velaphi. There is nothing my brother didn’t tell me. Him and Madlala along with Sibiya reported you to the police, of course Velaphi’s reasons were different from Madlala and Sibiya’s reasons. Those three did not like each other, they used each other to get what they wanted.”

I need to breathe, but I can’t seem to get air into my lungs. He shoots up from the bed, worry covering his bloodshot eyes.

“Makoti? Are you running out of air?”

I’m hyperventilating.

“What about my beer?” He asks, while running out of the room.

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I have been given a lecture, as if that does not add to my stress.

What is wrong with this man?

I'm fine now, I guess I panicked. I'm still hurt though, how could he do this to me. My own father? I won't even point a finger at Velaphi, he owed me nothing.

Mbuzo is back with a plate of pap and beef stew, plus cabbage on the side.

He pulls a chair and sits down.

"How are you feeling?" He asks.

My focus is on the spoon he's using to scoop food.

"You don't have to feed me," I say.

He sighs and gives me the plate, then sits back with his arms crossed.

"What did my uncle say to you?"

He's angry and expecting me to answer his question.

“I told him to be careful with you, I don’t want him here anymore.”

That’s too harsh.

“What did he say to you, Cashile?”

Yoh, must he call me Cashile? I’m slowly losing my appetite.

I don’t give him an answer, he’s staring and I’m getting annoyed.

He stands and goes to the bathroom, I won’t speak to an angry man. If he wants us to have a conversation then he has to calm down.

His phone buzzes with a message, it’s on the bedside table. I see Lona’s name flash on the screen.

I can’t help it, I take the phone and unlock it. It doesn’t need a password.

Why does he still have her number saved?

She’s sent him a WhatsApp message, it’s

messages actually. They've been chatting back and forth.

I hear him flash, and put the phone down. I've lost my appetite.

He walks back in just as I put the plate aside.

"You hardly ate?"

I want to roll my eyes so bad. I shift away when he sits on the edge of the bed.

"You have to eat KaMadlala, the doctor..."

Nxa!

"Can you find Nothando?" I change the subject, Nothando was the furthest thing on my mind. But I'm trying to calm myself before I go in.

He frowns, probably thinking what I'm not thinking.

"For what?"

"Bakhe thinks my father killed Mankosi and

eloped with Nothando.”

Maybe that’s what this man is planning to do with Lona. Kill me and elope with her.

“If that’s the case, then let them be. Why would you want him back in your life?”

Sometimes I forget that he’s this person, I just don’t get why he would think it’s okay for a man to kill his wife and run away with his mistress.

He’s staring, I haven’t looked into his eyes since he came out of the bathroom.

Did you speak to the detective?” I ask, changing the topic again.

The frown on his face tells me that he’s confused.

“They are still looking, we were not able to trace Nkosana’s call.” Mbuzo says.

We should have thought of tracing it before he

called.

“We will find them, they can’t be far.” He says.

I know we will find them, I want it to be now, not the four days Nkosana gave me.

“I want him in jail, I don’t care if you’re related or not. I don’t want Nkosana part of our lives anymore, he’s not someone we can trust.”

He scratches his head, God knows what he’s thinking.

“The seer said we have to make peace or there will be a tragedy in the family. It was a message from my father.”

I laugh, “Velaphi? The same man who didn’t want us to be together?”

I know for a fact that man is a bad ancestor.

“We don’t have to be best friends with him, we’ll only make peace and...”

I’m not allowing it, I don’t care if it was God who

said it.

“Nkosana has tried to do things to me...” I break the news out of anger, Mbuzo reacts instantly.

“What things?” His question comes way too fast.

I have started a fire, haven’t I?

“I asked you a question, KaMadlala, please don’t make me lose my mind.”

“That day when you left me at work, I went to his office and he locked me in and took his clothes off.” I start, I’m not even done and his chest is bouncing up and down.

“And what, Cashile? Please tell me he didn’t do anything, tell me that son of a bitch didn’t touch you.”

I guess Velaphi is the bitch in this case.

“No, he only tore my shirt off.” His eyes widen before he jerks from the bed in anger.

“And you didn’t tell me?”

Whoah! Does he have to yell?

“I’m telling you now,” I snap.

“Yoh hhayi, KaMadlala.”

“Yini? What did I do?”

“Nothing, and that’s the problem, you never do anything.”

I get that I should have went and reported to him when it happened, but that’s no reason to act impulsive.

“Why are you reacting like this, Mbuzo? He didn’t do anything, I told you mos. I took care of it.”

He squints his eyes at me, “You don’t get it, do you?”

Maybe if he would calm down, I’d get it.

“You are still the same, you keep things from

me. I must be an idiot to think you will ever share anything with me,” he says.

It’s always about him.

“What about you? You’re talking to Lona behind my back, arranging meetings.”

He’s surprised that I know, his whole attitude has changed. From anger to shock.

“You went through my phone?”

“For you to be asking me that, just confirms that you didn’t want me to find out.” I tell him.

“Why would I keep Lona a secret? I’ve been open and straight forward with you, you know my intentions.”

“Do I? You said you miss her too, and told her that your brother was childish for what he did to her. Mbuzo you apologized and promised to make it up to her.”

He looks confused but has a frown on his face.

I take his phone and go to his WhatsApp, then flip the phone around.

“Is this Lona, laying naked on your bed. Why is she sending you nudes, Mbuzo?”

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I apologize for the delay.

Please don't forget to like my comment in the competition, the post is below this chapter.

[03/06, 15:54] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 99

MHLONIPHE

He's walking out of his bedroom and nearly collides with someone coming from the opposite direction. He looks up, startled, only to find himself locking eyes with Mbali, who stands before him.

There is an overnight bag hanging over her shoulder.

He's still not used to seeing her in normal clothes. They make her look her age, he can't fathom how it came about that she caught his eye, a young girl like her.

Mbali's head is bowed, she appears shy.

"Little One."

When she lifts her gaze, her eyes are wide with wonder.

"Mhloni..." it's a whisper.

“Why are you here?” His eyes shift to the bag, Mbali adjusts it and timidly looks at him.

“My mother sent me to bring sis’Cashile’s clothes.” She bites her lower lip as she looks down from his penetrative gaze.

Mhloniphe nods, his thoughts drifting to the unexpected kiss they shared. It’s a memory that refuses to fade despite his best efforts to push it aside. He chastises himself for allowing it to happen, reminding himself of the significant age difference between them and the potential complications it could bring.

It wasn’t their first kiss, but the second time was intense.

“I didn’t expect to see you here, Little One.” He says even after she’s told him why she’s here.

“Do you have time? I want us to talk.”

Mhloniphe nods in agreement and walks back into his room, leaving the door open. He sits on

the bed and looks at her, looking at him from outside his room.

Mbali slowly walks in, she closes the door just as slowly.

She clears her throat while doing everything she can to avoid his gaze, she puts the bag down and leans against the door.

“About what happened between us... I think we need to talk.”

“Yes, you’ve said that already.” Mhlo says.

“It’s about the kiss,” she finally says, meeting his gaze.

“I’ve been trying to make sense of it all, but I can’t deny that there’s something between us.”

Mbali’s eyes widen in surprise at his admission, her breath catching in her throat.

“You feel it too?” Her voice is barely above a whisper.

He nods, a small smile playing at the corners of his lips as he gets up and approaches her.

“But I don't know what it means, we are not compatible. But I have tried to ignore what I feel for you, Little One. It's slowly eating at me,” he says.

He strokes her cheek and kisses her when she least expects it, he doesn't stop until Mbali is kissing him back with her arms curled around his neck.

Without breaking the kiss, Mhlo locks the door then scoops her up in his arms and walks with her to the bed.

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CASHILE

“I have never seen those pictures in my life.” He takes the phone and deletes them.

Now I know how Jesus felt when Peter denied him. This situation is different but I’m appalled actually, there was proof on his phone.

“Are you going to stand there and lie to me, Mbuzo?”

He’s a man, what do I expect?

He joins his hands together and kneels on the side of the bed, the look in his eyes is intense.

“When I lost you months ago, I told myself that if I ever find you again, I will do whatever it takes to make sure you never leave my side.

You are my wife, the only woman I have eyes for. Why would I risk losing you over a woman that I can’t even sleep with?”

I don’t know, men have many reasons for

cheating.

“Have you forgotten that you are the only woman I can sleep with?”

Well...

“But the naked pictures... were you turned on by them?” I ask and ready myself to attack him.

He drops his eyes, I guess that's my answer.

“Get out of my sight,” I say.

“You want me to lie to you? I’m a man KaMadlala, of course I get turned on by a naked woman but it doesn’t mean I want to do something with them. How do I prove to you that I only have eyes for you?” He’s pleading, groveling to say the least and that’s where I want him, on his knees.

“Fine, what about the messages? You miss her?”

He pinches the bridge of his nose, his eyes

moving away from my gaze. This is how you spot a liar.

“I don’t miss her, Lona knows things that might put me in jail and I’m trying to escape that.” He says.

Why am I feeling jealous that they share something together?

“So you are going to make her think you love her?” I ask him.

Ngiyalingwa!

“I will do whatever it takes to stay out of prison.” He’s on his feet now, I didn’t say he should stand.

Where is he planning on going to?

“Mbuzo, what are those things? Are you and Lona involved in illegal stuff?”

“If I tell you then we’ll both be arrested if the police ever find me out, I can’t take that risk.”

Nonsense.

I'm hurt, "So it's okay that Lona knows but I don't?"

"You don't get it, do you? I'm trying to protect you, to protect us and our family. I'm only asking that you trust me."

He takes his phone, pecks my lips and dashes out. I have never seen long legs move that fast, he didn't even answer my question.

I'm stuck between running after him and leaving this place. I don't want to think where he could be going but something tells me that Lona is around. When a man says trust me, then he's up to something you won't like.

My life is just a bundle of a mess, things should be looking up now that my parents were exposed. What do I have to do to fix this mess?

Why didn't I think of creating a missing persons' post on Facebook? The one I just made already has five shares and 27 reactions. It has Lulu and Nkosana's pictures attached to it. I made it clear on the post that the man kidnapped my daughter. Unfortunately, I don't have Mrs. Ngwenya's picture.

Nevertheless, I have faith in the power of social media, this post will reach someone who has seen Nkosana and Lulu.

Right now, I need to get out of this bedroom
It smells like Mbuzo-Traitor Xaba and I don't want to smell him right now.

"Hi."

Mkhotheni is behind the stove cooking, it smells like curry in here. If I see pap in front of me, I will throw up.

"Why are you out of bed?"

He's turned and frowning at me, I have a 38 year old father.

"Where is your brother?"

No answer.

Why do I bother asking him? They protect each other, it's brothers before outsiders.

"He's not cheating on you," he says.

I know that look on his face is meant to intimidate me.

"You would know, he is your brother and he tells you everything." Anger can bring out the worst in a person, so this is me, talking back at this man. It could also have everything to do with the fact that I have lost all respect for Velaphi, their father. So I'm not intimidated by anything that looks, walks and talks like Velaphi.

"Did he leave my car? I want to go home."

"KaMadlala..."

I lift my hand to stop him from testing my patience.

“Sisi, sisi you have to see this.”

Ehh! And then, Mbali? She’s running out of Mhlo’s bedroom, what am I seeing today?

“What were you doing in Mhloniphe’s bedroom?” I whisper shout, but Mkhetheni has caught it all. He storms out of the kitchen, I wouldn’t want to be Mhloniphe right now.

“Did you sleep with him?”

I’m asking because she smells like sex.

She drops her gaze, I’m going to kill this child. A slap will do for now, she stumbles back and holds her cheek. Tears burn behind her pupils, I am not done. I want to slap the other cheek.

Mhloniphe jumps in front of her and my hand lands on his upper arm, I don’t know where he

came from.

“It’s not her fault, dade. I initiated it,” he says.

“But I wanted it,” Mbali says.

Are they playing Romeo and Juliet in front of me? This is wrong in so many levels, Mhloniphe is my brother in-law and Mbali is my sister.

What in the Bold and the Beautiful is happening in this house?

“I’m married to your brother for heaven’s sake, how could you?”

He frowns at my question.

“We love each other,” Mbali says from behind him.

I look at Mhlo, I don’t think this is love for him.

“Go home Mbali, why are you even here?” I tell her.

“Mama sent me to bring you clothes.”

“And you made a pit stop in Mhloniphe’s room?”

Mhloniphe rubs the back of his neck, “Can we talk about this later? There are important things to worry about.”

“Like what?” I snap.

“There’s a post trending on Facebook, a white couple rescued Lulu from a paedophile. They were in a cruise ship and the man jumped into the water while running from security, he’s in Parklands hospital.” She shows me the pictures on her phone, I see Lulu in the arms of a white woman.

My baby has been found, I have to call Mbuzo and let him know so he can tell that useless detective.

My phone rings before I can say anything.

“Thuli, I’m busy...”

“Lulu has been found,” she cuts me off.

“I just heard the news, I’m about to head out.”

“Okay, you will find me here.” She says.

“Where? You’re at the hospital?”

“Yes, I’m here to see Nkosana. I heard he has broken bones from the impact he got when he fell into the water.”

Why would she visit him?

“Thuli, is there something you want to tell me?”

“Except that I love you and I’m sorry I never came to visit you in jail. No.”

This doesn’t sound good.

“What’s going on?” I ask.

I’m growing nervous.

“Promise me that you will visit me in jail and take care of my son.” She says.

She’s confusing me.

“I’m going to finish what the water started, it’s

the only way you will be free from Nkosana. When I'm done, I'm going to deal with Lona, I can't believe that bitch is after your husband." She says.

This woman wants to deal with my enemies accordingly. I love her but...

"Thuli, thank you but you can't fix my problems for me,"

"Watch me," she says and hangs up.

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[03/06, 15:54] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 100

MHLONIPHE

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His twin brother and Cashile are on their way to Durban, they could have waited for Mbuzo but there was no time. Cashile was restless and wanted to leave immediately, she didn't care that she was leaving her cousin alone with him.

Mbali is not as talkative as the girls he's been with before, he attracts loudmouths who don't know when to stop talking.

He's cooked pap, spinach and meat. Mbali ate and left the plate clean, he's not a chef in the kitchen but he didn't think she would finish the food.

He walks into the lounge with a glass of coke and a bottle of beer for himself.

"I drink beer," she says when he hands her the coke.

“Come back to me when you turn 21,” he’s not falling for it.

Mbali sighs.

“What time should I drop you off? Or will you spend the night?”

Her eyes almost fall into the glass, he immediately catches on.

“Relax Little one, I don’t mean it like that. I figured maybe you want to spend the night with your cousin, since she’s not feeling well.”

His throat feels dry, Mbali has dragged his mind into the gutter along with hers. He gulps down half of his beer and finishes off with a clearing of a throat.

“My mother expects me home, but she won’t mind if I tell her that I’m spending the night.”

She plays too much with her fingers, how can she be shy after the experience they had

together?

“Spending the night?” -Mhlo.

Get your mind out the gutter bro.

Mbali lifts her eyes to him, “With Cashile.”

She quickly clarifies and bites her fingernails.

Mhloniphe notices her shyness, he faces her as he clears his throat one more time.

“What's your guilty pleasure? Mine's binge-watching cheesy rom-coms.”

He's lying, he wouldn't be able to name one. TV is not his thing but— anything to get her out of her shell.

Mbali's lips twitch with amusement, a hint of a smile tugging at the corners of her mouth.

“I have a weakness for chocolate, especially when it's paired with a good book.” Her voice is soft and genuine.

Mhloniphe chuckles, leaning back comfortably in his seat.

“Ah, a fellow bookworm? Any recent favorites?”

This is tricky, he doesn’t even read the local newspaper.

Mbali's eyes light up as she recalls a recent read. She opens her mouth to speak but...

“You know what, I’m lying. The only book I’ve ever read was Animal Farm and Maru back in the day and that’s because I was tutoring someone.” He says.

There’s the confession, Mbali nods. He was expecting a laugh, she’s too uptight maan!

“I have a question, Little One.”

She looks at him, if she’s not biting her nails, she’s biting her lip.

“Why don’t skeletons fight each other?”

Mhloniphe asks, his eyes glowing with

anticipation.

Curiosity dances in Mbali's eyes, "Why?" "Because they don't have the guts!" Mhloniphe blurts out, unable to contain his laughter while waiting for Mbali's reaction.

And there it is, she bursts into giggles, her laughter infectious as it fills the room.

"That's a terrible joke," she manages to say between fits of giggles.

But it worked, mission accomplished.

Mhloniphe grins, pleased with himself.

He finds himself staring for way too long, up until Mbali notices.

The second her giggles die down, Mhloniphe attacks her with a kiss. Her response is just as quick.

His bedroom is not far from the lounge, he scoops her up and shuts the door once they are inside.

There's no time for breathers, he's devouring her. Mbali is on her back on the bed, reciprocating. He keeps trying to remove her clothes, Mbali wants them on until she's under the covers.

She undressed while under the blankets when they had sex hours ago, she didn't want him to see her nakedness.

Mhlo didn't have a good time, it was too hot.

He unbuttons her jeans and attempts to pull them down, Mbali grabs the waist. This kills the excitement Mhlo had, he breaks the kiss and looks at her.

"I want to see you" he sounds desperate.

"No man has ever seen me naked but my husband."

Now this is not the response he expected.

“Late husband, he’s dead.” Okay, how insensitive.

Mbali nods in slow motion, she’s hurt by his remark.

Mhloniphe notices and pecks her lips then her cheeks.

“Forgive me, Little One. Are we always going to do it under the blankets?” It’s a simple question.

She slightly squirms under him, his rode is poking her.

“Allow me to teach you a thing or two about intimacy.” He buries his face in the crook of her neck and nibbles on the sensitive parts of her skin. Her moan is quite loud, Mhloniphe chuckles at it.

It’s as if she’s never been touched before.

“I would never lust over your body, Mbali. I just

want to worship you with my eyes and appreciate your beauty.” His hands are all over her body, his lips haven’t grown tired of kissing her.

He trails his lips from hers up to her ear and nibbles her earlobe, Mbali visibly trembles, her nails digging into his shoulders.

“I need to see you, please.” He whispers into her ear.

He stops and looks into her eyes with a silly smile, “Besides, it feels like I’m swimming in sweat under the covers.”

Mbali cracks a giggle, he smiles in return and kisses her.

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CASHILE

We've been driving for two hours, had it been for me, we would be at the hospital by now.

Mkhotheni pulls up in the parking lot, there doesn't seem to be parking space and I'm growing impatient.

"Drop me here, you will find me inside." I tell him.

He frowns at me, "No. I have to keep an eye on you, you were not supposed to leave the bed to begin with."

Silly me, "Yebo baba."

Since he's acting like my father now. I'm not going to argue with this man, I have been doing enough of that with his brother.

Oh, finally someone is pulling out of parking. I open the door, he tells me to wait he will get it, and runs to the other side.

What is his problem? I'm not glass, I will not

break.

He gives me a look when he finds me out of the car. I walk past him, my child needs me.

Thank God I don't have to run around the hospital looking for my baby, a nurse offers to take me to her ward when I explain who I am. Mkhetheni is stuck to me like glue, it should be Mbuzo by my side.

I sure know how to choose them, from fathers to husbands.

The nurse opens the door and walks in first, she starts to tell the white couple sitting with my daughter who we are but I don't have time for that.

"Lulu," I shout her name the second I see her.

She lifts her head and her face lights up, she jumps off the white lady's lap and runs to me.

“Mommy!” She repeats, I lift her up and hold her closer than I’ve ever had.

She’s getting heavier by the day.

“Are you okay? Tell mommy if you’re hurt.”

She cups my cheeks, her hands are cold. I feel like a failure, I have never done right by my baby since the day she was born. I have done to her what my parents did to me, this can’t be the life I should be giving my daughter. She deserves better.

“I’m fine, grandma left me alone with uncle.”

That witch will get it from me when I see her.

“Uncle jumped in the water. Do you think the sharks ate him?” Lulu asks.

There are times when I forget that she talks too much.

“I don’t know baby,” I hope they did... but unfortunately the man is in the hospital. I curse

the day I bumped into Nkosana.

“I’m here now baby, I will never let you out of my sight.” I plant kisses on her face, she pouts and kisses my lips.

“Thank you for helping our daughter,” Mkhetheni says to the white couple.

They must be thinking I’m rude.

With Lulu still in my arms, I shake their hands. They are all smiles, I’m too down to return them.

“She’s a sweet little girl, you should never lose sight of her.” The lady says, I feel accused.

“Her grandmother had her, we don’t know what happened.” I mean, I have to defend myself.

Why is Mkhetheni looking at me like that?

Must I let people think I’m a bad mother?

“We can compensate you, name your price.”

Yoh, I never thought I would ever hear those

words come out of a Xaba brother's mouth.
They are well off now, must be nice.

"No, it was our pleasure. Just make sure that man never sees the light of day, they caught him. He's around here somewhere." She says.

That's if he's still alive, Thuli sounded determined over the phone and I believed every word she said.

The couple say goodbye and leave.

"Do you want to talk to him?" Mkhetheni asks.

I know he's talking about Nkosana, what will I possibly say to him? The only thing I want to do is kill him.

He finds out from the cop that was guarding the door where Nkosana's ward is. We head there, there's also a cop standing outside his door.

I'm guessing Thuli's mission failed, there is no

way you can kill someone with these people around and get away freely.

“We’re here to see the man in there.” Mkhetheni tells the policeman.

“He’s under arrest, he’s only allowed two visitors at a time.”

Hau! There’s only two of us and Lulu.

“Okay, step aside then.” Mkhetheni orders.

“There are people in there,” the policeman says.

Let it not be Thuli, what will I tell her son?

The door opens and a nurse walks out, for a second, I’m thinking the cop was talking about the medical team until I see Mbuzo and Lona in the room.

The fuck is happening?

The policeman is about to close the door, I push it open and walk in.

“Sisi, you are not...” -The policeman.

“Awume wena.” I snap at him, he draws back when Mkhetheni pulls him aside. I don’t know what he says to him, I don’t care.

“This is cosy, what a reunion.”

Everyone turns to look at me, including this man I am married to.

“I thought you couldn’t make it, is this the reason?” I point at Lona.

“Uncle...” Lulu has her arms stretched toward Mbuzo. I don’t want her to go to him, but it’s too late. He takes her and kisses her cheek.

Those lips have better not been kissing Lona.

“Your mom and I were worried about you, how are you princess?” Mbuzo says.

“Fine.” -Lulu.

Mxm!

Let me deal with Nkosana, he looks regretful as he looks at me.

“And then wena?”

“Not in front of the child,” Father Mkhetheni says.

He knows I have a loose, unfiltered mouth.

I want to vent, I wish Thuli had made it in here and killed Nkosana. It looks like he only got away with a broken leg.

“I’m sorry KaMadlala.” Nkosana says.

“Don’t call me that,” is he mad?

He sighs, “I was desperate. I have already explained to Mbuzo, and I’m willing to pay for my sins.”

“Willing or not, you’re going to be locked up for a very long time.” I tell him.

I hate that he looks understanding, like he is ready to pay for his crimes.

“Please forgive me, I will never bother you again.” -Nkosana.

Damn right he won’t.

“Apology not accepted, you took my daughter without my permission.” I would be a fool to forgive him.

“But she’s back, have a heart.” -Lona.

And then, this one.

“Why are you here, Lona?” My eyes run to Mbuzo, he drops his and starts baby talking Lulu.

He sounds like an idiot.

“Mbuzo invited me,” Lona answers with a smile.

“And may I ask why?” My eyes run to the cause of all this, Mbuzo.

Lona’s giggle brings me back, “Because we are getting married. You and me are going to be sister-wives.”

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[03/06, 15:54] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 101

CASHILE

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A second wife?

“You’re considering taking a second wife?”

“Not considering, we are getting married.” She holds her hand up, showing a big shiny ring.

I didn’t even get a ring, did he ever propose?

“I’m not talking to you, Deputy Jesus. Does God know you’re out here seducing married men?”

She gasps, this child can't be Christian.

"Mbuzo, you're a man. Umdala, answer me when I'm talking to you."

His silence is never cute.

"I'll take the child out for ice cream." Mkhetheni takes Lulu and makes his way out with her.

I guess we're going to have this conversation here, in front of the enemies of progress.

"I'm listening," I say to Mbuzo. "And while you're at it, tell me why this plastic Barbie gets to get a ring and I didn't."

One thing about this man, he's thinking of a lie when he's pinching the bridge of his nose like that.

"We didn't plan it, it just happened." Mbuzo finally speaks, I see arrogance and pride flash on Lona's face.

This is what she wanted.

“Are you out of your mind, Mbuzo?” I’m not trying to stress myself, not again.

He lets out a sigh and comes to stand in front of me, “I understand that this might be difficult for you to accept, but I need you to understand that this decision is not about you. It’s about our family’s future.”

I scoff at his words, “Our family’s future? What about our present, Mbuzo? What about the promises you made to me, to cherish and honor me as your wife?”

Mbuzo’s jaw tightens, “I know this is hard for you to understand, but in our culture, taking a second wife is not uncommon. It’s a sign of prosperity and...”

I cut him off with a bitter laugh, “Oh, spare me the cultural excuses, Mbuzo. This is about one thing and one thing only – your selfish desire to have your cake and eat it too.”

His eyes narrow at my accusation, “We spoke about this KaMadlala. I won't apologize for wanting to protect our family. If you can't accept that, then maybe we need to reconsider our marriage.”

“Is that a threat? Are you really willing to throw away everything we've built together over this?”

My finger points towards Lona.

He releases a sigh, “I don't want to lose you, but I can't abandon Lona. She was there when I had no one.”

Wow! And Lona is standing behind him, grinning like a freak.

“Then I guess you've made your choice, and don't expect me to stick around and watch as you destroy everything we had.” I say.

“Fine, I guess this is it.”

He takes Lona's hand, they begin to make their

way towards the door.

“I have one question.”

They stop at my words.

“How are you two going to sleep together? She will...”

He cuts in, “We will make a plan, don’t worry about us, KaMadlala.”

MXM!

Who said I was worried?

I don’t want to fight him, what if this time, I lose this baby.

It takes me a while to settle down on the chair, I bury my face in my hands and cry. A hand rubs my back.

“He doesn’t deserve you,” Nkosana says.

I thought they made peace.

“It’s not his fault, he must be bewitched again.”

Nkosana laughs, I look up at him... his eyes are watery.

“What’s funny?”

He wipes the tears off his face, “Tell me you’re not falling for that.”

That look on his face says I’m stupid.

“I know Mbuzo okay, I have seen the way he looks at me. That man is not him, he was bewitched.”

He dies of laughter, I can’t cry in peace. My tears are gone, I look this one in the eye, head-on.

I thought his bones broke when he fell in the water, where does he get the bones to laugh at me like that?

“I’m hurting and you’re laughing at me,” I say.

He composes himself, “Forgive me. My feelings

for you were always true, Cashile. Sure I was an ass, but never in a million years would I have treated you the way my twin brother has.”

“But you’re not perfect either, Nkosana. You lied to me and took my child. You even told me that you were thirty six years old, but you’re Mbuzo’s twin. From the get go, you approached me with bad intentions.”

It’s funny that he thinks he’s better than Mbuzo.

“I know and I’m sorry I used you to get back at my brother.”

“Well you were wrong, you put my child’s life in danger. I can’t even trust you with anything, the same man that convinced my child’s grandmother to work with him. How did you even do that? Mrs. Ngwenya loves Lulu, I trusted her with my baby.”

He looks at the ceiling and sighs, “I didn’t convince her to do anything, I just told her that

the Xaba brothers killed her son and she believed me. She also agreed because she's my aunt."

His what?

"You're related to Mrs. Ngwenya?"

"She's a distant relative of my mother, But that's not the reason she agreed to help me, she wanted to avenge her son's death." He says.

"But I loved Juba, he was my first love. Why would she want to punish me as well, by taking my child?"

He holds my hand, it doesn't help calm me down.

I want to roll my eyes at him.

"Aunt was just following my instructions, you were a perfect weapon to punish Mbuzo. From the day we were born, I have always been sidelined by our father. I wanted Mbuzo to feel what

I felt, taking you away from him was going to be my perfect revenge.”

As if I’m an object to be taken away and have no freewill.

Speaking of Mbuzo...

“Why was he here anyway, and with her?” I ask.

He shrugs and shifts his eyes away.

“It’s okay, you don’t have to tell me. Anyway, I’m leaving, going back to Joburg. I am done with the Xabas, including you.”

These people know how to ruin someone’s life, from Velaphi right down to his offspring.

Being pregnant is surely a punishment, it’s taking eons for me to get off this chair. This one is even holding my hand, I yank it away.

“Wait, don’t go. I will tell you.” He says.

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MBUZO

The least his brothers could do is understand him and where he is coming from. Why would they let such a small matter that can be resolved come between them?

“So when is the wedding?” Mkhetheni asks.

“Next Saturday,” he says, brushing Lona’s thigh. She’s seated beside him, her arm clutched around his. It’s a scene Mkhetheni and Mhloniphe can’t stand.

The twins sigh in unison.

“What’s the rush?” Mhlo asks.

They just announced their engagement two

seconds ago.

“There is no rush, we’ve been dating for long now.”

“What about Cashile?” Mkhetheni asks.

“What about her?”

“Good question baby, what about her? I was willing to share Mbuzo, but Cashile is too selfish and greedy. She wants him all to herself, right baby?” Lona says.

Mbuzo sighs, he’s tired of all the fights and never ending drama between him and Cashile.

“I gave her a choice and she chose to walk out of the marriage.”

“That’s bullshit,” Mhlo snaps at him. “She’s carrying your child.”

“Don’t you think I know that? I won’t abandon my child.” –Mbuzo.

Another giggle from Lona, “I’m going to be a

great stepmother.”

Mhloniphe stands and leaves the room, his twin is too stunned to move. He’s staring at the couple with raised brows.

“Are you sure this is what you want?” Mkhetheni asks.

“Yes,” –Mbuzo.

“Well then, all the best. I won’t be here for the wedding, I will be travelling to Europe to see MakaSbani.” Mkhetheni announces.

“Can’t you postpone? I need you for this Saturday. You’re my brother, you can’t miss my wedding.”

Mkhetheni gets off the chair, “No, I can’t postpone. She’s been waiting for me to come.”

And with that, he walks out, leaving them with their jaws dropped.

Lona cups Mbuzo’s face and pecks his lips,

“Don’t worry baby, Mhloniphe will be there.”

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CASHILE

Aunt Lindie is still expecting Mbuzo’s family, I didn’t tell her that we have separated. My bags are packed, I’m ready to go.

I will stay with my aunt for two days before flying to Joburg. Lulu is with her. I haven’t heard From Thuli in days.

The left side of my brain must be asleep because, how did I stay in this house for a week? It’s been hard especially with the wedding preparations, Lona is over the moon. She’s told everyone she can that she is getting married and from what I have heard, it’s going to be a

grand wedding.

Mbuzo has been sleeping in the guest room, this time it feels real. I know it's over for good, we will never get back together.

"Let me help you with that." Mhloniphe runs to me and takes my bag.

"Thanks," I say.

Why is he not moving? He's looking at me, clearly there is something on his mind.

"Are you sure about this?"

I've lost count of the number of times I have heard this question this week.

"I lost the only man I have ever loved, how can I be okay? But I will survive, such is life. Maybe love is not for me." I walk ahead of him, I don't want anyone convincing me to stay here.

It's only going to raise my blood pressure.

"Put that over there," I hear Lona's voice before I

get to the lounge.

She's directing some men where to put the new sofas she got, in a week, she has changed everything in this house. The curtains, the couches and had the house repainted.

"Can you believe Mbuzo is actually doing this?" Mhlo asks, he's standing beside me, also looking at Lona.

"I can," I tell him.

"Cashile!"

Oh God, she's coming this way. I turn to leave but she catches up, damn me and my swollen feet.

"Cashile, what do you think about this dress? I'm having it designed in Italy, it's going to be ready tomorrow." She's showing some ugly ass dress on a fashion magazine.

"It's ugly," I give her my honest opinion and

push her out of my way.

She waves me away.

“If it were up to me, we would have the wedding in Italy. But Mbuzo’s family is here, so.” She shouts after me, I don’t know what this girl wants from me because here she is, on my back.

“Thank you for giving him up for me, I promise to take care of him.”

Bitch!

I pick up my pace until I’m outside, her voice irritates me.

“Back off lady,” Mhloniphe tells her, she stops in the doorway

Mhloniphe puts my bag in the back seat, and opens the driver door for me. I’m about to go in when I see Mbuzo walk out of the house .

I can’t believe this is it, this is how it ends. He

approaches, his eyes glued on me.

I brace myself for whatever he's about to say to me, God-knows it's not going to be good. Oh God, like glue, Lona follows him.

"You're leaving?" He asks..

What does it look like?

"You can still change your mind, you know."

How do you slap a man in bulk?

"Stay for nonsense, you mean?" I snort at his words.

This man has the guts.

He folds his arms on his chest, "I had the annulment papers filed two days back. That way, we don't have to go through the process of divorce."

What does he want me to say about that? I am tired, my baby is tired. I just want to be left in peace with my children.

“You will let me know when the baby is due?”
Mbuzo adds.

Mbuzo’s words have Mhloniphe frowning.

“It’s your baby,” I shrug.

He’s nodding, can’t he just come out and say it?

“I loved you, KaMadlala. I really wish you were more open minded.” He says.

“You mean the way I was open minded about opening my legs for you? Bad idea, look where that got me.” I tell him.

“It’s your loss,” Lona says.

I’m getting out of here. I get in the car and drive out, it’s really the end of it all.

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[03/06, 15:54] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 102

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What a hectic week it's been, preparing for a wedding is not child's play. Especially a grand wedding that will make history.

The day has finally arrived, Lona stands before the vanity mirror, her reflection adorned in a stunning white gown, her bridesmaids flitting around her like busy bees.

"Wow, Lona, you look absolutely stunning!" Thandi is one of her closest friends and maid of honour.

All three of her bridesmaids have been singing praises to her. As they should, it is her day after all.

Lona smiles warmly at the compliment, "Thank

you, Thandi. Of course I look stunning, that was the plan.” She replies, her voice swimming in excitement.

“I can't believe today has finally arrived, I'm going to be Mrs. Xaba.”

“Have you written your vows yet? You don't want to leave it until the last minute. This wedding was rushed, remember.”

Sandi's comment darn near spoils Lona's mood, she glares at her friend through the mirror.

“The wedding wasn't rushed, Sandi. Mbuzo and I have been engaged for months. Don't you see this ring?” No one in this country hasn't seen the ring Lona's flashing.

“I'm finally going to marry the man of my dreams and the best part about it is that ugly pig Cashile is out of the way.”

It was a close call, she was living peacefully with her Joshua but Cashile had to come and

turn tables around.

Thandi rubs her back, “Don’t let anyone ruin your day baby. Think about that dashing man you’re about to marry. Mbuzo is one lucky guy to have you as his bride.”

Thandi just knows when to say the right thing.

“I have a question. What if Cashile comes back and stops your wedding? Don’t be upset babes, someone has to think out of the box. That’s her baby daddy, do you honestly think she will sit back and let this wedding take place?”

It seems Sandi was born with a big mouth.

Lona turns to face her, face cold as stone.

“She won’t come back and stop mentioning her.” Lona snaps.

“Sorry, I’m just looking out for a friend.” Sandi says, raising her hands in surrender.

Lona rakes her eyes over her body, her face

squeezed in disgust.

“The only thing you should be looking out for is that damn weight you failed to lose. What the hell, Sandi?” Her voice rises with each other.

Their other friend Zanele pulls Sandi away,
“That’s enough. Not today, please.”

Thandi pours them drinks, just to lighten the mood. Lona is too nervous to drink but she manages two glasses of champagne.

“How did you manage to get Mbuzo to finally put a ring on it?”

Sandi! Sandi! Sandi!

But Lona chuckles this time, it must be the alcohol. She gleams confidently as she adjusts her veil.

“Oh, you know, I just made it clear that he had no choice but to marry me,” she says.

Her friends erupt into laughter at her bold

declaration, their eyes widening in amazement.

“Seriously? You just told him he had no choice?”

Lona nods, her smile widening into a grin.

“Absolutely, sometimes you have to set boundaries. Let him know that you call the shots.” She smiles with pride.

Sandi shakes her head in amazement, “Show us wena girl. You really are something else.”

Lona shrugs modestly, but there's a twinkle of satisfaction in her eyes as she gazes at herself in the mirror. “Hey, when you know what you want, you go after it with everything you've got,” she says confidently. “And now, I'm about to marry the man of my dreams. So yeah, I'd say it was worth it.”

There's a knock at the door, “I'll get it. It could be my husbae.”

Lona says, grinning with excitement.

She pulls the door open and her smile slowly fades.

“Thuli? What are you doing here?”

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MBUZO

“Do you think this tie is sitting right?” Mbuzo asks Mhloniphe, nerves have him by the neck and Mhloniphe cannot understand why he’s nervous when he’s only marrying Lona.

“Does it matter?” Mhlo , he’s slumped on the couch with a bottle of Heineken in hand.

Mbuzo stands before the mirror, adjusting his tie with nervous fingers. Mhlo watches him with

a concerned expression.

He shakes his head, his brow furrowed in disapproval.

“Have you really thought this through? You barely know this woman. Are you sure she's the right one for you?” –Mhlo.

“I know all I need to know, my heart chose her and that's it. I'm going to marry her, ndoda.”

Mhlo gags, had he been heavily drunk right now, he would have thrown up on the spot.

“You are going to regret this, I won't even bother saying I told you so. You selectively destroy your own life, Mbuzo. Sometimes I fear that Velaphi's spirit lives in you. Should I call someone, you need prayers wena.”

“Say whatever you want. That woman has done so much for me, and I'm not going to let anyone talk me out of marrying her.”

Mhlo sighs heavily, there's concern on his expression.

He puts his beer on the table and stands.

"You are making the same mistake your father did when he abandoned the doctor. Your child will grow up resenting you and the children you're going to have with that woman. That's if you will be able to break the blood oath. Do you really want to bring someone like Lona into our lives?"

Mbuzo turns to face his brother, "I am going to marry her. There is nothing you can do to change my mind."

Mhlo realizes that Mbuzo is hard headed, his attempt to persuade him has fallen on deaf ears. He sits back down and goes back to drinking his beer.

"Mkhotheni is gone, I'm the only one you have left because I care. I don't want you to make a

mistake.”

Mbuzo gives him a nod, “And I am grateful, I just wish you would support me with this as well. I’m marrying that woman Mhlo and I’m not going to let anyone stand in my way.”

With that, Mbuzo straightens his tie one final time and squares his shoulders as he turns to face his brother.

“I’m ready, let’s go.”

Mhlo rolls his eyes, and chucks down his beer.

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His hands are clammy and his heart is pounding in his chest. He’s been throwing nervous glances towards the door, if his bride does not show up now, he will faint right at this altar.

The venue is filled with a hushed silence,

broken only by the occasional whisper of the guests seated in the pews.

The people present were invited by prestige and just to fill up the seats. Lona doesn't have much of a family.

Glancing around, Mbuzo catches sight of uncle Mpiyakhe, sitting in the front row, he's fast asleep and snoring like a generator.

He feels a gentle touch on his arm, it's his groomsman, Mhloniphe.

"There is still time, Ndoda. Are you really doing this?" Mhlo whispers. Mbuzo meets his brother's gaze, "It's too late to try and convince me, don't you think?"

"You can still run." Mhlo says.

"I'm marrying her, Mhlo and we are going to spend the rest of our lives together."

"Marriage is a big step, and I don't want to see

you get hurt. Ngenile-ngenile.” –Mhlo.

Mbuzo nods, “I appreciate your concern, but I know in my heart that this is the right choice for me.”

He’s tried, there’s no convincing him. Mhlo gives his brother a supportive pat on the shoulder, there is nothing else he can do to change his mind.

Mhlo’s eyes catch a glimpse of Mbali walking in, with her is her mother and Cashile’s aunt. They sit right at the back like unwanted visitors.

“What are they doing here? Don’t tell me you invited KaMadlala’s family.” Mhlo is in utter shock. “Please tell me you didn’t invite KaMadlala too.”

Mbuzo is capable of doing that.

Mhlo sees Mkhetheni striding in, wearing a suit. He comes to stand next to him.

Before Mhlo can speak, the bride's song fills the places.

Mbuzo's breath catches in his throat and his pulse quickens with excitement. He watches with a bated breath the guests rise to their feet, their eyes trained on the entrance, eagerly awaiting the arrival of his bride.

Suddenly, the doors swing open, and there she is – his bride, in a princess dress and veiled in a delicate white veil, her face hidden from view.

"I'm going to need a bucket, I think I'm going to throw." Mhlo grumbles, turning his gaze away.

Mbuzo hears him and pays him no attention, this is his moment.

His bride begins her slow procession down the aisle, his gaze never wavers from her, his eyes locked on her every movement.

And as she finally reaches the altar, and stands before him, his hands tremble slightly as he lifts

her veil to reveal her face. Mbuzo's heart skips a beat at the sight of her radiant smile.

Mhlo's eyes bulge when he eventually turns to them.

"KaMadlala?" He whispers in shock.

Cashile smiles, her eyes glowing with tears.

"I don't understand, how? I thought you two broke up." He says.

Mbuzo pats his brother on the shoulder, "I told you I was going to marry her, KaMadlala is the only woman for me."

"You guys played us? Where is Lona?" Mhlo asks.

Mbuzo glances at Cashile and takes her hands in his. "I will let KaMadlala explain after the wedding, this was her plan after all."

Mhlo takes a long breath and falls back on a chair, chuckling, "I hate you two. Inhliziyo yami

cishe yama. My heart almost stopped."

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[03/06, 15:54] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 103

CASHILE

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Getting married while weighing more than two men is not how I envisioned myself. I wanted to wait until the baby is born, but we don't always get what we want.

My aunt was against it when I told her Mbuzo and I were getting married in a week, until the Xaba delegates came to pay their dues. He paid both damages and lobola, I know now what they mean when they say money talks.

It's been an exhausting week, believe it or not, pretending can be taxing. That aside, I was up and down planning a wedding while trying not to get caught.

Mbuzo was in charge of picking suits for himself and his brothers, while Thuli and I focused on the ladies. Mbali and Nompilo are my bridesmaids.

Thuli is my maid of honor, she's out doing what

maids of honor do best.

She was with me at my aunt's last night and this morning, it's where everyone got ready for the wedding. We left the place with a whole convoy of cars behind us.

The drama is over, the wedding has to start. We booked the venue for a few hours. I go out so I can walk down the aisle again, uncle Balungile will be walking me. It should be my brother or my father, I couldn't get a hold of Bakhe and my father is missing. Lulu is the flower girl, she walks in first.

"Our perfect wedding is here, they are going to cover your wedding." Mbali says with urgency in her voice. I turn around and there they are, the whole camera crew at my wedding.

I'm confused because I did not write to the TV show.

"Umakoti ungowethu, siyavuma."

That's Nomsa Buthelezi and she's dancing her way towards me, this is awkward. I figure the cameras are already rolling.

She greets and tells me what Mbali has already told me.

"We didn't write to the show, sisi." I say.

It's really not my style, why would I want my wedding televised?

"Someone did, and we are here. We have to do the show," she says.

Eish!

"Mbali, please go and ask Mbuzo if he knows anything about this."

Her phones rings as she starts to make her way into the hall, she stops and answers it. We're running out of time.

Mbali looks at me and holds out her cellphone,
"It's Thuli."

My heart jumps, has something happened?

“Mfazi...”

She cuts in, “Is Our Perfect Wedding there?”

Lord, she didn’t.

“Thuli, why didn’t you tell me?”

“I wanted it to be a surprise friend, the whole country must know that you two are off the market.”

Yep! It can only be her. How dramatic can she be?

This is overwhelming.

“Let them broadcast your wedding Mfazi, it’s going to be fun. Make sure they don’t leave before I get there, my future husband might be watching.” Thuli excitedly says and hangs up.

I have no choice, maybe it will be fun.

“Okay, let’s do it.”

Nomsa smiles, “Amazing. We will do the interview when you come back from your honeymoon. There is a honeymoon right?”

I hear laughs around me, Thuli made sure there is a honeymoon.

My answer is yes.

“We will have to do everything from scratch, dress fitting, cake tasting... but after the wedding.”

I’m exhausted just hearing her say all this, “We’ll talk after the wedding. Right now, I have a man waiting for me at the altar.”

They laugh, Thuli is going to pay for this. Her time to get married will come one day.

It’s time for me to walk down the aisle, I opted for a song to be played instead of the old traditional wedding song. Ruelle *I get to love

you* starts playing, I hold on to my uncle and we begin our walk.

Aunt Lindie starts ululating, aunt Hluphekile joins her. It's starting to sound like they are competing. They should be saving this for the traditional wedding.

Sigh! I focus on my husband, he's looking at the camera people with confusion on his face, then he looks at me. I will explain later.

"Marriage is not a piece of cake."

Are we supposed to be talking?

"I know baba," I say.

"You're going to be staying with a man 24/7."

I'm losing focus here, I'm supposed to keep my eyes on Mbuzo.

"You will be annoyed by the way he snores and chews, sometimes he won't come home early. You might even catch him staring at another

woman.”

Is this uncle trying to scare me? I’m having second thoughts, now.

“I hear you.”

“Okay, just know you have a father in me. When things get tough and you feel like coming home, your aunty and I will be there.”

Uncle Balungile has succeeded in making me cry.

“Thank you baba,” my voice trembles.

We’ve made it to the altar, he glares at Mbuzo, this man I’m about to marry for the umpteenth time rubs the back of his neck. It’s good that my uncle is scaring him, so he knows I am not alone in this world.

“I used to be a hunter back in my day, don’t ever make my little girl cry.” That’s my uncle calling me a little girl.

Mbuzo nods and reaches out to take my hand, he pushes his hand back and that has people laughing.

Mbuzo looks terrified, I'm trying not to laugh.

"Basop mfana wami!" Uncle Balungile.

We don't choose family, I'm convinced that they surely choose us just for this reason. To embarrass us, he eventually gives me away.

The priest begins the ceremony, his voice resonating through the hall as he speaks of love, commitment, and the sacred bond of marriage. I'm getting bored, he just threw in a verse and now he's preaching. How is Jonah being swallowed by a fish related to love?

Mbuzo sees me yawning and frowns but there's also a faint smile in it.

He mouths, "Behave."

Yeah, I'm trying. Had he not been holding my hands, I'd literally fall.

The time comes for us to exchange vows, Mbuzo goes first.

"Cashile... KaMadlala, I have loved you since the first time we met. You were my friend first, then my lover, then you became my wife. I'm the luckiest man to have a best friend, a lover and wife all bundled up in this beautiful woman.

This day, our unborn baby and this ring are my way of showing the world what has been in my heart for as long as I have known you. I love you, Cashile Madlala. My love for you is timeless."

I'm going to ruin my makeup with all this crying.

I squeeze his hands... he faintly smiles and winks at me.

"Mbuzowakhe, you are my rock, my soulmate, and my best friend. I promise to stand by your side through thick and thin, to support you in

your dreams and aspirations, and to love you with every beat of my heart, for as long as we both shall live.”

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Meanwhile....

Lona runs through the church doors in a frantic haze, her footsteps echoing through the half empty hall. The décor is as she ordered, the close church members she invited made it and they kept to the theme. Nothing can be embarrassing as this.

She drove here after Thuli showed her Mbuzo and Cashile’s wedding, all in the comfort of her hotel room.

It must be a nightmare because there is no way

in hell Mbuzo would do this to her, not after everything she's done to keep him.

Thuli follows closely behind, watching Lona's reaction with satisfaction.

Heaving and two seconds from bursting with anger, Lona turns to her cousin.

"I'm sorry, Lona, perhaps this is for the best. Mbuzo never truly belonged to you, after all." Her voice lacks sympathy.

Lona's eyes flash with hurt at her cousin's words, her fists clenching at her sides as she struggles to contain her emotions.

"How can you say that, Thuli? Mbuzo and I were supposed to be together. He promised me," - Lona.

Thuli's lips curl into a smug smile, "Promises are easily broken, Lona but the truth remains, Mbuzo was never yours to begin with. He belongs with Cashile, and deep down, you know

it's true."

That's bullshit!

Lona's chest tightens, she falls back on a chair crying.

"Why would you do this to me?"

"I'm only looking out for a friend." Thuli answers.

"You're my cousin, your loyalty should lie with me," Lona snaps.

"Yes, that's why I'm stopping you from making the biggest mistake of your life. How do you think your marriage was going to pen out? You blackmailed Mbuzo into marrying you, you cannot force a man to love you." –Thuli.

Lona's shoulders slump in defeat, tears pricking at the corners of her eyes.

"He's going to pay for this, I will have him arrested and sentenced to prison for a very long time."

Thuli sits beside her, “No baby, he won’t. Mbuzo was never involved in your shenanigans.”

This is shocking to Lona, her eyes widen as she looks at her cousin smirking at her.

“What do you mean? What have you people done?” She screams.

“I told your parents what you’ve been up to, I even sent them screenshots of the nudes you sent to another woman’s husband. You know how daddy loves the Lord, you’re in deep shit baby. You didn’t even tell them you were getting married.” Thuli chuckles.

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CASHILE

Being Mrs. Xaba comes with its perks. I know

that because this is not my first time holding this title. I know without a shadow of a doubt that Mbuzo and I have a long way to go in terms of understanding each other. He's not perfect, neither am I, and it's fine. Relationships have its ups and downs, it doesn't mean we should give up on each other. Velaphi the ancestor will not be happy about this, that's another thing I know for a fact.

I'm in the bridal room with my bridal team, retouching my makeup, it's interview after interview with OPW, I can never get used to this.

I have to ask the camera people to leave when Mbuzo and the brothers arrive. Mhloniphe was probably pushing him for answers, the first person his eyes run to is Mbali. I see the looks she keeps exchanging with Mhlo. These two are even sitting next to each other.

"It started the day I found nude photos on Mbuzo's phone," I start.

“I didn’t look at them, KaMadlala was the first one to open the pictures. I made her believe that I had seen them just so there could be conflict between us, I had a reason of course. I wanted to start a fight, to make Lona believe that things were not going well between us so she could let her guard down.” Mbuzo says, he’s standing against the door.

His brothers frown in confusion, “And it worked. I really thought you were an asshole.”

Only Mhlo can be this open.

“But he told me everything that day. It turns out Lona had sent evidence to a trusted source that Mbuzo has been scheming insurance companies. She used that to blackmail him into marrying her. So we came up with the plan to make everyone believe that we are breaking up and for good this time.” I say.

I wasn’t happy when he told me about the type

of job he does, I've been there before. Crime surely doesn't pay.

Mbuzo gives me an apologetic look, we had a fallout about this job of his. I made him promise to stop, we have a family now.

"So while Lona was occupied with planning a wedding, I was busy clearing my name. I'm no longer part of the company, everything that could lead me to the syndicate has been erased, and I found the source that had evidence. I paid an arm and a leg to get him to give me the evidence." Mbuzo explains.

"But you should have told us, I know how to act." -Mhloniphe.

I know he does but...

"We had to make sure that everyone's emotions on the breakup was real, to make it believable. Lona had been planning to come to the village, she's smart, she was going to pick up on

something.” -Me.

Mkhotheni has been quiet, he’s not a talker yes, but I would like to know what he’s thinking. He sees me looking at him and faintly nods in approval.

I don’t know what that means.

“And you planned a wedding in a week and kept it a secret? I’m still stuck on that, sorry.” Mbali says.

I love my aunt Hluphekile, but I didn’t trust her not to spread the news. Aunt Lindie is a different story, she doesn’t know anyone in the village whom she can boast to.

“The day he told me what was happening, and while Lona was planning her wedding, I was planning mine as well with Thuli’s help. The fight in Nkosana’s room was important, we wanted him to tell us what his connection was. The first time I bumped into Mbuzo and Lona,

Nkosana already knew that Mbuzo was alive. The man was always a step ahead, he wanted Lona to work with him. She agreed, but changed her mind.”

“Why?” –Mkhotheni.

I look at Mbuzo, I hate to say this.

“She told Nkosana that she loves Mbuzo and he wasn’t going to leave her because she had a hold on him.”

So much has happened from the day I met Mbuzo and Lona, the dinner party at Thuli’s. I knew there was a reason Nkosana was there, they had planned it with Lona.

There’s a knock at the door, it’s the OPW lady. They have somewhere to be after this, we will have a talk some other time.

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The wedding reception is almost over and Thuli hasn't arrived. She sent me a message saying she's on her way. The old people and kids are gone, now the party can begin. Aunt Hluphekile took a sleeping Lulu home with her.

One dance with Mbuzo and my feet are killing me, I can't continue with everyone on the dancefloor.

The OPW team wants us outside for a little interview, Mbuzo almost fainted when he saw them. He's hesitant about the interview, I drag him outside and ask him to behave.

He holds my dress as we make our way out of the hall. This is nerve wrecking, having these cameras pointing at us.

"Congratulations Mr and Mrs Xaba." Nomsa begins.

"Thank you." Mbuzo nods instead of saying thank you.

“What a beautiful day guys.” –Nomsa.

She goes on to ask about our wish list, dress, décor and everything.

I don't know about Mbuzo but everything went well for a wedding that was planned at last minute.

“I want to see the stop nonsense, show the people that you both are off the market.”

She means our wedding rings, I lift mine, Mbuzo is camera shy or he doesn't like his business aired for the world to see. But he lifts his hand, he smiles brightly as our eyes meet.

Can he keep that smile till they leave?

Nomsa glances at Mbuzo, “How do you feel now that you are married to the love of your life?”

“Fine,” he can't be serious.

I pinch his side, I hope the camera did not catch

that.

He clears his throat, he better be preparing for round two.

He looks down at me, “I’m happy, as you said, she is the love of my life. I can’t wait to spend forever with her.”

That’s better, I’m a smiling bride now.

“On that beautiful note, Mr and Mrs Xaba, was this your perfect wedding?” Nomsa asks.

I want to laugh because that’s always been my reaction when watching the show.

“I’m not saying it,” Mbuzo mumbles through gritted teeth.

“You have to say it and smile.” I whisper back.

They show us which camera to look at, I hope this man is also smiling. The world is watching.

“Yeeeess! This was our perfect, perfect, perfect wedding.”

He said one perfect.

SMH!

It's Nomsa's turn, "Pop mabhodlela, pop champagne, bashadile abantu. Our perfect wedding, sishadisa betele." (We host the best weddings)

"Mbuzo, Mbuzo baby."

And then?

How did this one find us? I thought Thuli had it handled. The cameras turn to her, why are they still here?

My heart stops for two seconds, I'm ready for Lona. She's running towards us, still in a wedding gown.

Her makeup is smudged, one can tell she's been crying. But damn, black Barbie still looks good.

I see Thuli behind her, she mouths an apology.

"I can't believe you Mbuzo, how can you choose this fat pig over me?" She screams, pointing a finger at me.

Mbuzo opens his mouth to speak but I beat him to it, "At least I didn't buy my hips and ass from Temu. It's all original baby."

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[03/06, 15:54] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 104

MHLONIPHE

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Europe is not a place for a man like Mkhetheni, he will get tired of the cold and whatever food they eat that side and come back home. After all, there is no place like home.

It's been a month since he left, Mhlo gave him a week and said he will be back by then. But his twin has proved him wrong, Maka'Sbani must be keeping him warm because, what the hell?

He's been walking around looking like a piece of him is missing, they are 38 years old for crying out loud.

Why is it so difficult to function without his brother? Even with Mbuzo and Cashile around.

Mbali has been warming his bed, their chemistry is undeniable. He's done fighting his feelings for her, age difference be damned.

They have something going on and he wants to see where it lead them to.

Mbali easily expresses herself, more with words

while Mhloniphe lets his actions speak for him.

Love is a word far from his mind, maybe the feeling is there, he is not entirely sure.

Mhloniphe leaves Mbali cuddled up under his covers and drags his feet to the kitchen where he finds uncle Mpiyakhe eating last night's pap and sausage.

Jesus of Nazareth! It's six in the morning.

"Mshana."

"What's for breakfast?" Mhloniphe asks.

He shrugs, taking big bites of sausage. It's too early for beer, then again this is uncle Mpiyakhe.

Mhlo pulls a chair and sits opposite him, he's rubbing his temples and grunting in pain.

"Hangover, mshana?"

"No, I just have a headache." He says.

"When is your twin coming back?" –uncle

Mpiyakhe.

“I don’t know, maybe never.” He sounds depressed.

Uncle Mpiyakhe’s eyes follow him as he leaves his seat and saunters to the counter to make coffee.

“Is that why you keep letting that young girl sleep here? You are taking advantage of your brother’s absence.”

Mbali has been around since Friday, her excuse to her mother was that she is here to help Cashile because she is close to her due date.

Anyway, uncle Mpiyakhe is entering dangerous territory, Mhlo is not fazed.

“Is Mbuzo around?” –Mhlo.

“No, he went out for a walk with KaMadlala.”

It’s part of their routine, the walks help with dilation.

“I want to talk to you and your brothers about your father.” Uncle Mpiyakhe randomly says, there is a hint of urgency in his voice.

“What, does he have a request?” Mhlo asks with a chuckle as he sits down with his coffee.

“No, it’s about his presence here.”

Okay, he looks worried. Uncle Mpiyakhe never looks worried.

“What is it?” Mhlo urges.

He sighs, “Your father wants what is best for you.”

This is the part where Mhlo laughs like a hyena, but he clicks his tongue instead and sips his coffee.

“Do you have anything serious to tell me, uncle? I have things to do.”

“This is serious, Mhlo. I knew my brother better than anyone, I knew his heart. A bad person

doesn't become good just because they crossed over."

This is suddenly concerning.

Mhlo's brows furrow with wonder, "What has he done now?"

Velaphi is one restless spirit. What kind of RIP does he not understand?

"The problem is not you, it's KaMadlala. My brother had a deep hatred for her because she was a threat to his future."

This is news.

"Explain," Mhlo says, as he lets out a deep sigh and leans back on the chair, arms crossing over his chest.

Uncle's eyes are filled with concern, "You know KaMadlala has been accepted into the family, traditionally. The ancestors approved, except your father."

Mhlo laughs this time around, “Go figure. Selfish Velaphi is at it again.”

“It’s not selfishness, but hatred. He lived with it and died with it. Velaphi’s spirit was brought into the yard to protect and bring fortune.”

–Uncle.

“Unfortunately.”

That’s what Ngwemabala did, or said he did.

“And he will never disappoint, but KaMadlala is not safe here. Mbuzo doesn’t want to go back to Juburg, you have to convince him to leave for her sake, either that or we send my brother back to the cemetery.”

“How do you know this?” Mhlo asks.

“I was burning incense in the ancestral hut yesterday, I needed clarity on a personal matter. I had a dream of my brother packing a baby’s clothes into a suitcase.”

It's not like he can interpret dreams, he's just a drunkard. But the dream leaves Mhlo worried.

What does Velaphi have to do with baby clothes?

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CASHILE

Whoever said pregnancy hormones will urge me to have sex every second of the day must come here and tell my husband why I don't want him touching me, let alone rubbing against me.

I'm in my last trimester, eight months pregnant to be precise. This baby is due anytime, if it were for me, I would have it sooner than yesterday.

What a hefty price to pay for opening my legs to a man.

This same man has been grumpy like he's the one who has to walk around with a human inside him.

Mhlo and Mbali are not home, neither is uncle Mpiyakhe. He stays here, no one knows if it's permanent or he plans on going back to his home. Wherever that is. The walk was longer today, we did a few workouts.

Mbuzo was bubbly and smiles when we left, his mood changed on our way back. He strides to the bedroom and I direct myself to the kitchen. I'm hungry, I want real food, not bread.

There's a full grilled chicken from Woolworths, Mbali bought it yesterday but because Mhlo cooked, she abandoned it.

I put it in the microwave, and pour a glass of fanta orange. The chicken will go well with rolls.

I'm heaving by the time I sit with my food, I want to eat fast. Mbuzo hates it when I drink fizzy

drinks in the morning.

Here he comes, couldn't he wait a little longer?

"Hey baby."

He goes to the fridge, no eye contact whatsoever. That's the attitude of someone who didn't get it all this morning.

I focus on eating, he will be strong.

"When are we going back to Juburg?"

I don't want to be a village wife, and living in his father's home. We spoke about this, came out with no conclusion. And by the way he keeps avoiding my question, tells me that he is not ready to go back. Either that, or he has no plans of going back at all.

Our wedding was two months ago, we haven't gone to our honeymoon. I refuse to go on holiday while breathing like it's my last. Our wedding was never featured on OPW because

we didn't agree to do the interview and all the other mambo-jumbo they wanted us to. We were also not sure if they weren't going to add the scene where Lona crashed our wedding.

Speaking of, her parents came and took her. I forgot where Thuli said they were from, it's irrelevant. What matters is that Lona is out of our lives.

Nkosana... not exactly. The brothers want him part of the family, he's in jail. I'm not ready for him to come out yet

I haven't gotten my answer, "Mbuzo, I asked you a question."

"I don't know," he says after a long sigh.

His mood swings will send me into early labor.

What's this?

He's mixing a plate of yoghurt, peanut butter and honey. He adds lemon juice and raisins. Is

he going to... Oh God, he just tasted and is doing a happy dance with a smile on his face.

“Is that tasty?” I want a taste too.

The look he gives me, like I want to take away his favourite toy.

I fetch a spoon in the drawer, he pushes my hand away just as I go for a scoop.

“Eat your cereal, I’m not sharing.”

I have a stingy husband.

He takes a seat and digs in, the look of satisfaction that comes on his face each time he nibbles on a spoonful.

I’m worried, “Are you okay?”

He gives me a nod that I do not buy, he’s invested in that yoghurt cocktail and making sounds while at it.

“I think we should consult, I’m worried about you.” What he is doing is not normal.

He stops and lifts his eyes to me, “You think I’m bewitched.”

Is he not?

I tell him the story uncle Mpiyakhe told me, his face is full of confusion as I narrate.

What is this now?

“You’re crying?” There are tears in his eyes, either he is bewitched or he has ADHD.

He sniffs as he rubs his eyes, I think of running away because, what is this man showing me?

“Mbuzo, the curse was removed. It’s no longer effective, you are free from your father’s curse.”

Thanks to me.

He lifts his face to the ceiling, blinking back stubborn tears.

“I know.” He sniffles, a bubble pops out of his nose.

This old man is legit crying.

“Then stop crying,” I head to him and pull him in for a hug.

Wait, is he sniffing me?

He looks up at me frowning, then gags. I quickly move back, is he on the verge of vomiting?

“Were you eating chicken?” He looks disgusted as he asks, I’m offended. My chicken smelt nice and tasted better.

“Yes,” I point at my plate to show him.

He looks more disgusted as he covers his nose and runs to the sink...

Damn, he’s throwing up.

“Mbuzo, are you pregnant?” He better be pregnant, or we will have a problem, my food does not smell.

He gags louder, emptying his stomach's contents in the sink.

Yep, a standing ovation for me. First woman to get a man pregnant.

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[03/06, 15:54] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 105

CASHILE

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I'm nursing a 33-year old man with course hair in all the places that can possibly grow hair.

He's in bed, grumbling and crying of a headache and nausea. I've made my own version of a broth, it had carrots, diced onions and chicken pieces, and beef stock cubes—you can never go wrong with beef stock no matter how bad of a cook you are.

Sigh!

He threw it up, it was the chicken—I know it was the chicken. I've been dapping his forehead with a warm towel, it's what I have been doing the whole morning. He's not that sick and that I'm sure of. In all my years of knowing Mbuzo, I have never seen or heard that he was ever sick, not even a case of flu. This is probably his first time, it would explain why he is being a drama queen.

I leave a wet towel on his forehead and step out of the bedroom to call my aunt. I don't have a mother to run to, plus, I'm not close with aunt Lindie and MaGumede; uncle Balungile's wife.

The phone rings unanswered, I try again because I'm not about to relax and not call back when my daughter is with her.

"Lulu you're going to drop that, put it down."

This is aunt Hluphekile answering the phone.

Lulu is growing and becoming more of a terrorist than a child.

I haven't heard from Mrs. Ngwenya, if she ever shows her face, I will be on speed dial with the police.

"Hello," aunt says after her shouting marathon with Lulu.

"What is she doing? Please beat her, she won't listen until you do." I tell her.

She chuckles, "She wouldn't be like this if you were disciplining her. If her mother can't hit her, what will I do?"

I know I don't beat my child, I just need

someone else to do it for me. I don't have it in me to lay a hand on her.

"How is she aunty?" It's been almost a week without my baby, I miss her.

"Troublesome, but she is fine."

"I'm coming to fetch her today, I miss her." I tell her, knowing still that she won't be happy about this.

Aunt Hluphekile is lonely, her husband died, Mbali is grown and has no time for her. I should find her a man.

"Can't I stay with her another week? Lulu's always with you and I barely ever see, she was shy when we first met after two months of not seeing each other." She says and sighs in the end.

"I will bring her back, I promise." This is a blatant lie, she will see her when we decide to visit her again. I have gotten so used to having

Lulu around, it's hard to be without her.

"Okay, I will get her ready."

That means my child looks like a zombie wherever she is, crusty and dusty.

"Will Nonkosi be fetching her?" She asks.

"No aunty, I will fetch her myself. Mbuzo is not feeling well."

The gasp bathong!

"What's wrong with my son in-law?"

It's as if I said he's dying, she needs to breathe. No man has ever been this favoured by an in-law, what a lucky man Mbuzo is.

MXM!

"I don't know aunty, he's been eating strange food and vomiting. He has mood swings too," I don't like his attitude.

"Are you feeding your husband restaurant

food?" Aunt ignores the part where her favourite son in-law has mood swings.

She has this notion that I got married to slave in the kitchen for a man, this man cooks better than me. What's actually worse is that, he got me pregnant and now I must cater to his snobbish stomach?

Who was wronged here?

"I cook aunty, I made him a full breakfast then pap after that. But he wants yoghurt," I'm not about to be a bad wife in her eyes, I'd rather lie.

"Then take him to the clinic, mntanami. Something must be wrong."

Well yeah!

"His symptoms are that of a pregnant woman, do you think...."

"Hayi, hayi, hayi Cashile!" She whisper shouts, shock evident in her voice. "You don't say that

about a man, there are things you don't say about a man, my child."

What she means is that "you don't say about Mbuzo" this woman worships him.

I swallow my sigh because... well, she always has something to say.

"Okay aunty, I will take him to the clinic. Please get Lulu ready, I will let you know when I'm on my way."

I end the call at the sound of footsteps heading this way, Mhlo appears around the corner. He smiles, while I'm thinking of a way to avoid him. It's hard for me to be around him knowing he's sleeping with my cousin.

"Dade, I'm taking the little-one on a date." He sounds and looks awkward, that head scratch says it all.

Does he know what a date is?

He's never called Mbali little one when talking to me, but I've heard him call her that and by the looks of it, she's been called that for a while.

"Okay," I don't know what to say.

There's a moment of silence, I'm hoping this is awkward for him as it is for me. You're dating my little cousin, dude.

"Uh... A plumber will come." That's so random.

"Is there a blockage?" I ask.

"No, he's here to change the sink. Your husband vomited in our sink."

He can't be serious... oh he is and there's a look of disgust on his face.

"He's your brother, you two sucked milk from the same breast."

He's Mhloniphe, free spirited. I can say things like this to him.

He's disgusted, "Nope! I was there first. I don't do left overs"

Mhloniphe Xaba is full of himself as fuck.

His face transforms into a grave expression, always panic when clowns like Mhloniphe become serious.

"Everything okay?"

"I need to talk to you and Mbuzo."

I don't like it when people swiftly change, my head is thinking the worst.

I open the bedroom door and walk in first.

"KaMadlala," Mbuzo is calling out to me with his eyes closed and face pinched. Not even Lulu has ever acted this way.

"I'm here baby, Mhlo too."

His eyes shoot open, a frown shows up on his face as he looks at his brother before he's closing them again.

“Iscefe sakho ndoda. Stop being a starring and get up, you’re stressing my sister in-law.”

Please tell him Mhlo.

Mbuzo clicks his tongue when Mhlo slaps his legs.

“I think I have piles, it feels like something wants to come out of...”

Ahem...

“Let’s go to the clinic Nonkosi before this thing of yours worsens.”

This must stop!

I take his hand, pulling him to a sitting position. He’s not working with me here, his body is tense—it feels like I’m trying to lift a very heavy object.

“Mbuzo, I can’t carry you and this baby inside me at the same time.”

He quickly sits up, his shoulders slumping, then

smiles at me.

“I want ice-cream.”

I’m not falling for that grin.

“You don’t eat ice-cream,” Mhlo disputes and yes, Mbuzo does not have a sweet tooth.

“I do now and I want it,” –Mbuzo.

“We don’t have ice cream at home, we’d have to go out and buy it.” I’m saying this in hopes that he will drop it.

“Will you go, ndoda?” -Mbuzo.

Mhlo coughs out the word “Bullshit!”

That leaves me, “I’m fetching Lulu from my aunt’s. I’ll pass by the garage on our way back.”

Did I say I will go? Why is Mbuzo sulking now?

“You’re going to leave me alone?”

Hayi ndoda!

“You want ice cream or not?” I ask, and that

shuts him up.

“Grab him panties and a bra as well, here’s the money. It’s on me,” Mhloniphe says, handing me R200. I take it not because I agree with him that my husband is acting like a drama queen, but my number one rule is never say no to money.

“You’re not funny Mhlo, what are you doing here, anyway?” Mbuzo asks, he’s getting out of bed and moving like every bone in his body hurts. He stretches out his hand to me, I take it so to help him up but his plan is to wrap his arms around me.

Mhlo rolls his eyes, “Shoot me when I turn into a marshmallow.”

I laugh, he’s funny. Mbuzo gives me a look.

“It’s funny baby, you should see yourself. I will take a video and show you when you are better.” That’s a promise.

“I need to talk to you guys when I return,” Mhlo says, striding towards the door while answering his ringing phone.

“What about?” Mbuzo.

He doesn’t get an answer, Mhloniphe is gone.

This one is gaging again, he sits back on the bed with his hand pressed over his mouth.

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The sun has set but it’s not dark yet, I don’t know how I lost track of time. I have to get Lulu from my aunt’s.

I walk in the bedroom to inform Mbuzo that I am leaving, he’s sitting on a chair with a laptop on his lap. My first thought is that he’s doing that dodgy business of his, I won’t accept any crime in this house.

“Why are you out of bed?” This is my second thought.

He looks fine and strong, not that jub-jub he was hours ago. He smiles as his eyes crash into mine.

“Why would I be in bed?”

Jesus! He even sounds like Samson before Delilah cut off his hair.

“I don’t know, maybe because you were sick.” I stand behind him and massage his shoulders just to see what he’s doing on the laptop. I’m not a computer wizard, I can’t see anything that makes sense in my head.

He’s moaning and throwing his head back, this is not a serious massage.

“That feels good, move further down.” I’m being ordered around. “You have never given me a massage before, KaMadlala. It feels good, we should do it more often.”

We or I?

What have I gotten myself into?

Let me put my escape out there, “I’m going to get Lulu from my aunt’s. I’ve dished up for you, your food is in the microwave.”

He probably won’t eat.

“I will come with you, I can’t let you drive alone at night.” He laces his left hand with my right hand before he closes the laptop and stands.

I won’t ask if he’s feeling better, he looks fine and there are no signs of mood swings.

I want to drive my car, I haven’t been driving in a while. This stay at home, bed rest thing is not for me. Mhlo and Mbali are still on their date, I thought he was joking about changing the kitchen sink. A guy actually came with a new sink, courtesy of Mhlo. We have a new kitchen sink, I’m speechless.

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We arrive, Lulu is playing outside with two kids. You know umntana kagogo when you see one, her face is shining like Joburg at night.

She runs to me and I almost stagger as she throws her arms around my legs. My hug lasts a second, she's pouncing like a Kangaroo in front of Mbuzo, with her arms held high.

Mbuzo lifts her up and spins her around.

"What did you bring for me?" Lulu asks.

I leave them to it, children always want to be brought something. My aunt steps out of the house, she's also an ambassador of Vaseline. I can even smell the dove soap she bathed with and the Vaseline.

"Why are you fetching the child late at night?"

She asks.

It's not seven yet.

"I was cooking for Mbuzo," like she said I should.

She looks over me and smiles, "You didn't tell me you were coming with son in-law."

There is no reason for her to be nervous, he's not intimidating.

"It was a last minute thing," I say.

Mbuzo approaches with Lulu still in his arms.

"Sanibonani," he greets.

Aunt is all smiles, this is how my mother should have been around her son in-law.

"KaMadlala said you were sick, you didn't have to come all the way."

Judas!

I feel Mbuzo tense, he wouldn't want people to

know that about him.

“It was nothing big Ma, I’m fine.” He says.

“You can come in, there is food inside.”

Nope!

“We can’t stay aunty, we don’t want to drive in the dark.” She will be the one to reprimand me about it.

Thankfully, she understands.

“I have something of your mother’s, someone from her stokvel brought it.” She disappears into the house before I ask what it is.

“You told your aunt I was sick?”

I’m not going to answer him, I follow my aunt inside and bump into her in the passage, carrying a small plastic bag.

“What’s this?”

“A dress, MaNkosi had lent it to her friend

months before her death.” She says.

What am I going to do with MaNkosi’s dress?
The rest of her clothes are still at home, I
haven’t had time to gather them.

I thank my aunt, then we head out.

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Mbuzo says he wants hot wings and coke, we
pass by KFC. It’s not full, we get our order in
less than twenty minutes.

“Let me drive,” Mbuzo offers when we get to the
car.

“I want to drive.”

I take the driver’s seat while he helps Lulu into
the car, she’s happy about her fold-over and
chips.

And Mbuzo is happy about the wings, there’s a
smile on his face as he opens the box and

stares for what feels like the whole twenty eight years of my life.

I focus on driving us home.

“I didn’t ask for wings, KaMadlala.”

Huh!

“Mbuzo, you were with me when I bought these wings. You nodded with a smile when I asked if you wanted wings.”

Why is he stressing me? I’m pregnant but he’s acting like he’s the one pregnant.

The tears... I can’t.

“Yini Mbuzo?” I snap.

“Kodwa KaMadlala, uzolokh’gwinya amagama ami?.”

The fuck! When did I snub his words?

He drops his head, “I don’t want wings anymore. I want ujeqe nobhontshisi.”

Yeah, that word ‘anymore’ is him accepting that wings were his first choice.

“Where am I going to get steamed bread and sugar beans? Do you know how long it takes to prepare that? Mbuzo, tell me if you want to carry this baby and I will pass it over,” I’m getting upset.

He side eyes me but keeps his lips sealed, he’s suddenly sniffing the air.

“Can you smell that?” He asks, swiping his nose around.

The only thing I can smell is fried chicken.

“Smell what?”

“The steamed bread and beans?” He closes his eyes, sniffing the air.

I’m taking him to the hospital right now, we have medical aid. They can book him into a mental hospital, it’s alright, I will show his child

pictures of him.

It was nice while it lasted.

“Can we go and get it? It smells so good, I just want a taste.” Mbuzo asks, he’s sobbing.

I give him a sad look, is my husband losing his mind?

“I can’t smell anything, stop acting crazy, you are scaring me.”

His face turns sour, “Then one of us must be crazy because I know I’m not lying.”

He just called me crazy, I will drive this car into a tree if he calls me that again.

My clap back is stolen by Lulu giggles, “Mommy, why is uncle crying?”

“His eyes are sad baby.”

He’s stupid, that’s why. Mbuzo side eyes me with bloodshot eyes

“No, he’s acting like a girl.” She throws her head back laughing.

Mbuzo folds his arms across his chest, and looks out the window. I thought I have seen it all but it turns out I haven’t.

One thing I hate about driving at night is stopping at a traffic light, it’s not safe.

I’m counting the seconds, this traffic light is not opening fast enough. The hairs at the back of my neck stand, sudden chills rush through my body. I glance over at Mbuzo, and meet a puckered brow.

“Do you feel that?” He asks, I nod and check on Lulu. She’s eating her food.

When I turn back, I see a woman striding this way. It’s too dark, I can’t see her clearly.

She’s walking in front of the car, heading right

at us. That's odd, why is she walking in the middle of the road?

I glance at Mbuzo, his widened eyes tell me that he sees it too. I'm frozen, unable to move. My eyes are engrossed on this person, following her movements until she's standing by my window. It's rolled down halfway, slowly she bends over and peeks through the window and my spirit leaves my body.

It's my mother.

What the fuck? We buried this woman, she's a... ghost.

"KaMadlala, have you seen your father? I can't find him anywhere?" She says, her voice soft as I remember it.

I hear the passenger door open, it's Mbuzo, he jumps out and falls on his knees. I'm thinking he's coming around to chase the ghost away but he's crawling towards the bushes, I have

never seen anyone run with their knees. He'd outrun a springbok.

"Mbuzo!" I scream.

Where is he going?

I step on the accelerator and drive away. No one has time to close the door, I will close it when I get home.

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[03/06, 15:55] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 106

MHLONIPHE

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This wining and dining business is definitely not for black men, well not for the type of black man that he is. The date was her idea, he's never been to one before.

Not that it was unnecessary, but putting this much effort for a girl was never in his raider.

The only thing he likes about this date is Mbali in this sling-slim pleated design dress. She's showing off her body tonight, it's not too revealing but sexy as fuck.

Her flawless skin is hiding behind makeup, he's not complaining. If anything, he appreciates the effort she put just to look good for their date.

"You keep staring," Mbali can hardly look into his eyes, his stare is too intense—raised brows, adoration in his eyes and a distant smile on his face.

“You’re sitting too far from me,” he says and shifts with his chair close to her.

Blushing can make one’s cheeks hurt, she hides her face in a glass of wine.

“Should we go? I booked us a hotel,” he places his hand on her thigh.

The seductive looks have been thrown around since they arrived.

“I want to stay here a little longer, I enjoy talking to you.” Mbali says.

“More than you enjoy me?” That’s a silly question Mhlo is asking.

She laughs, “You’re always thinking about sex.”

Well, point at a man who doesn’t.

“You’re wrong little one, it’s you I’m always thinking about. I can’t get enough of you.” Either he knows the right things to say or he’s trying to score himself a good time.

“Tell me more about yourself.” Mbali says.

What a draining question.

Mhlo gives her a bored look, “Are you interviewing me, now?”

“I want to know more about you, you’re mysterious. You hardly say much unless you’re with your brothers, I want to know what makes you tick, what makes you happy.”

He can’t think of anything at the moment, his life is not that interesting. Anyhow, he’s just man trying to make it to the next day and live life to the fullest.

“How about you tell me what makes you tick? I want to know who Mbali is and what her deepest desires are.” He doesn’t look into her eyes that often and when he does, his stomach does a nay-nay.

“I’m big on honesty, love is important to me. I have always been a hopeless romantic.” Mbali

says.

He looks confused, “What’s that?”

“It means I believe in love and that it’s the most powerful force in the world.”

That’s interesting.

“Sounds like a film,” Mhlo snorts.

Maybe it’s not that interesting.

Mbali smiles at his words, “Have you ever been in love before?”

He shakes his head, “I have had women I cared about but my heart has never gone that deep.”

Mbali bites her lower lip, sending her eyes to Mhlo’s hand that’s playing on her thigh.

“How about now? Are you in love?”

Sheesh!

That’s a heavy question.

He shoots up from his seat, “I’m going to the

restrooms.”

He doesn’t wait for her response, as he turns, he bumps into a man, their shoulders colliding.

“Watch it,” the man snaps.

Mhlo’s eyebrow raises, it’s an intimidating stare. This idiot looks familiar, but he can’t remember where he’d seen him.

“Tshepang!” That’s Mbali, disbelief palpable in her voice.

Mhlo looks at her, she’s on her feet and staring at the bird in front of them.

“You know him, little one?”

“This is Tshepang, Thabiso’s brother.” Mbali says.

It all comes back to Mhlo, he remembers where he’d seen him.

“What are you doing here?” Mbali asks Tshepang.

“I was having dinner with a friend, what about you?” Tshepang asks, his eyes raking Mbali’s body.

That’s one unhappy looking man.

“Having dinner with her boyfriend.” Mhlo answers, as he puts an arm around Mbali’s shoulders.

Tshepang nods, his jaws ticking.

“I have to go, I will see you soon.” He takes off towards the exit.

Mhlo clicks his tongue, “I don’t like that guy.”

He sits back down after Mbali is seated.

“He’s harmless,” Mbali says.

He doesn’t want to talk about him, “We should go.”

His night has been spoiled, maybe the night at

the hotel will put him back in a good mood.

Mhlo pats his pockets, his brows slowly start to come together in a frown.

“What is it?”

“My wallet,” he checks under the table.

There’s nothing.

This is going to hurt his ego, “Don’t you have money with you? I will pay you when we get home.”

“No, I don’t have money.” -Mbali.

Taking a deep breath usually helps... it doesn’t in this case.

“We should trace the path we walked, I’m sure we will find it.” Mbali says and it is a good idea but...

“I know who took my wallet Little One, it’s gone.” His eyes shift to where Tshepang disappeared to.

“Who?” She looks innocent and clueless, it brings a soft smile to Mhlo’s face.

“Don’t worry about it,” he says, impatiently tapping his fingers on the table.

“I can offer to wash the dishes in the kitchen and you will sweep the floors, they will let us walk free if we do that.” –Mbali.

That’s a crazy suggestion, it has Mhlo laughing.

“I have a better idea,” he leans in whispering, “let’s go to the bathroom.”

Mbali’s eyes bugle, “Mhloni...”

“It’s not what you think,” he cuts in swiftly.

“Okay take my coat and put it on your stomach. Make sure you look as pregnant as possible.”

He hands her his coat, confusion is lain on her face for a second—then it the light bulb in her head goes on.

Mbali clutches the coat in her arms, Mhlo

stands and pulls out her chair as she stands from her seat. He catches her face with his hand and kisses her.

“See you later, baby-mama.” He winks, she giggles and rushes off to the bathroom.

Now as for Tshepang, he sends a text to Njabulo telling him what happened.

Find him. The last text says.

Njabulo is reliable, he is one hell of a go-getter.

Here comes Mbalil, looking pregnant. The tight dress is hugging that fake belly perfectly.

Mhlo pulls a chair for her, she sits.

“What do we do now?” Mbali asks.

“Your contractions just started,” he says. “1. 2. 3... Go.”

“Aaahhhh!” Mbali screams, folding over the

table.

The restaurant goes completely silent as all eyes turn to their table.

Mhlo is on his feet, rubbing her back.

“Breathe baby... baby.” He says.

A waiter runs to their table, “Is everything okay?”

“My wife is in labour, I have to get her to the hospitals.” Mhlo announces, rubbing Mbali’s fake belly.

Mbali leans back on the chair and opens her legs, “It’s coming Mhlo... the baby is coming.”

She’s screaming, her hand tightening around Mhlo’s hand.

That’s too tight, he winces in pain.

“I will get the bill sir and...”

“Babe get this baby out of me, right now.” Mbali cuts off the waiter with a shout.

There's panic on the waiter's face.

"There is no time for that, my wife is two seconds away from giving birth." Mhlo snaps at the poor lady and just when he thinks Mbali is over acting, she climbs on the table and lays on her back with her legs open.

"I swear if you don't get this baby out of me..." She's breathing like she's about to get an orgasm. Mhloniphe closes her legs, she's doing too much now—there are men in this restaurant.

"Baby, not here. You can't give birth here, I will take you to the hospital." Mhlo projects his voice, the other customers are on his side. His pregnant wife should be sent to the hospital right now.

"It's okay, take her to the hospital. You can come back and settle your bill," the waiter.

Praise God!

Mhlo scoops Mbali in his arms, "Don't worry

baby, we're going to the hospital."

He dashes outside with her in his arms, and puts her down when they get to his car.

Mbali laughs, "I didn't think that would work."

He smiles, "It did. Let's go before she comes."

He opens the door for her, she freezes just as she's about to get in.

"Yini?" Mhlo asks.

"I left my purse inside."

What kind of purse is that with no money.

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CASHILE

Lulu wants to know where her uncle went, I am

tired of explaining.

“I want uncle,” if it’s not Mbuzo crying, it’s Lulu.

I have to control my hormones because I have two babies to pacify. Speaking of Mbuzo, I don’t know where he is. I’m worried, what if MaNkosi came back as a demon and she went after him?

I watched Ubizo the calling, Somizi’s mom traumatised me for life.

My knees are still shaking from fear, I have never seen a ghost in my life. My heart won’t stop pounding.

We’re in the house, I switch on the TV just to keep Lulu occupied while I call Mbuzo.

“Mommy let’s go back, we left uncle Mbuzo.”

I want to cry too but I’m not.

“We’ll go back baby, watch TV while I call him.”

She nods and settles down on the couch.

He's not answering my phone, I can't believe I drove off and left him there. I'm such a bad wife, what am I going to tell his brothers.

I hear the door opening and run to check, it's uncle Mpiyakhe—drunk as always.

"Kotiza, don't you have R50 for me?" He burps, it's all he ever does.

"I don't have money, uncle." I walk past him and peep out the door, there is no sign of Mbuzo.

It's dumb of me to think he will show up when I left him with no transport. It's getting late.

"I will pay you back, kotiza."

Sigh! This uncle is so drunk, he can't even talk, yet he wants more money to buy beer.

I'm calling Mbuzo again, his phone rings. He's still not answering.

"I will find you a good husband," uncle Mpiyakhe says.

He is driving me crazy, I give in and fish for money in my pocket.

I have R30, he's not complaining. He staggers away, singing at the top of his lungs.

My phone rings, it's Mbuzo.

"Nonkosi, where are you? I'm sorry I left you. Nawe, why did you get out of the car?" I'm shouting.

"KaMadlala." He says, softly.

My heart stops.

"I'm at the hospital," he says and my world comes crushing down.

She got to him and...

"Please tell me you're okay." I would die if anything happens to him.

"I'm fine, I got a ride from an ambulance. Please

come and get me.”

Thank God.

I take my daughter and leave the house, it’s not like uncle Mpiyakhe will notice that we left without informing him.

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I use the location Mbuzo sent and speed to the hospital.

We find him in the reception area, looking agitated.

“Uncle Mbuzo,” Lulu runs ahead of me, he whisks her up in his arms.

They are having a moment, and I’m waiting for my hug. I was worried about him too, should I tell him that?

Our eyes meet, “Are you okay? And the baby?” He uses his vacant hand to brush my belly.

“We’re fine, I should be asking you if you’re okay.” I tell him.

“I’m fine, so you drove home with the door open?”

How does he know that? I thought he was too busy crawling like Rebecca Malope to notice anything.

“Ave uyigwala KaMadlala.”

Me? A coward?

“Says the man who crawled his way out of the car.” Now that I think about it, it’s funny.

“The door wasn’t properly closed, I fell out of the car.” He says, lying to me.

“Excuse me, sir.” A nurse says from behind him.
“The doctor will see you now.”

The doctor?

“I insisted that they take blood tests, I want him to tell me why I’m crying all the time and have

these weird cravings,” Mbuzo explains. We follow the nurse to the doctor’s office.

“You may sit, Doctor Thompson will be with you shortly.” The nurse says before leaving the room.

Lulu wants to be put down, she’s fascinated by the colours on the doctor’s wall.

“My knees are still weak,” Mbuzo says, holding my hand as we sit.

“Is that why you crawled into the bushes?” I laugh, he doesn’t.

“I can still see her face, you don’t?” He says.

I can, I don’t think I will ever forget it.

“I was trying to forget about her, thanks to you, I’m back to square one. Now I must force myself to forget.” I tell him.

Geez!

He rubs his temple, wincing in pain. At this point,

I am not sure if he is listening to me.

“What’s wrong?” I ask.

“I want to throw up.”

Again?

“Why does it look like you are dying?” I ask him.

He’s starting with his dramatics.

“You know, studies show that nausea has never killed anyone,” -Me.

Mbuzo frowns at me.

“Then why do I feel like I’m dying?”

This calls for an eye roll moment, a serious one.

The doctor walks in and greets, I tell Lulu to stop touching the charts on the wall, but he tells her to continue. It’s his office.

“Doctor, please tell my husband that there is nothing wrong with him.”

He laughs while taking a seat opposite us.

“What you have sir are pregnancy symptoms.”
The doctor announces with a smile on his face.
I see Mbuzo’s eyes pop out of their sockets, I’m
seeing the worst pending.

“I... I’m pregna...” he doesn’t finish talking, he
falls forward, his head slams on the doctor’s
table with a bang. He fainted, somewhere in his
left brain, he is convinced that he has a womb.

I want to un-marry.

“Are you married doctor?” I can even swap
husbands with his wife.

The doctor laughs, “Your husband is not
pregnant. What he has is called couvade
syndrome, or sympathetic pregnancy, it’s when
an expectant father experiences some of the
symptoms as his pregnant wife, they will wear
off when you’ve given birth.”

After birth?

Oh, now I feel good.

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[03/06, 15:55] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 107

MHLONIPHE

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With his wallet stolen or “missing”, the night out at the hotel has been cancelled. He’s driven them home, Mbali does not look happy.

“You were quiet on the way home,” Mhlo points out.

He's worried that she's closed off, and for some reason, it freaks him out not knowing what she's thinking. It's a stupid feeling he doesn't understand.

She sighs, her eyes fixed to the front.

"Are you upset because we didn't go to the hotel?" There's a smile on his face as he asks, he knew she couldn't resist him. It's nice to have proof.

Mbali sighs, "Nooo! Why would you think that?"

What else would he think, but this?

"Then what's wrong, little one?" Worry is found in his voice and puckered brow.

Mbali turns her face to him, "I wanted to spend more time with you because I'm going back home tomorrow."

So soon?

"What's the rush?"

It's been a while since she's been here but it doesn't feel like it, he hasn't had enough of her—heck it scares him that he might never be enough of her.

"My mother sent me a text after we left the restaurant. Important people are coming tomorrow, I have to be home." She says.

"Then you can come back when they leave," it's a good suggestion.

"I guess," she still sounds down.

She opens the door, Mhlo reaches over and closes it.

When Mbali turns to him, their faces are a breath away from each other. Her eyes stretch into wide golf balls, he can hear her heart thudding violently in her chest.

"What's wrong?" Mbali asks, confusion clear on her face.

“I can’t let you out of this car until you smile for me,” he says and that instantly puts a smile on her face.

Just what he wanted, she’s a beautiful woman.

He’s looked and appreciated her beauty before, but he never took time to really look at her.

She’s only 19, will be turning twenty soon. But he sees more than just a girlfriend. Could she be the one he will grow old with? Chills rush through his body at the thought, he swallows and cradles her cheeks with his right hand. She feels warm to the touch.

“Little one,” Mhlo whispers, his voice trembling past his lips.

“What have you done to me?” He asks.

Mbali’s breathing is ragged, their eyes are locked.

“This is not a game, I will never play you.” Their

lips brush as he speaks.

Mbali slightly nods, "Okay."

"You trust me?"

She nods, "Yes."

"When I look at you, I see everything I have always wanted in life. I don't know what I did to deserve this. I don't only want to date you, I want a future with you. If you would let me, I will worship the ground you walk on."

Another nod from Mbali, her breathing is shaky at this point.

He pecks her lips, her eyes flap closed then open.

"You said you're big on loyalty, so am I. Don't ever feel like you can't talk to me about anything, if you feel I am not doing anything right, then tell me." He says.

Mbali releases a heavy breath, "I will."

Her eyes wander from his gaze, she's a shy person by nature.

"Won't you look at me?" Mhlo asks, Mbali sends her eyes back to him.

"Does this mean we're a real couple now?" She's smiling, he smiles back, nods and crashes his lips on hers.

In this moment, the house lights go off.

"It must be load shedding," Mhlo says.

They exit the car and head into the house with the help of a torchlight. They find Mbuzo and Cashile cuddling on the couch. Lulu is sitting on the floor, playing with her dolls.

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CASHILE

It's a good thing we had supper before load shedding, otherwise we would have eaten cold food. The rechargeable light will only last four hours, I'm sure we'd be in bed by then. I suggested that Mbuzo rests when we got home from the hospital, I mean he fainted.

The doctor said he's fine but he doesn't look, fine to me, you'd think he still believes he's pregnant.

It's a little over 9pm, Lulu should be in bed. We were having a movie-night but Eskom showed us who is boss.

When I heard a car pulling up outside, I told this one to get his head off my lap and he refused. Now Mhloniphe is standing in the room, looking at us like we fell from an alien ship.

"You two act as if you don't have a bedroom,"

Mhloniphe says as he settles down on the couch.

I saw the complaint coming but I'm not there,
where did Mbali get that dress?

Aunt Hluphekile would have a heart attack if she sees her in it.

She sees me looking and chases her eyes away from me, while taking Lulu from the floor, and slowly sitting next to Mhlo. She's always been intimidated by me, I think I scare her but I don't bite. I just have a bad-bitch resting face, she's mostly free around Bakhe.

"You're early," Mbuzo says.

He's lying on the couch, his head is on my lap. The man wanted me to massage his temples, he thinks I have magic fingers.

The wrong person is getting massages in this marriage.

“He lost his wallet,” Mbali says.

Mbuzo chuckles, “Who lost his wallet?”

“Me, some idiot thought he was smart and stole from me,” Mhlo’s tone gives me chills.

“I hope you’re not planning on doing anything stupid, it’s just a wallet. Let it be,” Mbuzo tells him, giving me an impression that Mhloniphe goes around looking for trouble.

“If you’re telling me not to look for my wallet, then forget it and I will make him pay for challenging me.” –Mhlo.

That’s concerning and this is not a conversation to be had in front of a child.

“You know who took it?” Mbali asks Mhlo.

He shakes his head, she seems to believe him.

“When is the electricity coming back?” –Mhlo.

“I didn’t check the schedule,” I say.

We were not scheduled for load shedding today but then again, this is South Africa.

Mbali says she's going to take a bath and leaves with Lulu.

"Can we talk now? What I have to say can't wait any longer." Mhloniphe says.

I forgot that he wanted to talk to us, I force Mbuzo to sit up. He's like a child, don't get me wrong, it's nice that he also gets to feel what this baby is doing to me but a sulky husband is not what I signed up for. He's stealing all the attention that's supposed to come to me.

He shifts closer to me as he sits until we're pressed up against each other.

"Dade, are you planning on giving birth here or in Joburg?" Mhlo asks.

I look at the man next to me, "Mbuzo wants us

here, but I prefer Joburg. Why do you ask?"

Mhloniphe presses his back against the backrest of the couch and crosses his arms, it's so strange how for a second there, I saw Mkhetheni in him.

"I think egoli is a better option. Uncle Mpiyakhe had a dream where Velaphi was packing baby clothes into a suitcase, turns out the old man was never a fan of yours. I'm sorry to say this Dade, but the man hated you with passion."

I don't care about Velaphi hating me, he better not be thinking of harming my baby, I will fight heaven and hell. I will get into witchcraft and capture his spirit if he dares me.

I feel Mbuzo tense beside me, "But that was when he was alive, KaMadlala and I were still young then? Surely his hatred would have subsided over the years."

"I highly doubt, some people don't change."

Mhlo says.

“I agree with Mhlo, I have always been a threat to your father.” Dying doesn’t change one’s heart, unless you repent seconds before you die. Velaphi killed himself, he was angry, depressed and still heartless when he died. So what are the odds of him becoming a saint on the other side?

“How was your relationship with your father?” I ask Mbuzo and my question puts a frown on his face.

Come to think of it, I never hear him talk about his father.

“I was closer with my mother, baba was always an angry man—very snappy. He needed everything to be perfect, one mistake and he’d beat you.” His voice is tinged with pain, I’m guessing he doesn’t have much good memories of his father.

“He was different with me and Mkhetheni, I don’t remember him laying a hand on us. He was gentle and barely raised his voice.” Mhlo says.

This breaks my heart, my husband was not given the same love and attention as his twin brothers.

Ubandlululo can destroy relationships between siblings, it must be a miracle that these brothers are still close.

I stroke Mbuzo’s hand, he looks troubled.

He feels my eyes on him and turns to look at me, the smile he gives me is supposed to convince that he is fine. I don’t buy it.

“I was sent to boarding school, so I can’t say what is what.” He says.

He doesn’t want to believe that Velaphi didn’t love him like he loved the twins.

I can't imagine what he's going through, my parents were perfect almost all my life, until my dad decided to be dodgy but that was later in life.

"So what's the plan? Baba's spirit is here, in the yard. Do we do another ritual and send him back?" –Mbuzo.

I vote yes.

"Either that or you and Madlala go back to Joburg, the baby's life could be in danger."

"My children will not live in exile because their dead grandfather doesn't like their mother. This is their home, where their father was born and bred. At some point they will have to visit their father's home."

Velaphi must rest.

"I agree with KaMadlala, can you call Ngwemabala?" Mbuzo says to his brother.

“I’ll call him tomorrow, I don’t know if Mkhetheni will have to be present.” Mhlo.

This is his perfect excuse to bring Mkhetheni back home.

We hear dishes in the kitchen, it can’t be Mbali because she’s bathing. I can hear the water splashing in the bathroom.

“Is uncle Mpiyakhe cooking?” Mbuzo asks with a shaky voice, it’s shaky because he knows that uncle Mpiyakhe is not home. He went back to the shebeen after that money I gave him, and we all can hear Mbali bathing.

“There’s no electricity and he’s not home.” I tell him.

The brothers exchange looks, I don’t feel good about this. Someone is washing dishes in the kitchen.

“Mhlo go check,” –Mbuzo.

Mhlo stands, “Maybe your uncle brought a girlfriend home and forgot about her.”

Mbuzo is behind him, fear has me following them. I’m not staying in here alone.

We don’t have a rechargeable light in the kitchen, but it’s dim because of the light in the living room. There’s someone behind the sink, her hands are dipped inside the sink. She’s not moving but we can hear the dishes. Mbuzo stands behind Mhlo as he grabs his shirt, my heart is already beating like a drum.

“Hello?” Mhlo says, we’re standing by the entrance.

Slowly, the woman turns her head and smiles.

Jesus Christ!

“KaMadlala, have you seen your father?”

The next thing I hear is a man screaming then

feet heavily stomping on the ground!
Dududududu!

It's Mhlo turning with so much speed that he crashes into Mbuzo. Both men fall with a thud, but Mhlo is the only one who gets up as fast as he could and disappears like lightning into his bedroom.

"Mbuzo get up!" I scream, my eyes stuck on my mother.

I grab Mbuzo's arm and pull but he's not moving, his eyes are closed.

Fuck! Mhloniphe killed my husband with his stampede.

I run to our bedroom, I will pray for him there.

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[03/06, 15:55] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 108

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Mbali runs out of the bathroom with Lulu tailing her, her body is wrapped in a towel but that's the furthest thing from her mind.

She stops in the passage and screams when she sees Mbuzo on the floor.

“Uncle!” Lulu runs to him and attempts to wake him up.

“Sisi! Sisi!” Mbali shouts for her cousin.

Mhloniphe is the first one to run out of the bedroom, Cashile’s bedroom also opens. Her eyes are wide with panic.

“What happened? I heard screams.” Mbali says,

pointing at Mbuzo on the floor.

No one gives her an answer, Mhlo is slowly walking towards the kitchen, his heart is sitting on his throat.

“Is there anyone in the kitchen?” He asks, Mbali shakes her head.

The lights are back, they give Mhlo confidence to walk into the kitchen. There’s no one there, he sighs in relief.

But Mbali is confused, “Bhuti is unconscious. Is anyone going to help him?”

And Lulu is crying on his chest, Cashile lifts her up and gives her to Mbali.

“Uncle Mbuzo is sleeping, baby. You should go to sleep too.” She looks at Mbali. “Please put her to sleep, I won’t be long.”

Mbali hears all this but...

“What about bhut’ Mbuzo?”

“He’s fine,” Cashile dismisses and Mbali has no choice but to abide. She takes Lulu with her to Mhlo’s bedroom.

Now for the fainting teddy bear, it takes Cashile time to finally get on her knees.

“Nonkosi wake up,” just as she’s gently patting his cheek, Mhlo empties a glass of water on Mbuzo’s face.

He jerks up, gasping for air and choking.

Cashile is not happy about the baptism on her husband, she shoots Mhlo a warning stare.

“KaMadlala... your mother...” Mbuzo mumbles incoherently.

“How many fingers am I holding up, Nonkosi?”
She waves two fingers on his face.

“Two, what happened? Was I dreaming?”

“Your brother knocked you down, that’s why you fainted.”

Yeah, she's not about to admit that her husband faints when he sees ghosts. Guilt washes over the twin, he remembers alright—how he violently knocked over his brother in his attempt to run away.

With Mhlo's help, Mbuzo makes it to the bedroom.

"We'll talk about this in the morning," Mhloniphe says and walks out of the room.

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Her husband wouldn't have fallen had it not been for Mhloniphe crashing into him, that coward almost killed her man.

"I almost became a widow at such a young age," and she doesn't like black.

He lets out a soft chuckle before wincing in pain,

he's got a bump on the back of his head. Poor baby hit his head when he fell, that's why he fainted.

"I know you would have faced my mother's ghost head-on, once bitten, twice shy for what and for who?" Cashile teases.

He laughs, takes her hand and kisses it.

"Don't make me laugh, I have a headache KaMadlala." He says.

That's his punishment for letting fear consume him.

Cashile kisses the injured spot, "There, much better?"

He puckers his lips and taps them with his finger, he wants a kiss. A smile spreads on his face as she kisses him.

"Now I feel better, mkami. Uyabonga umyen'i wakho, yezwa?"

Argh!

It's not about the kiss anymore, if a human can be a crutch then Cashile would make a great one. She's his perfect match, was made from his rib.

"I don't know what made me think of a blood covenant all those years ago, and I don't regret it. It has brought us together again, life without you would be meaningless. Don't ever leave me, KaMadlala."

His words place worry on her face, she wouldn't dare leave him.

"Ours is a forever yena type of relationship. We're stuck together Nonkosi."

It's nothing but the truth, they are connected body and soul.

"That's good to know, so you won't leave me because I keep fainting, right?" There's a silly smile on his face, Cashile cracks in laughter.

“I won’t leave even if I get you pregnant.” She tells him.

It’s a joke Mbuzo finds funny.

They share a soft kiss before Cashile takes the cotton and Dettol to the bathroom.

She comes back to him changing into his nightwear.

“I’ll get you water so you can take painkillers,” she gives him a sachet of grandpa pain killers and walks out of the room.

It’s insane how she keeps forgetting about her mother’s ghost, her heart rate changes when she walks into the kitchen. All house lights are on, she can’t sense anything out of the ordinary.

She quickly pours water into a glass and hurries out of the kitchen.

Mbuzo is sitting on his side of the bed, she gives him the glass and takes her side.

“I hate this pill, it tastes horrible.” He says, putting the empty glass on the side table. His face is squeezed in sourness.

“Pills taste horrible,” Cashile says. “You should sleep, we will go to the doctor if you still have a headache in the morning.”

“We should check on Lulu before we sleep,” he gets off the bed.

“Mbali will bring her, she’s sleeping with us tonight. I don’t want her alone with my mother’s ghost here.” She says.

Mbuzo sits on the bed, facing her.

“Why do you think she is haunting us?” He asks. And why all of a sudden? How long do spirits need before they start haunting people?

“What puzzles me is that we can all see her, it should be you alone.” Mbuzo adds.

Nah, that’s not funny.

He smiles and lifts his hands in surrender when Cashile narrows her eyes at him.

"I don't mean it like that, KaMadlala. You know how it's only family members who see ghosts of their loved ones."

Well, he's right but...

"MaNkosi was a witch, she's probably not resting in peace because of the evil things she had done." -Cashile.

"I will call Ngwemabala first thing in the morning, I hope he will make time for us tomorrow. The matter is urgent." He says.

"Great, now we have two ghosts to chase out of this yard." Cashile complains and rolls her eyes.

"My father?"-Mbuzo.

Technically, Velaphi is an ancestor not a ghost.

"I want to hash things out with him and ask for peace between you two. I don't like the fact that

my father hates my wife, and will probably hate his grandchildren as well." He says.

There shouldn't be any bad blood between his parents and wife.

"You think your father would agree to a peace treaty? I don't see it happening."

"It's possible, there's always a way to please the ancestors. We will find one, KaMadlala. Like you said, this home belongs to our children. I don't want them to feel like strangers in their father's home and they will need someone on the other side looking after them. My father looks after his boys, he will do the same for our children. I promise you."

He kisses her lips, Cashile nods but doesn't look hopeful.

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MHLONIPHE

Mbali has been singing a lullaby to Lulu for too long. How long does it take for these small people to fall asleep? What happened to getting into bed, closing your eyes and falling asleep without anyone's help?

He does it every night and it works like a charm.

"Is she sleeping?" Mhlo whispers, she nods.

Finally!

He's standing in the middle of the room with his arms crossed, looking like a visitor waiting to be told where to sleep.

"Sit down," Mbali says with a smile.

He's afraid to come close, what if Lulu wakes

up and Mbali will have to start soothing her all over again.

"Finish, I will wait here." He whispers.

"She's sleeping, I'll take her to sis' Cashile." She scoops Lulu up and leaves the room.

Now Mhlo can breathe without feeling like he's breathing too loud, he changes into boxer shorts. Just as he sits on the bed, Mbali walks back in, she closes the door.

"What happened out there? I heard a scream," she asks.

That's a question Mhloniphe would rather avoid.

"We saw KaMadlala's mother, but I don't want to talk about it now." He gets off the bed and wraps his arms around Mbali's waist, ignoring the shocked expression on her face.

"My aunt is a ghost?" Mbali whispers the words, her mouth is close to his ears. Did she really

have to say the word “ghost”?

Mhloniphe attacks her with a kiss when she opens her mouth to speak again, she obviously has more questions, but he has better things to do than talk about a restless spirit.

Mbali is out of breath when Mhlo breaks the kiss, his hand is steady on her side, and the other stroking her cheek.

She's fighting a smile, “Is that why you screamed?”

Argh, women and spoiling the mood.

“I did not scream.”

Of course he didn't, men don't scream.

Mbali doesn't believe him, “I know your voice. That was you who screamed.”

She's gone with laughter, Mhlo clears his throat and steps back.

“Are you laughing at your man, little one?”

She covers her mouth, stifling a laugh while shaking her head.

"I wouldn't have screamed, I would rather faint."

She says.

Mhlo chuckles, "Really? So you're not a screamer?"

A head shake, "Nope."

His hands are running over body, "Well let me teach you how to scream then."

He buties his face on her neck, stealing tiny bites and nibbles. Mbali's giggles are loud.

"Your brother's bedroom is right next door," she's trying to escape him.

Mhlo looks at her, "I want to make you scream, not my brother."

He loosens the towel around her, as he attacks her with a sloppy kiss. When he breaks away from the kiss, his eyes run to her perky breasts.

He looks up at her with a slight frown, the sight of her nakedness is shooting down to Nonkosi junior between his legs.

“Have I told you how good of a kisser you are?”
Mhlo murmurs.

She doesn’t answer but runs her hand down his chest, “Can I try something?” Her hand is moving down his torso, and into his boxer shorts and in a second she’s touching his manhood.

Mhlo can’t hide his shock, it shows in his widened gaze.

“Mbali...” she’s Little One to him but at this moment, he sees a woman.

But this woman looks nervous as hell, Thabiso was her first love, her high school sweetheart.

He wasn’t much experienced in the bedroom, they were both virgins and broke each other. Sex was just that—sex. They knew there was

more to it than doing it the missionary style but they never got the chance to explore further.

Mbali has seen more than she's experienced, but Thabiso was not open minded. She asked once and when he declined, she kept her thoughts to herself.

"You don't have to," oh but he wants her to, he's just trying to be polite.

Mbali kisses his lips before slowly going down to her knees and drags his shorts down. She swallows, it's her first time seeing junior at close range. It's an appealing sight, mouth-watering but also nerve wrecking.

It's darker than his skin tone and standing at attention. Second thoughts linger in her mind, many what-ifs and one of them is failing to do it right. But she's already on her knees, there's no going back up. Every part of her body that can

be tickled has come alive, her nipples are hard, her clit is throbbing

She grabs his balls and gently sucks them, catching Mhlo off guard that he gasps and makes a sound that has Mbali smiling in satisfaction. She licks his tip before sucking his mushroom head like a lollipop.

“Mbali,” Mhloniphe groans and sucks in a breath when she swallows his shaft. It touches the roof of her throat, Mhlo lets out a scream and quickly covers his mouth to muffle it.

Mbuzo and Cashile must have heard that if they are not sleeping.

She grabs his buttocks, spreading them out like she’s opening a double door. Her fingers invade his crack, it gives Mhlo a tiny jump—chills ripple through his body.

The sloppy sounds she’s making are not helping him calm down, he’s close to losing his

mind.

He throws his head back hissing, “Mbali mana...
ngiyak’cela, khawula.”

He’s begging her to stop, stopping is not what he wants her to do though. Mbali takes it to the clouds, she takes turns sucking his shaft and his balls. Another scream leaves his mouth, he grabs a pillow and presses it against his mouth.

Now he can scream like a woman.

His body is trembling and his knees are weak, something is coming and it’s huge. It starts off from the tips of his fingers, surging through his veins. He presses his toes on the floor as he grabs her head and fvcks her mouth. He’s close, he lets her go and moves back but Mbali holds on to his shaft. Her other hand is gripped on his buttocks.

Mhlo panics, “Khawula Mbali. I want to release.”

She lifts her teary eyes and continues to suck

him, it's so sexy how she's choking and gagging on his shaft but no... he's about to cum and she needs to stop.

"Mbali! Mbali! It's coming," Okay that was loud, he shoots his cocktail into her mouth.

It's not his fault, she wouldn't stop.

It takes Mhloniphe a moment to come back to the real world, when he looks down, she's licking him clean.

What the!

"Little One?" Mhlo jumps back in fright. "Don't tell me you swallowed."

With innocence in her eyes, she opens her mouth wide to show him, and shrugs her shoulders.

"You shouldn't have swallowed." Mhlo says, grabbing her by the shoulders to bring her up to

her feet.

“Am I going to be pregnant?” She looks scared.

Mhlo laughs, “No my sweet Mbali.”

Mbali laughs with him, “I like the way you screamed. It’s how you screamed when you saw my aunt’s ghost.”

Okay, they were having a good time. What is this now?

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Happy mother's day to all the moms and aunties.

[03/06, 15:55] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 109

CASHILE

I have been doing everything I could not to cross paths with Mbali after hearing her and Mhloniphe last night. It's a good thing Mhloniphe is not home, he went with Mbuzo to fetch Ngwemabala. I have taken it upon myself to prepare supper, I was taught that guests have to be fed.

My body tenses when Mbali walks into the kitchen.

“Morning sisi.”

She's bubbly, I hate that I know the reason. It's a good thing Mbuzo was fast asleep when they were...

Jeer! I can't even think about it, she's my little sister and Mhlo is... he's older.

“Hey.” She smiles when I look at her, it is me or

she's gaining weight?

"You look fresh," I want to hear her reply on this.

She drops her eyes, and folds her arms across her chest. It's the shyness, I believe.

"Thanks," she says as she joins me by the counter. "Can I help with anything?"

God knows help is what I need, I instruct her on what to do. There's not really much.

She takes the task of pealing carrots, there's an elephant in the room that needs to be addressed.

"How is Mhloniphe treating you?" I ask.

She drops a carrot on the floor and quickly picks it up, we never talk about her relationship. She doesn't see me like that, anyway, I'm digging because I want to know if Mhlo is serious or he's playing my cousin.

Mbali clears her throat, "I'm happy sisi. He loves

me and I love him.”

Is that not a huge word? Men don’t just fall in love.

“Did he tell you that?”

“Not the exact words but he said he wants to build with me,” she says.

“He’s a man Mbali, he needs to say the word. Only then should you believe it,” with men, things are never as they seem.

They are a complicated puzzle.

“Saying the words is not something a woman can stand on, men talk with their actions. When I first started dating Thabiso, he would tell me he loved me and I knew it wasn’t true. He said it because it’s what couples say to each other, when he finally fell in love with me and told me he loved, I could tell the difference.”

Ow! They grow up so fast, I didn’t even know

that.

“So you trust Mhlo?”

“With my life,” she says.

I wash my hands.

In that case, maybe Mbuzo and I should really move to Joburg because I am not going to listen to my cousin and brother in-law having sex. It’s uncomfortable, I can barely look at Mbali right now.

“Just be careful with your heart, Mbali.” I tell her.

“I am, besides, he has my heart and I trust him to take care of it.”

Ahhh! Finish! She’s a gone girl, bamthathile!

“My mother wants to see me, I won’t be here to help you with the visitors, sisi.” Mbali says.

I don’t think there will be much to do, it’s also not guaranteed that the seer will want to eat.

“I will manage, you can go ahead.” I tell her, aunt won’t like it if I keep her daughter from her.

It also helps that Lulu is at daycare.

My phone beeps with a message, I jump for it thinking it’s the husband and they are on the way. But nope, it’s a number I don’t know. Curious, I open the message.

My jaw drops!

Why is Nkosana sending me messages? I delete it, I don’t want trouble in my marriage.

What the hell does he want to see me for?

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It’s midday, they just arrived. I’ve changed into a knee length dress and tied a scarf around my head. Mbuzo walks in first, the seer is behind him and Mhlo not far behind.

“Sanibonani,” the seer greets respectfully.

“Ninjani baba,” I extended a hand, he ignores me and sits down where Mhlo gestures.

Mbuzo slightly frowns at me, how am I supposed to know you don’t shake his hand?

The brothers share a seat, I’m sitting across from everyone.

“She’s the woman of the house, uKaMadlala.” Mbuzo introduces me to the seer.

He looks at me and with respect says, “Oh, nice to meet you sisi.”

“Likewise,” I say.

“KaMadlala, this is ubaba uNgwemabala. He’s the traditional healer we told you about.” Mbuzo says.

I nod this time.

There’s a bit of silence after the introductions, I think they are waiting for Ngwemabala to begin. I was expecting him to feel my mother’s

presence the second he walked through the door. But I doubt she's still here, we slept well last night and I haven't felt funny vibes.

"Can I have a word?" Mbuzo says as he stands and heads towards our bedroom.

I excuse myself and follow him, he tells me to close the door.

"Is everything okay?"

"I don't know how to tell you this, it's about your parents." He starts.

Why does he have to start slow? He's scaring me.

"What about them?"

He takes my hand and ushers me to the bed where he makes me sit on its edge, he takes a chair and sits in front of me.

I don't like the look of pity in his eyes and the

suspense is killing me.

“On our way home, the seer told us how your mother died. We thought it’s best I break the news to you since it’s a sensitive matter.” He says.

“And?”

He takes a deep breath, and takes my hands into his.

“She poisoned herself and your father.”

Oh God! This feels like losing a parent all over again.

“My father is dead?” My voice trembles.

I try to hold my tears back but they don’t listen to me, all this time we thought he eloped with Nothando. This can’t be real, why would MaNkosi do such a thing.

“Mbuzo, my father is dead?”

I snap my hands from his grip only to realise

that they are shaking, my heart is racing and I'm struggling to control my emotions.

Mbuzo wraps his arms around me, "Cry it all out, sthandwa sami."

And I do just that, right in his arms until I'm left with no strength to cry. He lets go of me and wipes my tears away.

"Where is his body?"

Ngwemabala must know what happened to him.

"The seer hasn't told us that much yet, I will go and hear what else he has to say. You sleep, I will fill you in on what happened." He says.

I don't think I will sleep a wink after the terrible news.

"I want to be present," I tell him.

He looks worried, "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I want to know where my father is and why MaNkosi killed herself and my father."

My mother was a dramatic person, secretly... but I didn't see this coming. Sure her husband was on the brink of death but there was no reason for her to kill him and herself.

We go back to the living room, tears are occasionally dripping down my face. I'm trying to be strong but it's hard.

"KaMadlala, are you okay?" Mhlo asks, I give him a nod.

But I'm not okay, my world has crashed once again. Mbuzo holds my hand, he's silently assuring me that he's here.

"Let's start with prayer," Ngwemabala speaks, taking the unnecessary attention away from me.

The brothers close their eyes, I keep mine open. He looks at me, my heart jumps. I don't know why I'm suddenly afraid.

“Do you know that you are the glue that holds this family together?”

Well, now that he’s told me.

I shake my head, my eyes running to Mbuzo. He shoots me a faint smile.

“Cha baba,” I reply to Ngwemabala.

He smiles, “Don’t worry about your father in-law. He won’t do anything to you or your baby, I’m here now.”

I don’t know how to act, I wasn’t really worried about Velaphi.

“Where is your mother’s dress?”

Ehh!

“Which dress?” I ask, again looking at Mbuzo. He seems just as confused.

“You were given a dress by someone”
– Ngwemabala.

“My aunt, she said a friend of my mother brought it.” I tell him, a frown of confusion forming on my face.

“Your aunt was right, someone brought the dress to her and told her to pass it on to you. The woman is not your mother’s friend, she’s the wife of a witch doctor. He wants his money and he wants it from you.” –Ngwemabala.

“I don’t owe any witch doctor money, I have never been to a witch doctor.” I can even swear on a bible.

“It’s your parents who owed him money and since they are not able to pay him back, it is up to you.”

What? I don’t even know what the money was for.

“What was the money for?” I ask.

“What else could it have been for? They owed a witch doctor,” Mhloniphe says.

He's right, I don't think I want to know.

"So this man is waiting for your arrival, he's the reason your mother's spirit is here. She's been sent to bring you to him, he will only let them go when you pay him." Ngwemabala says.

"But how come my brother and I could also see the ghost?" Mbuzo asks.

"Maybe that's how the witch doctor wanted it, he's a very powerful man. He's captured their spirits and he won't let them go until he gets his money back." –Ngwemabala.

I define confusion right now. What the hell is going on?

Mhlo laughs, "So Madlala's spirit is kept in a bottle? What goes around comes back around."

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[03/06, 15:55] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 110

She sits on a small wooden bench outside her home, the sun is setting, casting a warm glow over the village. There are children playing on the streets, it's the only peaceful thing right now.

Otherwise, her life is falling apart.

When her mother said there will be guests, she didn't expect it to be Thabiso's family. They are in the house, chatting over supper.

It's been a year since her husband passed away and these people have never stepped foot here, the only person who came was Tshepang.

Mbali thought it to be a friendly visit, why is he

here with his uncles and aunts today?

“Mballi, come and collect the plates. The guests are done,” her mother says, peeking through the crack of the door.

Mballi sighs, she has to parade around the living room again. It’s uncomfortable because Tshepang stares... a lot.

She moves around the lounge where her late husband’s family and the elders are gathered. Tshepang is among them, his eyes following her every move.

She feels his gaze like a weight on her back, but she keeps her head down, focusing on her task. Her movements are mechanical as she carries everything to the kitchen.

“KaMadlala!” One of the elders calls.

Mballi rolls her eyes, knowing what’s to come.

She drags her feet back to the lounge.

“Come join us. We need to talk.” Uncle Mfaniseni says.

Her heart races as she walks over, taking a seat on the floor as is custom. The room falls silent, all the elders have their eyes fixed on her.

How uncomfortable!

One of Thabiso’s uncles, a stern-faced man clears his throat.

“KaMadlala, you know our customs and the respect we have for them. It’s been a year since your husband passed. The time has come to discuss your future.”

Mbali looks at her mother, she looks just as confused.

“What do you mean, her future?” Her mother asks.

Wasn’t this supposed to be done a year ago?

The uncle leans forward, “We’ve decided it’s time for her to come home.”

Mameshane!

“My child is home, this is the home her father built for her.” Hluphekile throws a look at Balungile, his head is cast down.

“She does not belong here, we married her and we are here to collect our bride.” The uncle says.

“Collect? My daughter is not a package for you to collect, please respect us. I know we are poor but these poor people have deserve respect.”

Hluphekile says.

Her loudness is scratching Mfaniseni the wrong way.

“Hluphekile, you are not supposed to talk. This matter involves men...”

She lifts her hand to shut him up, “Don’t tell me what to do in my house Mfaniseni. You have no

right to dictate my daughter's life."

Hluphekile has moved to the edge of her seat, her face tight with anger.

"Why are you getting worked up, Hluphekile?" Mfaniseni snaps.

"Because I see what is going on here, you want to marry my baby off to her late husband's brother."

"As tradition would have it," Thabiso's uncle replies.

"None of this was discussed with me, I'm not going to allow it. Mbali is my only child, she's still young. The only reason we allowed her to marry Thabiso was because of the baby. Now give me one good reason why I should let my child be tied down to a man at such a young age."

"I don't want to marry him, I have found someone else." Mbali mumbles, her head still

bowed.

The room erupts in murmurs and shocked gasps.

“What nonsense is this, KaMadlala? You have a duty to your late husband’s family!” Thabiso’s uncle snaps.

Tshepang stands up, his voice rising. “This is exactly why we need to do this now. Mbali, you are meant to be with me. This... fling of yours is a disgrace to our customs.”

Hluphelike stands at the edge of the room, “We must consider Mbali’s feelings in this. She’s suffered enough. Let her choose her own path.”

Tshepang’s uncle slams his hand on table, “This is not about feelings! It’s about tradition and respect. KaMadlala, you will marry Tshepang.”

This one came with a mission.

Mbali looks around, her eyes pleading for

someone to understand. “Please, I beg you. I can’t marry Tshepang. I don’t love him.

“You don’t have a choice, Mbali. You belong to this family. You will marry me, and that’s final.”

“Is it by force?” Her mother sizzles.

These people are driving her crazy, to think she spent the whole day cooking for her.

“Enough. KaMadlala, you will follow our traditions. The elders have spoken.”

This is worse than losing Thabiso, she’d rather lose him over and over again, than bear this.

Her world is spinning out of control, she stands up “I will not marry Tshepang. I will not betray my heart.”

Everyone is staring at her in disbelief.

“She’s just like her mother, you stand in the presence of men.” One of the uncles shouts,

pointing a finger at Mbali.

These men are from the pits of a village, probably a place where all villages are made because, what kind of backwardness is this?

Tshepang's face contorts with rage, and he steps forward, his hand reaching out as if to grab Mbali.

Before he can touch her, Hluphekile steps in front of Mbali, her eyes blazing with protective fury.

"You will not force my daughter into anything. If you want a fight, you'll get one."

Balungile shoots up to his feet, "That's enough. This man and Mbali are already married."

Gasps!

"What are you saying, Balungile?" -Hluphekile.

"The family approached Nkululeko that week Thabiso was buried, they paid lobola for Mbali.

She's their daughter in-law." Mfaniseni says.

Mbali's widened eyes run to Tshepang.

He smiles, "Yes, Mbali, you are my wife."

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CASHILE

My life is fucked up, that's what it is. The first person I wanted to tell was Bakhe, but his phone is phone. He worries me sometimes, the least he could do is keep in touch.

I'm only comforted by the fact that he can take care of himself. We will have to have another funeral, chances of my father buried are zero to nothing. God knows where his corpse is.

Mbuzo makes his way into the bedroom, his hands are on his waist. Why in God's name is he walking like every bone in his body hurts and he's carrying the whole world on his shoulders?

I know that look, he's possessed by the pregnancy hormones again.

"Is she sleeping?" I ask.

Lulu wanted him to be the one to tuck her in, I love them together. It's beautiful to watch.

Ngwemabala gave us something to burn to ward off spirits, so there won't be any MaNkosi around here tonight.

Mbuzo crawls into bed, the old frame creaks under his weight.

Jehovah! We need a new bed.

He groans dramatically, rubbing his back as if he's the one carrying our baby.

I can't help but laugh at him.

“Ave unedrama shame. You’re such a drama king. It’s me who’s almost due, not you,” I tease, settling against the pillows.

He shoots me a playful glare. “Haibo KaMadlala, you don’t know the struggle. My back has been killing me all day. I think our baby is using me as a practice dummy for you.”

Music to my ears!

I chuckle, patting his cheek. “You mean your sympathetic pregnancy? Maybe you should try carrying a watermelon around for a day, then come back and talk to me.”

He grins, shifting closer to me. “You’re right, my love. You’re the real hero here. But I must say, I’ve got the cravings and mood swings down perfectly. Today, I almost cried because my sandwich didn’t have enough cheese.”

He made that sandwich himself by the way.

I burst out laughing, “You’re hopeless, Nonkosi.

But I love you anyway and I wouldn't trade your dramatic-self for anything."

As much as I enjoy seeing him suffer, I can't wait for this period to be over. I can't deal with two babies in the house, Lulu and Mbuzo, not forgetting this one I'm carrying.

He wraps an arm around my shoulders, his hand resting on my belly.

"I love you too, KaMadlala and our little Lulu. And this little one. You think they'll be as funny as their father?"

Yeah right! Who said he's funny?

I raise an eyebrow, smirking. "Let's hope they have my sense of humor. Otherwise, we're in trouble."

Mbuzo chuckles, leaning in to kiss my forehead.

"I'm serious though. How are you feeling? Any signs that it's almost time?"

He's asking me because he's tired as well, I wish he could carry the baby for two seconds so I can rest.

I rub my belly thoughtfully, "A bit tired, but no major signs yet. Just the usual aches and kicks. Our little one seems quite comfortable in there."

He nods, "I can't wait to meet them. To hold them in my arms and see who they look like. Hopefully, they get your beautiful eyes."

World come and listen to this, even I didn't know I have beautiful eyes.

"I know they will have your stubbornness, they'll need that to survive in this world." I say.

We lie there in comfortable silence for a moment, the house is dead quiet. Mhlo is around, he retired early. I have no clue where uncle Mpiyakhe is, that one will not leave this house as long as his nephews are sponsoring his beers.

I look up at Mbuzo, his eyebrows rise in question.

“Do you think you’ll survive the delivery room, Mr. Sympathetic Pregnancy?”

Mbuzo laughs, shaking his head. “Honestly, I don’t know. I might faint the moment you start screaming. But I’ll be there, holding your hand, even if I pass out.”

I laugh with him, “That’s all I need, Mbuzo. Just you by my side. We’re in this together.”

He kisses my cheek “Always, KaMadlala. Always.”

I feel grateful for this man.

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The morning sun is barely peeking over and we’re ready for the journey to see the witch doctor. Mbuzo fetched Ngwemabala around

5am, he said it has to be done in the morning. I'm in the kitchen preparing something to eat before we leave, I don't want to be tortured by the tenant in my belly.

I see Mhlo's car pulling up outside, he went to fetch Mbali, I need her to help Lulu prepare for school when she wakes up.

While looking at Mbali and Mhlo exit the car, arms wrap around me from behind, his hands rest on my belly. His scent always gives him away.

"Can I have some?"

"I'm not sharing," I tell Mbuzo.

He lets go and stands beside me, "Then where is mine?"

Great, he's sulking.

It's bread and jam, I make him two slices. Two bites and the man is gagging and showing me a

sour face.

He puts the bread back on the plate and gulps down my juice, I'm ready to slaughter a man.

He sees the glare in my eyes and offers me a smile I do not return.

Nxa!

Mbali and Mhlo walk in the kitchen, her eyes are red and swollen.

“Mhloniphe...”

He quickly lifts his hands in surrender, “It wasn’t me, I found her like this. She won’t tell me what’s wrong.”

“Mbali, are you okay?” I ask, maybe I shouldn’t have, she’s crying.

She runs off towards Lulu’s bedroom.

What is going on?

Mhloniphe shrugs, “I will talk to her when we

come back. She didn't say a word on our way here."

"I will call aunt and ask, something must have happened." I say.

The last time I saw Mbali this sad was when Thabiso passed. Mhlo looks worried, this is not the mood he had when he left.

"Your uncles should be here by now, it's getting late." Mbuzo reminds me as he glances at his wrist watch.

"Where are those two?"

Uncle Balungile and Mfaniseni said they would be here, they didn't believe me when I told them what happened and they were sceptical about coming.

But if that witch doctor has my father's corpse, then we will need an adult there. Preferably, his brothers.

Mbuzo puts a reassuring hand on my shoulder.
“They are probably on the way.”

They better be.

Mhloniphe grins and shakes his head. “You know why they’re late, right? They’re scared of ghosts. Afraid of Madlala’s corpse.”

Mbuzo’s brother is having a blast at this. I can’t deal with him.

Just then, we hear the rumble of an engine, an old bakkie pulls into the yard, with uncle Mfaniseni crammed on the passenger seat.

We meet them outside, uncle Balungile hops out, looking apologetic.

“I’m sorry, mntanami, traffic was bad.”

I roll my eyes but smile. “Traffic? At this hour? Okay baba, let’s just get going.”

He’s never had a car, so he can’t lie like real drivers.

We split into two groups, as planned. Mbuzo and I climb into Mbuzo's car, while Mhloniphe drives with Mfaniseni and Ngwemabala in his car. The tension in my chest eases slightly. At least we're finally on our way. I have the money with me, R12000 in my account, courtesy of the husband.

I'm D.J Sub broke.

"My child, are you sure about this? I have heard of this witch doctor, he is known for his tricks. He might demand more money when we get there." Uncle Balungile says.

"We have back up, Ngwemabala is with us. He won't try any funny business."

"If he tries anything, we will call the police. What he did is a crime, he stole a corpse." Mbuzo says.

He's right, we should be opening a case against

this man. But that would be inviting more witchcraft into our lives.

We fall into a contemplative silence, my thoughts are keeping me entertained. Will we find my father? What if this man refuses to show us where he is buried?

That's if he was buried.

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Sheesh! We finally arrive, we pull up behind Mhlo's car. He was leading the way, I'm guessing Ngwemabala was the GPS. Everyone steps out, the men exchange nervous glances.

The witch doctor's place looks eerie in the morning light, shadows dancing around the strange ornaments hanging from the trees.

What in the 'Kwakhala nyonini" is this? I feel a

hand tighten around mine, it's Mbuzo. I can hear his heart thudding, Lord give me strength.

Mhloniphe nudges uncle Mfaniseni. "Still think it was traffic, eh?"

My uncle chuckles, though it's a bit strained.
"Let's just get this over with."

"He knows we are here, we can't go in. He has to invite us in, there are spirits on this yard."

Ngwemabala says.

I hear a fart, and turn to Mhlo's side. He's sweating marbles, I don't even want to think that he's afraid. His eyes are wide, staring into the yard.

I follow his line of sight and see a man appearing from behind the isolated hut.

Ngwemabala starts chanting words I can't make out, but I'm not there. My eyes are on the man, he's carrying a sleeping toddler on his back and starts sweeping the yard.

"That's your father, Bab'Madlala." Ngwemabala says and just then, my father stops sweeping and turns his head to where we are standing.

He looks like a hobo, his clothes are torn, his skin darker than I remember.

Mbuzo's hand loosens from mine, the men run to the car in dead silence. I see the car doors shut, the engine starts.

They are all squashed in Mbuzo's car, Balungile is on the driver's seat. The car drives off, leaving me and Ngwemabala at the gate.

Nope, not again.

I send Mbuzo a message, "It's over."

The car abruptly stops at a far corner, they are reversing back.

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[03/06, 15:56] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 111

“Aunt Mbali, I’m hungry.” Lulu pulls her hand, snapping her out of her thoughts.

Mbali blinks and looks down at her, “Sorry nana. I’m almost done, okay?”

She’s been “almost done” since fifteen minutes ago.

The water in the kettle is lukewarm now, she has to boil it again.

“Go watch TV, I will make you cornflakes.” She pats Lulu’s head before the child runs off to the lounge.

Mbali sighs, she's out of character today all thanks to Thabiso's family. They are all over her head, she can't even think straight.

Less than a minute and she's done preparing cereal, she takes it to Lulu in the longue, and goes back to the kitchen to continue preparing the eggs and palony she promised her.

Her phone buzzes, the screen lighting up with Tshepang's name. She hesitates, a knot forming in her stomach. What could he possibly want now? The thought of him makes her skin crawl.

With a deep breath, she answers.

"Hello?"

"Mbali, it's Tshepang. We need to talk. Can you meet me at the old park by the river?"

Her scepticism flares up immediately. "Why, Tshepang? What is this about?"

“It’s important, Mbali. Please. Just meet me there. I promise it won’t take long.”

“Is this about what happened yesterday?” She asks.

“Yes, I don’t want to discuss it over the phone, or with the elders. I understand your feelings Mbali, I hope we can come to an understanding. Please.”

She glances at Lulu in the lounge, and sighs.
“Fine. I’ll come, but I’m bringing Lulu with me. I’m babysitting her.”

“That’s fine.”

After bathing Lulu and getting her dressed, Mbali sets out, the little girl’s hand clasped tightly in hers. The park is not that far, but the walk feels longer than usual. When they finally arrive, Tshepang is waiting by a bench, his face lights up with a smile when he sees them.

“Thank you for coming.” He stands.

“Let’s make this quick, Tshepang,” Mbali says, keeping Lulu close.

She’s suddenly second guessing her decision to come here, there is nothing good that will come out of this.

Tshepang takes a deep breath. “Have you thought about what we spoke about last night?”

“What did we speak about, Tshepang? You and your uncle did the talking and I had to listen like a good little dog.” Her anger is evident in the tone of her voice.

“That’s not what happened, baby...”

“Don’t call me that, don’t ever call me that.” Mbali snaps.

He exhales sharply, “I’m not a bad person Mbali. I just want to take care of my brother’s wife, please come back to Limpopo with me. I can

give you a better life there, you will be treated like a queen.”

Traps also come in different forms, this one can even speak and has legs.

Mbali stiffens and steps back when he reaches out to touch her, “Tshepang, we’ve been through this. I’m not going to Limpopo. My life is here, and I’m in love with someone else.”

Maybe she should say it in Chinese, only then will he get it.

His face hardens, there’s a stubborn glint in his eyes. “You don’t understand. I can take care of you. I can give you everything you need. Why settle for less? What will that village boy give you?”

Now wait a minute!

“I’m not settling for less,” she snaps, “I’m choosing happiness, I’m choosing love. And that’s not something you can just replace with

money or promises.”

Lulu tugs at her hand, “Auntie Mbali, can we go now?”

Tshepang looks down at her, “Is this the life you’re going to live? Babysitting your cousin’s brats?”

Mbali pulls Lulu closer to her side, “Don’t you dare use her to manipulate me, Tshepang. I know what I want, and it’s not you.”

He steps closer, desperation leaking into his voice. “Mbali, please. Don’t throw this away. We can be happy. Just come with me. Thabiso would want this.”

“No, I’m staying here, and that’s final. Now, if you’ll excuse us, we’re leaving.”

Tshepang’s face twists with frustration.

A white van suddenly pulls up in front of them, the door opens and a man steps out.

“Bokang?” Mbali mutters as the man stands in front of her.

Bokang and Tshepang are first cousins, she’s seen him once in her life.

Bokang does not a spare a smile.

“What’s going on?”

“We’re going home,” Tshepang tells her as he separates Lulu’s hand from Mbali’s grip.

“Tshepang...”

“You’re my wife, and you don’t want to come home. So I will take you home myself,” he says and before she can speak, Bokang lifts her up from behind and throws her in the van, kicking and screaming. He shuts the door, not giving Mbali a chance to scream for Lulu.

“Run home, little girl.” Tshepang tells a crying Lulu and she takes off running without question.

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CASHILE

The car stops at the gate, Mbuzo exits first.

“Mododa phumani emotweni yami,” Mbuzo growls.

He’s telling them to get out of his car with a trembling voice, I am flabbergasted by his cowardice.

He side eyes me, the fear in his eyes... Jesu!

“Haibo, imohlola. I said get out of my car, kanti yini?” He drags Mhlo out first, then my uncles. They all stumble as they hit the ground, their eyes wide with fear.

Mbuzo is no different, the reason he forced them out of the car is because he doesn’t want to be the only man here, lest my father starts

attacking.

Our eyes meet again, he slowly comes to stand next to me.

“What was that?” I ask.

“We were going to pour petrol and get something to eat,” he lies through his adult teeth.

“Yes, I think we should leave you guys. I mean this is a Madlala issue, it’s not like he ever liked us and stuff.” Mhlo says.

Of course he would use this opportunity to run.

“Mina owami ubhuti died months ago, I don’t know the man sweeping that yard. So, I will leave with the Xaba boys.” Uncle Balungile says, pointing at my father who is back to sweeping the yard.

Ngwemabala chuckles, “You should have let them go, I can handle this.”

In unison, the men turn back to the car.

“Get back here, now.” I snap, no one is leaving this place. “I’m also afraid, but I’m still here.”

“KaMadlala... your father is a... he’s...”

“Umkhovu.” Mhloniphe takes over from his brother.

They are telling me something I am aware of, I look to Ngwemabala for confirmation.

“He’s alive, but his spirit has been captured.” He says.

I am beside myself with shock.

“Alive? Isn’t he supposed to be dead?”

“He is... dead. That’s what we know, he was on the verge of death the last time we saw him. How is he still alive? And MaNkosi poisoned him...” Mbuzo answers.

I wasn’t asking him.

“I told you that this man is a powerful witch doctor, he was able to revive your father. Look at him, he’s barely alive.” Ngwemabala says.

I look at my father, he would have come to me by now. But he’s focused on sweeping that stupid compound, and whose baby is that on his back?

“He turned him into umkhovu and has been using him as an errand boy.” Ngwemabala says.

I have seen enough of earthly things, I’m ready to go to heaven now.

What the actual fuck!

An unnerving laugh pierces from inside one of the huts, making my skin prickle. I feel Mbuzo’s hand on mine, it’s tight.

A man emerges from the house, a tall, thin man with piercing eyes that seem to look straight

through us. He stands in the middle of the yard, arms crossed, a smirk playing on his lips. Behind him, Baba stands motionless, his eyes are vacant and unseeing.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" The man's voice booms, commanding attention.

I have a feeling he knows why we are here, he's just asserting some kind of control just because he can.

Ngwemabala steps forward with narrowed eyes, "Khathala, mthakathi ndini."

Yoh! Yoh! Yoh!

Why did he call him a witch? He's going to attack us just for that.

"That man behind you does not belong to you, his people have come to claim him."

Ngwemabala says.

This Khathala person looks at me, I feel like

shrinking into a corner. He grins, and my blood runs cold. Mbuzo's arm wraps around my waist, he must have seen me shivering.

"So MaNkosi is not useless after all, I have been waiting for you." Khathala says.

He's confirming that he did send MaNkosi's ghost to torment us. Bloody witch!

"I have your money, now let my father go."

Khathala's smirk widens. "You think money can buy everything?" He laughs, a harsh, grating sound. "His spirit belongs to me now."

Bathong! Are we not here to pay him back?

My heart races as I step forward, unable to hold back.

"Baba!" I shout. "What have you done to him? Is he...a zombie?"

Khathala's mocking grin spreads wider.

"Madlala is very much alive, but his spirit is

captured. He's in between worlds, Cashile."

Fuck! He knows my name, there is nothing worse than a witch knowing your name and surname.

I don't know if I should run or stay and fight for my father.

"You captured his spirit? Why?" I ask.

"KaMadlala, stop talking to him. Let Ngwemabala handle it, you're pregnant." Mbuzo whispers to me.

He must not do this right now.

"Give us the man, Khathala and we will give you the money and leave." Ngwemabala commands.

Khathala's gaze hardens, and he raises a hand, making a sharp gesture. Baba flinches but doesn't move.

"Your father's spirit belongs to me now, give me my money and go before I curse you all."

Khathala says.

“We won’t leave without both my parents’ spirits. What about my mother? She died months ago. You have her too, don’t you?”

Khathala’s grin fades, replaced by a look of annoyance.

“Your mother’s spirit is also mine. Be grateful I’m giving you a chance to pay me back.”

My blood boils, what is wrong with this witch?

“I’m not paying you a cent until you release them! Release my parents’ spirits, both of them.” I shout and turn to my uncles, they are hiding behind Mhloniphe’s large frame.

Why did I bring them here?

Khathala chuckles, there’s a dark energy crackling around him.

“Something is not right, we should pay him and leave.” Mbuzo murmurs.

“You dare challenge me? Give me my money before all hell breaks loose.” Khathala roars.

“What’s your account number?” Mbuzo asks with a tremble in his voice, while taking out his phone from his pocket.

Doesn’t he see what’s going on? This man will not bend, he just wants money.

“Ibambe lapho mfana!” Ngwemabala tells Mbuzo.

He steps into the yard, I’m ready to see the worst but nothing happens to him. Khathala is fuming.

“We are taking Madlala, and we demand his wife’s spirit as well. Release them, take your money and we will forget this ever happened.” Ngwemabala.

I’m not hopeful at this point.

Khathala's eyes flash with fury, and he raises his hands to the sky.

"Am I getting my money or not?" He shouts in rage.

"Release the Madlalas first." Ngwemabala yells, he's getting on his knees.

I never liked Harry Potter, what's this nonsense now?

"You've been warned. Now, face the consequences." That's Khathala.

A sudden gust of wind whips through the yard, lifting dust and leaves into the air. Mbuzo stumbles back, pulling me with him but I lose his grip. I see uncle Mfaniseni run out the gate and down the streets.

Haike!

Mhlo's eyes are wide with fear.

"Bhekani phezulu! Look at the sky!" Mbuzo

shouts.

Dark clouds have gathered, please God, let this be you. Otherwise, kuyonyiwa! We're fucked!

I'm looking for my uncle, Balungile.

Oh, there he is in the car. It looks like he's praying, his eyes are closed, hands joined together and his lips are moving.

The wind howls louder, and Khathala's laughter echoes ominously.

What is going on?

"KaMadlala asambe, let's go."

I'm not leaving, who is going to narrate this to me when we all run?

"Stop pulling my hand, I'm not leaving." I tell Mbuzo.

"Let them sort it out, witch to witch." Mbuzo's voice trembles.

I thought Ngwemabala was not a witch.

Ngwemabala is on his feet now, his own hands raised and he's chanting under his breath. The air crackles with tension, and a bolt of lightning strikes the ground between us, sending Mbuzo and Mhloniphe diving for cover.

They land on their stomachs with their hands covering their heads. I stand behind a tree.

Ngwemabala's chanting grows louder, his eyes locked onto Khathala's. The air shimmers with power, and another bolt of lightning streaks down, missing Khathala by an inch. He falls back and crawls to a corner where he gets back up on his feet.

He is angry as hell, "You will regret this, Ngwemabala. You cannot win."

These people know each other, probably from the sky while flying at night. I don't know

anymore because, what is this thing
Ngwemabala is showing us?

My father is my biggest worry here, he's still
standing like a statue. What if he is struck by
lightning?

"Libambe lingashoni!" Khathala yells, pointing a
finger at Ngwemabala.

I believe that's him saying see you tonight,
mthakathi.

Yoh! I must be dreaming!

Ngwemabala stands his ground, "We will not be
cowed by your threats, Khathala. Release their
spirits, now!"

The wind picks up, swirling around us with
increasing intensity. "Maybe we should go back
and rethink this plan!" I shout, hoping
Ngwemabala will hear me, every hair on my
body standing on end.

“Cashile!” That’s Mbuzo calling me, I almost forgot about my husband.

Before I can look back, someone grabs my wrist. I turn my head, my heart racing against my chest, there’s no one.

“KaMadlala, I’m down here!” Mbuzo’s voice calls again in a whisper this time, I look down. He’s lying on the ground, trying to pull me back.

“Cashile, we need to leave. Now!” He whispers.

Leave how, when he’s lying on his stomach? So is he going to slither on his stomach like a snake all the way to the car?

Ahhh!

Mhloniphe is already doing that and he’s headed towards the car, he must have been a soldier in his past life because that speed he’s moving in... wow.

“KaMadlala kanti yini? I’m leaving.” Mbuzo pulls

my hand.

“Get up!” I shout, I don’t think he can move a muscle. His body is visibly trembling.

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[03/06, 15:56] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 112

CASHILE

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The lightning cracks again, and I duck, kneeling down beside Mbuzo. He wraps his arms around me in a protective manner, only God knows how he got on his knees.

“Are you okay?”

I nod, he's rubbing my belly with a puckered brow. I have to commend him for the love he has for the baby.

"I can't wait for this baby to be born, my husband has turned into a weakling." I tease.

He lifts his eyes and finds me staring, "Did I ever promise you to be superman? I'm a black man, we run first and ask questions later."

He's right, we don't subscribe to such danger. His hand is rubbing my back, as if to sooth me. I smile at him, he frowns instead.

"Don't look at me like that, you say I'm stubborn. What about you? We shouldn't have come. Ngwemabala was going to handle it just fine without us."

Well maybe, but I had to see for myself, and besides...

"None of us knew this was going to happen." I tell him.

“Do you think we should name the baby, Mbani?”

That better be a joke.

“We are not naming our baby, Lightning.” I say and he laughs.

“The situation calls for it, and it’s a nice name if you don’t translate it to the nearest English.”

He’s mad!

We’re distracted by Ngwemabala shouting, “Give up, Khathala!”

That man will never stop.

“Baba, stop this madness!” A woman’s screams cuts through the chaos. “You need to stop!”

We turn towards the yard, Khathala looks calmer. He shakes his head as he turns to her.

“Stay out of this, Nolwazi.”

“That must be his wife,” Mbuzo says to me, I think so too.

She marches up to him, standing toe-to-toe,
“Enough! Accept the money from the Madlalas
and free their spirits. This has gone too far.”

Mhkay!

She's not the “Yebo baba” type.

I stan!

For a moment, it looks like Khathala will refuse,
but he nods. There's still wind and the skies are
still dark. The wife takes the baby from my
father and heads to the house, my father was
their house keeper?

I will never be able to get over this.

Khathala looks at us, “Fine, follow me.”

Mbuzo and I exchange glances, “I'm not going
in there.”

I knew he would say that.

“He said follow me,” I tell Mbuzo, and
Ngwemabala is already headed inside.

This could only mean all is well.

“He’s a witch, let’s wait in the car.” Mbuzo says.

Is there even time to argue about this?

“I asked you to come with me because you’re the only one I have, don’t abandon me now, Nonkosi, not when I need you the most.”

His jaw ticks as he rubs my cheek, “Forgive me, I will go with you.”

That’s what I want to hear, he helps me up.

Ngwemabala says my uncle has to be present, Mfaniseni is gone, and Balungile refuses to get out of the car. Mhlo is on the driver’s seat, I don’t know when he got in there.

He doesn’t say a word or look at us as we speak to my uncle.

“Baba please, can we do this and leave this place. You know I’m pregnant, it’s not safe for the baby.”

He sighs and steps out of the car, Mbuzo and I lead the way.

We follow Khathala into his hut, the interior is filled with strange objects and the smell of herbs. He moves to a corner where several gourds and pots are placed.

“Give me the money,” he demands, not looking at us.

This man is so fuckin’ rude, he annoys me.

“Can I have your account number?” Mbuzo asks, his voice kept low. I swear my husband is a coward.

Khathala frowns, “What do you want my number for?”

“The... the money is in my account.” Mbuzo says.

I wish Ngwemabala could borrow him his

confidence, hayyi.

“I want it cash,” Khathala commands.

“That’s not going to happen, who knows what you will do with their money. The money will be sent to your account.” Ngwemabala says.

“Yes, I can send it now.” My husband adds.

Shame, he’s still afraid.

Khathala glares at Ngwemabala, these two have a history—I refuse to believe otherwise.

“Take the number down mfana,” Khathala is talking to Mbuzo who types down the account number. It’s Capitec, he does the transaction and a second later we hear a buzz.

Khathala retrieves his phone from the pocket of his pants and a smile appears on his face as he swipes the screen to life.

“15K? Nice, usebenzile mfana.” Khathala says, seemingly satisfied.

Does this man know he longer does his shady business? He needs to spend money wisely, how did R12K become R15K?

I shoot him a glare, he doesn't look at me. We'll talk about this at home.

"Now do what you promised." Ngwemabala orders.

Khathala begins to chant, his voice low and rhythmic. He pours some liquid from a gourd into a bowl, adding herbs and powders, the mixture smoking and bubbling.

Ngwemabala watches closely with a stern stare, "Do it right, Khathala," he warns.

Khathala glares at him but continues the ritual. He dips a feather into the bowl and waves it over Baba, then over an old photo of MaNkosi.

Yeah neh! I'm never taking pictures again.

The chanting grows louder, more intense, and I

feel a shift in the air. Chills rush through my body, I know Mbuzo felt it too because his body shudders. He keeps looking at me, then the baby bump. He's worried that something might happen to the baby.

Suddenly, Baba's eyes clear, and he blinks, looking around as if seeing us for the first time.

"Baba?" I whisper, my heart pounding. "Are you okay?"

He nods slowly, still not speaking, but there's recognition in his eyes. I look at Mbuzo, only to meet a frown on his face. I know he's worried about my father practising witchcraft again.

Khathala finishes his ritual with a final chant.

"It's done, take him and go." Khathala angrily says.

We don't waste any time, Mbuzo helps me up, while Ngwemabala helps Baba to his feet, and we hurry out of the hut. Outside, the air feels

fresh and alive, the sky is starting to come alive again.

My shoulders feel lighter as we walk out the gate.

We help Baba into the car. His eyes are alert, though he remains silent. Ngwemabala gets in with us, while Mhloniphe drives with Balungile. As we drive away, the relief washes over me, but there's still a knot of worry in my chest.

"There's your uncle!" Mbuzo announces.

Yep and he's flagging us down.

Where was he going in the first place?

"I needed to go for a walk, doctor's orders," uncle Mfaniseni says, climbing into the car.

Which doctor?

I don't say anything because I'm not familiar with him as I am with Balungile. I feel Mbuzo's

hand on my lap, he squeezes gently and briefly looks at me with a small smile on his face.

Will I ever be able to do life without this man?

He's my rock!

Baba's eyes meet mine in the rearview mirror, and I see a spark of life there. It's a start. We still have a long way to go, but for now, we have him back. And that's enough.

"Baba, how are you feeling?"

He snorts, "What took you so long?"

Yoh!

Mbuzo looks my way, his brows furrowing in surprise.

"We thought you eloped with Nothando, baba."

Tongue click!

Why am I telling him this? He's my father, that's

something you should never say to an African parent.

I look back, he looks out the window. I can't tell if he's upset with me, or he's just quiet.

"I will take him with me so I can examine him," Ngwemabala says.

I approve, who knows what tricks that Khathala man is playing with us.

"I want to go home," my father says.

"It will only be for three days," Ngwemabala tells him.

He shakes his head; my father.

"I want to go home, where my wife died. Take me home, KaMadlala." His voice trembles, a tear escapes his eye.

I know he wants to go home, but I'm not taking any risks. He will have to go with Ngwemabala.

Mbuzo seems to think so because he drives to

Ngwemabala's home, right after we drop off my uncle. We step out of the car, I help my father out because Mbuzo refuses to touch Lazarus.

"We will come and take you home in three days baba, I promise."

He looks away from me, it's confirmed that he's upset with me.

Two young men come running from inside the yard, one of them takes Ngwemabala's bag.

"Usher Bab'Madlala inside," Ngwemabala instructs the boys.

"Baba, I will come and get you." I have to assure my father, he doesn't even look my way. At least he's not fighting the boys, he let's them lead him inside.

"Is he going to be okay?" I ask the seer.

"Yes, I just have to check if Khathala untied everything. I don't trust that old witch."

Ngwemabala says.

Now I know they are sworn enemies.

“We will discuss everything in three days, you still have to do a cleansing ritual to ward off umkhokha.” he says.

Umkhokha?

“I don’t understand baba.”

“The spirit of suicide, your mother died by su!cide. The whole family has to be cleansed.”

It never ends!

Ngwemabala heads inside without biding us goodbye.

“Let’s go, you must be tired.” Mbuzo says, taking my hand.

“Maybe we should take him with us,” I say.

“Maybe not, let’s go, KaMadlala hau.”

He’s dragging me to the car, my father doesn’t

eat people.

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It's past 8am, Lulu must be at school. I call Mbali to ask if Lulu got to school safe, there's no answer. Third call later, she's still not answering.

"What is it?" Mbuzo asks when I sigh in exhaustion.

"Mbali is not answering her phone."

I text Mhlo, his response is that she's not answering his calls as well.

"Maybe she forgot her phone at home," Mbuzo.

I hope that's the case, I've been cautious when it comes to Lulu since Nkosana kidnapped her.

Speaking of...

“Your twin sent me a message yesterday,” I tell him, I must, lest he finds out and accuses me of hiding things from him.

“What does he want?”

Oh, he’s handling this well.

“He wants to see me.”

I hear a soft sigh, he’s focused on driving. I need him to say something, I don’t like being kept hanging.

“I will go and see him, I don’t want you in that place with my baby.” He says, dismissively.

I can’t say I expected this response from him.

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Cashile’s call has him unsettled, even worse now because he’s been calling Mbali and she’s

not answering. Mbali always takes his calls. He's dropped Cashile's uncle off and is now driving home. His mind racing with guesses and questions. Mbali wasn't okay this morning, maybe he should have stayed with her. His worry gnaws at him, a cold dread settles in his stomach.

He leaves her another message, trying to keep his voice steady. "Little one, it's me again. Where are you? Call me back, please."

Mbali is a responsible young woman, too mature for someone her age. Surely whatever happened to her last night, can't be so bad that she would resort to harming herself.

This is a comforting thought, but the truth is that she has her weak moments. She's tried to take her own life more than once, could it be that...

Nah!

He shakes his head to get rid of the dreadful thought, this is the one time he's truly fallen for a girl and it has to work out. It just has to.

Mbali has changed him, without realizing it. He's gone from an unapologetic player who couldn't hold down a relationship to cupid's victim.

He pulls up to the house, Mbuzo and Cashile are just arriving as well. Lulu is sitting outside the gate, tears streaming down her face. This can't be right, Mbali was with her. No way would she leave her outside, fear grips his heart.

Mbuzo is the first to run out of the car, rushing to her and lifting her into his arms.

"Baby, what happened?" Mbuzo asks, his voice filled with concern.

"Why are you sitting out here alone?" Cashile asks.

Lulu sniffles, wiping her eyes with the back of her hand. “I went to the park with Mbali, but then a man took her away.”

Mhloniphe’s heart stops. “What? Who took her? What was his name?”

Lulu looks up at him, her eyes wide with fear and confusion. “Tshepang... he told me to run home and I ran.”

Mhloniphe’s face darkens with rage.
“Tshepang,” he mutters, clenching his fists.
“That bastard.”

“Language, ndoda.” Mbuzo reprimands him.

“What’s a bastard?”

Too late, Lulu heard him.

This child does not miss anything under the sun, she will suck in every word and tone.

Cashile sighs, shooting Mhlo a stern gaze.

“Lulu, did he hurt you? Are you okay?” Mbuzo

asks.

She shakes her head, “No, daddy. He didn’t hurt me. But Mbali...”

Gasps!

Tears fill Mbuzo’s eyes, he lets them roll down his face.

“She called me, daddy.” He tells Cashile like she didn’t hear a thing, and all Cashile could do is smile.

He kisses Lulu’s cheek, “You called me daddy?”

These two need a moment, Mhlo is impatiently waiting for the hugs and kisses to be over. But it’s all worth it, Lulu has forgotten her tears.

She’s giggling in Mbuzo’s arms like life is rosy again.

“I’d hate to interrupt, but we need to find Mbali, now.”-Mhlo.

Ah yes, Mbali!

“Sweetie, did you hear where they are taking her?” That’s Mhlo.

“The park,” Lulu points nowhere in particular.

She’s a child, of course she doesn’t know everything.

“Why would he do this?” Mhloniphe asks, his voice shaking with fury. “Why take Mbali?”

“Tshepang is Mbali’s brother in-law, I don’t want to think the worst but it must have something to do with a forced marriage. I heard his family is quite old fashioned.” Cashile says.

“You think he wants to marry Mbali?” Mbuzo asks.

Which rock do those people live in? It’s crazy that people still believe in arranged marriages, forced in this case.

“Oh God, what if he marries her before we find her?” Cashile is scaring an already terrified

Mhloniphe.

“Over my dead body.” Mhlo hisses, marching towards his car.

“I will go with him, call your aunt, maybe she knows something about this forced marriage nonsense.” –Mbuzo.

He hands Lulu over to Cashile and follows Mhloniphe.

Well life is a bitch, but can it get bitchier than this?

Lulu clings on to Cashile as they watch the car drive off.

“Mommy, is a bastard a man?”

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[03/06, 15:56] T: CALL ME ADDDY

CHAPTER 113

CASHILE

It's crazy how you think your life is terrible until you take a walk in someone else's shoes.

Just today, we got my father back and lost Mbali. I spoke to my aunt, she didn't take it well. She mentioned something about my uncles, I couldn't quite catch. She was too angry, her words were all over the place.

It's late at night, Lulu is sleeping in her room. I haven't heard anything from Mbuzo.

Oh, I think he's the one pulling up outside. I'm too bloated to get up from this couch. He walks in seconds later.

I'm stunned at how he just laid back on the couch and puffed out cigarette smoke out from his nostrils. I used to smoke, I can't even remember when I stopped. It wasn't that deep anyway and I have no problem with smokers, but this right here... this nonsensical nonsense this man is doing, is something I will not accept.

"Can you do that outside?"

I'm not happy and, who told the Xabas that when you're stressed you should smoke your life away?

He looks at me, slowly stands and flips the cigarette out the window with his fingers.

"Do I look like a joke to you?"

He chuckles lightly, "Ngiyaxolisa, KaMadlala."

Nxa!

"How did it go?" I've been waiting for them to come back home with Mbali.

Mbuzo came back alone, which means Mhlo is still out there looking for her.

He sits on the couch he abandoned and sighs while crossing one leg over the other, this is bad.

“Well?”

My aunt is worried sick, she was fuming when I told her what happened. One thing I know about aunt Hluphekile, she will sell her soul to the devil just to get her child back. Those people haven't seen nothing yet.

“I think my brother has lost his mind, he refused to come home without her. We have looked everywhere.”

Yeah he's been gone the whole day, I actually missed him.

“Let me get your food first, then you'll tell me how it went.”

I head to the kitchen to warm his food, I didn't

go all out today. Who am I kidding? I never do, Mhlo is the chef in this house. But Mbuzo cooks better than all of us.

“How is Lulu?”

Well, I hope she’s still sleeping. Did he have to raise his voice?

“She’s fine,” I keep my voice down because this house is not too big for him not to hear me.

I go back with a bowl of water and a dish cloth.

“Thank you,” he says as I hand it to him.

“I made rice and chicken stew.” I’m a lover of chicken lately, and this one does not look impressed.

“Who cooked?” He asks.

He’s about to joke about my cooking skills.

“MaNkosi,” I say, his eyes almost fall off.

“She’s back? I... I thought Khathala dealt with it.”

His voice is shaky, that will teach him not to play with me like that.

He frowns at my bored expression.

“No, she’s not back. Why would you ask me who cooked when I was the only adult left in this house?”

The microwave calls for my attention, he’s washed his hands, I take the bowl with me, and come back with his food.

“Are you going to eat here, or the dining room?”

One spoonful... gone into his mouth. I have to wait for him to finish chewing and swallow.

“I’m fine,” he says, shoving another spoonful into his mouth.

You can never go wrong with Rajah curry powder, it’s a hero.

“This is nice, ngiyabonga KaMadlala.”

He’s just saying it, we both know he does it

better. I'm sure he once worked as a chef.

Now that the thought has crossed my mind.

I sit my ass down next to him, "What did you do for a living before we met?"

He chokes on his food, probably a piece of rice entered his nostrils because yei... this man is choking. I pat his back, it takes a while for him to come back to me.

"Are you asking me this after two years of knowing each other?"

"Almost two years," I correct him.

I've had two New Years since we were reunited, the first one, we were more like strangers and the second, he was missing in action.

What's that sigh for?

"Were you a chef?" I ask, then I remember that Lona is a chef.

Argh!

“No, I worked at some restaurants waiting tables. I worked at night clubs too.” He’s suddenly eating fast, not giving himself time to swallow.

“Oh, doing what?” I ask.

He’s never told me any of this, I mean, I get waiting tables but night clubs?

“Were you a bouncer?” I ask when he doesn’t reply.

A head shake, now the plate and spoon are wrestling each other. It’s making me nervous, and he’s making me nervous with his silence.

“You were a stripper?” I’m going to guess until he tells me the truth.

What’s so funny?

“A stripper, KaMadlala? Awkahle bo.”

“Then what? I suddenly feel like I’m married to idlozi, they can be secretive you know.”

Another laugh! He's done eating, that was fast. He puts the plate on the coffee table and looks at me.

"No mkami, I was not a stripper."

Damn! There's a knock at the door. I exchange a quick glance with Mbuzo, both of us wondering who it could be at this hour. He gets up and opens the door to find Aunt Hluphekile standing there.

"Ninjani auntie?" He greets, stepping aside to let her in.

She walks in briskly, not even waiting for an invitation. One thing about my aunt, she will nail the village mother look. Mhloniphe walks in after her.

"Did you come together?" I ask as my aunt takes a sit beside me.

"No, a friend dropped me off." She says.

"What's going on? Did you find Mbali?" That's Mhloniphe, he looks like he was being tormented by demons, shame. I feel sorry for him, I would lose my mind too.

I know damn well Mbuzo and his brothers are not going to speak to my aunt while standing. They see my glare and settle down.

"I just spoke to Thabiso's aunt from Limpopo. Mbali is with them." Aunt says.

My heart skips a beat, and I feel a surge of both relief and worry.

Mhloniphe jerks from his seat and starts pacing the room.

"Limpopo? She's in Limpopo?" His voice rises, trembling with rage. "I've been searching for her all fuckin' day, and that bastard took her to Limpopo?"

Uh! Does he know he's in the presence of his potential mother in-law? I look at Mbuzo, he must tie the bull.

"Ndoda calm down." Mbuzo pats his shoulder.

But nope, calming down is the last thing Mhlo does. His face contorts with fury.

"I'm going to get her back, I'll tear that place apart if I have to, but I'm bringing Mbali back."

"Calm down, nawe phela. I don't think they'd hurt her, just take a deep breath." Mbuzo tells him.

But Mhloniphe shakes his head, his eyes wild.

"You don't understand, Mbuzo. She's my everything— I can't lose her."

Ehh! He's also gone... High five Mbali. You've tamed a playboy.

"I'm there too, that's what I came to tell you and we need to leave now. I won't rest until she's

back home.” Aunt says.

“Please take uncle Balungile and Mfaniseni with you.” I say.

She shakes her head in anger, “I don’t trust those old witches. They sold my daughter off to those people and put the blame on my husband. May his soul rest in peace.”

She told me about the arranged marriage, but Mhloniphe is only hearing about it now.

His eyes widen, “Mbali is married?”

I think they should leave now before this man explodes.

“You guys should go, and Auntie, please be careful. Limpopo is far, we don’t know what Tshepang might do.”

She squeezes my hand, “Don’t worry, I’ll be fine. I will take your useless uncles with me, they better be useful this time.”

Mhloniphe grabs his keys, ready to head out. “We’ll call you as soon as we have any news,” he promises, giving his brother a pat on the shoulder.

With a final nod, they head out the door.

“Do you think they will bring her back?” I ask Mbuzo as I slide into bed beside him, it’s been hours since they left and we haven’t heard anything from Mhloniphe.

He looks at me lustfully, I sleep naked because it’s more comfortable, it’s the baby bump that’s driving me crazy. He should be used to it by now.

“Knowing my brother, he won’t leave that place without her.” He says.

I have never asked how he feels about his brother dating my cousin.

“Does their relationship make you uncomfortable?”

His eyebrows crinkle in confusion, “Why would it?”

“She’s my cousin,” I say.

“Mhlo is an adult, he’s allowed to love whoever he wants.” He says.

That’s a good response I guess.

“I can’t wait for our lives to be normal, do you think we should renovate this house since we’re still going to have more children.” -Him.

I want to laugh but he’s making me upset.

“What do you mean more kids?”

He looks at me like he doesn’t understand my question.

“We are going to have more, right?”

“I mean the baby making process is nice but carrying a baby for nine months is not in my list of favourite things.” I tell him.

I don’t think I want to go through this again.

“And what do you mean renovate the house? Like building more rooms?” I ask.

Is this his way of telling me that we will never leave this place?

We never spoke about permanently staying here. I don’t know if I go with everything Mbuzo does without realizing it or I’m just stupidly in love. Or maybe it’s his Daddy demeanour. Sure I grew up in the village and I love it here, but I love the city life more. It doesn’t have to be Joburg.

“I love it here,” he says with a shrug.

“Me too, but we can always visit, our kids will have better opportunities in the city.” I say and

get another shrug from him.

“What can’t we give them here that is found in the city? Times have changed, KaMadlala. There’s no difference between the city and the village.”

Yeah no, I don’t believe that.

“We’ll take them to private schools, starting with Lulu.” He adds.

“With what money?” I ask.

As far as I know, we’re both unemployed and chances of us getting work here are slim.

That reminds me, “Why did you give Khathala R15000? We only owed him R12000.”

He keeps his eyes on the ceiling and deeply sighs, “It was the only way to make sure he released your parents. I had to do it.”

‘I had to do it’ is the reason many are broke.

“Mbuzo, we don’t have that kind of money to just throw around. You just paid lobola, the damages, we had the wedding, and now this? Where did you even get that extra R3000?”

If he tells me he’s back to scamming people, I’m going back to Joburg without him.

He stays quiet for a moment, “I had some savings.”

“Some savings? Are you sure? Unless... You didn’t go back to scamming people, did you?”

He glances at me quickly and sits up, “No, I’m done with that life.”

He doesn’t sound convincing, but rather offended. His brothers left their hijacking “business” behind, thanks to Mkhetheni. Mbuzo has to do the same.

“Mbuzo, promise me you’re not going back to those ways. I can’t handle that life. We’re trying to build a life here, a real life. We can’t do that if

you're always looking for shortcuts. What will I tell your children when you're in prison?"

That's my biggest worry, his children having a jail bird for a father.

He nods, his face serious, "I promise, KaMadlala. I won't go back."

I'm comforted by the sincerity in his voice, it soothes me a bit, but the worry doesn't leave.

"We need to talk about our finances. We need to find a way to make things work without resorting to desperate measures." I say.

He reaches over and takes my hand, giving it a reassuring squeeze. He puts his arms around me and showers me with kisses.

"We will. I'm going to find a job, something steady. Now smile, Mbani will hate me for upsetting you."

This is the third time he's mentioning that name,

he better not stick with it. I don't know why I can't help but smile back.

He's hovering over me, I don't like being on my back with this huge bump on top of me. I feel suffocated but I give him a few seconds, his hands are trapping me on both sides and his face is so close to mine, I can feel the warmth of his breath.

"What?" He's staring.

"I enjoyed your cooking today."

"Today?"

This man must choose his words carefully.

He Kisses my cheek, "I enjoy your food all the time."

Good boy!

"You know what else I will enjoy?" He asks, there's a naughty smile on his face and I just

know what he's thinking.

"You!" He says with a smile.

"I'm not horny," I cut his happiness short.

"But I am, please let me in, KaMadlala." He hides his face on my neck, the wet kisses are not doing me the favor I need.

I feel betrayed by my hormones, why am I moaning? His kisses are making me warm in between my legs.

Our lips meet, the kiss is sloppy and passionate. He's never kissed me like this before, have I been starving him that much?

I haven't had sex in a long time, I think I'm about to release just from this kiss.

He gradually breaks the kiss, the look of love in his eyes makes my eyes water.

"Can I try something?" He murmurs, he's on his feet before I can say anything and... there he

goes out the door.

I sit up and wait, he's back in a split second and closes the door.

"I was going to check if Lulu's sleeping," Mbuzo says, as he reaches for my hand and helps me out of bed.

"Okay, what's going on?" I ask, I'm made to sit on a chair.

"I want to arouse all your senses tonight," he kisses me passionately and abruptly pulls out, leaving me gasping for air.

I'm watching him striding to the wardrobe, he takes out four ties and turns to me with a naughty smile.

"What are you going to do with those?"

"Patience, kitten."

Oh shit! He called me Kitten, so we're doing that?

"Is this the part where I run?" I say, he laughs.

But seriously, why am I being tied to a chair?
He's using his ties to bind my legs and wrists.
His lips are all over my body as he does this, I'm
wriggling, unable to stay still.

It feels nice.

Mbuzo is headed to the wardrobe again, he comes back with a feather and a whip. It's leather and...

"Am I missing something?" Why does he have those things?

He doesn't answer but winks, and stands behind me. I hope he's not about to whip me, I will cry like a baby if he does.

I feel his hands on my shoulders, it's a gentle rub. He moves them up to my scalp, and lightly moves his fingertips over it, paying more attention to the space behind my ears, just above my neck.

I didn't know this place is arousing, I'm

struggling to sit still—I want him... now!

“Mbuzo, come this side.” Now I’m horny, we should just do it. We’ll play later after I’ve had my orgasm.

He’s not coming, but I feel his breath on my neck. A kiss follows, then he’s lightly blowing into my ears and whispering.

I feel something ticklish enter my ear, making me scream with laughter.

“It’s ticklish,” I complain, he’s using the feather to make me squirm.

He kisses my ear and nibbles my earlobe, my body is awake. I can testify that I have never been aroused in this manner before.

“Mbuzo, can we do it already?”

He comes to kneel in front of me and looks into my eyes.

“Call me daddy.” He reminds me.

Yoh hai!

“Daddy!” I whisper, I can’t recognise my own voice.

Mbuzo grabs my face and kisses me, he’s using the feather to trace circles around my navel and teases his way to my stomach.

My breathing has changed, my eyes are squinted and I can’t describe what’s happening in between my legs. I throw my head back, and moan louder. I think I’m going to orgasm now.

He needs to put it in me, I’m barely hanging on.

The door abruptly swings open, we both freeze.

“Sorry, I thought this was the toilet.” The person staggers back out.

What the hell just happened? We should have locked the door, the same damn door opens. Uncle Mpiyakhe is back with his drunk self,

Mbuzo jumps for a blanket and covers me. He should be untying me instead. My horniness flies out the window, now I'm petrified and ashamed. The anger and shock on uncle Mpiyakhe's face.

"Mbuzo, so you tie your wife up when no one is looking?"

Jesus, he's yelling.

"No uncle... it's not what you..."

"This is gender based violence!"

Oh no, this uncle is taking out his belt... oh, it's the phone.

Deep breath!

"GBV! In my brother's house?" Uncle Mpiyakhe yells while typing something on his phone, he puts it against his ear. Who is he calling?

"Nonkosi untie me, now." I whisper snap, Mbuzo rushes to me and starts with my legs.

“Call your uncles and aunts for a family meeting. Babize bonke.” Uncle Mpiyakhe says over the phone.

God knows who he’s talking to, we’re in deep shit.

Mbuzo should be untying me, but his body folds over with his arms clenched around his stomach, he winces in pain.

“What’s wrong?” I ask.

His uncle is still on the phone.

“I don’t know, my stomach hurts.” Mbuzo says.

Suddenly, I feel a wetness between my legs, then a gush.

Oh shit!

“My water just broke! Untie me quickly.” I announce.

Mbuzo’s eyes widen, “Please don’t tell me what I’m feeling are birth pains.”

That should be the least of his worries, he's about to tell the whole family why he tied me up.

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[03/06, 15:56] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 114

CASHILE

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“I want to throw up.”

Better he wants to throw up, I want to bite his head off. But I can't do that because my children need a father and I'm not ready to be a widow.

What a lucky man.

“I’m hungry, I want food.” He says.

Rhaaaa!

This is the wrong person to drive me to the hospital, uncle Mpiyakhe would have done a better job.

“Should we drive by McDonald’s or KFC?” He looks at me through the rear view.

I’m okay... it’s not like this is my first baby. I’ve done this before, all I have to do is count my breaths.

We left Lulu with Mbuzo’s cousin, Nompilo. I need to get a babysitter.

And now? Why is he making a U-turn?

“The hospital is that way, Mbuzo.” I don’t point to any direction because I’m sitting in the back and he can’t see me, but he knows what I’m talking about.

Where the fuck is he taking me?

“I thought we should get food, first.” He sounds so stupid.

I need a gun... no, a sword.

“Fine, go get your food but take your baby with you.” I scream, what kind of a specie is he?

I’m gripping the car seat so hard my knuckles are white. Every bump in the road feels like it’s shaking my entire body, sending waves of pain through my abdomen. Mbuzo keeps glancing over at me.

“Are you okay?” he asks for the hundredth time.

I glare at him through the haze of pain. “Do I look okay, Mbuzo? I’m in labour!”

He winces, one hand on his stomach. “I know, I know. But my stomach is killing me too. This pregnancy thing is no joke. I’m starving.”

I let out a groan, partly from another contraction

and partly from exasperation. “You’re starving? Mbuzo, I’m about to give birth! Focus!”

“I’m focusing, KaMadlala. But... can we just swing by McDonald’s real quick? I need something to eat.”

Not that again!

I stare at him in disbelief, then another contraction hits, and I can’t hold back the scream. “Nonkosi, if you even think about stopping for a Big Mac right now, I will lose my mind!”

He flinches, probably at the loudness of my voice.

“Okay, okay, no McDonald’s. But what about a drive-thru? Just something small?”

“Are you out of your mind?” I shout, clutching my belly. “I’m in labour, you idiot! We need to get to the hospital, not McDonald’s!”

He mumbles something under his breath, clearly torn between his hunger and the urgency of the situation.

“But what if I pass out from hunger? Then who’s gonna drive?”

I take a deep breath, trying to calm myself even though every fibre of my being wants to strangle him.

“If you pass out, I will personally drive us to the hospital and leave you by the side of the road. Now, drive faster!”

God, why me? Why this husband?

He lets out a dramatic sigh, pressing harder on the gas pedal.

“Okay, KaMadlala, okay. I just thought maybe some fries would help us both.”

“Fries?” I repeat incredulously, another contraction making me squeeze my eyes shut.

“You think fries are going to help right now? Get me to the hospital before I have this baby in the car!”

Why is he driving slow?

Mbuzo’s face is a picture of nerves, his eyes keep darting between me and the road. He’s sweating, and I can see he’s in some discomfort too, but my pain triumphs everything at this moment. It’s about me, not him. He won’t have to push a big head out of his vagina... fuck, he doesn’t have one, nor is he in pain.

Sympathetic pregnancy my foot!

“Hang in there, sthandwa sami. We’re almost there. Just keep breathing.”

That’s what I have been doing but it hasn’t changed anything.

Still, I focus on my breathing, trying to ignore the ridiculousness of my husband’s

sympathetic pregnancy cravings.

“God, I’m so hungry.” He’s doing it again, I bet he wants me to feel sorry for him.

“No more food talk,” I snap.

He nods vigorously. “Got it, no more food talk. Straight to the hospital.”

As we speed through the streets, I can’t help but let out a small, strained laugh at the absurdity of it all. Here we are, on the way to welcome our baby, and my husband is whining about McDonald’s. But deep down, I know he’s just as scared and excited as I am. We’re in this together, hunger pains and all.

“Mbuzo,” I say through gritted teeth as another contraction hits, “we’re going to have a beautiful baby, and you’re going to be a great father. But if you mention McDonald’s one more time, I swear...”

He chuckles nervously, glancing at me, “I hear

you, KaMadlala. The focus should be on bringing our baby into the world.”

“Good, because if this baby comes out smelling like fries, it’s on you.”

He laughs, and I can’t help but smile despite the pain.

“Deal,” he says, pulling into the hospital driveway.

“Now let’s have this baby.”

Mbali's hands are raw from scrubbing the pots, her back aching from bending over the firewood stove all day. She glances at the clock on the wall; it's well past midnight. Tshepang's grandmother and mother sit by the fire, their eyes following her every move, their faces stern

and unkind.

They arrived in Limpopo around 7pm, Tshepang didn't stay after dropping her off here, nor did he tell her where he was going. She's been here before, with Thabiso. She knows these people, the uncles, the aunts, cousins. More especially Thabiso's mother and grandmother, as to why such old people are still alive...

Why are they outliving everyone else?

"Girl, you missed a spot on that pot,"
Tshepang's grandmother barks with her notorious sharp tone.

Mbali's response is a head nod, she scrubs harder, tears threatening to spill but she blinks them away. She has to stay strong, if not for herself, then for the hope that someone will come for her.

There is no place more rural than this, she'd have to travel two hours to get to the main road

where she would probably hitchhike to town. The houses are surrounded by hills. Thabiso once told her that there are baboons on those mountains, it was enough to scare her away. She had sworn she'll never come back here.

Tshepiso bloody swine!

A plate falls and breaks, it wasn't on purpose. Her hands are shaky from overworking, these people didn't give her a chance to rest when she arrived. Two seconds in and she was sent to the kitchen to cook for the family.

"Are you going to finish my plates?" Tshepang's mom shouts.

"I didn't drop it on purpose, I can't feel my hands." It's the first time Mbali is complaining since she arrived.

The old women exchange glances, "There is no such thing, a woman never gets tired. And a

daughter-in-law must work hard to prove she is worthy, you must show us that you are fit for our son.”

To hell with their son!

She stops washing the plates and turns to them, “I don’t want to be here. Tshepang took me by force, I want to go home.”

If only she knew the way out of this place.

The old women snort, “What about our money? You are our daughter in law, you’re here to stay.”

That’s the grandmother talking.

“I was your daughter in-law, my husband died. Even if he were here, he wouldn’t have brought me to this place. Thabiso knew I hated it here, he knew how wicked you two are.”

Tears roll down her face, she doesn’t wipe them away.

“You talk too much, shut up and finish your work.” Tshepang’s mother scolds.

“Can’t I finish tomorrow? I’m tired.” Mbali pleads.

Everyone has gone to bed, it’s just these two women that won’t let her rest.

“No, we are still awake. And hurry up, you have an early morning tomorrow.” The grandmother says.

It’s no use talking to these old hags, they are not fazed by her insults. Mbali moves to clean the floor, her muscles screaming in protest. The women’s eyes never leave her, she can feel them watching her and can hear them stuttering under their breaths.

“Did you hear me, girl?” Tshepang’s mother snaps. “You are to sleep only when everyone else has gone to bed. And wake up at four in the morning to clean the house and make food

for the whole family. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Mbali replies, her voice trembling. She knows arguing is pointless. She is alone here, trapped in this house, miles away from her family.

"Now make us some tea," Tshepang's mother commands, her eyes fixed on Mbali as she points to the kettle boiling over the fire.

Which is which? Clean the damn place or make tea?

Exhausted, Mbali drags her feet over. She can barely keep her eyes open.

She reaches for the kettle using a dish cloth, in a split second, the boiling kettle tumbles to the ground and lands on the grandmother's feet.

"Yoh! Mbali! Yoh" The grandmother shrieks in pain, her body rolling on the floor.

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Let's also reach targets in the chapters so there's no delay when I have to post.

[03/06, 15:56] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 115

CASHILE

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I've been in labour for three hours, I'm starting to think these doctors don't know what they are doing. I'm in labour, that means the baby is ready to come... it wants to come out.

"What time is it?"

No answer!

Every family has its problems, mine right now is Mbuzo.

People are giving us looks because he screams when I scream and he's pacing around with his hands on his waist, like a freaking pregnant woman.

"It's almost 3:30am," he says.

How long am I going to wait in this ward?

There are other women here, acting crazier than me.

"Please get the doctor, tell him the baby is ready

to come out.”

Why that look?

“Mbuzo get the doctor,” I hate it when I scream at him, but he doesn’t listen sometimes.

He rushes out, I see my aunt Lindie pacing the passage just as the door opens. I’m not sure what time she arrived, it feels long though and she’s been praying in tongues since she got here. There are two more ladies with her, they were chased out of the ward.

I need more than prayers, Jesus himself must come and get this baby out of me.

Mbuzo is back, “I couldn’t find anyone. I think the nurses are sleeping.”

I need positive people around me, motivational speakers will do. Someone to tell me that I will give birth any second now and this will all be

over sooner than the next contraction.

Someone comes with a wheelchair, Mbuzo sits and takes a deep breath.

“Ngiyabonga nurse, my back is killing me. It feels like it’s ripping into pieces.” He says to the guy behind the wheelchair.

I don’t remember praying for a husband and if I did, I must have been praying while laying down, and God said “this one is not serious, I will give her my last hope.”

Mbuzowakhe Xaba was God’s last hope and here I am, suffering the consequences of not kneeling while praying.

“The wheelchair is for the pregnant woman, sir.” The guy says.

Mbuzo looks up at me, his eyes widening. I want to grab him by his shirt and throw him across the room.

I hold on to the wall, screaming my lungs off.
There's fire inside my abdomen, and it feels like
my enemies are slashing my back with sharp
razor blade.

"Here, sit on my lap." He pats his lap.

I need to remember that this man is a Xaba,
they are insensitive by nature.

Another scream from me sends him jumping up.

"Slowly," he says, helping me sit.

The doctor is here, he smiles at me.

Deep breath.

"Is it time?" I ask the doctor as the nurse
pushes me out of the ward with crazy pregnant
women.

"No, we're taking you to a single ward."

What's that supposed to mean?

I know what it means, but I should have given

birth hours ago.

“Cashile, God will not forsake you. Have faith my child.” That’s my aunt rushing behind us.

“Doctor, it’s been three hours. My wife should be holding our baby already.” Mbuzo says, he’s striding beside me with his hand on my shoulder.

I want to bite it.

“The baby is not ready yet...”

“Then cut me open and get it out,” I growl.

I’m not going to spend another hour writhing in pain, this pregnancy wasn’t even planned.

“It’s not God’s time yet, Cashile. Let the doctor do his job,” Aunt Lindie’s words shoot through my spine. That was painful, I grit my teeth to stop myself from screaming at an old woman.

They are not allowed into the ward, I wish I wasn’t allowed as well.

Take me to the bloody theatre already.

“I want an epidural.”

“We’ve given you two already, overdosing might cause an infection within the spine area or blood clots.” The doctor says.

“Might means it’s rare, right? Give me another one,”

He doesn’t know what I’m going through.

Mbuzo frowns, “KaMadlala, maybe we should wait. It won’t be long, you’re almost there.”

Isn’t he supposed to be screaming in pain as well? We had sex together, why am I punished alone?

The doctor puts on latex gloves, I ignore my husband and open my legs for the doctor.

The look on his face is not promising as he probes my vagina with his finger, the look on Mbuzo’s face is worse. He will punch the doctor

if he doesn't get his finger away.

"That's enough doctor," Mbuzo quickly says.

The doctor smiles, shaking his head.

He checks his wrist watch, "Thirty more minutes."

I will be dead by then, this pain is going to kill me. There he goes, out the door. These doctors don't care about us.

"Why are you crying?"

That's a stupid question this man is asking me.

"We should have gone to a public hospital, I would have given birth already." I just know it.

Mbuzo leans over and kisses my temple, he squeezes my hand.

"I'm sorry that you're in pain, it's my fault. I shouldn't have..."

He's going to say he shouldn't have released

inside me.

“It’s Eve’s fault, she trusted the serpent and ate the fruit.” I tell him, making him laugh. I love how I’m the only one who can make him laugh, otherwise to other people, he’s the Undertaker, as Bakhe called him.

“We’re going to be okay, you will give birth to a beautiful baby.” He says.

I can’t wait to avenge myself, this baby is going to get it from me.

“You are going to be the best mother in the world,” he says.

*Evil laugh!

One thing’s for certain, this man will never grasp the depths of my love for him, how deeply I love him to a point where I would give him a million chances before giving up on him.

I grip his hand, way too hard that he winces in

pain and almost shouts.

My back is on fire, it feels like brim stones have been placed there. Lulu's birth was easier than this and it was my first.

"Don't touch me," I pull my hand away from him, it's his fault I'm in this mess.

His phone rings, "It's Mkhetheni," he takes the call outside.

A nurse walks in, at least this one is smiling.

"Mrs Xaba, how are you feeling?"

Like I just married the devil and he's taking me on a tour in hell.

"I will never have sex again," I tell her.

She thinks it's funny, I'm serious. She's shocked when she finds out that this is my second baby.

"The second time is supposed to be the

easiest."

Maybe for other women.

When she's done with her task, she leaves. I want to cry, when are they taking me to the delivery room?

Mbuzo strides back in, "That was Mkhetheni. We're naming the baby after our mother."

Fuck no!

I'm not going through hours of labour just for my baby to be named Agnes.

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It was light outside when I was taken into the delivery room, I came out holding a beautiful baby boy. I'm lying, he's not beautiful. My baby looks like an alien, I think he didn't have enough space in the womb.

“Is he supposed to look like that?” Mbuzo keeps asking, he’s standing over us, his eyes fixed on baby Mbani.

Yes, I went with the name.

Love has turned me into a fool.

“He’s a newborn, they all look like foreigners from out of space.”

He frowns at my answer.

“Can I hold him?”

“You don’t have to ask for permission, you’re his father.” I say.

His face lights up as he looks up at me, “I’m his father, we made him.”

I give him a nod, I’m overwhelmed as well.

I can’t move due to pain, so he has to take the baby.

“Carefully, he’s fragile.” I say.

The admiration on his face makes me tear up, I didn't choose him to father my child. But I know he's going to do a splendid job, and I am going to enjoy watching him raise our kids.

"Let's name him Buhlebethu Mbani Xaba." Mbuzo says, planting soft kisses on Mbani's tingy fingers.

Shocking!

"That's my brother's name."

Well my brother is Buhlebakhe, but same difference, if there is such a thing.

"Your brother has been your protector, I can never thank him enough." He says.

I don't know what to say but, "Thank you. Bakhe will love the name."

I can't wait to tell him.

My heart is heavy, I can't stop thinking about Mbani's twin.

“Mbuzo!”

“Yes!” He doesn’t remove his eyes from the baby, there’s a smile on his face as he plays with Mbani’s fingers.

“We have to name his twin.”

His smile vanishes, he’s looking at me like I just hurt him.

We never got to do the cleansing or ritual for the baby we lost.

“I will speak to my uncle,” he says.

I wish I had both my babies with me.

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MHLONIPHE

Growing up in the village does not mean you are immune to the sound of owls howling all night

long and dogs barking at things you can't see. They arrived at 4am and Mhloniphe being the stubborn man he is, picked up a stone and hit the gate. No one came to open, nor did the lights in the house go on.

Hooting did nothing for him as well, they had no choice but to sleep in the car.

It's daybreak.

That's one hell of a huge ass compound, why does it seem like the Limpopo province got more land than the rest of South Africa.

They are outside the gate, waiting to be let in. The family has seen them, they've been coming in and out of the house like ants collecting food for winter.

"We should go back, these people will not let us in." It's actually not the first time Balungile is suggesting this.

No one gives him an answer, not even his

partner in crime, Mfaniseni.

Finally, a little boy in shorts and no shirt or shoes on runs to the gate. He opens it and runs back into the house.

This must be them letting them in.

With a tongue click, Mhlo walks in first. The sun is blazing overhead. There's tension as they're ushered into the house by another kid, where a group of old men with unwelcoming faces are gathered.

Mhloniphe's eyes scan the room, he's searching for Mbali. Suddenly, she appears, carrying a tray of drinks and biscuits.

She didn't look like this the last time he saw her, the Mbali he remembers was fresh. Yes she was sad, but she didn't look like her soul had been sucked out of her. And what is that ugly dress she's wearing?

Mhloniphe's heart wrenches at the sight.

"Little One?" He whispers, jerking up from his seat. Their eyes lock and in this moment, the tray comes crashing down. Mbali is startled, she quickly gets on her knees and begins to gather the broken pieces. Body language does not lie, that's movement of someone who is abused.

Mhloniphe rushes to her, he grabs her hands, stopping her from picking the broken glasses.

She looks up at him, tears in eyes.

"What are you doing?" Mhloniphe murmurs, his brows lifted.

"My duty," she yanks her hands back and continues.

But Mhloniphe is stubborn, he stops her once more. Their eyes meet again.

“Stop, I came to take you home.” He caresses her cheeks, swiping his thumbs over them to wipe away her tears.

“You came for me?” She almost sounds shocked.

“I will always come for you.” Mhlo says, he wraps his arms around her, bringing her up with him in the process.

There are gasps and grumbles in the room, the elders are not happy.

“What is this?” One yells.

“Who is this boy?” Another barks.

“What did these people do to you, Little One? Tell me and I will deal with them one by one.” He keeps wiping her tears.

Mbali points towards the kitchen, Tshepang’s mother is standing by the door with a broom in her hand.

“She made me work until 2 in the morning.”

Mbali snitches.

Mhloniphe’s eyes run to the old woman, there’s no ounce of fear in her eyes.

“Mbali is my daughter in-law and she is not done with the chores.” She hands Mbali the broom. “The dog pooped all over the yard, go clean it up. We have guests, as you can see.”

“Mbali put that broom down,” Mhloniphe orders.

The gasps resound again.

“I said put that broom down, I’m sure she uses it to fly at night.” Mhloniphe says, squarely looking at Tshepang’s mother in the eye.

The uncles are shocked beyond the word, they start cursing him. He doesn’t care, his eyes are on the old woman.

“Mbali, you are married to my son. Now do as I say,” the mother commands.

Mhloniphe snatches the broom from Mbali and throws it at the old woman.

“Yeyi madam, take your transport.”

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[03/06, 15:56] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 116

CASHILE

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“You’re a strong woman, KaMadlala. Some women pass out after giving birth.” Aunt Lindie

says.

Should I tell her that her son in-law was stronger than I was? He held my hand throughout, I was waiting for him to pass out. All he did was scream with me.

“Thank you auntie.” My eyes run to the door, Mbuzo left hours ago to get food.

Why is he not back yet? I want to go home and soak myself in hot water, I’m tired and feel dirty, and I smell like sweat.

“What’s his name?” She asks, heading back to Mbani’s cot. It has wheels, I’m afraid he will wake up if she touches it.

“Mbani,” I’m absent minded as I answer her.

I hear a light scream, she quickly covers her mouth. But it’s too late, baby Mbani is awake.

“Please bring him to me,” I say.

I’m annoyed because he just fell asleep. This

child twirls his tongue around my nipple and sucks like his life depends on it.

“Don’t carry him like that, he will choke.” Aunt says.

“The nurse said this is how it’s done, I was shown what to do auntie.” I’m snappy because she’s telling me what to do, Mbani is not having mercy on me, the pain shoots down to my toes, forcing a wince out of me.

“Nurses will say anything, it’s part of their job. But I’m your aunt, I care about you and my grandson. I can’t believe you named your child after lightning, you want his peers to laugh at him?”

Times have changed, but she won’t get it.

“His father named him, I can’t argue with that. And I like the name, it’s unique.”

“Like Cashile?”

Is that a jab at me? I'm offended, my parents were too excited when they named me.

Mbani has a more, deeper meaning, my aunt won't understand when I try to explain.

"I have cleaned the house for the baby's arrival, you will sleep in the main house with me."

She means my parents' house.

"I'm not going there auntie, Mbuzo won't want to be away from his son."

"Hau, Cashile, it's what all new mothers do. You need someone experienced to help you with the baby."

I know, but I don't want to be at my parents' house. I still don't trust that place, cleansed or not.

"You can come and stay with me for a few days," although I prefer aunt Hluphekile but it will be weird having her in the same house with

Mhloniphe. She's his potential mother in-law, it just won't work.

"I can't stay at my in-laws." She argues.

Then I will have to manage, I'm not leaving.

"Ubaba will be back in three days, I don't want him around my son. He's too young to be around any negativity." I tell her.

I don't know the spirits my father carries, I'm not saying he's still evil, then again, he could be. I heard that witches never change.

Aunt Lindie does not look happy.

"I just want to take care of my sister's child but it's okay, I can come and help you whenever you need help. Tell me if you need help with Lulu too, being a mother of two is a lot of work." She says.

The door opens, the husband is back with

goodies. He slowly retreats when he sees my aunt, the look on his face says he didn't expect to find her here.

"Ninjani auntie?" Mbuzo greets as he puts the food on the table.

Aunt Lindie replies bashfully, and excuses herself.

I'm greeted with a kiss.

"I arrived five minutes ago, I didn't want to walk in immediately after being in a crowded place." He kisses the baby. "How is my little lightning?"

I give him a look, "Not funny."

He smiles, "Can I hold him."

He takes him before I say anything and heads to a chair with him, I think he can't get enough of Mbani's face. He's engrossed on him.

"What did you get?" I'm going through the package he brought.

“Wings and other things.” He says.

I don’t want wings, Mbani was the one making me eat them. There’s Nandos rice and chicken, and a salad. I go for that.

“When are we going home?” I ask, I already see myself in my bed.

“Ngwemabala will be cleansing the place tomorrow, we will do a small ceremony.”

“What ceremony?” I ask, with my mouth full.

Ancestors and wanting to party all the time.

Mbuzo looks at me, “I wanted to know if it will be safe for the baby to enter the homestead, you know, with my father there.”

Oh that! We still have to send Velaphi back to where he came from—hell.

“It’s not safe, my father is still not happy about us. We will do the ceremony tomorrow with my uncle, we are sending my father back. I think it’s

enough that my mother is there.” He says.

I thought he’d be troubled, but he seems fine. At least Agnes is a peaceful spirit.

He’s staring, I smile, he doesn’t smile back.

“I’m sorry my father is the way he is, our son won’t have a proper grandfather.”

Some people never change, Velaphi is an example of that.

“I’m okay, Mbani has you and his uncles. My father is here too,” I’m starting a fire, aren’t I?

Now I see the Undertaker Bakhe saw. He gets off the chair and hands me the baby, I’m still eating, Jehovah. I’m confused by the look in his eyes. Is he about to cry?

I thought the hormones die after birth.

Oh God, he’s on his knees.

“Cashile KaMadlala!”

And then?

“I haven’t been a good person to you and our children, I failed you.”

What is he talking about?

“I said things to you back then, and because of that, you lost our baby. I live with that regret every single day, not a day passes by without me wishing I can turn back time and fix what I broke.”

The tears come, his tears.

I’m just here, speechless because, what do I say to him?

Yes I blame him for the loss of our baby, it’s his fault. Witchcraft or not. But regardless, I love him more and more every day and I cannot fathom spending my life with anyone who is not him.

He looks at Mbani just as he makes baby noise,

he's awake and looking at me—I think he is. You never know with babies, he might be looking at the speck of dust between us.

Mbuzo lets his pinkie finger wrap around Mbani's tiny hand.

"Nonkosi, ngithi yobe Khehla, ayidle izishiyele mfana kababa. It's my fault that you lost your sibling. Nothing I do or say can ever change what I did, but I promise to spend the rest of my days making it up to you and your mother."

He lets the tears run down his face, I have no words.

What do I say to this?

I wipe the tears from his face, he kisses the palm of my hand as I do. His eyes are closed, I can feel him shuddering. He's softly sobbing, how do I tell him that it's okay when I know it's not?

"Please don't cry, you will upset the baby." I say,

he's actually upsetting me.

He opens his eyes, "I'm sorry KaMadlala. A thousand apologies will never be enough, I'm sorry for the things I said to you. I'm sorry for the way I treated you. I'm sorry for every wrong thing I ever did to you. I will try to be better, I promise to live for you and our children. I will love them with every ounce of my heart and leave no space for anything else."

His mission is to make me cry, it's working.

"Thank you, Nonkosi. You are a good man, don't ever forget that. You are important to us, we can't live without you." I tell him.

I know life would end for me if this man were to leave us.

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MHLONIPHE

“Did you here that, brother? This man called me a witch.”

Offense is not given, it's taken and Tshepang has taken it with both hands.

“No such word came out of his tongue, unless you have something to tell us.” That's Hluphekile.

She doesn't care that she was made to sit on a reed mat, she will speak and let her voice be heard all the way from down there.

“Does the shoe fit, Zinderella?” Mhlo says, there's no sign of a smile on his face. The mother narrows her eyes at him.

This granny is pissing him off.

“This is not what we came here for,” Mfaniseni argues.

He's not impressed with how Mhloniphe is handling everything. So much is at stake here.

He turns to Hluphekile when Mhloniphe doesn't give him the attention he's looking for.

"Sisi, who is this boy?"

Oh he knows damn well who this boy is, they were dodging lightning together just the other day.

Hluphekile looks disgusted by the sight of her brother in-law. Exactly whose side is he on?

First they sell off her only child, now this?

Smakade!

"Bhuti Balungile, are you going to sit there and not say anything? You people sold my daughter to these people, say something." Hluphekile snaps.

But Mhloniphe does not wait for the not so talkative Balungile to speak, he takes Mbali by

the hand and starts walking with her towards the door.

Yes, they are leaving and all eyes are on them.

“Stop him!” One of the uncles yells, pointing at them with his walking stick.

“You cannot take her by force, her life will be in danger.”

Who said that?

The voice sounded like it’s been around for a thousand years.

Mhlo’s feet freeze before he could penetrate the threshold, and of course, Mbali stops as well.

They look back, their eyes fall on the oldest person in the room. He’s sitting on the floor, legs stretched and back hunched, he’s drawing out smoke from a wooden pipe. His skin looks like it was washed and wrung and left to dry without stretching it.

Whoever permitted people to qualify to be living ancestors must be found and interrogated. This man is not old anymore, he's expired.

"What did you say?" Mhloniphe asks, his hand still tight around Mbali's.

"Everything was done according to tradition when she married Thabiso, she's ours by tradition. If you take her by force, it will anger the ancestors. Chances of her making it to KZN are slim." The old man says.

Mhlo can't tell if his eyes are closed or narrowed, can he even see?

Before he can say anything, Tshepang's mother strides over and drags Mbali back into the kitchen, barking orders at her. Mhloniphe clenches his fists, his jaw tight with fury.

How the hell did he lose grip of her hand?

He begins to go after her.

“She will be fine,” Mfaniseni says.

Mhloniphe will not be told what to do, he continues to go after the old woman.

“Sit down boy, things have to be done accordingly. We are your elders and this is not your father’s house.” It’s the uncle with the walking stick, yelling after him.

Because he’s Mhloniphe and can’t be told shit, he makes it to Mbali, takes her hand and marches back to the living room with her, leaving the mother stunned.

“Sit down, little one.” He softly tells her, Mbali is reluctant, but she finds space next to her mother.

That’s better, the meeting can begin. The tension in here can be cut with a knife, the elders are shaking their heads in disbelief.

“Now tell us why you are here.” The living ancestor says.

Balungile speaks first, yes, he has a voice.

“We are here for our daughter, her mother says she was taken by force.”

Her mother said? Balungile can’t be serious.

“KaMadlala is our daughter-in-law, we have paid her bride price, not once but twice.” Tshepang’s uncle raises two fingers to illustrate.

Mhloniphe's patience snaps. “Paid her bride price? Did she agree to this so called marriage? Niyahlanya? (Are you crazy?) And you think that gives you the right to treat her like a slave?”

The room erupts into a disharmony of arguments.

Mhloniphe is on his feet again, digging into his pockets. He comes out with a stash of money, three bundles of R200 notes.

The room becomes silent in a second. Balungile and Mfaniseni exchange glances, they remember passing by the bank. Who knew he was going to withdraw so much money?

“How much did you pay for her?” Mhloniphe asks, moving to the middle of the room.

No answer.

He throws a few notes at the uncle, “R2000? R5000?”

“You think you can just pay us off?” Tshepang's uncle spits, his eyes blazing. “This is not about money. This is about respect and tradition.”

Mhloniphe stands his ground, his eyes burning with rage.

“You're a joke old man. Is this what you call respect? Look at her! Look at what you people have done to her! I don't care about your traditions. This woman will not stay another minute in this place.”- Mhloniphe.

“You Zulus think you can just come here and disrespect us? This is our home, our rules.” The uncle sputters loudly, pointing a finger at each and every one of them.

“Your rules end where human decency begins. Mbali is coming home with us.” Hluphekile argues, it’s a room full of men, most way older than her. Of course she will keep her head down.

“This is an abomination, women raise their voices while men are talking? What kind of household do you people come from?” The ancient human shouts.

The arguments grow louder, voices overlapping in a chaotic symphony of anger.

Mhloniphe's voice cuts through the noise, the loudest of them all.

“If you think you can keep her here against her will, you have another thing coming. I will pay back every cent of that bride price. Mbali is not

your property!"

"She's our daughter in-law, Thabiso would have wanted her here." That's Tshepang's mother re-entering the room.

There are men in here for crying out loud.

She quickly kneels by the door and bows her head, to show respect to the men.

The battle lines are drawn, and the fight for Mbali's freedom has only just begun.

Mhloniphe marches to her, "Get up Little One."

She stands, he takes her hand.

"Did she give you this ugly dress?" He asks, pointing at Tshepang's mother who is glaring at them.

"Yes, and it wasn't ironed." Mbali and her sweet little voice.

"We'll get you a new one, my love, and burn this ugly thing." Mhlo lovingly says.

Tshepang's mother cackles in disbelief, the uncles are grumbling under their breaths.

"We're leaving, you two can stay here. I don't want snakes in my car." Mhlo tells Balungile and Mfaniseni who jolt to their feet with eyes wide as saucers.

Hluphekile leads the way, Mhlo and Mbali are not far behind her.

"Walk out that door and she will not live to see another day, the ancestors will make sure of it. Do not anger them, young man." It's the living ancestor.

Mhloniphe stops and looks back at him, "So they sent you as their representative? Is that why you escaped the underground?"

The room bursts with loud complaints, Mhlo doesn't stay to hear what they are saying. He's gone with his little one.

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[03/06, 15:56] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 117

BAKHE

It's been months since he left the village, leaving was an emotional decision he took out of desperation. He hasn't found the light at the end of the tunnel, but there is hope. Keeping a distance from family and friends was hard, even Cashile was among those people.

A change is what he needed, therapy perhaps but going away seemed to work as well. He's back, his first stop was the hospital. He had to meet his nephew but he didn't stay long, as soon as Cashile told him that their father is alive, he had to come and see him.

He steps into the yard, there's a strong scent of herbs the second you step in. Ngwemabala is sitting under a tree, grinding medicinal roots.

"Sanibonani" Bakhe greets, trying to keep his voice steady.

"Yebo mfana, unjani?" Ngwemabala replies, looking up. "You've come to see your father?"

He figures his sister has briefed him in.

Ngwemabala has been a blessing in their lives, had it not been for him, Nkululeko would still not be resting in peace.

"How is he?"

Ngwemabala sighs deeply, wiping his hands on his traditional cloth. "Fighting demons, the spirits that held him captive still haunt him. He barely sleeps, and when he does, he gets nightmares."

Tough!

Bakhe expected to feel nothing when hearing about his father's condition, he didn't think it would sting like this.

"You may see him, he's in there." Ngwemabala points towards a hut.

Bakhe nods and makes his way there, he steps in, his eyes adjusting to the darkness. The air is thick with the smell of burning incense.

He sees his father lying on a mat, eyes closed, and sweat glistening on his forehead. Madlala looks thin and frail, a shell of the man he once was. The sight of his father, once so strong, now reduced to this state, makes Bakhe's heart ache.

"Baba," he calls softly, kneeling beside him.

Madlala's eyes flutter open, struggling to focus on his son's face. "Ndodana, you're here?" he whispers, his voice weak and raspy.

“Unjani?” Bakhe asks.

Madlala tries to sit up, but his body fails him. Bakhe helps him, propping him against the wall. The old man’s eyes are filled with pain and tears.

“You came to see me?”

“How are you?” Bakhe asks again.

“I’m alive, I should be dead. Your mother is gone, she left.”

Is he crying? And there’s snot, sure he loved MaNkosi but, was it that deep?

Bakhe can only sigh, MaNkosi loved him, she loved all her kids. But it turned out that she loved herself more. She wouldn’t have killed herself had she cared about them.

“It’s been months, baba.”

He should be over it already.

“I wasn’t myself all those months, to me it feels

like I have just lost her. Now I am stuck here, I can't even visit her grave." Madlala says.

Bakhe can't tell if he's genuine, or he just wants to be pitied.

"You have to stay here until you're better, Ngwemabala will take care of you."

Madlala shakes his head, and takes a deep sigh.

Bakhe is staring at him, it feels surreal having his father here. How is it that MaNkosi died and Madlala gets to live? It's not that he wishes death upon his father but this man has been the worst father in the world. He would be far in life had it not been for him.

"Why, Baba? Why wasn't I enough?" That's so random.

Madlala's eyes narrow, he's confused.

"Why did you turn your back on me?" Bakhe asks.

He's not spelling anything out, Madlala should know what he's talking about.

"I did what I thought was best for the family."

That's a nice excuse!

"No! You did what was best for you, not us."

Bakhe yells.

"You will understand when you are my age, everything will start to make sense."

Another polished answer.

But none of this will ever make sense.

"I can't believe you don't see anything wrong with what you did. Haven't you learned anything from any of this?" -Bakhe.

But Madlala doesn't seem to get it, must be the burning incense, it's getting to his brain.

He weakly shakes his head, "I did nothing wrong."

Nah! Something must be wrong with this old man.

“You did everything wrong, Baba. You turned on your children, and made sure we don’t succeed in life.” This is not the place to be raising his voice, but he can’t help it. The father he’s trying to talk to lies down and closes his eyes, it’s ridiculous how unbothered he looks.

Ngwemabala steps into the hut, “Son, this is not the time or place.”

There’s never a time or place for anything.

Bakhe takes a deep breath, his chest heaving with the effort to keep his emotions in check. He looks at his father, clicks his tongue and storms out. These are not the results he expected when he came here.

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MHLONIPHE

He almost steps on an old woman sitting on the porch with her legs stretched. How many of these people are in this yard?

“Sorry gogo,” that’s an apology by the way.

The old woman clicks her tongue, it takes years of practise to perfect it like that. She shifts her gaze to Mbali.

“My daughter in-law, where are you going?”

The words daughter in-law are new to Mbali’s ears, she has been called all sorts of things but that, since she arrived.

“Don’t answer her,” Hluphekile says as if she knows what the old woman’s intentions are. She grips Mbali by the hand and heads towards the exit.

Balungile and Mfaniseni refuse to stay here.v
Mhloniphe is left behind, eyes fixed on the old woman.

Something is fishy.

“Why are you looking at her, like that?”
Mhloniphe asks, he’s talking about Mbali.

The woman quickly looks at him, “My son, I don’t know what you are talking about.”

Poor granny!

Her eyes don’t have manners, they are back to glaring at Mbali.

Maybe she is right, he must be seeing things.
Like the look of desperation on the granny’s face, it’s something he can’t put a finger to.

“Tshepang is on his way home, can’t you wait for him? Please, my grandson will be disappointed.”

She’s talking to the wrong person, this man

does not care about her grandson.

He looks up and meets Mbali's frowning face, they are out the gate. Mhloniphe rushes to them, Mbali clutches his arm and covers her ear with the other hand .There is fear in her eyes.

"What's wrong, little one?"

"I'm hearing voices in my head. It's like they're whispering things to me."

Creepy!

"Something is going on here, we have to go." Mhlo says.

"You're right, the old man's words didn't sit well with me. I need to pray over this car before we leave. These people have dark energy, we can't leave without protection." Hluphekile says.

Mhlo has seen enough to know that people are never who they seem, Madlala proved it just perfectly. He gives Hluphekile a go ahead.

She begins to pray, her voice and words are powerful and commanding. The name of Jesus is thrown around a lot, her voice keeps rising in intensity. Heaven is too far, she wants to make sure that God hears every word.

“Hey! Hey!”

Whoah!

When did this one get up?

Tshepang’s grandmother is marching towards the gate, her face twisted with rage. Her steps are a little dizzy, they should get her a walking stick.

“Stop that praying nonsense! It’s against our beliefs.” She’s shouting, her voice cracking like a whip.

Hluphekile's eyes narrow, but she doesn't stop. Her prayers grow louder, more fervent.

“In the name of Jesus, I bind all evil spirit...

every spirit of car accidents, every power of darkness, I bind you and I command you to loose your grip you demons from hell. I bind every demonic spirit..."

Bind which spirits? On whose yard?

A-never!

The granny charges at Hluphekile with her hands stretched out, But as she gets closer, something strange happens. Her steps falter, and she stumbles, clutching her chest. With a final gasp, she collapses to the ground, eyes wide in shock.

"What the fuck?" Mhloniphe exclaims, jumping back in fright.

"What just happened?" That's Mbali.

"I think she had a heart attack." Mhloniphe assumes.

"No, that's the power of God." Hluphekile says.

Chaos erupts in the yard, Tshepang's mother runs out of the house screaming.

"Mme! Mme! What have you done to my mother?"

The noise brings out neighbors like flies to a slaughtered animal.

She kneels beside her mother, shaking her, trying to wake her up.

Her screams pierce the air, "What did you do?"

But Hluphekile's prayers continue.

Suddenly, Tshepang's mother cries out, clutching her head. "Stop it! Please stop!"

Mhloniphe clings on to Mbali's hand, he's as confused as a deer in headlights. What kind of dangerous prayer is Mbali's mother praying?

"Let's go," he whispers urgently. "We need to get out of here now."

At this point, Mhlo's heart is trying to escape his

chest. They waste no time in jumping into the car, just as he starts the car, Balungile and Mfaniseni dash in and sit in silence.

Damn to whoever said you can't choose family!

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I apologize for the late post, currently going through writer's block.

[03/06, 15:56] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 118

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Their love was something to write home about, sure he wasn't the perfect husband and his eye would wander to places, making him want to commit adultery.

He's shared a bed with women in the past, women who were not his wife. But that took nothing away from the love he had for his wife, she was everything to him. She helped him build his father's home and gave him a son to carry his legacy.

Only God knows what went wrong, how greed got him under its grip.

MaNkosi comes to him whenever he closes his eyes, she looks younger than he remembers. There's sadness and tears in her eyes, she hasn't spoken a word yet, however, he knows what she wants.

That day, she wanted them to go together. He wasn't ready, although death was at his doorstep, he wasn't ready to embrace it.

It makes no sense to him that he is still alive, yes Khathala is known to be a great wizard but to actually cure him of whatever he had is

beyond his wildest imagination.

Ngwemabala is on his way to the hut, his footsteps are always loud. Madlala is annoyed, he sighs when he walks in carrying a bowl of porridge. He places it beside Madlala.

“Yini manje, what do you want?” He tosses and turns to face the wall.

Ngwemabala places the plate on the floor.

“You need to eat, you'll die of hunger if you don't.”

He hasn't eaten since yesterday.

Madlala barely moves. “I don't care. I want to go home.”

“You can't go home. You are a witch, Madlala and that demon is still attached to your soul. It'll make you practice witchcraft again. Your family will be in danger.”

That's a shocking discovery to Madlala, he's

never seen himself as a witch, just a man with a plan.

He slowly sits up, his eyes judging Ngwembala's existence.

"My daughter saved me, she wouldn't have if she believed I was a witch." He says.

"Your children do not know, I didn't disclose it to them. But I am going to help you, you will never think of witchcraft after I am done with you. And if you love them, you'll stay. You have to fight this. Get rid of the unclean spirit, then you can go home."

Madlala sighs, "How much longer?"

"I don't know, your spirit has to be willing. You have to cleanse your heart, let go of all bitterness. Forgive your wife, and yourself."

What forgiveness is he talking about?

"I am not holding grudges against anyone,"

Madlala disputes.

But that's not what Ngwemabala thinks, he pushes the plate towards him.

"Eat. Regain your strength."

Madlala reluctantly takes the bowl. His hands tremble as he lifts a spoonful to his mouth. His face turns sour, that was one hard spoon to swallow.

"Did you make this?" He asks.

Ngwemabala shakes his head, "My wife."

"Hayi shame! She can't cook bakithi, it tastes like food from a dream." Madlala says.

This is one ungrateful man.

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CASHILE

I have been discharged, the problem with that is I can't go home until the ritual is over. Before I sleep, Mbuzo and I agreed that he will talk to the doctor but it looks like he didn't, unless he forgot.

The nurse broke the news to me when I woke up and my husband wasn't around.

"Can I book the room for another two days?"

I'm on my knees, not literary, but I do sound desperate. The baby is a few hours old, I can't be travelling to hotels with him.

The nurse has been making this bed for too long, it's almost like she's trying to prove a point... maybe show me that this is not my house.

"Nurse."

"Cha sisi, you can't book the room. This is not a hotel, we have other patients."

“My husband and I have medical aid,” she can’t tell me anything.

We are paying a lot of money for this room.

And where is this so called husband when I’m being sent home? I call his phone again, it goes through but there is no answer.

It’s things like this that make me believe that Mbuzo is still making money the illegal way.

“Alright, is there anything I can help you with before I leave?” The nurse asks.

The only thing I need is another day here, until things are sorted back home. I wish I was in Joburg.

I shake my head, her eyes rake through my body. She’s giving me the attitude I gave her, I murmur an apology as she walks out.

That woman does not understand how frustrated I am.

I take Mbani from the cot, no child sleeps like this one. He's starting to look like his father, or I'm seeing things that are not there. But he definitely got the nose and ears from his father.

My husband is back, I don't like that he's late. He should have been here to negotiate with the nurse.

"Why are you not in bed?"

Good question!

"We have been discharged," I want him to go and find the nurse and tell her we are not leaving. But the serious look on his face is not giving me hope.

"That's good, I came to get you."

He sits down beside me and counts Mbani's fingers, he does that every time he holds him. I don't know if he thinks he will have one less

finger.

“Where are we going?” I ask.

“Home,” he says.

I blink, not understanding, “What do you mean? They said I can’t step into the yard until your father’s spirit has been sent out.”

He glances at me, “My uncle says you have to be present. You’re the daughter-in-law of the family. If we are going to appease the ancestors, then the people we are pleading for have to be present.”

I feel a chill run down my spine, I will never understand ancestors. I’m going to introduce my children to the ways of God, at least I’m a step closer to God. Mbali and aunt Hluphekile are born again Christians. I’m buying myself Sunday outfits when I lose the baby fat.

“Are you not worried? What if something happens to the baby?”

I'm not going to risk my child's life, we will sleep in the car if need be.

"Ngwemabala will make sure everything is safe, nothing will happen." Mbuzo says.

I look down at our son, my heart is banging against my chest. We're talking about someone we cannot see, a spiritual being who might attack without us seeing anything.

"Mbuzo, what if it's not enough? You know how strong these spirits can be."

He reaches out and touches my hand, "I know, KaMadlala. But we have to do this. It's the only way to bring peace to the family. My father's spirit needs to be put to rest properly."

"I thought we were sending him back? We're putting him to rest now?" I ask.

This family never ceases to amaze me.

"Uncle Mpiyakhe thinks there's a way to make

him change and be a good guide. We just have to do things right.”

I bite my lip, torn between fear and duty.

“I’m scared, Nonkosi. I don’t want anything to happen to our baby.”

He takes Mbani from me, and gets off the bed.

“We’ll take every precaution, the elders will be there, and we’ll follow the rituals exactly. Trust me, my love.”

I trust him with my life but it feels like I am gambling with my baby’s life.

“Alright. We’ll go. But you have to promise me that we’ll leave if anything feels wrong.”

And if anything happens, I won’t forgive him and his family.

He takes his gaze back to the baby, I want an answer. Why is he not saying anything?

He’s afraid as well, he’s not sure if it’s safe to

take Mbani home.

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Lulu is obsessed with her little brother, she keeps wanting to hold him. I've given her two opportunities, the second one, she sneezed and almost dropped the baby.

Yeah, we're home.

Uncle Mpiyakhe burnt something before we walked through the gate, I wasn't told that something would be burnt. These people told me to calm down when the smoke made my baby cough, I'm not trying to go back to prison. But they are provoking me.

"Baby, it's time for your bath." I say to Lulu, she's glued beside me and planting kisses on Mbani's face. It's crazy how he hasn't woken up

after all this.

“Okay, mommy.”

She doesn’t bother looking up at me.

Nompilo walks in just in time, “These two are going to get along well.”

She’s laughing at Lulu’s obsession.

“That’s a good thing, right. Please give Lulu a bath, it’s almost time for supper.” I say.

Lulu is not happy about leaving her brother.

He’s sleeping, I want to use this opportunity to nap. I put Mbani in his cot and get in bed, they will wake me up when supper is ready. Mbuzo is in the kitchen cooking, uncle Mpiyakhe doesn’t understand why a man slaves in the kitchen while his wife is around. I’m going to be hung and crucified for this, come meeting.

I was shocked when Mbuzo told me that the family meeting is still on, it’s been postponed

because of the baby's arrival. I feel for my husband, I doubt he even knows how to defend himself to angry, confused elders.

“Must be nice.”

What in God’s name is he doing here?

“What is it with poor people and having high standards?”

Is he talking about me? I’m not poor, I do not fall under that category. I have always feared this man, not as in reverence but he scared the shit out of me. Those deep set eyes that stare into your soul, no one can convince me that he wasn’t a serial killer in his past life.

I’m choosing not to converse with him because,

why is he here, talking to me?

“How is my grandson?”

Oh hell no! I snap my eyes at him, “My son is off limits Velaphi.”

He smiles, is he allowed to smile? I need to report this to the HR underground, that’s if this is where I am.

Wait a minute!

Am I dead? Why am I in the presence of a man who died?

“You’re a true Madlala, disrespect runs in your blood.”

At least I have blood.

Anger covers his face, “How dare you call your father in-law by name.” He roars, stepping closer to the door.

He can’t enter, something is keeping him outside.

He's standing outside the ancestral hut, hands on the door post. I'm inside the hut, there's smoke hovering around me, it smells like incense. I'm wearing my traditional wedding outfit.

"You will address me as Nonkosi, or baba."

Velaphi commands.

I know well enough not to call elders by name but this one pissed me off.

"Ngiyaxolisa."

I don't trust angry spirits.

My apology worked, he's calm.

"You have turned me against my sons," he says.

I did no such thing.

"They want to send me away, who will take care of them if I leave?"

He's not the only Nonkosi who crossed over.
His father or grandfather can take over.

“You don’t want me and my children here, this is my husband’s home. We have every right to be in this homestead.” I tell him.

He’s shaking his head, “Talk to my son, tell him not to send me away.”

Is that a serious request?

“I’m not going to do that, this place is too small for us both, Nonkosi. One of us has to go.”

“You don’t understand, Mbuzo is my son. This is the only way I can make up for all the neglect, I need to be here.” He shouts, he’s angry all over again.

“Then accept his wife and children,” I yell back.

Does he think I’m that naïve to accept his request?

Velaphi falls to his knees, there’s desperation in his eyes.

“Please, I’m begging you. Don’t let them send

me away.”

What is wrong with this man?

“KaMadlala!”

Someone slaps my thigh, everything changes in a blink of an eye. I’m looking at Mbuzo, he’s standing over the bed with a furrowed brow and the baby in his arms.

Oh shucks! I was dreaming.

“Since when do you moo like a cow in your sleep? You woke the baby.” He says.

Nx!

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500+ comments ... 15 shares

[03/06, 15:56] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 119

CASHILE

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How is it possible that Velaphi came to me in a dream? Me of all people!

His number one nemesis.

I have chills running through my body.

“What’s wrong?”

Mbuzo has grown worried, the expression is visible on his face.

I wrap the throw around me, I was so brave in that dream and there was no ounce of fear in me. How is it that I am terrified to death now?

“KaMadlala!”

Either he’s growing impatient, or my silence is pissing him off.

“Your father was in my dreams begging me to

stop the ceremony.”

Should I tell him that he went down on his knees? Is it even appropriate for an ancestor to do that?

People are going to show us things.

“I’m calling uncle Mpiyakhe,” he storms out, not giving me a chance to stop him.

What is Mpiyakhe going to do? Do corrections on my dream? Mbuzo takes his uncle too seriously, forget that he is a drunkard.

I look like a new mom hobo who just woke up from a bad dream, my head wrap is lost somewhere under the blanket and I’m wearing pyjamas.

I have to look decent, I don’t want to give his uncle something to add into his list of things to complain about in the meeting. It takes me hissing and wincing in pain to finally get out of bed.

Natural birth is all fun and games until they cut you because the baby's head is too big. I don't know how many stiches I'm nursing, all I know is that it hurts like a bitch.

I'm a former tomboy, I don't know anything about tying a scarf around my head. I just do what my hands can, cover my pjs with a robe and wait on the bed.

The man left with my baby, he comes back with his uncle. Their eyes are zoomed out, you'd think there's an emergency. Nice how his uncle stops at the door, he doesn't enter. If only he did that the day he walked in on us playing ubaba nomama.

"KaMadlala, what did he say?"

Oh, fancy seeing him not drunk. The urgency in his voice is rather shocking.

"Tell him what happened." Mbuzo says.

Had he waited for me to tell him everything, he

would be the one reciting the story to his uncle.

“Vela...” That look from his uncle.

Ahem! Let me try again.

“Nonkosi came to me, he was on his knees
begging me to stop the ceremony. He doesn’t
want to be separated from his sons.”

Talking about Velaphi is an extreme sport, I’m
running out of breath.

Mbuzo and his uncle look worried.

“What else did he say?” Uncle Mpiyakhe asks.

“He thinks I’m with his son for the money, and
he didn’t say anything when I told him to either
accept me and my children, or leave.”

Yes, I gave my father in law an ultimatum.

There’s a smile on uncle Mpiyakhe’s face,
confusing might I add.

I look at Mbuzo, he shrugs.

“Congratulations Makoti, your father in law has accepted you.” Uncle Mpiyakhe says.

If this is him taking Velaphi’s side, then I am offended.

“How? He asked me to stop the ceremony.”

Is he drunk?

“The fact that he came to you in your dream, means he approves of this marriage.”

This uncle is confusing me.

“Did he deny you when you asked that he accepts you and the children?”

“No!” I reply, not sure where he is getting at.

“Then there you have it, your father in law has approved.” He laughs, I can’t tell if he’s excited or laughing at me. “The ceremony will take place tomorrow before sun rise, we will appease him and ask for peace.”

And with that, he’s gone.

“Is he drunk?” I ask Mbuzo.

“Let’s wait for tomorrow,” he says.

I am out of words.

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MHLONIPHE

The drive from Limpopo to KZN has been long and silent. Mhloniphe grips the steering wheel tightly, glancing at Mbali every few minutes.

She’s sitting beside him, staring out the window, and lost in thought. Her mother and uncles are crammed in the back seat.

Mhloniphe’s furrowed brow betrays his concern. He wants to comfort Mbali, to reassure her, but the presence of her family restrains him. At one point, he reaches over and holds her hand,

squeezing it gently. She looks at him, and forces a smile. But he quickly lets go, aware of the watchful eyes behind them.

The silence is shattered when Mbali's phone rings. She hesitates, glancing at the caller ID. It's Tshepang.

Bloody fool!

"Who is it?" Mhloniphe asks.

It's the look of shock on her face that has him prying, she flips the phone to show him.

Mhloniphe clicks his tongue, his grip on the steering wheel tightens until his knuckles turn white. Anger surges through him.

How dare that bastard call Mbali after everything his family put her through?

"Give me the phone," he growls, his voice low.

She hands it over, he snatches it and brings it to his ear.

“Listen to me, mgodoyi. If you ever call her again, if you ever come near her, I swear you’ll regret it. She’s not yours. She never was.”

There’s a moment of stunned silence on the other end before Tshepang responds, “You think you can threaten me? You have no idea who you’re dealing with.”

“Try me,” Mhloniphe spits before ending the call and handing the phone back to Mbali.

Hluphekile sighs, she’s exhausted. When will this stop?

The rest of the drive is tense, Mhlo keeps his eyes on the road, but his thoughts are with Mbali. Her mood has dropped to zero, he shouldn’t have answered the phone.

It's late, the uncles are sleeping over Hluphekile's house. That way, Mhlo won't have to drive around like an Uber driver. Balungile

and Mfaniseni are the last to leave the car and because of that, Mbali can't bid Mhlo a proper goodbye.

He watches her until she's inside the gate.

This sucks!

"You will share a room with Bakhe, he won't mind." Hluphekile tells the uncle who are seated on the couch.

They don't seem to mind.

She looks at Mbali, "Get two extra blankets from the wardrobe."

Mbali looks unsettled.

"Mama, I left my phone in the car. Let me run before he leaves."

She flies out the door, her phone is charging in her room but Hluphekile doesn't need to know that.

Mhlo is still there, standing outside with a

cigarette between his fingers. She runs to him and throws herself in his arms, he wraps his arms around her, almost lifting her up.

They kiss, it's brief.

"When am I going to see you?"

"I don't know, we're going to church tomorrow." Mbali says.

No one misses church in Hluphekile's house.

"Can't you skip church? I miss you." Mhlo says.

"My mother would never let me skip church."

She can skip anything but church.

Mhlo kisses her again, his arms are around her waist.

"I hate this, I want to hold you all night and make love to you." He confesses.

Mbali smiles, "Me too."

"You too what?" His brows furrow.

“I want to make love to you.” Mbali says, causing him to laugh.

“Don’t be ridiculous little one, there is no such thing. I’m the love maker, not you.”

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BAKHE

Visiting his father yesterday proved to be a bad idea, it has set him ten steps back. He woke up with the anger still simmering inside him and that same anger has brought him back to Ngwemabalala’s compound.

Hluphekile wanted to know where he was going, it’s a Sunday and she prefers everyone that stays under her roof to attend church.

It's really not his place.

This old man is forever sitting under a tree, preparing herbs.

“Ninajni?” His greeting is as fast paced as his wandering eyes, he just wants to get to the hut where his father is.

“You’re back?” Ngwemabala asks.

“Yes, is he awake?” Bakhe, he’s fidgety and looks nervous. However, Ngwemabalala doesn’t catch on it.

“He’s sleeping, you should have told me you were coming.” Ngwemabala says, Bakhe has his number.

“I wasn’t planning on coming baba, it was a last minute decision.”

Why not come when the man kept him awake throughout the night?

“How is he doing?” Bakhe asks.

Ngwemabala’s face lights up, he loves to talk

about his job and progress his patience are making.

“The goal is to set your father free from the unclean spirits that cause him to turn to witchcraft. So far, there’s no change yet. But there’s hope.”

That’s hard to believe.

Bitterness is visible on Bakhe’s face, “My father... He’s still the same. Stubborn. Evil,” Bakhe says, he doesn’t have a short fuse but at this moment, he’s finding it hard to contain his rage.

“He’s still under the spirit of witchcraft. It’s going to take time, release your heart ndodana. Do not match his energy, he will change eventually. It’s going to take time though.”

“I see!” That’s Bakhe’s response, cold and unbothered. “I’ll see him now.”

He quickly strides away, lest Ngwemabala gives

him a list of dos and don'ts.

He doesn't knock, the smell of herbs give him an instant headache. How is Madlala able to breathe in here?

And there he is, sleeping like he didn't turn people's lives upside down. Bakhe walks over, his grip tightening around the sjambok hidden behind him

"Wake up, Madlala!" Bakhe says, violently nudging him with his foot.

Madlala groans, blinking awake, "My son. You came back?"

"How are you feeling today, Baba?"

Madlala sits up, confusion turning to fear. Why does Bakhe have that look in his eyes?

"What's going on? What is the sjambok for?"

"You ruined my life, and you have the audacity to sleep like a princess Baba!"

“My son...”

Bakhe narrows his eyes at him, “Do you know I haven’t gotten proper sleep in years, but here you are, snoring like a billionaire. You’re even farting in your sleep.”

He’s let anger take control of his emotions, and Madlala is not about to take it lying down. His bones are not so old, he’s on his feet in a jiffy, standing head to head with his son.

“Son, put that thing away.” His voice is firm.

“Ungijwayela amasimba wena.” Bakhe sizzles, jaw tightening.

Hau! Hau! Hau!

Madlala’s eyes are on the sjambok, if push comes to shove and a fight breaks. Bakhe will break his bones.

“Ngwemabala says you have a demon.”

Madlala chuckles nervously, “Don’t believe him.

He's keeping me here just to suck my daughter dry, she's paying him a dime."

"But I believe him, you have a demon baba. You are evil and I would like to perform an exorcism on you."

Since when is he an exorcists?

Madlala's eyes run to the sjambok, he tries to scramble away, but Bakhe swings the sjambok, it lands on Madlala's waist.

"Phuma Sathane!"

This is for neglecting his own son.

"Maye!" Madlala screams, scrambling towards the door but Bakhe runs to block the door.

He swings the sjambok again, it lands on Madlala's back just as he turns to run across the room.

"Phuma Sathane!" Bakhe shouts.

This one is for bewitching him and turning his

life upside.

This damn hut is small for Madlala but perfect for Bakhe, two steps and he catches up with his father.

Bakhe thrashes him again, “Phuma Sathane!”

This one is for not owning up to his mistakes!

“Sizani! Hayi! He’s killing me! Help!” That’s Madlala screaming.

There’s a sin for each whip and this boy has all day.

Ngwemabala rushes in, just in time to see Madlala sprinting out, Bakhe in hot pursuit and the sjambok raised.

Ngwemabala stands there, jaw drooped. Never in his life has he seen anything like this, a child should never lay their hands on their parent.

“Bakhe, stop! This isn’t the way!” Ngwemabala

shouts but Bakhe's ears are ringing with anger, he can't hear anything else.

Madlala is darting around the yard with Bakhe chasing him with the sjambok.

"Maye! Ngwemabala, help!" Madlala yells, dodging left and right.

Ngwemabala eventually steps in, he grabs Bakhe's wrist and snatches the sjambok from him.

"It's not our way, ndodana. Respect your father."

Respect? That's a bit too much to ask.

Madlala collapses behind Ngwemabala, gasping for breath. Poor old man. Hasn't he been through enough?

God will deal with his enemies. He's afraid to look up at his son who's glaring at him.

"See you tomorrow baba, same time! Same place! Same sjambok! Same demon!"

“You can’t do this, he’s your father.”

Ngwemabala scolds him.

“I know, I was talking to the demon.” Bakhe turns and walks away, feeling a bit of relief from all the anger he’s been harboring.

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Unedited!

500+ comments... 15 shares.

[03/06, 15:56] T: CALL ME DADDY

CHAPTER 120

MBUZO

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It was around three in the morning when he left his wife sleeping. It’s a good thing she’s a heavy sleeper, otherwise he would have had to explain

why he was leaving the house at the crack of dawn. The issue with his father and wife wouldn't give him a moment of rest, he had to talk to someone and the only ones who could understand him are those who have departed.

Life is going well for him, the only thing standing in his way is his father.

Ngwemabala was expecting him, he burnt incense, threw bones, and told Mbuzo to speak his heart.

“Bika, tell them what’s troubling you.”
Ngwemabala said.

There was so much Mbuzo wanted to get out of his chest, with a heavy heart, he opened up. He started off by reciting his clan names.

“Ngizwa ngiyasindwa, ubaba ufunu ukubhidliza umuzi wami. My own father has become my enemy. I brought him home so he can protect us, but he has turned his back on me..”

His tone became harsh.

“I’m trying to build a legacy for my father, your legacy, but he is standing in my way and you people are not saying anything. How do you expect me to build the Nonkosi legacy when you can’t even call out your son?”

The plan was not to scold the elders but things got out of hand. Sometimes you have to be aggressive to get your point across.

“khuzani uNonkosi, ngiyoniqobela inyama.”

(Talk to my father, an animal will be slaughtered for you.)

“You have spoken, go home, they will respond.”

Ngwemabala said.

It was still dark out when he left and Cashile was fast asleep when he arrived. He kissed his son, got into bed and cuddled his wife.

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He's walking down the river, Cashile is by his side, carrying Mbani in her arms.

"Vikizitha!" A voice echoes above the waters.

"Did you hear that?" Mbuzo asks, she smiles at him.

"No." Cashile answers.

"Vikizitha!" The voice echoes again, causing him to stop in his tracks as he fixes his eyes across the still water.

He's lost sight of his wife and son, suddenly he's surrounded by two old men in brown clothing.

His father is standing behind them like a grumpy child who has been told to behave, it's the first he sees his father with his head down and shoulders slumped.

He can't tell if their clothes are dirty, or the

colour is fading. He'll ask Cashile to wash their clothes.

He looks around for her, she was here just now.

"UMakoti is preparing umqombothi for us, don't bother her." One of them says.

Mbuzo lets out a soft chuckle, the Makoti in question grew up in the village but she can't make traditional beer to save her life.

These men are taller than him and resemble every Nonkosi he's ever known. The Nonkosi ears and nose never lie.

"Mzukulu, iskhalo sakho sisizwile. Inyembezi zakho ziyaithunuka, you will never shed a tear from today. Your heir and future generation will be protected at all times. We acknowledge the names you have chosen as his father. For us to always be with him, you shall name him Vikizitha. That is the only name he will be known by and because of him, you will always

be protected from your enemies. Your kraal will be filled with livestock." The one who spoke continues.

Mbuzo's eyes shift to his father in the back, Velaphi nods. There's a smile on his face, which is odd for Mbuzo, he's not used to seeing him smile.

"Ngiyaziqhenya ngawe Nonkosi. I am proud of you," Velaphi says.

Someone is tapping his thigh, the pain jolts him out of a deep sleep. His wife is frowning at him, her morning face means she just woke up.

"What?" He asks, rubbing sleep off of his eyes. His brows are puckered, he's not sure of his surroundings yet.

"You were talking in your sleep. You will wake the baby." She says.

It clicks, “Shit! It felt so real.” He buries his face on the pillow, squashing it in his arms.

“What?” Cashile asks.

Mbuzo looks at her, “Last night I went to see Ngwemabala. He burnt impepho and I spoke to the elders.”

She does not look impressed.

“Where was I? We went to bed together.”

“Around three, I couldn’t sleep thinking about my father. But everything is okay now, my father will no longer be a problem.” He says.

“He told you that?” Cashile is not convinced.

“Not him but the ones who came before him,” he says.

She smiles at him, “Is that why you were mooing like a cow?”

Really though?

This is pay back, he smiles and pulls her into his arms. He flips them over, and hovers over her.

“We can’t have sex, I still have stiches.”

That’s not what he was thinking.

“We can start over now, everything has been resolved. Our children will be born and raised here, together we will build a legacy for them. I can’t wait to grow old with you KaMadlala.”

He kisses her all over, Cashile struggles to suppress her giggles.

“Shh! You will wake Vikizitha.”

Who is that?

She presses her hands on his chest and pushes him when he tries to kiss her again.

“Who’s that?”

Oh yeah, he left that part out.

“Mbani’s new name given to him by the elders.

From today, he will go by the name Vikizitha.”

She doesn’t know how to feel about the name, she sits up.

“I have never heard of that name. So what do we call him in short? Viki, Vika, Viko or Zitha?”

Seriously, this is stressing her.

Mbuzo finds humour in all this, “It’s a nice name, I like it and we can’t deny it. You know how they are, they will make an example of us if we don’t abide.”

“I know. I’m not disputing the name,” she cups his cheek. “Your father has finally seen the light. Congratulations baba kaVikizitha.”

She laughs, it’s going to take time for her to get used to this name.

“Ngiyabonga makaVikizitha.”

Cashile rolls her eyes, an amused smile on her face.

“This is what I get for falling in love with you, children with funny names.” She complains.

Mbuzo throws his head back laughing, “It’s not like the parents have better names.”

He’s right, so the kids have no right to complain.

His phone rings, he reaches over the table and checks the caller ID.

“It’s bab’Ngwemabala.” He says, pressing the phone to his ear. “Baba?”

“Livumile idlozi.” Ngwemabala says.

That’s something to celebrate, Mbuzo feels like throwing the mother of all parties.

“They answered baba,” he confirms, and climbs off the bed. He’s woken the baby up, Cashile rushes to his crib.

“I know, you have nothing to worry about now.”
—Ngwemabala.

Life is good when you have no worries.

Mbuzo looks at his wife cradling their baby, she smiles when she finds him staring. The future is bright, he's got everything he's ever wanted in life.

"There's something else you need to know, Nonkosi. Your brother in law was here with a sjambok, he beat your father in law."

It's expected of Bakhe, he's just like Mhloniphe. They have no regard for elders, they live life on their own terms. The worry on his face is visible for Cashile to see.

The baby is sleeping, she puts him back on the cot and approaches Mbuzo.

"What happened?" She asks.

He sighs, "It's your brother."

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CASHILE

Life after prison has been nothing short of... amazing is not the word I'm looking for. I have been on a crazy rollercoaster, every moment has been an element of surprise.

It's a miracle I survived the journey, I guess looking back, I can say it's been a ride and I can do it again in a heartbeat. The mistakes, the heartbreaks, without them, my marriage wouldn't be as strong as it is.

Now that the ceremony is over and done with, we can move on with our lives. I just have one small matter to fix. Two... learn how to make traditional beer. And talk to my brother, I'll start with the latter.

Aunt Hluphekile rushed here after church, I thought of calling my uncles but after what they did to Mbali, I don't think I can trust them with anything.

And Bakhe is hard headed, he won't listen to a word they say. He's soft and gentle when talking to aunt Hluphekile and he respects her.

"Nompilo's food smells nice," aunt says.

Nompilo is not the one slaving in the kitchen, my husband is. She's with the baby. All I can say is auntie will faint if she finds Mbuzo behind the stove.

"Should I dish up for you, aunty?"

The food must be ready, he's been at it for hours.

"No, I will eat after we've spoken to your brother. Where is he anyway? I have to go back to church for the evening service."

God, I know I said I will go to church, but two services?

Hawemah!

“I will call him.”

Speak of the devil, he walks in, greets and finds a seat. He looks agitated, and reeks of nicotine.

“Where is Lulu and my nephew?” He says.

He’s avoiding eye contact.

“Lulu is taking her afternoon nap, Vikizitha is with Nompilo.”

Oh now he decides to look into my eyes.

“Who’s that?” He asks.

Does this mean I will have to explain the name to everyone who already knows my son as Mbani?

“It’s a long story, I called you here because...”

He interjects, “Because I beat your father?”

There is no remorse in his voice.

“Bakhe, what you did will bring you nothing but bad luck. Why would you hit him?”

Something must have happened for him to act impulsively, I know he would never lay a hand on our father.

His jaw ticks, “He’s not sorry for what he did to us.”

“What has he ever been sorry for? You know how he is, Bakhe.”

“Are you saying I should turn a blind eye and pretend that everything is okay?”

“No, but there is no harm in forgiving him.” I say.

I don’t think he is okay with what I said, he shifts to the edge of the seat. I can’t recognise the man glaring at me, my brother is free spirited and a happy-go-lucky.

“Forgive that witch? Are you serious, Cashile?”

He yells, jerking from his seat. “You have no idea what I have been through because of that man, what I’m going through because of him. I will never forgive him... he can go to hell for...”

Mbuzo walks in and that puts a stop to Bakhe’s ranting, they are looking at each other. I know Mbuzo can be intimidating at times, right now he’s overdoing it. My brother holds the stare but quickly loses to the Undertaker.

“Sbari.” That’s Mbuzo.

Bakhe nods.

“Is everything okay?” Mbuzo asks, he knows nothing is okay. He wants to scold my brother, I see it on his face.

“Yes,” Bakhe mumbles.

“That’s good. We are all going through something, Sbari. But respect is very important, I would never come to your house and yell. Neither will I ever speak to your wife the way

you are talking to mine, KaMadlala is the mother of this household first, then she's your sister."

Bakhe gradually takes his seat, he rubs his hands together as he looks up at Mbuzo.

"Ngiyaxolisa." He apologises.

Mbuzo nods and looks at me, "Should I dish up or you're still talking?"

My aunt gasps loudly, she looks like she's seen a ghost. Mbuzo might as well write my obituary, how can he expose me like this?

He reads the room and heads back to the kitchen, the damage has been done.

"Cashile, who is the woman in this house?"

Ayi, she won't understand.

Let me focus on my brother, aunt can call me out later.

“I understand what you’re feeling Bakhe, we’ve been wronged equally-”

“Equally? You have kids Dade, two. You have always been the favoured one, so dad was easy on you.”

That’s bullshit!

“MaNkosi favoured you over me, and you can’t tell me that nonsense Bakhe. Why are you even comparing? Don’t start something you won’t be able to finish, we should be united and fighting towards a better life for ourselves and our children. Why are you trying to cause conflict over something that’s passed? We are both victims of our parents, they failed us.”

I don’t understand, what has he been doing all those months he’s been gone? I thought he went to find healing.

“It’s up to us to forgive and move on, of course things are not going to change overnight. We

just have to take one step at a time.” I say.

He’s shaking his head, my words are probably going in and out of his ears. He won’t understand anything I say with that anger.

“Things seem to be going well for you.” He says.

He doesn’t sound bitter, so I know it’s not coming from a bad place. Bakhe is my brother, he’d die for me and that’s something I will never second guess.

“Seem doesn’t mean it is what it is, no one can tell when an apple is rotten on the inside.” I say.

His eyes bulge, “What does that mean? Is Mbuzo treating you bad?”

He’s ready to run out of here and find Mbuzo.

“No, Mbuzo is perfect. Just because I am married, doesn’t mean I have it all bhuti. Marriage is not an achievement, neither is having kids. But both these things are part of

life, it's what society expects from us. There is no pressure, or a time frame for you to attain everything you want in life. Forgive ubaba and MaNkosi, and things will eventually start to fall into place.”

He drops his eyes, he's hurting. The damage our parents caused is irreparable.

“KaMadlala is right, God looks at the heart. You will pray until you lose your voice but if your heart is not right with him, your blessings will delay. Let go of the grudges my son, there is a church service tonight. Come with me, my pastor will pray for you.”

I saw this coming, aunt is always inviting people to church.

Bakhe is not having it, “Church auntie? Hayi no, I have things to do.”

“It's just for today, I'm not saying move into church.” She says.

He'll be wasting his time if he continues to deny her, she won't give up until he agrees.

Bakhe sighs, that must be him throwing in the towel.

"We're buying a cow, ugeze uyihlo. You need to cleanse your father. Nothing will go right for you if you don't fix this." I remind him.

He lets out a heavy breath, "I know."

Great, that's settled then.

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BAKHE

Birds of the same feather flock together.

He's always been doing things with Mhloniphe

and Njabulo, why not drag them with him to church?

The first time he graced the walls of the holy place was to pursue a girl who caught his eye, he's going for a different reason this time. They are leaning against the car, having a smoke. No one wants to face God sober.

"Where is Njabulo?" Mhlo has been asking since he arrived. He's convinced that Njabulo has aborted mission.

Bakhe nudges him and points to the opposite direction, Njabulo is headed their way. The men die of laughter, trust Njabulo to wear a suit.

"Why are you laughing?" He doesn't look offended.

"Did you tell your mother you're going to church?" Mhloniphe asks.

Njabulo smiles, "I have never seen my mother so happy."

“So happy that she picked a suit for you.” Bakhe says, laughing his head off.

“Fusegani, zinja. You’re just jealous I have a mother and you don’t.”

Ouch!

The laughter dies, Njabulo is nervous. He swallows, and looks away from his friends. Bakhe is the first to break into laughter, Mhlo follows suit. It’s a relief for Njabulo, they get the dark humour.

“I’m ready.”

They compose themselves at the sound of Hluphekile’s voice. She’s dressed for Sunday morning church, hat and all.

“Hau, you invited your friends Bakhe?” There will be a party in heaven tonight.

“Yes auntie, their souls need saving.” Bakhe says.

She looks at Njabulo and smiles, “You look nice mfana wami.”

His friends laugh, Njabulo narrows his eyes at them.

Mbali is making her way to the car, Mhlo has lost focus of his surroundings.

“Auntie, you sit in front.” That’s Bakhe opening the door for his aunt and exchanges a glance with Mhloniphe.

This is not him giving Mhlo a ticket to date his little cousin but he understands that the heart cannot be ruled.

Mbali sits in between Mhlo and Njabulo.

They are about to drive away when they see Madlala running towards his brother’s house.

He must not have seen the car because there he is, speeding into the yard and collapses on

his knees.

Bakhe and Hluphekile run out of the car,
Madlala's heart almost stops at the sight of him.

He crawls towards Hluphekile, "You have to help me. I escaped, he's going to kill me. He said he will come and kill me tomorrow," he cries.

"Who?" Bakhe asks but gets a cold stare instead. "Baba..."

"Hluphekile, I'm sorry for everything I did to you. This boy thinks I'm a witch, he wants to kill me. You have to help me," Madlala says.

Bakhe snorts, why does he bother? Madlala will never change.

"I will be in the car," he tells his aunt and makes his way back.

There's a frown on Hluphekile's face, she's a living confusion.

She knows the story, but what is this man doing here?

“We are on our way to church.”

She shouldn’t be giving him a time of her day but here she is.

Madlala is on his feet, “I will come with you.”

That’s worrying, he smells like muthi and looks like a hobo. She walks ahead, his steps are slow. He ran to his brother’s house, it must be a miracle an old man like him hasn’t fainted.

“I want to sit in front,” Madlala says.

Hluphekile quietly gives up her seat, she joins the three in the back. There’s a smile on Madlala’s face as he takes the front seat, this is a beautiful car.

“Usebenzile mfana, this is a beast.” He tells Bakhe, gleaming with pride.

“It’s not my car, it’s Mhloniphe’s.” Bakhe coldly

says.

Madlala runs his eyes to the back and quickly looks to the front when he meets Mhlo's stern gaze.

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Church is going well, to Hluphekile's surprise, the pastor is preaching about forgiveness.

"Let's go wait for everyone in the car," Mhlo whispers to Mbali.

Bakhe opens his eyes, "I heard that."

Wasn't he sleeping?

Mbali hasn't stopped blushing since they arrived, "We can't leave, church is not over yet."

"God will understand, he doesn't discriminate." Mhlo says.

"Shh!" Comes from the front, it's Hluphekile

chiding the kids. She's sitting in the front row with Madlala, Njabulo is focused and taking notes. His mother will want to know what he learned.

Bakhe has fallen back to sleep, Mhlo holds Mbali's hand and eliminates the space between them.

It's not every day they get to sit so close.

The pastor wraps up the sermon and makes an altar call, "If you want to leave the old behind and be a new creation in Christ, come forward."

"Go." Hluphekile nudges Madlala.

"Where?" He's confused.

"To the front, go and give your life to God."

Madlala dies with laughter, "You are funny Hluphekile. Why would I give my life to another man? He won't be able to handle me, he will bring it back in a day."

No one can handle him.

“Giving your life to Jesus is accepting him as your Lord and saviour, you’re putting away your old ways and becoming a new person in Christ.” Hluphekile says.

“Putting them where?”

She takes a deep breath, “If you want to change, then you have to do this. Only God can save you, Madlala otherwise you will go from cape to cairo in search of help. Only God can save you. The bible says demons run and flee at the mention of Jesus.”

“Then they are cowards.”

He’s not getting it.

Hluphekile has aged ten times in two seconds.

The pastor is still calling people to the front, the worship team starts a song.

*“Phind’ukhulume moyo oyingcwele, phind’

ukhulume Nkosi yami. Ngoba zonke izono ebengizenza, namhla zisobala ebusweni bakho.”*

Madlala is squirming on his seat, that song can’t be a gospel song.

“What’s wrong?” Hluphekile asks.

“It’s hot in here, I’m going to get some air.” He stands and a scream erupts from his mouth, eyes turn to him. The demon is manifesting. Ushers surround him, one of them wraps a black cloth around his waist.

“Yeyi! What is this?” Madlala screams.

“Bring him forward.” The pastor announces.

Hell will freeze over!

The door is open, Madlala runs as fast as he could. His feet are on steroids.

“Close the door!” The pastor yells and two ushers at the door act in haste. This demon is

smart, it immediately sees an open window and jumps out.

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500+ comments... 15 shares

Let's also react on the inserts

[03/06, 15:56] T: CALL ME DADDY

THE CLOSING

CASHILE

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Of all the things Bakhe could do, giving his life to Jesus is not one of them. He's not ready to give it all up and be a good boy, he hasn't lived life to the fullest yet. His words, not mine.

My aunt should have known better. My father

though was an easy target, he was delivered that day they went to church. I heard he jumped out the window, but they caught him before he could get far.

The story of his deliverance deserves a page in the bible.

He's different now, walks different and talks different. He never misses a day in church, thanks to auntie.

He's gained weight, that's also thanks to my aunt. MaNkosi must be turning in her grave because that auntie feeds that old man like the world is ending.

Church has become tradition in this house... yeah, aunt Hluphekile has a hand in it.

We go to church except for Mbuzo and Mhloniphe.

It's Vee's second hospital visit, he's 6 weeks old. The good thing about having a doctor is that you don't have to take your child to a public clinic. The B&B is generating quite a generous income, the brothers have managed to open two more B&B's around Durban and revive some of their father's businesses. Fortune is in the Xaba blood.

We have a long way to go, but we're getting there.

The doctor is done checking Vee, I'm dressing him up, then we'll head home.

"The doctor said he's too small."

I knew this was coming, he's standing beside me, his pinkie finger caught in Vikizitha's tiny hand.

"He's 6 weeks old, he will gain weight." I tell Mbuzo.

He should know how much this child eats, I'm

thinking of using a breast pump. Otherwise, I will lose my breasts.

“My love, I’ve been thinking.” He says, sounding distant.

“I’m listening.”

“I want Lulu to carry my surname, will you permit me?”

I’m rendered speechless. I don’t know how to feel about it.

“I don’t know what to say, won’t we be taking away her identity?”

He’s disappointed, I didn’t mean to burst his bubble.

“You’re her father, and she knows it too. Can I at least think about it?”

I would love for Lulu to have Mbuzo’s name, he’s the best father in the world. But I can’t help but feel like I’ll be taking away Lulu’s biological

father from her. I wouldn't want her to resent me when she's grown and the Ngwenyas start appearing left and right.

A nurse walks in. Mbuzo takes Vee and we make our way out.

"Can we pass by the mall? I promised Lulu I'd buy her a talking doll." He says.

"No, we are not going to the mall. We have a baby with us."

What's wrong with him?

Mbuzo becomes too much when it comes to Lulu. A child asks for a swimming pool and you have one built. What the hell is that?

He literally gives her everything she wants.

Saying no is easy, it's one of the shortest words in the English dictionary. I can't even tell his brother to chide him, Mhlo is exactly like him. It's a good thing Mkhetheni is still in Europe,

Lulu would be spoiled to death. We still don't know when Mkhetheni plans on coming back, I have a feeling Maka-Sbani is keeping him busy.

They are bonding with their brother Nkosana, Mbuzo visits him in prison. I don't know how he can stand him, Mhlo is weird about it. He's not the affectionate type, it's only when it comes to Mbali.

"Nothando?" I gasp.

She's headed this way, and is holding hands with a woman. Mbuzo has seen her too.

Nothando has always been beautiful, I see life is treating her well. Short hair dyed greyish, and this is the first time I'm seeing her in jeans and a bodysuit.

She's surprised to see us, I didn't think she would stop.

“Mbuzo!” She’s looking at him.

It’s Mbuzo and Cashile, he comes in bulk now.

“Hello!” Mbuzo greets.

She looks at me and smiles, bitterly I’m not sure.

“You two finally made it?”

What kind of thing is that to say?

“Yes, we have a family now.” Mbuzo answers, he should let me do the talking.

“And what brings you here?” I ask, sending my gaze to the stud beside her.

“We came to the fertility clinic.” Nothando says.

“We’re trying for a baby.” The lady adds.

Now I’m confused, is she a guy that looks like a woman? Mbuzo also looks confused, I see he wants to ask but he won’t dare.

“This is my wife, Yvonne.” Nothando introduces.

I’m not surprised, I’ve always known she played

for both teams.

I look at Mbuzo, he's like a robot.

Jesus!

"Congratulations." I say.

They thank me in unison, they even speak at the same time.

"Congratulations on your son." Nothando says.

"Thanks, he's a dream come true." I reply.

He is, even though he wasn't planned. And he has a twin in the other world.

"We have an appointment, it was nice seeing you two again." That's her.

"Likewise." I reply.

They walk away, and we head to the car. Nothando said they are trying for a baby, meaning they'll be doing artificial insemination. This is unsettling.

“Have you ever donated your sperms?”

He chokes on his saliva and looks at me with widened eyes.

“What?”

“I just want to make sure that Nothando won’t be getting your sperms.”

Plus, he had his first child at 33. What if he donated his sperms thinking he will grow old without a child?

“No, why would I do that?” He says, I’m convinced.

Sis was once obsessed with him, I’m not taking chances.

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“You’ve been quiet!” Mbuzo says, as he joins the road leading to our house. I’m conflicted, he wants Lulu to bear his name. Juba loved her,

never mind the fact that he went behind my back for her to carry his name. Changing her name would mean I'm erasing him from her life, I'm overwhelmed with so many emotions.

"Can we get home, I need to sleep." I tell Mbuzo.

"Over sleeping is not good, you were sleeping before we left for the clinic."

Is he counting my sleeps?

"I'm nursing an infant, excuse me if I'm always tired all the time." I say.

That did not sound like him, I wouldn't be surprised if uncle Mpiyakhe is behind this.

"It came out wrong. It's just that I miss you, if you're not sleeping, you're spending time with the baby. We don't cuddle at night anymore."

I hear the cuddling part but this one of spending more time with the baby than him is something I cannot control.

“Mbani is still young.”

“Vikizitha.” He corrects me.

Argh! I will need more time to get used to the name.

“He’s still an infant, Mbuzo. And you’re a father now, your priorities have changed. The kids should be the centre of everything, it’s different with Lulu. She’s at a stage where she doesn’t need us all the time.”

He sighs heavily, “I hear you. I’m sorry if I sounded ungrateful.”

“Man please, it’s okay to be obsessed with me. Don’t let me stop you.”

He laughs out loud. I love that he gets my dry humour.

We’re home, the gate has been decorated with different shades of blue balloons and ribbons. There’s a small tent inside and tiffany chair.

“Don’t tell me Mbali is pregnant and this is her baby shower.” I will kill his brother.

“I doubt that’s for her,” he says.

Then who? It can’t be Nompilo, and why would she throw it here when she has her own place?

He gets the door for us and takes Vee from me, I grab the baby bag. There’s a fleet of cars down the street and loud music blasting the speakers. My worry is the baby waking up.

“Can you get them to keep it down, the baby is...”

The tiny cry... he’s awake. Mbuzo cradles him, humming softly while rocking him back and forth. Vikizitha falls asleep faster in his father’s arms.

“Is that Mhloniphe’s car?” I ask Mbuzo, following him inside. Mhloniphe’s car is among the cars parked on the side of the road, he’s the one having a party. Where is Mbali? I’m going to

do my aunt a favour and kill her myself.

The husband heads to the tent, I'm confused. He takes a bouquet of flowers from the small folding tray and turns to me.

"Welcome to your surprise baby shower, my love."

Haibo, Mbuzo!

"You did this?"

He smiles, "You didn't have one, nor did you mention wanting a baby shower."

Yeah, there was a lot happening. It didn't cross my mind, plus I didn't have one for Lulu, so it wasn't a big deal. But this has made me so happy, the effort he's put in surprising me.

"Who knew you had it in you? This is amazing, thank you Nonkosi. I promise to let you impregnate me again and again."

His face lights up, "Then I should do this more

often.”

I’m signing my soul away.

Lulu comes running from the house, Nompilo is behind her, carrying a blue gift bag.

“Happy mother’s day, sisi.” She says.

It’s not international mother’s day, it’s Cashile’s mother’s day.

“Thank you.”

Lulu wants to sit on my lap, Mbuzo lifts her up instead and heads to the gate with her.

He looks at me, “Because the baby is still delicate, we’re having a baby shower drive-thru. First up is Mhlo and Mbali.”

He introduces, Beyonce is blasting through the speakers. That song choice has everything to do with Mbali.

They step out of the car, and dash to the boot. Mhlo takes out diapers, too many diapers. I can't tell how many packs are there, but it's a lot.

"Congratulations, makoti. Have fun changing diapers." He says, Mbuzo laughs.

"I'll help you sisi," Nompilo says.

She's the one who's been helping me with the baby, both my aunts didn't want to stay at their in-laws. They say it's taboo.

"It's baby blankets." Mbali announces, holding a big box wrapped in blue. Mbuzo accepts the gifts.

They get in the car and drive off.

"Next in line are Bakhe and Njabulo." Mbuzo says.

I think that's Brown Dash's song with Mzekezeke. Bakhe and Njabulo are dancing as they step out of the car, where there is my

brother, you by all means find vibes.

Bakhe lifts his arms as if he's about to preach, "Jesus said, follow me and I will teach you to be fishers of men. Vee, the most handsome nephew in the world, follow me and I will teach you to be a fisher of ladies." There's a slick smile on his face, Mbuzo frowns at me. I'm laughing, he's crazy if he thinks that's going to happen.

I blame my aunt and her desperate attempts to get my brother saved. He thinks he's Jesus' cousin and Satan's homeboy.

"Congrats sis Cash. Parenthood is wild but it's worth every moment." Njabulo sounds mature. By the way, that's "Cash" for money.

Don't ask!

More diapers! They probably went shopping together with Mhlo and selectively agreed to get me diapers. Such shallow minds.

They do a little a dance before driving off.

Thuli and her infectious energy, I missed her so much. That's a new car she's driving, she's in boyfriend Jeans and a white button-up shirt and she's dancing smoothly to amapiano, like a millennial.

I love the energy.

"Mfazi, you're an amazing mom. Vee is lucky to have you, I am so happy for you friend."

She's been an amazing friend, I owe her so much.

She got Vee a baby stroller.

"It's a Fendi Carrozina Pram, worth over 20k. Make sure my baby enjoys rides to the park." She says.

This girl got herself a sugar daddy because I know she can't afford that stroller. Mbuzo looks worried, he needs to relax. This is Thuli at her

worst, she can top it up if she wants. That's how crazy she is.

I thank her before she drives away.

The other guests drive through, offering their congratulations and gifts. Aunt Hluphekile and my father are in the same car, driven by uncle Mpiyakhe. Those two are bonding over church, God and my father's soul. My aunt is obsessed with making sure he doesn't fall back to sin.

When all is said and done, Mbuzo takes the gifts inside with Lulu and Nomiplo's help. I need to get inside as well, Vee has been exposed to the wind for too long. He walks back out before I step into the house.

"Lulu has started unwrapping some of the gifts, she's excited." He says.

That's my baby.

"This has been amazing, thank you so much hubby. I'm happy, I'm sure Vee is too."

He hugs me briefly, "Thank you for everything, KaMadlala. I couldn't be more grateful to share parenthood with you."

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We're having a small celebration with only family, Bakhe is not here because of my father. He's forgiven him but says in order for him not to relapse, they have to be in separate places. My father has a mouth that can provoke a sleeping lion. My brother is renting Juba's house, he stays there now. He doesn't want it, so he'll be paying me monthly rent.

It's comforting to know that Mrs. Ngwenya will not come back to claim the house, it's mine. Lord knows where she is. I'm glad she

disappeared.

Thuli went back to Joburg, her boyfriend wanted her back. He's a sugar daddy, a twenty eight year old sugar daddy. I wonder where she got him.

"Lulu don't go into the deep, you will drown." I yell.

God forbid!

This child thinks she's a swimmer, I've been telling her to be careful since she got into the water.

"Mama look," she waves before doing a backstroke.

Kudos to the swimming lessons she's been taking. My attention is taken by Mbali giggling, I wonder what lies Mhlo is whispering to her. These two are like the modern day Romeo and Juliet.

Tshepang disappeared, I know Mhlo will do the worst when he finds him. They sit, no space between them. Aunt pushes Vee's stroller and takes him into the house, they make her uncomfortable.

I look at Mbuzo seated beside me, he knows I'm about to say something, and shakes his head in disapproval.

"So when is the wedding?"

Someone chocks and almost dies. I thought he was that in love.

"Are you okay?" Mbali is patting his back.

Idliso! They gave each other a love portion because, what is this?

"Little one and I are not in a rush," Mhlo says.

He's turning 39, my poor cousin will be married to a grandpa.

"Mhlo..." Mbuzo presses a kiss to my lips to

shut me up.

“Leave them alone,” he says.

I’m never leaving them alone, but I will shut up for now.

I hear my father’s loud laugh, he’s happy lately and I know aunt said something to make him laugh. Oh Lord! He’s wearing swim shorts and no t-shirt. There’s a prideful smile on his face as he heads towards the pool.

“Baba be careful.”

He turns to me, “I used to compete with crocodiles in my time. You should ask your mother one day.”

One day? That’s a creepy thing to say, she’s dead.

“Your father should take up a job as a life guard, he’s better off out of the water.” Mbuzo says,

humorously.

He's right, dad is walking in the water like it burns. He's terrified.

"You never told me what you did for a living?" I say to Mbuzo.

Now that I look back, he avoided my question.

He clears his throat, "I worked at a BDSM club, as a dom."

What the fuck is a dom?

"Sizani! Help!"

It's my father screaming for help, he's drowning. Lulu is on the side, watching. I almost jump to my feet but remember I also can't swim.

"Go save my father!" I tell Mbuzo.

He hesitates, the man is drowning. My aunt comes out, her eyes widen. She's scared for her patient.

“Mbuzo!” He’s sulking as he kicks off his shoes and jumps into the pool.

What the hell! And then!

“Haibo! Mbuzo can’t swim?” I ask Mhlo.

They are both fighting for their lives in the water.

“Nope!” Mhlo says, unbothered.

The only thing he cares about is his Little One.

“Mhlo, why didn’t you tell me?”

“I thought you knew,” he’s walking away with Mbali.

“Mhloniphe come and save my husband.” I shout after him.

“What about your father? He also can’t swim.” Aunt Hluphekile says.

My father has lived, my husband is still young and has children to raise.

THE END...